

Divided Consciousness and the Surrealist Structure of the Unconscious in Haruki Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*

Dipeshkumar B. Patel, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Smt. S. B. Patel Arts & Shri R. N. Amin Commerce College, Vaso, TA- Vaso, Dis- Kheda (Gujarat), India.

dipesh16patel@gmail.com ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8806-9265>

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Abstract

*This study examines the role of surrealism in Haruki Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, focusing on how the novel represents the unconscious through its narrative structure. Drawing on the theories of André Breton and Sigmund Freud, the study employs qualitative textual analysis combined with psychoanalytic close reading. It argues that Murakami's surrealism functions not only as a thematic element but as a structural mechanism that organizes divided consciousness. Through analysis of the split self, the Town, memory, and ego dissolution, the paper shows how identity is fragmented, displaced, and reconfigured within the narrative. The findings show that surrealism in the novel does more than represent psychological states. It shapes the narrative itself, making unconscious processes visible. While existing scholarship frequently identifies Murakami's use of magical realism, this study addresses the critical gap regarding how surrealist 'psychic automatism' dictates the dual-narrative architecture itself. By examining how inner experience is externalized through symbolic structures, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of Murakami's narrative method and the continuing relevance of surrealist theory in contemporary fiction.*

Keywords: Surrealism, Divided Consciousness, Haruki Murakami, Unconscious, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Narrative Structure

1. Introduction

Surrealism emerged as a reaction against reason, redirecting attention toward the unconscious. André Breton defines surrealism as follows:

SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern (Breton 26).

Breton's definition presents surrealism as a method that suspends rational control, allowing thought to unfold beyond logical or moral constraints. He extends this position through his emphasis on dream and associative logic: "ENCYCLOPEDIA. Philosophy. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought" (Breton 26). Dream becomes a privileged mode of reality in which the boundary between waking and dreaming weakens and inner processes begin to shape experience.

Murakami echoes this orientation toward the unconscious: "writing lets me enter my own

subconscious” (qtd. in Yücel 56). His understanding of narrative likewise resists a strict separation between reality and unreality. In an interview, Murakami remarks that he “can’t always see the borderline between the unreal world and the realistic world,” describing them instead as overlapping domains. This permeability helps explain why psychological processes in his fiction repeatedly assume narrative and spatial form. This dynamic acquires narrative expression in the structure identified by Matthew Strecher:

From the beginning it was clear that two principal elements informed Murakami’s fiction: a focus on some internal being or consciousness that worked with the conscious self, sometimes in concert, other times antagonistically; and the nearly constant presence of a magical ‘other world’ in which this internal being operated. As such, there was always a tension between the metaphysical—indeed, the magical—and the psychological in his work (Strecher 5).

The “other world” does not stand apart from consciousness; it externalizes it. Inner experience takes shape as space and narrative, creating tension between psychological reality and surreal expression. *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* presents a system in which consciousness divides and reshapes itself through symbolic worlds.

While earlier studies discuss Murakami’s use of psychological duality and narrative ambiguity, they do not fully explain how these elements are structured through divided consciousness. This study examines *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* through surrealist and psychoanalytic theory, focusing on the ways unconscious processes shape narrative form. It argues that surrealism functions not merely as a thematic element but as a structural method through which identity is expressed and transformed.

2. Theoretical Framework

Anchored in Breton’s surrealist premise, this framework examines contradiction within the mind and its dissolution under unconscious logic. Surrealism does not simply privilege dream or association; it destabilizes the oppositions that structure perception. Breton expresses this condition with precision: “Everything tends to make us believe there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future . . . cease to be perceived as contradictions” (qtd. in Hopkins 105). Distinctions lose clarity and begin to overlap.

Sigmund Freud provides the analytic grounding for this psychic operation. Dream, in Freud’s formulation, does not introduce disorder but organizes desire: “The dream is the (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed, repressed) wish” (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*). Dream images reveal concealed conflicts rather than random associations. Within a surrealist narrative, they materialize what cannot be directly articulated by consciousness.

Peter Stockwell sharpens this connection by arguing that “Language is a medium providing access to the unconscious mind” (Stockwell 38). Surrealist writing therefore does more than depict the unconscious; it becomes one means through which it is expressed. As Stockwell notes, “The surrealist unconscious is the place of dreams, intuitions, socially repressed urges, drives, and opinions; it is pre-moral, unregulated, uncivilised, and irrational” (39–40), reinforcing Freud’s account of psychic conflict.

Such repressed material returns through what Freud identifies as the uncanny: “the ‘uncanny’ is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (Freud, *The Uncanny* 1–2). The effect arises not from complete strangeness but from the familiar becoming strange. What appears alien retains traces of prior intimacy, creating uncertainty between recognition and disorientation.

This dynamic intensifies through the figure of the double. Freud notes, “These themes are all concerned with the idea of a ‘double’ in every shape and degree” (Freud, *The Uncanny* 9). The

double disrupts identity by displacing the self across mirrored or externalized forms. Unity gives way to multiplicity, leaving subjectivity unsettled.

The boundary between imagination and reality likewise begins to erode. Freud observes that “an uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality” (Freud, *The Uncanny* 15). As this distinction weakens, images assume external presence, enabling the unconscious to shape narrative events.

As Freud notes, “The uncanny as it is depicted in literature... contains the whole of the latter and something more besides” (Freud, *The Uncanny* 18). Literature transforms psychological disturbance into narrative form.

Taken together, Breton and Freud provide a framework for understanding how the unconscious reorganizes narrative through the collapse of oppositions and the externalization of inner experience.

3. Literature Review

Critical discussions of Murakami consistently focus on the uncertain boundary between reality and imagination, a condition that structures rather than disrupts his narratives. Matthew Strecher identifies this quality directly: “one was constantly in doubt as to whether Murakami’s characters lived in a magical world or were simply out of their minds” (Strecher 5). This hesitation is not a weakness in the narrative. Instead, it creates a space in which psychological disturbance and metaphysical possibility remain equally operative, resisting resolution into a single explanatory framework.

Strecher locates the source of this ambiguity in the psyche itself, describing Murakami’s figures as “some of the deeper psychological underpinnings of his work... living embodiments of the Murakami hero’s memories and dreams” (5). Memory and dreams move outward to become active elements of the narrative, rendering the unconscious visible.

Questions of reality and subjectivity have also been examined from a postmodern perspective. Kasturi Sinha argues that “Murakami deconstructs reality and renegotiates the definition of the human self in a postmodern way” (b329). Sinha broadens the discussion beyond psychological ambiguity by linking Murakami’s narrative method to identity formation. Reality becomes less a fixed external condition than a field through which the self is continually reconstructed.

Ecem Yücel similarly emphasizes the connection between Murakami’s fantastic narratives and the search for identity, arguing that “by creating unusual, unreal situations with using magical realist elements, Murakami forces his protagonists to set off on a journey in search for their individual identity, believing one’s core identity is centered in one’s subconscious” (6). This perspective shifts attention from the fantastic as a purely narrative device to its psychological function. The unreal situations that characterize Murakami’s fiction become means of exploring hidden dimensions of the self, suggesting that identity is rooted in the subconscious rather than in external social realities. While Yücel interprets these phenomena through magical realism and Sinha through postmodern subjectivity, the present study argues that such effects are more coherently explained as manifestations of divided consciousness structured by surrealist logic. While some critics approach Murakami primarily through postmodern narrative experimentation and others emphasize the psychological dimensions of his fiction, these perspectives collectively suggest that identity emerges through the interaction of narrative form and inner psychic processes. Postmodern critics such as Sinha emphasize the instability of reality and identity as products of narrative and cultural construction, while magical realist readings such as Yücel’s focus on the integration of the fantastic into everyday experience. The present study departs from these approaches by treating such phenomena as manifestations of unconscious processes structured through surrealist logic.

This outward projection is further specified through what Strecher terms “nostalgic images”: “This was my way of exploring characters in Murakami’s novels that simply could not be real... ‘nostalgic images’... projections from the protagonist’s inner mind” (5).

A similar emphasis appears in Jason Barone’s discussion of Murakami’s protagonists, who are often “haunted by memories, dreams, and visions” and compelled to seek understanding of their “hidden, unknown selves” (2). The unconscious therefore functions not merely as thematic background but as the primary direction of the characters’ journeys. Movement through Murakami’s fictional worlds repeatedly becomes a search for concealed aspects of the self.

Murakami’s account of writing reinforces this internal origin of narrative reality: “When I write, I’m kind of like a god, creating everything. I create what looks real to me” (qtd. in Strecher 27). Creation does not reproduce the external world but reshapes subjective experience, through which reality itself is constructed. This orientation also distinguishes Murakami from many expectations associated with Japanese literary realism. As Kenzaburō Ōe observes, “Murakami Haruki writes in Japanese, but his writing is not really Japanese” (qtd. in Strecher 11). Ōe’s remark highlights Murakami’s departure from traditions that often privilege social realism, historical experience, and everyday life. Rather than grounding identity primarily in communal structures, Murakami frequently turns inward, exploring memory, dreams, and unconscious desire. His fiction therefore occupies a distinctive position within contemporary Japanese literature, combining concerns about identity and alienation found in postwar Japanese writing with narrative techniques shaped by surreal and transnational influences.

Strecher ultimately frames Murakami’s project in explicitly psychological terms: “he is, rather, concerned with portraying the inner mind—the realm to which we retreat when we dream—in visual terms his readers will understand” (15). The emphasis falls on translation. Interior states—intangible, elusive, and often inaccessible—are rendered as spatial and narrative forms. The novel becomes a site where inward experience is reorganized into visible structure.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that Murakami’s fiction is deeply informed by the unconscious and by ongoing questions of identity. Yet they do not fully explain how these concerns are organized at the level of narrative structure. This study therefore focuses on the ways divided consciousness is constructed and represented within the novel.

4. Methodology

This study employs qualitative textual analysis informed by Breton’s surrealism and Freud’s theory of the unconscious. Through close reading, it examines how narrative structure reflects mental processes. The analysis focuses on the split self, the Town, memory, and ego dissolution as key narrative sites where psychological and spatial structures intersect.

Central to this approach is the uncertainty between animate and inanimate forms. Freud, drawing on Jentsch, observes that “a particularly favourable condition for awakening uncanny sensations is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one” (Freud, *The Uncanny* 8–9). This uncertainty operates throughout Murakami’s narrative, where shadows, objects, and constructed spaces exhibit forms of agency that resist clear classification. The boundary between life and non-life weakens, producing a perceptual field consistent with surrealist logic. Surreal elements are treated as signs of psychological division rather than as fantasy. Drawing on Breton and Freud, the analysis examines how unconscious processes shape the novel’s structure and the protagonist’s movement through its symbolic spaces.

5. Structures of Divided Consciousness

Consciousness does not remain fixed but undergoes continual transformation. Identity develops through separation, displacement, and loss, visible in the division of the shadow, the erasure of the mind within the Town, the uncertainty of memory, and the movement toward ego death. The following subsections examine these transformations in detail.

5.1 The Split Self and the Shadow

The splitting of the self in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* is materialized through the forced separation of the shadow, an act performed under the authority of the Gatekeeper. This section focuses on how the separation of the shadow produces a structural rupture within identity. The narrator witnesses the moment directly: “Keep still now,” the Gatekeeper told me. Then he produced a knife and deftly worked it in between the shadow and the ground. The shadow writhed in resistance. But to no avail. Its dark form peeled neatly away” (Murakami 62). Power is distributed unequally throughout the scene: the Gatekeeper acts, the narrator observes, and the shadow resists. The separation functions as an imposed rupture rather than abstraction.

This division is immediately articulated from within the divided self. The shadow speaks: “People can’t live without their shadows, and shadows can’t live without people. Yet they’re splitting us apart. I don’t like it. There’s something wrong here” (Murakami 63). The statement does not explain the event; it registers it as disturbance. The insistence on mutual dependence establishes the shadow as structurally necessary to identity. Its removal introduces not transformation but disorder, marked in the simple recognition that “something” has gone wrong. The permanence of this disorder appears in the Colonel’s account: “I was in my sixty fifth year when they put my shadow to death... we already had had a lifetime together” (Murakami 85), marking the shadow as integral to identity.

The later encounter with the shadow confirms the extent of this loss: “My shadow lies in bed, unmoving, with a blanket pulled up to his ears. He stares at me with lifeless eyes” (Murakami 331). What remains is neither active nor responsive. The earlier resistance has disappeared. The shadow persists only as a residue, deprived of agency and vitality. Its gaze, fixed yet empty, reflects the consequence of separation without restoring connection.

Within a psychoanalytic framework, this separation aligns with Freud’s concept of the double, originally understood as protection against the ego’s destruction (Freud, *The Uncanny* 9). Its removal leaves the self intact in form but diminished in function.

Barone identifies a similar pattern throughout Murakami’s fiction, arguing that “his dilemma is caused by the rift between his conscious and subconscious selves; the only way to resolve his situation is to link them together” (3). *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* externalizes this psychological conflict through the separation of the shadow. Rather than remaining an internal condition, the division becomes visible, transforming psychic tension into narrative structure.

The shadow’s final directive—“You must never doubt that” (Murakami 385)—offers not resolution but confirmation of an irreversible separation.

Across these moments, the shadow emerges as a necessary dimension of identity subjected to control, separation, and eventual extinction. The narrative does not treat division as metaphor but as process: an act performed, resisted, remembered, and completed. The result is a sustained depiction of psychic division in which the self continues, but no longer as a unified structure.

5.2 The Town as Surreal Dreamscape

The Town in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* works as a psychological

space in which inner consciousness is not merely limited but actively removed. The narrator's exchange with the Colonel makes this clear:

"I have a mind and she does not. Love her as I might, the vessel will remain empty. Is that right?"

"That is correct," says the Colonel. "Your mind may no longer be what it once was, but she has nothing of the sort. Nor do I. Nor does anyone here." (Murakami 169)

What is denied is not emotion but the presence of interior consciousness.

The Colonel clarifies this condition further: "Kindness and a caring mind are two separate qualities. Kindness is manners. It is superficial custom, an acquired practice. Not so the mind. The mind is deeper, stronger, and, I believe, it is far more inconstant" (Murakami 170). Social behavior remains intact, but it no longer arises from inward experience. Gesture continues without depth. The Town sustains form while removing the interior ground that would give it meaning. In Breton's terms, the Town functions as a space where conventional distinctions between inner and outer reality collapse, leaving consciousness externalized rather than internally experienced.

Set against this tentative opening is the Gatekeeper's directive: "You have to endure. If you endure, everything will be fine. No worry, no suffering. It all disappears. Forget about the shadow. This is the End of the World. This is where the world ends. Nowhere further to go" (Murakami 109). The language shifts from possibility to closure. Endurance here does not imply strength; it demands submission. Forgetting replaces memory, and disappearance replaces conflict.

5.3 Memory, Identity and Psychic Intrusion

Memory in the novel does not operate as a stable record of the past but as a fragile construct subject to doubt, displacement, and removal. The narrator confronts this instability directly:

There ended the memory. Though I couldn't be sure any of it had really happened to me. I had no recollection. Perhaps this was a hallucination induced by the sounds of the water in the darkness, a daydream dredged up in the face of extreme circumstances. But the image was too vivid. It had the smell of memory, real memory (Murakami 238).

The passage holds experience and doubt together. Memory persists not through certainty but through sensory intensity. This uncertainty gives way to recognition of intrusion:

They had shoved memories out of my conscious awareness. They had stolen my memories from me! Nobody had that right. Nobody! My memories *belonged* to me. Stealing memories was stealing time. (Murakami 239)

Memory is no longer abstract; it is claimed as possession. Its removal disrupts continuity, severing the relation between past and present. What appears is not simple loss but violation. This structural division is explicitly articulated within the narrative framework itself. As the Professor explains,

"So the black box is the subconscious."

"Yes, that's correct. Each individual behaves on the basis of his individual mnemonic makeup. No two human beings are alike; it's a question of identity." (Murakami 255)

Consciousness is no longer unified but organized through layered processes in which memory functions as the determining basis of identity. The narrator later confirms this condition: "Two different cognitive systems coexisted in the same person" (Murakami 258), indicating duplication. Consciousness no longer works as a unified field but as parallel systems that do not fully intersect. Identity remains unresolved.

Ecem Yücel similarly argues that the search for identity in Murakami's fiction unfolds "both physically and mentally, both consciously and unconsciously," ultimately leading inward toward

the subconscious (56). The novel's divided narrative structure reflects this movement. External events repeatedly direct the protagonist toward deeper layers of memory and consciousness, where identity emerges not as a fixed essence but as a process of continual negotiation.

5.4 Ego Death and the End of the World

By the final stages of the narrative, identity undergoes a transformation shaped by the convergence of memory loss, shadow separation, and the dissolution of the mind. The narrator recognizes this movement as externally compelled: "Something has summoned me here. Something intractable. And for this, I have forfeited my shadow and my memory" (Murakami 109). The phrasing removes the possibility of choice. What occurs is not accidental loss but a necessary condition tied to entry into a particular psychological state. Identity, already unsettled, approaches its final stage of disassembly.

This progression raises a direct question of remainder. The narrator asks, "You mean to say, as soon as my mind vanishes?" (Murakami 85). The mind functions as the final structure sustaining identity, and its disappearance marks a decisive break in continuity.

The End of the World becomes the literal manifestation of Breton's "certain point of the mind"—a space where distinctions between life and death, reality and imagination, no longer operate as oppositions:

It isn't this world. It's the world in your mind that's going to end... It's your core consciousness... Meanwhile, this world in your mind here is coming to an end... your mind will be living there, in the place called the End of the World... Everything that's in this world here and now is missing from that world. There's no time, no life, no death. No values in any strict sense. No self. In that world of yours, people's selves are externalized into beasts. (Murakami 270)

The displacement is framed as continuation: "It's not death. It's eternal life" (Murakami 290), where existence persists without the governing presence of the ego. This movement proceeds through separation, erasure, and psychic transformation, culminating in the erosion of the ego as a stable center.

6. Conclusion

Murakami's narrative shows how the self undergoes fragmentation through the uncanny, which Freud associates with the return of what was once familiar. In this case, what returns are not external ghosts but discarded elements of the self—memory, shadow, and mind—each persisting in altered form.

Reason reaches its limit here. The narrator observes, "All efforts of reason and analysis are... like trying to slice through a watermelon with sewing needles" (Murakami 113). Reason remains confined to surfaces, unable to access the processes through which consciousness is transformed. The same limit governs self-knowledge: "You can call up the drama... But you can never know its contents" (Murakami 114). The self generates experience but cannot fully comprehend it.

Identity does not return as a stable whole but remains shaped by memory, absence, and competing forms of awareness. Within Breton's surrealist framework, this condition reflects the collapse of boundaries between inner and outer experience, allowing the unconscious to function as an organizing narrative force. As Kasturi Sinha observes, Murakami's characters confront questions of existence and identity that persist beyond any single moment of crisis (b332). The novel therefore explores not only unconscious processes but also broader concerns of postmodern subjectivity. Murakami's surrealism operates not merely as a theme but as a narrative method that renders psychological experience visible through symbolic and spatial

forms.

In this sense, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* demonstrates how surrealist narrative transforms psychological experience into narrative structure. The study also suggests that surrealist theory remains a productive framework for examining contemporary fiction and for reconsidering psychoanalytic approaches to narrative identity. The framework developed here may also be applied to other Murakami novels in which memory, dreams, and divided identity function as organizing narrative principles. Ultimately, Murakami employs surrealism not as ornament but as a means of exploring how identity is continually reshaped.

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