

Temporal Distortion in Murakami's *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*

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Abstract

Temporal distortion is a technique used by Postmodern writers to disrupt the chronological flow of time. Murakami uses this temporal distortion of time to present a substantially altered perception of time in such a manner that the temporal relationship between events seems fundamentally altered. By using non-linear narratives, Murakami's novels lose their chronological structure and embrace discontinuous, circular, or recurring patterns primarily by traveling back in time or to a specific event in history in order to revisit the past to narrate the traumas and obscured historical events of Japan. The present research closely examines the postmodern treatment of time in exploring the history and alternate realities in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* to depict the protagonist's process of self-exploration and their peregrinations into different realms in order to gain a stable sense of their subjectivity owing to which Murakami plays with history, space, and time in order to form a connection with the deep unconscious that he strives in his writings. The use of temporal distortion allows Murakami to create a multiplicity around his narratives that set out to destabilize the linearity of narratives and the temporality of time. Murakami creates a dualistic sense of space by disrupting the conventional idea of 'being in one place at one time' which allows him to change the credibility of the 'here' and 'now' concept of space and time. The space and time in his novels are structured as synergetic entities for the self-exploration of protagonists.

Keywords: Postmodern, Distortion, Space, Time, Self-exploration

In postmodernism, temporal distortion refers to the manipulation or disruption of traditional linear concepts of time. Postmodernists reject the idea that time is a fixed, objective, or universal concept, instead suggesting that it is subjective and socially constructed. Temporal distortion is a common technique in postmodern literature, art, and film, where non-linear narratives, flashbacks, and fragmented time sequences are often used to challenge traditional understandings of time and history. Postmodernism also explores the idea that multiple, alternative temporalities can exist simultaneously, and that time can be experienced differently by different individuals and groups. This challenges the idea of a singular, objective, and universal history, and instead emphasizes the importance of subjective experiences and diverse perspectives. Postmodern writers such as William S. Burroughs, Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, Italo Calvino, and Jorge Luis Borges have incorporated non-linear structures and temporal disruptions to challenge the perception of time and reality in order to create multiple perspectives. Murakami disrupts the traditional chronological order of events to create a sense of ambiguity and disorientation within the narratives. The manipulation of time discerns him to explore the subjects of memory and history through which he challenges various perceptions of reality. Murakami's experimentation with form within his narratives makes him stand out from the crowd. With global cultural references and the treatment of history and memory, Murakami creates a multifaceted reality through the construction of different spaces permeated by his protagonists in order to create a strong subjectivity within Japanese society while revealing all its tenebrosity.

In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, Murakami uses experimental narrative techniques to explore the complex relationship between subjective experience and the objective reality of time. The novel skillfully manipulates historical events, time, and memory to create an immersive reading experience. Murakami's portrayal of time is noteworthy as he emphasizes the subjective nature of time perception. This subjectivity is crucial to the transformation that his protagonists undergo throughout the narrative. Murakami intricately weaves together time and space, recognizing their interdependence in his characters' journeys of self-discovery. He creates a tangible, magical-realist space that is closely associated with his depiction of time. The novel presents time in three distinct locations: the time we experience in our daily lives on "this side,"

immeasurable time on the "other side," and an ambiguous time that exists in a space between these two realms. Murakami's masterful manipulation of time and space is an essential component of his storytelling, enabling readers to become fully immersed in his characters' journeys.

The novel *Wind-up Bird Chronicle* commences in the kitchen where Toru is doing the household chores and at the same time, has been assigned the duty to search for the missing cat. This search for the cat in turn leads him to a greater quest to explore the violent heritage of modern-day Japan. It teeters on the edge of the exotic, weaving in enigmatic elements of the occult, and transporting its audience to distant locales both in time and spaces removed from modern Japan. The narrative shifts to the various historical events which foster a new way of viewing time that is not of chronological order. The novel is primarily discerned as a chronicle about self-exploration, carried through memory and history in order to unveil the inconspicuous brutality and violence that consumed Japan.

After coming home Toru discusses the details of his meeting with the clairvoyant, Malta Kano, with his wife, Kumiko, and in their discussion the narrative shifts back to the past when they both used to visit Mr. Honda, a war veteran for some kind of divination but during their visits, Mr. Honda would recount his days at war. The narrative seamlessly takes the readers to the Manchurian-Mongolian border and narrates the horrific incidents of the battle of Nomonhan which proved to be a great embarrassment for the imperial army of Japan, and "they sent the survivors to the places they were most likely to be killed".(The Wind-up Bird Chronicle 53) The people who fought wholeheartedly were annihilated and the officers in the Nomonhan battle who were responsible for the imbroglios accomplished greater fame and honor. "I kept thinking about the Nomonhan battlefield after Kumiko fell asleep there. The soldiers were all asleep there. The sky overhead was filled with stars, and millions of crickets were chirping. I could hear the river. I fell asleep listening to it flow" (55). The narrative shifts back to the mundane life of Toru who is loitering around the neighborhood alley in search of the cat where he meets May Kasahara. They together locate a deep dry well with impenetrable darkness. This well becomes a focus of attention throughout the novel, it provides Toru a space to self-introspect, away from the bustling city, he probes his subconscious mind and travels to different places, which provides the intricate

contexture to the novel wherein narratives become fragmented and subsequently analyzes the events that unfold over time. Toru Affirms;

Here in this darkness, with its strange sense of significance, my memories began to take on a power they had never had before. The fragmentary images they called up inside me were mysteriously vivid in every detail, to the point where I felt I could grasp them in my hands. I closed my eyes and brought back the time eight years earlier when I had first met Kumiko. It happened in the visitors' waiting room of the university hospital in Kanda...Kumiko came to the hospital every day between classes in order to tend to her mother, who was with there in duodenal ulcer. (The Wind-up Bird Chronicle 222-23).

The fractured narratives are connected through a series of loosely connected vignettes by scrutinizing the temporal and cultural background. The story swings back to the past in the childhood of Kumiko and her brother Noburo Wataya and peeps into the environment in which Kumiko grew up and the relationship she had with her parents and brother who emerged with great fame and political career. Through the narratives of Mr. Honda, Malta kano, Creta Kano, May Kasahara, Nutmeg, and Cinnamon, the novel is split among various characters, spaces, and time periods that explore the various undeniable interpretative possibilities. The depiction of time is discernible through three dimensions; the historical, magical realist, and the present.

Prior to Lieutenant Mamiya's scheduled visit to Toru's home, Toru is deeply perturbed by the presence of a Christian Dior perfume that he believes someone may have gifted to Kumiko. He is consumed by a sense of bewilderment as he struggles to make sense of the situation, attempting to fathom who could have bestowed such an opulent and expensive fragrance upon his wife without his knowledge. He tries to console himself that a friend might have presented him but his heart senses something erroneous. As the unsettling sensation begins to manipulate his thoughts, Toru becomes increasingly exasperated, succumbing to an involuntary state of vulnerability. Murakami deftly orchestrates the timing of this pivotal moment to coincide with the arrival of Lieutenant Mamiya, crafting a narrative that seamlessly interweaves the character's inner turmoil with external events. "Just then the doorbell rang. Relieved, I hung up without a word" (130), and Lieutenant Mamiya enters. He has come to hand

over the keepsake to Toru which was from Mr. Honda, who died recently, and assured Mamiya to distribute all the keepsakes to the people he wanted. The fragile veil of anonymity between two unfamiliar men is quickly dispelled as they engage in a dialogue about Mr. Honda. Lieutenant Mamiya and Toru's shared history with the elusive figure establishes an unbreakable bond between them. Murakami artfully constructs the Lieutenant's character, weaving a narrative that intimately intertwines with Mr. Honda's story, forging a deep connection between the two men. Mamiya provides a horrific account of the Manchurian war which intrigues Toru and he insists to tell him his story. The narrative shifts to the time of World War II in Manchuria, where Lieutenant Mamiya and corporeal Honda together joined a clandestine team, comprised of the inscrutable commander Yamamoto and sergeant Hamano, tasked with a perilous mission that involved fording the Khalkha river and infiltrating outer Mongolian territory. Yamamoto is skinned alive right before the eyes of Mamiya. While as Mamiya is spared by the Russian officer who throws him into a deep dry well in the middle of the steppe, with the faintest chance of survival. The vivid imagery and meticulous details of the war account exports the readers to the time of World War II and as narrative becomes engrossed, Murakami pulls his readers back to the present time, "At this point in his story Lieutenant Mamiya looked at his watch. "And as you can see," he added softly, "here I am." He shook his head as if trying to sweep away the invisible threads of memory" (167).

Toru's psychological exploration and reality takes a formidable turn when he is able to transport himself to the hotel where he sees Noboru Wataya on the big Television screen in the lobby, he furthers moves to 'Room 208', where he is met with bizarre incidents and the time becomes irrelevant, "There is no way of knowing the time it could be morning or the evening or the middle of the night. Or perhaps this place has simply no time" (393). He occasionally goes down the well and finally finds a solace in the darkness of well. "Down here there are no seasons. Not even time exists." (392). He meets an enigmatic woman in the room but is unable to see her face and only hears her voice. She gives him a baseball bat and then somebody in the dark tries to stab Toru but he terminates his bat. The woman also helps him to permeate through a jelly-like wall back to the well.

Down in the well, the narrative ceases to follow a coherent order, transitioning from the past to the spaces in between the two worlds and the 'other world'. when May Kasahara closes the lid of the well and when Toru finds no way to console his hunger pangs. Toru goes back to the time in the past when Kumiko comes back from the clinic after the abortion. He revisits the time to introspect his relationship with Kumiko. In the well, Toru loses the tract of time and without the ability to mark the passing of time, it no longer seems to be a continuous line, but instead becomes an amorphous and unpredictable fluid. The entire disruption of the time flow allows Murakami to explore the complexities of the human mind. Through magical realism, he not just explores Toru's inner self and identity, but also explores the whitewash of Japanese history and the inescapable nature of time.

The *Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* explores the darkest corners of the human psyche. The graphic violence and the horrific accounts of the past serve to emphasize the circular continuity of time and the link between identity, blood, past, present, and nation. The abstract dimension of the time forms a concrete sense in the 'other world' which Toru permeates through the walls of the well. Through the incorporation of magical realist elements, the boundaries between reality and fantasy are convoluted in such a manner that it challenges the protagonist's sense of what is real. Murakami's portrayal of time is distinct and reflective of postmodern rendition, that challenges the conventional and traditional depictions of time in literature. The novel foregrounds the way in which Murakami entwines a Japanese perspective on time by integrating it with magical realism and juxtaposing it with reality, creating complex and diverse depictions. Murakami's portrayal of time is used symbolically to represent the stages of self-discovery experienced by the protagonist. Through the depiction of time, Murakami explores the journey of Toru as he navigates his personal growth and development.

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