



## Fate as Deus Ex Machina in Murakami's Norwegian Wood

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**Abstract:** *Norwegian Wood* is a fiction which has been predominantly studied as a love tale of mixed feelings, entangled between Toru, Naoko and Midori. It has a signature narrative technique of Murakami where the story thrives connecting the past and present, creating the peculiar Murakami-esque effect. In the present research paper, the researchers are trying to revisit the story of Toru in the light of fate acting as the ultimate authority. One can consider it as *deus ex machina*. *Deus ex machina* or God in the form of machine is a classical terminology which has been used by writers for ages. Here, Murakami has used it as a 'red string of fate' in order to reach the climax. Fate has a unique mechanism for each individual. It may not be the same as it is equal to that of his deeds. God has plans for every individual and fate is the string through which He implements his plans. Fate is the greatest leveller that adjudicates the deeds of a man and reciprocates the same treatment by different means which the researchers name it as *deus ex machina*.

**Keywords:** *Fate, Deus-ex machina, Destiny, Love, Norwegian Wood, Haruki Murakami.*

### Introduction

All human things are subject to decay,

And, when Fate summons, monarch must obey. (Dryden lines 1-2)

The above lines from the popular satire, *Mac Flecknoe*, by John Dryden insinuate that nobody, even the monarchs, can stop the dictate of fate when it knocks the ear to enter one's life. It shows that fate is omnipotent and omnipresent which punishes the vice and rewards the virtue as the maxim, "we reap what we sow" (Nordholm77) demonstrates. Fate forewarns by its alarming signals and alerts the subject but waits for none. One cannot either barter or strike a deal with fate. If fate wants, it can act as a shield or it can be a ruthless sword to haggler one into pieces. Though fate is invincible, one should learn to live in its terrain just as the popular saying goes "if life gives you lemons, make lemonade" (qtd. in Hill). Long-lasting goodness can act as reward like that of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress* — an allegory where the character Christian is saved by Help — which reveals that fortune can turn its fate on command of fate.

In Murakami's fictions, the underlined fact enunciates that life is predestined by a string called fate which highlights the life of the postmodern man interwoven in a riddle where man finds himself wondering, despite he starts from any of the ends. Murakami has illustrated the perplexed mindset of a man which announces that fate can manipulate the human mind as well as life like that of the following nature imagery which has been described by the author in one of his fictions:

Sometimes, fate is like a small sandstorm that keeps changing those directions.

You change direction but the sandstorm chases you.

You turn again, but the storm adjusts.

Over and over you play this out, like some ominous dance with death just before dawn (Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore* 3)

There is an analogy between sand in the hands of wind and that of life in hands of fate. The wind takes sand wherever it wants, sometimes in the form of a cyclone, shattering it in all directions and sometimes in the form of a breeze soothing and lolling but constantly changing the shape of a strand. In a similar way, fate affects the life of a man. The eminent writers in literature have always used fate as a tool to carve their plot. The classic, *Oedipus Rex* has fate as a written entity moulding the life of the protagonist even before his birth such as the soothsayer's augury about King Laius and Queen Jocasta's heir, Oedipus, and that he will kill his father and marry his own mother. Hence, to mitigate this apocalypse which is summoned by fate, the King immediately orders the Queen to kill the infant but neither she nor the servants could kill Oedipus. Though abandoned for years and unaware of his true parentage, Oedipus reached out for his belonging and unknowingly did what he was destined for. He became a prey to his fate. Oedipus was free but still his freedom was tied in the shackle and clutches of his fate. This has made the plot quite evident but the mastery of Sophocles in using fate makes storytelling a mesmerizing experience. Similarly, *Kafka on the Shore* is the magnum opus of Haruki Murakami which takes close to what Sophocles did while using fate as *deus ex machina*. Murakami has shown the kaleidoscopic nature of fate by highlighting the hidden nuances of characters suffering in different time zones.

Fate at times acts as 'destiny' and sometimes acts as 'time' itself. Fate and time are like railway lines that run parallel to one another as fate is all-pervasive in Murakami's fictions which results in constant development of actions. The 1987, Murakami fiction, *Norwegian Wood* has been discussed in the present research paper, where 'fate' is a recurring theme which follows the story of Toru Watanabe — a college student in Tokyo. The story begins in 1960s Japan where the protagonist navigates the complexities of love, loss, and self-discovery. In this novel, fate is often portrayed as an uncontrollable force that shapes the lives of the characters. The characters frequently find themselves at the mercy of circumstances beyond their control which can lead to unexpected outcomes. For example, the death of a mutual friend named Kizuki serves as a turning point in the lives of Toru and his love interest, Naoko. This incident sets off a series of events that influence the characters' choices and actions, seemingly driven by fate. Additionally, Murakami employs the motif of coincidences and chance encounters in the novel, which further emphasizes the overarching theme of fate. The characters often meet by chance or experience serendipitous moments that have profound impact on their lives. These encounters are portrayed as fateful, as if perfectly calculated by some supreme power.

Murakami also uses the concept of fate to explore the idea of existentialism and the search for meaning in life. Toru and other characters grapple with questions about the purpose and direction of their lives as they confront the inevitability of fate and the uncertainty of the future. The novel delves into the lives of the characters, particularly Toru Watanabe, as they struggle with the existential implications of fate and here are some ways in which fate raises questions about existence in *Norwegian Wood*. The protagonist Toru Watanabe

and his girl, Naoko are mere puppets in the hands of fate. This fiction talks about the desires of humans which are against the forces of Nature where the conflict is rooted in the characters' existence which leads them to tragic flaws. The ironic twist brought upon the life of characters relates to the actions of the characters. Here, the characters fall in a dull witted magnitude, an unexpected force or energy. The mechanism of holding the fatal flaws is the illustration of deus ex machina. However, it is worthwhile to note that Murakami's writing style is often open to interpretation and can leave room for ambiguity. The concept of fate in *Norwegian Wood* may be seen differently by different readers, and Murakami intentionally leaves some aspects of the story open to personal interpretation, allowing readers to reflect on their own beliefs about fate and its role in our lives.

Deus ex machina is a widely used literary device by authors since the large span of time. It has been defined as: "a person or thing that appears or is introduced suddenly and unexpectedly and provides a contrived solution to an apparently insoluble difficulty" (Merriam-Webster). Earlier in Greek and Roman plays deus ex machina was used as a dramatic device, where dramatists used this device to conclude their play. The antagonist of the play attempts to trap the protagonist by exploiting his limitations. To a large extent, he exploits the protagonist's limitations and chokes him, but at this point the author introduces God as the savior of the protagonist. In Greek and Roman plays 'the third wall' is broken and God from heaven is shown to fight the battle and provide the plot with 'poetic justice'.

During 1600s, the novelists used this dramatic device to make the weed-choked field as a harvesting land. Sometimes, the novelists get so involved and puzzled with the complexities they use in the plot and hence they try to find a skilful escape by using deus ex machina in the form of different situations which may be in the form of events handled by unexpected force or energy like that of fate and destiny. Likewise, in the present research paper the researchers will analyze how Murakami has used the concept of fate and destiny as deus ex machina to mould the plot and to solve the triangle situation. In his fiction Murakami is basically trying to unfold the mystery by using fate and destiny.

When fate turns its face, our mind takes time to adjust to a new normal and the fiction *Norwegian Wood* is just about travelling through a journey of fate. When the readers meet characters like Toru Watanabe, a decent and reserved guy who says about himself "I'm just ordinary guy - ordinary family, ordinary education, ordinary face, ordinary exam results, ordinary thoughts in my head" (Murakami, *Norwegian Wood* 134) whose life seems to be controlled by inevitable augury. One aspect of Toru's relationship with fate in the novel is his contemplation of the concept of inevitability. He often finds himself pondering the seemingly predetermined events in his life and the lives of those around him. He questions whether certain events were fated to happen or if they were simply a result of chance and coincidence. This contemplation of fate adds a philosophical layer to Toru's character as he is bewildered with the idea of free will versus predestination. Furthermore, Toru's emotional connections with Naoko and Midori also raise questions about fate. His deep feelings for both the women and the challenges he faces in navigating his relationships with them lead him to question whether his emotional connections are a result of fate or personal choice. He struggles with the idea of being drawn to certain individuals and whether this attraction is pre-agreed by fate or a conscious decision on his part. Toru's reflections on his past and the impact it has on his present and future also highlight the role of fate in his life. He often revisits memories and past events, pondering how they have shaped him and the direction his life has taken. This reflection on the past and its influence on his present circumstances raise questions about the role of fate in shaping one's life trajectory. Overall, Toru's relationship with fate in *Norwegian Wood* is multifaceted and complex. It involves his contemplation of the concept of inevitability, his emotional connections with others, and his reflections on his past. Murakami uses Toru's character to explore the interplay between fate and personal agency, adding depth and philosophical musings to the novel's narrative.

Toru and Naoko share a bond of friendship. Naoko loves Kizuki who is a mutual friend to her and Toru. Toru accepts this as his destiny and surrenders before the fate till Kizuki's demise. The deep buried seed of Toru's love get sprouted on the grave of Kizuki and get flowered when he has a physical encounter with Naoko but soon this Spring turns to Autumn when fate distances Toru from Naoko and meanwhile other characters in the novel go head over heels or part from their life at definitive moments. Almost all the characters are compelled to pre-established fate and feel deceived where they actually have no choice. Fate ties up characters not just to an unreliable nature of life, but also to the possibility of astonishing death and this we see when we meet Toru's best friend Kizuki and Kizuki's girlfriend Naoko in the novel. Naoko is Toru Watanabe's first love and a central character in the novel. She is depicted as a troubled and enigmatic young woman who is haunted by her past and struggles with mental health issues. Despite their emotional connection, Naoko and Toru find themselves separated when Naoko withdraws to a secluded sanatorium to seek treatment for her mental health. Throughout the novel, Naoko's life is heavily influenced by the workings of fate. Her past traumas and emotional struggles have shaped her present circumstances, leading her to seek solace and healing in the sanatorium. Her choices and actions are driven by the unpredictable and uncontrollable forces of fate, which have a profound impact on her life. Toru, on the other hand, is also affected by fate's role in Naoko's life. His deep feelings for her lead him to question his own choices and emotions, and he becomes entwined in Naoko's journey as he tries to understand and support her. Additionally, Naoko's story also serves as a contrast to the character of Midori, who represents a more spontaneous and free-spirited approach to life. While Midori embraces the unpredictability of life and makes choices based on her desires, Naoko is depicted as being more constrained by the workings of fate and her own inner demons.

Fate inclines Toru towards Midori who is already in a relationship. Midori is a vibrant and outgoing character who is portrayed as a contrast to the more introverted and melancholic Naoko. She is described as having short hair, wearing unconventional clothing and being outspoken and independent. Midori has a carefree and spontaneous nature, and she is known for her sense of humour and witty remarks. In the novel, Toru and Midori meet while they are both attending university. They form a close friendship and share a deep connection, as they both struggle with their own personal challenges and emotional complexities. Midori challenges Toru's reserved and introspective nature and they are drawn to each other despite their differences. At the same time, Toru is trying hard with his past relationship with Naoko, who represents his first love and a haunting figure from his past. Naoko's presence in Toru's life, along with his feelings for Midori, creates a sense of emotional turmoil and uncertainty. As Toru navigates the complexities of his relationships with Midori and Naoko, he is confronted with the capriciousness of fate. He must make choices and confront the unforeseen circumstances that arise, which ultimately affect the course of his life.

Toru's love towards Midori can be said as the judgment by destiny which is a sentence for his frivolous attitude towards life. Fate acts as a tune which makes the performers dance. Here, Toru is kept running by fate or the longing for true love. From the story the researchers are trying to analyze that Midori is the call of destiny which makes Toru learn a lesson for his light-hearted attitude towards love. Toru's feeling towards Midori is a string in the hands of God which makes Toru realizes that love has that captivating power which can make a man suffer for his wrong doing. None can choose their fate neither can escape from it. It just remains tossed into a labyrinth. The researchers find that all the characters in these fictions are prisoners of fate and fate acts as *deus ex machina* to release the characters from its supremacy.

This sense of mystery and ambiguity surrounding fate adds to the overall atmosphere of the novel, contributing to its introspective and philosophical tone. Overall, the unique mechanism of fate in *Norwegian Wood* is characterised by its subtlety, unpredictability, and enigmatic nature. It influences the relationships and mental state of the characters, while also posing existential questions about the nature of life, meaning, and

destiny. Murakami's portrayal of fate in the novel adds depth and complexity to the story, inviting readers to ponder the role of fate in our lives and the cryptic nature of human existence.

Fate leads the inclined, the one ready to face everything fearless and drags along hesitant, disinclined and unwilling ones. Fate never gives you choice; it just gives you a chance. Fate has its own sequence of events where it warns an individual, gives a chance to serve with good psyche and behaviourism. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Once you make a decision the universe conspires to make it happen" (Coelho<sup>24</sup>). It may seem something that makes one weary and exhausted, the higher you climb the more physically and mentally you feel drained but at the very end when clouds are removed you see a bright, new day and the novel ends in the same way.

## Conclusion

Fate is a concept that has been debated and discussed for centuries while some believe that our lives are predetermined, others argue that we have free will to make our own choices. In Murakami's novel *Norwegian Wood* fate plays a significant role in the lives of the characters. The protagonist Toru Watanabe struggled with various challenges and encounters throughout the story which seems to be beyond control. These events often shape his experiences and influence his decisions. Murakami in this 1987 fiction explicitly portrays the love tale of Toru Watanabe and Naoko. Toru and Naoko's journey of being together in the fiction is not a duck soup. When the readers read this fiction, they mostly are perplexed, as to whether Toru and Naoko come together because fate plays a game of hide and seek with them. Painfully, Toru and Naoko will never come together despite of their initial friendship and an accidental physical encounter. Fate conspires and their destiny gets apart. Toru lost Naoko and could not even stay with his secondary love, Midori. This novel is mostly commented as dark and gloomy fiction just as fate appears dark when it hits someone but when you travel through the novel it may seem travelling up a mountainside on a gray day. The journey appears cloudy and sunless but behind it there is a reason which fate never reveals in the beginning. "April ended and May came along, but May was even worse than April" (Murakami *Norwegian Wood* 336).

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