**Pure beauty**

“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. A man living a spiritually deprived existence would not be capable of doing so.”

--Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 175

- Bashō

“The people in Kawabata’s stories, then, are purified by their longing for the infinite, which gives them a particular kind of beauty. For them, life is transfigured; it has both the simplicity and the profundity of a fairy tale.”

--Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 185

The types of person best qualified to discover pure beauty:

- little children
- young women
- dying men

--Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 186ff

Three components of effective literary style

- pure beauty
- sincerity
- sadness

--Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 199ff

**Beauty as fragile**

“Pure beauty, as conceived by Kawabata, is also perishable, fragile beauty.”

--Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 184

“Kawabata’s favorite type of beauty was delicate, fragile, and perishable; when it perished, sadness ensued. . . . In short, anything truly beautiful is sad and anything truly sad is beautiful. . . .”

--Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 201

“We can see now why Kawabata was so impressed by the sparkling glasses at the Kahala Hilton Hotel. Their beauty was evanescent; it would disappear the moment the sun rose higher or the observer moved a little. The glasses themselves were transparent (an adjective, incidentally, used by Kawabata to describe the clean beauty of a young woman) and breakable. Furthermore, they were described by Kawabata as sparkling like stars, which are located at an unattainable distance.”

--Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 184

**Beauty as impermanent**

“We can see now why Kawabata was so impressed by the sparkling glasses at the Kahala Hilton Hotel. Their beauty was evanescent; it would disappear the moment the sun rose higher or the observer moved a little. The glasses themselves were transparent (an adjective, incidentally, used by Kawabata to describe the clean beauty of a young woman) and breakable. Furthermore, they were described by Kawabata as sparkling like stars, which are located at an unattainable distance.”

--Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 184
**Beauty of wasted effort, dedication, the unattainable (1)**

“Snow Country enlarges an evocation of the poetry of place to a general comment on the human condition, specifically on the sadness and on the beauty of human dedication. Kawabata’s particular method of manifesting these larger themes comes through his constant reference to the beauty that lies in wasted effort, a beauty that ultimately justifies that effort. The references are explicit and cumulative.”

--Rimer, *Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions*. 176

“a virgin’s love is always unrewarded. No matter how much love she may give out, she does not and cannot expect it to be returned. . . . In all cases a virgin’s love goes unrequited; to borrow Shimamura’s phrase, it is a ‘complete waste of effort.’ But the beauty of love increases in proportion to the degree love is wasted.”

--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 75

“Pure life” as conceived by Kawabata, then, is dynamic. It is energy generated by striving after an ideal. To use his favorite word, it is a ‘longing.’ Deploring the fact that critics frequently called him a decadent writer or a nihilist, he once explained: ‘I have never written a story that has decadence or nihilism for its main theme. What seems so is in truth a kind of longing for vitality.’ A typical Kawabata hero longs for something so distant that it seems unattainable. Consequently, uninitiated readers took it for labor in vain or (to use another of Kawabata’s favorite terms) ‘a waste of effort,’ and saw him as a man who had lost all faith in life. But life burns more purely, more beautifully, when it longs for a distant ideal. The ideal may not be attainable, but the effort to attain it is beautiful.”

--Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 177

“Because of Yukio’s illness, there is an unbridgeable distance between him and Yoko. The harder she tries to bridge the distance through her love, the more intense her life becomes. She is a woman living a ‘pure life.’ That is why Kawabata makes her eyes shine so beautifully.”

--Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 178

“We can see now why Kawabata was so impressed by the sparkling glasses at the Kahala Hilton Hotel. Their beauty was evanescent; it would disappear the moment the sun rose higher or the observer moved a little. The glasses themselves were transparent (an adjective, incidentally, used by Kawabata to describe the clean beauty of a young woman) and breakable. Furthermore, they were described by Kawabata as sparkling like stars, which are located at an unattainable distance.”

--Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 184

“The people in Kawabata’s stories, then, are purified by their longing for the infinite, which gives them a particular kind of beauty. For them, life is transfigured; it has both the simplicity and the profundity of a fairy tale.”

--Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 185

“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

**Longing & beauty of unattainable (2)**

“The people in Kawabata’s stories, then, are purified by their longing for the infinite, which gives them a particular kind of beauty. For them, life is transfigured; it has both the simplicity and the profundity of a fairy tale.”

--Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 185

**Beauty and sadness**

Sadness & beauty:
impermanent & fragile
unattainable
yearning

Yoko “has to be always eager to give out her love, because the object of her love is always distant and is moving even farther away from her. Her eyes are piercingly beautiful because of her eagerness to give her love; her voice is so beautiful that ‘it struck one as sad’, because she expects nothing in return for her love. Yoko’s beauty if that of love given in vain. Because of this, her beauty always has a tinge of futility and sadness.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 76

Three components of effective literary style

pure beauty
sincerity
sadness
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 199ff

“Gazing at a beautiful work of art, people sense the pure, selfless love expended by the artist, the beauty mixed with sincerity and sadness.”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 215

Ethereal beauty

(mirror scene, page 10) “Again, Kawabata selects two things, one from man and one from nature, and lets them collide in a most extraordinary fashion. What emerges from this contact is a weirdly beautiful scene. Clear emphasis is placed upon the flow of scenery outside.”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 253

“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 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

“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

Beauty and sincerity

“Sincerity is an aesthetically beautiful but also moral manifestation of pure life-energy. A person living a pure life can be said to be living a sincere life from a more moralistic point of view, for he is trying to live his life to the full. He has set a very high ideal for himself and is doing his best to attain it, in disregard of his more mundane interests. . . .”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 200

“A person living a ‘beautiful’ and ‘sincere’ life – that is, a person living his or her life to the full – is most likely to feel ‘pathos,’ if only the pathos of an unfulfilled (because unfillable) goal. The unattainability of his goals enables him to live with great intensity, but at the same time makes him prone to frustrations and disasters on a superhuman scale.”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 201

Three components of effective literary style

pure beauty
sincerity
sadness
--Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 199ff

“Gazing at a beautiful work of art, people sense the pure, selfless love expended by the artist, the beauty mixed with sincerity and sadness.”

**Moments of supreme beauty**

“Like Shimamura, all men are passengers on a train, a train called Time, and are prone to be bored as they watch the monotonous landscape endlessly extending into the distance. They often lose sight of their destination, of a meaningful purpose in life. On rare occasions, however, external nature reveals something that glows, the glow pervading a person whose soul is pure and transparent. Supreme beauty emerges in a tangible form at that moment. As the glow is gone the next moment, it requires an extraordinarily sensitive person to glimpse that beauty. Shimamura, who notices the beauty of Yoko’s face mirrored in the window, is precisely such a person. Whenever there is a moment of supreme beauty, he catches sight of it and reports to the reader.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 74

“As a novel *Snow Country* has neither a well-knit plot nor skillful characterizations. Yet, thanks to Shimamura’s presence, each of the episodes mirrors a moment of rare beauty in life, and that fact in turn provides a unifying principle for the entire novel. *Snow Country* is itself a large mirror reflecting a series of fleeting landscapes, with a beautiful light glowing in it from time to time.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 74

**Mirror & beauty**

(mirror scene, page 10) “Again, Kawabata selects two things, one from man and one from nature, and lets them collide in a most extraordinary fashion. What emerges from this contact is a weirdly beautiful scene. Clear emphasis is placed upon the flow of scenery outside.”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 253

“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 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

“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

**Fire scene and beauty**

“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

**Komako and beauty**

“The change makes Komako beautiful in a new way. The beauty she emanates is no longer a virgin’s, but something akin to a bride’s beauty during the honeymoon. Or, more exactly, she is less than a bride; she is a young *geisha in love with a client*, and so her position is more precarious. She wants to be a bride, but knows she should not; the dilemma creates an ambivalence within her. . . . Komako, having an insoluble dilemma, is living her life to the full at this time; she is *alive in all her vital intensity*’ (86), as Shimamura observes. That is essentially the nature of Komako’s beauty during his second visit to the
“He thinks he has found beauty in the white bush-clovers flowering on the side of a distant hill, but they turn out to be *kaya* grass when he sees them close by. In contrast to the flowers of the bush-clover, which are small, delicate and silver-white, *kaya* grass is so strong that it can be used to thatch a roof (92).” . . . [Komako] “has changed from delicate bush-clover to strong *kaya* grass.”

--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 82

“a novel embodying a sustained search for the purest, noblest, **supremely beautiful way of life**, a way of life that **forever remains untouched by the foulness of mankind**. The search is difficult. . . . The only hope lies with a virgin, a person who instinctively defies foulness, a person who is destroyed at the touch of foulness. **But could there be an eternal virgin? . . . It is by becoming a nun. . . . She will lead a life of penance, with full knowledge of both the nobility and depravity of humanity. She will merge with wild, primeval nature, humbly dedicating herself to it.**”

--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 87-88

**Yoko and beauty**

“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

“a virgin’s love is always unrewarded. No matter how much love she may give out, she does not and cannot expect it to be returned. . . . In all cases a virgin’s love goes unrequited; to borrow Shimamura’s phrase, it is a ‘complete waste of effort.’ But the **beauty of love increases in proportion to the degree love is wasted.**”

--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 75

Yoko “has to be always eager to give out her love, because the **object of her love is always distant** and is moving even farther away from her. Her eyes are piercingly beautiful because of her eagerness to give her love; **her voice is so beautiful that ‘it struck one as sad’, because she expects nothing in return for her love.** Yoko’s beauty if that of love given in vain. Because of this, her **beauty always has a tinge of futility and sadness.**”

--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 76

**Snow country and beauty**

“Shimamura’s love of the snow country and wild mountains is also related to his virginity. Tokyo is a city of ugly, foul reality where Yukio fell ill and Komako lost her physical virginity. In contrast, the **snow country is beautiful, clean, unpolluted. . . . The snow country and its mountains help him find his virginity when he loses sight of it.**”

--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 78

**Creating a world of beauty**

“The poet did not describe the nature of the beauty he saw; instead, **he presented, or suggested, the particulars of the time and place that created the beauty.** The reader who had been to the Echigo Mountains . . . could see the beauty in his mind’s eye. To this type of reader, the poet needed only to give the proper setting and proper emotional stimulants; the reader took over from there, injecting personal meaning into the commonest words.”

--Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 212

> like haiku

lips as leech: “Here, as elsewhere, he demonstrates his remarkable **capacity to isolate specific elements**
of beauty – in this instance, texture.”
--Araki, “Kawabata and His Snow Country.” 337