

Flooding of Lust – A Review of “Norwegian Wood”

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Abstract

In the story, the young people may love two different persons at the same time. This can be seen as their feeling of lost in growing. The lust that belongs to puberty had caused the young men and young women to be addicted to sensuality. On one hand, physiological reactions compelled them to love a few people simultaneously; on the other hand, ethnical peaching had forced them to feel guilty for what they have done. Not knowing how to give up the love for someone whom they shouldn't fall for and struggling between two sentiments without a way out, they felt lost, not knowing what they were doing, but still keep moving forward step by step. Perhaps, this is how growing is like. "Norwegian Wood" is famous for its portrait of realistic romance and is great in portraying the vulnerabilities of human nature. The film also successfully portrays these. In complicated romantic love triangles, the characters have experienced much struggles as they fall prey to their own temptation of lust. Vulnerabilities of human nature are shown in disobeying morality. Lust is like an encrusted wound which people scratch due to the itchy feeling. These circumstances are often seen in adolescence, because they lack a thorough understanding of themselves, heart and virtue, and the world. Not knowing the consequences of their actions, they could not control themselves and lack patience. These are what they have to learn to grow.

Keywords: Norwegian Wood, Japanese Movie, Haruki Murakami

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Introduction

The film was a remake from “Norwegian Wood” (“Noruwei no Mori” in Japanese), Haruki Murakami’s novel of the same name. Toru Watanabe, the leading role, was played by Ken’ichi Matsuyama. The film talking about the complicated romantic relationship triangles among a group of young people and their feeling of lost in growing.

1. The Feeling of Lost in Growing

Toru Watanabe and Naoko were secondary school colleagues. Kizuki is a childhood playmate of Naoko and Naoko is also a friend of Toru. Sometimes, when Kizuki and Naoko went on dates, Toru also chatted alongside. Without an obvious cause, Kizuki committed suicide. His death had brought profound sorrow for his friends. Toru decided to leave the city and went on pursuing further studies in Tokyo to leave behind what troubled him. After some days, Toru met Naoko and slept with Naoko on the day of her 20th birthday. It was the first night of Naoko. Toru was curious why Naoko had never slept with Kizuki and the question had aroused the sorrow in Naoko.

After that, Toru lost touch with Naoko and met another girl Midori. Unlike the reserved Naoko, Midori is very outgoing and optimistic. Midori, however, had a boyfriend and Toru was missing Naoko at the same time. This prevented their relationship from developing. When Naoko eventually sent a letter to Toru, she let him know that she was suffering from mental illness and was staying in a sanitarium. Toru went for her and learned from the conversation that Naoko had a struggle in her heart: she felt that she belonged to Kizuki, but she could not give Kizuki her body and reacted emotionally to Toru instead. This has haunted Naoko’s memories, so she became a mental illness patient.

Naoko had emotional struggle, but so did Toru. Toru loved Naoko and Midori at the same time, but unlike Naoko, Toru was not tortured by the mental stress. In her auditory hallucinations, Naoko heard the voice of Kizuki. Failing to stand the torture of hallucination, Naoko committed suicide. Toru was also absorbed in the sorrow of loss of a lover, but unlike Naoko, he decided to start a new life with another lover – Midori.

In the story, the young people may love two different persons at the same time. This can be seen as their feeling of lost in growing. The lust that belongs to puberty had caused the young men and young women to be addicted to sensuality. On one hand, physiological reactions compelled them to love a few people simultaneously; on the other hand, ethnical peaching had forced them to feel guilty for what they have done. Not knowing how to give up the love for someone whom they shouldn’t fall for and struggling between two sentiments without a way out, they felt lost, not knowing what they were doing, but still keep moving forward step by step. Perhaps, this is how growing is like.

Sometimes, the result of growing is tragic, just as in the case of Naoko, she chose to end her own life. Maybe growing takes some costs, as one may not learn of the danger of fire until he is burnt. In Toru’s life, he was always accompanied by loneliness. Despite he had experienced the suicide of his friends once and again, he handled his emotions with a positive attitude. Instead of escaping from life, he continued to seek motivation to move on his life path.

2. Symbols of the Shots

The film is filled with shots with symbols. For instance, when Toru celebrated Naoko's birthday with her, Toru kept eating cakes while Naoko was laying her heart bare. This shot shows how unconventional in life style Toru was. It is not hard to imagine he enjoys going around women. In the same circumstances, when Toru met Midori in a restaurant, he kept eating absently, while Midori was telling her feelings with all her heart. These behavioural traits conveys two kinds of meaning: on one hand, it demonstrated how the character smooths up the secret that he was swifting between two women, thus conveying his hypocrisy; on the other hand, it demonstrated his casual attitude toward romantic relationships, not taking things too hard, nor tolerating ambiguous situations. These behavioural are part of the reasons why Toru could have less difficulty walking out of the shades than Naoko.

Besides being a shy person, Naoko can be recognized by her fast walking pace. There were a few times she walked with Toru, while they had different walking paces – Toru was left far behind her. Naoko had a smaller body, but her walking pace is so fast that Toru could hardly catch up. Her walking pace symbolizes that she had an urge to break away from the bondage of reality. In reality, she lived in the shades of the suicide of her ex-boyfriend Kizuki. Bounded by this shade, Naoko could not build a normal relationship with Toru. At the same time, Toru is a bondage to her as well. Whenever Naoko saw Toru, she would think of Kizuki and be reminded of her disloyalty to Kizuki which led to prickings of conscience. The psychological pressure had caused her to suffer from mental illness. If she never met Toru again, her psychological pressure might be relieved, then she might recover from her mental illness, and thereby avoiding the ending of her own life. Naoko's life was chained by many invisible peaching. She tried to break away but she couldn't. The author's arrangement of her fast walking pace not only indicates her anxiety, but also symbolizes her wish to break away from everything.

The sanitarium where Naoko stayed in was a beautiful place. Naoko's heart has always been occupied by darkness, but the beautiful scenes that she saw symbolizes her ideal world. She has been working to walk out of the shade of Kizuki and she tried to encourage herself with the beautiful scene and to let herself believe she could walk out. Unfortunately, it didn't work at the end. In this plot, a wide snow scene was continuously displayed on the camera. The coldness of the snow reflects how Naoko is in need of love and warmth. She was so fragile that she seemed to break at a touch.

Toru always feels lonely, so he kept involving himself with women. What displays his loneliness further was his reliance on his friends to grow since young, just like Kizuki in secondary time and Nagasawa in university time. He relied on Kizuki to a degree that he intruded Kizuki's dates with Naoko without finding any problem. His desire for his friends may even be greater than his friends' desire for their love. When Naoko said she didn't know why she could not sleep with Kizuki, we may guess that Naoko might have loved Toru long ago, then would Kizuki's suicide be related to Toru? After Toru entered university, we can see a change in his mindset. He changed from pure romantic love view to a casual sentimental, which is due to his new idol Nagasawa. Nagasawa is a sentimental, an unrestrained loafer who never stay loyal for any one girl. Toru envied how Nagasawa had slept with different girls. Nagasawa taught Toru how to chat with girls in pubs and brought along Toru even when he went on date with Hatsumi. Toru came along as he did with Kizuki and Naoko back in secondary school. Toru's attachment to his friends shows his sense of loneliness. He tried to escape from loneliness by attaching to people. This is how he grows.

3. Vulnerabilities of Human Nature

“Norwegian Wood” is famous for its portrait of realistic romance and is great in portraying the vulnerabilities of human nature. The film also successfully portrays these. In complicated romantic love triangles, the characters have experienced much struggles as they fall prey to their own temptation of lust.

On the night of Naoko’s birthday, Toru could not resist to sleep with his deceased friend’s girlfriend. After that, he tried to make up for hurting Naoko and wrote letters to communicate with her.

Naoko admitted that seeing Toru made her excited and the excitement made her involved and enjoyed the sex with Toru. However, she had to remember the fact that she loved Kizuki. The presence of Toru might be the reason why she could not have sex with Kizuki. Her vulnerability to lust and being controlled by lust has sent her to the road of no return.

Naoko is obsessed with Toru, simply because Toru made her feel excited or because Toru made her remember Kizuki as well? Naoko could be fascinated with the past memories with Kizuki, and hanging around with Toru would make her feel like being with Kizuki, as the three of them used to go on dates together in secondary school time as a habit. Unfortunately, this kind of romantic relationship looks immoral and any overstepping of the boundaries of morality seem formidable.

Midori had a boyfriend at that time. Midori was so deprived of parental love since young that she had a strong desire to feel loved in romantic relationships. With her good-looking appearance, Midori had much choices in partners, so she vacillated. Attracted by Toru, Midori stepped out of the line and swam with Toru, touching and even kissing each other and yelling that she wanted to be gently undressed by Toru. She is so weak before lust that her morality collapsed, so she acted against social standard.

Toru thought he loved Naoko, so he turned down the chance to develop a romantic relationship with Midori. However, after turning down Midori’s invitation, Toru kept trying to connect with Midori to make an apology. While seeking to make his apology to Midori, Toru realized he loved Midori from the bottom of his heart. The way he loved two girls at the same time was impermissible by morality, yet he failed to escape from his lust.

Vulnerabilities of human nature are shown in disobeying morality. Lust is like an encrusted wound which people scratch due to the itchy feeling. These circumstances are often seen in adolescence, not only because the outer beauty of those in their adolescence can attract many dates, but also because they lack a thorough understanding of themselves, heart and virtue, and the world. Not knowing the consequences of their actions, they could not control themselves and lack patience. These are what they have to learn to grow.

Conclusion

The film “Norwegian Wood” received mixed comments. Some believe that its artistic effect could hardly compare with the novel in a way that it disrupted the structure of the novel and failed to create the atmosphere of the novel, and thus is an unsuccessful film. However, I reckon we should appreciate how its narration follows the original work and the fact that it won the nomination to Golden Award of Venice International Film Festival. Having the

remarks and elaborations from the novel, the film is worth recommending.

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