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Figure 1: *Hang Glider* by Karina Beltran

**Foul Play, Awareness, Virtue
and Accountability in *South of
the Border, West of the Sun* by
Haruki Murakami**

Kiegan E. Lloyd

Keywords: Accountability, Relationships, Honesty, Morality,
Redemption

H AJIME'S consciousness is consumed with memories of his past. As Hajime struggles to find a sense of moral character within the novel, he makes questionable decisions that hurt those around him. Ultimately, Hajime does not take responsibility for his actions and because of this he avoids facing reality. Hajime's lack of accountability provides him with an excuse to be an immoral person. Furthermore, Hajime understands what he is doing is wrong and yet continues these actions, despite knowing that his actions hurt those around him and have consequences. This degrades Hajime's sense of identity and self-worth. By the end of the novel, however, Hajime accepts his past and begins to develop empathy for others. Murakami's novel is important because it explores themes of identity, self-worth and acceptance which are issues people in society today face on a daily basis. This novel is significant because it provides the reader an outline in how to live a moral life.

An analysis of Hajime's immoral decision-making helps the reader to understand the process whereby Hajime evolves into a more genuine and thoughtful person. The reader will be presented with three decisions that Hajime makes in the novel and will show how they are ultimately immoral. The first immoral act that the book describes is a teenage Hajime cheating on Izumi, his first girlfriend, with her cousin. The second is Hajime's dishonesty towards his wife Yukiko about going on a trip with Shimamoto. The final immoral act, near the end of the book, is Hajime's decision to be involved in a lucrative financial scheme with Yukiko's father.

Hajime was born in Japan in 1951 and grew up in a small nuclear family to a mother who was a housewife and a father, a stockbroker in a large Japanese stock market firm (Murakami 3). Being the only child in a Japanese society where two children was the custom and norm, made Hajime feel different and ultimately inferior from those around him. As an example, Hajime recalls his youth stating that "... I hated it whenever someone asked me how many brothers and sisters I had. Just let them hear I didn't have any, and instinctively

they thought: An only child, eh? Spoiled, weak, and self-centred, I betcha" (5). However, to compensate for his internal shortcomings Hajime encounters characters in his life that aid, hinder and impact the decisions and relationships he has with his family and others around him.

The protagonist's deceitful activities first begin when Hajime's relationship with Izumi begins to deteriorate. As a result, the decisions he makes involving her become less important to him. For example, when Izumi appears reluctant to fully engage in sexual intercourse, Hajime has sexual intercourse on a continual basis with Izumi's cousin. Hajime knows what he is doing is wrong, but continues anyway. For illustration: "Izumi's cousin already had a boyfriend, but for the two of us, that was besides the point. . . For the next two months. . . All we did was bang away" (42-4). Hajime's sexual relationship with Izumi's cousin is immoral for two main reasons. Firstly, Hajime cheating with Izumi's cousin broke the trust between him and Izumi, who thought they were in a monogamous relationship. Secondly, the cheating is fundamentally dishonest, because Hajime kept it a secret from Izumi. The fact that Hajime knew what he was doing was wrong, and cheated anyway shows the reader that he had a weak sense of character. For example, he tells the reader that: "So if the relationship hadn't been discovered, Izumi and I might have continued for some time as we had, boyfriend and girlfriend. . . [But I didn't care whether she found out or not] . . ." (45-6). Throughout this cheating episode, Hajime not once apologizes to Izumi for what he had done, and ultimately he did not take responsibility for his actions. This cheating behavior which continued to follow him as a young adult demonstrates that he continued to lack moral character.

While in university, Hajime slept with one girl after the next, and did grow beyond these sexual encounters (51). Hajime states that his university years were filled with disappointment and loneliness: "My four years of college were pretty much a waste of time" (49). During these years Hajime keeps his feelings inside, becoming very antisocial (51). For illustration: "I withdrew into myself. I ate alone, took walks alone, went swimming alone, and went to concerts and movies alone. . . I started talking to myself [and] drinking alone at night. . ." (48-52). Later in Hajime's mid-twenties he began a career as a textbook editor, and his attitude changed very little. Hajime

continued to be antisocial and also pessimistic. While he went on several blind dates, rather than being positive about meeting someone new, Hajime was very judgmental. This impacted his ability to be positive and enjoy life. For example, when he went on a date with the pharmacology girl he spent more time silently criticizing her appearance and comparing her to his first true love, Shimamoto, then genuinely being interested in getting to know her (53). Throughout the story the reader learns that Hajime was genuinely interested in Shimamoto. While Hajime constantly thought about Shimamoto, he lacked attentiveness toward the other characters in his life; this includes his wife Yukiko.

The second immoral act that Hajime committed was being dishonest with Yukiko about going on a trip with Shimamoto. Again, Hajime knows what he is doing is wrong, but does it anyway. For example, he made up a story for his wife about what he was going to do on Sunday, when he actually planned embarking on a trip with Shimamoto (110). A quotation that adequately describes his lack of care for his wife Yukiko is: "I've lied to Yukiko before, when I slept with other women. But I never felt I was deceiving her. Those were just harmless flings. But this time was wrong. [But] not [because] I was planning to sleep with Shimamoto..." (111). Hajime viewed Shimamoto as his first true love as both of them had similar upbringings and life circumstances. For Hajime, Shimamoto filled the void in his life, something that Yukiko could never do. Also, Hajime's actions resembled the character traits of Yukiko's father. While both of them were successful businessmen, they also shared the same type of immoral behavior.

Interestingly, Yukiko's father told Hajime that he condoned Hajime having affairs with other women. This adds to Hajime's moral dilemma (132). For example, in conversation, between Hajime and Yukiko's father tells Hajime the following: "When I was your age I played around quite a bit. . . I think a fling or two on the side isn't all bad. It really refreshes you" (132). The relationship dynamic with Hajime and Yukiko's father is odd in that fact that he promoted unfaithfulness to his own daughter.

Hajime and Yukiko's father both showed other traits of immorality. After Yukiko's father told Hajime how to successfully commit infidelity, it bolstered Hajime's morally lacking activity. Lastly, Yukiko's father asked Hajime to sign his name on legal documents,

without telling Hajime the real motives surrounding the “new business.” This immoral act impacted Hajime’s moral character as well (129). While Hajime told his father-in-law that he was not comfortable with the entire process: “Dad, to tell you the truth, I don’t like this kind of thing. I don’t mean because it’s illegal or anything. . . I’d rather not get involved in backroom deals” (131), on the other hand he continued anyway. Hajime may have felt coerced due to his father-in-law knowing about his infidelity. Yukiko’s father wanted Hajime to sign documents stating that he was a founder of a business that did not actually exist for financial gain.

These three acts show the reader aspects of Hajime’s immoral character. When faced with difficult decisions in the plot, Hajime thought about consequences but did not care whether he hurt others or not. Hajime’s justification for immoral actions was that his poor decisions in the past would continue into the future because he was a bad person. For example: “Maybe I’ve lost the chance to ever be a decent human being. The mistakes I’d committed—maybe they were part of my very makeup, an inescapable part of my being” (48). Consequently, Hajime provides himself an excuse to be an immoral person.

Near the end of the novel, however, Hajime’s moral character changes. For example, when Hajime told his wife Yukiko about his affair with Shimamoto, she asked: “You have somebody else you like, right?” (192). Hajime replied yes, and stated, it was more than a fling (192). After spending many weeks with Shimamoto, it had required courage to tell his wife about their affair. Another example is when Hajime stands up to his father-in-law about pulling his own family savings out of a specific illegally suspect stock that the father-in-law had encouraged (158). These examples show Hajime changed from an uncaring, immoral character, to one that was more honest with himself and others.

Hajime’s through a character transformation could be described as a personal reformation or reinvention. His change to a more honest and thoughtful person, was reflected in his changed actions and decision-making. Hajime learned to take responsibility for his actions and he faced reality. As he became accountable for his actions and decision-making it created change in his sense of identity and self-worth. Moreover, the end of the novel shows Hajime embarking on a more thoughtful existence and provides the reader an

outline in how to live a moral life.

Author Bio

Kiegan E. Lloyd is a international virtual exchange student from Luther College at the University of Regina in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada studying at California State University - Monterey Bay. Kiegan is completing a Bachelor of Arts honours degree in History and currently a UROC Researcher at CSUMB working with Dr. Stephanie Spoto.

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Artist Statement

***Hang Glider* by Karina Beltran**

This photo is meant to show the beauty of Marina Beach. The ocean to me resembles peace hope it has gotten me through anxious times. The hang glider as one of the subjects resembles freedom. Freedom you may also feel from the ocean.

Works Cited

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