



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

Hugvísindasvið

**The Function of Music in**  
*Norwegian Wood*

*From Page to Screen*

**B.A. Essay**

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## ABSTRACT

Haruki Murakami published *Norwegian Wood* in 1987; Tran Ahn Hung adapted the novel to film in 2010. This essay investigates the function of music in the novel and compares it with the function of music in the film adaptation. To support my thesis I have provided some background theory on adaptation of music from novel to film and investigated the use of music in other novels by Murakami and in other films by Hung.

The main body of the essay consists of a detailed analysis of the music in the novel and the way it is used to provide deeper insight into the emotions and psychology of some of the main characters. This is achieved by analysing the underlying meaning of the songs and lyrics.

A contrast is drawn between the use of music in the novel and the score of the film. Music in the film is not part of any diachronic reference system as it is in the novel. Instead, it is mainly used to add emotional depth to certain scenes and enhance the general atmosphere of the film. Although certain songs in the film are associated with characters and themes, they serve a very different function and one that is not synonymous with Murakami's novel.

The essay concludes with an independent comparison between the music in the novel and the score of the film to determine what is lost in the adaptation process.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Summary

First published in 1987, *Norwegian Wood* is Haruki Murakami's fifth novel. It is a coming of age love story set in and around Tokyo at the end of the 1960s. The novel is a departure from Murakami's earlier surrealist style in favour of a realistic story line centered on a teenager's search for personal identity and love. Yet despite this departure in style, *Norwegian Wood* retains fundamental elements which identify it as a Murakami novel, and perhaps the most obvious of these are its myriad of musical references..

In December 2010 a film adaptation of *Norwegian Wood*, directed by the French-Vietnamese Tran Ahn Hung. The film retains many of the core themes and elements of the novel, but strangely omits all of the musical references except the titular Beatles song. Hung commissioned an original score by composer, multi-instrumentalist, Jonny Greenwood, who is also a member of the celebrated English band *Radiohead*.

This essay hopes to show that the replacement of the numerous musical references in the novel with an original film soundtrack radically changes our perception of the work.

## 1.2 Method

In this essay, I intend to focus on the role of music in the novel *Norwegian Wood* by Haruki Murakami and to compare it with the role of music in the film adaptation of the same name directed by Tran Ahn Hung. I will attempt to show that music plays a central role in the novel that is all but obliterated in the screen adaptation. Hung's adaptation omits almost all of the songs referenced in the novel, retaining only the title song *Norwegian Wood* by the Beatles. The music in the film is almost entirely atmospheric. The association of specific songs or genres to characters, which is so important in the novel, is so muted as to be inaudible. Within an alternative structure, certain tracks from the film score are used thematically to associate mood with certain scenes. I will attempt to analyse this use of music in the film to create an association with different characters and determine whether this is as successful as the novel.

I will be using the English translation of *Norwegian Wood* by Jay Rubin, published by Harvill Panther, 2001.

## 2. Adaptation from Page to Screen

### 2.1 Adaptation of Music

In *The Cambridge Companion to Adaptation*, Annette Davison discusses the role of music in novels and the adaptation of music from page to screen. Music, Davison tells us, is often used to set a mood or create ambience in a particular scene but it can also be used to create an association with particular characters or motifs. This association with characters or motifs informs and enhances the association that a reader may already have with particular songs, artists or genres of music (Davidson 212-225).

Music absorbs cultural and personal significance through its associations with a myriad of different media from sleeve art, videos and advertising to personal listening on an mp3 player or a car stereo. There is a distinction between cultural musical influences and personal associations with specific music. As Davison explains: "[i]ndividuals often develop strong personal associations in relation to particular pop songs, genres or artists – these may be associations with specific people, relationships or periods in a person's life" (Davison 213). These personal associations enable readers to empathise or otherwise intimately associate themselves with the music in a novel or film, and to allow experiences from their own personal history to influence their experience of the work. "Engagements [between filmgoers and film scores] are conditioned by filmgoers' relationships to a wide range of music both within and outside of their filmgoing practice" (Kassabian 2).

Within the narrative of a novel the music is almost always diegetic, one of the meanings of which is that the characters can hear the music being described within the scene. As an integral part of the storyline the music can serve to enhance the mood or add an extra dimension to a scene. Music also serves to engage the reader and may create empathy or antipathy between him and a particular character or characters. Specific songs may have lyrics that have significance or relevance to a character in the story, or a music genre may add an extra dimension to a character. Both of these techniques are used in the novel *Norwegian Wood*. The lyrics to the central female character in the novel, Naoko's, favourite songs, "Dear Heart" and "Michelle", speak of lost love and a longing to reconnect. In one section of the novel, the protagonist, Toru Watanabe spends a great deal of time alone, reading and writing to Midori and Naoko, and listening to jazz. This image of a troubled young man, struggling with his emotions while listening to jazz touches upon a romantic

association that readers may already have if, like Watanabe, they connect jazz with introspection and sadness. The type of music he listens to tells us something about him, provides an insight or adds depth to his state of mind that otherwise would be missing: "I bought a copy of Faulkner's *Light in August* and went to the noisiest jazz café I could think of, reading my new book while listening to Ornette Coleman and Bud Powell and drinking hot, thick, foul-tasting coffee" (Murakami, 2001, 262).

Film music can be both diegetic and non-diegetic. As with a novel, diegetic music occurs within the narrative of the film, within the "diegesis", where characters can *hear* the same music as the audience. Conversely, music that is inaudible to the characters is commonly referred to as non-diegetic. Non-diegetic music therefore serves a different function, that of enhancing the mood of a scene or creating a certain atmosphere. In the case of *Norwegian Wood*, almost all of the diegetic music in the novel is omitted from the film.

## **2.2 Murakami and Music**

Haruki Murakami grew up in the Japanese city of Kobe. His parents were both academics, teachers of Japanese literature and his early life seems to have been relatively uneventful. He discovered jazz when he was in his early teens and was so enamoured of the form that he opened a jazz club upon leaving university so that he could listen to jazz for a living. In an essay entitled "Jazz Messenger," written for the *New York Times*, Murakami provides an interesting insight into his relationship with music and how deeply it informs his life and his work:

[...] shortly after leaving the university I opened a little jazz club in Tokyo. We served coffee in the daytime and drinks at night. We also served a few simple dishes. We had records playing constantly, and young musicians performing live jazz on weekends. I kept this up for seven years. Why? For one simple reason: It enabled me to listen to jazz from morning to night" (New York Times, July 8, 2007).

Murakami ran his jazz bar, Peter Cat, until he wrote his first novel at the age of 29. Music has permeated his writing ever since; his books are replete with musical references, usually from western pop music, classical music and jazz. In *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*, Jay Rubin observes that the author has "an encyclopaedic knowledge of jazz" (Rubin 17) which is no doubt supported by his "collection of more than 6000 records" (Rubin 3). The importance of music to Murakami cannot be underestimated. He repeatedly

emphasises the fact and draws parallels between it and writing: "[m]usic is an indispensable part of my life. Whenever I write a novel, music just sort of naturally slips in [...] Music always stimulates my imagination" ( Random House website).

Given the volume of musical references in his work and his own statements regarding the importance of music in his life, the rhythm of the writing, the songs themselves, and the music that Murakami associates with certain scenes and characters is not accidental. Since music is so important to him it should be safe to assume that the songs and artists that he mentions in his novels serve more of a purpose than to simply create atmosphere or enhance mood. In his article in *The New York Times* Murakami reiterates the impact that music has had and continues to have on his writing:

Practically everything I know about writing, then, I learned from music. It may sound paradoxical to say so, but if I had not been so obsessed with music, I might not have become a novelist. Even now, almost 30 years later, I continue to learn a great deal about writing from good music" (*New York Times*, July 8, 2007).

A cursory perusal of some of his other novels reveals how much Murakami has used music in his writing. *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985) and *Kafka on the Shore* (2002) are both surreal tales which differ dramatically from the realistic style of *Norwegian Wood* and yet both of these novels contain numerous musical references. *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* published two years before *Norwegian Wood*, contains numerous references to songs or musicians, from classical music such as Bruckner and Bach, jazz references to Kenny Burrell, Miles Davis, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker and Woody Herman, and a myriad of popular music references including The Beatles, Ray Charles, Cream, The Doors, Bob Dylan, Marvin Gaye, Bob Marley, Jimi Hendrix, Otis Redding and Steppenwolf to name just a few. *Kafka on the Shore* was published fifteen years after *Norwegian Wood* but the influence of music remains just as prevalent. References to Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, Puccini and Schubert and other classical composers are interspersed with references to jazz musicians John Coltrane, Duke Ellington, Stan Getz and Herman Hupfeld, while popular music is represented by The Beatles, The Beach Boys, Cream, Bob Dylan, Otis Redding, Led Zeppelin, and curiously a rather unusual reference to a modern track by Radiohead.

It seems fair to surmise then that music is a fundamental part of Murakami's life and strongly influences his style as a writer and that music is an essential part of his storytelling and adds depth to his narratives and characters. Even by his own standards *Norwegian Wood*



is top heavy with musical references. There are sixty-six references to songs or musicians in *Norwegian Wood*, compared to thirty musical references in *Hard Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* and twenty five in *Kafka on the Shore*. If we accept that the music in *Norwegian Wood* adds some fundamental element to the story, that Murakami includes musical references as intertexts which thread through the narrative and which connect characters and scenes while at the same time providing insight and depth to certain scenes, then the almost complete absence of these musical references in the film adaptation seems at the very least a curious decision. Why did the director decide to change the music in the film and how does his decision influence the adaptation process?

### **2.3 Tran Ahn Hung and Soundtrack**

Tran Ahn Hung is a Vietnamese director who had written and directed four films before adapting *Norwegian Wood*. This is his first adaptation of someone else's work and it follows the story reasonably closely, keeping the core plot, main characters and events. Why then does he not use Murakami's musical references? Clearly, judging by the way he usually employs a score in his other films, the emotional impact of music is of paramount importance to Hung. For example, the scores to his first three films *The Scent of Green Papaya*, *Cyclo*, and *The Vertical Ray of the Sun* were all composed by the Vietnamese composer Ton-That Tiet and in each case the soundtrack is almost entirely atmospheric. The music serves to add to the mood or feeling of the films, complementing the cinematography and supporting the rhythm and pace of the story. Speaking about the music in *The Vertical Ray of the Sun* Hung stated that he wanted "music that would convey a mood at once vague and poignant, a sympathetic look at the human drama unfolding before our eyes" (Sony Pictures).

This idea of using music to enhance the emotional experience of the film is as evident in *Norwegian Wood* as it was in his previous films. In an interview at *zimbio.com* Hung claims that he wanted the music in the film to enhance the harshness of the story and to reflect the emotions that the story evoked in him rather than any sense of nostalgia that may have been evoked by the use of the popular or well known music:

The film adaptation was not just adapting a story... it was also adapting all the poetic ramifications, all the emotional ramifications that the book provokes in you. I preferred to use less well-known music but with strong emotional power, mostly to avoid the nostalgic side. The story could otherwise be seen as something softer, nicer. Instead it's seen as harsher, crueler because of the

music (zimbio.com). This desire to avoid nostalgia is also the reason given for altering the setting of the film from a memory to the present tense. "The novel begins with a plane landing at Hamburg Airport. The story is told in a nostalgic voice, looking back at the past, but I wanted to recreate the raw painfulness of fresh wounds. That's why I wrote the screenplay in the present tense. That was the hardest decision to make" (Soda Pictures).

The importance of the emotional aspect of the music in his films may explain Hung's desire to use the music in this adaptation to reflect his own emotional response to the novel. The music reflects atmosphere and mood, but does not necessarily connect to the narrative of the novel. His desire to avoid a sense of nostalgia that may have been associated with music from the late 1960s in favour of a soundtrack that conveys the emotion of the story seems to be his explanation for his decision. "I still wonder if the source material is the book or the emotions it created in my heart. Of course, I read and reread the book many times, trying to find the secret mechanism of the book that works on a very intimate level in its relationship with the reader. But I also looked inside of my emotions to find solutions for the adaptation" (Examiner). To achieve this emotional adaptation Hung commissioned Jonny Greenwood, the lead guitarist with the English band *Radiohead*, to compose the soundtrack. Greenwood had previously worked on the soundtrack to the film *There Will be Blood* and it was this score which led Hung to offer him the commission for *Norwegian Wood*:

The characters in this film often find themselves in complex psychological states, involving deep pain and profound dilemmas. I wanted the music to have the depth to express their psychological states (Soda Pictures).

Greenwood has stated that Hung asked him to create music that evoked confusing emotions, to reflect the confusion in the characters and their emotional immaturity. Apart from his contribution to the original score, Greenwood also suggested that Hung use a number of songs by the German band *CAN*. This decision seems to have been influenced simply by personal taste and the desire to include some music from the 1960s that would be unfamiliar and thereby perhaps avoid the sense of nostalgia that Hung was concerned about. In an interview in the magazine *Knack*, Greenwood stated:

I wanted sixties songs that fit, but weren't too familiar, nothing by The Doors or The Beach Boys. If I had to put together my favourite sixties soundtrack, there would be a lot of Can, Neu!, Kraftwerk and other krautrock bands (Walveren 2010).

### 3. Music in the Novel

#### 3.1 Music and Memory

The novel is narrated in retrospect; it is told from the perspective of Toru Watanabe as a way for him at 37 to remember and understand that particular period in his life, "Which is why I am writing this book. To think. To understand. It just happens to be the way I'm made. I have to write things down to feel I fully comprehend them" (Murakami 4). Music is a fundamental trigger in memory, indeed the compunction to write the story, to remember and understand, is triggered by a "sweet orchestral cover version of the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood" (Murakami 1) played on the speakers of an aeroplane in Hamburg.

Many of the characters and scenes in the novel are associated with music.

Remembering the past, Toru seems to associate music with particular places and people. The music is not dispersed randomly throughout the novel but is associated with certain times, people and places. I will attempt to analyse the music associated with the main characters in the novel and investigate the relevance of the music chosen by Murakami, whether the songs add an extra dimension to the narrative or provide the reader with insight into the characters.

#### 3.2 Naoko's Music

Apart from the memory triggered by the Beatles song *Norwegian Wood* at the beginning of the novel, the first mention of music associated with Naoko is the Henry Mancini album, *Dear Heart and Other Songs About Love*, released in 1964, which Toru gives her as a Christmas present. The album contains one of her favourite songs, "Dear Heart", about someone who is lonely, missing their beloved with whom they long to be reunited. There is a sadness of loss in the song which reflects Naoko's sadness and loss.

Dear heart, wish you were here  
To warm this night  
My dear heart, it seems like a year,  
Since you've been out of sight.

But Naoko's beloved, her ex-boyfriend Kizuki, is dead, and the only way for them to be reunited is for her to die. Taken from this perspective the song is foreboding, a premonition of her longing for death and final reunion with Kizuki. The lyrics are all the more profound because it has been a year since Kizuki committed suicide.

Later in the novel Toru mentions that he and Naoko listen to Bill Evans on the night of her 20th birthday. This is a fateful night for her and a turning point in the story, Naoko leaves Toru the following day and he doesn't see her again until he visits her six months later at the sanatorium. The song doesn't appear to have any real significance to the scene or the characters but when Toru finds the same Bill Evans album at the sanatorium he remembers the night of Naoko's birthday. This forms a connection between that night and her ending up in a sanatorium and it reinforces his sense of guilt and responsibility towards her.

On the first night of Toru's visit to the sanatorium, when the Bill Evans album has finished playing on the turntable, Reiko plays the guitar as the three of them drink wine by candlelight. Naoko requests that Reiko play the Beatles and she plays "Michelle", "Nowhere Man", "Julia" and "Norwegian Wood". Are these songs significant to Naoko or are they just random Beatles songs? "Michelle", like "Dear Heart", is a love song about absent love, and a longing to reunite. The tune itself is not sombre or sad but the lyrics are insightful. The singer declares his love for Michelle and promises that he will be with her again somehow. The promise of reunion if we associate it with Naoko and Kizuki, is once again tinged with sadness and foreboding. Kizuki will never return to Naoko and the only way that she will get to him is through death.

I think you know by now

I'll get to you somehow

Until I do,

I'm telling you so you'll understand (The Beatles, Michelle 1965)

I will address the song "Nowhere Man" in the section discussing Toru's Jazz because that song seems to tell us more about Toru than about Naoko. The song "Julia", however, once again connects with Naoko and death. John Lennon wrote the song in memory of his mother. It is a sweet melodic song, with a rather haunting sound. The lyrics are a message to a dead loved one and again when considered from Naoko's perspective we have this sense of trying to reach out to someone who is lost to her.

Half of what I say is meaningless

But I say it just to reach you, Julia (The Beatles, Julia 1968)

When Reiko plays "Norwegian Wood" and Naoko describes the feelings it evokes in her we begin to understand why hearing the song sent a shudder through Toru at the start of the story when he was on the aeroplane in Hamburg. The song reminds him of this time when Naoko was struggling with her inner demons and he was too self involved to be able to help her. Naoko explains that the song can fill her with sadness and describes herself alone and

cold in a dark wood. This image of the forest is a frightening symbol for Naoko, and for the reader it is a premonition of what is to come, the subtitle of the song "this bird has flown" hints at what Toru the narrator knows, that Naoko will never emerge from the forest, but to the younger Toru it was just a pleasant night listening to Beatles songs and drinking wine.

The following day Naoko, Toru and Reiko go out for a walk on the mountain and end up in café where a radio is playing. A few popular songs are played and Reiko is offered free milk if she plays the Beatle's "Here Come's the Sun" on the guitar. This is perhaps a glimmer of hope. It's a beautiful day, Toru and Naoko have spent time alone together, she seems better and the afternoon ends with Reiko singing a song of hope by the Beatles. As Toru says "I almost felt as if the sun really was coming up again as I sat there listening and drinking beer and looking at the mountains. It was a soft, warm feeling" (Murakami 184).

Little darling, it's been a long cold lonely winter  
Little darling, it feels like years since it's been here  
here comes the sun  
here comes the sun, and I say  
It's alright (The Beatles, "Here Comes the Sun" 1969)

Despite the optimistic lyrics and feel to the song, there is again an undertone that resonates with Naoko's state of mind. She has been sad for a long time, over a year since her boyfriend committed suicide, is Toru coming to visit her a glimmer of hope or just a brief interval of warmth in her long winter? Toru doesn't seem to grasp the depth of her depression and associates the song with the setting which gives him a soft warm feeling. However, for Naoko this is a just one good day or not such a bad day.

### 3.3 Midori's Singing

Murakami does not associate music as much with Midori in the novel as he does with the other characters. The only scene where we are given any musical reference is when Toru goes to see Midori and she cooks lunch for him. Toru has brought a bunch of daffodils for Midori and she tells him that she used to sing in folk group and while she cooks lunch she sings the song "Seven Daffodils", a folk song originally released by *The Brothers Four* who were very popular in Japan in the sixties. The song is a sentimental love song, about a person who has nothing to offer but their love. Does this hint that Midori is falling for Toru? When they finish lunch, the couple go up to the roof and Midori sings folk songs as they watch a building in the neighbourhood burn. "She sang some of the folk songs she had played with her group. I

would have been hard pressed to say that she was good, but she did seem to enjoy her own music" (Murakami 97). Perhaps what is interesting here is the fact that Midori sings. Apart from Rieko's rendition of "Here Comes the Sun" at the end of the novel, Midori is the only character that sings. There is a stark contrast between Naoko, who absorbs music but never plays or sings, and Midori who expresses her lust for life through singing, watching a building burn, contemplating death, she sings. "Oh, well...Anyway, let's stay here and watch for a while. We can sing songs. And if something bad happens, we can think about it then" (Murakami 97). The songs she sings are traditional folk songs which were recorded in the sixties by the group *Peter, Paul and Mary*. She sings "Lemon Tree", "Puff (the magic dragon)", "Five Hundred Miles" and "Where Have All the Flowers Gone". In contrast to Naoko these are all relatively upbeat songs, they reflect Midori's optimism and vitality. Also unlike Naoko, the lyrics of the songs don't seem to provide any insight into Midori's character. The song "Lemon Tree" is about a young man who is warned by his parents to be wary of love, and when he does fall for girl she leaves him for another, just as Midori leaves her boyfriend for Toru, again perhaps an indication that she is falling in love with him. One other observation that I will touch upon later is the fact that Toru and Midori spend the afternoon on the roof of the building which may connect this scene with the funeral songs when Toru sings "Up on the Roof" towards the end of the novel.

### 3.4 Toru's Jazz

Before discussing the jazz music associated with Toru in the novel, I want to mention the song "Nowhere Man" that was played by Reiko when he was visiting the sanatorium. The song almost certainly refers to Toru and the situation in which he has found himself, drifting through life, unable to connect with those around him, even with Naoko. The song can also be interpreted as a premonition of Toru's wandering after Naoko's suicide, he does become a nowhere man, all of the plans that he had for living with Naoko came to nothing, and she became nobody, a corpse, a memory.

He's a real nowhere man

Sitting in his Nowhere land

Making all his nowhere plans

For nobody. (The Beatles, "Nowhere Man" 1965)

When he loses contact with both Midori and Naoko, Toru drifts into a period of melancholy and introspection. He writes endless letters, spends time alone drinking coffee,

reading, writing and listening to Jazz. "Afternoons I would spend in the nearby shopping district of Kichijoji, watching double bills or reading in a jazz café. I saw no one and talked to almost no one" (Murakami 320). This may be suggestive of the autobiographical nature of Toru's character. Murakami has often mentioned his love of jazz and the influence of jazz on his writing

"I've been listening to jazz since I was thirteen or fourteen years old. Music is a very strong influence: the chords, the melodies, the rhythm, the feeling of the blues are helpful when I write. I wanted to be a musician, but I couldn't play the instruments very well, so I became a writer" (Wray).

Toru listens to Miles Davies' "Kind of Blue", Bud Powell and Ornette Coleman, all sombre sad music which reflects Toru's mood and state of mind. The image of Toru as being somehow disconnected is reinforced by this image of a young man sitting alone in a café or in his room, writing and listening to jazz music. He is not just disconnected from the two women in his life but there is a sense that he is disconnected from the world around him.

### **3.5 Reiko's Lament**

At the end of the novel, after Naoko's suicide and Toru's wandering by himself for a month mourning, Reiko comes to see him in Tokyo. They spend the evening drinking and she plays 51 songs in memory of Naoko commencing with Dear Heart. Reiko then plays a few songs by the Beatles, including "Norwegian Wood", "Michelle" and "Here Comes the Sun". These songs draw a connection between this scene and the night that Reiko played the Beatles at the sanatorium. Once again they are drinking wine and once again Reiko is playing the guitar, but this time Naoko is just a memory, the songs which had previously hinted at her fate are now being played to remember her. The songs connect Reiko, Toru and the reader to Naoko. As mentioned earlier, this is the only time that Reiko sings in the novel "she sang and played Her Comes the Sun" (Murakami 381). Perhaps this time there is hope, but for Toru rather than Naoko, he has been wandering for a month lost in his own grief, but Naoko's death has given him the chance of a future with Midori. Reiko has already told Toru that he needs to move on, to be happy with Midori "If you feel some kind of pain with regard to Naoko's death, I would advise you to keep on feeling that pain for the rest of your life. And if there's something you can learn from it, you should do that, too. But quite aside from that, you should be happy with Midori" (Murakami 379).

Following a cigarette Reiko continues to play more Beatles songs and when she has reached fourteen she asks Toru to play something. Toru plays “Up on the Roof” by *The Drifters* which he had practiced earlier in the novel. If we consider Reiko's advice to move on and be happy with Midori then this may be connected with the day he spent on the roof with Midori the day she sang. The song is about escape to a place of comfort and happiness, away from the troubles of the world, which Midori represents for Toru.

When this old world starts getting me down  
And people are just too much for me to face  
I climb way up to the top of stairs  
And all my cares just drift right into space (“Up on the Roof,” The Drifters, 1962)

The final verse of the song suggests that there's room enough for two on the roof, and everything is alright. In the end it is Midori that Toru chooses or rather Naoko has made the choice for him by choosing to die.

### **3.6 Norwegian Wood is a Dark Forest**

I want to give a brief analysis of the song “Norwegian Wood” and the symbolic role it plays in the novel. There is an obvious parallel between the lyrics and the night of Naoko's birthday. The opening line of the song reflects Toru's relationship with Naoko “I once had a girl or should I say, she once had me”. Toru never really had Naoko, he was always chasing her, trying to connect with her, to save her. Toru loved Naoko but she never loved him. “The thought fills me with an almost unbearable sorrow. Because Naoko never loved me” (Murakami 10). On the night of her birthday Toru offered to leave but Naoko just kept talking, so he stayed and drank some more wine “I sat on her rug, biding my time, drinking her wine”. Eventually, the couple go to bed “we talked until two and then she said it's time for bed”. Toru leaves the following morning and when he tries to contact Naoko later she has left the apartment, left Toru without a word “I was alone, this bird had flown”. The connection between the lyrics of the song and the night of Naoko's birthday seem obvious but there also seems to me to be a deeper, darker association in the novel to do with Naoko's interpretation of the song. The title of the novel in Japanese is *Noruei no mori* which translates literally as “a forest in Norway” or “Norwegian woods” (Rubin 149). This may explain Naoko's interpretation of the song when she tells Toru that she imagines walking all alone in a cold forest “that song can make me feel so sad. I don't know, I guess I imagine myself wandering



in a deep wood. I'm all alone and it's cold and dark, and nobody comes to save me" (Murakami 143). The forest is a potent and negative symbol throughout the novel. At the beginning of the story when Toru's memory is first stimulated by the song on the plane, he remembers walking with Naoko, first in a meadow but then they walk "through the frightful silence of a pine forest .. as if searching for something we'd lost, Naoko and I continued slowly along the path" (Murakami 8). The pine forest is described as frightful, it's a beautiful day and yet the forest is frightful. Toru and Naoko are of course connected by the loss of Kizuki. It is standing in that forest that Toru promises never to forget Naoko, following her plaintive plea to be remembered. "I want you always to remember me. Will you remember that I existed, and that I stood here next to you like this?" (Murakami 9). It is his promise to remember her in that frightful forest that compels Toru to write about Naoko, to remember her "this is the only way I know to keep my promise to Naoko" (Murakami 10).

The image of a forest as a dark place recurs later when Toru visits Naoko at the Ami Hostel for the first time. He remembers that the bus "plunged into a chilling cedar forest" and later "it began to seem as if the whole world had been buried for ever in a cedar forest" (Murakami 110). The forest becomes an underworld, a chilling dark place. The symbolism continues the theme established earlier when Naoko walked with Toru in a forest. The location of the Ami Hostel, a walled community within the woods may also be symbolic. The sanatorium is cut off from the rest of the world, it is accessed via a road "leading into the woods" (Murakami 111). It is here that Naoko has come to recover and protect herself from the real world, but it is here that she sinks deeper into depression and the torment within her own mind. It is also here, on the first night that Toru arrives, that she describes her feelings about the song "Norwegian Wood". Naoko does in fact end her life alone in a forest, she never escapes from that place in her mind and Toru is unable to save her.

The final reference to a forest, or at least to trees, comes just before Toru hears of Naoko's death, he is sitting in the garden of his rented apartment in Tokyo, the apartment in which he has asked Naoko to live with him. He describes the cherry blossoms in the garden and the smell of rotting flesh and this brings to his mind an image of buds growing out of Naoko's body. "The garden filled up with that sweet heavy stench of rotting flesh. And that's when I thought of Naoko's flesh. Naoko's beautiful flesh lay before me in the darkness, countless buds bursting through her skin, green and trembling in an almost imperceptible breeze" (Murakami 325). Why does Toru make a connection between cherry blossoms, rotting flesh and Naoko? Is this a premonition? Has Toru already made the association

between Naoko, death and the forest? The image is quite disturbing if we consider that Naoko is still alive when this scene occurs.

It seems that the image of a forest as a symbol of something negative and foreboding runs through the novel from the very first memories that Toru has of walking with Naoko, to her eventual suicide. Perhaps the forest represents Naoko's separation from the real world, her descent into despair and darkness. By contrast Toru's relationship with Midori is represented by Tokyo, walking through suburbs of the city, being together in cafés and bars, spending time on the roofs of buildings, nature is absent from their relationship. There is no dark forest associated with Midori, only Naoko.

## **4. The Soundtrack to the Film**

Most of the songs on the soundtrack are used only once in the film, however, there are a few tracks that are played more than once and these seem to be associated with specific characters or themes.

### **4.1 Naoko's Music**

The first song in the film associated with Naoko is played in the background when Toru walks with her the first time they meet (00:12:18). The song is titled “Ate mo naku arukimawatta” (aimlessly walking and crying in circles) and is track number ten on the soundtrack album. The first time they walk together, the couple end up back where they started and Naoko is obviously walking aimlessly “Where are we asked Naoko, as if noticing our surroundings for the first time” (Murakami 23). Toru is always one step behind Naoko, always catching up. “*You* brought us here, I was just following you” (Murakami 23). The song is a sombre slow piece led by violin and cello, there is a feeling of foreboding associated with the sound, it evokes an atmosphere and emotion of melancholy.

The track is played again later in the film when Toru is in the back of a car with Hazumi (1:18:00), accompanying her home after they have had dinner with her boyfriend Nagasawa. Hazumi tells Toru of her sadness, and he asks her why she remains with Nagasawa even though he makes her so sad. The song suits the scene, it is sombre and again foreboding. We are informed via voiceover that this was the last time that Toru saw Hazumi, that she committed suicide four years later.

This association of sadness and suicide with the music is felt once again when Toru and Naoko fight following their failed attempt at sex in the sanatorium (1:30:00). This scene was added by the director and is not in the novel. The song continues to play as Toru and Naoko walk through a winter scene, she is lost and confused, and Toru cannot connect with her. This is the last time that Toru sees Naoko, just like the previous time that the track was played, it is a prelude to death.

A few minutes later the scene cuts to Naoko alone in a forest, the ground is covered in snow, the trees are bare and dark, this is perhaps the dark forest that Murakami alluded to so often in the novel. A voiceover from Rieko is used to read a letter to Toru where she describes Naoko's descent into despair "I'll tell you truthfully, controlling Naoko is getting harder. I can't leave her alone for even a minute. The voices in her head are getting louder. She cut herself off from the world and went deep inside herself" (1:38:20). Harsh sounding violins fade in as the image fades to Naoko alone in the forest, she looks lost and confused and she whispers Kizuki's name. The song is called "Hageshii Genchou" (intense hallucination). The music continues as the scene fades to Toru alone in his apartment where he is talking in his mind to Kizuki about Naoko. Once again Hung uses stark, depressing violin strings to reflect the images on the screen, the music is bare like the trees in the forest and evokes a feeling of hopelessness.

One other piece of music which is associated with Naoko in the film, the song "Naoko ga Shinda" (Naoko is Dead) is played when she commits suicide (1:45:00). The camera pans across a desolate snow covered dark landscape until we finally see Naoko's legs and feet hanging mid screen. The music is harsh, difficult to listen to, grating. The song continues in the background as we watch Toru mourn on a rocky shore, the sea is wild, the violence of white waves crashing against the rocks reflect the mood created by the music.

## **4.2 Midori's Music**

"Toki no senrei o ukete inai mono o yomuna" (don't read what hasn't been baptised by time) is the fifth track on the soundtrack album. The song is a lot more upbeat than the songs associated with Naoko mentioned previously. The song is played when Toru first meets Midori (00:28:01) and later (1:39:49) when Midori comes and talks to him after she has snubbed him for a few weeks. It is also the last track at the end of the closing credits. It is an acoustic guitar led piece, with a rhythm and tempo that give the scenes a feeling of lightness. The mood set by the music is much lighter than many of the other songs in the film and

evokes a sense of anticipation. Hung uses the music to create an emotional feeling which is in stark contrast to the emotions evoked by some of the other tracks in the film, this is one of the few songs that has a sense of hope associated with it.

Following the scene where Midori and Toru have lunch together, the camera cuts to the record store where Toru works, Midori is wandering around the store looking at albums, the song “She Brings the Rain” by CAN plays in the background. The scene is light, Toru and Midori seem at ease and happy, she smiles. Unlike most of the atmospheric music by Jonny Greenwood this song has lyrics and they are insightful “in the dawn of the silvery day, clouds seem to melt away” (CAN, 1970). Midori represents a brighter side of life for Toru, the clouds associated with Naoko melt away when he is with Midori.

#### **4.3 Toru's Music**

The first piece of music we hear in the film is played in the background (00:06:07) when Toru first moves to Tokyo and is wandering around the University. This is the same song that is played when Toru first meets Midori later in the film. There is an energy to the scene, a sense of a new beginning associated with Toru coming to Tokyo and this is reflected in the mood of the music playing in the background. It is worth noting that the song ends when Toru meets Naoko and is replaced by the much more sombre “Ate mo naku arukimawatta”.

“Ti ko da kara damattete” (be quiet like a good girl), is again a slow guitar piece, but unlike the song associated with Midori this is not a hopeful song, it evokes feelings of sadness and resignation. It is the ninth track on the soundtrack album. It is first played when Toru receives a letter from Naoko inviting him to come to visit her (00:38:00), and continues in the background as Toru walks through the forest on his way to the sanatorium. The scene is green and sunny, there seems to be hope, the music is sweet and sad but not morose.

The song is played again when Toru and Naoko are walking alone together on the mountain (1:02:46), again the scene is beautiful, green and sunny but again the music is sombre. The song continues as the scene cuts to Toru swimming back in Tokyo and fades out as he meets Midori. This music is associated with Toru and perhaps reflects his sense of hopelessness or resignation that he cannot connect with Naoko. It is interesting that the song fades when he meets Midori, just as the more hopeful track “Toki no senrei o ukete inai mono o yomuna” ended at the beginning of the film when Toru met Naoko.

The song “Watashi wo Toru Toki wa Watashi Dake wo Totte Ne” (all that matters is when I’m me) is played twice in the film and connects Toru to all three of the women in the

story. We first hear it when Toru tells Midori that he loves her but that he needs time and Midori asks him not to hurt her (1:42:58). Their relationship has moved on from the lightness felt earlier when they first met, to something deeper and more meaningful, but Toru's feelings and sense of responsibility towards Naoko is a cloud hanging over them. The music is a lot heavier than any of the other songs associated with Midori, but perhaps that is because Naoko is in the scene, if not in person then certainly as a symbol of Toru's sadness. The song is played again when Toru returns to Tokyo after mourning Naoko (1:49:10). The funeral songs that Reiko plays in the novel are omitted and instead the night she spends with Toru is accompanied by this piece of sombre sad music. The song lasts for more than five minutes, during which there is also a flashback to Naoko and Toru in a forest when she asks him never to forget her. The music is again primarily violins and cello, the sound is haunting and sad, it is not easy to listen to and certainly evokes feelings of sorrow.

## 5. Conclusion

Haruki Murakami has used music consistently in his novels to add depth and insight to his narratives and characters. Even though the book *Norwegian Wood* is a departure for Murakami from his more familiar surreal detective style to a more straight-forward realistic story, he has still retained music as a fundamental element in the novel. It is sprinkled with a myriad of references to music and musicians, from classical and jazz to sixties pop music. The music in *Norwegian Wood* gives the reader a deeper understanding and insight into the emotions and personalities of the main characters. The songs chosen reflect elements of the narrative and create a connection between the reader and characters in the novel. The music also acts a thread which runs though the novel and binds the narrative thematically and structurally.

Tran Ang Hung employs music in his films primarily to increase the emotional impact of a scene or to create an emotional response associated with the images on the screen. The music is more often than not instrumental and non-diegetic. In his adaptation of *Norwegian Wood* Hung decided to omit almost all of the music that Murakami had referenced in the novel in an attempt to avoid any sense of nostalgia that it would evoke in the audience and instead replaced the music with a score that was more atmospheric and reflected his own emotional response to the book. This approach, along with his use of lingering cinematography and slow paced narrative, makes the adaptation feel similar to previous Hung films. The music in the film serves a different function than it does in the novel and ultimately this effects the success of the film as an adaptation. The film looses some of the essence of the novel and feels more like a film in the style of Tran Ahn Hung than an adaptation of a novel by Haruki Murakami.

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