

Trauma, Pseudodementia, and Magical Realism in Haruki Murakami's "A Shinagawa Monkey"

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During the late Renaissance, while printing presses were churning out books, the mind was compared to a book. In the seventeenth century, the mind was likened to a theater. Today, there is a tendency to talk about the brain and to refer to it in computer terms. We speak about the hardware of the brain and the software of the mind. Although we do not normally refer to the "megabytes" of our memory space, we do speak about memories being "burnt" into gray matter. However, what about memories being deleted, characters on the stage of our mind remaining silent or pages of our mind appearing blank? Are these metaphors meaningful when it concerns memory loss? How can they be, if they attempt to define the very disappearance of meaning? If we do insist on metaphorical terms to speak about memory loss, perhaps it is more fitting to say that we have failed to make marked neuronal connections about the disappearance of neuronal connections.

This article focuses on one specific type of memory loss, pseudodementia, which occurs when individuals have been so wounded beyond recovery that they constrict their cognitive functions and behave as if they were partly demented.¹ Haruki Murakami's short story "A Shinagawa Monkey" (2006) serves as an excellent laboratory to observe these phenomena, as the main character Mizuki suffers and eventually recovers from trauma-induced pseudodementia. Her form of therapy takes place in the very location of her pathology; she does not rely on drugs to heal her brain, but rather on her own mind.

Before delving into the psychology of Murakami's character, I set the stage for a discussion of pseudodementia by exploring trauma theories advanced by Henry Krystal. I propose that Mizuki suffers from pseudodementia, since she has experienced the trauma of "crib shock." This position is confirmed by studying not only Mizuki's psychology from a psychoanalytic approach (Freud, Horney, and Klein), but also the actual structure of the story. Macherey's and Iser's literary theories support my argument that the role of the omniscient narrator and the presence of gaps in the story are related to the condition of pseudodementia. Furthermore, just as reading promotes conscious awareness, Mizuki recovers as she gains conscious awareness through psychotherapy and an encounter with the unconscious. In light of Lacan's, Klein's, and Bettelheim's theories, I explain how imaginative thinking, originating from the unconscious realm, restores memory after psychic suffering.

While some analysts (such as Matthew Strecher and Patricia Welch) argue that the main subtext in Murakami's work is the construction of the individual subject (in light of ideology), this article seeks to explore how trauma affects individual identity. More specifically, if Strecher contends that "What Murakami is after in the end is some means of looking at the core identity of the individual and discerning what leads it either to become part of the 'system' of Japanese society, or alternatively, to fall through the cracks," I concentrate instead on how individuals might develop a sense of identity despite or even thanks to trauma (271). The issue is not so much whether one is reintegrated into society, but whether one is reintegrated into one's own life after a traumatic experience. How can one establish, for instance, a connection with the unconscious Other, if all connections have been severed due to a traumatic experience? It is one thing to construct the Self from within the confines of society, and yet still another if one is burdened by a traumatic history. Finally, taking my cue from Strecher who contends that "Most Japanese critics have noted the paranormal in Murakami's literature, but few seem to have grasped the essential structure of the internal and external minds that is supported by Murakami's use of magical realism, or the critique of the society versus the Self that it presents," I explore how Murakami's "paranormal" serves as a source of therapy (281).

Trauma and Crib Shock

Why do some memories fail to appear in a mind? Trauma plays with memory in distinct ways. On the one hand, victims and witnesses of traumatic events can be haunted by memories. The harrowing event is replayed in the mind in an attempt to render it intelligible. What happens if the initial traumatic event defies logic? What happens if the traumatic event is so traumatic that it merits a long and profound grieving process? What happens if the mind is in such a vulnerable state that it cannot grieve? The initial disturbing event becomes permanently traumatic. This is referred to as post-traumatic-stress-disorder. PTSD (once called "battle fatigue" or "shell shock") has been associated with the experiences of war veterans. The definition of PTSD has expanded to include any attack from the outside—such as rape, physical assault, torture, kidnappings, serious accidents, natural disasters, war crimes, and diseases transmitted by armies of microbes—that damages the vulnerable tissues of the body and mind. Sufferers may feel irritable and aggressive, suffer from sleep disturbances, and turn violent. Like sentinels, they enter a heightened state of attention, guarding themselves as prisoners of their own torture cell of memories.

On the other hand, the initial traumatic event and its lasting trauma can affect memory in an opposite way. The mind turns off or switches into "cruise control" in order to dampen all emotion. In clinical terms, trauma can lead to repression, depression, denial, and psychic numbing, all mechanisms to insure survival, although certainly not psychic flourishing. Such a state can lead to pseudodementia. Although much of his research and clinical work has been devoted to the psychological condition of Holocaust survivors, the psychiatrist and trauma specialist Henry Krystal describes the condition of pseudodementia, which occurs when survivors have been so traumatized by their past that they avoid historical narratives. Some even feel reluctant to enter the realm of "make-believe," lest they construct narratives that are tainted by the past, which to quote a survivor, is catching up with the present in his/her

mind (Krystal 82).² In other words, the initial traumatic event and the ensuing pseudodementia lead to a “protective” silence.³

As we shall later discover, Murakami explores the consequences of trauma on memory but from a different angle in “A Shinagawa Monkey.” Upon a close reading of the text, it becomes evident that the main character Mizuki suffers from what I call the “trauma of neglect” or “crib fatigue” or more forcefully, “crib shock.” The research from trauma theorist Henry Krystal is most insightful regarding children, and especially infants, who suffer when neglected emotionally. It is a type of “insidious trauma” (Brown 107) that tortures the mind, rather than the body. Krystal reminds us that, “Since separation from the mother quickly becomes a matter of life and death, the whole affective apparatus of the child is mobilized, the child becomes frantic and noisy and assumes a search pattern” (79). Eventually, if their emotional needs are not met, neglected children will turn down the volume of their cries. Considering that the trauma of emotional neglect occurs before children have the neuronal hardware to record it in their memories, the trauma is characterized by an absence. The traumatic event is not a violent blow to the vulnerable tissues of the mind or body. There is no lasting record of a concrete blow. Still, emotionally neglected children may very well be aware consciously or unconsciously of what I call “crib shock.” In light of Krystal’s research, I draw the conclusion that Mizuki’s pseudodementia and psychic numbing are symptoms of a traumatic event from her past, which will be discussed in greater detail in the sections that follow.

Pseudodementia, Psychotherapy and the Act of Reading

Now that a possible cause of Mizuki’s pseudodementia has been put forward, there are two pertinent questions to examine: What does her treatment consist of and is her condition curable? While it might be tempting to analyze her condition from an exclusively psychoanalytical approach, I propose to examine it in light of literary theory, as Mizuki’s psychopathology and psychotherapeutic experiences resemble the act of reading.

To understand Mizuki’s condition and treatment, it is useful to examine the structure of the story and namely the role of the narrator and the presence of gaps in the text. Let us first consider the omniscient narrator. In her article “Haruki Murakami’s Storytelling World,” Patricia Welch points out that Murakami’s fiction is an exploration of narratives and how they shape their subject. She argues that “... master narratives, however normative they seem, are constructed and may not necessarily benefit either individuals or society. Each master narrative conceals points of contestation through cultural amnesia” (58). At first, the third-person narrator moves the narrative along, precisely in a “normative” sense, concealing points of “contestation” by glossing over topics that may be too complicated. If Mizuki suffers from a type of amnesia, then it might seem logical for the narrator to play such an active role. She suffers, however, from a most curious form of dementia: she only forgets her name.⁴ She could have assumed, therefore, ownership of her story. It may be that the narrator plays such an active role because the heroine is too dense to understand and relate her emotional state. Nothing could be further from the truth. Although her job at a Honda dealership does not require that much intellectual acumen, she does show clear signs of emotional intelligence. According to the narrator, she is astute with people. “Mizuki was a good conversationalist, and she had a winning smile that always put customers at ease. She also knew how to subtly

change tacks, based on her reading of each customer's personality" (154). She reads each customer's personality and yet remains illiterate to herself? It is one thing for her to forget her name. It is still another for her to remain silent about her own story. After all, she does seem to possess the intellectual tools to chip away at an identity that remains buried in the marble of her mind.

She is neither too dense nor too demented. Apart from her forgetting her name, Mizuki's memory functions perfectly well. She can recall her birthday, her address, her phone number, and even her passport number. She draws a blank only when asked her name (150). Her silence contrasts sharply with the overbearing presence of the narrator. Readers might have the impression that she is a "prisoner of someone else's words" (Barthes 17). Just as readers are prisoners of the thoughts and words of an author, Mizuki is a prisoner of the narrator's words. We can push this position even further and suggest that because she lives the experience of thinking the thoughts of the omniscient narrator, her consciousness belongs to another. And as long as she "allows" the narrator to tell her story, she remains "locked out of the text," to use Iser's terms (208). Thus, the presence of a dominant narrator and a near-silent heroine serve as representations of an outer world and an inner mind reality (both in the realm of fiction).

An explanation as to why she has imprisoned herself in metaphorical solitary confinement surfaces with a confession: "A life without a name... was like a dream you never wake up from" (151). She appears to be in a zombie state. In other words, she does not possess a strong sense of conscious awareness. The narrator, for instance, is in charge of transmitting the heroine's darkest anxiety: "Mizuki began to worry that forgetting her name might be a symptom of some awful disease, perhaps an early sign of Alzheimer's" (152). She even depends on the narrator to relay straightforward events and raw emotions: "Mizuki went to a jewelry store, bought a thin, simple bracelet, and had her name engraved on it. 'Mizuki (Ozawa) Ando.' She felt like a cat or a dog" (151). While she seems to consider herself a closed book, the narrator apparently views her as an open one. "So she kept the whole thing to herself. Still, she thought, what her husband said—or would have said if he'd known about the problem was off the mark..." (151). By keeping her memory lapse to herself, she is ironically hiding it from herself. Conversely, by eventually sharing her story with her psychotherapist and readers, she is able to capture her name and a keener sense of personal awareness.

Before elaborating further on the issue of conscious awareness, the presence of absences in the text should be explored. Macherey insists that all books are defined by absences. "The speech of a book comes from a certain silence, a matter which it endows with form, a ground on which it traces a figure. Thus the book is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accompanied by a certain absence, without which it would not exist" (95). Absences are not just defined by blanks, but also by negations. Mizuki must not only find a way to silence the omniscient narrator, but also make those blanks and negations speak. She appears struck at the gaps in her life when she begins to speak to her counselor, Mrs. Sakaki:

As she responded to all these questions, Mizuki was struck by what an uninspired life she'd led. Nothing even remotely dramatic had ever touched her. If her life were a movie, it would be one of those low-budget nature documentaries guaranteed to put you to sleep. Washed-out landscapes

stretching endlessly to the horizon. No changes of scene, no close-ups, nothing ominous, nothing suggestive. Mizuki knew that it was a counselor's job to listen to her clients, but she started to feel sorry for the woman who was having to listen to such a tedious life story. If it were me and I had to listen to endless accounts of stale lives, like mine, Mizuki thought, at some point I'd keel over from sheer boredom. (154)

Terms such as "an uninspired life," "nothing even remotely dramatic," "one of those low-budget nature documentaries guaranteed to put to sleep," and keeling "over from sheer boredom" indicate that Mizuki is not exactly flourishing. The movie of her life must rock her to sleep, even though her unconscious realm refuses to sleep, as we shall see shortly. The terms, "No changes of scene, no close-ups, nothing ominous, nothing suggestive" also point to an extreme linguistic and semantic absence. How could there have been *no* changes or *no* close-ups in her life? How could *nothing* have been ominous or *nothing* suggestive? Not only do these exaggerations point to an absence, but to something kindred to Macherey's negations or better, to shadows, which denote "a true absence, or is it the extension of a half-presence" (Macherey 91)? The term half-presence describes both Mizuki's state and the ill-defined nature of her narrative. It also brings to mind Freud's comment that, "Nothing can really disappear... in mental life, nothing which has once been formed can perish, that everything is somehow preserved" (*Civilization* 16). Mizuki has a name, but fails to remember it. She has an identity, but fails to understand it. She has a hidden source of trauma, but fails to put her finger on it. The pertinent question, therefore, is: how does she make sense of what remains preserved? Barthes argues that, "...language is never innocent: words have a second order memory which mysteriously persists in the midst of new meanings" (16). His emphasis on the lingering memory of language intimates that to reveal that which remains veiled, Mizuki must first engage herself completely in language (talk therapy), which will lead eventually to an experience in the unconscious realm.

The presence of absences should not be taken lightly. Macherey points out that "For there to be a critical discourse which is more than a superficial and futile *reprise* of the work, the speech stored in the book must be incomplete; because it has not said everything, there remains the possibility of saying something else, after another fashion" (91). In other words, the awareness of gaps in a work is the starting point of criticism. This statement may be intended for students and teachers of literary theory to make "known that which one does not wish to know" (Bourdieu 158). It can also be applied to Mizuki's condition and treatment. The realization that there are absences in her life provokes her to question what the blanks might be hiding. Therefore, the structure of the story—the presence of an omniscient narrator and the gaps—adds to the portrait of pseudodementia, and this is a distinctive case of the form of a story embellishing the thematic content.

Finally, the presence of an omniscient narrator and the gaps in the story support an overarching theme of Mizuki's lack of conscious awareness. Even though philosophers (and scientists, such as Antonio Damasio) have questioned the absolute certainty of Descartes's *cogito*, arguing that "consciousness is a highly fugitive state," literary theorists have highlighted that conscious awareness can be gained by reading (Freud *Outline* 31).⁵ While Iser emphasizes "how little we are aware of our own reality," he is also quick to point out that "reading plays a not unimportant part in the process of becoming conscious" (159). I would

like to push Iser's position even further and suggest that just as we develop conscious awareness through reading, we develop another acute form of conscious awareness through delving into the unconscious realm through psychotherapy. By telling her story during therapy and encountering the dark and wounded tissues of her unconscious mind, Mizuki undergoes a treatment that leads to the cure. The story, therefore, is about curing and the story becomes the cure. In metaphorical terms, "A Shinagawa Monkey" resembles a portrait of a painter painting a self-portrait. Iser sums up this *mise en abîme* as, "As a text and reader thus merge into a single situation, the division between subject and object no longer applies, and it therefore follows that meaning is no longer an object to be defined, but is an effect to be experienced" (9-10). The emphasis is on the term "experience." Mizuki engages in her personal narrative therapy in order to find a cure. She becomes the object as well as the subject of her analysis, just as "To learn 'something *from* psychoanalysis' is a very different thing than to learn 'something *about* it:' it means that psychoanalysis is not a simple *object* of the teaching, but its *subject*" (Felman 26).

It may seem obvious that talk therapy promotes a cure. However, this paper does not attempt to study talk therapy in general. Instead, it centers on treatments for a loss of memories due to trauma. Talk therapy seems to be key to Mizuki's recovery, perhaps because research shows that humans attempt to make sense of experience mainly through narrative, particularly those "whose profound losses undermined the very foundations of their constructions of self and world" (Fireman 166). Once Mizuki transmits her life story to the psychotherapist and to readers, she not only captures parts of herself, but she also begins to construct herself. Returning to Krystal's theories, we can draw the conclusion that it is during psychotherapy that Mizuki is able to capture and construct herself, and it is most notably thanks to a journey to the unconscious that she is able to find a cure.

A Journey to the Unconscious

Relying on psychoanalytic research to make sense of Mizuki's encounter with the unconscious realm, I also offer a close reading of the text so that readers might journey along with Mizuki to discover her inner world. In his *An Outline of Psycho-analysis*, Freud emphasizes that the unconscious is ill-defined. It is a place and yet not a place. It is dominated by instinctual drives and the search for pleasure. For Lacan, the unconscious Other is like a language: it is a moving target that escapes logical discourse (174-76). To employ Saussure's terms, it harbors signifiers (*signifiants*) and not so many clear-cut signifieds (*signifiés*).

An encounter between the unconscious and the conscious parts of Mizuki's mind occurs only gradually. To use Freudian terms, it is through free associations (and eventually through an imaginative experience) that the ego is invited to be quiet and the id reveals a story. Before this can happen, the "unreliable" narrator must disappear, at least partially (Iser 204). Mizuki begins to relate her story to her counselor and consequently, silences the omniscient narrator, fills in the gaps, and locates the memories. If according to Lacan, the unconscious Other serves as a "confident" to the conscious Self, then one could argue that the counselor Mrs. Sakaki is even a figment of Mizuki's imagination.

In a *coup de théâtre*, Mizuki's story unravels not as a boring documentary, but rather filled with 'changes of scenes,' 'close-ups,' and 'ominous' feelings. The speed of the story picks

up when her counselor asks her to relate an event that might have had to do with names. She explains how a beautiful and popular classmate named Yuko had given her nametag to Mizuki, shortly before committing suicide. When Mizuki asked Yuko why she had wanted to give her the nametag, Yuko responded: "I don't want a monkey running off with it while I'm gone" (156). While relating the unfortunate circumstances surrounding Yuko's suicide, Mizuki reveals two important features about her background and psychology: She had been sent away to boarding school, even though her sister stayed at home and, more importantly, Yuko had asked Mizuki whether she had ever felt jealous. Mizuki skirts the question at first, perhaps since she is incapable of locating, communicating, and responding to it. The following confession confirms what we had suspected of her being out of touch with her emotions due to hidden psychic trauma: "Actually, there are lots of things I should feel frustrated about, but for whatever reason, that hasn't made me feel jealous of other people. I wonder why" (155). As for Yuko, she appears to be a figment of Mizuki's imagination. Yuko broaches the topic of jealousy, because Mizuki would have wanted to bring it up herself, but cannot. She must rely on an "acquaintance" of her mind, which is only the first step toward a journey into the unconscious realm.

To excise the metastasized tumor of jealousy, Mizuki engages in a therapy that consists of a surreal if not magical realm, where the source of her trauma and the reason for her pseudodementia are revealed. Mrs. Sakaki hands over the missing nametags to Mizuki and states: "Those nametags were stolen from you and that's why you had trouble remembering your name" (158). From an Iserian perspective, it may be disturbing to witness Mrs. Sakaki replacing the narrator as Mizuki's spokesperson. The counselor serves, however, a completely different role in the story compared to the original omniscient narrator. She does not speak on behalf of her client, but helps her client to speak. She does this by helping Mizuki to take a magic carpet ride through her own imagination.⁶

At this point in the story, a border is crossed. We move from the confines of realist literature, to the open world of magical realism. In other words, like *Alice in Wonderland*, Mizuki's story is divided into two different spheres. Instead of falling into a rabbit's hole, Mrs. Sakaki brings Mizuki to the Ward's police station and leads her to a makeshift cell where the thief is imprisoned. There, we meet a monkey, who represents Mizuki's unconscious, the part of her being that has remained silent or to return to Barthes's metaphor, imprisoned. At first shocked to discover that the nametags had been stolen by a monkey and by a talking monkey at that, Mizuki reconsiders her reactions when she hears in her mind Yuko's voice, "*I don't want a monkey running off with it,*" which confirms our suspicion that Yuko was a figment of Mizuki's imagination (158). Murakami has created an imaginative character stemming from the unconscious sphere within the imaginative realm of literature. Yuko, Mizuki, the narrator, and the author appear as Russian dolls: Yuko dwells inside Mizuki's mind; Yuko and Mizuki dwell in the narrator's mind; Yuko, Mizuki, and the narrator all dwell in the mind of the author. And could not one argue that the author and his cast of characters dwell inside the mind of us readers?

And what about the monkey? He proceeds to confess to Mizuki the reasons for his crime: "I'm a monkey who takes people's names. It's a sickness I suffer from. Once I fix on a name, I can't help myself... I'll see a name that attracts me, and then I have to have it. I know it's wrong, but I can't control myself" (159). The monkey's words make us think of a drug addict.

He fixes on a name. He cannot control himself. Mizuki is encountering irrational and impulsive urges and inevitably the power of her unconscious mind to reveal her traumatized past. The monkey also claims that when he steals a name, he assumes the negative as well as positive traits of that person. The monkey further explains that along with Yuko's name, he would have taken away "some of the darkness that was inside her" (160). Such a comment leads Mizuki to her own darkness. She must know "what evil things have stuck" to her name (160). She does not care if the truth hurts (160). "For a time, the monkey thought about this, deep frown lines in his forehead. 'I think it's better for you not to hear this,' he said" (160). Mizuki has heard this type of reasoning before. She has tried so hard to forget something that it has become engraved deeper and deeper into her gray matter. She coaches the monkey further and speaks in a clear and confident voice. This is the monkey's revelation:

Your mother doesn't love you. She has never loved you, not even for a minute, since you were born. I don't know why, but it's true. Your older sister doesn't like you, either. Your mother sent you to school in Yokohama because she wanted to get rid of you. She wanted to drive you as far away as possible. Your father isn't a bad person, but he isn't what you'd call a forceful personality, and he couldn't stand up for you. For these reasons, ever since you were small you've never got enough love. I think you've never got enough love. I think you've had an inkling of this, but you've intentionally turned your eyes away from it. You've shut this painful reality up in a small dark place deep in your heart and closed the lid. (161)

Statements such as, "ever since you were small you've never got enough love" and "you've never got enough love" confirm our suspicion. Mizuki was traumatized. She did shut down all emotional responses in order to survive. Following Krystal's theories, we can conclude that her pseudodementia is indeed an attempt to survive this "crib shock."

Although these revelations might be painful, they are not devastating, since Mizuki has been unconsciously aware of them all along. She has had an "inkling" of this (as revealed in her discussion with her alter-ego Yuko about jealousy) and simply turned a blind eye to reality. She confesses: "I've known it for a long time, but I've always closed my eyes to it, blocked my ears" (161). Mizuki has "forgiven" the monkey, and now it is time for the voice of the unconscious to return to the folds and nooks of her mind. The monkey is released to the mountains.

What Mizuki does with the knowledge of the ill circumstances that had caused her to forget her name remain unclear. Curiously or perhaps not so curiously, the narrator (the superego) closes the story with: "She finally had her name back and could resume a normal life. Things might work out. Then again, they might not. But at least she had her name now, a name that was hers, and hers alone" (161). The narrator's final words might disappoint our expectation of closure, while Mizuki's statement that she "should" be able to "handle" the monkey's revelations all by herself does not exactly assure readers that she has achieved a sense of conscious awareness. This ambiguous ending corresponds to Freud's conviction that analysis was an impossible profession, along with education, because "one can be sure beforehand of achieving unsatisfying results" (Freud quoted by Felman 22). Unlike Krystal's patients who suffer from the trauma of the Holocaust, Mizuki can still enter the realm of

“make-believe.” Thus, there is a sense that Mizuki is more cognizant of her trauma, and this is at least a first step toward healing. Her mind has been nourished by the imaginative experience of the monkey, and she has begun to recover from the impoverished state of the crib.

Like patients with other forms of dementia who suffer from hallucinations, Mizuki’s encounter with the monkey comes from her own mind and leads to an awakened state and to elucidation. Unfortunately, the hallucinations experienced by sufferers of other forms of cognitive impairment seldom resemble talking monkeys who ask for forgiveness. It might be tempting, therefore, to conclude that Murakami got it all wrong, that he trivializes the condition of pseudodementia by introducing a monkey who confesses to stealing not only nametags, but also the bananas in the kitchen (159).

Magical Realism

Even though the Shinagawa monkey might appear as an anti-pedagogue—since he appears polar-regions away from a sophisticated analyst—he turns out to be the pedagogue, par excellence. Through the literary technique of magical realism, Murakami introduces us to an unconscious realm, a place where a talking monkey has more to reveal than conscious states ever dared to make known. Magical realism occurs when the author waves his wand on a natural setting and transforms it into the supernatural. The run-of-the-mill turns into the bizarre and extraordinary. For Strecher, “...it is the means by which Murakami Haruki shows his readers two ‘worlds’—one conscious, the other unconscious—and permits seamless crossover between them by characters who have become only memories, and by memories that reemerge from the mind to become new characters again” (268). How does this happen? According to Strecher, the interaction between the unconscious and conscious realm that occurs in magical realism is based on metonymy. An object substitutes another related and yet undefined object of desire from the unconscious. Still, this does not explain exactly how pulling a rabbit out of the unconscious hat might stir characters to become “new” again.

Relying on both literary and psychoanalytic theories, we can discover how magical realism “works”. First of all, since the unconscious Other is a place that defies reason, the object appears intrinsically alien. Consequently, Mizuki and readers can indulge in what Iser calls, “alien” thoughts (155). The monkey’s presence gives Mizuki (and perhaps readers) the impression of having experienced another life or something altogether new. Thus, instead of relying on psychoanalytic techniques (such as the analysis of dreams, Freudian slips, and hypnosis), magical realism create a literary atmosphere for characters to experience the Other first hand in a strange form. Secondly, Mizuki’s experience with the talking monkey seems similar to what the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein describes in her article “The Psycho-analytic Play Technique” about her patient Rita (35-40). The playground was a therapeutic environment for Rita; she found the playground a safer place for acting out her trauma than the psychiatrist’s office. Similarly, Mizuki finds a more therapeutic environment in the imaginative experience of her mind where she encounters a talking monkey. Thirdly, magical realism speaks to us in the language of symbols that represent unconscious content, just as fairy tales represent a duplication of the unconsciousness. Mizuki’s encounter with a talking monkey brings to mind Bettelheim’s theories on fairy tales. Bettelheim contends that for children to enrich their lives, they must stimulate their imagination. “In a fairy tale, internal

processes are externalized and become comprehensible as represented as the figures of the story and its event” (Bettleheim 25). To Bettleheim’s mind, “The child’s unconscious processes can become clarified for him only through images which speak directly to the unconscious (31). Therefore, magical realism is not just a whimsical literary style designed to attract a post-modern readership. It is the literary feature that guarantees a character’s source of healing from a deep-seeded trauma, and it may very well serve readers in the same way.⁷

Conclusions

This statement leads us back to the beginning of the article and its stated goals. While it might seem that Murakami’s talking monkey renders Mizuki’s lamentable condition absurd, it is the most salient feature of the story for the purposes of this article. Mrs. Sakaki and Mizuki were definitely onto something by finding and speaking to the Shinagawa monkey. Not only is he controlled by uncontrollable urges (159), but he is also a masked character. He hides in the sewers (159), in the dark recesses of the mind. Furthermore, the appearance of the monkey is significant, because it is an animal, as opposed to another human. Animals often serve as a source of comfort, like a teddy we clutch in our arms in the absence of our mother. We humanize animals and ask them to make sense of our emotional experiences, precisely because they have sophisticated sensorial powers and seem, therefore, to be in touch with basic emotions. In addition, their emotions do not seem to be burdened by reason. Animals’ emotions seem to flow naturally from impulses. Thus, the monkey leads Mizuki to a more primitive mental state, where a suppression of emotion due to trauma can no longer occur. Ironically, it is by encountering an animal that she is able to become more human, as to be human is to feel emotions, as primary and primitive those might be.

How might such a conclusion help those who suffer from this condition? The Shinagawa monkey provokes us to ask ourselves whether we might be suffering from an atrophy of the imagination. Mrs. Sakaki knew that Mizuki’s treatment was all about reaching the part of her client’s mind that was still intact, and it was in the unconscious realm where Mizuki’s primary and primitive urges found a talking monkey to care for her. This obviously is neither a universal model nor a perfect method of care. Mrs. Sakaki employs a practice of care and empathy to treat Mizuki’s pseudodementia and crib fatigue, by inviting us to consider sufferers of dementia and psychic numbing as nothing less than human, by practicing an etiquette of warmth and therapies that take us to other realms of imaginative experience. Above all, she inspires us to use another part of our mind to communicate with those who suffer from the ill consequences of trauma. A talking monkey takes over when Namenda and Prozac wear off.

Finally, if we are going to define literature in reference to medical practice, then we might say that the act of reading literature is a therapeutic treatment. It is about changing the reader into a creative creature who imagines talking monkeys. Perhaps more significantly, it is about a transformation of a rational creature into a feeling one who cries over a character’s crib shock and is rocked by the music of language and the images that come to life in the cradle of her mind.

Notes

¹ Referring to his patients, Krystal writes: “They seem to be so bitter, and disappointed with the world at large, that they seem to have retreated into a sullen state... I feel that this condition is similar to pseudodementia, in which individuals are so hurt, so deeply wounded beyond the possibility of recovering through grieving, that they constrict their mental functions, and function as if they were partly demented” (92).

² In his book *Trauma A Social Theory*, Jeffrey Alexander elaborates further on this narrative impasse: “A tragic narrative offers no redemption in the traditionally religious Judeo-Christian sense. There is no happy ending, no sense that something else could have been done, and no belief that the future could, or can, necessarily be changed. Indeed, protagonists are tragic precisely because they have failed to exert control over events” (60).

³ In his book *How the Brain Changes Itself*, Norman Doidge writes in fact: “Depression, high stress, and childhood trauma all release glucocorticoids and kill cells in the hippocampus, leading to memory loss. The longer people are depressed, the smaller their hippocampus becomes...” (241).

⁴ Murakami seems to be intrigued by the topic of names and lost identities in his fiction. Boku, the narrator of the *End of the World*, gives up his name and his shadow, which means that he relinquishes his mind, heart, and memories. The other characters of the story have ill-defined names, such as “Rat” and “the Woman Missing a Finger.” Strecher has devoted sections of his article to the enigma of names in Murakami’s literature (266-67; 292-93).

⁵ See neuroscientist Antonio Damasio’s *Descartes’ Error*, a reappraisal of Descartes’ *cogito*. For Damasio, emotions, intellectual abilities, and consciousness are intimately attached and make up conscious awareness (130).

⁶ It is also plausible that Mrs. Sakaki, the counselor, is a figment of Mizuki’s imagination, just as Yuko and the monkey seem to be.

⁷ Some may argue that it does not make sense to read Mizuki’s condition as a simple realist representation, since her condition could serve as a symbol of a greater cultural pathology of emotional and mental repression due to ideology. Such a discussion, however, would merit a considerable diversion away from the conditions of crib shock; pseudodementia; and forms of recovery, such as journeys to the unconscious realm (magical realism). Furthermore, one of the starting premises of this article is that it does indeed make sense to study Mizuki’s condition as a realist representation, as the magical realism of the text renders it closer to an authentic literary work. Eagleton confirms this in his *How to Read Literature*: “The only authentic literary work is one which is conscious of this falsification, and which tries to tell its tale in a way that takes it into account. Literature is false. But the only literature that is true, is that which takes into account the fact that it is false” (106).

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