

The concept of symbols in the Trilogy of the Rat by Haruki Murakami

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Abstract. This article explores the symbolism of Haruki Murakami's novels "Hear the Wind Sing", "Pinball, 1973" and "A Wild Sheep Chase". Each character and location in these novels has its own emotional and allegorical meaning, symbols are a conventional designation for those or other abstract concepts. Therefore, we tried to identify artistic symbols in the works and determine their functions.

Key words: symbolism, emotional and allegorical meaning, analysis of artistic symbols, functions of symbols.

The language of Murakami's works is very special, unique, and reminiscent of the sound of music. The author surprisingly subtly conveys any shades of the characters' moods and experiences. Most often this is done through comparisons, which are sometimes quite unexpected. Stories, according to Murakami, generally convey and explain a lot - they "heal". By listening and telling stories, people share invaluable experiences. The ability to tell stories is an invaluable human quality. Any person will see some meaning in any story. But for one person this meaning will lie in one thing, for another – in another. Therefore, the author does not undertake to interpret them, he only tells.

The Trilogy of the Rat is the first three stories by Haruki Murakami: "Hear the Wind Sing", "Pinball, 1973" and "A Wild Sheep Chase". These three stories are combined by readers and critics into a trilogy, because all three stories are being spoken on behalf of the same narrator. They tell about the life of two friends.

The title of the first novel of the trilogy Murakami borrowed from Truman Capote. One of his stories ends with the phrase: "Think of nothing things, remember nothing. Just hear the wind sing" [7]. The impulse to write the book "Hear the Wind Sing" arose literally out of nothing, and the element of randomness and unpredictability played an important role in creating the novel. According to Murakami, he did not describe the events in chronological order, but "photographed" each "scene" and then arranged them in the desired sequence.

All this, probably, looks like chaos, but the book has quite traditional features of the novel - chronologically arranged events (of course, not quite a "story") from the lives of certain characters in specific historical circumstances.

The novel is set for a clearly defined period from 8 to 26 August 1970, a dull summer following the collapse of the student movement, a prelude to the usual university routine in the new academic year. The unnamed storyteller is a 21-year-old biology student who came home for the summer and plans to return to Tokyo for the fall semester.

His slightly older friend, "The Rat" ("Nezumi"), is clearly upset by a failed love story and decides to drop out of school; however, it soon becomes clear: in fact, disappointed by the fact that, being beaten by a policeman, he did not achieve anything. Friends spend a lot of time at The Jay's Bar, drink beer in unimaginable quantities, trying to quench their existential thirst, and share drunken

revelations (the tirades of the wealthy Rat are directed against wealth, despite the fact that his father made an unjust capital during the Second World War, the occupation and war with Korea).

In *The Rat*, we find a controversial self-portrait of an aspiring writer:

“- Where did you get this nickname?

- I forgot. I have it for a long time. At first I really hated it. And now I don't even think about it. You get used to everything.” [8, P.20] (*Hereinafter quotes translated by the author of the article*).

The nickname was received so long ago and has so grown into the “cultural layer” of the soul (“mukashi”), which has been accumulating since time immemorial, that the hero has already “forgotten” where it came from.

This self-absorbed youth is identified with a gloomy, frightening creature lurking in dark, secret holes. Perhaps Murakami did not “understand” everything in his first book, but he realized that he was digging up the past of his soul, rummaging among half-forgotten memories and misunderstood images that suddenly emerge from the depths of the “other world”. Lack of a rational explanation, oblivion, free associations, this is how deep mines and dark tunnels open, leading to another, timeless world that exists parallel to ours - a world that Murakami will explore with more and more confidence. Even *The Jay's Bar* gives you access to the world of the soul:

“In *The Jay's Bar*, there was an engraving over the counter, yellowed with tobacco smoke, and when time was unbearably slowing down, we stared at it for hours. The image somehow reminded me of the Rorschach test: the vague outlines in which I could distinguish two green monkeys tossing two half-deflated tennis balls ...

- What do you think they symbolize? I asked [Jay].

- The monkey on the left is you, and on the right is me. I throw you a bottle of beer, and you give me money for it.” [8, P.15]

The writer makes fun of the symbolism attached to the images of animals, and symbolization in general. He stubbornly denies the presence of “symbols” in his books. However, Rorschach's monkeys are a typical example of paintings that sweep before Murakami's readers: generalized images of animals, water elements, plants or terrain, which the author does not agree to define either in interviews or in texts; like Rorschach spots, they can independently influence the minds of readers.

If the Rat is a writer obsessed with the intimate, subjective world of symbols, then the narrator is the only one of the authors of “these pages” who is a little more inclined towards objectivity. He reacts to - or simply contemplates - events and people that come into his field of vision and are of greater interest than himself. In adolescence, the main problem for him was communication with the outside world. He was so quiet that his parents took him to a psychologist. At the age of fourteen, the young man unexpectedly began to talk as if a dam had burst; it lasted three months, and then he became an “ordinary” person, not too taciturn, but not overly talkative either.

Finishing school, the narrator deliberately adopted a calm, detached view of things, vowing to say more than half of what was on his mind. Now, having become a writer, he considers his habitual restraint a disadvantage. She certainly makes it difficult for him to communicate with the Rat, who does not see the opportunity to turn to a friend for advice.

The serenity of the narrator, the imaginary author of the book, is also conveyed to the language of the book. The most compelling feature of this small first novel is, without a doubt, its style - how intricately Murakami handles words. “In your style, I like the sense of the joy of playing with language,” one interviewer confessed to the writer after several more of his novels were released. “Unlike the writers of the past, I feel the distance between the person and his words,” Murakami replied. – “Well, in my case, the reason for this is a strong desire to speak when there is nothing to say. I didn't want to write about too many things, therefore, deleting them, I saw that there was

nothing else left". Here Murakami laughed, but continued: "So I turned to the realities of 1970 and started putting words together. It looks like I decided: what the hell - something will work out, I must try. Returning to this now, I think that then I reasoned like this: it doesn't matter how words are connected - since I am doing this, then my consciousness, one way or another, should be reflected in them" [5].

In his lecture at Berkeley, Murakami talked about his struggles with style, referring to foreign literature that inspired him:

"I suspect many of you are surprised that in all this time I have never mentioned a single Japanese writer who has influenced me. Yes, indeed, I only mentioned American or British names. Many Japanese critics suck me for this feature of my work. Many students and teachers of Japanese literature in this country do the same. However, the fact remains that before I started writing myself, I loved reading writers like Richard Brautigan and Kurt Vonnegut, and among Hispanics, Manuel Puig and Gabriel García Márquez. And when the books by John Irving, Raymond Carver and Tim O'Brien appeared, I liked them too. I was attracted by the style of each of these writers, there was something magical in their works. To be honest, I did not feel this kind of charm in the modern Japanese prose I was reading at the time. The question arose: why is it impossible to create such magic, the same charm in the Japanese language? And so I started to create my own style." [2]

Murakami achieves soothing detachment in a variety of ways. The narrator describes the events that happened to him when he was a little over twenty, from the position of a wiser, but only slightly more adult "self", in which there is not even a hint of adult complacency. It is important that Murakami always denotes "I" with the word "boku". Although the tradition of the first-person novel has long been rooted in serious Japanese prose, it is commonly used to refer to the narrator as "watakushi" or "watashi." Murakami preferred to designate the pronoun "I" with the word "boku" - a more everyday, simpler, until then mainly used by young people in an informal setting. (Women never use "boku" when speaking of themselves. In cases where the story is from a woman's perspective, the neutral "watashi" is used.)

All of this does not in any way imply that Murakami was the first Japanese novelist to use boku for "I" when referring to an unnamed male storyteller. But the personality designated by the writer as Boku is truly unique. First, it reminds him of himself, endowed with a generous supply of curiosity and inclined to calmly, detached and even absentmindedly perceive the immanent oddities of life.

The writer decided to name his fictional character "Boku", feeling: the Japanese word for ego is closest to the neutral English "I"; only in the smallest degree related to the Japanese social hierarchy, it is more democratic and, of course, does not serve to designate any important person.

Twenty-nine-year-old Murakami also made Boku his own age, describing the events of almost ten years ago. In essence, the narrator finds himself in the position of a benevolent big brother - someone who can advise (without any adult complacency) how to survive the tumultuous decade from twenty to thirty and achieve a certain degree of self-knowledge. Boku saw death and experienced disappointment in life, but he is above all an ordinary guy who loves beer, and not at all a subtle artist or an outstanding mind. He is polite and knows how to behave, loves baseball, rock and jazz, is interested in girls - although he does not spend all his time and energy on them, he treats his partners with attention. In fact, he is something like a role model from a more or less didactic book on how to overcome the difficulties of young years and not give up before life.

The narrator in the novel "Hear the Wind Sing" immediately disarms the reader, abandoning all claims to create high art, but in his book, one can probably "here and there" find "one or two instructions." Beginning with the title, this light and playful novel is clearly didactic - in keeping with modern Japanese tradition of offering readers life models. However, the author conveys his message without resorting to the participation of authoritative voices of his parents, which arouses

sympathy among young readers and hostility among critics of the older generation.

Briefly summarizing the events of 1969-1973 (student riots in Tokyo and beyond), in "Pinball, 1973" (1980) Murakami refers to the few months of 1973 (September to November), when Boku is twenty-four and the Rat is twenty-five.

Boku lives in Tokyo and continues languidly as a commercial translator, working with a friend and attractive office assistant. Meanwhile, the Rat, leaving the university, hangs out in the "Jay's Bar" in Kobe (700 kilometers from Tokyo), trying to break up with the woman with whom he had a relationship, and intending to leave the city forever. The only hint that the Rat did not abandon literary ambitions is the circumstances of the meeting with this woman: they met through an advertisement for the sale of a typewriter.

Boku and the Rat never meet in the novel; Boku's first-person chapters alternate (somewhat erratically) with a third-person story of the Rat. This gives us the first reason to believe that the Rat is an "artificial", fictional character, while Boku is close to the author himself. The element of admonition arises in this book as well, but most clearly it does not come from Boku, who does not use here the image of his matured self, but rather from the wise "old" (forty-five-year-old) Chinese bartender Jay, who was rarely mentioned in the first novel. Appearing before us in his current state and not in retrospect, 24-year-old Boku is much more open to the Rat than he was in "Hear the Wind Sing". The Rat's pain is almost as burning as in the early novel, but here Boku also reveals to us the secret of his past suffering. We understand that his calmness is hardly sufficient protection against the bitterness of loss.

As a result, the general tone of the second book turns out to be much darker than the tone of the first, but instead of returning Boku to the most painful chapter of his past - the death of his beloved Naoko, Murakami forces the hero in embarrassment to go in search of Pinball. The same Pinball, which Boku spent many mindlessly happy hours with, as before with a similar car in the Jay's Bar. The book's climactic scene takes place in the harsh, blinding light and chilling cold of a freezer warehouse drenched in the scent of dead chickens — an unusually inelegant, fetid image of death as Boku encounters the silent and timeless "other" world of memory. This world then appears as a legendary "elephant graveyard"; then "a graveyard of dreams, so old that they lie beyond memory"; that "dark fairy forest", where Boku himself for a moment feels the threat of transformation into a motionless chimera; then a repository of faded teenage dreams; and, finally, outer space, where a pinball - an automatic machine - "Spaceship" - awaits him in complete peace. This kaleidoscope includes almost all of the "other" worlds offered by mainstream literature and cinema.

The presence of death in the "other world" by Murakami is quite tangible, but this does not mean at all that the "other world" is simply death.

When we meet Boku, the Rat, and the Chinese bartender Jay in "A Wild Sheep Chase", it's already July 1978, although the opening section is titled "November 25, 1970."

Boku, now twenty-nine, has managed to marry and divorce an attractive office assistant during this time. He turned his translation office into a relatively successful advertising agency. However, Boku lost all connection with the Rat: the old friend simply disappeared, as it was supposed in the finale of "Pinball, 1973", and no longer sends novels in December (this feature of his was discussed in the postscript to "Hear the Wind Sing").

In "A Wild Sheep Chase", boredom and life are for the most part diametrically opposed phenomena, and the possibility of escaping boredom into life promises an adventure. Literally the title of the novel translates as "Adventure around the sheep".

"A Wild Sheep Chase" characters seem familiar, but they live and act in a completely new way.

The story, extracted by Murakami from the depths of his consciousness, is distinguished by spontaneity, unpredictability, and develops as follows ... As soon as the sinister man in black is

going to explain to the hero why he was so interested in exactly the sheep that appeared in the advertisement made by the Boku agency, into the narrative invades flashback, flash memory. It turns out that last December (1977) a package with a letter from the Rat and a novel came from the far north. Another letter "from completely different places" was received in May; attached to the letter was a photo, a landscape with sheep, and a request to publish this picture. The Rat also asked Boku to visit Jay and the woman Rat left in "Pinball, 1973" and say goodbye to both of them. (To the great advantage of the plot, the postmark on the second package was destroyed when Boku opened the letter.) Fulfilling his duty to a friend, the hero inserted the photo into an advertisement produced by his company and made a sentimental journey to his hometown.

Returning to the present moment, we learn that the sinister man in black found Boku, as he was interested in a sheep photograph for unknown reasons. This man - the secretary of the conservative leader Sensei, who is dying of a huge tumor in his brain - makes the hero go in search of one particular sheep from the photograph - the one on whose back there is a faint spot in the shape of a star. Now Boku needs to find the Rat, who sent him the picture. The hero takes his new girlfriend with him.

It is the Boku's girlfriend who, for no apparent reason, predicts an important call to him in connection with the sheep. It is she who insists that they go to Hokkaido to look for the sheep, and she, as if by chance, fishes out the coordinates of a "metaphysical" hotel called "Dolphin" from the phone book.

Miraculously, the building of the hotel turns out to be the former "Union of Hokkaido Sheep Breeders", where "Professor Sheep" lives - a man who in 1935 was possessed by a sheep, now wanted by heroes. The professor turns out to be the only person in the world who can tell the hero where the photo was taken (as it turns out, the same photo adorns the hotel lobby), and he also tells Boku how to find the Rat - in fact, Boku could have guessed about it himself, if he had not "forgotten" that the Rat's family owned a summer house in Hokkaido.

When Boku receives the last clue, his girlfriend fades into the background, and then disappears altogether while Boku goes through the purification. To the advantage of the plot, the hero does not notice Sensei's clear connection with this part of Hokkaido until he manages to find his way to the Rat's summer refuge. There, almost by accident, Boku comes across one wartime book. This publication, glorifying Japan's advance to the mainland, contains the names and addresses of ardent expansionist activists, to which Sensei belongs.

The already weak plot connections get a final shake-up in the finale, when the secretary dressed in a black suit informs Boku: he himself knew about the Rat's whereabouts, and the "sheep hunt" was needed only in order to send a person to the Rat whom he trusts. After all, the Rat should not have suspected anything about the secretary's insidious intention to extract a sheep with supernatural powers in order to use these abilities for his own purposes.

In search of the Rat - Boku hopes that he will lead him to the mysterious sheep - the hero finds himself in Hokkaido, where his office assistant in "Pinball, 1973" offered to go on a tour.

While Boku is waiting for a friend in a secluded mountain hut where the Rat apparently lived recently, the only human being with whom the hero communicates is a weird local character named "Sheep Man" ("hitsu-zhi-otoko"). In fact, this small (no more than one and a half meters tall) creature is not quite human. Here is how he appears before the bewildered hero:

"He was wearing a whole sheep skin, slipped over his head. The lamb's legs, apparently made by himself and simply attached to the skin, dangled, but overall the suit sat on his stocky figure like a glove. On both sides of the helmet protruded two flat ears, apparently shaped by a wire. The costume was complemented by a mask that hid the upper part of the face, gloves and stockings made of black leather. In front, along the entire length of the body - from the neck to the crotch - a

zipper was sewn in ... From the back the suit ended with a tiny protruding tail" [9, P.148].

In this form, the Sheep-Man hides in the forests, hiding from world wars and from the military presence in general, and proclaiming himself the sacrificial lamb of the world. We do not know if he has a dwelling, and if he exists in reality in addition to those scenes when he talks with Boku: he just comes out of the forest and goes back - a sort of fabulous creature.

Gradually, as Boku begins to feel the "presence" of the Rat in this strange creature, autumn comes into its own - the snow falls, and the cold that penetrates us in the scene with the chickens stored in the freezer from "Pinball" becomes more and more ferocious. Boku senses that something is about to happen.

And yet we have not answered the question: why sheep? what do they symbolize (if they symbolize anything at all)? Murakami tried to explain it this way:

"When I started "A Wild Sheep Chase", I did not plan any plan. The only thing I did was to use "sheep" as a kind of key word and arrange a meeting between the primary character - "I" ("boku") - and the secondary - the Rat - at the end of the novel. That is the whole structure of the book ... And I believe: the novel is a success precisely because I myself do not know what the sheep has to do with it." [2].

This sheep moved into Sensei's brain in 1936, and once it may have inspired the bloody Genghis Khan.

When Sensei dies, the mysterious sheep leaves him and chooses the soul of not someone else, but the Rat as a new abode; from a detailed explanation of the reasons that prompted the sheep to go over from a conservative thug to a disaffected radical student, the writer wisely avoids.

For the last time experiencing the flowering of idealism in the spirit of the 60s, the Rat decides: the only way for him to benefit society is to commit suicide while the spirit of a powerful sheep slumbers inside him. Boku assists him by launching a clockwork bomb to kill a malevolent secretary who is obsessed with inheriting the power of a sheep.

Another novel, which is considered a continuation of the Trilogy of the Rat - "Dance, Dance, Dance". "Dance, Dance, Dance" is considered a sequel to "A Wild Sheep Chase", as it tells the story of Boku's life from the moment he blew up the sinister man in black and returned from Hokkaido to Tokyo.

The struggle to gain innocence and immediacy, which makes it possible to clear the mind, drive out logical thinking, lure the "inner story" to the surface, becomes the main theme of "Dance, Dance, Dance" - both in the plot and in the style aspects.

It all starts with Boku, now thirty-four, returns to Hokkaido, the hotel "Dolphin", which served as his home when he hunted sheep five years earlier. It's 1983. At the hotel, Boku hopes to find at least some information about his old girlfriend with magical ears, in this novel named "Kiki" ("The Listener"). A shabby old hotel has been transformed into a modern high-tech marvel, but in some indefinable dimension, it also "includes" the frozen world of the Sheep Man, who talks about the importance of connecting with others.

But as the action progresses, Boku encounters a wide variety of characters. Among them, of course, it is worth noting a pretty young hotel employee named Yumiyoshi, with whom the hero falls in love (although from the outside it looks rather unconvincing). With the exception of this rather artificial love affair, all of Boku's relationships with other people that come his way are clouded by financial interests. Ultimately, thanks to a clairvoyant, the hero learns that Kiki was killed by his classmate named Gotanda, who became a movie star and sacrificed his personal life for the sake of a professional image. True, it is not entirely clear why Boku needed the help of supernatural forces - the cause of Kiki's death was obvious from the very beginning.

If "A Wild Sheep Chase" was a fantastic attack on right-wing extremists and adventurers with

conquering ambitions, then "Dance, Dance, Dance" is rather a detailed analysis of that, what it means to acquire a profession and try to survive in a society dominated by the mass media. As before, while remaining faithful to the most important existential issues of life, death and memory, in this novel, Murakami pays more attention to social ulcers. In "Dance, Dance, Dance" a new level of seriousness is reached, indicating that the writer has acquired a sense of responsibility towards society.

Another thing is also important: Boku from "Dance, Dance, Dance" has another world that belongs exclusively to himself. This world is a kind of chain, and as the Sheep Man explains, Boku is a link in this chain. And it is connected with all that exists. It is his chain that connects him with everything that he has lost and that has not yet had time to lose.

Perhaps "Dance, Dance, Dance" is the first of Murakami's novels, where the habitually "cool" Boku finally throws off equanimity and speaks openly about his sadness. Although, over time, the writer admits that "Dance, Dance, Dance" does not belong to his best works. According to him, he "simply had to write this book in order to recover from the general madness provoked by the "Norwegian Wood". "In this sense, I can say with confidence: I wrote "Dance, Dance, Dance" with great pleasure, than any of my other novels." [5]

Having reached the age of twenty-nine, Boku has little hope of gaining understanding someday in the future (perhaps decades later, he even deserves salvation if he continues to write), until today he denies that he has answers. He himself is not authoritative, and with those who could act as authorities, he deals rather cruelly. Literary authority, strange fictional American novelist Derek Hartfield, went mad and committed suicide. The disease turned the uncle, who discovered Hartfield to the author, into a grotesque monkey. Another uncle, representing the military generation, died an absurd death, after the war was blown up by a mine he had laid. The only surviving uncle is a pathetic crook.

After reading Hartfield's book "What's Wrong with Feeling Good?", Boku learned about the importance of a ruler - distance, irony. The very bizarre title of the book, "What's wrong with feeling good?" suggests the comfort that can be achieved. Perhaps this is the only way to survive these eight years - between twenty and the eve of thirty (and perhaps what awaits beyond thirty years of age) - albeit without guarantees. There is nothing left but to repeat to yourself: "You can learn a lesson from everything" and measure the distance between yourself, things and people in the world around you. There is a hidden cynicism in this, but also a willingness to try and experiment, an undeniable desire to define one's relationship with the world, to explore the nature of communication between two, to trace how dreams and visions are connected with what is "out there," to comprehend the nature of reality - and fantasy.

Perhaps one of the striking features of Murakami's debut story lies in a clearly balanced scenario: a nihilist - the Rat constantly denies any norms, including moral ones - and the main character, in turn, is Rat's nihilism itself. Moreover, the arguments on both sides are equally divided. Denial and affirmation. The stories of Boku and the Rat are stories of two antipodes. The situations they find themselves in are similar, but the reactions of one and the other are diametrically opposite. The dispute between them is very much like the subconscious quarrels of any person with himself. And in each of us it is resolved in its own way.

Closer to the end, the Rat loses a woman, who obviously had some kind of tragedy that led to a falling out. The Rat itself is becoming colder, more painful, his monologues are becoming more abstract, more and more divorced from reality - and as a result, he himself disappears from the pages of this story for good.

The hero, in every conversation with himself, still tries to cling to some earthly, recognizable feelings. Speaks about pain, about compassion for people who are sick, dying, something or

someone who is missing. Portraits of other characters (not the Rat) are becoming more human, warmer - and are resolved by the story of a paralyzed girl who does not lose hope. And also - the radio recognition of a lonely DJ: "I Love You All".

In the arguments between the hero and the Rat, there are the same number of denials and statements. Superimposed on each other, by the end of the story they are simply annihilated.

The hero meets the Rat - and immediately gets into an accident with him. The car turns upside down. Having come to his senses, the hero sees the Rat, which vomits on the dashboard. And a little later, they have the following dialogue:

“- Ye-ah ... - he said a few minutes later. - Lucky you and me. Think about it, not a scratch. Does that happen?

“No need to say,” I replied. – “Only the car is probably over?

- God bless it. You can buy a new car. You can't buy luck!” [8, P.19]

Actually, from this moment their strange friendship begins - and paradoxical, leading nowhere disputes, in which all the usual attitudes of "this world" at the behest of the Rat are methodically turned upside down.

According to Dmitry Kovalenin: it is from this moment that the Rat leaves for another world. In the pages of “Hear the Wind Sing”, he dies in a car accident in 1970. And the surviving Boku receives an unexpected gift, or "access" to communicate with "those who have lost" - to which both this and all further stories of the parallel worlds of Murakami are dedicated. [3, P.60]

In search of "meaning" Boku turns to Kant's “Critique of Pure Reason”, which he often reads during the action of “Pinball, 1973”. Here the hero is forced to play the role of a priest at the "funeral". In this dark scene, everyone is soaked to the skin in the October rain, but the ritual is carried out with great solemnity. And no matter what is so beautiful, even touchingly, it is not Naoko that is buried, but the electronic control panel, "dead" and no longer needed. An absurd ritual around a meaningless subject, this funeral dispels the "illusion" that there is more meaning in human life than in the life of a control panel. What is a sense of life? What is the meaning of things, as well as people who first enter our life and then inevitably leave it? All of them are just images that live in our consciousness, which means that there is no more meaning in them - and no less - than we ourselves put into them. Boku is reminded of the control panel again when he tries to dissuade his office assistant that her life will inevitably come to a standstill. The hero believes that the only response to the hardships of life is detachment: "It's better to just want nothing more." [10, P.105]

In “A Wild Sheep Chase”, the theme of death and irreparable loss sounds surprisingly clear. First, Boku learns about the accident that resulted in the death of his ex-girlfriend; then the hero recalls the ritual self-gutting of Yukio Mishima; later it is revealed that the Rat also committed suicide; and finally, after meeting Boku and the ghost of the Rat, a sinister man in black dies. At least four more deaths are reported along the way, including the death of Conservative leader Sensei and the "death" of the port area in his hometown of Boku, with its modern tombstone-like buildings. The disappearance of the hero's girlfriend at the end of the novel is another loss, which was preceded by the departure of Boku's wife and the end of his business partnership.

Calm Boku tries not to take it all too seriously. According to his observations, losses are of three types: "Some things are forgotten, others disappear, and still others die. There is hardly anything tragic in this." [9, P.196]

Sitting in a house in Hokkaido, Boku feels that something is about to happen:

“The more I thought about it, the more difficult it seemed to me to get rid of the feeling that the actions of the Sheep Man are performed at the will of the Rat. The Sheep Man drove my girlfriend off the mountain and left me alone. His appearance here undoubtedly portends something. Something is growing around me. The space is tidy and cleaned. Soon something is going to

happen." [9, P.166]

"Foreshadowing" future events, Murakami uses the archaic expression "atari-ga hakikiyomerareru": literally "everything around is swept and cleaned" - this is how they say about the altar of a Shinto shrine, where a ritual of purification is performed before the appearance of the god. "Don't forget that this place is not easy," the Sheep Man advises Boku. And now the hero undergoes physical cleansing: he begins to monitor his diet (in Shintoism, the cult of food plays an important role), refuses sex and cigarettes and makes daily runs in clean, cold air. Boku also intends to purify himself mentally.

During one of the runs, the hero suddenly becomes very cold, and he returns to the house halfway through. The entire neighborhood is immersed in winter silence, and Boku turns the player on to autorepeat to - as a cleansing mantra - listen to Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" twenty-six times in a row. The hero feels that "everything flows" completely without his participation, and, as if becoming a part of this stream, he continues to perform the purification ritual described by the author almost poetically.

The ritual is physically demanding, but Boku's purified lungs are well prepared for this. He vacuums, washes and mops the floors. He scrapes off the dirt in the bathroom and toilet, polishes furniture, flushes windows and shutters, and in the end (and this is the most important task) cleans the mirror - the main subject of the Shinto rite.

The mirror in this house is large, full-length, antique, and Boku manages to wash it so that the reflection in it seems no less, if not more, real than the world on this side of the mirror. However, when Sheep Man appears, attracted by the sound of music (Boku is playing the Rat's guitar), the mirror does not reflect him and Boku breaks out in cold sweat. For all the dissimilarity of the tall Rat and the undersized Sheep Man, Boku guesses: his old friend somehow possessed the Sheep Man. With a theatrical gesture, breaking the guitar, the hero demands that the Rat come to him in the evening, and the Sheep Man goes back to his forest.

Waking up from a restless sleep in the cold and darkness, Boku is waiting for an old friend to come. The hero has the feeling that he "sits, crumpled, at the bottom of a deep well." He stops thinking and completely surrenders to the passage of time. In silence, the voice of the Rat begins to sound, and friends are briefly transported "to the old days", stopping the clock for this period of timeless unity. They drink beer to the Rat's story about how he committed suicide, and at the same time with the monstrous sheep that settled inside him. Boku is pretty cold, and the Rat promises that they will meet again - "it would be nice in the sun, it would be nice in summer" [9, P.208].

Boku spends the rest of the night in heat and delirium, trying to figure out if the meeting with the Rat was in reality. After coming into contact with the world of the dead, the hero undergoes another short ritual of purification: he shaves and frees himself from an "incredible" amount of urine. It doesn't matter if we perceive Boku's long-awaited reunion with his late friend as "reality" or as a hallucination, it is either the culmination of the hero's quest. He managed, even for a few moments, to regain the lost past - "the old days."

In his work, the Japanese writer Haruki Murakami, who has become a cult favorite, touches on the most pressing issues of our time, combining the genres of science fiction and detective, mystery and dystopia. The writer often uses metaphors and symbolic images. Sometimes it is mysticism, and sometimes he simply describes strange situations, almost impossible in life, and strange people who behave strangely.

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