

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

Mapping the Borders of the Subconscious: A Study on the Dynamics of the Nocturnal Psyche in Murakami's *After Dark*

SARANYA NARAYANAN¹, ANUSUDHA R S²

¹P G Student, Department of English, Amrita School of Arts and Sciences, Amritapuri

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amrita University, India

saranya110294@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, Amrita School of Arts and Sciences, Amritapuri

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amrita University, India

anu.sdh1@gmail.com



SARANYA NARAYANAN

ABSTRACT

This research paper offers a study of the popular Japanese writer Haruki Murakami's novel *After Dark* (2004) and retraces the inherent human instincts through the exploration of the psyche. A psychological explanation is given to the violence of human beings by associating it with the psychological devices, mirror, and mask. These devices reflect the inner psyche, the primitive animal self of an individual. Jung's tripartite division of human psyche- anima/animus, shadow, and persona is also discussed in the paper by drawing parallels with the novel. The stressed and pressured psyche is the reason for the outburst of human violence, and this is proved through the paper. The darkness assists the man and therefore the inner consciousness takes the form of a nocturnal psyche that lives and breathes in darkest corners of one's heart.

Key Word: Psyche, Mirror, Mask, Human violence.

Haruki Murakami, a rebel against the culture and tradition of Japan, found interest in the pop culture of America through the English books, Jazz music, and the world of Hollywood. He always thought of a world outside Japan which he witnessed through the jazz music and Hollywood movies. His writings always deal with the aspects of philosophy and existentialism. According to his friend Kazuo Ishiguro, his works have "the bizarre, anarchic style" and "the very controlled, melancholy approach" (*In Dreams* 1). His works stand as an example of blurring of genres; it is an amalgamation of science fiction, fable, realism etc. They exist as a

chain of allegorical symbols; every piece brings an insight into the readers.

Murakami's *After Dark* (2004) is all about the incidents of a single night; the darkness assists the businessman, Shirakawa to brutally attack a Chinese prostitute, which is indirectly connected to the lives of all the characters. The novel is set between the time span of 11:55 p.m., and 6:55 a.m. The story moves through the vision of an omnipresent camera that moves through all the scenes, escapes all barriers, and even sees through the characters. All the characters of the novel find themselves connected to this situation.

Murakami was always affected by the state of his country during the period of his growing up. Japan witnessed an economic stagnation during the period. "What one observes in the Japan of the 1990s, is a multifaceted breakdown of the political, economic, and socio-cultural bases that had been the source of stability in previous decades" (Iida 209-210). Two disasters that occurred during this period were the Kobe Earthquake and the gas attack on Tokyo subway system organized by the *Aum Shinrikyo* cult. He wrote two non-fictional works based on this. His writings reflect these violent times, and he also tries to give answers to the problems faced by people. One such instance of violence can be traced from this novel; the darkness of the night brings out the animal inside the businessman Shirakawa; his violent psyche finds a way out in the darkness and attacks a young Chinese girl. Character's hope to overcome the violence in the society gives the novel a positive climax.

Every decade witnesses the formation of a new human civilization. The human race, to elevate itself into a civilization, kept controlling the inner madness of the human mind. Religion, literature, and even politics have been trying hard to force the people to control themselves as mentioned in Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913). The savage within every man is to be eliminated as to make them civilized. But controlling the inner madness or our own psyche is not always possible. The outburst of the inner violence used to be associated with the paranormal or the supernatural. Later with the advancement of psychology, the whole perspective has changed. The discipline of psychoanalysis, established in 1890 by Sigmund Freud, includes the theories and therapeutic practices for the study of the unconscious mind. The theories of psychoanalysis link the violence projected by human beings to the human psyche and everything is shown as a result of its evil, and madness. Michael Eigen, American psychoanalyst and writer, says that, the source of every violent action of the human being is within themselves.

An inherently stressed, pressured psyche trying to maintain good feeling in [the] face of bad. Great tension. Great struggle. A war psyche. Every capacity potentially

defending against and attacking every other. A psyche constantly trying to keep up with its own destructiveness. (1)

Murakami depicts this "pressured psyche" in his novel. He had once compared the human psyche to that of a two-storeyed building which has two basements. On the first floor, every one remains together. Then comes the basement, a room that is not used every day, but one uses it to store necessary things. The second basement consists of a special door that leads one to darkness. This darkness signifies inner psyche or the unconscious of an individual. Murakami's reference to the psyche is very similar to Jung's dream of the unconscious, which he mentions in his *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1962). Jung interpreted this dream to be the unconscious or the inner psyche of an individual. He dreams of himself inside a house which is finely furnished. He went and explored the house; every room, and even the cellar. The walls seemed to represent the Roman times. "Thick dust lay on the floor, and in the dust were scattered bones and broken pottery, like remains of a primitive culture" (Jung 197). Jung interpreted this dream to be the unconscious or the inner psyche of an individual.

It was plain to me that the house represented a kind of image of the psyche--that is to say, of my then state of consciousness, with hitherto unconscious additions. Consciousness was represented by the salon. It had an inhabited atmosphere, in spite of its antiquated style. The ground floor stood for the first level of the unconscious. The deeper I went, the more alien and the darker the scene came. In the cave, I discovered remains of a primitive culture, that is, the world of the primitive man within myself--a world which can scarcely be reached or illuminated by consciousness. The primitive psyche of man borders on the life of the animal soul, just as the caves of prehistoric times were usually inhabited by animals before men laid claim to them. (Jung 198)

This primitive psyche of man is what is referred to as the nocturnal psyche; the primitive

animal self finds an outlet in the dark, not only the darkness of the night, but any favorable situation that keeps it buried from the outside world. It can be associated with what Freud calls the Id. The uncontrolled part of the mind which exists in the unconscious realm is the Id. It is the immoral or the aggressive side in every person. Shirakawa, in the novel, reflects this same primitive violent self; his actions are the result of his unconscious mind. Though the scene where the businessman, Shirakawa assaulting the young Chinese prostitute is not depicted explicitly in the novel, but through the conversation between Mari and Kaoru, which clearly exposes the violence inherent in every human being. He does not look like a man who buys a Chinese prostitute and assaults her in an unmerciful way. As said in the novel, "The ordinary-looking ones are the most dangerous" (Murakami *After Dark* 77). The psyche finds its way out in the darkness, hoping that it will remain undetected. Through this scene, the violence is unleashed in the novel. Midnight, in the novel, is symbolic as it reflects the madness and violence of the psyche. The night time, not only in the unnamed Japanese city in the novel, but everywhere around the globe, is the darkest hours. As Kaoru, the manager of the love hotel Alphaville warns Mari Asai, "It's got some pretty dangerous characters hanging around. I've had a few scary brushes myself. Between the time the last train leaves and the first train arrives, the place changes: it's not the same as in daytime" (Murakami *After Dark* 63). When the clock suddenly displays the time "0:00", the unplugged television in Eri Asai's room suddenly starts flickering, creating an image of horror. This foretells the disturbing events to happen in the novel will be deeply disturbing.

On screen is the interior of a room. A fairly big room. It could be a space in an office building, or some kind of classroom. It has a large plate-glass window; banks of fluorescent lights line the ceiling. There is no sign of furniture, however. No, on closer inspection there is exactly one chair set in the middle of the room. An old wooden chair, it has a back but no arms. It is a practical chair, and very plain. Someone is sitting in it. (Murakami *After Dark* 33)

Another character, Korogi, the housekeeper of the love hotel, is constantly haunted by her past, and is therefore in a perpetual flight. When she was Mari's age, she found herself a perfect job. But then something terrible happened. Murakami fails to give a clear picture of this "something"- Korogi, because of the "something" had to keep running from one place to another. She was violently treated by the people and there are strange marks made from hot iron, on her body. Murakami does not give a clear picture of the violent attack on her, but through the perfect use of words he has succeeded in transferring the terror into the minds of the readers. "They're chasing me when I'm awake, and they're chasing me in my dreams when I'm asleep: I can never relax" (Murakami *After Dark* 169).

Even Murakami realises that violence is inherent in every human being, and one cannot completely overcome it. This is revealed through the words of Takahashi. As a part of his studies in law, he had to attend a number of trials. After being in the court a few times, he believes that he can never be like those people who commit vicious crimes, who live in a different world. There is a high wall that separates him and those violent people. But later when he hears the testimonies of the witnesses, the speeches of the prosecutors, the arguments of the defence attorneys, and the statements of the defendants, he realises the truth: no man is different. The evil inside every man finds a way out.

I started seeing it like this: that there really was no such thing as a wall separating their world from mine. Or if there was such a wall, it was probably a flimsy one made of papier-mâché. The second I leaned on it, I'd probably fall right through and end up on the other side. Or maybe it's that the other side has already managed to sneak its way inside of us, and we just haven't noticed. (Murakami *After Dark* 104)

The evil inside one can take the shape of any creature, and for Takahashi it is an octopus that keeps pulling one into the depths of the ocean of evilness. Though one tries to cut off the creature's legs, it keeps growing back to its original self. "What I felt then was a deep terror. And a kind of

hopelessness, a feeling that I could never run away from this thing, no matter how far I went" (Murakami *After Dark* 104-105). Thus Murakami tries to prove that violence exists in every human being, no matter how well mannered they are. Any single human being, no matter what kind of a person he or she may be, is all caught up in the tentacles of this animal like a giant octopus, and is gets sucked into the darkness.

This violent psyche of a human being that forms the central part of the novel, is given more importance through the image of a mirror. When Shirakawa reaches his office, late at night, after the attack on the young girl, and stares into the mirror, he tries to conceal the violence that he had just performed. Though he leaves the room, the reflection remains indolent; the reflection simply stares back from the mirror without any change in expression. "It does not move or change expression. It simply stares straight ahead. Eventually, however, as though giving up, it relaxes, takes a deep breath, and rolls its head" (Murakami *After Dark* 143). The reflection in the mirror is the inner psyche, the animal instinct of an individual that threatens him as well as other individuals. It is this psyche in him that made him attack the young girl. Mari is presented as positive character; even then her reflection in the mirror, that is, her inner psyche also reflects terror.

A closer look reveals that Mari's image is still reflected in the mirror over the sink. The Mari in the mirror is looking from her side into this side. Her sombre gaze seems to be expecting some kind of occurrence. But there is no one on this side. Only her image is left in the Skylark's restroom mirror. (Murakami *After Dark* 72)

This shows that there is a violent psyche in every human being that resides in the depths of man's consciousness.

The mirror imagery is also used by Murakami in one of his short stories "The Mirror" (2006). In that story the narrator is a night watchman at a high school. During one of his night rounds, while passing through the hallway he finds a mirror in the center of the hall, a mirror that was not present in the previous night. But the reflection in

the mirror seems to be strange and it brings a fear in the narrator.

After a couple of puffs, I suddenly noticed something odd. My reflection in the mirror wasn't me. It looked exactly like me on the outside, but it definitely was not me. No, that's not it. It was me, of course, but another me. Another me that never should have been. I don't know how to put it. It's hard to explain how it felt like.

The one thing I did understand was that this other figure loathed me. Inside it was a hatred like an iceberg floating in a dark sea. The kind of hatred no one could ever diminish. (The Mirror 72)

The narrator feels the hatred of the reflection; it is nothing other than the psyche of the individual. Shiny reflective surfaces have always been associated with the mystical. People found fascination with their reflection in the water or in the mirror. Lacan had demonstrated the relation between a reflective surface and the unconscious. A child develops his consciousness through his or her reflection, which he termed as the mirror stage. Marie-Louise von Franz, in her work *Projection and Recollection* (1980), had mentioned that the reflective surface of water (or mirror, in this case) projects the unconscious realms of human mind. As one is not able to recognize the depth of the water, similarly, the depths of the unconscious remain a mystery. In the myth of Narcissus, the reflection has a significant role; Narcissus fancies his own reflection, which ultimately leads to his own destruction. In all the versions of the fairy tale *Snow White*, the mirror can be considered as the primitive psyche of the queen. When she asks the mirror about the most beautiful woman, it is her psyche that replies. When Snow White becomes more beautiful, her unconscious mind cannot tolerate this, and thus decides to kill her. It was her inner most desire (to become the most beautiful person) that brought out the violent psyche.

Jung also introduces two terms that is associated with the unconscious of a person- the anima, and the animus. The feminine figure that is "a typical, or archetypal, role in the unconscious of a man" (Jung 227) is the anima and "The

corresponding figure in the unconscious of woman” (Jung 227) is the animus. Goethe’s *Faust* (1808) uses the psychological symbol of anima. Faust is brought to the kitchen of a witch by Mephistopheles. There he finds a magic mirror, and stares into it; he becomes completely mesmerized by the image in the mirror. He sees the image of a beautiful woman. She is very thing that he is not, and longs to be with her. In a psychological perspective, what he really sees in the mirror is his own unconscious mind, which Jung calls the anima.

In the novel, Shirakawa leaves behind his animal self in the mirror and the reflection keeps staring in from the other side. The image does not realize that when dawn comes, the violent side of a man needs to be hidden. The narrator in the story, “The Mirror”, confesses that he was a part of the hippie generation; he disregarded the University system of education, worked at various manual laboring jobs, and was, therefore, a rebel against refined norms of society. Thus his reflection shows his primitive animal self. He is scared of this reflection which is trying to take control of him; “As though I were the reflection of what was in the mirror and he was trying to take control of me” (The Mirror 72).

Mirror, in the Japanese mythology, is associated with the Gods. The most prominent among them is the myth of the Goddess Amaterasu, the goddess of the Sun. The Goddess, because of an argument, shut herself in a cave, rendering the whole world in darkness. Shaman Goddess, to solve the crisis, started dancing outside the cave, joined in by all the Gods and Goddesses who went wild. Amaterasu, too curious to know the reason for the celebration outside, asked out. Someone said that they had found a Goddess better than her. They even had set a mirror just outside the cave. When she came out, she was mesmerized by her own beauty, and then they tied the entrance of the cave with a rock so that she could not enter again.

Japanese tradition does not suggest that we simply blame others for the disorder we experience. Rather the world can be seen as a mirror of our inner selves. When the mirror is dim, the soul must be examined. Thus if we find ourselves out of harmony

with the world, it is necessary to seek inner reasons that contribute to this disharmony. (Monaghan 74)

Murakami must have used the mirror image to show that the world, torn apart by violence, is a reflection of our inner self; the primitive violent self of a person is the reason for the destruction of the world and its inhabitants. It is this same view that Michael Eigen has: the reason for everything happening outside has a common source- it arises from within a person.

Shadow, in Jungian psychology, refers to the unconscious personality of an individual. It represents the dark side of an individual. Everything beyond the conscious, good or evil, is associated with the shadow. It also represents the primitive animal self of an individual, the darker side within a person. “Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it gets” (*Psychology* 87).

Mask is another psychological device used in *After Dark*. The man, in the novel, who stares at Eri Asai, through the television screen placed in her room, is a masked figure, a “Man with No Face” as Murakami calls him. The masked man keeps staring at the sleeping figure of Eri Asai and the television screen functions as a window in the room. The appearance of the man is very similar to that of Shirakawa. One can consider him to be the unconscious self of the businessman as his real self is hidden with a mask. The mask represents his inner psyche and it covers his original self.

What makes the mask truly eerie is that even though it fits the face like a second skin, it prevents us from even imagining what (if anything) the person within is thinking, feeling, or planning. Is the man’s presence a good thing? A bad thing? Are his thoughts straight? Twisted? Is the mask meant to hide him? Protect him? We have no clue. (Murakami *After Dark* 56)

The masked man, which is the second consciousness of Shirakawa, is his alter ego. Alter ego, a term coined by Cicero, Roman politician, lawyer, linguist in the 1st century, was used to refer to a trusted friend. Later, with the term’s appearance in psychology, it acquired a wider

meaning. The term, in Latin means 'the other I'; it is the second self of a person. It also suggests the presence of good and evil inside an individual.

Here, in the novel, what is hidden behind the mask is the real self, and it reflects the unconscious self, the Id. Thus it makes one free to do anything and he is not bound by any shackles. The person's inner most desires find its way out through the mask. Carl Jung associated the mask with the unconscious, and he used the term 'persona' for this (which means 'mask' in Latin).

The persona is a complicated system of relations between the individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual. (*Two Essays* 192)

The presence of the masked man is not clarified by Murakami. When Eri wakes up in a "different kind of reality", she finds herself in a place similar to Shirakawa's office. On the floor, she finds a pencil with "VERITECH" inscribed on it, similar to the one Shirakawa was using. Thus the masked man is none other than the primitive animal psyche of Shirakawa and one can interpret that, he can be the reason for Eri's perpetual sleep; she must have been a victim of his violence. Takahashi seems to have recognized it; "She's carrying around so many problems all by herself she can't make any headway, and she's searching for help" (Murakami *After Dark* 139). Like the Chinese girl, she must have also been a victim of his violence. The mirror and the mask are used as symbols to show the inherent violence in human nature. They portray the vicious and murderous nature of human beings.

Thomas Hobbes, English philosopher and writer, had a similar view about humanity, and he mentioned this in *Leviathan* (1651). Good and evil, according to him depend upon humanity's inherent desires. The desires of one person can be common to others as well; the stronger one takes away what he needs, even willing to kill the weak. If one turned out to be 'lucky', then he would be the one to kill others. Hobbes believes that man is the only enemy of man. "the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (94).

William Golding, an English novelist, in his work, *Lord of Flies* (1954), deals with a similar theme. He says that the nature of man is evil. The novel discovers the darkness in the heart of human behaviour with children as its characters. They are usually considered innocent, but the children in Golding's work nourish their violence when they are alone on an island. Thus man himself is the reason for his destruction. As Freud says:

The bit of truth behind all this- one so eagerly denied is that men are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love, who simply defend themselves if they are attacked, but that a powerful measure of desire for aggression has to be reckoned as part of their instinctual endowment. (69)

The dark creature in every human being finds its way out. Violence cannot be controlled and the psychological devices used in the novel, like that of the mirror and the mask highlights this. The mirror shows one's true identity, the inner psyche of a person. It even reflects the hidden face that one covers using the persona or the mask. Thus the mirror and the mask are interlinked; the psyche that is hidden in the depths of the mirror takes the form of the mask, thus hiding one's true self. All these suggest that there is an evil inherent in every being; the reason for all the violence in society is the human himself. It is this inherent human violence that Murakami tries to highlight in *After Dark*. But he does not give us a way to overcome the inherent violence. Even the great psychologist like Freud had learnt that the ego of a man cannot be controlled. As Eigen says;

No individual or group, in any part of the Earth or at any time in history, has ever figured out what to do with the destructive side of human nature. But we can realize that from the Big Bang to cataclysms, earthquakes, hurricanes, and tsunamis, this destructive force is part of nature itself. And since humans are part of the universe, it's not a big surprise that this is part of our nature. (1)

Though a possible solution is not known, Murakami ends the novel with the view that even though one is completely immersed in the darkness,

one must remember that there is always a hope for a new day; the sun will rise again after the dark. "The night has begun to open up at last. There will be time until the next darkness arrives" (Murakami *After Dark* 212).

WORKS CITED

- Eigen, Michael. Interview. *America on the Couch*. By Pythia Peay. US: Sussex Publishers, 10 Dec. 2015. Web. 5 Jan. 2017.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilisation and its Discontents*. Chandigarh: Abhishek Publications, 1978. Web.
- Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan: or the Matter, Forme, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*. Ed. Michael Oakeshott. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008. Web.
- Iida Yumiko, *Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan: Nationalism as Aesthetics*. London: Psychological Press, 2002. Web.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *Memories, Dreams, Reflection*. Trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston. Ed. Aniela Jaffe. New York: Vintage Books, 1963. Web.
- _____. *Psychology and Religion: West and East*. Trans. R F C Hull. New York: Yale University Press, 1953. Print.
- _____. *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. Trans. Richard Francis Carrington Hull. London: Psychological Press, 1992. Web.
- Monaghan, Patricia. *The Goddess Path: Myths, Invocations and Rituals*. USA: Llewellyn Publications, 1999. Web.
- Murakami, Haruki. *After Dark*. Trans. Jay Rubin. London: Harvill Secker, 2007. Print.
- _____. *In Dreams Begins Responsibility An Interview with Haruki Murakami*. By Jonathan Ellis and Mitoko Hirabayashi. n.p., Aug. 2004. Web. Feb. 2017.
- _____. "The Mirror". Trans. Philip Gabriel and Jay Rubin. *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*. London: Vintage Books, 2007. Print.