

THE STORYTELLING IMAGE AND THE AGES OF A CHARACTER: YASUNARI KAWABATA, *THE SOUND OF THE MOUNTAIN* (山の音 • *YAMA NO OTO*, 1949-1954)

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Abstract The present study aims to analyse the novel *The Sound of the Mountain* (山の音 • *Yama no oto*, 1949-1954), by Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972), beginning with a *storytelling image*, or an image that automatically produces a story. The image under scrutiny is auditory, an image of a mysterious, strongly affective intimacy, which sets the narrative tone and generates the *function of the unreal* (in the sense that follows Bachelard's view) and, implicitly, of the imagination (which truly stimulates the psyche), in an obvious opposition with the *function of the real*. By regarding the Japanese novel as an internal narration with a "limited" viewpoint, given by the *actorial narrative type*, since the *centre for orientation* coincides with the narrative perspective of an actor playing the role of a nucleus-character with a dynamic psychology, the present paper aims to explain, from a poetic and hermeneutic perspective, the meaning of the text beginning from the surface level that hides another view beneath. Moreover, in the case of the Japanese writer in question, the study highlights the search for the appropriate linguistic expression meant to depict the dual appearance of the perceptions, sensations, emotions and ideas that are, on the one hand, clear, precise, but impersonal and, on the other hand, confused, mobile and inexpressible, revealing the means by which Kawabata sometimes tries to extract the abstract from the concreteness of words, in order to give them a *purer* meaning. Furthermore, by contextualising within the field of Kawabata's literature, the narrative plot of the novel *The Sound of the Mountain*, which is seemingly devoid of intrigue, climax and denouement, I outlined a narrative technique that I would call a *linked novel*, an architectonic construction that covers Yasunari Kawabata's entire literary creation, through which the author simultaneously reveals and hides himself, while offering reading and interpretation keys for his works.

Keywords Actorial narration, "limited" viewpoint, storytelling image, auditory image, linked novel.

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Les grands souvenirs d'une âme, ceux qui donnent à une âme son sens et sa profondeur, on s'aperçoit un jour qu'ils sont en train de devenir rationnels.
Gaston Bachelard, *L'intuition de l'instant*

And it was as if a crucial moment had come, as if a decision were forcing itself upon him.
Yasunari Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain*¹

With the coronation of Emperor Meiji, in 1868, Japan enters the modern era of its history. One hundred years later, the jury from Stockholm acknowledges the Japanese literature as an important component of world literature by awarding the Nobel Prize for Literature to writer Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972), in 1968. Undoubtedly an innovator of style, Kawabata, in his works, uniquely weaves together the Japanese and the Western sensibilities, the Japanese literary tradition and the new modernist movements of that time.

Yasunari Kawabata writes at a time that was in full process of Japan's modernisation, and his career traverses the historical periods that are not only particularly turbulent, but also, most often, filled with contradictions for the intellectuals who lived them first-hand: the Taishō democracy, the Shōwa militarism and the Pacific War, the American occupation and the beginning of the economic miracle. Permanently connected to the status of the times, the Japanese writer, in fact, used the crises of the contemporary society as background scenes for his novels, so as to provide authenticity to a fictional universe interpreted as a (psycho-analytical) story-meditation about the present.

In this particular historical and social context, together with Riichi Yokomitsu (1898-1947), Yasunari Kawabata works within the *Shin Kankaku-ha* (Neosensualism or Neoperceptionism) literary movement, which tried to incorporate the Avant-Garde trends such as Cubism, Dadaism, Futurism, Symbolism and Expressionism into the Japanese literature of the first half of the 20th century, by reinterpreting tradition in the light of modernity. However, the Japanese writer was also interested in Surrealism and the stream of consciousness, as well as in psychoanalysis. Moreover, the remarkable (direct or indirect) impact that Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) had on the Japanese artists, including Kawabata,² is an aspect that is by now unanimously acknowledged. In a somewhat paradoxical context,³ although he brings contemporary lives into the spotlight in all of his novels, Yasunari

¹ Yasunari Kawabata, *Yama no oto* (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2006), 61:

なにかいよいよ生涯の決定の時が来ているような、そんな気持ちもした。決定すべきことが泊まっているようだ。

² See Masaki Mori, "Decoding the Beard: A Dream-Interpretation of Kawabata's *The Sound of the Mountain*," *The Comparatist*, 18 (May 1994): 129-149, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44366871> (Accessed on 15 June 2022).

³ See DeVere Brown, "Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972): Tradition versus Modernity," in *World Literature Today*, 62, No. 3, *Contemporary Japanese Literature* (Summer, 1988): 375-379, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40144283> (Accessed on 15 June 2022).

Kawabata seems rather interested in traditional culture, which he subjects to a process of re-evaluation, by confronting it with the perspective of modernity. As such, it is not by chance that the Japanese writer was appreciated and honoured by the jury for the Nobel Prize for Literature, for his particular affinities for the Japanese cultural traditions, first and foremost.

As a great *dreamer* of written words, Yasunari Kawabata offers the reader a literature that delights in and through the word. By knowing the words' power to imagine and to metamorphose into images, the Japanese writer's opus is one of the imagination situated between perception and memory, attempting to convince the reader that imagination, which holds *the function of the unreal*, is, psychically, just as important as *the function of the real*. The attempt of reconstructing the stream of consciousness facilitated, for Kawabata, the technique of an *internal narration*,⁴ which would help the author describe the narrative fictional universe through the "limited" perspective viewpoint of a single character, a technique that was successfully explored in the novel *Yama no oto* (山の音・*The Sound of the Mountain*, 1949-1954).

The contents of the novel *The Sound of the Mountain* appear as an exposition of the relationships between three generations of a post-war traditional Japanese family, and the time of the narration is that of the American occupation (information only obliquely provided). The protagonist, Ogata Shingo, is the head of a family from Kamakura, playing an active role as the executive director of a company from Tokyo, a position for which he commutes together with his son, from northern Kamakura to a faraway suburb of the metropolis. At an age of over sixty, however, he is faced with several major problems: based on unsettling thoughts about the proximity of death, Shingo seems to feel a sensation of failure regarding not only his own happiness and fulfilment, but also regarding his responsibility as head of the family. Incapable of saving the marriages of his two children and to thus ensure the continuity of the family by succession, Ogata Shingo seems to have failed in the most important mission that lies with the leader of a traditional Japanese family.⁵ His personality being rather passive than active, Shingo is a contemplative who becomes *conscious*,⁶ through successions of thoughts, remembrances, oblivion, dreams or reveries about art, seasons, life, love and death, not merely regarding his own imperfections, but also regarding those of his family and, ultimately, of the contemporary society. Therefore, the novel is built on a scaffold constructed from a recollection of the protagonist's memories and on a contemplative meditation on the fleeting moment, stirred by these memories.

⁴ See Akiyama Masayuki, "Point of View in Kawabata Yasunari and Henry James," in *Comparative Literature Studies*, 26, No. 3, *East-West Issue* (1989): 193-203, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40246674>.

⁵ See Florina Ilis, *Romanul japonez în secolul al XX-lea* [The Japanese novel in the 20th century] (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022), 154-157.

⁶ See Mary Dejong Obuchowski, "Theme and Image in Kawabata's *The Sound of the Mountain*," in *World Literature Today*, 51, No. 2 (Spring 1977): 207-210, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40133285>.

As a heterodiegetic narration, in which the main character, Ogata Shingo bears, for the reader, the function of a *centre for orientation*⁷ on the perceptive-psychical, temporal, spatial and verbal levels, the text of the novel *Yama no oto*, the place in which reality joins hands with imagination, presents all of the events as having been filtered in and through the consciousness of this character. The narrative type is *actorial*,⁸ since the *centre for orientation* coincides with the narrative perspective of an actor who plays the role of a nucleus-character. Inevitably, this type of narration combines the narrative principles given by the pictorial means of describing the outside world with the dramatic means of presenting the inner life. Similarly to unravelling a scroll, which follows the indirect path of the protagonist's stream of consciousness, the reader can discover views on their own experiences or on the inner thoughts and feelings of not only the central character, but of all of the characters in the narrative text. In this narration, Yasunari Kawabata uses the "limited" perspective, which leads to the fact that both the behaviour and the psychology of the other characters are seen from an external viewpoint, given by a single perspective that belongs to the protagonist. Thus, through this technique, which is generally used on the theatre stage, each character eventually enters the spotlight,⁹ a light that is filtered through the single viewpoint of Ogata Shingo. Even the conversations, which are quite numerous in the novel, serve the same "limited" perspective which configures a story of the passing of the seasons, of death, of remembrance and of oblivion, all filtered by the interpretation given by the protagonist.

As a rhetoric of the overture, the novel opens with Ogata Shingo's morning commute, and the beginning of the day coincides with the beginning of the story, whose origins it mimics. The topos of oblivion in the narrative universe thus combines the entrance of a character (in action) with the entrance of the story (its beginning), completed by the imaginary entrance of the reader into the fictional universe (the beginning of the reception) of the novel. Developing the subject of growing old and of death, the intrigue and the plot of the novel seem to be less important than the themes configured using images and symbols, thus creating a unique literary style. From the very beginning, the reader is invited to enter the mind and consciousness of the leading character through his memories, thoughts and dreams,¹⁰ thus quickly learning several biographical data. At this point, Ogata Shingo, shortly after World War II, is 62 years old (he would be 63 by the end of the narration), and the medical biography notes an episode of spitting up blood, which, to him, seems to be "the darkest forebodings,"¹¹

⁷ See Jaap Lintvelt, *Încercare de tipologie narativă. Punctul de vedere. Teorie și Analiză* [An attempt to outline a narrative typology. The viewpoint. Theory and analysis], transl. Angela Martin, ed. Mircea Martin (Bucharest: Editura Univers, 1994), 20-21.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹ See Akiyama, 197.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹¹ Yasunari Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, Translated from the Japanese by Edward G. Seidensticker (New York: Vintage International, 1996), 6. Original text:

いかにも陰惨な気がする。Yasunari Kawabata, *Yama no oto...* (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2006), 8.

which had occurred one year before, when he had refused to be examined by a doctor. Moreover, Shingo struggles with memory lapses, a forgetfulness that instills fear in his heart, as if “a life was being lost.”¹² In fact, the appearance of the meditation that his glum silence creates for those around seems to actually be a recollection, a factor that generates certain inner thoughts and feelings, somewhat inevitably, about the unmerciful passage of time – which seem to either enclose Shingo in an obsessive state of suspense, or to open him up to the hope of certain late absolute feelings and emotions.

Furthermore, the reader also finds out that Shingo has a wife, Yasuko, who is short and robust, not at all beautiful, and two children: a son, Shūichi, who is married to Kikuko, a young, graceful and charming woman, and a daughter, Fusako, who is the mother of two girls. Fusako, trapped in a failed marriage, eventually leaves her husband and returns, together with her children, to her parental home. The son-in-law, Aihara, actually proves to be an adulterer, involved in suspicious businesses and, at one point, he attempts to commit suicide together with another woman. She dies, but he survives, and he receives the divorce papers from Shingo. Because of his near-death military experiences, Shūichi, who, together with his wife, lives with his parents, excludes himself from among the “sentimental fatalists”, thus becoming immune to all human feelings. He is an angry man, still obsessed with the last world war, constantly feeling threatened by another war, which he, momentarily, perceives as being just around the corner. Asked by his father whether he had killed people during the war, Shūichi answers that he does not know, but that it is likely that those who had been caught by the line of fire of his machine-gun had indeed died. However, because he deemed himself merely “a machine behind another machine”, he was under the illusion that he was not the one actually firing. Kikuko, his wife, and Kinu, his mistress, both become pregnant at the same time. But Shūichi, as if “mentally paralysed”, seems to feel no remorse for the fact that Kikuko has an abortion, because the moment in her marriage was not right to have a child, and Kinu’s child becomes inaccessible, just as he seems unfazed by the fact that he could be left by his wife because of his mistress. Only Kikuko, who slightly resembles Yasuko’s older sister, and who reminds her father-in-law of his love for his sister-in-law during his youth, revives, “like flashes of lightning,”¹³ Shingo’s memories. Disappointed by his own family, who no longer lived in accordance with his desires, but nor did they live according to their own desires, Shingo felt the presence of his daughter-in-law as “a ray of light” in a gloomy atmosphere, and he enjoys indulging in his own sentimentalism. The attraction he had felt thirty years before to his sister-in-law (Yasuko’s older sister), resumed as a chorus throughout the book, seems to be an unhealed, bleeding wound in Shingo’s soul, on which Kikuko rubs the balm of her mere presence.

This constant remembrance of the past through a youthful love, favoured by a present stimulus, brilliantly illustrates, in the novel *Yama no oto*, the difference between the dialectic of reason, which juxtaposes contradictions in order to cover the entire realm of the possible, and the dialectic of imagination, which aims to capture the whole of reality, by finding more

¹² Ibid., 5. Original text: [...] 信吾は失われてゆく人生を感じるかのようであった。Ibid, 7.

¹³ Ibid., 17. Original text: 稲妻のような明かり。Ibid., 20.

reality¹⁴ in what is hidden than in what is revealed. If, in the dialectic of reason, as a final proceeding, the synthesis is provided in order to reconcile, by juxtaposition, two contradictions, in the dialectic of imagination, through an inverted, overlapping motion, the synthesis comes first; so as the image, in the complete imaginary perception (form and matter), in its turn, is divided into the dialectic of depth and of appearance. Therefore, the relation of openness with the outer-text, the avant-text and the text overall (openness-title, openness-continuance, openness-closing)¹⁵ from the Japanese novel can permanently be read observing two levels, namely one level of depth and one surface level. As the novel's table of contents shows (*The Wings of the Locust*, *The Chestnuts*, *The Cherry in the Winter*, *The Bell in Spring*, *The Cluster of Mosquitoes*, *Fish in Autumn*¹⁶), the dialectic of appearance emphasises, within the text, the succession of the seasons, which begins with the graceful summer butterflies, from a small world, and the bright stars of the full-moon nights, which confer infinity to the universe; it continues with the unnatural autumn budding of a leafless ginkgo tree, and, in the end, what stand out are a winter cherry tree blooming in January and the pine trees from the Ikegami forest in the spring dew. After having blindly passed by them for many years, the pine trees – their crowns seemingly entwining, either merging with the forest or detaching from it – now seem, to Shingo, smeared and dirty, because he sees them from the commute train, while his son confesses Kikuko's abortion. "Even when natural weather is good, human weather is bad,"¹⁷ Shingo tells himself, and, thus, all of nature's details that accompany the human passing through life receive, in the narrative text, in a dialectic of depth, a social importance, which differs from the unravelling of an intrigue per se.

Because "the mass of the towering green came grandly down to him, to wash away his gloom,"¹⁸ for Shingo, nature, in all of its manifestations, – from the buzzing of the cicadas in the cherry tree and the rustling of their wings, "as if something might be threatening them,"¹⁹ to "the moon, high in the east, [...] almost full, [...] in a blaze of clouds, [...] dimmed by them"²⁰ –, is received as a cluster of stimuli. Furthermore, the stimuli not only fuel Shingo's sensibility, but, moreover, by not limiting the narrative perspective to the visual perception, as suggested by the notion of a "viewpoint", they also give way to the manifestation of other senses: auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustative. Thus, what gives this novel coherence, despite it

¹⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *Apa și visele. Eșeu despre imaginația materiei* [Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter], transl. by Irina Mavodin (Bucharest: Editura Univers, 1999), 25.

¹⁵ See Lintvelt, 216.

¹⁶ Original phrases:

「蝉の羽」、「栗の実」、「冬の桜」、「春の鐘」、「蚊の群れ」、「秋の魚」。

¹⁷ Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 185.

Original text: 天気がいい日も、人間の天気は悪い。Kawabata, *Yoma no oto...*, 218.

¹⁸ Ibid., 192. Original text: [...] 鬱悶を自然が洗ってくれる。Ibid., 226.

¹⁹ Ibid., 34. Original text: 羽根の音よりも、おびえたような鳴き声がかたいへんでしたわ。Ibid., 40.

²⁰ Ibid., 52. Original text:

月は少し東にあって、だいたい円かった。炎の雲のなかにあつて、縁の雲をぼうとぼかしていた。Ibid., 60-61.

lacking the purely sequential order of certain factual events, is the auditory-visual leitmotif created by the sound of the mountain (which is, in fact, the title of the novel), which establishes the depth level of the imaginary perception in the narrative text.

On an August full-moon night, awakened (by his wife's snoring?!), Shingo sits on the porch and, in the absolute silence of the nature around him, comes under the impression that he hears an unusual sound coming from the mountain that ascended from the courtyard:

“Though August had only begun, autumn insects were already singing. He thought he could detect a dripping of dew from leaf to leaf. Then he heard the sound of the mountain. It was a windless night. The moon was near full, but in the moist, sultry air the fringe of trees that outlined the mountain was blurred. They were motionless, however. Not a leaf on the fern by the veranda was stirring. In these mountain recesses of Kamakura the sea could sometimes be heard at night. Shingo wondered if he might have heard the sound of the sea. But no – it was the mountain. It was like wind, far away, but with a depth like a rumbling of the earth. Thinking that it might be in himself, a ringing in his ears, Shingo shook his head. The sound stopped, and he was suddenly afraid. A chill passed over him, as if he had been notified that death was approaching. He wanted to question himself, calmly and deliberately, to ask whether it had been the sound of the wind, the sound of the sea, or a sound in his ears. But he had heard no such sound, he was sure. He had heard the mountain.”²¹

「八月の十日前だが、虫が鳴いている。木の葉から木の葉へ夜露の落ちるらしい音 [emphasis mine] も聞こえる。そうして、ふと信吾に山の音 [emphasis mine] が聞こえた。風はない。月は満月に近く明るい、しめっぽい夜気で小山の上を描く木々の輪郭はぼやけている。しかし風に動いてはいない。信吾のいる廊下の下のしだの葉も動いていない。鎌倉のいわゆる谷の奥で、波が聞こえる夜もあるから、信吾は海の音 [emphasis mine] かと疑ったが、やはり山の音 [emphasis mine] だった。遠い風の音 [emphasis mine] に似ているが、地鳴りともいう深い底力があつた。自分の頭のなかに聞こえるようでもあるので、信吾は耳鳴りかと思って、頭を振ってみた。音 [emphasis mine] はやんだ。音 [emphasis mine] がやんだ後で、信吾ははじめて恐怖におそわれた。死期を告知されたのではないかと寒気がした。風の音 [emphasis mine] か、海の音 [emphasis mine] か、耳鳴りかと、信吾は冷静に考えたつもりだったが、そんな音 [emphasis mine] などしなかったのではないかと思われた。しかし確かに山の音 [emphasis mine] は聞こえていた。」²²

Naturally, in this scene, the forefront is taken by the auditory stimulus which, through the eleven occurrences of the lexeme *oto* (“sound, noise”) in the original version, highlights the sound that breaks the utter silence of a night in which there was not one gust of wind.

²¹ Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 7-8.

²² Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 7-8.

However, here, the auditory sense is intimately associated with the visual sense, through the imagery given by the mountain behind the house, or the drops of dew on the leaves of the surrounding trees, as well as by Kikuko's dress (-the first mention, in the text, of the daughter-in-law's name-), left out in the night air, which, in the moonlight, looked like an image from a dream. Shingo immediately associates the sound of the mountain with the premonition of death, a sound he would hear periodically, from that point on, in a state of discomfort and fear. Shingo's medical file probably had the addition of a "transient ischemic (bloodless) attacks,"²³ signalling his gradual physical and psychiatric deterioration. However, this sound of the mountain would become the background tone of the novel,²⁴ the sound of death gaining, in the narrative text, an increasingly greater concreteness for the protagonist. Although it can also be interpreted as a sign of senile amnesia, which makes Shingo feel "the burden of the years" that had passed over him, this nocturnal scene on the outskirts of a dream is somewhat located at the limit of a temporary hallucination. As a hypnotic type of magic, the sound of the mountain awakens, in the protagonist, not only the desire for a "re-centring" of his own life within nature,²⁵ towards which he shifts his focus from this moment on, but he also recovers an affective memory, in which the present is no longer added to a linear past. The present moment is permanently enriched by the past and the future, which intertwine, thus creating states of confusion, as if in a melodic canon. After the prelude of the absolute silence, in the midst of vacuumed sonorities, the sound of the mountain facilitates the occurrence of the... moment. The simple continuity of the tethered time was destroyed, since the *moment-time* temporarily interrupted the common time that passes horizontally, accompanying the succession of the seasons.

The association of the acoustic element of the sound with the real referent of the nearby mountain, an association that had, in fact, already occurred during his youth but had been forgotten and relived in the present, creates an auditory image which seems to have melted inside Shingo, now thus stirring different reveries in the form of subterranean voices. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the *auditory image* of the sound of the mountain is readdressed and discussed throughout the entire text. It is first approached by the protagonist who, when he hears nothing of what is spoken by those around him, he excuses himself by invoking his ear issues, mentioning the night when he had gone out to cool off and he had had the impression that the mountain had thundered. Kikuko then addresses this matter by reminding her father-in-law that Yasuko had told her that Shingo had also heard the sound of the mountain before the death of her older sister, a detail he had forgotten, although he now deemed it as unforgivable. This sound of the mountain seems to harbour a voice, together with all of the voices from different moments of Shingo's life, which had been silent until then. As either a dream or a hallucination, the sound of the mountain, as a *sound-image* and an

²³ See Obuchowski, 207.

²⁴ See Mori, 129.

²⁵ See Illis, 157-160.

auditory image, seems to have “an imaginary root”²⁶ which would, hereinafter in the narrative text, provide testimonies for the “endosmosis”²⁷ between reverie and memories.

Shingo is a dreamer of the muffled and faraway voices, and thus, the ear manages to reveal transcendences²⁸ belonging to a whole from beyond what can be directly touched and seen. Hearing now became the sense of the night and, more particularly, the sense of the most sensible night:²⁹ the subterranean night, the night of the depth, the night of the death that seems to be closing in. Night and darkness are immobile instances in which the auditory image became a reality. The sound of the mountain, for Shingo, can only be the oracle voice that emerges vaguely from the abyss in order to fulfil its prophetic function of heralding the moment of death. Thus, the closeness of the void makes Shingo aware of the moment – a moment that, in the case under scrutiny, had become equal to the sensation of fear connected to the anticipation of death, its intensity actually having no unit of measurement.³⁰ Only as part of a logical analysis, the cause precedes the effect, while, in the case of the sensation, it does not occur before the present psychological impression, but simultaneously with it. Foreign to arithmetical quantifications and mechanical conditionings, the sensation is present within the moment that embraces the entirety of the life of the soul. Moreover, since fear is a primal sensation, Shingo attempts to translate it subjectively and objectively. Subjectively, he perceives the fear of death as a sensation that accompanies the sound of the mountain. He later objectivises fear by visualising it, for instance, in the representation of a raven perched on the branch of a dried-up tree, awaiting the dawn in the wind and rain of June,³¹ from a *suiboku-ga*-type monochrome drawing by Watanabe Kazan (1793-1841). Looking at the drawing, placed by his friend in the *tokonoma*, to match the season, Shingo openly expresses his resentment regarding the horrific appearance of the raven, as opposed to his friend, who confesses that he had often gazed upon Kazan’s work during the war, admiring the bird as a being that knows no fear. However, he later noted the peaceful air of the tableau.

According to psychophysicists, any phenomenon has a double appearance, both physical and psychological; therefore, the sensation of sound³² quickly receives an affectively marked character, since hearing also implies listening to yourself. Moreover, since any sensation changes through repetition,³³ each new occurrence of the lexeme *oto* (“sound, noise”) in the fragment cited above seems to mark if not a new sensation, then one that encompasses and deepens the former. As such, in each of the 11 occurrences, *oto* marks a new moment. Furthermore, if the sensation that reoccurs may be subjected to a shift of focus from

²⁶ See Bachelard, *Apa și visele...*, 77.

²⁷ See *ibid.*, 81.

²⁸ See *ibid.*, 158.

²⁹ See *ibid.*, 159.

³⁰ See Henri Bergson, *Eseu asupra datelor imediate ale conștiinței* [Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness], transl. by Horia Lazăr (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1993), 22-25.

³¹ See Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 209.

³² See Bergson, 46.

³³ See *ibid.*, 95.

the simple sensation to perception, by exteriorising itself into an act of consciousness, the moments that follow one another can be constituted into a temporal duration, so that, for Shingo, time seems to become an inner form of sensations and perceptions. Since only death can emphasise the drama of a moment in which the temporal duration is interrupted, the sound of the mountain, accompanied by the foresight of death, transforms, for Shingo, into a moment of grace, of meditation on the moment. This is the apparent moment of “temporal discontinuity,”³⁴ when the present moment latently contains the past moment that is now gone, as well as the future moment that is (un)expected. Upon a microscopic examination, duration seems to be an objective *continuum*. However, in order to analyse its affective nature given by the details, one inevitably reaches the subjective unity given by the moment. In Kawabata’s text, the moment seems to have become the relative unit of measurement for the duration, a *discontinuum* that attempts to signal the force of concentrated time. The sound of the mountain heard by Shingo, detached from cause and effect, de-values and re-values the past and the future of a personal history, so as to become the absolute present moment.

Shingo *experiences*³⁵ the moment through an active feeling, followed by its awareness. And the passive contemplation, along with its activation by becoming aware of the sensation as a physiological and psychological act, transforms, in the end, into the experience of time. However, the intimate and direct experience of the duration³⁶ is an immediate given of the consciousness, an experience that can subsequently be elaborated, objectified and deformed. In physics, time is uniform and lifeless, this dehumanised time transforms, in the field of mathematics, into a simple algebraic variable, more appropriate for the analysis of the possible than for the examination of reality.³⁷ In Kawabata’s novel, through this sound that can be the sound of the mountain or of anything else, the moment received both a primordial metaphysical nature and a pragmatic, real nature. Through the auditory component of the sound of the mountain, the moment gained its own manifestation, its own history, its own reality. From a metaphysical perspective, the moment suspended by the sound of the mountain is the meeting place for all simultaneities. The moment that made the sound of the mountain audible attempts to harmonise, in Shingo, the sentimental-passionate feeling with reason and with the intellectual analysis, metamorphosing them into a state of grace in which the dynamic ambivalence is not reduced to the antithesis, nor is simultaneity reduced to succession. At the boundary between dream and hallucination, the moment that awakened the premonition of death in Shingo contains within it a plurality of contradictory events, in which the intrinsic time broke out of the frame of reference of the social duration, of the phenomenological duration and even, provisionally, of the time of one’s own life. Located within itself, in a self-synchronous reference, the moment bursts out of the time that had

³⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *L’intuition de l’instant, Suivi de Introduction à la poésie de BACHELARD par Jean LESCURE* (Paris: Editions Gonthier, 1932), 15.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁶ See Bergson, 78.

³⁷ See Bachelard, *L’intuition de l’instant...*, 17.

temporarily stopped passing, thus imposing a distinction between the things that are inferred or felt, and the ones that are thought.

For Bachelard, the moment is not an immediate definitude, since it has the “dramatic nature” of a temporal construction, and the duration is a sensation like any other, with an apparently contradictory feature: the duration (*durée*) is compiled from duration-less moments, just as the line is made up of dimensionless points.³⁸ For Bergson,³⁹ however, the moments of a duration, which construct the profound reality of the psychological life, do not linearly succeed one after the other, but rather they blend together. If the scientific concept sees the temporal coordinate as a development of the three-dimensional space, as a fourth dimension, the Bergsonian view on duration introduces a musical illustration of the psychological life: the duration line is not a sum of abstract or material points, but of elastic moments in which a vital force constantly reunites a cluster of divergent and, by definition, transitory tendencies, since only ephemeral things last. In order to avoid artifices of the imagination or forced abstractions, I believe that the moment in which Shingo hears the sound of the mountain is neither an encomium of the moment, nor of the duration exclusively, but rather a hypostatisation of what I would regard as *the memory of the moment*, in which the intimate intuition⁴⁰ of time correlates with the absoluteness of the moment.⁴¹ In other words, would the *memory of the moment* not be the “direct consciousness of time,”⁴² as a meditation primarily on the intimate relative duration of time given by the *here and now* (*hic et nunc*) that annulled / suspended the physical duration?

The *auditory image* of the sound of the mountain is, I believe, in this novel, the *storytelling image*⁴³ of the *memory of the moment*, or the image that automatically produces a story. The original feature of the literary spirit promoted by Yasunari Kawabata in his writings, *the storytelling image* represents the shifts between the levels of the images, by elevating or lowering the imagination along a two-way axis, from the organic to the spiritual and vice versa, never content with a singular reality plane. For instance, one day, on his way home, Shingo admires, in a neighbouring yard, the splendour of a sunflower, its weight being “something very concrete”, in a “harmonious” and “neat” structure. The petals outline the shape of a crown, like an “ornamental tassel” that surrounds the central part, filled with elongated seeds, placed in a serene order. However, the “impression of an organised volume” makes Shingo compare the sunflower with a brain, and this natural force gains, for him, the symbol of virility, while the yellow colour of the petals suggests femininity:

³⁸ Ibid., 20-26.

³⁹ See Bergson, 83.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 85.

⁴¹ Bachelard, *L'intuition de l'instant...*, 29.

⁴² Ibid., 16.

⁴³ Bachelard, *Apa și visele...*, 108.

“My head hasn’t been very clear these last few days. I suppose that’s why sunflowers made me think of heads. I wish mine could be as clean as they are. I was thinking on the train – if only there were some way to get your head cleaned and refinished. [...] Just detach it and hand it over to some university hospital as if you were handing over a bundle of laundry. ‘Do this up for me, please’, you’d say. And the rest of you would be quietly asleep for three or four days or a week while the hospital was busy cleaning your head and getting rid of the garbage. No tossing and no dreaming.”⁴⁴

However, not long after, a storm foretelling autumn would knock down the flower whose stem was a meter and a half tall, and it would lie on the ground for days on end, as a head severed from the body: “First the petals withered, and then the stems dried and turned dirty and gray.”⁴⁵ Despite it being on his way and despite having to pass over it daily, Shingo no longer desired to see it, since the natural elements like the sunflower, the cherry blossoms, the cicada chirps or the moonlight were transitory and they reminded Shingo of mortality, of the temporary (and thus... sad) human condition, located *between* life and death:

“The blossoms floated up grandly in the light of the afternoon sky. Neither the shape of the tree nor its colour was particularly strong, but one felt it quite filled the sky. The blossoms were at their best. It was hard to think they would fall.”⁴⁶

The Japanese aesthetics actually regards this “motion of the soul”⁴⁷ towards the surrounding things as *mono no aware* (lit. “the motion of the heart towards things”) or the beauty of the

⁴⁴ Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 27.

Original text:

「わたしはね、このごろ頭がひどくぼやけたせいで、日まわりを見ても、頭のことを考えるらしいな。あの花のように頭がきれいにならんかね。さっき電車のなかでも、頭だけ洗濯か修繕かに出せんものかしらと考えたんだよ、、、洗濯ものみたいに、はい、これを頼みますと言って、大学病院へでも預けられんものかね。病院で脳を洗ったり、悪いところを修繕したりしているあいだ、三日でも一週間でも、胸はぐっすり寝てるのさ。寝返りもしないで、夢も見ないでね。」

Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 32.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 57.

Original text:

首を落とされたあとの、日まわりの茎の下の方は、門口にそのまま立っていた。葉がついていない。Ibid., 66-67.

⁴⁶ Original text:

ひる過ぎの日を受けて、桜の花は空に大きく浮いていた。色も形も強くないが、空間に満ちた感じだ。今が盛りで、散るものとは思えない。Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 173.

⁴⁷ See Karatani Kōjin, “D’un dehors à l’autre. Kawabata et Takeda Taijun,” in Patrick De Voss (ed.), *Littérature Japonaise Contemporaine. Essais* (Bruxelles: Editions Labor, 1989), 33-34.

simple and ephemeral life. The vegetal imagination⁴⁸ thus gains, in Kawabata's text, certain special connotations in order to emphasise this emotion stirred by the human's passing through the world. The sunflower, in full bloom, which gives the impression of encompassing within it the entire blaze of summer, seems to solidify, for Shingo, the sensation of being alive, just as its abandonment and oblivion, after the storm that breaks it, seems to remind him of the ever-changing human impressions that continuously try to adopt clear outlines. For Shingo, the surrounding nature, as the seasons pass, which he continuously perceives and which is ceaselessly depicted in his mind since the night he had (re)heard the sound of the mountain, borrowed something from his own conscious existence. It lives and grows old with him, showing the dreamlike power of the small infinity,⁴⁹ with the prolix significances given by the insignificant element, with the obsession of the mystery enclosed in the details of things: "But the clouds, and the moon too, were cold and faintly white. Shingo felt autumn come over him."⁵⁰

Thus, the *literary-storytelling image* is privileged to act both as an image and as an idea,⁵¹ involving what is intimate and what is objective, so as to place itself at the very core of the issue of expressivity. The search for the adequate linguistic expression that would render the dual nature⁵² of perceptions, sensations, emotions and ideas that are, on the one hand, clear, precise, but impersonal and, on the other hand, confused, mobile and inexpressible, is the challenging mark of Kawabata's literature. Fully aware of the fact that language cannot capture this duality without bracing its mobility, the Japanese writer resorts to the *auditory image* of the sound of the mountain, in order to comprise, into a single moment, not only a sound but also an image, as well as the smell of the sea or the colour of the leaves covered in dew in the humid night. Through the *moment*, Shingo comes to know surprise, strangeness, awe, protest and fear, and through its *memory*, he lives, in the present, both his past and his future, through recognisance and projection.

One October morning, Shingo was no longer able to tie his tie. He felt a slight pressure at the base of his skull and came under the impression that his head was spinning, while, in front of his closed eyelids, there was the image of snow powder after an avalanche, in the golden light of the dusk. Moreover, once again, Shingo thought that he heard "the roar."⁵³ Undoubtedly, close to his death, Shingo (who actually came to forget even the face of the housekeeper who had left the house five days prior, although he did remember the performance of the birds that he had seen one day before) had been wearing two watches for

⁴⁸ See Bachelard, *Apa și visele...*, 245.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁰ Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 52.

Original text:

しかし、その雲の炎は冷たく薄白く、月も冷たく薄白く、信吾は急に秋気がしみた。Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 61.

⁵¹ Bachelard, *Apa și visele...*, 145.

⁵² See Bergson, 93.

⁵³ Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 258.

Original text: どおうっと音も聞こえたようだ。Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 303.

several years: a wristwatch and a pocket watch. Although the pocket watch was two minutes ahead, which made the two watches seldom coincide, – a source of irritation for anyone wearing them –, Shingo did not wish to give them up. In the narrative economy, the time of the wristwatch seems to be the time passed, suspended, frozen – it does not measure duration, it is content to merely count simultaneities,⁵⁴ over a duration that is perceived as the mechanical translation of a physical body which, unravelling in space, passes through successive points. The accurate watch represents reality, the objective time divided into measures that signal the successive stages of the temporal duration, under the apparent impression of identical moments that follow one another. Moreover, the moments are distinctive merely because the hand of the watch cannot be in two places simultaneously. Contrarily, the pocket watch, which is running fast, seems to depict the imaginary part of life, a symbolic representation of the moment that does not subject to any arbitrary regulator, pointing towards a possible increase of the vital psychological moment,⁵⁵ in which the time passed represents a spiritual gain, an enrichment of the inner being. If it is true that the future does not come towards the human, but the human is heading towards it, the past becomes memory and the future becomes foresight, constantly relying on the reality of the moment. Worn together, the two watches constantly and permanently provide Shingo access to the *memory of the moment*.

All of the psychological descriptions⁵⁶ referring to the imagination begin from the postulate that the images reproduce, more or less faithfully, sensations, particularly when a sensation uncovered a taste, a smell, a sound or a colour. Through the sound of the mountain, Shingo is led towards a dream-like state. Thus captured by the dream, Shingo is under the impression that he lives inside an image that activates his imagination on two coordinates: *the dialectic of intimacy* and *the dialectic of expansion*.⁵⁷ On the one hand, imagination exuberantly fosters the values of intimacy, and, on the other hand, it transcends the drawn forms. In fact, any intimate richness limitlessly increases the inner space in which it is condensed. The dream moulds and develops, further on in Kawabata's text, into the most paradoxical of joys, into the most ineffable happiness.⁵⁸ Convinced that the human is nothing more than "life's spare parts,"⁵⁹ Shingo begins to not only (selectively) rememorize the sensations and experiences of the past, but he also starts to outline, through diurnal and nocturnal quasi-hallucinations, this dialectic perspective on the inner and outer spheres, which is similar to a reversible dialectic of a mask taken off and placed back on.⁶⁰ By no means coincidentally, after the death of Mizuta, a generation colleague who had died suddenly in a thermal hotel, where he had been

⁵⁴ See Bergson, 80-82.

⁵⁵ See *ibid.*, 132.

⁵⁶ Bachelard, *Apa și visele...*, 68.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵⁹ Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 138. Original text: 人生の部分品だからね。Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 162.

⁶⁰ See Bachelard, *Apa și visele...*, 22.

accompanied by a young woman, Shingo buys from his widow two Noh masks, “creeps” objects,⁶¹ contemporary with Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), but manufactured by different hands: the Jidō mask of the eternal adolescent, that is therefore asexual, wearing female half-moon-shaped eyebrows arched upwards, and the Kasshiki mask of the young man with virile features and bushy eyebrows. The Jidō mask had been passed down from generation to generation for 400 years and, once it reaches Shingo’s hands, this mask that represents seductive beauty seems to come to life, emanating the warmth of human skin. Unsettled beyond measure by the adolescent Jidō mask, – which was alluring to the point of a loss of reason –, on the day he had bought it, Shingo almost wanted to touch the red mouth of the mask with his own lips, feeling the shudder of a fatal passion:

“As he brought his face toward it from above, the skin, smooth and lustrous as that of a girl, softened in his aging eyes, and the mask came to life, warm and smiling. He caught his breath. Three or four inches before his eyes, a live girl was smiling at him, cleanly, beautifully. The eyes and the mouth were truly alive. In the empty sockets were black pupils. The red lips were sensuously moist. Holding his breath, he came so close as almost to touch his nose to that of the mask, and the blackish pupils came floating up to him, and the flesh of the lower lip swelled. He was on the point of kissing it. Heaving a sigh, he pulled away. [...] telling himself that his ancient eyes had made the skin more alluring than that of a real woman.”⁶²

In the end, remembering the verses from the Noh play: *It may be lost in the undergrowth, but while it still has the flower of the heart...*,⁶³ Shingo takes the Jidō mask, with its luminous forehead and mysterious smile, which seemed to come to life before his very eyes and hides it in the closet. Thus, he only hangs the Kasshiki mask on the wall. Through its features, the Jidō mask, as an incarnated divinity, does not express the ephemeral beauty of youth, but a form of grace that approaches holiness, that transcends physical age. Undoubtedly, Shingo’s attraction to the effeminate mask – a symbol of eternal youth and immortality – overlaps the memory of his first love (Yasuko’s older sister), a love that was never forgotten. Moreover, since, in the

⁶¹ Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 86. Original text: 「気味が悪い」 Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 101.

⁶² Ibid., 88-89.

Original text:

三四寸の近くに顔を寄せて、生きた女がほほえんでいる。美しく清らかなほほえみだ。目と口が実に生きた。うつろな目の穴に黒い瞳がはいった。茜色の唇が可憐に濡れて見えた。信吾は息をつめて、鼻が触れそうになると、黒目勝ちの瞳が下から浮きあがって、下唇の肉がふくらんだ。信吾は危なく接吻しかかった。深い息を吐いて、顔を離れた。離れると嘘のようだ。しばらく荒い呼吸をしていた。Ibid., 103.

⁶³ Ibid., 160. Original text: 「埋木なれども、心の花のまだあれば.....」 Ibid., 187.

Noh theatre, the mask characterises a typology rather than an individual, the Jidō mask, which is believed to represent the holder of the elixir of eternal life, placed on Kikuko's face, turns back time and transforms Shingo, while gazing at it, into the young man once in love with his sister-in-law. In fact, this is a hypostatisation in which one can also easily identify the adolescent protagonist from the novel *Izu no odoriko* (伊豆の踊子・*The Dancing Girl of Izu*), published by Yasunari Kawabata in 1926. In the aforementioned novel, written three decades before *The Sound of the Mountain*, a young student holds the role of the main character, travelling on vacation to the Izu Peninsula, where he falls in love for the first time with a dancer from a troupe of travelling musicians. Having left in search for the "wilderness purity", in the "pure and simple" life of a mountainous island, with a mild climate and luxuriant vegetation, the young traveller meets a uniquely beautiful thirteen-year-old girl. Seduced by her innocence, the young man decides to travel with her part of the way and joins the troupe on a journey that proves to be initiating for the young man experiencing the emotions of a notion of love⁶⁴. Overwhelmed by the lyricism of reverie melted into small gestures, the lonely adolescent transforms the shy and innocent dancer into an image that precedes the carnal being, like a contemplated desire on the Noh theatre stage, bestirred by the incarnation of the Jidō mask. In the Noh theatre, the one who wears the mask is the leading actor, *shite*, and the mask is generally smaller than the human face,⁶⁵ which makes *shite's* figure seem somewhat taller than that of the *waki* actor. *Shite* is actually merely *waki's* vision, the later being the medium interposed between *shite* and the audience, an instrument in the absence of which nothing can actually take place⁶⁶ in this type of dramatic piece. Although it would appear that a realistic expression of the facial physiognomy is out of the question for the *shite*, the mask he wears demands a very subtle play, the *shite* thus managing, through different reflections, to make the mask be as expressive as a mobile face. The facial expressions thus obtained are, of course, stylised and somewhat sculptural; moreover, since, as opposed to the mask in the Greek theatre, the Noh mask covers the voice, and the play of the physiognomy is completed by a characteristic diction.⁶⁷ The Jidō mask and the Kasshiki mask now owned by Shingo seem to suggest Shingo's youth and the roles he had played or had desired to play throughout his existence: "Had a flicker of youth given him a dream of pure love in old age?"⁶⁸ Shingo's life

⁶⁴ See Rodica Frențiu, "Rêverie et « psychisme hydrant » chez Yasunari Kawabata dans *La Danseuse d'Izu* (*Izu no odoriko*, 1926)," *Studia UBB Philologia* LXV, 1 (2020): 9-26, <https://doi.org/10.24193/subbphil.2020.1.01>.

⁶⁵ See Friedrich Perzyński, *Japanese Nō Masks. With 300 Illustrations of Authentic Historical Examples*, Edited and Translated by Stanley Appelbaum (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005), ix.

⁶⁶ See Zeami, *La tradition secrète du nô. Suivi de Une journée de nô* par Zeami, Traduction et commentaires de René Siefert (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 20.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁸ Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 132.

Original text:

また、老いのうちにもゆらめく青春の名残りが、少年少女の純愛を夢見させるのかと、信吾は感傷にもあまえた。Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 155.

story, its details recounted through memories, feelings and sensations stirred by different diurnal and nocturnal stimuli, is actually a banal path, filled with repetitions, anachronisms and failures. However, for Shingo, through the resonance caused in his soul by the Jidō mask, the love lost in his youth seems to simultaneously be both past and present; he feels and re-lives the *memory of the moment* in an intimate and personal experience, based on the diurnal and nocturnal reveries, because a feeling that lasts receives a somewhat “metaphysical” nature.⁶⁹

“The strange thing was that there were two Shingos. Another Shingo was watching the Shingo along whose uniform the flames were creeping. The flames licked the sleeves and the shoulder seam and the hem of the tunic, and disappeared again. It was less that they blazed up than they came and went like wisps from a charcoal fire, giving forth tiny noises.”⁷⁰

Shingo’s portrait is an Impressionist painting, in which the intuition of the moment is the image of the soul, rather than an image of things. For this reason, the description of the moment is made through another moment, not in succession but rather in simultaneity, and the description of a thought is made through another thought. Naturally, the experience of the *memory of the moment* implies a viewpoint, in order to harmonize the fragments that speak of “being” and “becoming”, on the real moment and the thought duration, on concrete and constructed, on concrete and abstract. Thus, the character recovers his different lived or future ages, while simultaneously being the elderly man of today and the teenager of the past, the elderly man in the present and the man in his prime of yesteryear, the elderly man of today and the elderly man of tomorrow. Shingo was on a business trip to Atami when, one night, he was awakened by a strong spell and a slight ear pain that radiates towards the temples and the sweat-covered forehead. In the suffocating room, he came under the impression that “a roaring”⁷¹ was coming from the depths of the storm, a sound he somehow felt in his brain and which he associated with the noise made by a train passing through a tunnel: “A whistle blew as the train emerged. Shingo was suddenly afraid; he was now wide awake.”⁷² Moreover, since

⁶⁹ See Bachelard, *L’intuition de l’instant...*, 50.

⁷⁰ Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 238.

Original text:

ふとうしろを見ると、木こりはころがるように逃げていった。信吾の軍服の方々から火が出た。おかしいことに、そこで信吾は二人になって、火の出る軍服の信吾をもう一人の信吾がながめている。火は袖口とか、肩の線とか、端にそって出ては消える。燃えるのではなく、細い炭火がおこるような形で、ぼちぼちはじける音がする。Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 279.

⁷¹ Original text: そういう嵐の音の底にごおうっと遠い音。Ibid., 127.

⁷² Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 3.

Original text:

汽車はトンネルを出る時に、汽笛を鳴らした。しかし、汽笛を聞いた後で、信吾はふとおそろしくなっってはつきり目がさめた。Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 127.

the noise lingered for an unexpected amount of time, Shingo, confused, asks himself, given the distance from the Atami train station, how he could hear the strange rumble from the train's entrance into the tunnel's farthest exist. In medical terms, Shingo probably suffered another stroke, but, in the course of his inner feelings, this noise, on the threshold between dream and reality, somewhat facilitates the access to the tunnel of time. Passing through this tunnel, Shingo recovers his youth and one again becomes the enamoured teenager and, once he falls back asleep, he feels that he hears his name called out by the voice of Yasuko's sister.

The tunnel is actually a repetitive image in Kawabata's works, having been used as an opening scene for two other narrative plots: the aforementioned novel *The Dancing Girl of Izu* and the novel *Yuki guni* (雪国・*Snow Country* 1937, 1948). The tunnel marks, for the Japanese writer, not only the mere change of a geographic climate, but also the passage from a space of personal, private loneliness, into that of the *floating world*, of human acts and feelings⁷³. The opening sentence from the novel *Snow Country* [(lit.) 'After passing through the long tunnel on the border, there was the snow country.'],⁷⁴ considered to be one of the most famous opening lines in Japanese literature, introduces Shimamura, a forty year old modern intellectual interested in the Kabuki traditional theatre and in European ballet. Bored by the monotony of his life spent in Tokyo, Shimamura leaves in search for something beautiful: a land, a woman, a sensation, which would free him of the state of indifference in which he had fallen. Thus, he reaches Echigo, the snow country where he meets Komako, the concrete, real presence, the Geisha whom, during his last visit in the region, he finds her with a fattened body and her skin, – which used to be as translucent as that of a silk worm, was somewhat different –, and Yōko, her concrete appearance being confined to the unreal eyes and the impersonal face. The latter, namely the girl "of a cold beauty" in her mask-like motionless simplicity, with a voice so beautiful that it seemed "sad", in a climate of beauty, sadness and death, seems to be another incarnation of the Jidō mask. However, the land of Echigo, from the novel *Snow Country*, is tangentially mentioned in *The Sound of the Mountain* as well, seemingly pointing to a Shingo who was Shimamura's age. On a winter day, on the train returning home, Shingo's gaze is drawn by the loud voices of several excursionists who had come from afar, from the Echigo Mountains, carrying large maple branches on their shoulders. On the deep red background of the maple leaves, which seems to remind one of the cold regions of snow, introducing something of the charm of winter into the train car, the imagination captured by the forces of vegetal life rekindles in Shingo's soul the romantic

⁷³ See Rodica Frențiu, "Yasunari Kawabata and the Nostalgia of the Timeless Time," *Philobiblon. Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities*, XV (2010): 161-176.

⁷⁴ Original text: 国境の長いトンネルを抜けると雪国であった。・*Kunizakai no nagai tonneru o nukeru to yukiguni de atta*. Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 3. The English translation of the opening sentence of the novel aims to interpret the original, with no particular fidelity to the original, which thus became: "The train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country.", in Kawabata, Yasunari, *Snow country and Thousand cranes: The Nobel Prize edition of two novels*, Translated from the Japanese by Edward Seidensticker, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 3.

love from his youth. Caught in the chains of remembrance and of the integrating image created by the red maple leaves, which revives the memory of the maple Bonsai wrapped in the *furoshiki* linen belonging to his sister-in-law, which had been returned to her childhood home upon her death, the past once again received, for the sexagenarian protagonist, an age:

“He was thinking less, however, of the wild maples in the mountains of his old home than the large potted maple, its leaves crimson, among the memorial tablets when Yasuko’s sister had died.[...] He came to himself.”⁷⁵

Through the diurnal and nocturnal remembrances, Shingo activates his will to see and hear within things, thus making his sight and hearing insightful enough to pierce the *memory of the moment*. Sometimes violently, sight and hearing uncover the gap through which the secret of the hidden things can be revealed. Thus, based on this will to see and hear the depths of things and of the world, to see and hear what is unseen and unheard, what must not be seen and heard, the strange wry reveries,⁷⁶ like the repetitive dream in which Shingo embraces a faceless maiden:

“Yet would it not be true to the laws of dreams if he had awakened at the shock of contact with the girl? Not, of course, that it had been a sharp enough sensation to wake him. Here, too, nothing definite of the dream remained. The figure had gone, and he could not bring it back; all that remained was a sense of physical disparity, a failure of physical contact. Shingo had not, in actually, experienced such a woman. He had not recognized her, but because she had been a mere girl, the meeting could not have happened in real life.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 262.

Original text:

しかし、信吾は故郷の山のもみじよりも、保子の姉が、死んだ時、仏間にあった、大きい盆栽のもみじの紅葉を思い出した [...]。ふとわれにかえると、[...]。Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 306-307.

⁷⁶ See Bachelard, *Apa și visele...*, 10.

⁷⁷ Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 89.

Original text:

目がさめた時、ざるそばの姿がいちばんはっきり頭にあったように、今はおぼえている。しかし、娘に触れた驚きで夢が破れたとする方が、夢の定石ではなかろうか。もっとも、目をさますような刺激はなかったのである。これも筋道はなにも覚えていない。相手の姿も消えてしまって、思い浮かばない。信吾は今覚えているのは、ゆるい感覚だけだ。からだがあわなくて、答えがなかった。まがぬけていた。信吾は現実にもこれほどの女を経験したことはない。誰かはわからないが、とにかく娘なのだから、実際にはあり得ないことだろう。Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 37.

The sound of the mountain opens the gates through which Shingo begins his journey into his own self. Inside himself, each memory or dream brings the protagonist increasingly closer to the depths of an almost unknown self, built through the closeness and fusion of the lucid consciousness and the oneiric consciousness. Shingo had been one step away from kissing the lips of the Jidō mask and, in his dream, he had embraced a young woman, “this sequence of strange occurrences”⁷⁸ making him ask himself whether “something was about to shake the foundation of his house.”⁷⁹ Through a state of meditation caused by an album of memories, by a flow of sounds and images inflicted by diurnal states on the verge of hallucination and by nocturnal dreams, Shingo explores the *memory of the moment*, probing its mystery. The induced state comes with the “unmediated data”⁸⁰ that somewhat use the *function of the real*, while the imagination bestirred by memories and dreams activates the *function of the unreal*, inviting Shingo to a multiple, metaphoric life. Even while awake, Shingo’s being seems to slip through a gap between real and imaginary and finds the impressions from the dream since, on this adventure, the lucid, clear consciousness, and the oneiric, diffused consciousness, can fuse.

The new state of eroticism, into which Shingo enters through his nocturnal dreams, is fairly bland and rather sleepy, with no physical sensations. As an utterly unnatural phenomenon, like the Gingko tree which, left leafless by a late summer storm, sprouts shoots in the fall, although the buds would never actually grow, somewhat similarly to hid generation colleague Kitamoto’s desire to become younger by plucking his white hairs, Shingo does not expect to grow younger.⁸¹ But he rather hopes to sweeten his old age through nocturnal sentimental fantasies with young girls, moments in which he could live a time that is par excellence affective:

“In any case, he felt himself bathed in a soft repose, the repose of sleeping with a young girl. Happiness, he thought, might be just such a matter of the fleeting instant.”⁸²

At every sexagenarian reunion in which Shingo takes part, the discussions take place around infirmities, old age and the fear of incurable diseases. Horrified by old age: “The change is a terrible thing,”⁸³ although aware of the fact that nature is cyclical and human life is linear,

⁷⁸ Original text: あやしいこと。Ibid., 104.

⁷⁹ Original text: うちにゆらめくものがあるのかと、信吾は考えてみた。Ibid., 104.

⁸⁰ See Bachelard, *Apa și visele...*, 70.

⁸¹ Obuchowski, 208.

⁸² Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 237.

Original text:

娼婦のみじめないたましさかもしれないが、信吾は若い女に寄り添われて寝るといふ、やわらかい幸福になごんだ。Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 277-278.

⁸³ Ibid., 66. Original text: 「更年期はおそろしいんだぜ。」Ibid., 78.

Shingo attempts to resist the flow of time by imagining a paradisiacal death, which he equates to the sleep in the arms of a young woman, convinced of the fact that an old man is always “at an advantage” with a beautiful girl beside him. Through his nocturnal dreams, Shingo builds himself a “home” in which the sleeping body can surrender⁸⁴ to all of life’s seductions and can enjoy the warmth of another body. The dreaming loneliness in which he finds himself helps the protagonist prepare for death and enter an almost metaphysical reverie in which the memories take the shape of tableaux and the sceneries surpass the drama. Shingo’s memories are neither sad nor joyful, but rather burdened by the aura of melancholy. And the melancholy as a sentimental synthesis of the contradictions that make man live in the *moment* can also be found as a background tone in the novel *House of the Sleeping Beauties* (眠れる美女・*Nemureru bijo*, 1961), published by Yasunari Kawabata several years after *The Sound of the Mountain*.

Eguchi, the 67 year old protagonist from *House of the Sleeping Beauties*, seems to be an older version of Shingo, who had given up on the idea of a “renewed brain”, in a “sleep hospital”, since he was completely seduced by the idea of the “sleeping body”. Both Shingo and Eguchi are characters who grow old inside their own memories. Echigo (or a septuagenarian Shingo) visits an unusual, sign-less house that sheltered sleeping beauties, next to whom he then spends his nights, admiring them or sleeping beside them, the physical pleasure having been replaced by reverie or dream, which help him connect the present through gaze, touch and smell, to the memory of the past⁸⁵. If light favours the ascending trajectory, the nocturnal opacity gives way to the intimate descent, while the reverie of the night colours the drapes that covers the walls of the house (sheltering the sleeping beauties) in blood red, and Eguchi’s memories in the colours of the rainbow. The rainbow that had, once, during his youth, accompanied him in his journey to Kyoto together with the first girl he ever loved is, in fact, the memory that opens the line of remembrances in the house of the sleeping beauties. All of the visual remembrances that occurred during these visits in the house of the sleeping beauties take place against the background provided by the sound or silence of the nearby sea, a background that amplifies the peacefulness of the reveries, leading Eguchi towards a psyche of rest, given by the “good of the anima.”⁸⁶ The sleeping beauty is not *THE* Sleeping Beauty, placed under a spell, awaiting her Prince Charming; it is the young body of an artificially dormant maiden that “moves the onlooker to tears” due to her beauty. If the nocturnal dream seems, for Shingo, connected to censorships and upsets, reverie makes Eguchi admit that the visit to the house of sleeping beauties is a story he only tells himself. If, through reveries, Eguchi

⁸⁴ Bachelard, *Apa și visele...*, 86.

⁸⁵ See Rodica Frențiu, “Towards a New Aesthetic Vision: Ryūnosuke Akutagawa in the Polyphonic Reading of Yasunari Kawabata,” *Philobiblon. Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in the Humanities*, XXI, 2 (2016): 127-144.

⁸⁶ See Gaston Bachelard, *Poetica reverie* [The Poetics of Reverie], transl. by Luminița Brăileanu (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2005), 76.

sinks carefully, but fearlessly, into a beautiful world that offers the self a non-self⁸⁷ that is close and friendly and with whose help the self, connected to the real world, is freed from the *function of the real*, Shingo continues to dream, activating the *function of the unreal* as a continuation of the real: *When I am in pain, I have dreams that continue reality*,⁸⁸ his dreams not necessarily always being directly connected to reality. For both elderly men, the gala of remembered experiences, in Shingo's case, during the nocturnal dream and, in Eguchi's case, transformed into reveries, seems to become unique through the proximity of death.

The novel *The Sound of the Mountain* ends with a family meal gathering, on an October Sunday, the trout on the menu reminding Shingo of his youth, when Yasuko's sister had encouraged him to write *haiku* poems, his train of thought associating ideas contextualised in the moment, and it thus makes him mention different literary expressions for trout, such as 'autumn trout' (秋の鮎), 'descending trout' (落鮎), 'rusty trout' (錆鮎). These trout had laid their eggs and, exhausted, let themselves be taken by the currents towards the sea, and Shingo openly admits that he sees himself in them, reproducing verses of old: *A trout in the autumn, abandoning itself to the water. Trout swimming down the shallows, not knowing they must die*.⁸⁹ The *haiku*, the shortest poetic form, is the poem made of 17 syllables invoking the natural phenomena corresponding to a season, together with the emotional implications that respond to them;⁹⁰ during a bland conversation over a family meal, the mentioning of the artistic act of creating a *haiku* merely confirms Shingo's fascination with the art. An understandable fascination, since the creative act represents the sudden shift of the moment into the duration of eternity, as an experience of the moment that had frozen time. The artefacts of interest to Shingo are the Noh masks (which can be associated with several verses from a Noh theatre play), a Buddha statue, a filmed *Kabuki* play, a calligraphic scroll, paintings made by the old masters, *haiku* and *tanka* poems, as testimonies to the art that restores the meaning of the world and discovers the hidden secrets of the human soul in different rhythms: image, sound, colour. In the *haiku* register, autumn is associated par excellence with melancholy, and the ending of the novel, in the spirit of the verses of old about the autumn trout, as a projection of the character's age, emphasises Shingo's melancholy. Thus, he once again experiences the *memory of the moment*, through a sentimental synthesis of the contradictions between desire and fulfilment. The accumulation of thoughts and images through their repetition, in fact, represent the transition that, in the novel *The Sound of the Mountain*, ensure the unity of the events or of the invoked memories, in the absence of temporal details or any other specific information. Through this stream of consciousness,

⁸⁷ See *ibid.*, 22.

⁸⁸ Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 271.

Original text: 「苦しみを内に持っている、現実の続きの夢を我は見ている。[...]」 Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 318.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 274. Original text:

「今は身を水にまかすや秋の鮎、とか、死ぬことと知らで下るや瀬々の鮎」 *Ibid.*, 321.

⁹⁰ See R.H. Blyth, *A History of Haiku*, In Two Volumes (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1984), 1-11.

Shingo's inner life seems to be reborn, discontinuously, into other ages and under other names, so as the dispersed self finally finds its unity in "the miracle" of life: "And the only struck by the strangeness of it all was an outsider. He wondered whether, accidental witness to it all, he too had partaken of the miracle."⁹¹ Moreover, the states of consciousness based on which the character solidifies into words and the self seem to cover an (outer) layer of psychological facts, fixed by the moment and gathered into the *memory of the moment*. Although, when it comes to a feeling, no other result could be precise other than, perhaps, that of having felt that certain feeling,⁹² the Japanese writer seeks the appropriate word to grant individuality to the feelings and ideas of a splintered self inside the person who feels and thinks and of a self that acts, somewhat in an attempt to reunite an inner life, continuously and discontinuously, with each new novel, in a new age.

However, this self of the literary character, which is both inwards-bound, understood as deep reflection, with inner states refractory to mechanical measuring, in which he thinks and talks, and outwards-bound or social, in which he acts, seems to transform, for the Japanese writer, in the end, into a method of the imagination through which the author aims to understand himself through his character, while traversing the ages of human life and of life's seasons: the springtime of youth – *The Dancing Girl of Izu*, the summer of maturity – *Snow Country*, the autumn of maturity – *The Sound of the Mountain*, the winter of death – *House of the Sleeping Beauties*. And, since it is somewhat natural that does not study himself directly, but rather discerns himself through forms borrowed from the outside world, the author of the narration can very easily become a character of his own fiction. The inner life of the character Ogata Shingo, an imaginary self that can be decoded, in a referential illusion, and as a possible (autobiographic) personal self of the writer Yasunari Kawabata, seems to be built out of different experiments of the *time-moment*, the *time-duration* and the *memory of the moment*, by applying a technique that I would call a *linked novel*, an architectonic construct in which the states of consciousness not longer juxtapose, but intertwine and blend together, each taking on the colouration of the other. One detail that arose from the depths of the subconscious would act somewhat similarly to a hypnotic suggestion,⁹³ depicting a succession through simultaneity: *I have met with what is difficult of meeting; I have heard what is difficult of hearing.*⁹⁴

⁹¹ Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain...*, 264.

Original text:

奇蹟の人が自分の奇蹟を知らないで去った。不思議に打たれたのは、第三者の信吾だ。

Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 309.

⁹² See Bergson, 132.

⁹³ See *ibid.*, 115.

⁹⁴ Original text:

「遇ひ難くして今遇ふことを得たり、聞き難くしてすでに聞くことを得たり。」

Kawabata, *Yama no oto...*, 194.

The relation between art and life, between imagination and reality represents the goal of any artistic act, and Yasunari Kawabata's work exploits an aesthetic intuition that refreshes the poetic force, breaking away from the literary routine. Also known as a "cultural nationalist", the Japanese writer attempted to freeze the time of traditional culture in his novels, before it would disappear forever,⁹⁵ which is why Kawabata's work appears as a monad in which *birth* and *re-birth*, *commence* and *re-commence* continuously intertwine, although to different rhythms. Reading *The Sound of the Mountain* simultaneously as a reprise-continuation of the novels *The Dancing Girl of Izu* and *Snow Country*, or as a preview for the narrative plot of the *House of the Sleeping Beauties*, one can identify the architectural technique of the *linked novel*, an attempt to apply, in prose, the model of the *renga linked verse*, a poetic process that is famous in the Japanese poetry of the Middle Ages, dependent on the effects of repetition or of the reprisal of an image from one verse to the next.⁹⁶ By identifying, in the work of the Japanese writer, the compositional technique of the *linked novel*, the novel that followed may modify not only the reading of the previous one, but also the particular meditation offered by the author regarding the unravelling of time in his moments of reverie and the outburst of the real. By providing access to the creative consciousness, through this technique, the author recovers his right to be his own interpreter, despite the fact that, in the end, he does not decode a meaning, but rather completes the meaning with meaning. As a theme with several discoveries, or as a poem that can endlessly be read and re-read, bearing inexhaustible significances, through the architecture of the *linked novel*, the author simultaneously reveals and hides himself, providing, as a decoding key for his work, the reading method of discontinuity, which interrupts the logical flow of the successive unravelling of events, thus giving way to the affective moment.

Similarly to the unravelling of a scroll that both reveals and hides its contents, this narrative type combines the narrative principles given by the pictorial means of describing the outside world and the dramatic means of presenting the inner life. Without being a simple photographic description of life, but rather a deep vision on it, Yasunari Kawabata's literature can also be interpreted as a "dramatisation" of the human state of mind, with dives into the inner psyche on different levels of depth: the (upper) surface level would include the novel *The Dancing Girl of Izu*, followed by *Snow Country*, on the (middle) intermediary level, while *The Sound of the Mountain* and *House of the Sleeping Beauties* explore, due to the technique of the flow of consciousness, the deeper levels of the inner self. By exploiting the possibility of making reprisals or anticipations and of not respecting the sequential order, the technique of the linked novel provides the grounds for a global reading, which identifies correspondences and identities, similarities and contrasts, reassessments and variations, in the nodes and intersperses in which the texture of the writing folds or unfolds. The vocabulary of the narration, in search for new combinations and associations in a unique stylistic context, gains

⁹⁵ See Brown, 379.

⁹⁶ See Jun'ichi Konishi, *A History of Japanese Literature. Volume three. The High Middle Ages*, transl. by Aileen Gatten and Mark Harbison, (ed) Earl Miner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 274-284.

new meanings, thus rediscovering not only its youth but also its freedom, since the word with imprecise outlines can “stir” or “cover up”⁹⁷ delicate or transient impressions, or the individual consciousness. As a heterodiegetic episode in the first person,⁹⁸ or, in other words, as a book written at different ages, whose reading has an undetermined end, Yasunari Kawabata’s literature does not describe, but rather it evokes, in an attempt to experiment the *memory of the moment*, on the border between the *time-moment* and the *time-duration*.

Translated from Romanian by Anca Chiorean

⁹⁷ See Bergson, 95.

⁹⁸ See Lintvelt, 67.