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## **About Sheep and Man: A Study of Haruki Murakami’s Sheep Man Image**

### **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to examine the multifaceted elements present in Haruki Murakami’s novels, with a main focus on their philosophical underpinnings. In particular, the analysis of the recurring character known as the Sheep Man is at the center of attention. The latter, a fundamental and mysterious figure in Murakami’s literary universe, embodies a fusion of human and animal traits. He becomes a means for the search of identity and the exploration of other existential themes. In various novels, the Sheep Man acts as a guiding force for the other protagonists on their quests for self-discovery. This article sheds light on the elements of magical realism and symbolism, such as the Sheep Man’s fondness for doughnuts, that enrich the narrative and invite diverse interpretations. This research also delves into philosophical concepts like “Possible Worlds,” suggesting that Murakami’s narratives exist in a realm where the boundaries between different realities are blurred. Finally, the article shows that Murakami’s exploration of identity and self-discovery mirrors his protagonists’ self-journeys. At the same time, it reflects autobiographical aspects of the author himself. The use of magical realism allows Murakami to effectively convey these themes and captivate readers with thought-provoking narratives.

**Keywords:** magical realism, inner narrative, the monogatari (storytelling), self-discovery, animal characters

### **1. Introduction**

Various aspects of Japanese history provide a broad background for Haruki Murakami’s narrative. Within this rich tapestry there are references to cultural landmarks, including the ones linked to Western influences and popular culture. His stories call into play philosophical themes, particularly existentialism, which

become more pronounced towards the conclusion of his books. For instance, “A Wild Sheep Chase” is a complex text that smoothly blends reality with the fantastical features typical of Murakami’s oeuvre. Told through the eyes of an ordinary protagonist navigating everyday life, the novel, rich in metaphorical depth, explores the profound quest for meaning and purpose in human existence.

According to Strecher (2014: 19), just as computers are connected to the Internet, all our individual inner narratives are interconnected and contribute to one overarching narrative, which results in a story that has been written and continues to be written perpetually. Murakami’s works revolve around the central themes of identity and the influence of history in shaping an individual’s sense of oneself. Therefore, the writer has tried to create a strong and self-reliant protagonist capable of investigating the darkest recesses of his soul.

In relation to this, Napier (1996) emphasizes the distinctiveness of Japanese identity crisis, noting that Japan was never colonized by European powers. It is a unique case. Japan did not endure the trauma of colonization experienced by other non-Western countries. Murakami is part of the post-war generation, which has inherited only the lingering memories of war without having lived through its tangible, immediate outcomes.

In his novels, much of what Murakami portrays is firmly rooted in reality and adheres to the natural laws of our world. However, quite abruptly, readers encounter surreal elements such as disappearing hotel floors, the mysterious Sheep Man, gatherings of skeletons, talking crows, or a sleeping character suddenly absorbed into a television screen. As readers, we are compelled to question whether these strange occurrences exist within the same world we inhabit or if the worlds Murakami describes are fundamentally distinct realms, potentially predisposed to such phenomena.

Haruki Murakami introduces his audience to interconnected worlds, one conscious and the other unconscious. This fact allows continuous, invisible, and logical crossover between the two. In this framework, characters reduced to memories resurface from the mind to be transformed into new ones. A philosophical explanation of this fact is the concept of “Possible Worlds,” which suggests that events may not have unfolded as we experienced them but could have developed differently in other realities (Menzel 2017).

Thus, Murakami’s magically real animals have functions that extend beyond merely inspiring fascination or evoking empathy through anthropomorphism. These animals are used to bridge conceptual realms that are traditionally separate, challenge dominant human-centered structures, and transcend national boundaries. Murakami’s animals connect typically distinct domains: the human with the animal, the magical with the real (or the mythological with the magical and real), and different magical dimensions with each other. Through speech, these animals cross the divide between non-speaking animals and speaking humans.

In addition to linking realms, Murakami’s beasts contribute to the internationalization of his fiction. The latter, like music and other cultural elements

drawn from the author's creative "reservoir," manage to address both local and global issues, expanding his audience. His animal characters are not tied to any specific national culture. For instance, the Sheep Man, a hybrid being partially derived from sheep, reflects this transnational quality. In fact, sheep allude to the unsuccessful attempt to introduce this animal in Japan during the country's expansionist efforts.

Strecher (1999: 267) defines magic (or magical) realism as the occurrence of something is highly detailed and placed in a realistic setting but too fantastical to believe in. In Murakami's works, animals frequently function as signs of such a world invasion, marking a transition in the narrative from a strictly realistic framework to one with a more magical dimension. These animals often act as conduits, linking the reader to a parallel reality.

Faris (2012: 172) defines magic realism as the proximity or near-merging of two realms. She refers to the closeness and accessibility between the magical and the real, a dynamic evident in "A Wild Sheep Chase". This conceptualization of two interconnected realities can also be applied to the relationship between the animal and human domains, exemplified by the hybrid nature of the Sheep Man. The act of speaking, performed by animals, establishes a communicative bridge between humans and beasts, as well as between the magical and the real. In this way, a talking non-human animal serves as a clear embodiment of magic realism. The hybridity between human and animal in a figure like the Sheep Man reflects the broader hybridity of literary forms characteristic of magic realism as well (Strecher 1999: 267).

Rubin further argues that animals captivate Murakami because they embody traits shared with the unconscious mind: they are alive but lack rational thought. They are attuned to mysterious forces but unable to articulate them. As this scholar notes, animals are richly symbolic without being tied to specific allegorical meanings (Rubin 2005: 51). If Murakami denies deliberate symbolism, Rubin, as a translator, contends that animals are highly symbolic, even if in an ambiguous way. Murakami envisions his animals as images designed to influence the mind of each individual reader. In this sense, they can be interpreted as symbols.

## **2. Methodology**

This study highlights the role of the Sheep Man character in the novels "A Wild Sheep Chase" (1989), "Dance Dance Dance" (1995), "The Strange Library" (2014), and "The Sheep Man's Christmas" (1985), identifying the magical realism model at the basis of the construction of this figure. The research focus is on: 1) the magical realism elements in the aforementioned novels; 2) the concept of animalism and its developments in the character of The Sheep Man in Murakami's books. There are different text models able to represent the magical realism as a vehicle for exploring existential values within specific cultural contexts.

Considering the cultural context is very important because literary works reflect social and cultural phenomena in Japanese literary tradition. Understanding

literary works as cultural products helps us comprehend how they were formed through social and cultural interactions between Haruki Murakami and his readers. For this reason, this research involves a typological comparison approach in the context of existential theory. In this theoretical current, an individual is deeply lonely, alien to everyone, and everyone is alien to him. Real existence is reduced to the spiritual experiences of the person. The forms of existence of the latter (fear, suffering, anxiety, horror, and worry) are determined by the fear of death.

Striving for beauty and goodness, a person does not find them in the real world, because they exist only in a transcendent, supernatural, incomprehensible to the mind dimension (Stretcher 1999: 267). In “A Wild Sheep Chase” and “Dance Dance Dance” novels, the key emotions of fear, loneliness, and worry inside the Sheep Man’s character make him desperate to find his lost feeling of happiness and self-content. In “The Sheep Man’s Christmas,” instead, he is struggling to find the lost gift of composing musical pieces. “Possible Worlds,” studied in the present research, are the places where the protagonist can find the answer to his main questions and dilemmas. Moreover, it is possible to see the connection between the concept of animalism and magical realism in the novels of Murakami due to the typological comparison of the Sheep Man’s look, his role in each of the analyzed novels and his way of talking (Rubin 2005: 51).

As a result, the article is an interdisciplinary study of Haruki Murakami’s style of writing in “A Wild Sheep Chase,” “Dance Dance Dance,” “The Sheep Man’s Christmas,” and “The Strange Library,” as well as an examination of language and Japanese culture. Semiotics, typological method, and hermeneutics were chosen as approach because they can give comprehensive interpretations of the texts under discussion. Semiotic methods are used to analyze the symbolic image and the visual magical-realistic model of the Sheep Man character, illustrating two different perspectives of the inner world of Murakami’s animal figure through the mirror of self-assessment.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1. Sheep Man: An Adventure Surrounding Sheep**

In his novel “A Wild Sheep Chase,” Murakami theorizes that speaking openly and speaking the truth are fundamentally distinct. He likens honesty to truth, comparing them to the prow of a ship and its stern. Honesty emerges first, while truth follows later. The time it takes for truth to surface corresponds directly to the metaphorical size of the ship. Larger things require more time for truth to arrive. In some cases, truth only reveals itself posthumously. Therefore, Murakami often refrains from presenting the truth directly to the reader – because the truth, as he sees it, must emerge gradually and in its own time. Murakami admits that we are all between everything that is behind us and the nothingness beyond us. In his later works, he depicts this existential condition as a doughnut. Our ephemeral existence has neither coincidence nor possibility.

In “A Wild Sheep Chase,” Murakami first uses a magical real animal and builds a narrative that puts under question the traditional literary praxis. This novel, as well as the other short stories with the bizarre Sheep Man character, is a combination of diverse literary genre such as detective fiction, magical surrealism, and adventure stories with quest elements.

Interestingly, the hybrid identity of the analyzed hero is quite literal. In fact, as far as his name is concerned, the sheep in Sheep Man comes before “man,” insinuating that he is more animal-like than human. There is also the integration of the absurd bordering on the surreal, as the center of the simple stories of this ambiguous human-animal creature is a constant search for his identity.

The plot of the novel is based on the Chinese legend about the transmigration of the soul of a Sheep into a Human. The sheep gives the owner of the body absolute power, while suppressing everything human. The allegory of a Sheep Man remains a vague one. In “A Wild Sheep Chase,” the reader finds only a few obscure characteristics in his description. He may wonder if the character is a local resident, a shepherd who deliberately left human life, or a Sheep (demon), which came out of the body of the Rat (the protagonist’s friend) and turned into a half-man, half-sheep. Murakami plays with the readers, throwing them into unsolvable riddles, to which he does not give an answer to make them scroll all kinds of possible versions.

In “A Wild Sheep Chase,” the protagonist embarks on a quest to locate a mysterious sheep. However, the peculiar connections and coincidences encountered throughout the “chase” challenge the reader’s sense of plausibility and evoke skepticism (Murakami 1989). For example, the narrator’s girlfriend’s uniquely attractive ears initially appear to be a normal trait of the character.

Instead, these ears abruptly become a medium for psychic predictions – an extraordinary phenomenon that the narrator seems to accept without hesitation. Such a reaction appears inconsistent with the expected response of someone from our reality. Additionally, the narrator’s discovery of the Sheep Man, the account of the mythical sheep marked on its back, and the confession of a man who claims to have been possessed by this figure are all met with a similarly casual and uncritical attitude.

In the novel, the Sheep Man has several specific functions. He is a hybrid of animal and human:

The Sheep Man wore a full sheepskin pulled over his head. The arms and legs were fake and patched on, but his stocky body fit the costume perfectly. The hood was also fake but the two horns that curled from his crown were absolutely real (Murakami 1989: 251).

It is never explicitly clarified whether the Sheep Man is a human dressed as a sheep or a sheep inhabiting a human body. The reason lies in the character’s position at the intersection of species, without the determination of which side of this

boundary he originates from. What matters is his otherness. This inherent strangeness underscores his status as an “other.” Murakami accentuates this oddness by mixing his and the Sheep Man’s words together when speaking, emphasizing even more his exotic and unfamiliar nature. For instance, he says:

Sometimes it’s like the sheep in me and the human in me are at odds so I get like that (Murakami 1989: 254).

The peculiar construction of the Sheep Man’s language, along with the inherent difficulty in deciphering his run-together utterances, mirrors the challenge of interpreting his character. The Sheep Man’s actions and speech reflect a fusion of human and animal traits. “Approach him and he’d retreat, move away and he’d come closer” (Murakami 1989: 254). Additionally, the Sheep Man refers to himself as *we*, which could signify either his dual identity as both human and animal or his existence as part of a collective, herd-like consciousness.

When the Sheep Man is encountered for the last time in “A Wild Sheep Chase,” his body has been taken over by the protagonist’s human friend, Rat, who is himself possessed by the star-marked sheep. This element of spiritual possession further obscures the boundaries between the magical and the real, as well as between human and animals. This heightened ambiguity adds complexity to the character and broadens the scope of symbolic interpretations.

The Sheep Man represents a liminal space where species intersect. He exhibits human behaviors such as drinking and smoking. His use of language further humanizes him. On the other hand, the first-person plural in speech evokes herd behavior, underscoring his animalistic traits. He is both a human in sheep’s clothing and a man “sheeped,” possessed by the spirit of a sheep. Despite speaking human language, his sentences lack spaces and capitalization, making it difficult to parse individual words. This stylistic choice imitates the indistinct sounds of an animal.

The Sheep Man’s characteristics are reminiscent of a Neanderthal. He is attuned to social norms and politeness. However, he is quick to retreat at the first sign of aggression, even metaphorical, such as when the protagonist raises his voice. The latter states:

The sheep man was just like an animal. Approach him and he’d retreat, move away and he’d come closer. As long as I wasn’t going anywhere, there was no hurry (Murakami 1989: 254).

The Sheep Man, being part-animal, is depicted as incapable of forming any emotional bonds with the protagonist, intensifying the sense of isolation experienced by both. Despite initially symbolizing a mere sheep, this entity later evolves into a pivotal character known as the Sheep Man. The sheep adorned with a star-shaped birthmark serves as a multifaceted allusion, representing various

concepts. At a deeper level, it embodies the existential quest for the meaning of life pursued by the protagonist. Its presence permeates the narrative, inundating readers with visions and dreams, awakening their imaginations.

It may be inferred that the world depicted in “A Wild Sheep Chase” is not our own. Alternatively, one could argue that Murakami is presenting a “possible world.” In philosophical terms, the concept of possible worlds is most often associated with modal logic, particularly in discussions of logic and argumentation. However, there is a branch of philosophy where possible worlds are considered to coexist with our own in the same space and time – this is the Many-Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics (Vidman 2018). According to this theory, the Universe contains overlapping worlds that we are entirely unaware of and with various versions of ourselves existing within these parallel realities.

Toward the conclusion of “A Wild Sheep Chase,” the narrator appears to gain awareness of these overlapping worlds during an unusual encounter with a mirror. In this episode, the narrator perceives the individual reflected in the glass as distinct and separate from himself:

I wasn't seeing my mirror-flat mirror-image. It wasn't myself I was seeing; on the contrary, it was as if I were the reflection of the mirror and this flat-me-of-an-image were seeing the real me (Murakami 1989: 269).

The term “real me” could refer to the version of the narrator that belongs to our own world. Furthermore, the protagonist observes that the Sheep Man does not appear in the mirror: “In the mirror world, I was alone” (Murakami 2007: 272). From this perspective, it becomes evident that the strange phenomena, such as the enigmatic presence of the Sheep Man, do not pertain to the reality reflected through the mirror. This “mirror world” reveals a different universe – one that aligns with our own world, inhabited by individuals like us. In it, nonetheless, the Sheep Man does not exist.

A comparable encounter with a mirror appears in Murakami's short story “The Mirror” (2007). This text reinforces the symbolic significance of this object and the thesis that Murakami's narratives are rooted in a world fundamentally different from our own (Murakami 2007). In “The Mirror,” this otherworldly nature is confirmed in the scene where the narrator recalls an incident from his time as a janitor on night duty at a high school. He recounts his experience of unexpectedly discovering a mirror that he had never noticed before:

It looked exactly like me on the outside, but it definitely was not me. No that's not it. It was me, of course, but another me (Murakami 1989: 72).

In this passage, the narrator encounters another version of himself from a different world, briefly and inexplicably revealed through the mirror. By presenting his stories through the lens of an alternate world, Murakami enables

readers to confront the absurdity of the human condition. He suggests that reality is not fixed; things do not have to be as they seem and could evolve in entirely different ways. Earlier in “A Wild Sheep Chase,” the narrator, during one of his characteristic digressions, discusses the concept of the “worm universe”:

In the worm universe, there is nothing unusual about a dairy cow seeking a pair of pliers. A cow is bound to get her pliers sometime. It has nothing to do with me (Murakami 1989: 67).

In this quotation, the protagonist directly references the concept of multiple worlds or “alternate considerations”. Murakami compels the reader to recognize that, if their world and our world are merely two among countless others and the stories may seem absurd and irrational to us, we have no basis to assume that all worlds are not equally absurd.

### 3.2. “Dance Dance Dance”: Updating Sheep

In the novel “Dance Dance Dance,” the reader encounters the familiar character of the Sheep Man once again. His mask appears worn and grimy, his horns are deteriorated, and he looks noticeably older. The Sheep Man is found at the Dolphin Hotel, the same location where he had reportedly sent the protagonist’s girlfriend in “A Wild Sheep Chase.” Compared to his previous appearance, the Sheep Man’s costume is shabbier, his stature seems smaller.

This time he explains to the protagonist Boku, what is worth living for. The hero experiences spiritual emptiness just at the moment when most people begin to enjoy life. He does not know what will happen next, understanding on a subconscious level that all his actions are vain. The Sheep Man helps him figure out a life full of material goods but poor spiritually. In “Dance Dance Dance,” the mysterious character appears as a mystical guide in the inner world of the main protagonist. He gives hope to survive in a capitalist society that does not care about the spiritual side of people’s existence. The Sheep Man offers him a key without explaining what it opens. He just advises to dance without thinking about anything:

Yougottadance. Aslongasthemusicplays. Yougotta dance. Don’teventhinkwhy. Start-tothink, yourfeetstop. Yourfeetstop, wegetstuck. Wegetstuck, you’re stuck. Sod-on’tpayanymind, nomatterhowdumb. Yougottakepthestep. Yougottalimberup. Yougottaloosenwhatyoubolteddownto. Yougottauseallyougot. Weknowyou’re tired, tiredandscared. Happenstoeveryone, okay? Justdon’tletyourfeetstop (Murakami 2011: 86).

Murakami employs two symbolic elements in the quote: dance and music. These symbols encapsulate the notion that one must continue to move forward in life and adapt to its flow. The dance represents movement and the need for action,

while the music symbolizes the ongoing rhythm of life itself. At this point in the narrative, the protagonist has experienced significant challenges and is seeking to re-engage with life. The Sheep Man's instruction to "keep dancing as long as the music plays" is a metaphorical exhortation for him to persist and act as long as life continues. It underscores the idea that, no matter the obstacles, one must continue to fight and move forward with the passage of time.

The Sheep Man grows older and older until he disappears, with any hope of peace and of the vanishing of wars along with him. This is a new Murakami's riddle that forces the readers to figure out who the Sheep Man is, how did he managed to evolve from a rough half-animal to a guru. Dancing in the novel can symbolize proactive behavior. Frequently in life, it is not immediately evident what actions should be taken or are necessary. Clarity about one's path often emerges only after actively engaging and participating in life.

### **3.3. "The Sheep Man's Christmas": Through the Doughnut Hole**

In "The Sheep Man's Christmas," the Sheep Man works at a doughnut shop and adores eating doughnuts. The character is under the curse of the Hole Sheep Man because he has neglected a sacred rule. He ate doughnuts on Holy Sheep Day, being unaware of the fact that one may not eat food with holes on that day. Later, he jumps into a hole, which is a traditional way for Murakami to connect mad and metaphysical realms. After this jump, the hero takes twisted doughnuts without holes which he shares with everyone he meets in the other world. In this way, he fills the historical black hole, and when he finally meets the Hole Sheep Man, he manages to connect to the history of his people. This encounter restores his lost ability to write music, symbolizing his renewed desire for self-expression and reconnection with his identity. The Sheep Man is the representation of the Japanese postwar generation. Murakami portrays its disorientation through the Sheep Man's association with doughnuts. He is a metaphor for the absence of individuality and the historical black hole in the creation of Nipponian culture.

It is worth noting the similarities between "The Sheep Man's Christmas" and "Alice in Wonderland" by Lewis Carroll such as:

- Surrealism and dream-like worlds.

In "Alice in Wonderland," Alice enters a fantastical, unpredictable world filled with nonsensical rules. Similarly, *Sheep Man* blends reality with the absurd, creating a surreal atmosphere where boundaries between the ordinary and extraordinary are blurred.

- The adventure and absurd-eccentric characters.

Alice embarks on a journey to discover Wonderland, meeting strange characters along the way. In "Sheep Man's Christmas," the protagonist is swept into an unexpected adventure through the doughnut hole that involves meeting unusual figures and discovering strange truths.

- Themes of alienation.

"Alice in Wonderland" explores the feeling of alienation as Alice struggles to

make sense of her new world. In “Sheep Man’s Christmas,” the protagonist experiences a similar isolation, often feeling detached from the surrounding reality.

– Non-linear narratives.

Both stories have a disjointed, non-linear storyline. In “Alice in Wonderland,” the sequence of events has not a clear path. Logic often takes a backseat to imagination. Similarly, “Sheep Man’s Christmas” does not follow a conventional narrative structure. Instead, at its base there is randomness and ambiguity.

The Sheep Man can be interpreted as a metaphor for the complexities and contradictions of human nature. By placing the protagonist in a world that seems illogical and surreal, Murakami invites readers to reflect on the absurdity of life and the ways in which we try to make sense of it. The bizarre occurrences in the story force the reader to think about the meaning of our everyday experiences, relationships, and choices.

### **3.4. “The Strange Library”: Memoirs of a Shepherd**

“The Strange Library” is Murakami’s latest work, differing somewhat from his typical novels and short stories. It is a child’s tale, accompanied by a collection of illustrations. The story begins with a young boy visiting his local library to return a few books and borrow new ones. He is directed to the basement, where an austere old man informs him that the books he has selected cannot be checked out and must be read within the library. Dutifully, the boy follows the man down a set of stairs toward the reading room, only to discover that he is being locked inside a prison cell.

In “The Strange Library,” the Sheep Man lacks the sinister aura and the peculiar speech patterns exhibited by the character in “A Wild Sheep Chase” or “Dance Dance Dance.” Nonetheless, he clearly plays the same guiding and linking role in the Murakamian surreal, parallel underworld. His presence is necessary, as the narrative occasionally ventures into darker territory. The gruff man emerges as a somewhat intimidating, though exaggeratedly caricatured, protagonist, harboring a dark secret within the labyrinth beneath the library. The Sheep Man, acting as a hesitant accomplice, reveals to the boy the deeper, hidden nature of libraries.

Murakami himself expresses uncertainty about the nature of the Sheep Man character, stating that he does not really understand it himself. He suggests various interpretations of the Sheep Man. Murakami acknowledges that, at times, he himself does not exclude the possibility that the Sheep Man may represent someone afflicted with a condition called sheep. However, he emphasizes that this reading is just one of the many possible ones (Rubin 2005).

The element of the maze in “The Strange Library” could represent a journey through the mind, where the protagonist is forced to confront his own fears, confusion, and potentially unresolved inner questions. In the surreal environment of the library, the boy is trapped in a labyrinth that seems to have no clear exit. This detail mirrors the way many people experience confusion and uncertainty in life, especially when dealing with loss or confronting mortality. Furthermore, the maze can be seen as symbolic of the existential challenges people face when confronting

the unknown. If we view it through the lens of death, the protagonist's struggle to explore the labyrinth might represent his confrontation with life's inevitable end, with the uncertainty and difficulty of dealing with loss or facing death.

While the death of the protagonist's mother is not explicitly discussed in the text, it is possible to read some of the events in "The Strange Library" as reflecting a loss or death-like experience. The story is filled with themes of entrapment, alienation, and isolation, all of which can symbolize grief or the emotional impact of losing a loved one. The way the boy is locked away in the library, forced to solve riddles and deal with strange characters, could be interpreted as a metaphor for the mental and emotional labyrinth that one passes through after the death of someone close. Therefore, the protagonist's experience could symbolize a period of mourning and confusion after a death, trying to find meaning to it.

In other words, the mysterious figure of the Sheep Man in the story, as well as the boy's encounter with the strange librarian and other characters, may reflect the sense of loss, the passage of time, or the haunting nature of unresolved emotions.

At the end of the story, there is a sense of ambiguity, as the protagonist escapes the library and seemingly returns to the normal world. However, Murakami often leaves endings open to interpretation. The surreal nature of the story suggests that the end could be seen as a metaphorical "rebirth" or release from a psychological maze, symbolizing a transition after a loss. This is in line with the idea that, after loss or facing death, people often go through a process of elaborating internal tangles of thought and emotion without ever truly "solving" them.

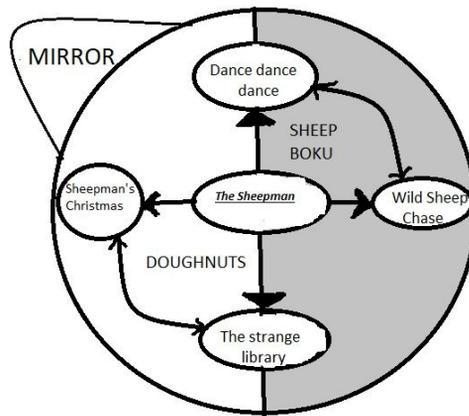
### **3.5. The Maze of Sheep Characters: the Way Through the Darkness Before You Get to The Light**

In the monogatari (a Japanese term meaning "tale" or "story") of the Sheep Man, the masterful storyteller Haruki Murakami constructs an alternate reality. As Uchida Tatsuru notes, the writer frequently employs the metaphor of digging a hole to symbolize the creative process (Uchida 2010). Indeed, while the act of creation could be metaphorically represented by building a house, growing plants, or preparing a meal, Murakami exclusively uses the imagery of digging a hole. This metaphor reflects the Sheep Man's inner world, which delves beneath the surface, descending into the enigmatic labyrinth of the subconscious. In doing so, it brings to light elements hidden from both the reader and the protagonist. This inner narrative, what Murakami refers to as monogatari, is evident throughout "A Wild Sheep Chase." Here, Boku seeks to unravel the dichotomy of good and evil through his interactions with the multidimensional character of the Sheep Man.

Having examined the novels "A Wild Sheep Chase," "Dance Dance Dance," "The Strange Library," and "The Sheep Man's Christmas", we created the following scheme that illustrates two different perspectives of the inner world of Murakami's animal figure through the mirror of self-assessment, where the central figure is the Sheep Man character.

The Figure 1 below consists of two main sections representing negative (dark) and positive (light) sides of the protagonist. The Sheep Man is placed in the center. The novels “A Wild Sheep Chase” and “Dance Dance Dance” reflect the “evil” aspects of the inner world. The analyzed short stories “The Strange Library” and “The Sheep Man’s Christmas” display the “good” ones.

In these novels, the magical realism elements employed by Murakami have numerous similarities with slight variations. First, magical realism serves as a tool, propelling the protagonists’ quest for self-discovery. Without the guides who introduce to the magical and without the themes of isolation and darkness the Sheep Man would likely remain lost and unable to find out his true identity. In the novels, the character embarks on physical journeys to access what he has always carried within, that is his inner self and core identity residing in his subconscious.



**Figure 1.** Dual perspectives of the Sheep Man

As it was already mentioned, the first portrait of the Sheep Man was created by Murakami in a negative light. In the novel “A Wild Sheep Chase,” we can see him as a brutal figure in a leather mask that covers the upper half of his face with cigarettes and matches in a pocket on his chest. Then, in “Dance Dance Dance,” the Sheep Man serves as a catalyst for the protagonist’s introspection and self-discovery, guiding the latter through the various challenges and obstacles he encounters. The Sheep Man’s fondness for doughnuts in “The Strange Library” and “The Sheep Man’s Christmas” also functions as a point of connection between him and the other characters, including the protagonist. Moreover, the act of eating doughnuts can symbolize moments of introspection or escape for the Sheep Man, providing him a temporary relief from the complexities of his life. This highlights the idiosyncratic and sometimes absurd elements of Murakami’s storytelling, adding layers of humor and charm to his narrative. In this way, the author gives an opportunity to uncover the favorable aspects of this mysterious character.

A philosophical interpretation of this can be drawn again from the concept of “Possible Worlds,” which suggests that alternative realities or experiences could have emerged from different choices or circumstances. Murakami constructs a world in which the Sheep Man exists in liminal spaces that are hidden in vanishing rooms, in the mountains of Hokkaido, and in candlelit conversations atop towering stacks of books, while indulging in doughnuts. These surreal environments embody the fluidity and multiplicity of potential realities, highlighting the idea that our current experience is just one of the many possible life trajectories.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study has explored the various elements present in Haruki Murakami’s novels, with a particular focus on the recurring character of the Sheep Man and its contribution to the exploration of themes of identity, existentialism, and the quest for meaning. Through the continuous integration of reality and fantasy, Murakami’s works transcend cultural boundaries, blending Japanese traditions with Western influences. The writer creates narratives that delve profoundly into the human experience. The Sheep Man, as a symbol of the merging of human and animal qualities, plays a pivotal role in guiding protagonists on their journeys of self-discovery, offering both philosophical and existential insights.

The use of magical realism and symbolism, especially the Sheep Man’s peculiar fondness for doughnuts, enriches the narrative and invites multiple interpretations. By applying the notion of “Possible Worlds,” Murakami casts readers in a realm where realities coexist and intertwine, deepening the exploration of identity. Finally, Murakami’s works reflect not only the protagonists’ quests but also mirror the author’s introspective journey. Through the employment of magical realism and carefully constructed philosophical themes, Murakami captivates readers with narratives that challenge and expand our understanding of reality, identity, and the self.

Thus, in Murakami’s novels, the exploration of one’s identity occurs on both physical and mental levels, whether consciously or unconsciously. They culminate in introspection. The physical journey serves as a way for the internal quest. Delving into the subconscious involves experiencing irrational phenomena such as dreams, suppressed emotions, and fears. This reliance on magical realism is integral to Murakami’s storytelling, enabling him to effectively depict the journey of self-discovery of his characters. It is not a coincidence that Murakami typically begins writing with only a vague idea, allowing the narrative to guide him through his personal exploration.

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