

**The Journey of Grief: The Resilience of Suicide Survivors in Haruki  
Murakami's *Norwegian Wood***

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## Abstract

David Damrosch, in his book *How to Read World Literature* (2009), posits that the challenges readers confront in dealing with the world's various literatures are noticeable. He is convinced that a work of world literature has an extraordinary ability to transcend the boundaries of the 'culture literary outlooks' that certain texts produce (2). World literature gains through translation. Translation plays an important role in creating the category of 'world literature', a term that has acquired new currency in this era of globalization (Chaudhuri 593). The Japanese writer, Haruki Murakami (1949- ), is one of the most prominent authors whose works have achieved incredible popularity in his native country and world-wide; they have also received rising critical praise. By the remarkable success of his works all over the world, Murakami has become known as a phenomenon. His literary debut also differs from his predecessors and many of his contemporaries in its preoccupation with the world outside Japan. Critics argue that Murakami's distinct style is influenced by Western culture, particularly by Western music and literature which are reflected in his literary works. Since world literature is now stimulating literary studies everywhere, not only in the US and Europe, but also in China, Japan, India, and many other countries, a close reading and interpretation of Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*, from the perspective of an Arabic critic and in relation to a global theme, can offer new perceptions for practical criticism and theoretical explorations. One of the worldwide themes that he uses in many of his works is suicide which is now the third leading cause of death in adolescence worldwide. Inspired by David Damrosch's view on world literature as a distinct type of literary production, this paper aims to examine the English translated version of *Norwegian Wood* (1987) that provides plenteous opportunity for analysis of the psychological impact of an adolescent's suicide on his friends, who are termed by psychologists as "suicide survivors". Drawing on psychological studies by Clifton D. Bryant, David E. Balk, Charles A. Corr, Margaret S. Stroebe and Wolfgang Stroebe, the paper focuses on grief of the survivors as an aftermath of suicide and how it appears to differ from one adolescent to the other.

Key words: Suicide survivors, adolescence, Murakami, complicated grief, Norwegian Wood

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*“I believe that the person who commits suicide puts his psychological skeleton in the survivor’s emotional closet-he sentences the survivor to deal with many negative feelings.”*

(Edwin Shneidman x)

### Introduction

There is a very strong relation between literature and psychology where both of them are concerned with human beings and their responses, views of the world, depressions, desires, doubts, struggles and adjustments. As one of the human concerns is to understand the mystery of death, then it can be said that literature is one of the most significant means in providing us with ways of approaching death and its aftermaths. It allows us to interpret our own life and emotions. Novelists use death in their narrations to create emotional effects and psychological awareness, which can act as a consolidation to those who are suffering. As David Lodge asserts, in *Consciousness and the Novel Connected Essays*, “... literature is a record of human consciousness, the richest and most comprehensive we have...The novel is arguably man’s most successful effort to describe the experience of individual human beings moving through space and time” (10).

Pam Cole, in *Young Adult Literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, suggests that “Young Adult literature offers a window through which teens can examine their lives and the world in which they live” (6). Young Adult literature addresses problems such as peer pressure, family relationships, sexuality, suicide and death. When reviewing YA literature, it is apparent that adolescent suicide is one of the most common themes. YA novels provide a special world for adolescents to learn and understand this experience better. Losing a friend by suicide matures adolescents, but each may take a different road in dealing with this problem on his or her journey from childhood to adulthood. By contending this shocking issue in novels, Paula S. Berger, in “Suicide in Young Adult Literature”, asserts that,

the adolescent reader, even if he or she identifies closely with any of

the characters, can maintain a discrete distance while absorbing potentially valuable information. The young adult is able to learn some of the reasons why teenagers commit suicide; the characteristics of people considered to be at high risk to commit suicide; the role family, friends, and relatives play in triggering suicidal thoughts as well as their ability to help prevent or avert a suicide; the value of seeking and utilizing psychiatric counseling; the effect suicide has on "loved ones" (14).

Since this paper is an attempt to bridge the two fields of psychology and literature, *Norwegian Wood* by Haruki Murakami is examined to analyze the impact of the sudden suicide of the seventeen year old adolescent, Kizuki, on his living friends. Insights from psychology are used to highlight Murakami's attempt to represent "suicide survivors" in a manner which transcends national boundaries of a universal theme that aggravates individuals around the world.

Haruki Murakami has an outstanding global effect. He is a representative of world literature in many anthologies of world literature such as *Gale contextual encyclopedia of world literature* (2009) and George Thomas Kurian's *Timetables of World Literature* (2003). His world of the 1960s which successfully connected young Japanese is now being substituted by the world of dystopia, depression and skepticism. He is very much fond of American literature and jazz music. In his childhood, his parents were both teaching Japanese literature and engaged their only child with their native traditions but Murakami's taste was entirely opposite to his parents' Japanese preferences. He preferred to read world literature, including Russian writers such as, Fyodor Dostoevsky and British authors like Charles Dickens. As a teenager, he read the works of popular American writers as Kurt Vonnegut, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Truman Capote. Since his literary debut in 1979, he has been the leader of renovation in contemporary Japanese literature. His novels and short stories are translated into over fifty languages and his increasing popularity on a global scale is often referred to as the "Haruki Murakami Phenomenon" (Wakatsuki 2).

Murakami's identity as a Japanese writer "has been frequently challenged at home due to his alleged "un-Japaneseness" (Wakatsuki 1). In Japan, Murakami is charged not merely with the alienation of pure Japanese literature, but with the deeper, harsher blame of its westernization. The West, on the other hand, has no such sensitivity to Murakami, but instead celebrates his familiarity. Compared to western writers such as Carver, De Lillo, Pynchon, David Foster Wallace, Philip K. Dick, Rushdie and Conrad, Murakami seems to have crossed the East-West

boundary. To many traditional writers such as Kenzaburo Oe, Murakami's texts are too postmodern, shifting away from "pure" Japanese literature because they propose multiple interpretations and display various global social problems. Moreover, he comments on Murakami's writing that it "is not really Japanese. If you translate it into American English, it can be read very naturally in New York" (Ishiguro & Kenzaburo 118). Thus, his rhythm and tone in most of his work are perceived by many critics as American and his style is known by others as "nationality-less" (Strecher 11). That is why, as Mark Lindquist asserts in his review "Japanese author's focus, flavor appeal to younger interests":

(Murakami's writing) has a flavor more American than most American writing. He has a keen feel for our pop culture - the music, the literature, the icons. His style is unquestionably unique, but there are obvious echoes of Raymond Carver and F. Scott Fitzgerald - both of whom he has translated into Japanese - and hard-boiled writers such as Raymond Chandler" (The Seattle Times).

With the publication of *Norwegian Wood* (1987), Murakami, as a Japanese writer, attained worldwide success, earned increasing critical approval and prompted him from an ordinary writer to an international literary phenomenon. Tiring of his celebrity status in his native country, he moved to Italy, Greece and then the United States refusing to stay within the normative limits of Japanese literature, and his protagonist in *Norwegian Wood* follows this way of life.

The novel is one of the famous and most relevant novels to the discussion of youth suicide. It still continues to sell in huge numbers and over 10 million copies have already been sold. It was translated two times into the English language, first by Alfred Birnbaum in 1989 then, by Jay Rubin in 2000. Rubin's superb translation is the first English edition authorized for publication outside Japan. The analysis deals with Jay Rubin's version as Alfred Birnbaum is out of print, whereas, Rubin's translation is widely available in the Western world and becomes the runaway bestseller in America (Mirza 800).

*Norwegian Wood* is set in Tokyo during the late 1960s where the rate of suicide at that period was so high and Japan was known as "Suicide Nation" (Di Marco). *Norwegian Wood* is a young adult novel that recalls the impact of someone's suicide on the lives of other people who are left alone to cope with the loss. The novel gained extensive popularity, as Damien G. Walter suggests in his review "Winter reads: Norwegian Wood by Haruki Murakami", because it guides "readers through some of life's darkest and most dangerous territory – the cold, dark winter

woods of death and grief and abuse” (The Guardian). Many reviewers see that Norwegian Wood is a coming of age that is beautifully written. It is a gripping read that is full of melancholy and charm and has a simple style that has won Murakami a multitude of fans all over the world. Moreover, Janice P. Nimura in her “Rubber Soul” perceives the novel as “more firmly rooted in Japan... but this is, nevertheless, a strikingly Westernized Japan, one where people listen to Bill Evans, read” (The New York Times). From the very beginning the title reveals Murakami’s love of the western world. The title comes from the American song of the same name by the Beatles. The lyric is about a love story of a boy and a girl which is taken as the basis for the novel *Norwegian Wood*. However, the story, beside the young love theme, deals with other subjects that are universal across borders such as, friendship, free love, sex, death and suicide.

According to David E. Balk, in *Dealing with Dying, Deaths, and Grief during Adolescence*, “the main causes of death for adolescents around the world are some form of violence: accidents, homicide, suicide” (64). Suicide, which is the main focus idea in this paper, can be defined as “a voluntary act by which one causes one's own death. It is self-decreed, intended, and hoped for” (Mandle 119). The highest increase in the number of suicide death throughout the life span occurs between early adolescence and young adulthood. Compared to adults, the effects of the death of a loved one are typically more noticeable in adolescents and young adults than middle and late adults because grief and death are not normal life stages for an adolescent. Death is more observed as an “unanticipated, traumatic life event” (Corr & Balk 5).

Adolescents live deeply in the present and the experience of a friend’s death causes them to suddenly look into the future at the possibility of their own death. This tragic experience is of special significance, and bereaved individuals may experience traumatic and complicated grief. Consequently, adolescents may be more likely exposed to conflicting reactions such as, ambivalence, blame, loneliness and survivor guilt. These reactions may include physical, social, emotional, and cognitive responses to grief and may take a long time to be overcome. Psychologists such as Gary W. Mauk hold that there are three grief-reactions to death (4). The first grief response phase is avoidance illustrated by surprise, rejection, and distrust. The second phase is confrontation, a state that is greatly emotional in which the adolescent realizes that the close one has actually passed away; in this stage grief is most intense. And finally, the phase of reestablishment in which there is a continuing refusal of sharp grief and the beginning of an emotional and social reentry into everyday world (2).

The impact of suicide loss ranges from mild to devastating, depending on the degree of kinship closeness to the deceased. The relationship between the deceased and the survivor is considered an outstanding factor in the assessment of the analysis of grief which can help predict a greater risk of complicated grief and an identification of its nature. Clifton D. Bryant points out that, historically, one of the most neglected areas of suicidology has been the issue of the aftermath of suicide and suicidal behavior (339). This lack of attention for this issue is the reason for writing this paper. Thus, drawing on special psychological studies on suicide and bereavement, the paper will be organized as follows: Part I will be concerned with the definition of the term “suicide survivor” and will discuss the general impact of suicide on survivors. Part II will deal with the suicide grief of the survivors and the impact of suicide on young adults in particular. These two parts will offer a framework for examining the case of the two suicide survivors in Haruki Murakami’s *Norwegian Wood* Toru and Naoko, an examination which will take place in Part III.

### **Part I “Suicide Survivor”**

The term “survivor of suicide” was first introduced by Albert C. Cain in his inspiring book *Survivors of Suicide* (1972). This work was the first study that recognized the traumatic effect upon people who “survive” the suicide death of someone close to them. During the decades that followed, suicide survivors and survivors of suicide became common expressions (Andriessen 38). Several definitions have been proposed to define the term: S. Clark and J. McIntosh assert that the term “suicide survivors” or “survivors of suicide” can have a dual meaning. It may either indicate an individual who is bereaved because of the suicide of a close friend or relative, or one who has attempted suicide and survived. The former definition is the one adopted in this paper following John R. Jordan and J. McIntosh. Jordan and McIntosh, in *Grief after suicide: Understanding the consequences and caring for the survivors* (2011), define a suicide survivor as “someone who experiences a high level of self-perceived psychological, physical, and/or social distress for a considerable length of time after exposure to the suicide of another person” (7). They further add that the social distress can be self-perceived when the individual reports feeling very guilty, or observed by others when he/she acts angrily, or identified by more formal measurement such as grief or depression.

Since friends play a significant role in how adolescents deal with various psychosocial goals, the sudden death of a close friend via suicide deeply affects some of the living ones. It leaves survivors bewildered and confused-and usually

guilt-stricken, blaming themselves for not stopping this tragedy. C. A. Corr and C. M. Nabe, in *Death and Dying, Life and Living*, suggest that adolescents may feel guilty for having failed to stop the suicide or feel that they should have died instead. Studies have revealed that “sudden, unexpected deaths are especially stressful, severely impacting and complicating the grief process of adolescents” (Schachter 5). Loy O Bascue pointed out that “These youngsters perceive adolescence as a time of self-exploration, expanding awareness, and identity clarification. They might see death as an enemy or the uncontrollable depriver of one's future” (589). The following section will deal with the psychological impact of suicide on “survivors”.

## Part II The Impact of Suicide

Different emotions arise, based on how well an adolescent copes. That is, there is no single manner in which all individuals respond to the suicidal death of a loved one. Some people will react mildly and experience normal grief, while others will experience acute grief and distress which often produce what is referred to as “complicated grief” or “prolonged grief disorder”. The latter type of grief is distinguished from normal grief by the nature, duration and severity of symptoms. S. Zisook and R. Devaul suggest that “normal grief” is supposed to be self-limited and nonthreatening whereas, “complicated grief” is considered as a chronic state, leads to adverse health consequences, and often requires intervention.

According to Kubler-Ross's conceptualization of staging death and dying, “normal” grief process is presented in the following phases: (1) an initial period of shock, disbelief, and denial; (2) an intermediate acute mourning period of acute somatic and emotional discomfort and social withdrawal; and (3) a culminating period of restitution. Regarding shock and denial, this stage may last from hours to weeks and is distinguished by erratic degrees of disbelief and denial. As for the second phase, acute mourning, begins when the death is recognized cognitively and emotionally. This stage comprises painful feeling symptoms generally occurring in recurrent waves of intense emotional and often physical discomfort. “This distress is often accompanied by social withdrawal and a painful preoccupation with the deceased” (M. Stroebe and W. Stroebe 24). This phase may last for several months before progressively being replaced by a feeling of well-being with the ability to go on living which represent the restitution phase. In this stage, the bereaved recognize what the loss meant to them, that they have grieved, and now begin to move attention to the outer world around them. What differentiates this stage from the previous ones is the ability of the bereaved to



realize that they can return to work, search for pleasure, and seek the company and love of others.

According to, Joan McNeil, Benjamin Silliman and Judson J. Swihart, the death of a friend during adolescence "can be especially profound, due to the fragility of the youthful ego and the intense relationships adolescents have with their friends" (133). Consequently, they may be exposed to conflicting tensions that distinguish their interpretations of death from those of adults. As Ann M. Mitchell notes, young suicide survivors may confront higher levels of problematic grief and intensified risk for physical or mental health complications, including post-traumatic stress disorders, increased risk of suicidal ideation, behaviors and attempts (Suicide Prevention Australia 2009). Not all of these survivors are seriously affected by the death of the deceased; it is likely that anyone of them might be exposed to a problematic bereavement experience. That is, such life crisis, if well responded to, may lead to growth and maturity in adulthood, whereas it indicates damage and "maldevelopment" if responded to badly. While some survivors remain emotionally wounded for life, other survivors who are known as "resilient survivors" recover fairly well. At the most extreme point of grief, bereaved adolescents who become resilient survivors come to two simultaneous realizations: (a) Their deceased ones will never return, and (b) they must regain control of their lives despite the "permanent lack of proximity" to their dead ones. These simultaneous realizations can lead to a turning point in the trajectory of grief and the regaining of a sense of hope for the future (Corr and Balk 190).

Michele Berk states that being exposed to a friend's suicide leads to a high risk of what is termed as "copycat" behaviors or "A point cluster" which is defined "as a significant increase in suicidal behavior that occur primarily during adolescence and young adulthood (ages 15-24 years)" (39). Additionally, Peter S. Bearman, and James Moody find that having an adolescent friend who committed suicide tend to increase suicidal ideation among both males and females. However, girls have been exposed to mourn longer and react more strongly around loss of a friend. Moreover, adolescent girls, who are socially isolated, are significantly susceptible to suicidal thoughts, leading to a complicated grief which, according to Nadine M. Melhem and Nancy Day, is exhibited by symptoms that include poor physical health, crying, detachment, sadness and yearning for the deceased peer. Complicated grief is described by Ilanit Tal Young as,

a bereavement reaction in which acute grief is prolonged, causing distress... The bereaved may feel longing and yearning that does not substantially abate with time and may experience difficulty re-

establishing a meaningful life without the person who died. The pain of the loss stays fresh and healing does not occur... positive memories may be blocked or interpreted as sad... Life might feel so empty and the yearning may be so strong that the bereaved may also feel a strong desire to join their loved one (179).

Recent research demonstrates that complicated grief symptoms include: (a) suffering for several years for some bereaved subjects; (b) over and above depressive symptoms, significant morbidity and antagonistic health behaviors, such as, suicidality and social dysfunction (Neimeyer and Prigerson 241). Suicide survivors' pain, at this stage, may be so intense that thinking of their own death may be the only possible way out of relief.

### **Part III *Norwegian Wood***

The story is told from the perspective of Toru Watanabe, a man in the mid-30s. It is told in flashback. He reminisces and comments on his past life in adolescence from the view point of a more mature self. In an airplane heading to Germany, he hears a version of the Beatles song "Norwegian Wood". The song takes him back to an intense and painful event that happened 18 years ago when he was 19 years old. The song is a lament for all that has gone and will never return again which sets the key tone of the whole novel. Toru Watanabe, the protagonist in the novel, is an ordinary eighteen-year old with limited future dreams. He studies at a mediocre university in 1970, a period that is characterized by violent and radical student movements driven by sectarianism. Beside his study, he finds a part-time job in a record shop where he can enjoy listening to Western music specially the Beatles. The reader is told that Toru also enjoys western novels, such as *Beneath the Wheel* by the German author Herman Hesse, and short stories by the American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald. His favorite novel is Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*; a book in which death in the form of murder, suicide and accidental homicide plays a central role. This emphasizes Murakami's fondness of the western culture, which helps him to establish his familiarity in the United States, Europe and all over the world.

This study focuses on the psychological impact of suicide on the male and female adolescents, in Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*, who faces this loss "unwillingly, as though [they have] been assaulted by a confrontation with reality that has no place in [their] world" (Raphael 139). In doing so, the study raises questions as: What are the consequences of suicide for the survivors? Are there gender differences among suicide survivors? What is a complicated grief and what

are some of its symptoms? How does Haruki Murakami, a representative of world literature, transcend cultural boundaries in representing the resilience of his characters? These questions will be examined through an analysis of the two main adolescent characters Toru Watanabe (a male adolescent) and Naoko (a female one) who faced the loss of their best friend, the 17-year-old Kizuki to suicide. The paper attempts to assess whether Murakami succeeded in probing into the lives of the characters and depicting the psychological impact of this painful experience on the young individuals.

Toru explicitly remembers the mysterious suicide of his best friend Kizuki on his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday and the impact of this event on him and Kizuki's fragile girlfriend Naoko. Toru and Naoko represent the "suicide survivors" in the novel. As already pointed out in Part I, suicide survivors, in general, are all thrust into areas of grief that send them to the edge of despair. Both Toru and Naoko are lost in their distressing and grievous memories of this tragic event. However, each of them responds to the matter in a different way. The reader is not given any details about their immediate feelings or reactions after Kizuki's death, but the story displays the impact of this traumatic event on them after one year of the accident.

Flashback takes Toru to school where he, his classmate Kizuki and Naoko are inseparable and happy friends. Jeffrey Arnett distinguishes between 'peers' and 'friends', such distinction may influence both the experience of grief and the meaning of the loss. Peers are individuals who have certain aspects in common, such as age. For young people, peers consist of a large network of their same-age classmates, community members or co-workers. On the other hand, friends are people who have developed a valued, mutual trust and loyalty. Psychologists such as Ruth Sharabany, Ruth Gershoni, and John E. Hofman also see that "intimacy" is a measure used to describe friendships. Intimate friends are characterized by feeling "free to be sincere, spontaneous, and open about themselves... They tend to know each other's feelings, preferences, and life facts... they enjoy doing things together... Finally, they help and support each other by giving and sharing emotionally as well as materially, feeling free to impose on each other"(800-801). This is relevant to the intimate trio of Kizuki, Naoko, and Toru who grows up in 'Kobe' hand in hand loving each other, as a devoted unit. They were more than peers; they were friends who had their own world away from outside society. Toru states that Naoko and Kizuki "had been close almost from birth...there was a casual openness about their relationship...They were always visiting each other's homes and eating and playing mah-jong with each other's families" (27). After a while, Toru joins the couple as a friend; he observes that the relation between the three of them was "odd, but that was the most comfortable combination...we were

like a TV talk show, with me the guest, Kizuki the talented host, and Naoko his assistant” (Murakami 27).

This close relationship is shattered by Kizuki’s death as he leaves no suicide note and has no motive that anyone can think of. This creates intense and baffled feelings of loss inside Toru and Naoko, two “suicide survivors”. Their feelings of grief are best manifested by Toru when he remembers the last day:

The last one I could remember was a pool hall near the harbor, where Kizuki and I played pool together in a spirit of total friendship. Kizuki died that night, and ever since a cold, stiffening wind had come between me and the world. (Murakami 96)

Naoko also declares that “after he died, I didn’t know how to relate to other people. I didn’t know what it meant to love another person” (Murakami 136). Naoko and Toru see each other only once after their friend’s funeral as if they are both ‘guilty’ of survival after Kizuki has decided to end his life. According to Ilanit Tal Young, after losing a loved one, suicide survivors usually face developing adverse physical and mental health reactions, often deepened “by feelings of guilt, confusion, rejection, shame, anger, and the effects of stigma and trauma” (177). Kizuki’s death traumatizes his friends Toru and Naoko severely to the extent that it alters the courses of their lives for the rest of the story.

According to Corr and Bulk, the death of a friend offers bereaved adolescents with new experiences and extra insights involving personal definition of the meaning of death and a realization of the impact of loss on thoughts which in many cases provide better understanding of one’s coping strategies and awareness about one’s level of resiliency to the loss experience (203). Throughout the novel, we find Toru struggling through his days, focusing on his routine trying hard to forget but there remains inside him the realization that “Death exists, not as the opposite but as a part of life” (Murakami 31). However, he goes on declaring that in spite of the fact that “Death exists”:

We go on living and breathing it into our lungs like fine dust. Until that time, I had understood death as something entirely separate from and independent of life. The hand of death is bound to take us, I had felt, but until the day it reaches out for us, it leaves us alone. This had seemed to me the simple, logical truth. Life is here, death is over there. I am here, not over there. (Murakami 31)

The above passage gives us an indication that Toru gains a personal insight about the significance of death. The expression “The hand of death is bound to take us” marks a cognitive development in Toru’s understanding of death in which he is capable of forming complex, abstract, symbolic representations of reality. This provides him with a positive vision to overcome pain and seek meaning in life.

The hallmarks of “healing” from the death of a loved one are the ability of the survivors to recognize that they have grieved, to return to work, to re-experience pleasure, and to be able to seek the companionship and love of others. In an attempt to gain some relief from the tragedy of Kizuki's suicide, moving from Kobe to Tokyo is Toru’s decision to start a new life, to stop taking everything so seriously and to establish a proper distance between himself and everything. But things are different for Naoko. Time moves forward but the intense grief remains. The sudden, unexpected, violent, and untimely death of her lover Kizuki is more traumatic for her to the extent that it turns the normal mourning to “complicated grief” which is evident in her relationship with Toru. The complicated grief includes states of crying, yearning, numbness, preoccupation with the deceased, functional impairment, and poor adjustment to the loss.

The two suicide survivors, Toru and Naoko, eventually meet up a year later by chance in Tokyo to attend university where they can get away from their past. Being sensitive and fragile adolescents with a painful past, both of them are not able to view the memory of this past event as an ordinary act. Long walks through the vast green woods of Tokyo push them towards something more than friendship. As the story progresses, Naoko and Toru grow closer romantically as a way to cope with the reality of losing their loved one. Toru describes his second walking-date with Naoko:

We talked about whatever came to mind—our daily routines, our colleges; each a little fragment that led nowhere. We said nothing at all about the past. And mainly, we walked—and walked, and walked. Fortunately, Tokyo is such a big city; we could never have covered it all" (Murakami 26).

After the death of a friend, some adolescents draw together to share their grief, while others are embarrassed and have difficulty sharing passionate grief. In the case of Toru and Naoko, silence prevails in grief, as if their silence, as Toru describes, is “a religious ritual meant to heal our wounded spirits” (Murakami 33). Silence as a way to avoid reminding the loss is one of the symptoms of complicated grief.

Psychologically, in order to grow healthier one has to detach one's self from her/his past. Toru searches for stability and meaning in life in his relationship with Naoko. On her twentieth birthday they become lovers. But in spite of all that, neither distance nor time has eliminated the sadness within each of their hearts, which Toru describes as a "hard kernel in my heart"(34). It is observed that Naoko keeps her feelings of rage, anger, grief, and guilt repressed for a year that even though she starts to study at the university, she is still unable to overcome her trauma. Her inability to get herself detached from the past makes it difficult for them to form an adjustment into the world and consequently, suffer alienation. In psychology, depression, anxiety, disruptive behavior and posttraumatic stress are the most prevalent complications experienced by adolescents grieving a suicide death. Depressive symptoms can include persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood, bursting into tears, feelings of hopelessness, pessimism, feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness, loss of interest or pleasure in ordinary activities, including sex. Describing their date on her twentieth birthday, Toru details Naoko's behavior which recalls Gray W. Mauk's classification of the three grief-reactions mentioned above. The first response of avoidance can be illustrated by Naoko's endless talking about everything except for the death of Kizuki. As shown in the extract below, Naoko is suddenly thrust into the second phase of confrontation, where grief is most intense:

It eventually dawned on me what was wrong: Naoko was taking care as she spoke not to touch on certain things. One of those things was Kizuki...she went on endlessly and in incredible detail about the most trivial, inane things...I began to feel nervous. She had been talking non-stop for more than four hours...Something was gone now...Lips slightly parted...One big tear spilled from the eye...Once the first tear broke free, the rest followed in an unbroken stream. Naoko bent forwards on all fours on the floor and, pressing her palms to the mat, began to cry with the force of a person vomiting. I waited for Naoko to stop crying...But Naoko's crying never stopped. (Murakami 48)

The above passage shows to what extent Naoko's abnormal behavior marks a severe "depressive" condition which makes her at a higher risk for suicidal ideation and behavior. As a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) patient, Naoko in this state is chronically anxious, with symptoms of flashbacks, exaggerated responses, nightmares, and sleep disturbance. This is evident in Toru's words when he tells her "The dark, bad dreams, the power of the dead. You have to forget them. I'm sure you'll get well if you do" (Murakami 176). Naoko suddenly

disappears and afterwards, Toru receives a letter from her informing him that she is mentally ill and seeks help in a sanitarium to rest her nerves in a quiet place cut off from the world.

Significantly, most adolescent bereavement studies usually focus on “powerful emotions” and “stressful reactions”, but there are often positive outcomes for the bereaved. These positive outcomes “include having a deeper appreciation of life; developing emotional strength; enhancing problem-solving skills; showing greater caring to loved ones; strengthening of emotional bonds with others” (Corr and Balk 211). This is relevant to Toru. He is found in motion throughout the novel, traveling from urban to rural, from bars to theaters. He also finds some part-time work beside his study in a record shop where he works in the evening and can listen to his favorite music. Psychologically, adolescents attempt to cope with death by using all their developmental power and means. In most cases, they find relief with friends of the same age as well as with other means of support such as, education, support groups, therapy, and grief camps which can improve their ability to cope with loss. That is why it would seem naturally therapeutic for Toru and Naoko to turn to each other for solace in the face of such tragedy. However, Naoko has more difficulty in coping with the grief of loss. Though Naoko does love Toru, the death of Kizuki complicated her relationship with him. She tells Toru she is "a flawed human being - a far more flawed human being than you realize'." Unlike Toru who tries all the time to cope with the loss of his friend, Naoko, unable to control her melancholic feelings, tries to find help in a mental institution. Suffering from ‘alienation and detachment’, she starts to communicate with Toru through letters.

During that period, Toru meets a girl named Midori in the university. She is young, cheerful, and full of life, unlike Naoko at that stage of her life. She is an outspoken and sexually confident girl. There is a notable trait in Midori’s character which is her ability to cope with death in her life. Although Midori is considered a ‘survivor’ in the novel, she, unlike Naoko, confronts the ‘natural death’ of her parents. She maintains a unique positiveness when coping with the deaths of her parents. In a conversation with Toru, she declares that she is not afraid of dying. She spends only a little time to mourn her losses. Instead, she actively seeks a purpose to live. That is why Toru is attracted to her liveliness and describes her spirit as follows:

A fresh and physical life force surged from the girl who sat before me now. She was like a small animal that has popped into the world with the coming of spring. Her eyes moved like an independent organism

with joy, laughter, anger, amazement and despair. I hadn't seen a face so vivid and expressive in ages, and I enjoyed watching it live and move (Murakami 62).

In many psychological studies, "resilience refers to an ability to overcome high loads of stressful events (e.g., trauma, death, economic loss, disaster, political upheaval and cultural changes) and maintain psychological vitality and mental health" (Agaibi & Wilson 196). Midori in the novel represents the "resilient survivor" which according to Corr and Balk, "replace[s] [her] profound sense of helplessness, hopelessness, and meaninglessness with a sense of help, hope, and meaning" (192). Resilience, according to Christine E. Agaibi and John P. Wilson, is claimed to contain strong liberal personality characteristics such as, "hardiness, ego resilience, self-esteem, confidence, locus of control" (198). Midori can be read as a symbol of this capability; she is often described as supremely self-confident and outgoing. She is described by Toru as "the lively, life-affirming" girl. She is a strong character in every way. This is shown in her reaction towards the deaths in her life. She describes her feelings towards her mother's death by saying, "sometimes my mother will be glaring at me out of the darkness and she'll accuse me of being happy. But I'm not happy she died. I'm just not very sad" (Murakami 92). The fact that she imagines her mother glare at her reveals symptoms of guilt. Her grief is perceived as uncomplicated and non-threatening. Robert A. Neimeyer, Holly G. Prigerson, and Betty Davies indicate that survivors of uncomplicated grief experience sadness and get upset over the loss, but are able to: (i) Accept the loss, (ii) Believe that life holds meaning, (iii) Sustain coherent sense of self (feel complete), (iv) Feel efficacious, (v) Maintain health and daily routine, (vi) Feel connected to others and reinvest in interpersonal relationships, (vii) find meaning and pleasure in pursuits. This is most relevant to Midori. We find her not distressed by the deaths of her mother and father. She even admits that death "doesn't frighten me at all" (Murakami 94). She manages to live her life bravely. She loses her mother to a brain tumor two years before meeting Toru, and her father dies from the same illness. After the death of her father, she invites Toru to her place and drags him out of his comfort zone to many places as bars and bookstores.

Moreover, she established a lively and energetic interpersonal relationship with Toru. Midori and Toru are always in the presence of food and drink. During their first date at her place, Midori cooks a meal in the Japanese style, while their first formal meeting took place in a small restaurant. The repeated image of Midori and Toru's being around food signifies nourishment, the necessary elements of life. Throughout the novel, they often eat together, drink together and attend lectures in



university. As for Midori, she cooks, sings folk songs, plays the guitar and does all kinds of vigorous activities. In spite of her independent personality, she asks him to promise her to take care of her “always and always” (Murakami 276) and he promises to do so. It is obvious that Midori is in need for emotional support. It is this belief in support as a significant developmental stage that distinguishes Midori’s more positive feelings towards loss from Naoko’s more negative ones. From the moment she enters Toru’s life, it is evident that Midori seeks care and company; attempting to recoil a fresh beginning by establishing a relationship with him. Midori is a typical “resilient survivor” who finds a sense of hope and meaningfulness in her way of life, and attempts to reach the third stage of grief, highlighted by Gray W. Mauk, as a stage of “reestablishment in which there is a continuing refusal of sharp grief and the beginning of an emotional and social reentry into everyday world” (2).

Naoko seems unable to reach this third stage of “reestablishment”. Unlike Midori who communicates and reacts with the outside world, Naoko is overwhelmed with her complicated grief for Kizuki’s suicide. Psychologically, suicide survivors often face unique challenges that differ from those who have been bereaved by other types of death. That is why Naoko’s psychological injury is more profound, perhaps because her experience with suicide has “far deeper roots” (Murakami 176). Both her uncle and her older sister killed themselves. Naoko was actually the one who found her sister. She represents, in the novel, the adolescent survivor grieving so many suicide deaths and at a high risk of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress to the extent that talking and even writing become a painful process for her. She refuses Toru’s love in favor of the loneliness she finds within her melancholic world. She feels longing and yearning that does not noticeably decrease with time and experiences difficulty re-establishing a meaningful life. The recurrent suicides in her life leave permanent feelings of loneliness, coldness, and depression inside her. This numbness can be seen as expression of the inability to assimilate the loss into her constructions of reality. This leaves her emotionally unstable. This is shown in her words to Toru:

I’m a far more flawed human being than you realize. My sickness is a lot worse than you think...And that’s why I want you to go on ahead of me if you can. Don’t wait for me... Otherwise I might end up taking you with me...I don’t want to interfere with your life. I don’t want to interfere with anybody’s life. (176)

Thus, Naoko’s case can be diagnosed with Criterion D for complicated grief in which “the disturbance causes clinically significant impairment in social,

occupational, or other important areas of functioning” (Neimeyer and Prigerson 242).

Toru, still in love with her, visits Naoko regularly during her stay in the mental institution. Naoko is by this time hanging scarily between the worlds of life and death. Although it would seem naturally healing for both of them to have an intimate relationship for consolation in the face of loss, Naoko is unable to do so due to her fright from “the dark”, “bad dreams” and “the power of the dead”. She loses all capacity for experiencing pleasure, which is termed in psychology as “anhedonia” (Corr and Balk 72). Thus, with Naoko, Toru Watanabe feels the influence of death everywhere. Finally, Naoko’s mental health deteriorates further, and she returns to communicating with Toru through letters and she has to move to another hospital for her treatment.

For bereaved adolescents who suffer from complicated grief, contemplation of death involves the threat of losing a self that is intimately tied in with the deceased ones. Suffering from a major depression, the shadow of death no longer seems terrifying; instead, it may begin to be perceived as an attractive idea, “seducing the adolescent into considering death as an alternative to that pain” (Corr and Balk 72). Accordingly, the bereaved adolescent may have recurrent disturbing images of the death. Moreover, that depression may lead to other problematic behavior, “such as panic disorders, aggression, and both personality and psychotic disorders” (Corr and Balk 73). This is relevant to Naoko’s case ; her roommate tells Toru about how she hears voices from the shadows and how she feels scared of them which makes her “shut down completely and burrows inside herself” (Murakami 309). These suicidal thoughts and behaviors are, for her, “the only possible outlet of relief” (Young 179). This explains the note Toru has received informing him that Naoko commits suicide, which indicates that she is finally overcome by the darkness of grief.

Traumatized by Naoko’s suicide, Toru again experiences grief as a suicide survivor for the second time. Grief-stricken, he spends a month traveling without money and sleeping wherever he can. "The image of her was still too vivid in my memory...I could bring this all back as clearly as if it had happened five minutes earlier, and I felt sure that Naoko was still beside me, that I could just reach out and touch her. But no, she was not there; her flesh no longer existed in this world" (326). Toru’s dilemma as a suicide survivor, at this stage is to choose between Naoko and Midori, two characters who respectively represent the dichotomy of life and death. Choosing between Naoko who becomes “a mound of white ash” and

Midori who is “a living, breathing human being” (Murakami 330), he finally decides that it is time to return to life:

By living our lives, we nurture death. True as this might be, it was only one of the truths we had to learn. What I learned from Naoko's death was this: no truth can cure the sorrow we feel from losing a loved one. No truth, no sincerity, no strength, no kindness can cure that sorrow. All we can do is see it through to the end and learn something from it, but what we learn will be no help in facing the next sorrow that comes to us without warning. Hearing the waves at night, listening to the sound of the wind, day after day I focused on these thoughts of mine (327).

Thus, Toru becomes Murakami's image of the stereotypical adolescent standing between the two extremes of life and death. His words towards the end of the novel mark his healing from the death of his best friend in which he is finally able to think of the deceased with calmness and self-control, to return to work, to recover pleasure, and to be able to seek the friendship and love of others. Amid these painful waves of memory, he eventually learns how to cut ties with his past and regains his purpose to keep living and start a new life until the “next sadness...comes...without warning” (327). He chooses Midori who not only acts as a counterbalance for him, pulling him back into life, but also represents his future, which he has to face in spite of grief.

## Conclusion

The current study emerged from a desire to understand adolescents' experiences of losing a close friend to suicide and provides profound understanding for these experiences. Little was known about the impact of a loved one's suicide on the living ones. Thus, this study was conducted to explore the serious meaning of the phenomenon through literature. The findings of this study show that grief is a normal process, inescapable and expected after loss; nevertheless, when prolonged, it results in “morbid”, “unresolved” and “complicated grief” that can have fatal psychological, physical and emotional consequences on the survivors. The paper pays homage to Murakami for spotting light on such a complex universal theme through his literary work *Norwegian Wood* marking it as an important world literature elegiac novel.

The story of Toru and Naoko as “suicide survivors” testifies to the reality that the death of a loved one to suicide is an enormously painful experience and can have a life – transforming effect on these survivors, Through the analysis of the survivors Toru and Naoko, this research has revealed how successfully the former character was able to rebuild his own self after being exposed to the loss of a close friend, whereas the latter neither recovers mentally nor emotionally from her obsessive grief on Kizuki’s suicide death. In the case of Toru, the resolution of his conflict concludes with the destruction of the memory of the past and hope for a new beginning in the future. As for Naoko, the death of her soul mate terminates the possibility for reaching any pleasure or happiness in real life. Midori, who is meant to represent a foil to Naoko, represents the resilient survivor who is able to adapt and cope successfully despite the traumatic experience of both of her parents. Insights from psychology can help interpret Naoko’s case as more complex, since the death of her friend was not a normal death, but rather a suicide, which was also preceded with earlier suicides in the family. Such repeated suicides led Naoko to the persisting suicidal ideation which ends with committing suicide.

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## ملخص

## رحلة الحزن: صمود الناجين من الانتحار في "الخشب النرويجي" لهاروكي موراكامي

يؤكد ديفيد دامروتش ، في كتابه "كيف تقرأ الأدب العالمي" (2009) ، أن التحديات التي يواجهها القراء في التعامل مع مختلف الآداب في العالم هي جديرة بالملاحظة. إن دامروتش مقتنع بأن عمل الأدب العالمي لديه قدرة غير عادية على تجاوز حدود "التوقعات الأدبية الثقافية" التي تنتجها بعض النصوص . يكتسب الأدب العالمي شهرة من خلال الترجمة. تلعب الترجمة دوراً مهماً في نشر "الأدب العالمي" ، وهو المصطلح الذي إكتسب قيمة جديدة في عصر العولمة. يعتبر الكاتب الياباني هاروكي موراكامي (1949 -) واحداً من أبرز المؤلفين الذين حققت أعمالهم شعبية لا تصدق في بلده الأصلي وفي جميع أنحاء العالم. وقد لاقت أعماله ثناءً نقدياً متزايداً. فبفضل النجاح الملحوظ لأعماله في جميع أنحاء العالم ، أصبح موراكامي معروفاً كظاهرة. بالإضافة إلى أن إنتاجه الأدبي يختلف بشكل ملحوظ عن سابقه والعديد من معاصريه في إنشغاله بالعالم خارج حدود اليابان. يرى العديد من النقاد بأن أسلوب موراكامي المتميز متأثراً بالثقافة الغربية ، لا سيما الموسيقى والأدب الغربي والذي ينعكس في أعماله الأدبية. نظراً لأن الأدب العالمي يحفز الآن الدراسات الأدبية في كل مكان ، ليس فقط في الولايات المتحدة وأوروبا ، ولكن أيضاً في الصين ، واليابان ، والهند ، والعديد من البلدان الأخرى ، فإن القراءة والتحليل الدقيق لك "الخشب النرويجي" لموراكامي ، من منظور ناقد عربي ، وفيما يتعلق بموضوع عالمي يمكن أن تقدم وجهات نظر جديدة للنقد العملي والإستكشافات النظرية. يعد الإنتحار أحد أهم المواضيع العالمية التي يستخدمها موراكامي في العديد من أعماله ، و يعتبر الإنتحار السبب الرئيسي الثالث للوفاة في سن المراهقة في جميع أنحاء العالم. بناء على وجهة نظر ديفيد دمروش حول الأدب العالمي كنوع متميز من الإنتاج الأدبي ، يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة النسخة الإنجليزية المترجمة من "الخشب النرويجي" (1987) التي توفر فرصة وفيرة لتحليل التأثير النفسي لانتحار المراهق على أصدقائه ، الذين يطلق عليهم علماء النفس "الناجين من الإنتحار". بالإعتماد على الدراسات النفسية التي أجراها كليفتون براينت ، وديفيد إ. بلك ، وتشارلز أ. كور ، ومارغريت إس. ستروبي ، وولفغانغ ستروبي ، تركز الدراسة على حزن الناجين كنتيجة للإنتحار وكيف يختلف الصمود أمام هذه التجربة الأليمة من مراهق لآخر.