

The Motif of the ‘Mirror’ in Literary Works

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Abstract. Mirrors have always been thought of as enigmatic objects. It has the enchanted ability to foretell the future. It acts as a doorway or portal connecting the other world to this one. Additionally, it symbolizes an individual's unconsciously held alter ego, spirit, shadow, or other identity. As a result, it has also been perceived as a source of terror. The motif of the "mirror" in literary works, along with the pictures and ideas it carries, will be thoroughly examined in this paper.

Key words: Japanese literature, novel, Murakami Haruki, mirror, unique, mysterious, metaphorical meaning, motif, reflection.

Introduction

Haruki Murakami is a contemporary Japanese bestselling author and translator of literary works. He is the author of many masterpieces, essays, travelogues, such as “Norwegian Wood”, which was a hit in the literary world, and “1Q84”, which won the Mainichi Publishing Culture Award. Furthermore, Haruki Murakami’s works have received worldwide recognition and various awards, including the Franz Kafka Prize in 2006, The Jerusalem Prize for the Freedom of the Individual in Society in 2009, and the Catalonia International Prize by the Generalitat de Catalunya in 2011.

In addition, each year Haruki Murakami is nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature. The Prince of Asturias Award for Literature, also known as the “Spanish Nobel Prize,” was given to Haruki Murakami in 2023, making him the first writer from Japan to win the honor. The following was the justification given for the award:

The Jury has considered the uniqueness of his literature, its universal scope and ability to reconcile Japanese tradition and the legacy of Western culture in an ambitious and innovative narrative, which has managed to express some of the great themes and conflicts of our time: loneliness, existential uncertainty, terrorism and dehumanization in big cities, as well as the care of one’s body and his own reflections on the creative process. Expressed in different genres, his voice has influenced considerably diverse generations. Haruki Murakami is one of contemporary literature’s major long-distance runners [1].

His works are characterized by the description of a unique and mysterious, unusual world and the frequent use of eccentric metaphors. Murakami Haruki has a sizable fan following—referred to as “Harukists”—and followers—referred to as “Murakami Children”—who are motivated by his writings.

The short story “The Mirror” by Haruki Murakami is examined in comparison in this article. We shall first focus on the mirror’s conventional metaphorical meaning.

Results and Discussions: Analysis of the mirror

Haruki Murakami wrote “The Mirror” in 1983. After World War II, this short story was included in the high school textbook. While other works have since taken its place, “The Mirror” continues to hold its standing. “The Mirror” has been studied by Japanese scholars from the perspectives of teaching theory and literature education. These perspectives include teaching Japanese literature, rereading and evaluating the textbook material, evaluating the teaching materials, and the idea of literary education.

There are a lot of books, anime, films, and other media out there that have mirror imagery. We might mention the stories “The Man in Front of the Mirror” by Omon Mukhtor (1996) and “Mystery of the Mythical Mirror” by Davron Sultanov (2020) as examples of contemporary Uzbek literature. The central theme of this piece is a horrifying mirror in the fantastical country of Natlandia that causes individuals to rot, age, and die one by one. Additionally, Murakami Haruki employs the mirror’s role in the work and does not deny that it possesses some sort of magical power. As Haruki Murakami has said, それはそれとして僕はどうも宿命的に鏡とか双子とかダブルとかにすごく惹かれるみたいである (It seems like I’m fatefully attracted to mirrors, twins, and doubles) [2]. Mirrors also appear in his other works, such as “A Wild Sheep Chase” and “After Dark.”

It makes sense that during the Middle Ages, the mirror was regarded as a representation of a different reality. People were cautious around mirrored things because they thought that supernatural forces resided in mirrors. Actually, this magic mirror causes a lot of motives, like individuals traveling to another world and returning, or powers from another world arriving to our world. It also opens the door to another world and acts as a conduit between our world and another world. Because of this, people have a lot of false beliefs about mirrors, and occasionally we get terrified of them.

Throughout history, the mirror has been used in witchcraft and has been associated with mystery. Mirrors were thought to have been created by the devil in Russia. In 1662, the Orthodox Church priests disseminated it widely. Many superstitions around the mirrors have surfaced since then. The broken mirror was interpreted as a symbol of unhappiness and failure for seven years. After feeling bad and apologizing to the mirror, the man who had broken it initially buried it. We have also heard the proverb “Do not look at the broken mirror, because if you look at it, you will be unhappy” among the Uzbek people. Thus, people avoid using damaged mirrors.

To ward off death, ancient priests employed talismans and mirrors. When someone passed away, they captured the image of that person in the mirror and the talisman, keeping the deceased's spirit alive in one of the mirrors. Some countries continue to this day to keep the custom of covering all mirrors in a deceased person’s home. Mirrors were also often used as holy objects in Central American culture. One of the most widespread ideas in Mesoamerica was that people interacted with divines, gods, and powers from another world through the use of mirrors.

In conclusion, mirrors frequently convey the following qualities in books and films that employ “mirrors” as a motif.

- 1) It possesses the magical power to predict the future.
- 2) It serves as a portal or doorway for individuals to transition from this real world to the extraordinary other world.
- 3) It serves as a portal or passageway for supernatural or evil beings to enter our world from the other world, such as monsters, apparitions, ghosts, and other such beings from the extraordinary realm.
- 4) Representing a person’s subconsciously imprisoned alter ego, spirit, shadow, or other identity.

“The Mirror” by Murakami Haruki depicts the main character’s journey from this world to another. “The Mirror” is a terrifying, spooky short story in the vein of mysticism from the perspective of genre. Following a few ghost and mystery stories from the friends of the main character, 僕 (boku-I), a young guy in his 30s, the host shares his account of a terrifying encounter he had when he was between 18 and 19 years old. The terrifying tale of the lead character doesn't involve ghosts or

otherworldly abilities. What exactly was the horrific event that the main character went through and hasn't disclosed to anyone yet?

The protagonist's tale concerned his observation of his own image in the mirror. “ただの僕自身さ” [3], his own reflection in the mirror, was what frightened him. In his opinion, man himself is the most horrifying and dreadful object in the world:

つまり、鏡の中の像は僕じやないんだ。いや、外見はすっかり僕なんだよ。それは間違いないんだ。でも、それは絶対に僕じやないんだ。僕にはそれが本能的にわかったんだ。いや、違うな、正確に言えばそれはもちろん僕なんだ。でもそれは僕以外の僕なんだ。それは僕がそうあるべきではない形での僕なんだ。

The mirror in Murakami Haruki's “The Mirror” has magical qualities and serves as a tool to reflect the “I” that is concealed in the depths of the human heart (mind). It is defined as a tool that shows the past, heart, and mind of a person.

There are works in Uzbek literature that describe the mirror from a philosophical perspective. In “The Man in Front of the Mirror,” a story by Omon Mukhtor, Vali, Badalbek, and Siroj Muallim (the teacher) are the primary protagonists. The work is replete with enigmatic moments. The story starts with the incident where a flame resembling lightning rots the roof of the school where Vali studies, revealing the bodies of Badalbek and teacher Siroj. While the cause of Badalbek's death is known, everyone is surprised by the reason behind teacher Siroj's death. The narrative narrates Vali's life and ideas as he worked to solve this riddle. To solve this riddle, Vali visits teacher Siroj's home. Sojidakhon, a teacher's daughter-in-law explains:

Bilasizmi, dadam yo 'lakda turgan ko 'zgu oldiga ba'zan o 'ymalashib qolardilar. Shunaqa odatlari bor edi [4].

The teacher looks into the mirror for a long time on the day of his death, sees an ugly person there, swears, and destroys it. On this day, he too will pass away. Vali's life is altered by this single event. Vali seeks to comprehend himself and the purpose of his existence by attempting to answer a number of enigmatic puzzles. He has numerous spiritual experiences at the same time. Vali sees a variety of people, and occasionally he even sees his own reflection.

I want to focus on what Vali has to say below:

Ba'zan uyda kitob varaqlab, ba'zan esa shunchaki rubob chertib, o'tgan butun voqealar yodimga tushadi... O'rnimdan turib, uydagi eng katta oynaga qarayman! Mening shaklim o'rnida boshqa bir shakl aks etishidan qo 'rqaman.

Similar to the protagonist of Haruki Murakami's “The Mirror,” Vali, says he is terrified of seeing other reflections in the mirror rather than his own. In a similar vein, teacher Siroj noticed an unattractive reflection of himself in the mirror. In the narrative, the teacher Siroj smashes the mirror because he is repulsed by his ugly appearance and impurity of heart. The unsightly reflection in the mirror represented the ugly nature inside teacher Siroj. By the end of the piece, Vali realizes this and comes to a conclusion about what it means to be human.

The narrative and its imagery are reminiscent of religious themes. Zahhok and Iblis is one of the stories among them. The narrative contains religious names as well; one such name is Vali, which belongs to the main character. “Valiy” refers to a saint, God's most cherished and devoted servant with prophecy-telling abilities. Its foundation is the historical association of the mirror with religion in human civilization due to its usage in numerous religious rites.

Conclusion

Literary works have parallels, linkages, and occasionally opposing features regardless of the author's country. The “mirror” is the focal point of the previously examined pieces, and it also unites the subjects of these two works. The purpose of the mirror is the same in both Uzbek and Japanese literature, as demonstrated by Omon Mukhtor's “The Man in Front of the Mirror” and Murakami Haruki's “The Mirror”: it reflects one more inner “I” and first reveals a person's character. The way

a person appears in the mirror is shown in both pieces based on how humane their thoughts and actions are. The magnitude of one's vices, transgressions, and weaknesses can only be seen in the mirror. Breaking the mirror, however, alludes to opposing ideas like life and death in "The Mirror" and "The Man in Front of the Mirror." When the main character in Haruki Murakami's story destroys the mirror, he returns to himself and the real world; ironically, teacher Siroj passes away the same day he breaks the mirror.

The narrative concludes happily as Omon Mukhtor's character, Vali, too comes to terms with himself after facing challenges. In Haruki Murakami's story "The Mirror," the protagonist faces intense animosity from his alter ego, which is reflected in the mirror. Therefore, he never uses a mirror again; instead, he just avoids confronting his inner "I" and makes no attempt to comprehend himself or modify his life.

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