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Fear of the Other in Haruki Murakami's "The Little Green Monster"

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ABSTRACT

Murakami's narratives are not mere stories; they are intricate tapestries woven with allegorical threads, inviting readers into a world where the familiar and the uncanny coexist in perfect harmony. Murakami's writing is characterized by a seamless fusion of the mundane and the surreal, deep exploration of human psychology and relationships, recurring themes of loneliness, alienation, and search for identity, and masterful use of symbolism and imagery.

Keywords: *The mundane and the surreal, human psychology, loneliness, alienation, and search for identity*

FULL PAPER

Haruki Murakami, a literary phenomenon of our time, stands at the forefront of contemporary Japanese literature. His works, translated into numerous languages, have captivated readers worldwide with their unique blend of reality and fantasy. As Deborah Treisman, editor of *The New Yorker*, aptly describes, Murakami's narratives are "inquisitive, exploratory." She further elaborates: "His heroes, hapless or directed, set off on missions of discovery. Where they end up is sometimes familiar, sometimes profoundly, fundamentally strange. A subtle stylist and a self-willed Everyman, Murakami is a master of both suspense and sociology, his language a deceptively simple screen with a mystery hidden behind it. In his fiction, he has written about phantom sheep, about spirits meeting up in a netherworld, about little people who emerge from a painting, but, beneath the evocative, often dreamlike imagery, his work is most often a study of missed connections, of both the comedy and the tragedy triggered by our failures to understand one another" (Treisman)

"The Little Green Monster," published in Murakami's 1993 collection "The Elephant Vanishes," encapsulates the essence of his literary style. This short story serves as a perfect entry point into Murakami's surreal universe. Written in the first-person narrative, the story is both surreal and magical as we find here a combination of the abstract and the concrete in the narrative. The incident that the narrator describes sounds like a nightmare that happened in her life. A strange creature enters her house, its physical description suggesting that such a creature does not exist in the real world. The creature begins talking like a human and can read the mind of the storyteller. Such a creature with superpower has not been met in this world yet. The way the storyteller tortures and overpowers him is also quite novel. Overall, the story seems like an event that happened in a dream world or fantasy world, with no basis in reality.

However, Murakami's genius lies in grounding these surreal elements in a realistic setting, creating a perfect example of magical realism. He doesn't transport the reader to a fantastical world; instead, he brings the fantastic into our everyday reality. As the author describes the whole incident, with all the details he has gone into, it never once felt like it was really happening or impossible. For a while, we believe the whole incident. Murakami has not taken us to any other world like 'Alice in Wonderland.' Rather, he has brought another world into our world. And in the combination of these two worlds, we have found a third world that somehow brings up the story of our lives.

The story is rich with symbolism and open to various interpretations. From an ecological perspective, the protagonist's love for trees represents humanity's connection to nature. The narrator is a tree-loving woman who planted a tree in her garden with her own hands when she was young. The tree grew along with the storyteller, and she looks at it with a compassionate eye. The monster emerging from the earth could symbolize nature's attempt to communicate with humans. The

woman's violent reaction might represent humanity's fear and destruction of the natural world.

From a psychological standpoint, Sara Ferreira's interpretation suggests the story as a metaphor for repressed trauma, possibly a rape experience. She argues, "In Murakami's 'The Little Green Monster,' the female protagonist experiences the repressed memory of her rape, which is conveyed through a visit by a little green monster in a dream. The little green monster is the expression of the Jung's shadow archetype which surfaces due to the dream like state that Murakami's main character and narrator is in (Ferreira).

As a social and political allegory, the story can be seen as a commentary on fear of the 'Other' in society. The lonely woman craves companionship but is afraid of the Other. This could represent the challenges of interpersonal relationships and the fear of intimacy. The narrative could also be exploring themes of xenophobia and social anxiety.

Murakami's writing style in "The Little Green Monster" exemplifies his ability to create a dream-like atmosphere. His prose seamlessly blends the real and the unreal, making the impossible seem plausible within the context of the story. The author's meticulous attention to detail grounds the surreal elements in reality, evident in the physical description of the monster, the sensory details of the garden and the oak tree, and the protagonist's internal monologue and emotional reactions. "That day, too, I was probably talking to the oak tree-I don't remember what about. And I don't know how long I was sitting there. The time slips by when I'm looking at the garden. It was dark before I knew it: I must have been there quite a while. Then, all at once, I heard a sound. It came from somewhere far away-a funny, muffled sort of rubbing sort of sound. At first, I thought it was coming from a place deep inside me, that I was hearing things-a warning from the dark cocoon my body was spinning within. I held my breath and listened. Yes. No doubt about it. Little by little, the sound was moving closer to me. What was it? I had no idea. But it made my flesh creep" (Murakami)

"The ground near the base of the tree began to bulge upward as if some thick, heavy liquid were rising to the surface. Again, I caught my breath. Then the ground broke open and the mounded earth crumbled away to reveal a set of sharp claws. My eyes locked onto them, and my hands turned into clenched fists. Something's going to happen, I said to myself It's starting now. The claws scraped hard at the soil, and soon the break in the earth was an open hole, from which there crawled a little green monster" (Murakami)

Its skin colour is like that of the leaves of the tree. Since she is fond of the tree the tree has also come to express her feelings in return. He came to say that he also loves that woman. Afraid, the woman thought that that the creature has come close to him and knocking at the door to kill her, to eat her.

When such thoughts are storming her mind, the monster begins to speak like a human in such a manner that it can read what is going on in her mind: "What a

terrible thought, madam: Of course I wouldn't eat you. No no no. I mean you no harm, no harm, no harm. Madam madam madam, don't you see? Don't you see? I've come here to propose to you. From deep deep deep down deep down deep. I had to crawl all the way up here up here up. Awful, it was awful, I had to dig and dig and dig. Look at how it ruined my claws! I could never have done this if I meant you any harm, any harm, any harm. I love you. I love you so much I couldn't stand it anymore down deep down deep. I crawled my way up to you, I had to, I had to. They all tried to stop me, but I couldn't stand it anymore. And think of the courage that it took, please, took. What if you thought it was rude and presumptuous, rude and presumptuous, for a creature like me to propose to you" (Murakami)?

Murakami explores several profound themes in "The Little Green Monster." The protagonist's solitude and her connection to the tree highlight themes of urban isolation and loneliness. The woman's reaction to the monster represents the human tendency to fear what we don't understand, touching on the theme of fear of the unknown. The story also delves into the complex relationship between humans and the natural world, exploring the nature versus humanity dynamic. On a deeper level, the monster can be seen as a manifestation of the protagonist's inner fears or repressed emotions, allowing Murakami to explore the concept of inner demons. Murakami leaves much to the reader's interpretation, a hallmark of his style. The story's conclusion is ambiguous, allowing readers to draw their own meanings and connections.

Murakami's themes are relatable and transcend cultural boundaries, appealing to readers across the globe. His unique blend of the real and surreal creates a recognizable "otherworldliness" that has become his signature style. Despite the fantastical elements in his stories, Murakami's characters remain grounded in reality, allowing readers to connect with them on a personal level. Furthermore, his approachable writing style avoids overtly complex literary techniques, making his works accessible to a wide range of readers.

Haruki Murakami's "The Little Green Monster" serves as a microcosm of his larger body of work. Through this short story, readers can glimpse the author's ability to weave complex themes into seemingly simple narratives. Murakami's talent lies not just in creating fantastical scenarios, but in using these scenarios to explore deeply human experiences and emotions. As readers continue to delve into Murakami's works, they find themselves drawn into a world where reality and fantasy dance in a delicate balance, where the ordinary becomes extraordinary, and where the human psyche is laid bare in all its complexity. It is this unique ability to illuminate the human condition through a lens of magical realism that cements Haruki Murakami's place as one of the most significant and beloved authors of our time. His stories, like "The Little Green Monster," continue to captivate and challenge readers, inviting them to explore the boundaries between reality and imagination, and to confront the complexities of their own inner worlds.

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