UNREALITY IN SNOW COUNTRY

(page 155 of Snow Country): “The real and the fantasied are so closely woven that we realize with a start that Komako’s appearance is only in Shimamura’s consciousness. ‘The time had come to leave’ is remarkably convincing as the reader is awakened from the reverie he has been allowed to share. In the syntactically looser Japanese version, the tenor and vehicle are even more subtly fused with the effect of maximally blending the human movement into the occasions of Nature.”
--Miyoshi, Accomplices of Silence, 112

“Kawabata refuses to take a trip into a never-never land. . . . In Kawabata’s locations, the basic laws of nature remain in operation, but to set the stage he reduces the glare and rawness of the real world by carefully selecting either a remote place like this snow district or a ‘detached’ space within reality like the tea-room” [in Thousand Cranes].
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 251-252

“One can see the importance of flow in Kawabata’s mirror in order to create beauty. At the same time the mirror in the second instance takes on a new attribute: it is semitransparent, and so allows things behind itself to be visible enough so as to blend with what it is reflecting. For Kawabata’s purpose this is this is the best kind of mirror, because it not only reflects while it allows things to be seen through itself, it also dilutes reality.”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 253

“In Kawabata a mirror also serves as a distance regulator with which he can blur the spatial dimensions of the real world and then proceed to combine two objects, often some elements from man and nature, in a manner impossible in physical space.”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 253

“As the mirror is a device for looking at a purer reality that one cannot touch, so Komako is a bridge to the pure woman Shimamura is only allowed a glimpse of.”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 255

“We have already observed how the night train has liquefied the scenery outside and turned it into a continuously flowing landscape. . . .”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 255

“As the Milky Way repeats its see-saw motion of coming down to engulf Shimamura and then scooping him up into itself, something significant happens. The last sentence of the novel reads, ‘and the Milky Way flowed down inside him with a roar.’ What is striking in the sentence is that in inversion of distance, perspective, and size has taken place: now Shimamura is larger than the Milky Way. He has become the Milky Way. Whereas the horizontal movement begins with a very slow tempo and on a large scale, the vertical movement begins with a sure, unhurried tempo and on a somewhat small scale, then terminates with a greatly accelerated speed but with a scope that encompasses heaven and earth. The effect of these two movements on the reader is to draw him into an extended pattern of a slow and easy tempo at first, and then, when their scales suddenly change and their tempos quicken, the reader’s grip on temporal and spatial perspectives is broken. In other words, these movements are designed to break down our normal, firmly structure image of reality. They condition our reality reflexes so that we may accept a world where Shimamura is free to vacillate between heaven and earth and where he can absorb the Milky Way, which itself has already absorbed Komako and Yoko.”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 262

“Although the mirror and the movement patterns liquefy reality enough to permit the fusion of distinct elements, the fire in the final scene probably plays the most vital part in this process. The most obvious effect of the fire is to liquefy the snow. . . . The world ‘melting in the quotation is yurumu, or ‘loosen,’ in the original. It is interesting to note that the author twice during this scene uses the same word in reference to Komako’s hairdo.”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 262
“The fire brings about vivid sensations”: olfactory, auditory. “the fire inspires inanimate objects with life, for Shimamura sees that ‘the low, dark houses along the street seemed to be breathing as they floated up in the light of the fire and faded again.’”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 262-263

“The fire scene likewise loosens the time framework by thrusting the future and the past into the present.”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 263

“Besides reversing time sequences, the fire also has the effect of suspending life and death. . . . Just as earlier it did not occur to Shimamura that it was impolite to stare at the girl reflected in the train window, because he was charmed by the unreal, other-worldly power of the window-mirror, which so shaped everyday reality that he could enjoy it as a purely aesthetic experience, so now the fire produces the same effect on Shimamura: it has stopped the passage of time, and with it the conventional polarity between life and death.”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 263-264

“Thus, by confusing our sense of space and time, such devices of Kawabata as the mirror, the oscillating movements, and the fire liquefy our survival-oriented world. Once inside this fluid state a pure aesthetic experience becomes possible.”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 264

“Yet it is not that her face or figure is beautiful. She emanates beauty through her eyes and voice, and that is all. . . . Apart from those two attributes her physical description is almost totally lacking, as if to suggest that for Shimamura her body does not exist. Her beauty is unreal, like an image reflected on the window pane. . . . Shimamura’s fingers are unable to touch Yoko’s body. She is an untouchable existence. . . .”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 74

“[S]he is a virgin. . . . If there is a life of pure beauty untainted by the world’s foulness, a virgin would come closest to it. From a man’s point of view, she is an embodiment of unreal beauty that exists in reality.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 74

“She takes Shimamura to her lodging and show him her room (53). This last act of hers is clearly suggestive of her metamorphosis: she has not come out of the unrealistic morning mirror and placed herself in everyday reality, with a dresser, a chest, a sewing box and all.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 81

“Life in the real world was a mixture of things true and untrue, pure and impure, sincere and insincere. A novelist leading a spiritually rich life would be able to pick out only those things in life that were true, pure, and sincere, and then rearrange them to produce an order of reality more beautiful than the everyday kind.”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 175

“The beauty is ‘pure’ in the sense that it is generated from an energy wastefully consumed, an energy used to reach out for an ideal far beyond its reach. It is like the beauty of a maiden, who is capable of loving a person with no exception of having her love consummated. This kind of beauty necessarily has a dreamlike quality, since it is based on an aspiration for the unattainable.”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 199

“Kawabata seems to have been especially careful in preparing a cosmos uniquely his own. In the opening sentence of Snow Country, for instance, Kawabata takes the reader into a special world.”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 213