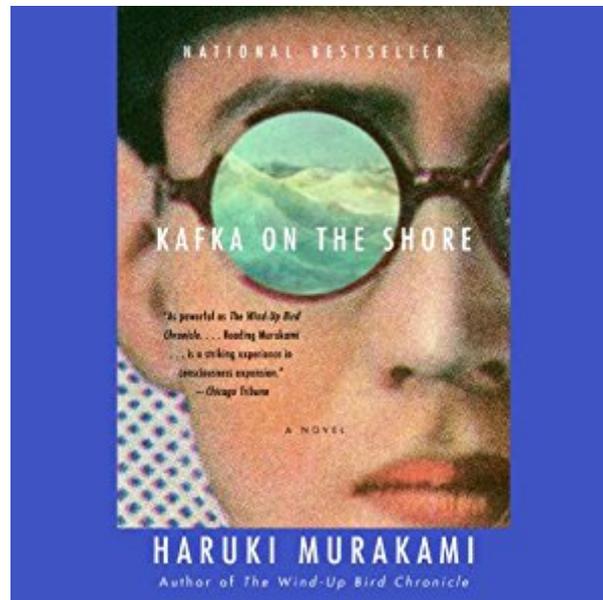


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Kafka On The Shore



Synopsis

With *Kafka on the Shore*, Haruki Murakami gives us a novel every bit as ambitious and expansive as *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, which has been acclaimed both here and around the world for its uncommon ambition and achievement, and whose still-growing popularity suggests that it will be read and admired for decades to come. This magnificent novel has a similarly extraordinary scope and the same capacity to amaze, entertain, and bewitch. A tour de force of metaphysical reality, it is powered by two remarkable characters: a teenage boy, Kafka Tamura, who runs away from home either to escape a gruesome oedipal prophecy or to search for his long-missing mother and sister; and an aging simpleton called Nakata, who never recovered from a wartime affliction and now is drawn toward Kafka for reasons that, like the most basic activities of daily life, he cannot fathom. Their odyssey, as mysterious to them as it is to us, is enriched throughout by vivid accomplices and mesmerizing events. Cats and people carry on conversations, a ghostlike pimp employs a Hegel-quoting prostitute, a forest harbors soldiers apparently unaged since World War II, and rainstorms of fish (and worse) fall from the sky. There is a brutal murder, with the identity of both victim and perpetrator a riddle - yet this, along with everything else, is eventually answered, just as the entwined destinies of Kafka and Nakata are gradually revealed, with one escaping his fate entirely and the other given a fresh start on his own. Extravagant in its accomplishment, *Kafka on the Shore* displays one of the world's truly great storytellers at the height of his powers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I guess from other reviews that I'm not the typical reader of this sort of book - some of the other reviews go way over my head, which might suggest that the book did, too. Unlike many readers, I'd never heard of this author, nor have I studied philosophy or metaphysics, nor did I appreciate any of the clever references to other works which I gather are in the book. So my review is based on the book alone without any external context or any expectations of this author at all. I picked the book up more or less at random from a public library shelf because it looked interesting. The first half of the book had me sitting up reading in the early hours of the morning, it was that good. I'd never read anything quite like it and was fascinated to see where the story was going to go. I appreciated the book's readability too, with the author conveying complex ideas without getting bogged down in complex language. Some of the reviews I've read subsequently are less readable than the book itself, so don't be put off by thinking you need to be an intellectual to read it. Unfortunately I felt that after the first half of the book, the sense of wonder began to fade and instead of being content to be caught up in the plot I was starting to wonder where it was going to go and how long it was going to take to get there. To be honest I hung in there for the last quarter mainly because I didn't want to abandon the book having come this far. It's not that the writing deteriorated or that the storyline wasn't still interesting, more that the characters weren't developing any further and it looked like they weren't going to. The plot just played itself out and I lost that "Wow, I can't wait to see what happens next" feeling.

I finished this book quite some time ago, and it's taken me a while to review this book, because frankly, I've just been at a loss of how to write a lucid and representative review. I felt tongue-tied and "writer blocked" in the afterglow on this spellbinding adventure. Murakami took me to realms I have not reached with books for a while now, and which I am still gently floating on. I finally did decide to write though, because I think it's imperative for me to document how I felt about the book and really try and impress upon other bibliophiles that they must, must, MUST read this! The two fundamental themes of the book are simple, and in fact, quite clichéd: one can run, but not escape, and life needs to be dealt with; and that every person has a purpose and a destiny to fulfil. The way these themes are illustrated is, however, far from simple, and to do so, Murakami shares with us two tales: one of a precocious fifteen-year old boy who leaves home in an attempt to escape his oppressions, and the other of a mentally challenged old man who needs support on many fronts to just go through daily life, but has curious abilities like being able to converse with cats and making fish rain from the sky. Both the protagonists undertake fascinating physical and metaphysical journeys which inevitably weave together at the end, but in very unusual and interesting ways.

Accompanying them, or somehow associated with them, on these journeys are just a handful of other characters, who while clearly playing a supporting role, are essential to the "success" (as in some logical conclusion) of the journeys, and are enchanting in their own right.

Kafka on the Shore is at once familiar and unfamiliar to readers of past Murakami stories: in story and in plotting it is reminiscent of past works of Murakami; the Tamura Kafka storyline is in many ways a re-telling of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, and the split narrative style also reminds one of that book. Indeed, many times throughout the book I found myself thinking that *Kafka on the Shore* felt like a kind of summation of Murakami's works, all the way from *Hear the Wind Sing* through *After the Quake* in terms of style and plot elements. Despite the many familiar elements, there are several significant deviations from the usual formula, starting with the protagonist Tamura Kafka. Unlike the typical 30-something "everyman" familiar to readers of Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore* features the young and proactive Tamura Kafka and to the best of my knowledge is the first of Murakami's novels to be written half in the third person, giving Murakami a bit more freedom in telling this tale from different characters' perspectives. More important than narrative technique was Murakami's approach to the story: whereas many of Murakami's novels are full of a sense of loneliness and a feeling that the characters are chasing after something which is already beyond their reach, Tamura Kafka is very much in charge of his own destiny as his choice at the climax of the novel indicates. Although *Kafka on the Shore* started off wonderfully, by the second half of the book, the plot became unusually linear and predictable for a Murakami novel. The Nakata/Hoshino plotline in particular was cryptic without the scope or wonder of *Wind-Up Bird*, for example. Oshima, one of the most interesting characters Murakami has created (and that's saying a lot) is sadly underused in the second half.

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