

The Theme of Incompletion and Absence: Fragmentation and Reframing Identity in Murakami's *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*

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<https://doi.org/10.66376/galaxy.v15.n5.12>

Abstract:

The aim of the research paper is to analyse the construction of identity as a fragmented and unfinished process in the novel, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, one of the famous works of Murakami. The main focus of the study lies in how the novel engages with the conceptual structure of “et cetera”, that acts as a space of incompletion, remainder and absence. The research explains that the “colorless” identity of Tsukuru is a constitutive condition of postmodern subjectivity, which is further determined by unresolved relational histories, narrative gaps, and memory disruptions. This means the identity of Tsukuru is not a lack to be resolved. The paper focuses on the qualitative textual analysis of the novel within the framework of postmodern theories. For this, the study takes the help of one of the renowned postmodern thinkers, Jean-François Lyotard, to interpret and study Tsukuru’s fractured sense of self that develops due to the collapse of coherent life narratives. Apart from that, the paper also uses the concept of simulation and simulacra, proposed by another famous postmodern thinker, Jean Baudrillard, to understand the surface-level and constructed identity of the protagonist that lacks origin or stable depth.

Article History: Submitted-05/09/2026, Revised-12/09/2026, Accepted-18/09/2026, Published-30/09/2026.

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Additionally, the paper aligns with the concepts proposed by Linda Hutcheon to highlight the open-ended structure of the novel, as well as to focus on the resistance of the novel to closure and how it embraces contradiction and ambiguity. The main observation of the paper lies in the fact that the novel depicts the emergence of identity through absence, instead of presence, which is further incorporated by what remains deferred, unsaid and excluded. The journey of Tsukuru, the protagonist, is not stable in the novel; it does not culminate in a unified self. Through the journey of Tsukuru, the novel highlights that identity is an ongoing negotiation. Incomplete narratives and partial memories influence identity. This perfectly aligns with the broader concept of postmodernism, as it believes that subjectivity remains in flux, and meaning is forever postponed. The study benefits scholars, researchers and academicians interested in postmodern theory, cultural studies, narrative, subjectivity, and aesthetics of the unfinished. In other words, the research paper contributes to cultural discourse and contemporary literary discourse by highlighting the significance of fragmentation and incompleteness in order to understand the formation of modern identities. The paper focuses on the productive potential of remainder and absence to rethink identity beyond the boundaries of coherence and closure. Therefore, it situates the novel within the conceptual terrain of “et cetera”.

Keywords: Fragmentation, Absence & Memory, Subjectivity, Postmodern Identity, Narrative Incompletion.

Introduction

Modern-day human civilisation, shaped by a techno-centric, capitalist world that is central to globalisation and consumer culture, has long described identity in terms of continuity, coherence, and psychological stability. With this concept influencing the entire world, people are often seen as having a sense of self that remains identifiable even in the face of changes caused by time and experience. And that is what is problematic. This view assumes that the past can be remembered, understood, and meaningfully combined with the present. Therefore, postmodern thought, which began taking shape after WWII, questions these basic assumptions. Postmodernism rejects rigidity; it embraces fluidity and fragmentation. It holds that nothing in the world is constant and consistent. Therefore, it does not see identity as a single, stable essence; rather, it regards identity as fragmented, contingent, and continually reconstructed via language, memory, social relationships,

and cultural narratives. Hence, the self can never be completely recovered. It can never be definitively known. Self-identity always remains open to revision, displacement, and reinterpretation.

Murakami's novel *Colourless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* (2014) clearly illustrates this postmodern idea of identity. The story focuses on the titular character Tsukuru Tazaki. He is an engineer who works at a railway station in Tokyo. On the surface, his adult life seems normal; however, it is deeply affected by an incident in his youth when he was excluded from a close group of friends. The group that affects Tsukuru psychologically consists of five people. His four friends, named Aka, Ao, Shiro and Kuro, have names associated with colours. Only Tsukuru's name does not consist of any symbolic meaning related to colour, and thus, he sees himself as 'colorless'. It is this difference in their names that becomes the central metaphor of the novel. From this, the novel examines issues of belonging, alienation, memory, trauma, and identity. The sudden, unexplained breakup with his friends shatters Tsukuru completely. For him, it is more than just the loss of friendship; it disrupts his self-image. For years, he keeps questioning why they suddenly excluded him without an explanation.

The novel highlights that identity is not something which comes about as a result of finding an authentic, hidden self. The identity of Tsukuru in the novel is built up from missing pieces, incomplete memories, fragments and encounters with the past that have been put off. His journey of self-discovery begins when his girlfriend, Sara, notices the lasting effect of the unresolved incident. It is she who asks him to go back and meet the people and places connected with his youth. Tsukuru returns to his memories and meets Ao, Aka, and Kuro. After his conversation with them, he realises his version of himself is based on an incomplete understanding of what happened before. It is Shiro who had accused him of rape. It was a false accusation. The accusation does not

produce a clear, coherent sense of self. It, in fact, leads to even more questions about memory, responsibility, trauma, sexuality, friendship, and the basic impossibility of fully recovering the past.

The article argues that *Colourless Tsukuru Tazaki* presents identity as an inherently incomplete process; therefore, Tsukuru's "colorlessness" should not be seen simply as a deficiency to be cured. On the contrary, his identity forms through what is missing, what is postponed, what is forgotten, what is excluded, and what remains unresolved. The novel thus expresses a notion of the self which corresponds with postmodernism's rejection of stable origins and of comprehensive narratives. Tsukuru's journey does not move from fragmentation to unity; rather, it shows that identity is constantly negotiated between remembered and forgotten experiences, between expressed and unspoken elements, and among the various versions of the past. The use of "et cetera" usually indicates that a list has not been fully worked out and stands for the inclusion of things which have not been explicitly mentioned; it thus stands for the remainder — that is, there is something which exists even though it is not named, not included in the list or left unfinished. When this idea is applied to Tsukuru's identity, "et cetera" acts as a metaphor for all that goes beyond the apparently coherent image of the self, for the memories that cannot be retrieved, for the motives that remain out of reach, for the experiences which are remembered in different ways by different people, and for the questions which cannot be definitively answered. Tsukuru's identity is therefore an identity based on "and so on", one whose meaning always extends beyond what can be expressed.

The argument draws on the postmodern theories of Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard and Linda Hutcheon; Lyotard's criticism of grand narratives is particularly useful for explaining why Tsukuru's first understanding of his own life comes to an end. Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and simulacra help examine the artificial nature of Tsukuru's self-image and the discrepancy

between how he sees the past and what he learns in later meetings. Hutcheon's understanding of postmodernism—with its emphasis on contradiction, ambiguity, historical representation, and resistance to closure—helps illustrate the novel's refusal to present a fully settled account of Tsukuru's identity.

The paper therefore suggests that Murakami's novel goes beyond simply telling the story of an individual who is emotionally healed. Instead, it considers the idea that incompleteness might be an essential part of identity. Tsukuru moves forward not because he has removed all uncertainty, but because he slowly learns to live with it. The novel's pilgrimage thus ceases to be a journey aimed at reaching a final destination and becomes a process of moving through fragments, remainders, and possibilities.

“Et Cetera” as a Conceptual Structure of Incompletion

In fact, the expression "et cetera" is quite simple: when it appears at the end of a list, it indicates that the sequence could continue beyond what has actually been mentioned. It therefore has two functions at once. On the one hand, it gives the impression of temporary completion—that is, that something has been referred to, listed, or described—while at the same time it defeats that sense of completion by suggesting that there is still some further item which lies outside the statement. "Et cetera" thus illustrates the contradiction between closure and incompleteness.

The tension is at the heart of *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki*. At first glance, Tsukuru's life seems to follow a simple sequence of events: he was one of a group of five friends who were suddenly excluded at university, suffered deep emotional isolation, and later managed to reunite with his former friends many years later. However, this straightforward account is consistently interrupted by major gaps. At first, Tsukuru does not understand why he was excluded, does not fully grasp

Shiro's accusation, and remains unsure about the emotional relationships among the five friends. Even after discovering the truth, the past still fails to become completely clear.

The novel's structure is therefore like "et cetera": each explanation leaves another question. When one question is answered, another question arises. Shiro's lie does not explain all aspects of Shiro. The real situation is that the conversations between Tsukuru and Ao, as well as those between Aka and Kuro, present different versions of the same past. Still, none of these versions is definitive. Memory is therefore not a clear container that keeps the past unchanged; rather, it is reconstructed through individual perspectives.

It is particularly important because Tsukuru initially defines his lack of an explanation in a negative way about himself; since his friends reject him without giving any reason, he ends up believing that there must be something fundamentally wrong with him and views himself as "colorless", thereby implying that the fact that he has no colour proves that he has no value. The unexplained rejection becomes the origin myth of his adult identity, and his method of understanding himself is based on a gap.

The truth is that the gap has a greater effect than any direct explanation could; if Tsukuru had been told he was rejected because of a particular misunderstanding, he might have treated the incident as part of a conventional story in which conflict arises and is then resolved. But because no explanation is provided, he is left to continually interpret what has occurred. He is forced to devise his own possible explanations, so his identity ends up depending on an unanswered question.

At this point, the conceptual significance of "et cetera" becomes more evident. The "colorless" self of Tsukuru is not merely empty. Rather, it is full of potential. Tsukuru's apparent lack of identity stems from multiple interpretations. This is because he does not know why his friends rejected

him, so he imagines many reasons. Here, absence becomes productive because it leads to multiple narratives.

The novel's plot thus casts doubt on the notion that identity depends on completeness; Tsukuru does not become important simply because the missing information is finally given. Indeed, it is the search for that information, and, in the process, navigating through the journey of self-discovery to find the true identity, that alters his relationship with himself. His journey shows that identity is sometimes shaped by encountering incomplete versions of oneself and unresolved issues from the past.

The use of 'et cetera' is also evident in the way names and colours are used in the novel. The names Aka, Ao, Shiro and Kuro together form what looks like a complete symbolic system and distinguish the four colours: red, blue, white and black. Tsukuru, by contrast, does not belong to this colour-based arrangement. Yet his lack of colour acquires a colour-like quality; 'colorless' ceases to mean 'nothing simply' and instead becomes the word Tsukuru uses to describe himself. What seems to be an absence thus becomes a sign. Tsukuru's 'colorlessness' is not a natural essence but a narrative construction shaped by comparison, memory, and social exclusion. His identity therefore lies between presence and absence: he is at the same time part of the group and excluded from it, known and unknown, and at the same time connected to his past and separated from it.

This makes the idea of 'et cetera' possible, allowing the novel to be read as one that deals with what is left over. Tsukuru is what remains after the original group splits up; his identity arises from what the group left out and from what continues once it seems to have disappeared. His pilgrimage attempts to encounter these remainders rather than eliminate them.

Jean-François Lyotard's theory of postmodernism provides an important theoretical foundation for explaining Tsukuru's fragmented self. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard notably associates

the postmodern condition with an "incredulity toward metanarratives"; traditional grand narratives have hitherto enabled individuals and societies to obtain coherent frameworks by means of which history, progress, knowledge and identity can be interpreted and have thus established links between individual experiences and the wider systems of meaning.

As a teenager, Tsukuru used a short form of that kind of narrative. His five friends formed a separate symbolic world; they were closely linked, and each had a particular identity indicated by a colour. In this world, Tsukuru felt a sense of belonging, and his identity seemed relationally secure because the group gave him a consistent narrative of who he was.

The story ends when the four friends suddenly turn against him. What matters is not simply that Tsukuru loses his friends but that he loses the explanatory framework through which his identity had been structured. There is no conversation, no trial, and no explanation—only exclusion.

The situation is thus akin to the collapse of a personal metanarrative since the narrative 'I belong here' is replaced by the possibility 'I don't belong anywhere'. Since Tsukuru is not given any explanation, he cannot fit the event into a clear sequence of cause and effect, and his past becomes discontinuous.

The fragmentation of things affects his adult life; even though Tsukuru can establish a career and appears to be living a normal life, his psychological condition remains focused on the incident which has not been resolved. Ironically, his professional role as someone who designs railway stations is at odds with his inner experience of having no secure destination, since Tsukuru creates physical spaces through which people pass while himself remaining psychologically stuck in an unresolved past.

Lyotard argues that the novel does not offer a single narrative that reconstructs Tsukuru's coherence. Each of the four friends provides his own version of their shared past, along with Tsukuru's personal account. These versions do not combine into a single definitive narrative. Instead, the past is plural. Each person's perspective is different from Aka's; Kuro's memory differs from Tsukuru's; it is revealed that Shiro's version of the events had been deceptive; and Haida, whom Tsukuru meets during his journey to find the truth behind the collapse of his relationship with his friends and to find his true identity, adds another element of uncertainty through his stories and his disappearance. The past is thus not a single thing that can be recovered. It exists as a series of narratives.

This kind of structure is typical of postmodern thought. Since knowledge can no longer rest on the occurrence of an original event, even if an event actually did take place, access to it is always mediated by memory, language, and interpretation. That is why Tsukuru embarks on his pilgrimage not to recover the original version of what happened, but to produce a new collection of narratives about the past. At first, Tsukuru sees the rejection as proof of a fundamental flaw. Later, however, he realises the event involved circumstances and desires that surpassed his understanding. The self he built based on the event therefore loses authority, and his identity is shown to depend on a story that was never completed.

One might not conclude that everything becomes meaningless, but only that meaning becomes temporary. Tsukuru has to get used to multiple interpretations. The absence of a final explanation then becomes integral to his circumstances.

Here, 'et cetera' can be regarded as corresponding to Lyotard's concept of the postmodern condition. Just as every narrative involves some experiences which cannot be fully expressed,

Tsukuru's story also contains experiences that go beyond complete expression. Therefore, instead of eliminating these remainders, the novel leaves them as they are.

The “Colorless” Subject and the Logic of Simulacra

Baudrillard's concept of simulation and simulacra plays a significant role in understanding and defining Tsukuru's identity. Through his work, Baudrillard challenges the notion that representation must always correspond to stable, authentic originals. In a world increasingly governed by signs, images, and systems of representation, the distinction between reality and representation grows blurred. A sign may cease to function as a clear reflection of an original and instead acquire its meaning from other signs.

Tsukuru's self-description as "colorless" can be read in this way. Initially, "colorless" seems to signify a basic aspect of his character, since he thinks that, unlike his friends, he has no special quality. But the novel later shows that "colorless" is not an objective fact; instead, it is a representation shaped by a particular social relationship.

Tsukuru is not actually devoid of colour; rather, his state of 'colourlessness' results from the symbolic system established by his friends' names. Since his friends Aka, Ao, Shiro and Kuro each have a colour, Tsukuru does not. Therefore, his identity is relative rather than intrinsic.

For this reason, identity remains unstable. Once the original group has broken up, the symbolic system also becomes incoherent. Even though the group no longer exists in its original form, Tsukuru still defines himself according to the category the group created. His identity is therefore just a simulation of the previous social reality.

The adult Tsukuru, in many ways, is a product of repetition; by recalling himself as the friend who had been excluded, he comes to understand his own body, personality, and relationships. What matters less is the first rejection than the identity that results from his interpretation of it. The relationship between the event and its representation is at the heart of the novel. Although Tsukuru's suffering is real, the explanation he gives for it is something that he has constructed. For a long time, he believed he had been rejected because he was, in some way, inferior or empty. Shiro's false accusation undermines how he understood it. However, the breakdown of one version of events does not immediately lead to contact with an authentic self; instead, it triggers a new process of interpretation. Tsukuru must revisit his entire account of adolescence. The 'truth' does not appear as a pure, uninterpreted entity; instead, it arises from memories and the statements of other people. When his original framework collapses, we see that his identity cannot be understood as a simple progression from falsehood to truth. It is a movement, a transition from one construction to another; initially, his self-image is based on exclusion, whereas later, he rebuilds his self-understanding after conversations with his former friends. Neither should be read as a completely transparent reflection of a true self. This becomes clear in how the novel handles dreams and desires. The experiences unfolding in Tsukuru's subconscious blur the line between memory, imagination, and reality. For instance, the erotic and dreamlike interactions between Shiro and Kuro in the novel disintegrate psychological boundaries, and suddenly the distinction between reality and dream vanishes; thus, they cannot be regarded merely as real memories; yet they reveal the emotional truths about Tsukuru with respect to his fears, desires, and unresolved relationships. This shows that identity is formed through multiple layers of representation. The self emerges through these representations rather than as a fixed core waiting to be found. Tsukuru's career is another example. He is an engineer who designs railway stations. On a superficial level,

it is just a profession that many people in the world opt for. However, if we look at the stations as symbolic representations, then we realise that those are spaces of transition that involve both departure and arrival, being places where paths cross and split. In the novel, Tsukuru designs stations and, in the process, creates spaces where people move without a clear idea of where their journey will end. This metaphor represents his own psychological journey. People entering and leaving his life, the appearance and disappearance of memories, and the connection of different meanings before they break off all suggest that his identity is structured like a railway station. No single final destination can permanently define him or his identity.

The fact that his identity, or true self, is described as 'colorless' is an imitation, since it is not real; the term has no firm origin. However, he believes that it expresses his fundamental deficiency. In reality, it results from a specific historical and relational arrangement.

Memory, Narrative Reconstruction and the Unfinished Past

Tsukuru's identity is shaped by memory. The novel argues that the past cannot be changed, but it can be reconstructed through recollection, testimony, and interpretation.

At the start, Tsukuru recalls the group in an idealised manner since, for him, the five friends represented a period during which he experienced a special feeling of belonging; the group appears almost perfect, and it is exactly this perfection that makes their subsequent exclusion so severe; that is why there is a clear contrast in Tsukuru's memory between a harmonious past and a damaged present.

However, his pilgrimage casts this simple division into question. Upon reuniting with his former friends, he finds that the past proved to be not as straightforward as he had thought. Each of them had a different relationship with the group, and the appearance of perfect unity concealed the fact

that there were multiple separate experiences. The fact that this has been discovered changes the status of memory because it is now clear that the collective experience which Tsukuru remembers was in fact experienced in a different way by each member. The group therefore existed as one common reality and as different separate memories.

The most important discovery concerns Shiro. For many years Tsukuru had believed that the charge brought against him was correct. Since the charge had neither been explained nor denied in his presence, it had become part of his self-image. He accepted the idea that he had committed the crime, even though he hadn't. He internalised the guilt without having committed the crime.

Shiro's later accusation shows how dangerous incomplete narratives are, since Tsukuru's self-image was based on insufficient information.

The novel thus shows that absence need not be passive: what is unknown can influence us more than what is known, and the missing explanation becomes the decisive fact in Tsukuru's life.

One of the most important aspects of the 'et cetera' framework is the role of the remainder; it does not simply fill a blank space outside the narrative, but instead gives it structure, and Tsukuru becomes the person he is because some things were not said.

The story also suggests that merely reconstructing the past does not imply that trauma disappears. Although knowledge changes the meaning of the past, the first experience never fades. Though the accusations were false, his friends actually abandoned Tsukuru, and the pain was real even though the explanation was false.

This difference portrays that the novel is not just a storehouse of revelation, but that the truth does not magically bring Tsukuru back to normal. Instead, it makes him realise that his earlier self was

based on an incomplete interpretation. Consequently, the past becomes an open field rather than a closed archive.

Absence as Presence: Shiro, Haida and the Reminders of Identity

Shiro is a central figure in the novel, since her death is, in effect, one of its most prominent features. Before Tsukuru learns of her death, knowledge of her comes mostly from memory and secondhand information. After she dies, it becomes impossible to access her point of view directly; thus, the person most responsible for the disruption in Tsukuru's life cannot provide a definite account of what happened.

Her absence matters; if Shiro had been present to explain fully, the novel would have followed the normal sequence of confession, explanation, and reconciliation. Since she has died, this kind of situation can no longer occur, and Tsukuru has to come to an understanding of her by looking at what other people have said.

Shiro thus turns into a leftover part of the narrative. She cannot be fully incorporated into the story's final interpretation, so her motives remain only partly understandable. The novel allows her to remain contradictory—which means that she can act as a victim, an accuser, a friend and as the cause of serious emotional harm—and no single category is sufficient. Shiro's identity goes beyond what the narrative provides; something additional always remains, and it cannot be fully recovered.

Haida is similar in this respect, though it is different. His relationship with Tsukuru is similar in this regard but differs in method. The relationship he establishes with Tsukuru is yet another example of incompleteness. He becomes a significant companion to Tsukuru at a time when the latter is emotionally vulnerable. Nevertheless, his sudden disappearance leaves Tsukuru with one more relationship that stays unresolved. The fact that he has a mysterious connection with the

pianist Midorikawa elicits questions concerning identity, transformation and the transfer of something intangible between people. The story cannot be fully explained and occupies the uncertain area lying between psychological narrative, folklore, dream and metaphysical possibility.

The fact that Haida has gone missing increases the ambiguity. For Tsukuru, it is not accidental that he cannot fully understand what Haida stood for or the reason for his disappearance; rather, this is the central feature of the novel. He keeps meeting people who cannot be completely known, and his relationships are just as much formed by absence as they are by presence.

The novel therefore disputes the notion that relationships must finish with a full understanding; some relationships remain unresolved, certain people disappear, and some questions stay unanswered. Yet these incomplete experiences do contribute to the formation of identity; it is therefore not a journey from absence to presence; this is a journey through various kinds of absence.

Linda Hutcheon and the Aesthetics of Open-Endedness

Linda Hutcheon's way of looking at postmodernism is very useful for explaining why the novel does not provide a complete closure; she draws attention to the contradictory and self-aware characteristics of postmodern cultural production, and postmodern narratives generally cast doubt on the clear distinction between truth and representation, history and fiction, presence and absence, and reality and interpretation. *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki* does not qualify as a historiographic metafiction in the strict sense, many of Hutcheon's observations concerning postmodern narrative are still useful when it comes to examining the novel's handling of history, memory and representation. The fact is that the novel shows over and over again that the past is not simply accessible as an objective reality; it is instead assembled through competing narratives.

The story also includes a contradiction since Tsukuru is at the same time connected to and separated from his old friends; even though he is said to be colourless, this lack of colour is in fact his most characteristic trait. Although he is looking for answers he finds that getting them results in new questions, and although he wants closure he meets even greater ambiguity— not a flaw in the way the novel is structured; they are in fact what the novel means.

Hutcheon's way of understanding postmodernism also allows us to look again at the distinction between presence and absence. Rather than assuming that presence is more important than absence, the novel demonstrates that absence can function as a basic element of presence. The fact that there is no explanation has a major impact on Tsukuru's life. Shiro, although he is dead, remains present in Tsukuru's mind. The vanished Haida still exercises an influence over Tsukuru. Tsukuru's lost friendship determines his adult identity.

Very well, the novel does not provide the usual kind of narrative conclusion. It is true that Tsukuru does undergo a significant change, even though this change does not finish with a definite statement of who he is.

The ending is especially important in this respect. Tsukuru reaches a point at which he desires connection with Sara, yet the future of their relationship is unclear. The novel does not provide an unequivocal romantic resolution. This vagueness is consistent with the larger argument of the novel: identity and relationships can't always be rigid, they are fragmented and fluid. Tsukuru's story stays open because life itself stays open. The idea of openness can also be linked with the metaphor of a pilgrimage. Although a pilgrimage usually means moving towards a destination, Tsukuru's pilgrimage is unusual in that it does not aim at arriving at a final truth about himself; it alters him instead by giving him access to various versions of the past. It thus becomes an aesthetic kind of "et cetera"; the journey can go on because identity goes on as well. The title, *Colorless*

Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage, immediately shows movement as one of the main metaphors in the novel; a pilgrimage normally entails abandoning an ordinary state, undergoing a change, and then arriving at a sacred destination where some kind of knowledge or spiritual fulfillment is anticipated.

Murakami casts doubt on this structure, since though Tsukuru is different from his earlier psychological state, he never arrives at a final definition of himself.

His pilgrimage consists mainly of meetings, during which he comes together with the people from his past and listens to their memories. As a result of each of these meetings, his understanding evolves. The journey proves thus not simply geographical but also epistemological; even though Tsukuru goes on it in order to acquire knowledge, he eventually comes to the realisation that knowledge on its own is only partial.

The pilgrimage is thus a very appropriate metaphor for postmodern identity.

A modernist viewpoint might regard the journey as one that results in the attainment of an authentic selfhood, the fragmented individual finally recovering a fundamental unity; yet Murakami's novel does not permit this. Tsukuru does not come on a hidden 'true self' which had been lying beneath his trauma, but instead he reconstructs his relationship with himself through new interpretations.

The difference is at the same time subtle and fundamental.

All we want to do is not to find out who Tsukuru "really is"; what we actually want is to realise that the question can never be finally answered.

That is the reason why his role as a designer of railway stations has a symbolic value, since stations are not final destinations but rather areas of transition which organise movement without determining where each traveller will end up; in just the same way, Tsukuru's own identity

functions as a point of transition between different experiences. The fact that his surname is Tazaki and the concept of 'making' or constructing also have a metaphorical connection with this process. Tsukuru builds stations just as he has to reconstruct his own understanding of himself; identity is therefore a thing that is created rather than one that is simply discovered.

The railway analogy also casts doubt on the idea of life as a single straight line. Even though trains adhere to their routes, railway stations permit a great many different paths; people get on and off, and these various paths cross and split apart. Similarly, Tsukuru's life cannot be viewed as consisting of one continuous line; it is influenced by his interactions with other people. Therefore, the pilgrimage shows that identity is relational.

A better understanding of Tsukuru can be achieved by examining his relationships with Aka, Ao, Shiro, Kuro, Haida and Sara; yet none of these relationships provides a complete explanation. Each of them adds one more element to the incomplete portrait of his identity.

The self might therefore be best regarded as a sequence of encounters rather than as a fixed essence.

Identity Beyond Lack: Reframing “Colorlessness”

The most important thing that the novel does is to reexamine the word "colorless". At first, Tsukuru understands the term in a negative way because colourlessness means the absence of individuality; he finds that each of his friends has a symbolic identity while he has no such thing, which is why he considers himself to be a deficient member of the group.

As a result of reading the novel, the reader becomes more and more suspicious of this interpretation.

The fact that something is colourless does not imply that it is empty, merely that it is open. Unlike the definite colours assigned to the other characters, the fact that Tsukuru has no colour means that

his identity remains rather unclear; he is not limited to a single symbolic category. One should not idealise his suffering either, since his exclusion does result in actual psychological damage; yet the novel illustrates that an identity based on incompleteness need not remain one based on deficiency. The reason for his mistake is that he applies the logic of lack to his colourlessness.

If it is this distinction of identity is considered to be a complete and stable structure, then anything missing must be seen as a defect; but if identity is regarded as an unfinished process, the missing element then becomes part of its structure. This transformation is possible precisely because of the "et cetera" framework. "Et cetera" does not mean "nothing else"; it means "there is still more". The phrase acknowledges that the list is incomplete since reality goes beyond it. Tsukuru's identity works in precisely this way: even though he is "colourless", it by no means follows that nothing exists at all, since his identity comprises all the things which cannot be described by a single colour—such as his occupation, his memories, his relationships, his desires, his anxieties, his disappointments and his possibilities. His identity is thus not empty but open. It also casts doubt on the usual idea that psychological recovery requires complete closure. Tsukuru need not discover all the answers about Shiro, Haida or the past if he is to go on living; he only needs to understand the limits of what can be known. The ability to come to terms with the idea that things do not have to be finished becomes a mark of maturity. Completeness develops into a sign of maturity.

The idea of the fragmented self is one of the main characteristics of postmodern thought; instead of possessing a stable identity that exists prior to social experience, the postmodern subject is brought about through different discourses, relationships, and representations. He is also a designer of railway stations, a former member of a close group when he was a teenager, an excluded friend, a lover, a son, a traveller, and a person who has an unresolved memory; none of these roles is sufficient to fully contain him. To call him "colorless" is itself a form of oversimplification, for

the novel demonstrates that no one category is sufficient. His identity is likewise subject to change over time; the Tsukuru who experiences rejection is not the same as the adult Tsukuru who makes the pilgrimage. Yet the two cannot be completely separated. The past remains alive in the present. Identity is therefore both temporal and recursive.

The present is influenced by interpretations of the past, while the past is based on the present; there is no straightforward progression from one to the other. This time-related structure is in line with the postmodern attitude of rejecting teleological narratives; Tsukuru's life does not simply progress from a state of innocence through trauma to recovery, but rather the past keeps coming back, is reinterpreted and takes on new meanings. The narrative gaps are productive since they stop identity from becoming fixed. In this regard, incompleteness is not simply an aesthetic device; it instead becomes an ontology of the subject. The self remains unfinished since experience itself is incomplete.

The Productive Potential of Absence

The paradox therefore expresses the main argument of this paper in the following way: absence does not have to reduce identity; it may in fact create identity. The most defining experience of Tsukuru's is the fact that his friends are missing. This absence shapes his understanding of himself. Shiro's absence takes on a permanent place in his psychology. Haida's disappearance adds another unresolved aspect. The lack of explanation shapes how Tsukuru remembers things. Indeed, the absence of a colour becomes his most identifiable symbolic feature.

The novel thus inverts the usual hierarchy that exists between presence and absence. Presence isn't always more significant than absence, since what is absent can have a greater impact by prompting speculation, desire, and interpretation. The potential for production lies in the remainder. What is left over is all that escapes complete representation, namely the 'and so on' which goes beyond

what has been stated in the narrative. For Tsukuru, the remainder includes everything that cannot be fully incorporated into a coherent account of his life.

That is the reason why the novel cannot be treated as a straightforward psychological story concerning a man coping with his childhood trauma; such interpretation would put a definite ending on it when the novel intentionally keeps the situation open. Rather, Murakami creates a narrative in which the unfinished still has meaning.

Conclusion

The novel *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* does not view identity as fully formed, but as a continuous process of negotiation. The fragmented way in which Tsukuru sees himself stems from a disruption that remained unresolved during his adolescence, yet the novel shows that the importance of this disturbance cannot be boiled down to the finding of one particular fact; instead, his identity is built upon what remains incomplete—such as unanswered questions, contradictory memories, lost relationships, absences, dreams and partial narratives.

The way "et cetera" is conceived offers a helpful way to understand this process. Just as the phrase does, Tsukuru's identity shows that something always goes beyond what has been said; at first his "colorless" identity seems to mean a lack, but the novel later turns this lack into an open category, and colourlessness comes to signify incompleteness rather than deficiency.

Lyotard's critique of grand narratives helps explain how Tsukuru's clear personal narrative ends; the friendship group he had in adolescence functions as a small-scale narrative of belonging, but its sudden end destroys the stability of his self-conception. The different versions of the past Tsukuru meets on his pilgrimage keep the past from cohering into one authoritative story.

Baudrillard's ideas about simulation and simulacra also show that Tsukuru's self-image is constructed. The 'colorless' self is not an original essence but a representation formed through social comparison and memory. For many years, Tsukuru lives with an identity whose supposed origin is finally found to be unstable.

Hutcheon's understanding of postmodernism makes it possible to account for the novel's devotion to contradiction, ambiguity, and open-endedness; Murakami does not turn the pilgrimage into a journey that leads to complete closure. Even when Tsukuru acquires important information about his past, several questions remain unanswered. For this reason, the novel does not equate knowledge with totality.

The fact that certain elements remain unresolved is not a sign of failure in the story's construction; it is exactly what gives significance to the novel's portrayal of identity.

Tsukuru's pilgrimage is therefore a voyage without a final arrival. He does not discover a definitive self waiting at the end of the road. Instead, he learns to negotiate the fragments that constitute him. His identity emerges through encounters with the past, but those encounters don't eliminate the past's ambiguity. Rather, they teach him that uncertainty can be inhabited.

The novel ultimately suggests that the self is never entirely present to itself. Memories remain forgotten, experiences are misinterpreted, relationships end without explanation, and possibilities remain unrealised. The subject therefore contains an irreducible remainder.

This remainder is the space of "et cetera."

Through situating *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki* within this conceptual terrain, the novel can be read as an important representation of postmodern subjectivity. It demonstrates that identity does not necessarily emerge through the recovery of coherence. It can emerge through fragmentation. It

does not always require eliminating absence. Absence can become one of its constitutive conditions.

Tsukuru's "colorlessness" so becomes less a symbol of emptiness than a metaphor for openness. He isn't defined by the colour he lacks but by the possibilities that remain beyond any fixed colour. His identity, like the phrase "et cetera," points beyond itself.

The importance of Murakami's novel therefore consists in its refusal to provide a final answer to the question of identity. Instead, it transforms the absence of an answer into the very condition through which identity continues to develop. The unfinished is not simply something awaiting completion; rather, it constitutes a mode of existence.

In this sense, Tsukuru's pilgrimage does not end with discovering who he is. It concludes with the recognition that who he is remains subject to becoming. The self is an unfinished narrative, a collection of fragments and remainders, a text that can't be closed because something always remains to be said.

And beyond that, there's always the "et cetera."

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