RE-READING YASUNARI KAWABATA: THE WINTER IMAGINARY IN THE NOVEL *SNOW COUNTRY* (*YUKI GUNI*, 1935-1937/ 1948)

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Abstract Filtered by the literary-artistic imagination, nature and the cycle of seasons represent a central theme in the classical literary and visual Japanese culture, known as 雪月花 (*Setsugekka*), or as the theme of seasons changing, a metonymical wording for the beauty of each season. Since the uniqueness of a work of art implies its identification by anchoring it in the context of a tradition, beginning from the *Setsugekka* theme, the present study aims to circumscribe the imaginary of winter in the novel *Snow Country* (雪国・*Yuki guni*, 1935-1937/ 1948), by Yasunari Kawabata. As in a (musical) canon across time, in the postmodern context that suspends the borders between the 'high brow' culture and the 'low brow' culture, between the original and the copy, the novel *Snow Country* appears in *manga* form in 2010, with drawings by illustrator Sakuko Utsugi, thus offering a particular re-reading, an 'inter-semiotic translation' of the original text. The present study goes on to analyse the specific vocabulary through which the 'iconography' of winter is created in the *komikku* version of the novel, and to identify the means by which it aims to configure the psychological states and the emotions of the characters. Due to his acute *sense* of the seasons, through his novel, Yasunari Kawabata succeeds in completing the traditional list of famous places (*meisho*) associated with the motif of winter in Japan, with the snow country from Echigo.
Keywords *Setsugekka*, Yasunari Kawabata, snow country, nature, the winter *imaginary*.

C'est l'hiver, et pourtant tombent du ciel des pétales de fleurs : au-dèla des nuages, y aurait-il un printemps?
Kiyohara no Fukayabu, *Kokin wakashū* (*Recueil des poèmes de jadis et naguère*), ca.905

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When you think it is yesterday, today has passed,
and when you think it is spring, it is autumn. When you
think that the flowers have bloomed, things shift to the
bright autumn leaves.
Nijō Yoshimoto, *Tsukuba mondō* (*Questions and Answers at Tsukuba*), 1372

In Japan, the contemplation and celebration of the seasons begins with the New Year, with the *hatsuhinode* (*the first sunrise*) and continues, in February, with *The Day Before the Beginning of Spring*, *Setsubun*, followed by *hanami*, or the *celebration/ viewing of the cherry blossoms*, in April; the *Midori no Hi* (*Greenery Day*), *Tanabata* (*Star Festival*), *Umi no Hi* (*Marine Day*) and *Yama no Hi* (*Mountain Day*) are dedicated to the summer, the latter of which having been celebrated since 2016, on the 11th of August; autumn contains the *momiji-gari* (*maple-tree viewing*) and *tsuki-mi* (*moon viewing*), the annual calendar of contemplating and celebrating nature (out of which we selected only several examples) thus undoubtedly emphasising an intimate relation between the Japanese and the *naturing nature* (*natura naturans*). However, the literary and visual Japanese culture quickly converted this relation in its own way, by replacing a possible mimetic function of nature, as a direct reflection of the material reality or the physical ambient, with one that re-creates and encodes nature; this type of *represented nature* (*natura naturata*) brings forward not a nature as it is, but rather as it should be… filtered through the poetic-artistic imagination. Never having been seen as the opposite of the human world, but as an extension of it, the aforementioned type of *secondary nature* (*nijiteki shizen*)[1] can be identified in forms as early as the religious painting of the 6th century (see Balcou 2018: 6), but the classical poetry, through the *waka* poems from the anthology *Man'yōshū* (*The Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*, approx. 759) was the one to spur and to establish the theme of nature, which, influenced by the Chinese culture, would come to bear the name of *Setsugekka* (*Snow, Moon and Flowers*). 雪月花 (*Setsugekka*),[2] or the theme of changing seasons, is, in the Japanese literary and visual culture, a metonymical formulation for the beauty of each season, representing the (urban) imaginary of three seasons: the snow season, the autumn moon season and the season of spring flowers (and possibly of summer flowers).

[1] See Haruo Shirane, *Japan and the Culture of the four Seasons*. *Nature, Literature and the Arts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 4.

[2] The encyclopaedic dictionary of the Japanese language (1995, 1202) explains the concept thusly: '(lit.) Snow and moon and flowers. Viewing the seasons'; (in original)「雪と月と花。季節のながめ。」.

雪月花・Snow. Moon. Flower[3]

Yet, since the central themes of the literary culture have continuously communicated with the visual ones, the emergence of the new artistic genres can easily be understood – such as the painting of the four seasons (*shiki-e*), of the months of the year (*tsukinami-e*) and of famous places (*meisho-e*), so that the *Setsugekka* theme gains its unprecedented shine in the *ukiyo-e* (woodblock printing) pictorial genre, which flourished, beginning with the 17th century.

A strictly quantitative viewpoint, regarding the number of poems dedicated to each season in the first eight imperial anthologies of *waka* poems (*Kokinshū* [approx. 905], *Gosenshū* [951], *Shūishū* [1005-1007], *Goshūishū* [1086], *Kinyōshū* [approx. 1127], *Shikashū* [1151-1154], *Senzaishū* [1183], *Shinkokinshū* [1205]), highlights the preference of the poets of that time for spring and autumn;[4] more or less surprisingly, the least number of poems were dedicated to winter. And the interest in the white season visibly increased in, for instance, the *haiku* poetry and in the *ukiyo-e* prints from the centuries that followed, which reconstructed the cultural harmony with the season of winter. Thus, at the end of the 18th century, to illustrate the 78 *kyōka* poems (the satiric-comical *tanka*) from the volume dedicated to snow in the trilogy of poetic anthologies compiled by Tsutaya Jūzaburō (1750-1797) on the *Setsugekka* theme (approx. 1790), Kitagawa Utamaro (approx. 1753-1803) drew five wintery landscapes; the same theme was continued by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) and winter became the subject of several

[3] Japanese Calligraphy by Rodica Frentiu.
[4] See Shirane, 221-223.

prints, including *Tea House at Koishikawa (Koishikawa no chashitsu. Kōsetsugo no asa)*,[5] from the series *The Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* (*Fugaku Sanjūrokkei*). The snow season would thus also play the main role in the prints by Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858), who readdressed the theme of winter not only in the series *100 Famous Views of Edo* (*Meisho Edo hyakkei*),[6] but also at the end of the collection *Eight Views of Edo Environs* (*Edo kinko hakkei*, approx. 1838), with a wintery scene in *Evening Snow on Asuka Hill* (Asukayama kureyuki).[7]

Ki no Tsurayuki (approx. 868-approx. 945), who prefaced the anthology *Kokinshū* (*Collection of Japanese Poems Old and New*, approx. 905), pointed out the strong link between the writer or the reader and nature, and noted the beauty of winter in a *waka* poem that became famous – a poem in which the poet… confuses the snowflakes with the cherry blossoms, through the *mitate* (見立て)[8] rhetorical figure: *When the snow falls, flowers unknown to spring bloom on both the grass and trees that have been dormant all winter* (*Yuki fureba fuyugomoriseru kusa mo ko mo haru ni shirarenu hana zo sakikeru*).[9] One millennium later, modern literature's turn came to offer an enchanting ode to the white season, as a splendid illustration of the *Setsugekka* theme, through the novel *Yuki guni* (雪国・*Snow Country*, 1935-1937/1948), authored by Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972), a novel that was readdressed in *manga* version in print in 2010 (and in electronic form in 2016), containing drawings by illustrator Sakuko Utsugi.

The novel *Snow Country* is a diegetic narrative text in the 3rd person, told from the perspective of the main character, Shimamura, who embodies the modern intellectual who, bored by the monotony of the life spent in Tokyo, sets off on a journey to the snow country, a region from northern Japan which, during the winter, is buried in snow drifts several metres high. Thus, the narration presents the visits made by the wealthy, middle-aged dilettante in this region, in his search for something… beautiful: a land, a woman, a feeling, anything that could circumvent the state of indifference in which he had sunken: "Shimamura, who lived a life of idleness, found that he tended to lose his honesty with himself…"[10] By placing Shimamura at the centre of the novel,[11] the Japanese writer managed to bring the reader into the snow country through him, in order to reveal the other two protagonists of the story, Komako and Yōko, who lived in the small thermal baths resort from Echigo.

Shimamura's first visit to the snow country takes place on the 21st of May, during a season that was safe from the danger of avalanches, when Komako, the Geisha from the thermal

[5] See Amélie Balcou, *Les saisons par les grands maîtres de l'estampe japonaise* [*The seasons by the great masters of Japanese prints*] (Paris: Editions Hazan, 2018), 38-42.
[6] Melanie Trede, Lorenz Bichler, *Utagawa Hiroshige. Meisho Edo hyakkei* [*One hundred Famous Views from Edo*] (Köln: Taschen, 2010), 228.
[7] See Balcou, 44-45.
[8] A visual transposition, seeing X as Y (See Shirane, 69).
[9] See Shirane, 45.
[10] Yasunari Kawabata, *Snow Country and Thousand Cranes: The Nobel Prize edition of two novels*, transl. by Edward Seidensticker (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 16-17.
[11] See Makoto Ueda, "*The Virgin, the Wife, and the Nun: Kawabata's Snow Country*," in Tsuruta, Kinya, Swann, Thomas E. (eds.), *Approaches to the Modern Japanese Novel* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1976), 73.

resort whom he then meets, was eighteen years old. His second visit takes place at the beginning of the winter of the same year – Shimamura arrives on the 8th of December and spends several weeks there. His third and final visit takes place two years later, when Shimamura spends his time in the mountain resort from the beginning of autumn to the first snow, namely the harbinger of winter. Since the structure of the novel does not follow the chronology of the visits, the narration begins with Shimamura's second visit to Echigo, at the beginning of winter, and ends with the third and, incidentally, longest visit. Shimamura's journeys, two of which had found him in the snow country during the white season, somewhat invoke a reiterated nostalgia of the search for *timeless time*,[12] a suspended time, at the conjunction between dream and reality, a meditative nostalgia that is amplified by the lonely melancholy of the wintery atmosphere in the background:

> It was a stern landscape. The sound of the freezing snow over the land seemed to roar deep into the earth (…). As the stars came nearer, the sky retreated deeper and deeper into the night color. The layers of the Border Range, indistinguishable one from another, cast their heaviness at the skirt of the starry sky in a blackness grave and somber enough to communicate their mass. The whole of the night scene came together in a clear, tranquil harmony.[13]

The scene that opens the novel, establishing the protagonist's distancing from Tokyo, the real metropolis, is connected to Shimamura's second visit – on the train that was taking him to the mountain resort, he meets Yōko for the first time, who was returning home in the company of a sick man whom she cared for with 'delicacy.' One of Kawabata's favourite methods of creating a relation with nature is the mirror,[14] which not only establishes inter-human relations, but also integrates, in a certain way, human life into the time of nature. Thus, the fogged window of the night train, on which Shimamura distractedly draws a line with his finger, thinking of the image of the woman towards whom he was headed, becomes "the evening mirror" in which he notices, in astonishment and suddenly awakening from the dream, that "A woman's eye floated up before him;"[15] the window was reflecting the profile of a girl that had "a coolly piercing beauty," sitting on the seat in front, whose name, Yōko, he would subsequently find out:

> But he had been dreaming, and when he came to himself he saw that it was only the reflection in the window of the girl opposite. Outside it was glowing dark, and the lights had been turned on in the train, transforming the window into a mirror. The mirror had been clouded over with steam until he drew that line across it.[16]

[12] Rodica Frențiu, "Yasunari Kawabata and the Nostalgia of the Timeless Time," *Philobiblon. Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Humanities* XV (2010): 161-176.
[13] Kawabata, *Snow Country*, 44.
[14] Kinya Tsuruta, "The Flow-Dynamics in Kawabata Yasunari's Snow Country," *Monumenta Nipponic*a 26, no. 3-4 (1971): 252.
[15] Kawabata, *Snow Country*, 7.
[16] Ibid.

But this mirror does not only reflect the surrounding reality, but also offers its dilution and its magical transformation into illusions, due to the unreal transparency: the light of the eye in the fogged window, which seemed to have borrowed, from the field traversed by the train, the ghostly background of *the darkness of the night whitened by the snow to its very core*, makes Shimamura shiver, faced with such beauty. In his eyes, Yōko immediately becomes as interesting as a "character in a novel." The "evening mirror" would actually be reminded to Shimamura several days later, by a "morning mirror," in which he would see the reddened cheeks and the striking contrast between the whiteness of the snow reflected in the mirror and the black hair of Komako, the Geisha he had met in the thermal resort during his first visit, in the spring:

> The white in the depths of the mirror was the snow, and floating in the middle of it were the woman's bright red cheeks. There was an indescribably fresh beauty in the contrast. Was the sun already up? The brightness of the snow was more intense, it seemed to be burning icily. Against it, the woman's hair became a clearer black, touched with a purple sheen.[17]

The image of the "morning mirror" reappeared in the narrative scenario in the form of a short reminiscence, towards the end, as a synthesis of Shimamura's entire experience in the snow country, emphasising the irreconcilable discrepancy[18] between a moment that is close to sacredness, of a "cold" timeless beauty, and the profane, the "tragic" time of a "warm" human connection:

> He remembered the snowy morning toward the end of the year before, and glanced at the mirror. The cold peonies floated up and yet larger, cutting a white outline around Komako. Her kimono was open at the neck, and she was wiping at her throat with a towel.[19]

Thus, the snow itself is transformed, in the novel, into a vast mirror, as a background scene that facilitates the interrelation between the characters of the novel and nature. Humans and nature are brought closer together by winter, so that the beauty can occasionally become tangible. The memory's past overlaps the present through reflected images in a manner in which the two (real) young women met by Shimamura in the mountain resort – fragile souls, in fact – are, in the end, for him, transformed into dreams turned unto themselves,[20] as in an emotional nihilism, enclosed inside a mirror:

[17] Ibid., 48.
[18] See Anthony V. Liman, "Kawabata's Lyrical Mode in Snow Country," *Monumenta Nipponica* 26, no. 3-4 (1971): 276.
[19] Kawabata, *Snow Country*, 150.
[20] See Kōjin Karatani, "*D'un dehors à l'autre. Kawabata et Takeda Taijun*," in Patrick De Voss (ed.), *Litterature Japonaise Contemporaine*. *Essais* [*Contemporary Japanese literature. Essays*] (Bruxelles: Editions Labor, 1989), 39.

> Always ready to give himself up to reverie, he could not believe that the mirror floating over the evening scenery and the other snowy mirror were really works of man. They were part of nature, and part of some distant world.[21]

The novel covers a time span of almost three years and, without reproducing the passage of time completely, the story in *Snow Country* dissolves into a flow of images whose inner unity seems to be given by the omnipresent snow, since winter, perhaps more than any other season, favours not only melancholy and metaphysical sadness, but also a particular kind of rebirth: "The mountains, more distant each day as the russet of the autumn leaves had darkened, came brightly back to life with the snow."[22]

Moreover, since the only relation to reality held by the protagonist Shimamura, the grumpy and silent intellectual, burdened by "being in love with someone he had never seen,"[23] is given only by the sense of perception (*kankaku*), the only source of information on reality, the writer's insistence on the sensory perception, particularly that of visual perception, has a direct consequence in the avoidance of the rational discourse and the intellectual process.[24] Thus, an event or a certain feature of a character becomes an indirect interpretation, in a particular moment, similarly to the cinematographic technique of the commentary through images. For Kawabata, this commentary is never too explicit or definitive, since the visual sensation triggered by an image opens a path towards the interpretation of a complex meaning, given by an emotional experience and a universal sensibility, which connects the unconscious emotion (or the semi-conscious emotion) with a natural phenomenon. As a sensualist that surpassed his own limits of the sensorial visceral experience, Kawabata tries to find the tangible expression of what is intangible and invisible – the scene depicting the fire at the end of the novel, at the silk worm factory, leads to the situation in which the "evening" mirror and the "morning" mirror overlap and break; against the background of the devastating fire, the still body of Yōko falls to the ground, from the balcony of the warehouse engulfed by the flames, with a short spasm, and Komako takes her into her arms, with an unsound mind, the scene unravelling under the (external) observing eyes of Shimamura:

> Two or three beams from the collapsing balcony were burning over her head. The beautiful eyes that so pierced their objective were closed. […] The fire flickered over the white face. Shimamura felt a rising in his chest again as the memory came to him of the night he had been on his way to visit Komato, and he had seen that mountain light shine in Yoko's face. The years and months with Komako seemed to be lighted up in that instant; and there, he knew, was the anguish.[25]

[21] Kawabata, *Snow Country*, 57.
[22] Ibid., 150.
[23] Ibid., 25.
[24] See Liman, 268.
[25] Kawabata, *Snow Country*, 174.

For Shimamura, the mirror, which seems objective, distanced from the viewer, slides onto another, strongly subjective one, connected to his own memories, so as to, temporarily, favour his detachment from temporality. The continuity of the material, real time-space axis, and the axis of the unreal, dream world time is now dislocated, and Shimamura, in contemplation of the Milky Way (*Amanogawa*), whose plethora of stars blends with the sparks of the raging fire, feels how time evades temporality:

> The Milky Way, Shimamura too looked up, and he felt himself floating into the Milky Way. Its radiance was so near that it seemed to take him up into it. Was this the bright vastness the poet Bashō saw when he wrote of the Milky Way arched over a stormy sea? The Milky Way came down just over there, to wrap the night earth in its naked embrace. There was a terrible voluptuousness about it. Shimamura fancied that his own small shadow was being cast up against it from the earth. Each individual star stood apart from the rest, and even the particles of silver dust in the luminous clouds could be picked out, so clear was the night. The limitless depth of the Milky Way pulled his gaze up into it.[26]

As suggested by the intertextual reference to Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694), Kawabata seems to have written the final chapter of the novel with the haiku of the mind-wandering poet: *Araumi ya*/ *Sado ni yokotau*, / *Amanogawa* ("A stormy sea stretches out to Sado Island / the Milky Way").[27] Shimamura's immersion into the Milky Way seems to imply an exceedance of the duality of this world, of the hiatus between the world of reality and that of intuition, between nature and the mind, between civilisation and the primary human instincts, between the snowy land, with its thermal baths, and the fire underneath the Milky Way, in the end. The invocation of the eternal dilemma of the Japanese spirituality regarding the choice between sensuality, or being alive, and the attraction of the void seems to be answered. The spatial poles are set in motion and their position becomes relative:[28] in the midst of the fire in the snow, Yōko, the mirage-girl, whose concrete features are reduced to the "unreal eyes" and to "such a beautiful voice that it struck one as sad"[29] finally meets Komako, the feral girl[30] that had a lively and enveloping femininity, the earth embraces the Milky Way, the flames set off in the snow, the fire contrasting the night's darkness, and the sparks blend into the stars. However, the fusion of the consciousness/mind, the ego and the natural environment into a comprehensive whole is almost an ecstatic moment of revealing the unseen from beyond the appearances of the world, liberating the human from all mundane connections, so as to facilitate a detached viewing of things, as a void or a transparency, devoid of the tragic surface meaning. The state of dispassion,

[26] Ibid., 165.

[27] Matsuo Bashō, *Cent onze haïku* [*One hundred and eleven haiku*], tranls. by Joan Titus-Carmel (Paris: Verdier, 1998), 46.

[28] See Liman, 285.

[29] Kawabata, *Snow Country,* 5. In original: *Kanashii hodo utsukushii koe de atta* (Yasunari Kawabata, *Yuki guni* [*Snow Country*] (Tokyo: Bungeishunju, 1988), 7).

[30] 'She seemed on edge, like some relentless night beast (…). It was as though a strange, magical wilderness had taken her.' (Kawabata, 1978, 47).

the removal of all thoughts and ideas, the withdrawal from the self and the entrance into the world of the void, of nothingness, – which is not the western emptiness, but rather its opposite, a universal spirit in which everything communicates freely with everything, limitlessly surpassing borders –, is the manifestation of the final truth, in its form outlined by the Zen Buddhism, as shown by Yasunari Kawabata[31] in the lecture *Japan, the Beautiful and Myself* (*Utsukushii Nihon no Watashi*) held at the ceremony during which he received the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1968.

As if part of a canon[32] across time, *Snow Country* in its *manga* version, published in 2010, offers a particular re-reading, an "intersemiotic translation"[33] of Yasunari Kawabata's novel. Having become, over the past few years, the subject of the academic studies that aim to theorize it as a "fine art" genre,[34] *manga* is a form visual pop culture, whose origins can be traced back, according to certain researchers,[35] to *Chōjū jinbutsu giga* (*Scrolls of Frolicking Animals*), from the 12th century whilst, according to other scholars,[36] the beginnings of the genre can be found in the *kibyoshi* illustrated books from the 18th century, which had appeared due to the influence of the *ukiyo-e* technique (woodblock printing). As an "ambiguous" or "impure" genre,[37] which combines the drawing and the scriptural in a creative process, the *manga*[38] artistic form is, first and foremost, considered to be a pictorial expressive form. Japan has had a long pictorial-narrative tradition,[39] which began with *emakimono*, the scrolls from the 10th century that tell stories using images. This could explain and justify the unprecedented interest stirred today by the *manga* comic books, thus reconfiguring the current relation between the postmodern social context and the subculture-like cultural production.[40] As a combination between images and words, the *manga* form seems to gain an increasingly more important role in the educational process in contemporary Japanese society. Thus, the cultural gesture through which the well-established works of Japanese classical and modern literature are readdressed in

[31] Yasunari Kawabata, "*Japan, the Beautiful and Myself*," in Tore Frängsmyr (Editor-in-charge), Sture Allén (ed.), *From Nobel Lectures, Literature 1968-1980* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co., 1993), 8.

[32] A musical form and compositional technique, based on the principle of strict imitation, in which an initial melody is imitated at a specified time interval by one or more parts, either at the unison (i.e., the same pitch) or at some other pitch (*Encyclopedia Britannica*: https://www.britannica.com/art/canon-music)

[33] See Roman Jakobson, "*On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,"* in Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *The Translations Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 114.

[34] See Hirohito Miyamoto, Jennifer Prough, "The Formation of an Impure Genre – On the Origins of 'Manga'," *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, 14, *Meiji Literature and the Artwork* (Dec. 2002): 43-44.

[35] Ibid., 41.

[36] See Susan J. Napier, "The Problem of Existence in Japanese Animation," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 149 / 1 (Mar. 2005): 73.

[37] See Miyamoto, Prough, 45.

[38] Bearing the English equivalent of the 'comic book', the *manga* publication has, in the Japanese culture, a meaning that is very different from that of the term used in the European and American culture, in which it is seen as a children's book or, perhaps, as a light, consumer book.

[39] See Napier, 73.

[40] See Kiyomitsu Yui, "Japanese Animation and Glocalization of Sociology," *Sociologisk Forskning*, 47/4 (2010): 44.

manga form becomes an irrefutable testimony to the means by which the contemporary public appropriates the literary heritage, in the postmodern context that suspends the borders between the "high brow" culture and the "low brow" culture, between the original and the copy, between genres, areas and hierarchies.[41]

Without altering the *authority* and the *aura* of the original,[42] the transposition of the novel *Snow Country* in the form of a *komikku*-type graphic narration can be interpreted as a 'reproduction' which, by inevitably raising the issue of authenticity, is also a reminder, among other things, of the fact that society's perception changes over time. Moreover, this perceptive change leads to the fact that the receptive public receives the quality of an "interpreter"[43] of the 'reproduction', although, most often, the public seems to prefer enjoyment over the critical stance. If the original *Snow Country* maintains the characteristics of the *complete image*, the *manga* version is fragmented, and the fragments are reassembled according to a composition logic that is characteristic to the genre, in its attempt to suspend the tension between the fidelity to the original and the adaptation of the original to the particularities of a stylistic model that combines the pictorial and the linguistic systems of representation.

Thus, *Snow Country – komikku* 版 begins, in accordance with the genre convention, with the presentation of the characters (*jinbutsu shōkai*), iconic characters brought to the reader before the beginning of the text itself, depicting their names, accompanied by a monochrome portrait and a short textual description. In this presentation, what is somewhat surprising is not only Shimamura's portrait, whose features are rather Caucasian, but also the short description that motivates his presence in the mountain resort not through his desire to rediscover nature and himself, but to escape the heat of summer. Although it is a detail mentioned in the original only in passing, the desire to escape the metropolis in order to avoid the suffocating summer heat is, indeed, an important aspect of the Japanese contemporary daily life.

Moreover, tributary to a narrative representation that is, by definition, fragmented into rectangular micro-spaces, with texts inscribed into adjacent bubbles, the subject of the 'evening mirror' in the original version is reproduced in a synthesised form across three frame-images, in which the transformation of the fogged window of the evening train into a mirror is very subtly depicted visually through a human palm overlapping the reflected image of the girl, crossed by a white streak, suggesting the trace left by the finger that drew on the train window. Furthermore, the "contents" of this mirror is essentialized in several words that accompany the last image: "The figures in the background were unrelated, and yet the figures, transparent and intangible, and the background, dim in the gathering darkness, melted together into a sort of

[41] See Ibid., 46.

[42] See Walter Benjamin, *Opera de artă în epoca reproductibilității sale tehnice* [*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*], Critical Edition by Burkhardt Linder, with the collaboration of Simon Broll and Jessica Nitsche, transl. by Christian Frerencz-Flatz (Cluj-Napoca: Tact Publishing House, 2015), 170.

[43] Ibid.

symbolic world not of this world"[44] (*Kagami no naka no kono yo naranu utsukushisa*[45]). In its turn, the "morning mirror" is suggestively depicted only in a single frame-image, whose background is a wintery mountain landscape, overlapped by two sentences: the first invokes the "snow mirror" (*kagami no yuki*)[46] and the second invokes Komako's hair which, in the light of the snow-mirror, had become an even brighter black-violet. Between the two "mirrors," the monochrome line suppresses the details; it simplifies the details to their very essence, in an attempt to capture the light and the transparency of the snow. In order to confer the landscape, in particular, and winter, in general, a poetic and mysterious aura, the mimetic reproduction of nature and reality is avoided, by emphasising their transfiguration and interpretation through the sensibility of the characters. However, as opposed to the scenes depicting the "mirrors," the scene of fire, unravelled across several pages in the *manga* version,[47] is constructed into a visual dramatisation of the space, of the time and of the event, by imagining scenes that are absent from the original, as, for instance, the dialogue between Yōko and Komako – the former, fallen to the ground, asks the latter whether she will cry for her death.[48] In a decomposition and reconstruction of the original text, the images and the text are subtly and complexly connected, as if in a movie which, through the close-up, stretches the space and, by use of idleness, stretches the motion,[49] thus instilling, into the dramatic moment of the fire, certain accelerations and decelerations, amplifications and decretions, bearers of semantic connotations. The coexistence of the images and the text bubbles, which complete or explain the accompanying frames, aim, as in the case of the scene of the fire at the silkworm factory, to capture the instantaneous and the ephemeral by opposing the static nature of the landscape to the human commotion, the motion of immobility respectively. In the scene in which Shimamura contemplates the Milky Way, in the *manga* version, one can note the omission of the intertextual reference to Bashō; the final bubble, in an obviously seasonal reference given by the winter landscape background, contains a paraphrase that encapsulates the final sentence of the original text: "[…] and the Milky Way flowed down inside him with a roar"[50] (さあと音を立てて天の河が流れ落ちてきた。).[51] In response to the demands of the social context while respecting the convention of the genre, *Snow Country – komikku* 版, which readdresses the original narration through a characteristic visual language, offers its contemporary reader an updated *reception in distraction*[52] of the *Setsugekka* theme, in which winter, suggested by a monochrome line in a

[44] Kawabata, *Snow Country*, 9.
[45] Yasunari Kawabata, Sakuko Utsugi, *Yukiguni* 雪国 [*Snow Country*], *Komikku han*, *manga bungo shirīzu* [Comics Version, Manga Series] (Tokyo: Shueisha, 2010) [with the electronic version 2016], 10.
[46] Ibid., 52.
[47] Ibid., 200-215.
[48] *Watashi… shindara naite kureru…?* (Kawabata, Utsugi, 52).
[49] See Benjamin, 172.
[50] Kawabata, *Snow Country*, 175.
[51] Kawabata, Utsugi, 217.
[52] Benjamin, 176.

minimalist landscape, aims to configure the psychological states and emotions of the characters, rather than a system of values.

The uniqueness of a work of art implies its identification by anchoring it into the context of a tradition,[53] a tradition that is, in fact, kept alive through continuous transformations. As in another canon across time, Yasunari Kawabata's novel seems to contain echoes of the *Setsugekka* theme in the interpretation given by Minamoto no Muneyuki (?-939): "In a mountain hamlet winter's loneliness grows deeper. Both people and grasses are withered – so run my thoughts;"[54] in another time (the 20th century) and another space (the snow country of the Echigo Province) only winter seems to be the same. Fully aware of the impossibility of the gesture, Kawabata does not plead for the return of modern human being to nature, but for "a re-centring of human life in accordance with the rhythm of natural life and the cycle of seasons,"[55] not only for a perfect communion with the environment, but also for the sake of rediscovering the beauty of simple and ephemeral things (*mono no aware*) in daily life.

Very early on, in order to emphasise the myth of harmony with nature and with the cycle of the seasons, the literary and visual Japanese culture imposed the association of the time of a certain season with a space marked by a specific landscape, in a manner in which it would, over time, become both a famous toponym and a chronotype that configures a true "imaginary"[56] of nature and of the respective season. *Waka shogakushō* (*First Steps in Learning Waka*, approx. 1169) notes a list of 'famous places' (*meisho*) and the association of certain motifs with a certain season – winter, for instance, being placed in relation with Mount Yoshino (which is also connected to the motif of the cherry blossom) and Mount Fuji. Several hundred years later, in the guide *Edo meisho hanagoyomi* (*Flower Calendar of Famous Places in Edo*, 1827), author Oka Sanchō associates snow with two other places in Tokyo: Atagoyama and Takanawa.[57] By appropriating the existing literary imaginary and plastic iconography of the white season, Yasunari Kawabata completes the *meisho* list with the snow country from a faraway land like Echigo through an original, nuanced style. Moreover, since Old Japan passed into myth and legend,[58] modern human being, influenced by the infirmities, corruptions and alienations of the current world, can no longer approach it in reality by means other than the journeys to these 'famous places', established by the poetic and visual tradition, or by valuing the famous artefacts

[53] Ibid., 157.

[54] This poem was illustrated by Hokusai (ca. 1835) in the *ukiyo-e* series entitled *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse* (*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*). See Amélie Balcou, *Les saisons par les grands maîtres de l'estampe japonaise* [*The seasons by the great masters of Japanese prints*] (Paris: Editions Hazan, 2018), 40.

[55] Florina Ilis, *Romanul japonez în secolul al XX-lea* [The Japanese novel in the 20th century] (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022), 159-160.

[56] See Claire-Akiko Brisset, "Peinture et saisons au Japon: une poétique du temps et du lieu [Painting and the seasons in Japan. The poetics of time and space]," in Christine Shimizu (ed.), *Le Japon au fil des saisons: collection Robert et Betsy Feinberg* [Japan through the seasons: Robert and Betsy Feinberg's collection], cat. exp. [Paris, Musée Cernuschi, 19 septembre 2014-11 janvier 2015] (Paris: Paris Musées, 2014), 39-45.

[57] See Shirane, 167-168.

[58] See Napier, 76.

of these places. Thus, during his visit to the snow country, Shimamura seeks the centres that manufacture *chijimi*, a hempen creased cloth about which it is said that: "'There is Chijimi linen because there is snow,' someone wrote long ago. 'Snow is the mother of Chijimi',"[59] an expensive material used for the summer kimonos, appreciated by Shimamura not only for the coolness it emanated, but also for its whiteness, for the absence of any smudges from the fabric, making him feel "purified" in his turn:

> The thread was spun in the snow, and the cloth woven in the snow, washed in the snow, and bleached in the snow. Everything, from the first spinning of the thread to the last finishing touches, was done in the snow.[60]

In the postmodern world, which acknowledges the fragmentation of time and space, the decentralisation of the self and the aesthetisation of daily life,[61] the novel *Snow Country* reminds the contemporary human being of the *three realms*:[62] Sky (*ten*) [The Milky Way], Earth (*chi*) [the snow country] and Man (*jin*) [Shimamura, Yōko and Komako], placed in permanent inter-relation through the repetition of the seasons, since the life cycle is intrinsic to the natural world. As he also stated in his speech *Japan, the Beautiful and Myself,* upon receiving the Nobel Prize, the Japanese writer had learned the *Setsugekka* lesson from Dōgen (1200-1253), a Zen priest, for whom *To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things of the universe*, from the poem *Original Face*: "In the spring, cherry blossoms, in the summer the cuckoo./ In autumn the moon, and in winter the snow, clear, cold" (*Haru wa hana/ Natsu hototogisu/ Aki wa tsuki/ Fuyu yuki kiede/ Suzushi kari keri*).[63] Endowed with an acute *sense* of the seasons and an ability to encompass the objective appearance and the subjective reaction, Yasunari Kawabata, through his work, revitalised this original reality, which became the basis of an aesthetic philosophy that permanently maintains the connection with the cultural literary and visual tradition of the natural world.

Translated from Romanian by Anca Chiorean

[59] Kawabata, *Snow Country*, 132.
[60] Ibid., 150.
[61] See Yui, 46.
[62] See Shirane, 20.
[63] Yasunari Kawabata, "Discurs" [Speech], transl. by Liviu Petrina, *Tribuna* XIV, no. 36 (1970): 8 and no. 37 (1970): 8.