Ueda, Makoto.  

“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

“In general, then, it can be said that, for Kawabata, the best literary material was a life that was vital, positive, and pure.”  
---Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 176

“Kawabata, however, differed from Shiga in one significant way: he did not idealize wild animals. For Shiga, the life of a sturdy animal in its natural setting was the ultimate model for human life. For Kawabata this was not so; animals in the wild might be living a more genuine life than men, but they were not conscious of it nor did they strive to perfect themselves.”  
---Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 176

“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

“Although [Komako’s] way of life differs greatly from Yoko’s, she is a variation of Yoko in the sense that her love is always directed toward some object that is unattainable.”  
---Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 179

“In all these instances, Kawabata used the character of a young woman to embody his concept of ideal love, a longing pure and without stain, impossible to consummate.”  
---Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 181

“Kawabata liked to place a young woman in the center of his novel not only because she symbolized his ideal, but because she was capable of living intensely in her selfless efforts to fulfill that ideal.”  
---Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 182

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

“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.”

“He was like Shimamura in Snow Country: he selected only those events and personal characteristics capable of exemplifying the kind of ethereal beauty that never ceased to fascinate him.”

The types of person best qualified to discover pure beauty:
1. little children
2. young women
3. dying men

“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.”

Three components of effective literary style
1. pure beauty
2. sincerity
3. sadness

“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. . . .”

“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.”

“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. . . .”
3 explanations for Kawabata’s lack of strong plot
1. associational structure
2. desire to be natural
3. children’s compositions
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 206ff

“Kawabata preferred to use an associational technique that was distinctly Japanese.”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 208

“The difference between the Western stream of consciousness and Japanese associational structure is suggested in the passage cited above. As Kawabata saw it, the former reflected the loss of a coherent world-view in the modern age, whereas the latter did not.”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 208

“Here, then, is a second possible explanation for the apparent lack of structure in a Kawabata novel: following the Japanese literary tradition, he wanted to be natural, to be free of artifice, in devising a plot. His novels were relatively formless, as life is formless. Some of them have no real ending, since life flows on forever.”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 208

“Finally, the lack of plot in a Kawabata novel is probably connected with his interest in children’s composition. . . . A child’s associations are carefree, unpredictable, and unrestrained.”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 209

Concept of literary language: “he both admired and tried to use a style that was simple in vocabulary and syntax but complex in meaning and connotation. . . . a more sensitive reader, while understanding every word of it, would sense something indescribable beneath the lucid surface.”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 209

“Lying behind Kawabata’s insistence on simple language was his belief that a verbal description, no matter how detailed it might be, would never be able to depict natural beauty at its most sublime. Words were always imperfect for a writer seeking to express the inexpressible.”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 210

“Description would encroach on the reader’s imagination, and Kawabata did not like that. Since he saw beauty as subjective, he would rather invite the reader to fantasize. . . .”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 211

“How, then, could a commonplace word be made imaginatively stimulating and expansive? By the context, Kawabata would answer.”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 212

“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

“While every novelist endeavors to create a proper setting for his novel, Kawabata seems to have been
especially careful in preparing a cosmos uniquely his own. . . . In these worlds of Kawabata’s, some of the commonest words come to have special meanings, though they may vary somewhat from one reader to another. There emerges a tension between the generality of the word and the specifics of the context, and that tension becomes a source of stimulation for the reader’s fancy.”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 213

“Symbolism becomes important in this type of writing, for, when properly used, it can present a specific image without limiting its emotional connotations. . . . Yet since the pattern [of Thousand Cranes] is symbolic not descriptive, of her beauty, each reader has the freedom to visualize her in the way he sees fit.”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 213

Kawabata “was a symbolist who used a simple vocabulary, easy diction, and common syntax. His prose style was deceptively lucid. Combining linguistic simplicity with literary ambiguity, Kawabata explored an area of modern Japanese prose that no other writer has come near.”
--Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, 214

“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

Ueda, Makoto
“The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun: Kawabata’s Snow Country.”

“Obviously, the evening landscape symbolizes the external world which surrounds the daily life of an average person. As Shimamura sees it, that life is ‘monotonous’ and ‘undistinguished mile after miles.’”
--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

Yoko
“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

“Sexual passion is completely lacking in the relationship between [Yoko and Yukio]. Yoko is a virgin, and as such her love is free of lust.”
“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

Window scene. “The woman in that evening mirror is of course Yoko, and so the implication is that Komako and Yoko have merged into one in Shimamura’s mind.”

---Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 77

“her virginity is completely out of danger. . . . Having no flesh means having no physiological recourse to live a vigorous life; accordingly, as long Yoko remains a virgin and refuses to be touched, she is doomed. Her future holds only three alternatives: madness, death, or rape.”

---Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 83

“Snow Country leaves Yoko’s destiny ambiguous. She may die, or she may live on as an insane person. The latter is more likely in view of what Komako says at the end of the novel (175). In any case, Yoko the pure virgin is dead. She has been as transparent as a silkworm, but now that the cocoon warehouse is burnt, she is burnt, too. Yoko is a silkworm that does not want to turn into an ugly moth. She does not want to become the second Komako. Here only choice, then, is death, physical or mental.”

---Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 85

Fire scene: “Yoko is an embodiment of virginity which Komako has lost – or, which she has sacrificed for Yukio’s sake and for Shimamura’s sake. Yoko, as such, is a painful reminder for Komako of what she has lost. Komako is a nun who holds, and will keep holding, that painful reminder in her arms.”

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

**Komako**

“Komako [is portrayed] as a virgin mother.”

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

“Komako’s virgin love has one more outlet: she has a romantic longing for actors, artists, and men of letters who live beyond the mountains.”

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

Window scene. “The woman in that evening mirror is of course Yoko, and so the implication is that Komako and Yoko have merged into one in Shimamura’s mind.”

---Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 77

“Komako has been marvelously successful in retaining her virgin beauty before she meets Shimamura. The success is due to her innate love of cleanliness and her will power to keep herself clean.”

---Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 79
“That love of cleanliness and will power of Komako’s markedly weaken on the night of 22 May. . . . Still, those qualities within her show resistance: they make her arms protect her breasts, they induce her to bite savagely at her arm . . . when she finds herself unable to refuse Shimamura’s advances. Yet in the end she surrenders to her womanhood. . . . From that night on, she is no longer a virgin to Shimamura, and the nature of her beauty begins to change as well.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 79-80

“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 at 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 snow country.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 80

“She seems to become more completely a bride with the passage of time, losing her will power to resist the temptation. . . . [G]radually she loses a maiden’s shyness.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,”80-81

“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

“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

Komako “has moved her residence to a more earthy place, too. Whereas previously she lived in a room that seemed unrealistically hanging in the void, she now lives on the second floor of a confectionary. . . . [Komako] cannot follow her inner urge to live cleanly, because she lives amid kind people who are unclean.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 82

“The longer Shimamura stays in the hot-spring town, the more wifely Komako becomes.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 82

“Komako’s downward slide reaches its lowest point in the celebrated scene of Snow Country where she is angered by Shimamura’s words, ‘You’re a good woman.’ He has said the words in reference to the warmth of her personality, but she misunderstands them and thinks they refer to her female physique. ‘You’re a good woman’ is, indeed, the kind of remark made to a prostitute by her client in the morning after. . . .[Komako] has made herself a prostitute, and Shimamura her customer. . . . Komako has changed from virgin to a bride, from a bride to a wife, and from a wife to a prostitute. Her fall is complete.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 83

[Fire scene] “If she were a wife or a prostitute, she would just watch Yoko lying on the ground, as Shimamura and other villagers do. What she actually does is to ‘break away’ from Shimamura, run toward the fire, and hold the unconscious girl at her breast. Komako has entered the final stage of her
metamorphosis.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 85

“The last phase of Komako’s transformation begins long before the fire. It starts, in fact, immediately after that dramatic incident in which she realizes she has become a prostitute. . . . After a while she comes back, says that she has reconsidered, and asks if he wants to take a bath with her. When he accepts the invitation she leads him to the bathing room, where she becomes very gay and winsome. Next morning Shimamura and Komako awake to a voice reciting a Noh play (149). Outside, the first snow of the winter has fallen. The distant mountains, which had been darkening day by day, have now come ‘brightly back to life with the snow’ (150). The cedar trees ‘point sharply toward heaven’ from the white ground. As these facts suggest the nature of Komako’s final metamorphosis.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 85

“She is here turning into a different woman, because she has become aware of her sinfulness and begins to repent.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 85

“It was natural that the recitation of a Noh play was heard the following morning, because Noh is basically a religious drama which cleanses man from his sins. Komako became the protagonist of a Noh play, so to speak. The snow that falls is a symbol of purification; and the tall cedars, that of aspiration for an ascent to heaven. Some time later Shimamura hears the sound of wind in the pine trees as he listens to a boiling tea-kettle, and he is shocked when he sees Komako’s feet far beyond that sound. The incident is suggestive of a Noh play, The Sound of Wind in the Pine Trees. Komako is like a heroine of that play who has fallen low because of love and who is fervently wishing to be saved.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 85-86

Procession of nuns in the Chijimi-weavers’ villages. “Komako will become a nun, in the metaphorical sense of the word. It is a logical answer, for she has turned into the protagonist of a Noh play. Many heroines of Noh become nuns when they grow older and are awakened to their sinfulness.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 86

Fire scene: “Yoko is an embodiment of virginity which Komako has lost – or, which she has sacrificed for Yukio’s sake and for Shimamura’s sake. Yoko, as such, is a painful reminder for Komako of what she has lost. Komako is a nun who holds, and will keep holding, that painful reminder in her arms.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 87

“. . . what redeems Komako is neither a Judeo-Christian nor a Buddhist nor a Shinto scheme of salvation, but a more primitive scheme that was the origin of all these religions. It may be viewed as a religion of primitive, wild nature which is symbolized in the image of the Milky Way near the end of Snow Country. . . . The nuns Shimamura saw were living in the mountains of the snow country. Komako, too, runs toward the mountains, leaving Shimamura behind, when the fire breaks out; and on those mountains the Milky Way is falling. Shimamura feels ‘a terrible voluptuousness’ in the Milky Way, as if it were coming down to ‘wrap the night earth in its naked embrace’ (165). If the Milky Way is coming to be the Woman for Shimamura, that transformation must have been initiated by Komako who is running toward it. Komako is merging with primitive nature, dedicating her womanhood to it. After the dedication, she will be a woman without womanhood: a nun.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 87

“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

**Shimamura**

“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

Window scene. “The woman in that evening mirror is of course Yoko, and so the implication is that Komako and Yoko have merged into one in Shimamura’s mind.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 77

“Shimamura is a kind of virgin. He was born in a wealthy family . . . and grew up in a well-protected environment . . . He has never been raped by ugly reality.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 77

“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

“Shimamura’s third visit to the snow country is filled with suggestions of foulness and death even before he meets Komako. It is the same snow country, but there is neither green foliage which was everywhere on his first visit, nor is there white snow that lay all over the ground on his second visit.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 82

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

“The Milky Way, now as the Woman [affects Shimamura profoundly] for the power of primitive nature is less intellectual, more immediate. It can flow down inside a person with a roar, even when that person is an atheist.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 87

“. . . what redeems Komako is neither a Judeo-Christian nor a Buddhist nor a Shinto scheme of salvation, but a more primitive scheme that was the origin of all these religions. It may be viewed as a religion of primitive, wild nature which is symbolized in the image of the Milky Way near the end of *Snow Country*. . . . The nuns Shimamura saw were living in the mountains of the snow country. Komako, too, runs toward the mountains, leaving Shimamura behind, when the fire breaks out; and on those mountains the Milky Way is falling. Shimamura feels ‘a terrible voluptuousness’ in the Milky Way, as if it were coming
down to ‘wrap the night earth in its naked embrace’ (165). If the Milky Way is coming to be the Woman for Shimamura, that transformation must have been initiated by Komako who is running toward it. Komako is merging with primitive nature, dedicating her womanhood to it. After the dedication, she will be a woman without womanhood: a nun.”
--Ueda, “The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun,” 87

Tsuruta, Kinya.
“The Flow-Dynamics in Kawabata Yasunari’s Snow Country.”
Monumenta Nipponica 26.3-4: 251-265

Images of Mirror and Flow
“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

“Several things happen in the mirror: man and nature are suddenly brought together, and Kawabata most carefully selects those features of each that form a forceful contrast, such as the red cheeks and black hair of Komako, and the snow. One also notes that the mirror reveals hitherto unnoticed aspects of things, such as the snow’s ‘burning icily’ and the hair’s ‘becoming a clearer black, touched with a purple sheen’. Lastly, because the mirror presents things in a purer form, they seem to be in a state of flux: a face ‘floating’ and snow ‘burning’.”

(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 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

“Thomas E. Swann . . . suggests that Komako is more of a ‘lens’ than a mirror. Like the window-glass of the train, Komako not only reflects things inside the snow country but through her translucent body also allows Shimamura a glimpse of a fairy-like maiden who does not belong to this world. Komako is the merger-point of the two worlds. The fusion is possible since the essential feature of a mirror or a lens, unlike a lamp, lies in its self-denial. Komako might be described as a ‘translucent mirror.’”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 253, n. 5

“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

“Kawabata . . . rejects this artificial separation of things instituted by us for the sake of survival. He sees all things as organically related. He refuses to recognize any division among things – the animate and the inanimate, man and beast, man and plant. He sees the world as one gigantic flow of a river. Thus he uses various devices to enable his reader to see things in this state of flux, so that the reader may gain experience of the basic life-force pervading the universe. One can almost say that Kawabata is anxious to reduce the rational world to its primeval stage so that his reader may be allowed a glimpse of the beauty of life no longer marred by rational compartments. This is why Kawabata takes advantage of dualities in order to eliminate them, since they are the fundamental division of things. Tokyo versus snow country, snow versus fire, sky versus earth, the past versus the future, man versus woman – these opposites are exploited until in the end they all merge into the single experience of the Milky Way roaring into Shimamura.”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 264-265

“I think that Snow Country is about a thoroughly differentiated man taking a trip back to a state of non-differentiation. It recounts the process of undoing his alienation. This explains why Shimamura is reluctant to accept human commitments and conflicts, and also why he persists in dissolving both man and nature to fuse them more easily. In this respect it is probably more than coincidental that there are frequent references to Yoko’s motherly quality and that the reader is made conscious of the tunnel at the very outset of the novel. Note, too, that during his visit to the land of chijimi Shimamura discovers that the locals call the snow tunnel between both sides of a street, tainai kuguri, literally, ‘womb passage.’ The process of returning to the womb is often a death process in the Western humanist’s terminology. It is a stroke of irony that only in this kind of ‘death’ process is Komako allowed to radiate a life-force and a beauty seldom paralleled in modern Japanese literature.”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 265

KOMAKO
“The Komako in the second half is noticeably different. . . . Her body, once translucent like a silkworm, is now changed into something entirely different. . . . Along with this increasing physical realness, Komako begins to emerge more clearly as an individual person aware of human contracts and morals. . . . As her attachment to him increases she beings to lose her function of a mirror and to grow in stature as a woman. . . . Shimamura’s previous vacillation was between Tokyo reality and snow-country unreality, but now that Komako begins to take on reality as a woman, he must have a new pole of unreality and finds it in Yoko. Now his to-and-fro movement is contained within the snow country, becoming shorter and more rapid. . . . The more solid Komako becomes, the more emptiness she brings out in Shimamura.”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 256-257

Opening lines of the novel: “The second sentence contains in the original an important key word: soko, or ‘bottom.’ The literal and less attractive translation would be, ‘The bottom of the night turned white.’ This word soko appears about ten times in the novel, but its appearances are heavily concentrated at both the beginning and the end.”
--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 261

FIRE SCENE
“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, and ends with a faster rhythm on a smaller 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

“We may also note that, though by her fall from the burning warehouse Yoko is abruptly thrust into the up-and-down movement, seemingly in place of Komako, the female lead role in the fire scene is undeniably neither Komako nor Yoko, but the Milky Way, which seems to combine Komako’s nearness and Yoko’s remoteness.”

--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 262, n. 11

“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

“The instant at which intense and complete union of the three characters takes place comes when the vertical-horizontal movements reach a sudden climax in the twitch in Yoko’s leg. Komako’s scream and Yoko’s spasm produce in Shimamura an unusual pair of simultaneous ‘motions’: ‘The scream stabbed
him through. At the spasm in Yoko’s leg a chill passed down his spine to his very feet. His heart was pounding in an undefinable anguish.’ Only after this union does ‘Shimamura become ready for a union of a much greater dimension, union with the Milky Way. It is a kind of union made possible only when Shimamura demands the purest of experiences, through mirror, not through raw reality.’

--Tsuruta, “Flow Dynamics,” 264

**Rimer, J. Thomas**

“Kawabata Yasunari: Eastern Approaches: *Snow Country*

*Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions: An Introduction.*


“Kawabata was careful to point out, however, that the asymmetry is not naturally evoked but comes from a discipline created through ‘a balance imposed by delicate sensibilities’ that have in turn been rigorously formed and refined.”

--Rimer, *Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions.* 163

**SIGNIFICANCE OF NATURE**

“Kawabata’s remarks reveal a necessary and close connection postulated between the poetic impulse and the atmosphere of the place that gives rise to that impulse. The aptness and simplicity of Issa’s response represent the outcome of his attunement to what might be termed the poetry of place. His reactions are personal and precise.”

--Rimer, *Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions.* 166

“Kawabata’s ability to evoke a natural scene represents one of his strongest talents as a writer. Whatever the larger purposes of his descriptions, his sensibilities (like those of the great *haiku* writers) are invariably particular, sharp, and precise.”

--Rimer, *Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions.* 166

“A few brief sentences . . . suffice to create an atmosphere for the whole environment of the novel. Precision creates suggestiveness, as in a good *haiku*.”

--Rimer, *Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions.* 167

“Kawabata . . . often blends the character and the geography of his story together, until Shimamura finds it difficult to distinguish in himself any distinction between his attraction to Komako and his attraction to the ‘snow country.’”

--Rimer, *Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions.* 168

“Shimamura cannot separate his vision of her from his vision of nature.”

--Rimer, *Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions.* 169

“Such blurring and blending produces the suggestiveness so important to Kawabata in setting up the larger evocative purposes of his novel, purposes that lie behind any given set of narrative particulars.”


“*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
NÔ DRAMA
“Nakamura suggests that Kawabata has constructed his novel along the lines of a nô drama. Komako, the focus of attention in the novel, functions something like the shite in nô, the character whose personality the spectator must penetrate as the drama proceeds. Shimamura is the modern equivalent of the waki, or subsidiary character, often a priest traveling in search of enlightenment.”
--Rimer, *Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions*. 172

“The vision of the distraught Komako rushing to embrace the body of Yoko, burned in the fire, has all the power, and all the intensity, of a powerful nô drama. And, as in the nô, such a final moment of intensity serves to show the innermost layer of emotion that makes up the character of the personage portrayed, a summation of the dramatic purposes of the whole. And, like the nô, Kawabata’s structure serves to emphasize the deepest roots of personality in the central character rather than to increase tensions between characters in the narrative: the tension remains internal.”

THE NATURE OF HIS FICTION
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WASTED EFFORT
“*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

“an inevitable connection between the poetry of the unreal and the idea of wasted effort.”

“The infinite care and labor required to produce the cloth can perhaps be justified, despite the wasted effort involved, because of the love that went into its making.”

Miyoshi, Masao.

“the essentially temporal nature of Kawabata’s art. Instead of spatially schematizing the continuity, planning a unique shape like a sculpture, Kawabata just lets his language flow in time, lets it weave its own strands, almost come what may. The ‘shape’ of the novel is thus not architectural or sculptural, with a totality subsuming the parts, but musical in the sense of continual movement generated by surprise and juxtaposition, intensification and relaxation, and the use of various rhythms and tempos. The renga form is often mentioned in connection with Kawabata and for good reason. . . .”
--Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, 104
“. . . the novel’s diffuse sense of time’s passage.”
--Miyoshi, Accomplices of Silence, 105

“Shimamura, like anyone else, is continually compelled from the past to the present, and from here into the future, but he lives the present as though it were a somehow lasting extended stasis, the experience of beauty occasionally shocking the moving darkness into a radiant stillness.”
--Miyoshi, Accomplices of Silence, 106

insects in Snow Country: “they are there not so much to interpret and comment on the hero’s action as to break the line of the story, or drop a hint that no matter what the characters may be up to, the world around them is always present but uninvolved, insensible, and not really attended to often enough. He reminds us to stop and look. The kind of resigned sadness of loneliness one always feels in Kawabata’s novels comes, it seems to me, from this acceptance of man’s helplessness before such a comprehensive flow of things in time. It is not all sadness, of course, because Kawabata finds quiet pleasure in this acceptance.”
--Miyoshi, Accomplices of Silence, 109-110

“Time flows through the process of his work, and he, having abandoned the effort to make particular judgments all the time, sees men and women on a larger canvas than human actions and their consequences can provide.”
--Miyoshi, Accomplices of Silence, 110

(moths, Russian woman) “The kaleidoscopic succession of images . . . effectively suspends the narrative progress and forces us to pay attention to those large margins in the canvas of life.”
--Miyoshi, Accomplices of Silence, 111

(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

<rest of article concerns another Kawabata novel, Sound of the Mountain, with important statements about the nature of the novel and the character Shingo>

“the paragraphs, highlighting the objects of [Shingo’s] consciousness, nonetheless gradually move away from the interior of his existence toward the container of all the drama – the world around, the wide margins of the novel.”
--Miyoshi, Accomplices of Silence, 118

“Shingo himself is not really very substantial in this moonlit reality; rather it is his instrumental role in making accessible the wide world that spreads around him. For Shingo, as for Kawabata, the awareness of the large margins of the world around human beings and their actions, the large area of silence that stays intact despite human speech and the words of the novel—that is what powerfully informs his mind.”
--Miyoshi, Accomplices of Silence, 118

“Kawabata’s achievement . . . lies in just this, his keen awareness of the objects around men that exist in themselves as solidly as people do. Objects, in the world and in the world of the novel, are somehow or other related to people, but Kawabata seldom makes the connection between them explicit for us. With each of his brief paragraphs self-contained in this way . . . . these objects tend to stand autonomous.”
“What I would call Kawabata’s nominal imagination is apparent even in his earliest work. The objects here are not organized syntactically. He does not relate them, with verbs and conjugations, into a sentence, a proposition, but just leaves them as he finds them. Exactly in the same way, *The Sound of the Mountain* reaches out and gathers objects into a narrative, but refuses to hook them into a chain of cause and effect, a plot. They are assembled and unconnected. What emerges, then, is not an argument – which any construction of plot (the whole cause-effect complex) implies – but a perception of the world and an acceptance of it as perceived, one thing at a time.”

--Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, 119-120

“What is so convincing to me about Kawabata’s art is the vibrant silence about it; the delicate strength in the leap of images, and finally, in his refusal to connect things into an easy meaning, his embrace of the shambled world. The lack of ‘structure,’ often mentioned as though it were a blight on his work, is Kawabata’s way of adjusting the novel to the flow of time so that art can survive and teach men and women to survive.”

--Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, 120

“For Kawabata, the margins of life blend imperceptibly into that yawning voiceless world and are finally commensurate with it.”

--Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, 121

*James T. Araki.*

“Kawabata and His *Snow Country.*”


“this theme of the evanescence and meaninglessness of passion, indeed of temporal existence…."

--Araki, “Kawabata and His *Snow Country.*” 342

“The mode of fiction exemplified by *Snow Country* in particular has been termed the “Tale of Genji mode” by Japanese critics, for the pleasure of reading Lady Murasaki’s eleventh-century *Tale of Genji* has been likened to that of viewing a traditional picture scroll, whose individual scene are independently attractive and yet are parts of a unified whole.”

--Araki, “Kawabata and His *Snow Country.*” 343

Chijimi scene: “This vignette contributes nothing to the dramatic value of the narrative; and yet it is attractive, like a purely lyrical scene that might emerge unexpectedly amidst as series of tragic scenes in a picture scroll depicting a tale of war. . . . This scene also exemplifies Kawabata’s use of the technique of the medieval *renga*, in which verses created independently were linked together through images rather than syntactic or contextual logic.”
“Shimamura awakens to the realization that the most intense emotion he is capable of experiencing fails to ignite even a spark of humanity in him.”
--Araki, “Kawabata and His Snow Country.” 344

Images of pine wind, bell and kettle: “Although this passage might be considered one laden with symbolism, the native reader would be inclined to accept the images as vehicles for suggesting moods.”
--Araki, “Kawabata and His Snow Country.” 345

“The tinkling of the tiny bell, an imaginary expansion perhaps of the faint bubbling of the water, may have a Shinto import of purity and cleanliness. Small Japanese bells are adjuncts to Shinto festivals and ceremonies in which ritually purified vestal virgins are colorful participants.”
--Araki, “Kawabata and His Snow Country.” 346

Final scenes: “The technique of literary expressionism: by transcending spatial and temporal logic in order to objectify inner experience, Kawabata seems to have successfully described an otherwise inexpressibly complex state of mind.”
--Araki, “Kawabata and His Snow Country.” 348

“Shōichi Saeki . . . interprets the novel’s concluding sentence as a passage symbolizing a sexual union with the greater universe.”
--Araki, “Kawabata and His Snow Country.” 348