

## Down the Treasures of Identity Lane in Haruki Murakami's 'A Wild Sheep Chase'

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### Abstract

*The subversion of standard concepts of space and time distinguishes magic realism, a stylized reworking of classic realism, and the Eurocentric tales of empire. In addition, it seems to represent the convergence point of postmodern and post-colonial ideas, giving rise to new representational schemes. The key concept of postmodernism and postcolonialism is the identity that emphasizes on an alliance on the fictionality of history. Critically analyzing Haruki Murakami's work "A Wild Sheep Chase" is a work of literature in the magical realism subgenre, it is distinguished by the illusion of grounded reality interspersed with surreal happenings. The novel illustrates how suppressing one's identity can leave a void in one's soul and cause trauma to the suppressed. An anonymous narrator embarks on a mission to find a sheep in the city of Hokkaido, an elegantly flowing tale. He encounters several individuals there who have fallen prey to the sheep man, who takes possession of people and manipulates them to achieve their own goals and takes a portion of their identity, which causes them to experience an identity crisis. The study analyses how magic realism is applied by the author to indicate the intensity of the trauma inflicted upon people in the name of colonialism and how people inside that magic glass were tortured by the trauma, imprisoned, and in search of the identity void created by the Colonialist suppression.*

**Keywords:** Identity crises, psychological trauma, magical realism, post-colonialism, power.

The stylized rewriting of classic realism and the Eurocentric narratives of imperialism, known as magic realism, is distinguished by the subversion of conventional ideas of space and time. It also appears as the point of convergence between postmodern and post-colonial thought, producing new orders of representation. Magical realism then turns into, as Bhabha explains "The literary language of the emergent post-colonial world" (Nation and Narration 7) and takes on a critical role, towards the Western metaphysics of reason both implicitly and explicitly. The entwinement of the representable and the unrepresentable gives rise to magic realism, an act of

writing back and creating a new identity and articulation order. The novel '*The Wild Sheep Chase*' belonging to the genre of magic realism deals with the quest for identity in one's native place. The question of identity in the novel starts with the fact that all the characters are nameless. Apart from the nickname the Rat and a Chinese bartender named J, the novel contains no proper names, only descriptive ones to identify the characters. Bhabha's analysis of postcolonial mimicry highlights how magic realism functions within a system of hyper-mimesis and slippery signification, resulting in a persistently problematic and unresolved connection between the signifier and the signified.

"*A Wild Sheep Chase*" is a work of literature in the magical realism subgenre, characterized by a novel's appearance of grounded reality interrupted by fantastical events. This was the first of Murakami's novels that achieved worldwide acclaim that addressed delicate subjects in Japanese history. Due to its global appeal and emphasis on Japanese history, *A Wild Sheep Chase* is regarded as a significant contribution to Japanese literature. Boku, the main character, and his companion the Rat belong to Japan's post-World War II generation, and the story takes place in the late 1970s. This has prompted some critics to believe that the Rat and Sheep conflict sprang from the 1960s student protests. Kyoto-born Haruki Murakami (1949) later relocated to Tokyo to attend Waseda University. His works are infused with his passion for music. Numerous characters in his works enjoy listening to music while passing the time, one of his well-known novels, *Norwegian Wood*, is titled after a Beatles song. '*Pinball*', '*1973*' and '*A Wild Sheep Chase*' comprise "*The Trilogy of the Rat*". His writings have been translated into over fifty languages and have received many nominations for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Identity is a core concept in postmodernism and postcolonialism. Postmodernism and postcolonialism incorporate an alliance of the fictionality of history and a strategic "Attentiveness to fragmentation and the gaps and silences within the archive" (Ward 100). The mid-1900s saw the liberation of numerous Asian and African nations from official colonial domination, despite several hundred years of imperialism and colonialism. Because of this, colonialism is frequently seen as a thing of the past in both colonised and former colonising states. Moreover, nations like the United States and Great Britain continue to rule over colonial territories. Furthermore settler-colonial nations like the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, where the long-term occupation of Indigenous territory has been institutionalised and ingrained. The majority of them wanted the ownership of the land rather than intercultural cooperation and peace. They sought to create money to line their coffers, not share the plentiful resources. They wished to impose their history and customs upon those of the Indigenous

people. The fact that land was regarded as communal and sacred was of little concern to these colonists. Most thought that earth was supposed to be purchased and sold.

The author cleverly portrays how one defines their own identity. By not giving proper names to the characters, the author is trying to emphasize the fact that something important is missing from the characters; that something is lost. An important part of oneself has disappeared from the namelessness and additionally, it shows the fact of loss of the possibility of one's self. Even the objects have names and by not naming the characters the author wants to show that the characters have become less than an object. One example of this is when the narrator reveals his identity to his new girlfriend. The narrator states: I've memorized all the murder's names in every Ellery Queen mystery ever written (Wild Sheep Chase 25). The idea postulated here is that all of the other have names, but the author does not. Even in one's place, their identity is suppressed and they are subjugated through the means of power. The supernatural character in the novel, the sheep man presents a clever analogy of the power-driven people. Murakami is trying to present a crowd that stands out with a revolutionary and rebellious will through a star-stained sheep as the representation of power in the novel opposite to a normal sheep that has no will. In the novel, the character of the secretary makes a rough commentary on the identity struggle faced by individuals in Japan. Though it at least carried through a unified theme. The "mutual opposition of ideologies" shall we call it. It spoke a certain pathos, rather like the mule, who placed between two identical buckets of fodder dies of starvation trying to decide which eats first".

The European settlers in the United States never departed, unlike the colonial occupants of much of the African continent. This is known as settler colonialism, a unique kind of colonialism that aims to supplant Indigenous people with a new settler population—often using forced assimilation and genocide. Any non-Indigenous person residing in a settler-colonial state such as the US, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand is considered a settler. By comprehending settler colonialism, colonialism is a continuous practice of violence against and erasure of Indigenous people rather than a single, isolated incident.

The sheep professor was a brilliant and successful person before meeting the sheep man but after the possession by the sheep man, he became someone who never leaves his hotel room and is obsessed with the sheep because the sheep had stolen a part of his identity from him. So, he begins to call him sheepless. The section in the novel highlights not only the magical realism

present in the work but also how an identity struggle can evoke a sense of emotional distress in an individual's life. As he feels that a part of him is missing, he is never ready to face society and become someone who is anti-social and bitter shut. The narrator of the story, who refers to himself using the Japanese pronoun "Boku" meaning "I," also experiences the same situation as if he is searching for the sheepman. He also searches for something he has lost in his life due to tragic events.

The first subsection of chapter two is devoted to the history of Hokkaidō and the Ainu people. A ka-i policy, imposed by the Tokugawa administration, divided the globe into concentric zones of foreignness or influence. Thus, while examining the colonisation of Hokkaidō and the Ainu people, the Tokugawa era serves as a useful starting point. As more people moved to Hokkaidō, the authorities realised it was crucial to distinguish between Ainu and Wajin immigrants. Whether or not the Ainu were seen as a distinct race, their enslavement persisted because they were viewed as distinct and beyond the ka-i's sphere of power. Ainu policy changed significantly throughout the Meiji period, and in the latter part of the Meiji period, the government made an effort to assist the Ainu who were impoverished. During this period, many Ainu-specific institutions served as tools for eradicating Ainu culture rather than for imparting knowledge, and the Japanese educational system still refuses to acknowledge the violent past of the Ainu people.

The Boss who heads a powerful capitalist organisation coerces the unnamed narrator and protagonist into a search for a mysterious sheep with a star-shaped birthmark. The protagonist, Boku undergoes a lot of strain after using a certain photograph in an advertisement by the secretary to a major right-wing figure called Sensel, or Boss. For Boku, at a glance, the sheep in this photograph do not seem different from one another and this suggests that it may represent the heterogeneous, sheep-like society lacking leadership. When the secretary instructs Boku to examine one of the sheep because of its oddity closely, Boku highlights his uniqueness, noting its power and distinction from the other sheep in the picture. Sheep as an animal were employed in military operations between the Meiji period and the conclusion of World War II. Sheep are portrayed as symbols of progress due to their conquering history and ability to build political and economic empires. Thus, the narrative shows the Sheep's selection throughout history.

Tracing the path of the hosts reveals a series of victories culminating in the Sheep's acquisition of the Rat. Following the path of the hosts reveals a series of victories culminating in the Sheep's acquisition of the Rat, which brings me to my study of the Rat in chapter three. The

third chapter of *A Wild Sheep Chase*, “*The Dialectic of the Sheep and the Rat*,” examines the function of the Rat in generating dialectic with the figure of the Sheep. This chapter aims to expand on the historical data and analysis provided in the second chapter. In the second chapter of the novel the sheep man is mentioned as a parasite that possesses its host body and gradually inhibits their thinking and replaces it with the contents of its mind. Here it gives an instance where the Sheep Professor is looking for his own identity: The sheep that enters a body is found to be immortal. And so, the person who hosts the sheep is found to be immortal. However, should the sheep escape, the immortality goes. It’s all up to the sheep. If the sheep likes its host, it’ll stay for decades. If not—zip!—it’s gone. People abandoned by sheep are called the ‘sheepless.’ In other words, people like me”. (Wild Sheep, 222) As a symbol of a species that has gone extinct, the hybrid figure known as the Sheep Man is removed at the end of the book. Sheep Man does not belong in a late-stage capitalist world, any more than sheep do. Sheep are neither native to Japan nor well suited to its environment.

In the novel’s conclusion, the hybrid figure known as the Sheep Man is destroyed, serving as a symbol of an extinct species. Sheep Men are ill-suited for a life in a late-stage capitalist society, much as sheep are neither indigenous nor appropriate for the conditions in Japan. Murakami announces the end of expansionism and “reckless” modernisation with his death, the death of the Rat, and the presumably fatal explosion of the Sheep Man. Psychological trauma, its representation in language, and the role of memory in shaping individual and cultural identities are the central concerns of the field of trauma studies. The psychoanalytic theories on trauma are paired with additional theoretical frameworks of post structural, socio-cultural, and postcolonial theory to form the basis for learning about the representations of an extreme experience and its effect on identity and memory. The field of trauma study first emerged in the 1990s and relies on Freudian theory to develop a model of trauma that imagines an extreme experience that challenges the limits and even ruptures meaning altogether. Having deep roots in the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud it serves as the foundation stone for the entire field. Nonetheless, trauma survivors possess a strong urge to tell their stories to the world. The pain inflicted upon the soul is much more unbearable than the physical pain endured sometimes. So, people turn to writings to tell about the agony they felt - how they lost their identity, how they became the other, how they became the oppressed. It is extremely difficult for a trauma victim or survivor to express their experience as they are something unconsciously blocked and turned into repressed memories. What makes the novel something that transcends the ordinary is when Haruki Murakami struck the chords of ordinary language to weave a tale

for the search for one's own identity and presented it in a stylish and swinging language. The narrator represents his dislocation from society: "I turn a corner,' I offered, just as someone ahead of me turns the next corner. I can't see what that person looks like. All I can make out is a flash of white coattails. But the whiteness of the coattails is indelibly etched in my consciousness. Ever get that feeling" (Wild Sheep Chase 31). Haruki Murakami's novel 'The Wild Sheep Chase', stages a rewriting of the identity crisis of the subjugated people in Japan. Embedded within the novel is a tale that delves into the relationship between the physical surroundings and one's sense of identity, presenting an indirect account of a character's struggle with their sense of self. The end of the novel portrays the narrator coming to terms with his differences and making peace with his lost identity in a colonised land.

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