

1. Introduction

1.1 *Norwegian Wood* in perspective

When I first heard about the book *Norwegian Wood* by Haruki Murakami a few years ago I wondered what a Japanese writer had to say about woods in Norway and I was intrigued. The book has in fact very little to do with Norway or Norwegian woods but more to do with a song by the Beatles which lends it's name to the novel, NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN).

Murakami is one of Japan's biggest writers today.¹ His first novel *Hear the Wind Sing* was published in Japan 1979 and since then he has published at least eleven novels, many of which have been translated into English and other languages. Besides that Murakami has also devoted himself to translating. When *Norwegian Wood* came out in Japan in the year 1987 he became so wildly popular that he chose to leave the country and live in Europe and America for a few years. On his return to Japan he has engaged himself more in the life in Japan and published two works as a response on the Kobe earthquake and the poison-gas attacks in Tokyo underground, *After the Quake* which is a collection of short stories and *Underground*. Murakami is a popular author, not only in his home country but world wide. His novels and short stories are captivating, different and full of little surprises. His writing has sometimes been called *magical realism*² with its often dreamlike transformation of reality into a world which is unique or strange The novel I have chosen to write about contains less of the magical realism than some of his other stories.

Norwegian Wood is a love story, but it is no ordinary love story. It's a story about a young man growing up. It's a story about a troubled young girl. It's a story about life and death. Toru Watanabe is a young man studying in Tokyo. On a train he meets Naoko, a girlfriend of a friend of his, Kizuki, who committed suicide two years back. They start to spend time together as they had done when Kizuki was still alive. Their relationship is somewhat complicated – Naoko celebrates her twentieth birthday with Toru drinking wine, eating and talking and at the end of the evening they have sex. After that she goes off to a mental health sanatorium in the mountains called Ami Hostel. Meanwhile Toru meets another girl, Midori, back in Tokyo who is full of life and energy and they start to spend time together. Toru visits Naoko in the Ami Hostel, and meets

¹ Autobiographical information inspired by <http://www.murakami.ch/>

² M.H. Abrams describes magical realism in *A glossary of literary terms* in the following way: "These writers interweave, in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and descriptive details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements". P. 135. Sixth edition, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College publishers, 1993.

her roommate Raiko and they pass the time talking and listening to Raiko play her guitar. While Naoko tries to settle her feelings and get well Toru develops his friendship with Midori and spends some time with his friend Nakasawa. When Naoko commits suicide Toru is left broken. Broken because she is gone away and because he had chosen to be with Midori and broken his promise to her.

The novel is written in the first person from Toru's point of view. Murakami's novel is not a typical Japanese I-novel³. The Japanese I-novel is described by Donald Keene in the 3rd volume of *A history of Japanese Literature, Dawn to the West* as autobiographical. He writes: "it is generally expected that an 'I Novel' will not merely recount events that have occurred in the author's life, but will expose them mercilessly in the manner of confession"⁴. Murakami himself has made it clear that the story of Toru Watanabe is not his own although it is agreed that he has borrowed many elements from his own life. As Jay Rubin writes in the end of his translation of *Norwegian Wood*:

The author may joke away its autobiographicality, but the book *feels* [Rubin's italic] like an autobiography, it favors lived experience over mind games and shots at the supernatural, and it does indeed tell us much more straightforwardly than any of his other novels what life was like for the young Haruki Murakami when he first came to Tokyo from Kobe. [...] The author is right though there is a lot of fiction here, and a lot of caricature and humor, and a lot of symbolism that Murakami's readers will recognize instantly. It is by no means 'just' a love story.⁵

It's clearly no autobiography but unavoidably it has some elements from the Japanese I-Novel or the related *mental attitude novel*⁶ which Keene describes as "[...] generally told in the first person, and the interest lies less in what is being described than in the attitudes of the author."⁷ Keene explains that writers of the mental attitude novel were often more interested in finding depth and beauty in the incidents of their regular daily lives than having important, even shocking, confessions.

Whether the novel is autobiographical or not and therefore whether it belongs in the category I-novel or mental attitude novel is not a major concern of mine here but being familiar with these genres might help to put the novel in perspective and even help with the understanding of the novel which is set in the years 1968 to 1970. What Keene describes in the mental attitude novel as "depth and beauty of the incidents of their daily

³ In Japanese the term is 'Watakushi shōsetsu'.

⁴ Donald Keene, *A history of Japanese Literature, Dawn to the West*, volume 3. Columbia University Press, New York, 1998. P. 506. Hereafter I'll refer to the book as *Dawn to the West*.

⁵ Haruki Murakami, *Norwegian Wood*, Translated by Jay Rubin, Vintage International, New York, 2000. P. 296.

⁶ The Japanese term is 'Shinkyō sōsetsu'.

lives⁷ is a big part of the novel, with long descriptions of the all-male corridors Toru lives in, descriptions of the music he and his friends listen to, random meetings with people and other everyday life descriptions. Music plays a large part in these everyday life descriptions and it is the music I will be focusing on.

1.2 Thesis and method

Toru describes what he listens to during different situations and some of the other characters comment on the music, or perform the music. The work is therefore full of music, mostly pop music from the sixties, but also classical music, jazz, and other music genres. Jay Rubin writes about music in Murakami's works in his book *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*⁹. He writes:

Murakami is a lover of music – music of all kinds: jazz, classical, folk, rock. It occupies a central position in his life and work. The title of his first novel commands the reader to *Hear the Wind Sing* (Kaze no uta o kike, 1979) [...]. Murakami owned a jazz bar for seven years and he continues to add to his collection of more than 6000 records. He is constantly going to concerts or listening to recorded music. It is a wonder that he did not become a musician himself – though, in a way he did. Rhythm is perhaps the most important element in his prose.¹⁰

Although it would be interesting to study rhythm in his works I will refrain from that mainly because of my inability to read Japanese but that doesn't prevent me from studying the music in his novel *Norwegian Wood* and the effect music has on the work. I'll be using Jay Rubin's translation¹¹ of the work from the year 2000 – but the novel came out in Japan in 1987.

I will be focusing on the music and the role the music plays in the novel both thematically and structurally. I will try to show that music plays a larger role and more central role than the reader might assume at first. Even though the music is mentioned quite frequently in the novel it's only after thorough reading that one realizes the extent of the influence the music has on the novel, structurally but mostly thematically. However as I already mentioned I will have to refrain from analyzing any potential rhythm in the language or other influence music might have on the language since I'm analyzing the

⁷ Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West*, P. 510.

⁸ Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West*, P. 513.

⁹ Jay Rubin, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*, Harvell Press, London, 2002. I will refer to the book as *HMMW* here after.

¹⁰ Jay Rubin, *HMMW*, P. 1-2.

¹¹ The book was previously translated into English by Alfred Birnbaum in 1989.

translation and not the original text and it's hard to tell how much of the original rhythm has translated over to English.

I do not think there are any problems with using the translation since I will be focusing on the structure of the novel and the thematic effects mostly. The fact that the novel is Japanese makes it even more interesting for analysis but I do not need to state that my analysis is from a *western* point of view and therefore some special Japanese elements might be invisible to my western eye. Most of the popular music presented in the novel is on the other hand western music. I will not be getting into much analysis of the cultural differences but focusing on analyzing the novel as I see it.

The analysis I do of the popular music which appear as intertexts in *Norwegian Wood* is entirely based on my own view of the song. It is very personal how one interprets a song or a melody and I have chosen to analyze the songs myself, with the novel in mind. I try to analyze both the feeling of the music and the lyrics and connect it with the novel as I feel is appropriate. At times I put the lyrics in connection with the novel or the characters to show certain depth that can be seen with close reading of the songs although the texts of the songs don't appear in the novel at all. The characters may or may not be said to sing the songs but I believe the connection that is made by mentioning it in the novel is important. I have attached some of the lyrics I speak of with the essay.

I will be analyzing the novel mostly by close reading. I will be using works like Calvin S. Brown's book, *Music and Literature – a comparison of the arts*¹², which gives a thorough analysis of music and literature and the associations and relationships there between. I will also be using Jay Rubin's book on Murakami and his works, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words* which brings certain insights both on the translation and to the work in general. Information about music, albums and songs I have taken from <http://www.allmusic.com>, I have the lyrics from <http://www.getlyrics.com/> as well as listening to the songs. Other literature that I will be using I will introduce as it comes. I will start by speaking about the structure of the novel and then proceed to the thematic analysis.

¹² Calvin S. Brown, *Music and Literature, a comparison of the arts*, The university of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia, first published 1948, 1963. I will be referring to it as *MaL* in my footnotes.

2. Structure

2.1. Contrasts and comparisons

The novel is told in the first person, as I've mentioned before, from Toru Watanabe's point of view. It consists of eleven chapters, where the first chapter is set when Toru is 37 years old but the rest of the story is a flashback to his student time in the late sixties. His story is told in a straightforward way with only a few ellipses (which mainly state fates of characters like Hatsumi who commits suicide a few years after the novel is set). The novel might be considered one-voiced but Toru presents the reader with various letters from different characters and lets other characters tell their story themselves – the letters are presented as if they are genuinely being copied for the reader just as they were written and the stories told by other characters are quoted in their entirety. It is none the less always Toru Watanabe who narrates the story.

Chapter six is a central chapter in the novel. It is the longest chapter with 76 pages, the first five chapters are together 84 pages and the last five 112 pages so it is set approximately in the middle of the novel. Thematically it is placed in the sanatorium where Naoko stays instead of in Tokyo where most of the story is placed.

The structure of the novel may seem rather chaotic or even unimportant at first but when one starts comparing the topics in each chapter there is a pattern to be seen. In table 1 I have put up the major topics in each chapter to compare. I have put chapter one beside chapter seven in the table for comparison and so on.

Table 1

Chapter	Topics	Topics	Chapter
1	Toru presents Naoko and her fears.	Toru gets to know Midori better.	7
2	Toru speaks of his triangle relationship with Naoko and the late Kizuki.	Toru goes out with Nagasawa and his girlfriend Hatsume and is reminded of the first triangle.	8
3	Toru becomes nineteen. Toru spends a lot of time with Naoko.	Toru becomes twenty. Toru spends a lot of time with Midori.	9
4	Toru gets to know Midori for the first time.	Midori tells Toru she's in love with him.	10
5	Naoko explains in a letter that she's feeling a bit better than before. She talks about her daily routine at the Ami Hostel.	Naoko commits suicide in the Ami Hostel after having been sent to a facility for mental patients.	11
	6	Set in the sanatorium where Naoko is. Toru also meets her roommate Raiko. She plays her guitar and tells Toru her story.	

When one compares two chapters like this it becomes obvious that the chapters take on similar subjects or themes. The simple example of his birthdays being in chapter 3 and 9, him meeting Midori in chapter 4 and then their relationship moving on to another level in chapter 10 are just the most obvious examples. Chapter 6 on the other hand stands out. It is thematically set in a different area and much of the chapter is Raiko's story. Time goes by more slowly in the sanatorium than in the rest of the novel and the *feeling* of it is somewhat different from the rest of the story. Rubin points out that Toru's remark "It felt like an awfully long day"¹³ rings true simply because "[t]his day has occupied more than 70 pages of the novel"¹⁴. The place is cut off from the rest of the world (as the chapter is *cut* from the rest of the story) with a wall. Rubin comments on that as well when he writes:

Ami Hostel itself, a place deep in the woods and surrounded by a wall, has several parallels to the well-like town of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. The patients are all seeking a relief from the stresses of life in the outside world, the sort of transcendence available to the mind-less (or heartless) inhabitants of the walled town.¹⁵

The comparison to Murakami's work from 1985 *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* isn't unjust. The walled-in town in the *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* is isolated from the rest of the novel. The novel is separated into two sections where one section happens in the *real* world and the rest in this mythical walled in town and to separate the two worlds entirely the novel divides the two with chapters, so each world gets every other chapter. *Norwegian Wood* which has a more realistic setting uses many of the same symbols and the same means to separate the *realistic* world from the *inner* world. I will go into more details about the thematic aspect of this later but this clear separation, both in theme and pace, shows that chapter 6 stands out as different from the rest of the novel. By parallel reading the chapters certain aspects become clearer as well. The contrast between Naoko and Midori is an example. Naoko is an introvert, depressed and lifeless while Midori is an extrovert, full of life and energy. In chapter 3 Toru and Naoko are celebrating her birthday:

Naoko was unusually talkative that night. She told me about her childhood, her school, her family. Each episode was a long one, done with the painstaking detail of a miniature. I was amazed at the power of her memory, but as I sat listening it began to dawn on me that there was something wrong with the way she was telling these stories: something

¹³ Haruki Murakami, *Norwegian Wood*, Translated by Jay Rubin, Vintage International, New York, 2000. P. 129-130. I will be referring to the book as *N.W.* here after.

¹⁴ Jay Rubin, *HMMW*, p. 3.

¹⁵ Jay Rubin, *HMMW*, P. 157.

strange, even warped. Each tale had its own internal logic, [...] with no end in sight. I found things to say in response at first, but after a while I stopped trying.¹⁶

Her dialogue is introverted and she speaks mostly to speak instead of communicating with Toru, it is a monologue rather than a dialogue. The night ends with a rather questionable act on Toru's part as he sleeps with Naoko, or as Rubin puts it when writing about the sexual relationship Toru has with Naoko and later Raiko it is a "morally questionable"¹⁷ act but it is the only thing he can think of to bring Naoko out of her shell. His attempt fails miserably.

In chapter 9 Toru and Midori spend time with each other after her father has died. Midori's conversations are quick and her responses are often quite odd. She seems to make statements to challenge the rest of the world, and she expects to be listened to and answered. After dragging Toru around town watching porn movies, drinking beer and dancing, they go to her place to rest. Midori wants him to watch over her while she sleeps and before she falls asleep they have a little conversation:

'C'mon, say something to me,' Midori said with her face buried in my chest.
'Whaddya want me to say?'
'Anything. Something to make me feel good.'
'You're really cute,' I said.
'Midori,' she said. 'Say my name.'
'You're really cute, Midori,' I corrected myself.
'Whaddya mean *really* cute?'¹⁸

She continues to provoke him into saying things she wants to hear and after Toru has told her the tiny story of her and the spring bear she asks him if he'll take care of her "always and always"¹⁹ and he promises to do so, just as he promised with Naoko, but in chapter 3 Naoko doesn't let him or he is unable to help. Midori communicates and reacts with the outside world. She expects reactions and gets angry if people treat her wrongly. As she says herself "I'm a real, live girl, with real, live blood gushing through my veins"²⁰. When she suspects she's falling in love with Toru she reacts on it as soon as she has taken a little time to think about it. The whole of her being is grounded in the real *outer* world, which is very different from Naoko who tends to focus on her inner world and doesn't care much about what is happening around her. Rubin writes of this in *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*:

¹⁶ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 38.

¹⁷ Jay Rubin, *HMMW*, P. 158.

¹⁸ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 231.

¹⁹ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 231.

²⁰ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 263.

Tōru is attracted to both the lively, life-affirming Midori and the death-obsessed Naoko. Midori is frequently associated with elevated locations such as laundry deck or a rooftop, while Naoko thinks of wells.²¹

The contrasts are on many levels and Murakami's use of symbols often affirm the contrasts that seem to revolve around the *real* outer world and the *inner* world.

Understanding the structure of the novel is essential to an understanding of its meaning. The plot which seems at first rather chaotic and complex is quite structured and the contrasts in the chapters bring deeper understanding of it.

2.2. The A-B-A form

The novel is divided into three sections. The first five chapters form the first one, chapter 6 the second one and the last five chapters form the last one. It can be identified as an A-B-A form.

Calvin S. Brown speaks of the A-B-A form amongst other musical aspects in his book *Music and Literature*. The A-B-A form is basis of "hundreds of small musical compositions"²² – Brown explains the A-B-A form of the March in the following way:

The A section is the march, with its chords and heavy rhythm in a minor key. The trio [...] is designed to furnish a strong contrast: it is a song-like melody in a different key [...] with an accompaniment of widely-spaced broken chords. After the trio, the march (A) is repeated exactly as it appeared before, except that the last chord is changed to provide a conclusion instead of leading into the trio.²³

Brown goes on to show the difference between the poetry A-B-A section and the musical one. He points out that the A section is considerably shorter than the B section in poetry and therefore the musical balance is missing in the poetry version of the A-B-A form. The repetition in the A section tends to be "little more than a motto or refrain used for a beginning and conclusion, and the middle section contains the body"²⁴. Brown also emphasizes that the A-B-A form is not necessarily a musical form, he points out that poets have often used it in their poems without any apparent influence from music, so the form is not unmistakably connected with music.

Brown compares the poem to the A-B-A form but when he talks about the sonata form and the fugue he discusses how writers have tried to imitate the musical forms in

²¹ Jay Rubin, *HMMW*. P. 157.

²² Calvin S. Brown, *MaL*, P. 135.

²³ Calvin S. Brown, *MaL*. P. 135.

²⁴ Calvin S. Brown, *MaL*. P. 135.

their short stories and in novels. According to him the imitation is next to impossible. The counterpoint, which is when two tones are presented simultaneously, is practically impossible in literature although writers like Aldous Huxley have tried to imitate it.

The sonata form has three sections, the first beginning with "the statement of the principal subject" writes Brown and continues that this subject can be of almost any length or nature, the only requirement being that it allows "ample possibilities for later development". The subject is then followed by a second subject which contrasts the first one. The middle section (B) is free and allows for "varied treatment in distant keys of any material presented by the exposition and it may even include new material"²⁵. The last section achieves an effect of finality within the subject. Brown continues:

This repetition, like that of the simple ABA form, does not have to be exact and literal, but it must be unmistakable and must give the effect of repetition rather than of further development. [...] Reducing sonata form to its simplest terms, we may summarily describe it as the statement of a first subject, a contrasting second subject, and a closing subject; the development of this thematic material; and finally its restatement.²⁶

If we assume that the subjects Brown speaks of are identical with the themes or a subject in a plot of a novel then we can continue and note that in *Norwegian Wood* the two major *subjects* are introduced in the first A section, Naoko and the contrasting Midori and what each of them represents: the *closing subject* might then be Raiko. The contrast between the two girls is obvious. In the beginning the focus is on Naoko and his time spent with her and in the later chapters he gets to know the lively Midori a little better.

While *Norwegian Wood* has an A-B-A form, although the later A section is not actually a repetition of the first A section it does take up the subjects from the first A section and provides the conclusion. There is no formal repetition like the normal A-B-A form requires but thematically it gives us two sections which are alike in many ways with the later section taking up the topics of the first A section and providing a closure. Then there is the middle section which is in a different key and as I've pointed out there is a different tone in chapter 6 (the B section of the novel). The third section (A) is a mirror image of the first A section – although the section unavoidably has further developments rather than repetition. The section does take up the subjects and gives closure. Toru chooses Midori and Naoko commits suicide. It even takes up the subjects topic for topic from the previously parallel chapter as I've shown in table 1. The last section closes up

²⁵ Calvin S. Brown, *MaL*. P. 162.

²⁶ Calvin S. Brown, *MaL*. P. 163.

the subjects, as do any closing chapters in a novel, but the section is indeed “putting them all in the tonic key this time in order to achieve an effect of finality”²⁷.

One could easily claim though that this is indeed the structure of any novel where the first chapters provide the reader with the subjects, problems and plot and the later chapters solve the problem. As to whether Murakami achieves an imitation of the sonata form I will let others decide but the structure of the novel does have similarities with the musical A-B-A and sonata forms. Murakami himself never claims to be trying to copy any form with his *Norwegian Wood* and it is hard if not impossible to copy these musical forms in literary works as Brown has pointed out. Brown asks himself in the conclusion of the chapter on the sonata form if the form is simply rejected by the superior literary judgment as an unpromising literary medium, and therefore not attempted or if it is simply too hard to copy. He writes:

Perhaps it is merely accident that no writer of first rank has concerned himself with the problem. If this be true, we may some day have a work which is at the same time a great piece of literature and a consistent literary application of sonata form.²⁸

To this he concludes a note which simply says “We do have a great novelette which might be thus described. See the account of Thomas Mann’s *Tonio Kröger* [...]”²⁹ which later he writes about in great details when it comes to his discussion about the leitmotiv although he doesn’t mention the sonata form there at all and never attempts to prove whether it’s a fair imitation of the sonata form.

Whether Murakami tries, and then whether he succeeds or not, to imitate the sonata form with his work I will not speculate further over. Although the thought is interesting, it would require a closer reading of the original Japanese text I suspect, to look for actual repetitions, and other elements that are represented in the sonata form. Instead I’m now going to focus on the importance of sound in *Norwegian Wood*.

²⁷ Calvin S. Brown, *MaL*. P. 163.

²⁸ Calvin S. Brown, *MaL*. P. 177.

²⁹ Calvin S. Brown, *MaL*. P. 177.

3. Sounds and sorrows

3.1. The sounds of the inner and the outer world

The senses, sounds, taste, sight, touch and smell are all central in *Norwegian Wood*. The sound of the rain falling, the smell of the dormitory, the sound of the Japanese national anthem, the feeling of another person's skin, the sound of people crying, moaning, shouting, jumping and so forth, the look of people and places. Toru's memories are awakened by remembering the different sensations and the feelings they gave him. The sounds play a big role in making him remember. One of the best examples of this is right in the beginning where he's starting to remember; "I was in the meadow. I could smell the grass, feel the wind on my face, hear the cries of the birds"³⁰. It is through sounds and mostly music that he gives life to places and remembers people. Toru constantly mentions what music he and his friends were listening to at any given moment and different sounds are often the first thing he remembers from a scene from the past. Murakami uses this element in his novel as a way to bring the feeling of the sixties into the novel and revive a certain atmosphere. He recreates a certain time and a place by talking about music the reader will hopefully recognize or at least will be able to familiarize herself with it and in this way get the feeling that the novel is set in the sixties. I might add that recognizing the music is not absolutely necessary when it comes to understanding, enjoying the novel or even recreating the atmosphere of the sixties but it helps and brings a deeper understanding.

The world of Murakami is full of contrasts and opposites. One of the most obvious ones in his works is the inner versus the outer world. This is represented in a different way in different works. Jay Rubin writes when discussing *Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World* that his "[...] writings tend to posit two parallel worlds, one obviously fantastic and the other closer to recognizable [...]"³¹ reality. This is obvious in many of Murakami's works, like *Hardboiled Wonderland* and even in *Dance Dance Dance*, but not as easily spotted in other novels like *Sputnik Sweetheart* or *Norwegian Wood*. Murakami connects certain symbols to these elements in his works, symbols like *the well*, which appears in many of his works. When discussing the well in the *Wind up Bird Chronicle* Rubin writes:

³⁰ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 3.

³¹ Jay Rubin, *HMMW.* P. 116.

The well thus holds out the promise of healing, which is why Tōru goes to inordinate lengths to assure himself of an opportunity to spend time inside it, but the process of 'well-digging' is by no means pleasant. Indeed, it suggests the threat of a slow, painful, and most of all lonely death, as we saw in *Norwegian Wood* [...].³²

Naoko is the one doing most of the well-digging in *Norwegian Wood*, and as she gets more and more focused on her inner reality, digs deeper into her well, the external world fades away. She doesn't hear what goes on around her and starts hearing voices which are not a part of the reality of the people around her. This deafness is closely connected to the inner world. The best example of Naoko's deafness is perhaps the example I have already used. When Toru and she are enjoying her birthday she keeps talking and Toru finds that she isn't paying any attention to him, she doesn't care at all if he's listening to her or not. Toru mentions the music they are listening to, which ranges from SGT PEPPER LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND to WALTZ FOR DEBBIE with Bill Evans³³ but she hardly hears the music either. When Toru mentions that he has to catch the last train she doesn't react until a little later, then she stops talking:

She had not actually finished what she was saying. Her words had simply evaporated. She had been trying to go on, but had come up against nothing. Something was gone now, and I was probably the one who had destroyed it. My words might have finally reached her, taken their time to be understood, and obliterated whatever energy it was that had kept her talking so long.³⁴

She doesn't respond to his words at all, or at least her reactions minimal are very delayed. She is so involved in her own mind and her emotions that she doesn't react at all to the outside world. A tear spills from her eye and Toru decides not to take the last train but to be with her and try to comfort her. Later in the novel when Toru gets the news of Naoko's suicide he himself gets mired in this inner world. He describes it as "walking on the bottom of the sea":

I could hardly hear what people said to me, and they had just as much trouble catching anything I had to say. My whole body felt enveloped in some kind of membrane, cutting off any direct contact between me and the outside world.³⁵

³² Jay Rubin, *HMMW*. P. 207.

³³ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 38.

³⁴ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 39.

³⁵ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 247.

Toru's retreat into his inner self is not as deep as Naoko's, yet he is cut off from the outside world for a while and he even makes Midori angry with his retreat and inability to respond or interact with her as she needs to be interacted with. The two worlds are not as separated as the two worlds in *Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World* but he still describes it as a membrane that cuts him off from *reality*. In the end Toru gets himself together realizing that he has to be an adult and connect himself to the outside world again which he does with Raiko's help. For Naoko that is too much of an effort, she can't do it and instead of living with it she commits suicide. The reader learns from the beginning that *the well* is an important factor in Naoko's mind. She speaks of the well in the first chapter and Toru isn't sure if it "existed only inside Naoko, like all the other things she used to spin into existence inside her mind in those dark days"³⁶. The reader learns from the beginning that the well is an important symbol for Naoko. She talks about this field well that people fall into and die there slowly cut off from the rest of the world:

You'd yell at the top of your lungs, but nobody'd hear you, and you couldn't expect anybody to find you, and you'd have centipedes and spiders crawling all over you, and the bones of the ones who died before are scattered all around you, and it's dark and soggy, and way overhead there's this tiny, tiny circle of light like a winter moon. You die there in this place, little by little, all by yourself.³⁷

Not being heard by the rest of the world is an important sign, a sign of being caught in this inner world. This dark place that you can't get out of by yourself she later connects with the Beatles song NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN). In the Ami Hostel she talks about her feelings towards the song "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"³⁸. Her words are almost an echo of what she said before about the field well, for her the field well and the song become a symbol for her own desperation. The music becomes a symbol for her inner battle but the song actually belongs to the outside world. The song becomes a signal, a connection between the *inner* and the *outer* world.

The sounds are not only a way to reconnect to old memories and to bring back atmosphere of years gone by but Murakami also uses sounds and hearing to show difference between the inner and outer world, the struggle that people go through when trying to stay connected to the outer world and not sinking into oneself entirely.

³⁶ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 5.

³⁷ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 6.

³⁸ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 109.

The sounds of the outside world and the silence of the inner world come together in the NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN) which is essential and central to the novels understanding – the key to Naoko’s suffering and to Toru’s memory of her.

3.2. NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN) as leitmotiv

Toru’s shudder in the beginning of the novel hints at what is to come and gives the song NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN) a special role in the novel. Mikael Van Reis writes in his essay “En smärta i frasens leende”³⁹ about Marcel Proust and his work *A la recherche du temps perdu*, and the leitmotiv Proust uses in the part about Swann and his love Odette. Van Reis writes:

På dessa märkvärdiga sidor kan vi följa hur sonaten blir till en bild för tiden och frasen en bild för konsten som erinring vilket djupast sett också är en fråga om kärlekens erkännande. Det är cirkel i konsten, men imaginär eftersom den reella tiden hindrar den från att slutas.⁴⁰

Proust’s work is a complicated piece and it is hard to describe the role that the leitmotiv, the sonata, plays in it in a few words but as Van Reis points out it transforms within the work and has the ability to re-create the past. Proust’s leitmotiv changes through time and is closely connected to the memory. Murakami uses a leitmotiv in his novel in a similar way that Proust does, although it plays a more central role in his work than the sonata does in Proust’s work.

Calvin S. Brown describes the leitmotiv in the following way:

A genuine Leitmotiv in literature is hard to define, for its existence is determined more by its use than by its nature. One might say that it is a verbal formula which is deliberately repeated, which is easily recognized at each recurrence, and which serves, by means of this recognition, to link the context in which the repetition occurs with earlier contexts in which the motive has appeared. [...] Perhaps we should add that in both music and literature the Leitmotiv has to be comparatively short and must have a programmatic association – must refer to something beyond the tones or words which it contains.⁴¹

³⁹ Ord och Bild, no 2. 1993.

⁴⁰ Mikael Van Reis, “En smärta i frasens leende”, *Ord och Bild*, nr. 2. 1993. P. 35.

⁴¹ Calvin S. Brown, *MaL*. P. 211.

The song that is mentioned quite a few times in the novel and lends its name to it carries many associations that is outside the work, and as such brings different associations to different characters and scenes. Naoko's theme song also evolves within the work from being her favorite song to become Toru's anchor when it comes to remembering her later on in life – or in the beginning of the novel. NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN) becomes a leitmotiv in *Norwegian wood*.

The words of the song carry a lot of connotations and Toru's situation gets analyzed through the song. The starting words "I once had a girl or should I say she once had me"⁴² echo Toru's situation in the beginning of the novel where he sits on a plane in Germany and the memories of Naoko rush over him. The general coziness of the melody mirrors the time Toru spends with Naoko, when visiting her in her apartment or her birthday and later in the sanatorium at the Ami Hostel. The young Toru doesn't speak much of his feelings concerning the song but he mentions the song itself many times.

When eating dinner with his *friend* Nagasawa and his girlfriend Hatsumi he drifts off thinking about Naoko and Raiko and wonders what they would be doing at that particular moment. He imagines that Naoko is reading a book and Raiko playing NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN) on her guitar. He suddenly gets a strong feeling to be there with them. At this point the mere memory of the song and the situation brings an easy, relaxed feeling over him. The song and Naoko are comfortably connected, but Hatsumi is the one that brings out the memory:

Hatsumi stared at her hands on the table. Like everything she had on, her hands looked chic and elegant and expensive. I thought about Naoko and Reiko. What would they be doing now? I wondered. Naoko could be lying on the sofa reading a book, and Reiko might be playing 'Norwegian Wood' on her guitar. I felt an intense desire to go back to that little room of theirs. What the hell was I doing in this place?⁴³

They continue with their meal but Nagasawa and Hatsumi are not getting along so Toru offers to take Hatsumi home. They decide to go for a drink first and on their way in the taxi the narration is cut and Toru describes his realization years later:

[...] and was sitting on a local pizza parlor, drinking beer and eating pizza and watching a miraculously beautiful sunset. Everything was soaked in brilliant red – my hand, the plate, the table, the world – as if some special kind of fruit juice had splashed down on everything. In the midst of this

⁴² Lennon, McCartney, NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN), *Rubber Soul*, performed by The Beatles, 1965.

⁴³ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 209.

overwhelming sunset, the image of Hatsumi flashed into my mind, and in that moment I understood what that tremor of the heart had been. It was a kind of childhood longing that had always remained – and would forever remain- unfulfilled. [...] She had been an absolutely special woman. Someone should have done something – anything - to save her.⁴⁴

He then tells us her fate, that she commits suicide 4 years after Nagasawa has left her to live in Germany, two years after she marries someone else - she slits her wrist. The blood colored sunset mixes with the image of Hatsumi slitting her wrist but it isn't until later that the reader gets the connection with Naoko and the fate they share. The unfulfilled feeling is connected with both of them. The similarities between Hatsumi and Naoko are quite clear in the novel. In chapter 2 while Toru is describing his former relationship with Kizuki and Naoko he states "Naoko would bring a classmate for me and the four of us would go to the zoo or the pool or a movie. The girls she brought were always pretty, but a little too refined for my taste"⁴⁵. In chapter 8 Toru makes a similar statement about Hatsumi:

Hatsumi then began talking about a girl she wanted to fix me up with. This was a perpetual topic for the two of us. She was always telling me about some 'cute freshman in my club,' and I was always running away. [...] 'I'm too poor to go out with girls from your school. I can't talk to them'⁴⁶

Not only do the girls radiate a similar elegance and share the same fate but they have a similar relationship to Toru – although Hatsumi never gets to know Toru the way Naoko does. Toru has also stated previously when Nagasawa is asking him to go to the dinner that the two of them, he and Hatsumi, would be more comfortable having him around. He reacts with the comment "Oh no, it was Kizuki, Naoko, and me all over again"⁴⁷. The mentioning of the NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN) while watching Hatsumi is a kind of a premonition of what is to come. Because for Toru, who already has made the connection when he tells the story, the shuddering feeling of the song is already a fact. The younger Toru hasn't yet made this sorrowful connection and is in the dark about it as is the reader but the song serves as a connection in his memory between the young self and his older one.

Van Reis writes when talking about the leitmotiv in Proust's novel:

Musikens slutna tidsuniversum skapar genom sina återkommande fraser inte bara ett minne av det som en gång var utan bär också på ett löfte om lycka, om något

⁴⁴ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 212.

⁴⁵ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 22.

⁴⁶ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 204.

⁴⁷ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 202.

anlëndande. Upprepningen av frasen är alltså ett minne som riktas framåt i tiden. I den musikaliska kompositionens tid, vill säga.⁴⁸

In Proust's roman the sonata represents Swann's love to Odette, Van Reis argues that the music becomes time within time and the little sonata becomes time, body, memory⁴⁹. The sonata then later transforms into something painful when Swan realizes that Odette's love for him will never be reborn. The song NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN) serves similar purposes in *Norwegian Wood* but the song never brings any promise of happiness. On the contrary it brings promise of sorrow and loss. The shudder in the beginning of the novel is the first clue towards this. Although we might argue that Swann and Toru have a similar role to play, the sonata and the song evolve in their minds – ranging from representing their love towards a girl to representing sorrow about the loss of that love. For Toru the feeling goes deeper and ends in guilt. Whether he believes his words when talking about Hatsumi's death, that "neither Nagasawa nor I could have managed"⁵⁰ to do something to help her, are true and whether that goes for Naoko as well – could he have done something to help Naoko - is a question he asks himself. He is obviously angry with Nagasawa since he refuses to have anything more to do with him after the letter about Hatsumi's death arrives. His anger might also be a representation of his anger towards himself.

3.3 This bird has flown

The leitmotiv in *Norwegian Wood* becomes even more complicated when Naoko's point of view is put into the picture as well. The song is connected with the field well and her journey to her inner self. She makes Raiko play it so often that they have come up with a system in the sanatorium where she pays Raiko a hundred yen each time she asks her to play it. She says that she will only request the song when she really wants to hear it. Naoko then explains her feelings about the song, saying it makes her feel "so sad" and then she continues "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. That's why Reiko never plays it unless I request it"⁵¹. Naoko's interpretation of the song is interesting and might at first seem slightly odd to those who have heard the Beatles melody. It is a chirpy and perhaps slightly nostalgic sounding pop melody. Jay Rubin explains that the name of the novel actually is *Noruwei no mori* which translates directly as "A forest in Norway" or "Norwegian Woods" instead of "Norwegian Wood". This, as he says, is "not

⁴⁸ Mikael Van Reis, "En smärta i frasens leende", *Ord och Bild*, 1993. P. 34.

⁴⁹ Mikael Van Reis, "En smärta i frasens leende", *Ord och Bild*, nr. 2, 1993. P. 35.

⁵⁰ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 212.

⁵¹ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 109.

Murakami's but the standard Japanese mistranslation of the title of the Beatles' song [...]”⁵². This makes Naoko's feelings about the song a bit more understandable. The well becomes a symbol for her mental illness or her digging into her problematic inner self and she is unable to climb up, unable to get out and slowly she dies on the bottom of that same well.

The forest is a frightening symbol just like the field well - a symbol of her loneliness after she loses Kizuki, when she imagines herself wandering in a dark, cold forest lost and all alone and nobody comes to save her. Naoko's salvation never arrives. She dies at the bottom of her well, in the midst of a foreign forest far from everything. Right before Toru gets informed of Naoko's death she has in his imagination become a part of this forest:

I spent the day watching the garden, propped against a pillar and stroking Seagull. I felt completely drained. The afternoon deepened, twilight approached, and bluish shadows enveloped the garden. Seagull disappeared, but I went on staring at the cherry blossoms. In the spring gloom, they looked like flesh that had burst through the skin over festering wounds. 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.⁵³

He does in fact sit in the garden where he's renting an apartment somewhere in Tokyo but the metaphor is of the cherry blossoms and the rotting flesh, flesh of a girl that is rotting even though she is still alive. The image is both beautiful and somewhat grotesque. Toru's desperation when he finds out they have had to send Naoko to a hospital that is more specialized in dealing with such patients becomes a metaphor where he tries to heal her body (and soul?) by making cherry blossoms grow out of her, by making her one with nature. She is indeed lost in her wood, somewhere foreign, in nature and although it isn't her forest far away it is Toru's way of keeping her close - a healing attempt - although it seems to be more of an attempt to heal himself as he is sinking into himself more and more.

After the suicide the song gets a new meaning - a meaning the reader has been getting hints at all along. "This bird has flown"⁵⁴ is now put in perspective and as the song becomes agonizing for Toru, the reader now understands fully the shudder in the beginning of the novel. The realization that she is gone, that she never loved him and that he turned his back on her when she needed him the most, hits him. Naoko's own

⁵² Jay Rubin, *HMMW*. P. 149.

⁵³ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 247.

fear of being left alone to die in some foreign place are finalized, nobody did come to save her.

The conversation Toru and Naoko have in the first chapter of the novel comes to mind again. She describes how she'll always be safe as long as she is with him because nothing evil will ever happen to her then. His inability to be her savior and in the end his decision to choose Midori, instead of Naoko, is what makes him feel guilty. He explains the guilt he feels to Raiko when she comes to Tokyo to visit him:

I turned my back on her in the end. I'm not saying anyone's to blame: it's a problem for me myself. I do think that things would have worked out the same way even if I hadn't turned my back on her. Naoko was choosing death all along. But that's beside the point. I can't forgive myself. [...] If you stop and think about it, she and I were bound together at the border between life and death. It was like that for us from the start.⁵⁵

Toru has been split between the two worlds, between the two girls, between life and death, between being a teenager and an adult. The shudder that comes over him when he hears the song is not just because of the memory of the girl who died but also because of his lost innocence – or the sudden need for him to grow up, make a decision and stick to it. Turning his back on Naoko for Midori means choosing life and the outside world instead of the darkness of the world he gets dragged into through Naoko. Raiko encourages him to hold on to the pain he feels over his experience and learn from it, to move on and not let his relationship with Midori suffer more than it already has “you have to grow up more, be more of an adult”⁵⁶. Naoko's own words become true as well where she claims that even though she is safe with Toru he can't be her babysitter:

It's not possible for one person to watch over another person for ever and ever. I mean, say we got married. You'd have to go to work during the day. [...] Can I be glued to you every minute of our lives? What kind of equality would there be in that? What kind of relationship would that be? Sooner or later you'd get sick of me. You'd wonder what you were doing with your life, why you were spending all your time babysitting this woman. I couldn't stand that. It wouldn't solve any of my problems.⁵⁷

She has already relieved him of any guilt he might feel. She has already made up her mind that she is alone in this. Hearing the song brings back to Toru the guilt and the

⁵⁴ Lennon, McCartney, NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN), *Rubber Soul*, performed by The Beatles, 1965.

⁵⁵ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 287.

⁵⁶ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 288.

⁵⁷ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 8.

memory of her that he has promised to keep forever, "Will you remember that I existed and that I stood next to you like this?"⁵⁸ but he is afraid of his memory failing him: "What if somewhere inside me there is a dark limbo where all the truly important memories are heaped and slowly turning into mud?"⁵⁹ The song helps him to remember but the fear of forgetting something fills him. The song doesn't become banal for him like the sonata does for Proust's character⁶⁰. The first chapter ends with Toru's words "She knew that my memories of her would fade. [...] The thought fills me with an almost unbearable sorrow. Because Naoko never loved me"⁶¹.

The use of NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN) is therefore closely connected with Naoko and Toru's memory of her. It is closely connected with the theme of the novel – Naoko's battle with her ghosts and the inner world – and her choice to end it all. It appears regularly in the novel and although it might seem coincidental it serves as a connection between the two worlds and Hatsumi and Naoko – but it also connects the novel to the outside world and brings all kind of associations and connotations. The song NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN) isn't the only song mentioned in the novel. In the next chapter I'll say a few words about some of the songs and the use of them in the novel.

⁵⁸ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 9.

⁵⁹ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 10.

⁶⁰ Mikael Van Reis, "En smärta i frasens leende", *Ord och Bild*, 1993. P. 35.

⁶¹ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 10.

4. Music

4.1. Naoko's favorites

Murakami mentions many songs in *Norwegian Wood*, most of which were popular songs in the late sixties but he also mentions songs from the early sixties, some classical works and folk songs. The reader's first response might be that the music is mentioned rather randomly throughout the book but the musical pieces are not coincidentally put into the work, each piece is meant to create depth, give a certain atmosphere or relay something to the reader, make connections to the outside world as well as bringing in connotations to the work. Close reading/listening of the songs gives an unexpected depth to both scenes and characters and is hardly coincidental.

When speaking about the pop melody in his book, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*, Rubin speaks of the difficulties that a modern writer has in making his work interesting, and mentions that Murakami has himself talked of the difficulty in making the modern readers interested in the reading, Rubin writes:

The novelist can no longer expect readers to put the time and energy into trying to understand difficult fiction: now the writer has to work hard to draw the reader into the novel. The burden is on the writer to entertain, to tell stories in simple, easy-to-understand language.⁶²

Murakami's use of popular music in his works certainly fills that purpose – to engage the reader more in the novel. The song's familiarity will make the reader more interested as well as giving the feeling that the reader herself has brought something to the novel from the outside world. Murakami writes in an *easy-to-understand language* but the novels are not all that easy-to-understand, analyzing the music mentioned does help and in *Norwegian Wood* the music is everywhere. It's played on Storm Troopers radio in their room, it sounds from the speakers in restaurants and pubs the characters visit, from record players and from talented characters who either sing or play an instrument.

In relation to Naoko many songs are mentioned. Toru speaks of her favorite songs and gives her an album for Christmas, Raiko plays her favorite music and Naoko herself talks about it. The first favorite we hear mentioned in relation to Naoko is DEAR HEART⁶³. The song describes a lonely heart and consists of two short verses and a sad sounding melody. The words describe a person whose loved one is absent and how lonely the town is without this person. The later part of the song brings hope:

⁶² Jay Rubin, *HMMW*. P. 146-147.

⁶³ Ray Evans, Jay Livingston and Henry Mancini, *Dear Heart and other songs about love*, RCA, 1965.

But soon I'll kiss you hello
At our front door,
And dear heart I want you to know
I'll leave your arms nevermore⁶⁴

These lines bring hope and harmony to the songs subject but in connection with Naoko the song gets a whole new meaning. Naoko's love has committed suicide and will not be coming back to her. Kizuki is dead so her alternatives are few and it's already been stated that she was never in love with Toru, her dear heart is Kizuki. Toru buys her the album for Christmas, "For Christmas I bought Naoko a Henry Mancini record with a track of her favorite, 'Dear Heart.'" It's almost certain that the record he talks about is *Dear Heart and other songs about love* which came out in 1965. The songs mentioned as Naoko's favorite bring a sad melody to her character, "Naoko was choosing death all along"⁶⁵ as Toru states in the final chapter. When the song's lyrics are connected to Naoko it sounds like a premonition of her death and perhaps some sort of reunion with Kizuki at the same time.

Another favorite song of Naoko's is MICHELLE⁶⁶. Raiko mentions this in the last chapter where she is describing the last night she and Naoko shared, the night before Naoko's suicide. MICHELLE is a love song which also describes an absent love. The melody is rather perky although perhaps slightly wistful. The singer is in love with MICHELLE but the girl is somewhere away and he is singing to assure her that he will be with there soon "I'll get to you somehow"⁶⁷. The song gives hope of reunion as in DEAR HEART but, again, when one connects it with Naoko it becomes sad and points towards her death. Kizuki is unable to return to her as the songs subject promises to do which leaves Naoko alone but she is still able to react and make her choices.

Naoko's self reflection appears in the songs. Her favorite songs are about absent love and sing of something she can identify with or that tell her something. They bring her closer to herself and her inner world which is dark and hopeless. So even though the songs sound hopeful that a reunion between two lovers will become a fact this same hope brings death to Naoko.

Murakami's use of the songs becomes two sided. At the same time that the songs bring an extra view on Naoko's character they also give the reader a premonition of what is to come. The reader who knows the songs or familiarizes herself with them will bring the text of the songs to a reading of the novel and with that the connections are

⁶⁴ Ray Evans, Jay Livingston and Henry Mancini, DEAR HEART, *Dear heart and other songs about love*, RCA, 1965.

⁶⁵ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 287.

⁶⁶ John Lennon and Paul McCartney, *Rubber Soul*, Performed by the Beatles, Capitol, 1965.

⁶⁷ Lennon, McCartney, MICHELLE, *Rubber Soul*, Performed by the Beatles, Capitol, 1965.

made. This is also an excellent way to make at least certain readers more interested in the novel as the Beatles have had a very large fan group all over the world.

4.2. Midori sings

The music is not often associated directly with Midori but in the scene where Midori cooks for Toru, they spend some time together and she sings. She tells him that she used to sing in a group that sang folk songs and mentions that she once sang SEVEN DAFFODILS⁶⁸ in a high school talent show and then she sings the song as she is arranging the food on their plates. The song is about someone who settles and is happy with her lot. After they eat they go up to the roof of the building and she continues singing as they watch a neighboring building burn. She sings LEMON TREE⁶⁹, PUFF (THE MAGIC DRAGON)⁷⁰, FIVE HUNDRED MILES⁷¹, WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE⁷² all of which *Peter, Paul & Mary* performed during the sixties and then she sings MICHAEL, ROW THE BOAT ASHORE⁷³. The songs are all folk songs and Midori sings them which is rather unique in *Norwegian Wood*. The other characters listen to the music in the original version, Raiko also performs many of the songs herself but she plays them on a guitar and only once it is mentioned that she sings while she plays. Midori on the other hand sings. Her voice is an important element in the novel and reflects her outgoing character.

LEMON TREE is about a young man who gets warned by his parents that love is like the lemon tree "don't put your faith in love"⁷⁴. Later the boy finds out that his parents are right when a girl he is in love with leaves him. The melody is jolly and has often been used as a children's song. The text is not as easy to associate with Midori (as most of the songs mentioned in connection with Naoko are there to put in connection with her) but the song states "she left me for another, it's a common tale but true"⁷⁵ and Midori does leave her boyfriend later in the novel because she is in love with Toru. A tiny premonition one might call it – although I find it more important to underline the happiness of the song in contrast to the rather harsh message the text gives.

FIVE HUNDRED MILES is softer, a sad sounding melody. The text is about someone who is going away from home and the person the song's self is singing to might miss the train. It deals with being away from home – or running away (or getting away) from one's past. Midori has a sad past to deal with, she and her sister having previously

⁶⁸ Written by Lee Hayes and F. Moseley

⁶⁹ Written by Will Holt.

⁷⁰ Written by Leonard Lipton and Peter Yarrow.

⁷¹ Written by Hedy West.

⁷² Written by Pete Seeger.

⁷³ Written by Gilbert, Hays, Hellerman, Salatan. Traditional.

⁷⁴ Will Holt, LEMON TREE.

⁷⁵ Will Holt, LEMON TREE.

taken care of her ill mother are now having to taking care of their ill father. The song shows a sadder side of Midori.

PUFF (THE MAGIC DRAGON) is then again a happier melody. It's a rather sad story about a boy and his magic dragon⁷⁶, the song is a children's story and has a catchy tune. WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE is a simple sounding song about changes and the circle of life, war and death. MICHAEL, ROW THE BOAT ASHORE is then again a religious chant and quite jolly.

The band Peter, Paul & Mary performed some of the songs during the sixties and the reader might therefore be familiar with them through that connection, besides which the songs were all quite popular folk songs. This mixture of sad, nostalgic melodies with childish, jolly songs which describe the joys and sorrows of life is very characteristic for Midori who deals with her past, is sometimes afraid but rides on the train of life. Midori herself describes her feelings towards life and death on the rooftop. She has been describing how her relatives die slowly from horrible diseases and then she continues:

That's the kind of death that frightens me. The shadow of death slowly, slowly eats away at the region of life, and before you know it everything's dark and you can't see, and the people around you think of you as more dead than alive. I hate that. I couldn't stand it.⁷⁷

She is enthusiastic about life and the songs reflect that – they are like herself, a bit weird, sometimes a bit sad but full of life. Her voice is a sign of her outgoing character in contrast to the quiet Naoko who doesn't always notice (or care) if people listen or not. When Midori on the other hand talks she expects to be listened to.

The last song that Midori sings for Toru on the rooftop is a song she has composed herself. It has only a few lines of text and Toru describes the song as "a truly terrible song, both words and music". Midori comments that the theme of the song is that "I have nothing"⁷⁸. A theme that the song shares with SEVEN DAFFODILS and FIVE HUNDRED MILES. It is not entirely true though, that she has nothing, because she has a greater will to live than any of Murakami's other characters. When she asks Toru what he thought of her song, he replies cautiously "[it] was unique and original and very expressive of your personality"⁷⁹. Her singing is expressive and her song bad but reflects well on her extrovert and sometimes rather peculiar behavior.

⁷⁶ It has been debated a lot what the song is actually about but I like to underline the childish cheerfulness of it.

⁷⁷ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 77.

⁷⁸ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 75.

⁷⁹ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 75.

4.3. The Funeral

After attending Naoko's funeral Toru is struggling with his own emotions and shadows and trying to reach out and contact the *real* world again. He goes on a month long trip to find peace but comes back feeling exactly the same. When Raiko decides to come visit him in Tokyo they hold a private little funeral in his apartment so that he won't have to remember the sad funeral and can instead remember theirs. She plays 51 songs or all the songs she can think of and Toru lays out one match for each song to keep track⁸⁰.

Raiko starts off by playing seven songs by the Beatles. She starts off with Naoko's favorites – DEAR HEART and NORWEGIAN WOOD and then moves on to other songs. Of the first seven, HERE COMES THE SUN⁸¹ plays a different role than the others since it's actually mentioned that she "sang and played"⁸² it. The song is a nice hymn to the summer. It's a soft melody with a positive feeling to it and the words "it's been a long, cold, lonely winter"⁸³ sound like a fitting description for what Toru has been through. The songs echo his sorrow and his love for Naoko, some of them are sad and others give hope of a brighter future. After playing seven songs she takes a little pause and comments that "those guys sure knew something about the sadness of life, and gentleness" and Toru adds that she "of course meant John Lennon, Paul McCartney, and George Harrison"⁸⁴. Then Raiko goes on playing her guitar and plays seven more Beatles songs and then she asks Toru to play a song. He chooses to play UP ON THE ROOF⁸⁵ which has been previously mentioned right after he has moved to his apartment in chapter ten⁸⁶ when he borrows a guitar from his landlord and finds out he still remembers most of the chords to the song even though he hasn't played the guitar since high school. The song is slightly connected with Midori whom he has previously spent a nice time with up on a roof. It is about having a place to go to when the world is too much trouble and one wants isolation from others:

I climb way up to the top of the stars
And all my cares just drift right into space
On the roof it's peaceful as can be
And there the world below can't bother me⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 288.

⁸¹ George Harrison, *Abbey Road*, Performed by The Beatles, Capitol, 1969.

⁸² Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 289.

⁸³ George Harrison, HERE COMES THE SUN, *Abbey Road*, Performed by The Beatles, Capitol, 1969.

⁸⁴ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 289.

⁸⁵ Carol King and Gerry Goffin, *Under the Boardwalk* performed by The Drifters, Atlantic, 1964.

⁸⁶ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 244.

In the end of the song there is room enough for two up on the roof. UP ON THE ROOF reflects the pain the world puts on Toru's shoulders and his choices, and in the end it is Midori up on his roof with him and not Naoko.

Raiko goes on playing songs. She plays a guitar transcription of Ravel's PAVANNE FOR A DYING QUEEN and Debussy's CLAIRE DE LUNE after which she states that she mastered these two pieces after Naoko's death and then she says about Naoko "to the end, her taste in music never rose above the horizon of sentimentalism"⁸⁸. A few more songs are mentioned and then even more names of artists from the sixties.

In the end she plays NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN) again after playing ELEANOR RIGBY⁸⁹ and the fifty first song is a Bach fugue.

Murakami's choice of songs for the funeral doesn't seem to be coincidental. The songs can all be put in some context and all the connotations that the songs and the texts bring to the novel seem connected to Toru's and Raiko's sorrow over Naoko's death. Naoko is the bird that has flown but Toru needs to learn how to fly:

Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these broken wings and learn to fly
All your life
You were only waiting for this moment to arise.

Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these sunken eyes and learn to see
All your life
You were only waiting for this moment to be free.

Blackbird fly Blackbird fly
Into the light of the dark black night.⁹⁰

They end the funeral by having sex with each other. Raiko is dressed in Naoko's clothes and as Toru mentions she is built like her, Raiko thus serves as a substitute for Naoko. Jay Rubin points out that they have sex exactly four times:

Because the number four can be pronounced the same way as the word for 'death' (shi), the Japanese avoid sets of four as scrupulously as we avoid the number 13, so capping a night of love-making with that number would seem to have ominous implications.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Carol King and Gerry Goffin, UP ON THE ROOF, *Under the Boardwalk* performed by The Drifters, Atlantic, 1964.

⁸⁸ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 289.

⁸⁹ John Lennon, Paul McCartney, *Revolver*, performed by The Beatles, Capitol, 1966.

⁹⁰ John Lennon, Paul McCartney, BLACKBIRD, *The Beatles [White Album]*, Performed by The Beatles, Capitol, 1968.

⁹¹ Jay Rubin, *HMMW*, P. 158.

Rubin also mentions that having sex with both Naoko and Raiko is a morally questionable act since they are both mentally unstable. Toru asks himself that question too in relations to Naoko but Raiko is old enough and stable enough to make her own decision and Raiko also assures him that he did the right thing⁹² concerning Naoko. Rubin goes on speaking of the ending of the novel, he reads the beginning of the novel together with the ending and sees the outcome negatively:

By sleeping (four times) with Raiko, a sexually functional surrogate for the sexually dysfunctional Naoko, he implicitly chooses death and negativity (Naoko) over life (Midori); Tōru will live with his memories of Naoko rather than give himself over to the vitality of Midori.⁹³

The phone call he makes in the end of the novel to Midori Rubin reads as negative when Toru can't answer the question about where he is. The desperation in the last lines; "Again and again, I called out for Midori from the dead center of this place that was no place"⁹⁴ does support Rubin's interpretation of the novel. And the reader is inclined to see only the negative aspects, to believe that Toru is stuck on that imaginary beach with an imaginary dead Naoko convincing him that "death is nothing much. It's just death. Things are so easy for me here"⁹⁵. The shudder in the beginning of the novel can then be seen in a new perspective, and the rain is symbolic of the negativity of the scene where he realizes that he has chosen death and Naoko over the love he felt for Midori and therefore he stops on the first page to remember the meadow where he walks with Naoko and he can "smell the grass, feel the wind on my face, hear the cries of the birds"⁹⁶ the impressions of the senses remembered from the past.

There are a few things that don't support the interpretation. His fear of having forgotten some important detail or happenings when it comes to Naoko; the fact that it takes him longer and longer to remember her face as he gets older; The funeral he and Raiko held and the song *HERE COMES THE SUN* and its positive feeling, which is underlined with the fact that Raiko sings it which is different from all the other songs she performs in the novel. The phone call in the end also supports this more positive interpretation and that he does indeed, as he says himself, choose Midori at least partially – the fact that he calls out to Midori – Midori who is a *real life* girl listens and hears him unless he's stuck in that *inner world*, the bottom of the well, where people have such a hard time hearing you from. The fact that he calls out supports the conclusion that he is not in that place. He directs his speech to someone and wants to be

⁹² Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 283.

⁹³ Jay Rubin, *HMMW.* P. 159.

⁹⁴ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 293.

⁹⁵ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 273.

⁹⁶ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 3.

heard – which is different from the previous times when either he or Naoko have been stuck in that place – to occupied with their own to direct their speeches to someone in particular, too numb to care who listens or if they hear. Toru, with the help from Midori, will despite of his broken wings “learn to fly”⁹⁷ all his life even though he honors Naoko’s wish about not forgetting her. Toru is the NOWHERE MAN⁹⁸ “sitting in his Nowhere Land” as the Beatles sing:

Nowhere Man can you see me at all?
Doesn't have a point of view,
Knows not where he's going to,
Isn't he a bit like you and me?⁹⁹

Toru is from “an absolutely ordinary working people, not rich, not poor”¹⁰⁰, he is the average guy passing from his teens to his adulthood, or as Rubin puts it:

The name ‘Tōru’ (literally ‘to pass through’) was used in *Norwegian Wood*, perhaps to indicate that the protagonist was making his passage into adulthood. In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, however, Tōru learns to ‘pass through’ the wall separating the ordinary world from the world of the unknown.¹⁰¹

He is in between two worlds, and he stays throughout in between those two worlds, between Midori and Naoko, in between the *inner* and the *outer* world. He doesn’t choose one or the other, he is both the NOWHERE MAN and the average man who is “just like you and me”¹⁰².

⁹⁷ John Lennon, Paul McCartney, BLACKBIRD, *The Beatles [White Album]*, Performed by The Beatles, Capitol, 1968

⁹⁸ John Lennon, Paul McCartney, *Rubber Soul*, Performed by The Beatles, Capitol, 1965.

⁹⁹ John Lennon, Paul McCartney, NOWHERE MAN, *Rubber Soul*, Performed by The Beatles, Capitol, 1965.

¹⁰⁰ Haruki Murakami, *N.W.* P. 61.

¹⁰¹ Jay Rubin, *HMMW*, P. 208.

¹⁰² John Lennon, Paul McCartney, NOWHERE MAN, *Rubber Soul*, Performed by The Beatles, Capitol, 1965.

5. Summary

Music obviously plays a central role in the novel *Norwegian Wood*, mostly when it comes to creating atmosphere and a sense of the sixties but also when it comes to giving the characters depth and giving the reader deeper understanding of them. The reader brings with her knowledge of the songs provided that she is familiar with them, but I'd like to say that it is by no means necessary to be familiar with the music from the sixties to enjoy the novel. It provides means of interpretation and understanding without taking over the novel.

Murakami uses music in his novel carefully and chooses the songs well. The structural similarities to a sonata or at least the A-B-A form are also clear although it is harder to prove that they are deliberate and not coincidental. As I previously mentioned it might be easier to point out the similarities to the musical structures in the Japanese version of the novel as the rhythm of the language and style can be a large part of that.

The song NORWEGIAN WOOD (THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN) becomes a leitmotiv, evolving throughout the novel bringing more and more to the novel as it evolves. It becomes sort of a theme song for the novel or at least for Naoko – a premonition. It comes from the outside world and becomes a part of the closed up world of the novel with all its connotations and memories people might have of it and of the sixties. As the novel progresses the song is mentioned several times, always in relation to Naoko, and the song becomes a premonition for her death as well as a way for the living to remember her by. The reader can hear the soft sounding melody echoing as she reads along, at least if she is familiar with the song.

Examining the music in *Norwegian Wood* could provide material for a much larger work than this essay, the more one studies it the larger the topic becomes it seems. It is also interesting to note that there are several other intertexts in the novel beside the music, Toru is constantly reading all kinds of literature, a few examples are *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann, *Beneath the Wheel* by Herman Hesse and *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger to name a few – each of these works in its own way brings a new aspect, connotation and depth to the novel. There are many more aspects of the novel to study than just the music – *Norwegian Wood* is the kind of work that looks like a simple love story at first but it is soon obvious that it is so much more.