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## Norwegian Wood (15)

TUES 8 AUG, 19:15 - FILM CLUB

Dir Tran Anh Hung /2010 JAPAN /133mins/ Japanese with subtitles / Ken'ichi Matsuyama, Rinko Kikuchi, Kiko Mizuhara

“Forbidden love is the sexiest kind, and love of death the most forbidden kind, in this emoish erotic tragedy from Franco-Vietnamese film-maker Tran Anh Hung, based on the bestselling 1987 novel by Haruki Murakami.

It is set in Tokyo in the late 1960s – a world of student dorms, going for walks, getting letters from your girlfriend, sitting in your student room looking at LP sleeves while the record is playing; it's a world of sexual and romantic excitement that is a cousin to widespread political unrest. Watanabe (Kenichi Matsuyama) is a student who begins a relationship with Naoko (Rinko Kikuchi), a beautiful, delicate young woman whom he knew a year before, in high school. But while Watanabe works towards his degree, Naoko is in a remote psychological facility, suffering from a breakdown, able to receive Watanabe only infrequently as a visitor.

What binds them together – in a dark ecstasy of despair – is an inexpressibly painful event in their past, a terrible, mutual loss. It is holding them back in life, and threatens to smother and paralyse them. But Watanabe and Naoko find themselves trying to forge a conjugal, sacramental bond with this past and, perhaps, with death itself. Attempting to fall in love with each other, as damaged souls, is a way of giving a narrative purpose and a moral grandeur to their lives, which another, more uncomplicated kind of dating could not possibly achieve. Their relationship almost attains the status of a suicide pact in which both partners are left alive.

This movie is gorgeously photographed by Ping Bin Lee, and has a plangent, keening orchestral score by Jonny Greenwood. It rewards attention with a very sensual experience, although there might be some who, understandably, find it indulgent. Having watched it now a second time since its premiere at last year's Venice film festival, I find the film that came into my mind – apart of course from *Twilight* – was Wong Kar-Wai's romantic classic *In the Mood for Love* (which Ping Bin Lee also shot), about two people drawn together by their respective partners' infidelities. That has the same tragedy, irony and romance which combine to create a doomy eroticism. *Norwegian Wood* ignites its own fierce, moth-attracting flame.”

**Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian 10/03/11** Presented with the support of the BFI Audience Development fund and The Continental venue



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