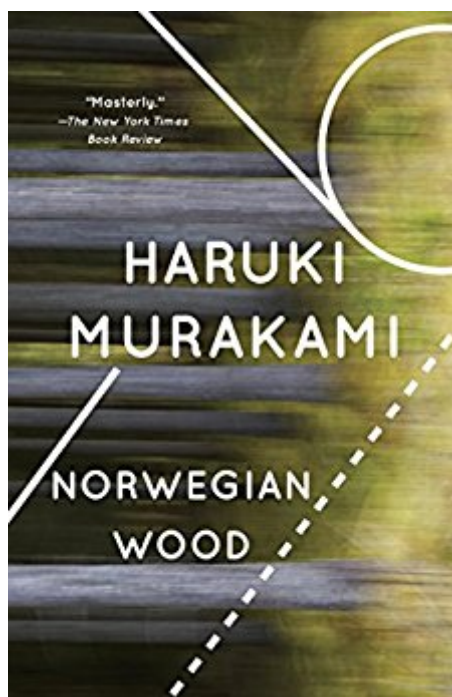


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# Norwegian Wood (Vintage International)



## Synopsis

First American Publication This stunning and elegiac novel by the author of the internationally acclaimed *Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* has sold over 4 million copies in Japan and is now available to American audiences for the first time. It is sure to be a literary event. Toru, a quiet and preternaturally serious young college student in Tokyo, is devoted to Naoko, a beautiful and introspective young woman, but their mutual passion is marked by the tragic death of their best friend years before. Toru begins to adapt to campus life and the loneliness and isolation he faces there, but Naoko finds the pressures and responsibilities of life unbearable. As she retreats further into her own world, Toru finds himself reaching out to others and drawn to a fiercely independent and sexually liberated young woman. A poignant story of one college student's romantic coming-of-age, *Norwegian Wood* takes us to that distant place of a young man's first, hopeless, and heroic love.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is the first book by Haruki Murakami I've read, and on the strength of this, I would certainly attempt his other novels. "Norwegian Wood" is a quick read, drawing the reader in closer and

deeper as the characters, their lives, and their deaths intertwine. Having just finished the book, I'm at a bit of a loss for what to say about it. It is about love, death, youth, friendship, and ultimately, how fragile and delicate humans are, and how much we seek protection from this fragility in the arms of others or in our own private prisons. Toru Watanabe, the protagonist, locks himself in a prison of solitude, which he eventually escapes, with difficulty, only through the death of a close friend/lover and the realization that he is basically alone in the world. This realization forces him to come to terms with his feelings for a woman who challenges his cold side while simultaneously acknowledging his softer side via her own need for companionship, understanding, and love. There are many deaths in this book, although they take place somewhat at the outskirts of the other action. The deaths act as catalysts for characters to learn, grow, change, or in some cases, retreat, wither, and become isolated. It is this constant interplay between retreat and advancement, withering and growth, isolation and togetherness, which seems to be a theme of this novel, and a central struggle each and every one of its characters must face. In that respect, Murakami has hit on a central struggle for all humans: intimacy vs. independence. It's Murakami's amazingly poetic writing, his evocative, sensual observations, and the way he renders characters so complex with the simplest of language and details that makes this novel so memorable.

I had read and enjoyed Haruki Murakami's tetralogy (Hear the Wind Sing, Pinball, A Wild Sheep Chase, and Dance Dance Dance), and I loved his Wind-Up Bird Chronicle novel, but I was ready for something new. In reviews and on websites, I had read over and over about Norwegian Wood, the "straightforward" novel that was published years ago in Japan, which still was not for sale in the states, since there was not an authorized translation available. This novel sold a HUGE number of copies in Japan. I was wondering: I love those other novels by Murakami. Are they so demanding? Complicated? If Norwegian Wood is so much simpler than the other novels, will I even like Norwegian Wood? The plot: It's the late 1960's. College student Toru falls in love with the girlfriend of his (dead) best friend. She eventually becomes ill (though not physically ill) and has to leave to live under special circumstances, far away from him. While she's gone, he meets Midori, a college student who obviously is interested in him. But he's holding out for his girlfriend Naoko. Never knowing if she will recover from her ailment and be able to rejoin him in society, he goes to classes, sells phonograph records at night, and spends some time with Midori. He visits Naoko a few times, gets to know her wacky roommate/friend/mentor Reiki, and eventually he has to decide between a life with Naoko (without Naoko?) or with Midori. Throw in a bizarre Geography-major roommate nicknamed "Storm Trooper," a scene where Midori (badly) sings folk songs to our Toru while they

watch a neighborhood fire from the balcony above her parents' bookshop, and assorted other hilarious/bizarre characters and passages, and you've got vintage Haruki Murakami.

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