

Self-Alienation of Haruki Murakami's Characters in *Norwegian Wood* and *Colorless*

Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage: A Novel.

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Abstract

Haruki Murakami, one of the most outstanding Japanese authors, always comes up with excellent ideas of surrealistic stories. His only realistic novel, *Norwegian Wood* (2003), is also a masterpiece. Translated from the original version entitled *Noruei no Mori* (1987), this novel tells about an intricate story deep-rooted from the death of the beloved one. *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage: A Novel* (2014) is the notable work which comprises of such alienated characters. The characters of Haruki Murakami often loners who alienate themselves from the family, society and oneself. Though they are very ordinary human beings they detach themselves from the world and become aloof when loved ones disappear from their life. This paper aims to examine the subjectivity of the core characters: Kizuki, Naoko, Toru, and Tsukuru as they do specific fundamental actions to be free from their symbolic mechanism. *Norwegian Wood* (2003) Set in Tokyo, during the late 1960s, the background shows the student movement which grew more extensive after World War II to protest the government. *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage: A Novel* (2014) set in Nagoya during 1990s, Tsukuru was a fan of Railway stations bearing colourless name that resulted in feeling suicidal.

Nevertheless, the ambition of Murakami's characters is to be free from the structures that bound them do not always come true. Some of them left their symbolic mechanism to

enter another one. In the end, the characters cannot be the Other; as long as they are still controlled by a particular token mechanism they would only be able to be the other.

Keywords: Alienation, Fundamental Action, Sexuality, colourless, Suicide, Subjectivity, ambition, symbolic mechanism.

Haruki Murakami is a Japanese writer who most often deals with the lives of alienated characters. *Norwegian wood*(2003) and *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage: A Novel*(2014)are the notable works which comprise of such alienated characters. The characters of Haruki Murakami often loners who alienate themselves from the family, society, and oneself. Though they are very rational human beings they detach themselves from the world and become aloof when loved ones disappear from their life. Often the protagonist of his works become aloof often the loved ones either die or go. The unexplained death or disappearance of the characters has a profound and lasting impact on the significant aspect of the novels.

Toru Wantanab, the protagonist of the novel *Norwegian Wood* (2003)loses his friend Kizuki at the age of 18; he commits suicide after a day- long entertainment with Wantanab. They both enjoy each others company but before he could commit suicide he didn't reveal any kind of emotional outburst. He enjoys swimming with his friend Wantanab. His unexplained suicide leaves his family shattered and brings dismay to his lady love Naoko; who then onwards shows the symptoms of mental illness.

Naoko tries to connect herself with the world around but fails to fix herself in this mortal world. She avoids talking with the last whom Kizuki preferred to be with before his death. She becomes a victim of Kizuki's imbalanced psychic vibration. She is not the usual being anymore. She stops being an extrovert even with Wantanab. She hardly speaks any world to him. She wanted herself lonely even when Wantanab takes effort to make her feel at

ease. Wantanab also suffers because of the death of his only friend Kizuki. Instead of mourning for the loss he is more practical in bringing out himself from the loss. Naoko is a constant reminder for Wantanab about the friendship he had with Kizuki whereas Wantanab is a constant reminder of pain and loss Naoko's love. Wantanab celebrates the presence of Naoko yet Naoko fails to see the optimistic presence of Wantanab. He says Kizuki was very normal that he didn't see any suicidal instinct in him. But Naoko says that Kizuki would always show his positive side to Wantanab. Naoko says:

He was always like that around you. He struggled to keep his weakness hidden. I am sure he was very fond of you. He made a point of letting you see only his best side. He wasn't like that with me. He'd let his guard down. He could be really moody. One minute he'd be chattering away, and the next he'd be depressed. (167)

Naoko suffers a lot in the asylum. Reiko, the friend of Naoko, also a patient in home surprisingly comes out of her depression but takes many years. Her company gives her the comfort which Naoko failed to get from others. Reiko feels that Naoko's family also failed to pay attention to her symptoms. Reiko empathizes:

"... she should have received treatment a lot earlier. Her symptoms were already apparent from the time that boyfriend of hers, Kizuki, killed himself. Her family should have seen it, and she herself should have realized that something was wrong. Of course, things weren't right at home, either..." (129)

The symptoms of Naoko's mental illness is expressed at the beginning of the novel itself. The inability to put forward her thoughts shows how much she is struggling inside. But unfortunately she knows her illness can never be comprehended by any mortal being. She

says “I lose track of what I was trying to say to begin with. It’s like I am split in two and playing tag with myself.” Her thoughts are highly disoriented that she is unable to collect her thoughts and speak out coherently.

But the absence of Naoko had a terrible impact on Wantanab. He says “She and I had needed each other more than either of us knew which was no doubt why one relationship had taken such a major detour and become, in a sense, Warped.” (53)The author gives an optimistic view on death. He conveys that “Death exists,not as the opposite but as a part of life”.(30)

Wantanab also feels alienated by the death of Naoko. It is stated that:

Nights when it was impossible for me to sleep, images of Naoko would come back to me. There was no way I could stop them. Too many memories of her were crammed inside me, and as soon as one of them found the slightest opening, the rest would force their ways out in an endless stream.(359)

He tries to alienate after the death of Naoko. He travels far from residence and cut away the human contacts for a while. But finally he reconciles to live.

In *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage: A Novel*(2014)Murakami focuses on youth in a five-member circle of teenage friends.Tsukuru Tazaki’s troubled emotions and alienation is overtly Murakamian’s nature. This novel begins with a truthful and soul-shattering confession that characterizes its protagonist throughout his journey. Tsukuru’s sense of isolation stems directly from a negative sequence of events that the novel opens with. Indeed, while Tsukuru may be similar to some of Murakami’s other characters, his depressed and melancholy attitude appears much more severe, as evidenced from the opening paragraph of the novel:

From July of his sophomore year in college until the following January, all Tsukuru Tazaki could think about was dying. He turned twenty during this time, but this special watershed — becoming an adult — meant nothing. Taking his own life seemed the most natural solution, and even now he couldn't say why he hadn't taken this final step. Crossing that threshold between life and death would have been easier than swallowing down a slick, raw, egg. (3)

This forlornness that Tsukuru feels is brought on by the fact that he is alienated from his close friend group — four friends that, interestingly enough, all have names which contain a color (red, blue, white, black) in the Japanese language. At 20, Tsukuru is a phantom of his teenage self. An engineering student at a Tokyo college, he feels as if he is sleepwalking through life as if he already died but not yet noticed it. The reason, as is swiftly made clear, is that upon his return to his home town of Nagoya between semesters, his four closest friends in the high-school circle on which his entire sense of happiness and belonging relied that they never wanted to see him or talk to him again. They refuse to tell him why.

Tsukuru survives the heartbreak, for in the next scene we see him at age 36, a reasonably successful and eligible bachelor, living out his childhood dream of building and rebuilding train stations. He is in a romantic relationship with attractive, intelligent, cosmopolitan Sara. But Sara can see the existential hole in Tsukuru's heart. As he recounts his mysterious exile from his childhood paradise — the formless, obvious sorrow that surges inside him still — she becomes convinced that he needs to confront the truth before he can move on to a meaningful relationship.

Tsukuru, however, is colorless; his name does not contain colour. Because of this, it's as if Tsukuru was destined to be excluded from this group of friends, never fitting in, to begin with, as the narrator describes:

The two boys' last names were Akamatsu—which means 'red pine'—and Oumi—'blue sea'; the girls' family names were Shirane—'white root'—and Kurono—'black field'. Tazaki was the only last name that did not have a color in its meaning. From the very beginning this made him feel a little bit left out. (9-10)

He is alienated from the group for several reasons that are wonderfully intriguing and utterly Murakamian — near the end of the book, one is left wondering if Tsukuru did do the awful things that his friends said he did, thanks to Murakami's slight employment of his traditional magical realism style. Regardless, he is cut off completely, immediately, and fails to ask his friends why they have decided to come to such a drastic conclusion. Indeed, Tsukuru's sense of agency in this situation is minute at best. While the average individual may demand reasons for being cut off so suddenly, when his friends "announced that they did not want to see him, or talk with him, ever again ... Tsukuru didn't dare ask [why]." (6) Furthermore, Tsukuru even fails to find the will to kill himself. While this may seem irrelevant, it only reinforces his lack of agency and control over his own life. Later in the novel, Tsukuru is alienated further when yet another friend abandons him. Once again, Tsukuru's inability to influence his surroundings disables him from stopping this good friend from leaving.

Murakami continues to illuminate Tsukuru's undeveloped sense of agency through other realities. In another example of the book's small retaining of magical realism, Tsukuru cannot harbor any sense of agency even within his dreams, where he cannot manage to control who he has sexual relations with. Tsukuru must search his past and simultaneously investigate the present. The result is a suspense novel with skillful twists and turns and an aptitude for quick, bright shocks of psychological insight.

Why would they banish Tsukuru from their happy milieu? Because his name had no hint of color? It is true that although he was good-looking, reasonably well-off and an integral part of their group, he was the only one who represented no particular hue and had no particular flaws or virtues. He was Colourless Tsukuru, glad to be part of their reflected rainbow. But the answer to the central questions — why had he been disliked, and why was a dire accusation leveled against him? — is disturbing; to tell you more would be to spoil the rest of this furious story.

This paper says that *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage: A Novel*(2014) and *Norwegian Wood*(2003) are about agonizing adolescent experiences that forever scar the soul. They are profoundly affecting novels, not only for the dark nooks and crannies that they explore but for the magic that seeps into their characters' subconscious, for the lengths to which they will go to protect or damage one another, for the brilliant characterizations that they deliver along the way.

Indeed, Murakami can group the troubles of a vast world and still mind a few precious details. He may be taking us deeper and deeper into fractured modernity and its uneasy inhabitants, but he is ever alert to minds and hearts, to what it is, precisely, that they feel and see, and to humanity's abiding and indomitable spirit.

All the alienation that Tsukuru feels eventually manages to act as a transformative agent, an aspect of his life which, paradoxically, contributes to his development of agency. It is only through being alienated that Tsukuru is able to find the truth about his original condition from his close friend group. Therefore, the assistance he displays through discovering the reasons behind of his initial alienation, in turn, is fuelled from the fact that he refuses to allow himself from being alienated once again, this time from his girlfriend. The transformation that Tsukuru experiences produces a magnificent character, one who has

indeed come full circle from a disempowered, alienated youth, to a confident adult, who, while still feeling alienated, now has the willpower to change his fate, as Alexander illustrates: “Tsukuru may be an empty vessel at the outset of the text, but over the course of a chain of conversations he’s filled up, measure by measure, to the extent that he has become one of Murakami’s most memorable leading men by the end.” Tsukuru’s newly found sense of agency, and the positive consequences that occupancy it, are displayed when he states, in regards to his girlfriend, “I’m going to propose to her right away. And give her everything I’m capable of giving — every single thing.” (385) While, in traditional Murakami style, the ending of the novel is open to interpretations and Tsukuru’s fate is left unknown, one can only assume that through this discovering of agency that Tsukuru will manage to avoid yet another encounter with alienation.

Murakami’s characters are often loners who lead their life dreamily because they lose their grip in reality. They don’t often find meaning in the mortal world. Either the Murakamian characters resort into insanity or they die. The tool which is often used by the characters to avoid loneliness is suicide. The people who are not integrated with the world around fall into an abyss through which they try to forget the scar created by the reality.

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