

NOBEL LECTURES
INCLUDING PRESENTATION SPEECHES
AND LAUREATES' BIOGRAPHIES

LITERATURE

1968–1980

EDITOR-IN-CHARGE
TORE FRANGSMYR
Uppsala University, Sweden

EDITOR
STURE ALLEN
Swedish Academy, Stockholm



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PHYSICS

CHEMISTRY

PHYSIOLOGY OR MEDICINE

LITERATURE

PEACE

ECONOMIC SCIENCES

FOREWORD

Since 1901 the Nobel Foundation has published annually “Les Prix Nobel” with reports from the Nobel Award Ceremonies in Stockholm and Oslo as well as the biographies and Nobel lectures of the laureates. In order to make the lectures available to people with special interests in the different prize fields the Foundation gave Elsevier Publishing Company the right to publish in English the lectures for 1901–1970, which were published in 1964–1972 through the following volumes:

Physics 1901–1970	4 vols.
Chemistry 1901–1970	4 vols.
Physiology or Medicine 1901–1970	4 vols.
Literature 1901–1967	1 vol.
Peace 1901–1970	3 vols.

Elsevier decided later not to continue the Nobel project. It is therefore with great satisfaction that the Nobel Foundation has given World Scientific Publishing Company the right to bring the series up to date beginning with the Prize lectures in Economics in 2 volumes 1969–1990. Thereafter the lectures in all the other prize fields will follow.

The Nobel Foundation is very pleased that the intellectual and spiritual message to the world laid down in the laureates’ lectures, thanks to the efforts of World Scientific, will reach new readers all over the world.

Lars Gyllenstein
Chairman of the Board

Stig Ramel
Executive Director

Stockholm, June 1991

PREFACE

The early volumes of the series *Nobel Lectures* were published in 1964–1972. The one covering the Prize in Literature, published in 1969, brought together all the lectures, presentation speeches and laureates' biographies for the period 1901–1967. In 1991, the Nobel Foundation decided to update the series and entrusted me with the editorship in the field of literature.

The two volumes now being published cover the years 1968–1990. For this edition, texts which were previously extant only in languages other than English have been translated, and the biographies have been brought up to date where necessary.

Stockholm, November 1993

Sture Allén

Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy

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Literature 1968

YASUNARI KAWABATA

*“for his narrative mastery, which with great sensibility expresses the essence of the
Japanese mind”*

THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

Speech by ANDERS ÖSTERLING, Ph.D., of the Swedish Academy
Translation

The recipient of this year's Nobel Prize for Literature, the Japanese Yasunari Kawabata, was born in 1899 in the big industrial town of Osaka, where his father was a highly cultured doctor with literary interests. At an early age, however, he was deprived of this favourable growing-up environment on the sudden death of his parents and, as an only child, was sent to his blind and ailing grandfather in a remote part of the country. These tragic losses, doubly significant in view of the Japanese people's intense feeling for blood ties, have undoubtedly affected Kawabata's whole outlook on life and has been one of the reasons for his later study of Buddhist philosophy.

As a student at the imperial university in Tokyo, he decided early on a writing career, and he is an example of the kind of restless absorption that is always a condition of the literary calling. In a youthful short story, which first drew attention to him at the age of twenty-seven, he tells of a student who, during lonely autumn walks on the peninsula of Izu, comes across a poor, despised dancing girl, with whom he has a touching love affair; she opens her pure heart and shows the young man a way to deep and genuine feeling. Like a sad refrain in a folksong the theme recurs with many variations in his following works; he presents his own scale of values and with the years he has won renown far beyond the borders of Japan. True, of his production only three novels and a few short stories have so far been translated into different languages, evidently because translation in this case offers especially great difficulties and is apt to be far too coarse a filter, in which many finer shades of meaning in his richly expressive language must be lost. But the translated works do give us a sufficiently representative picture of his personality.

In common with his older countryman Tanizaki, now deceased, he has admittedly been influenced by modern western realism, but at the same time he has, with greater fidelity, retained his footing in Japan's classical literature and therefore represents a clear tendency to cherish and preserve a genuinely national tradition of style. In Kawabata's narrative art it is still possible to find a sensitively shaded situation poetry which traces its origin back to Murasaki's vast canvas of life and manners in Japan about the year 1000.

Kawabata has been especially praised as a subtle psychologist of women. He has shown his mastery as such in the two short novels "The Snow Kingdom" and "A Thousand Cranes", to use the Swedish titles. In these we see a brilliant capacity to illuminate the erotic episode, an exquisite keenness of observation, a whole network of small, mysterious values, which often put the European narrative technique in the shade. Kawabata's writing is reminiscent of Japanese painting; he is a worshipper of the fragile beauty and melancholy picture language of existence in the life of nature and in man's destiny. If the

transience of all outward action can be likened to drifting tufts of grass on the surface of the water, then it is the genuinely Japanese miniature art of haiku poetry which is reflected in Kawabata's prose style.

Even if we feel excluded, as it were, from his writing by a root system, more or less foreign to us, of ancient Japanese ideas and instincts, we may find it tempting in Kawabata to notice certain similarities of temperament with European writers from our own time. Turgenev is the first to spring to mind, he too is a deeply sensitive story-teller and a broadminded painter of the social scene, with pessimistically coloured sympathies within a time of transition between old and new.

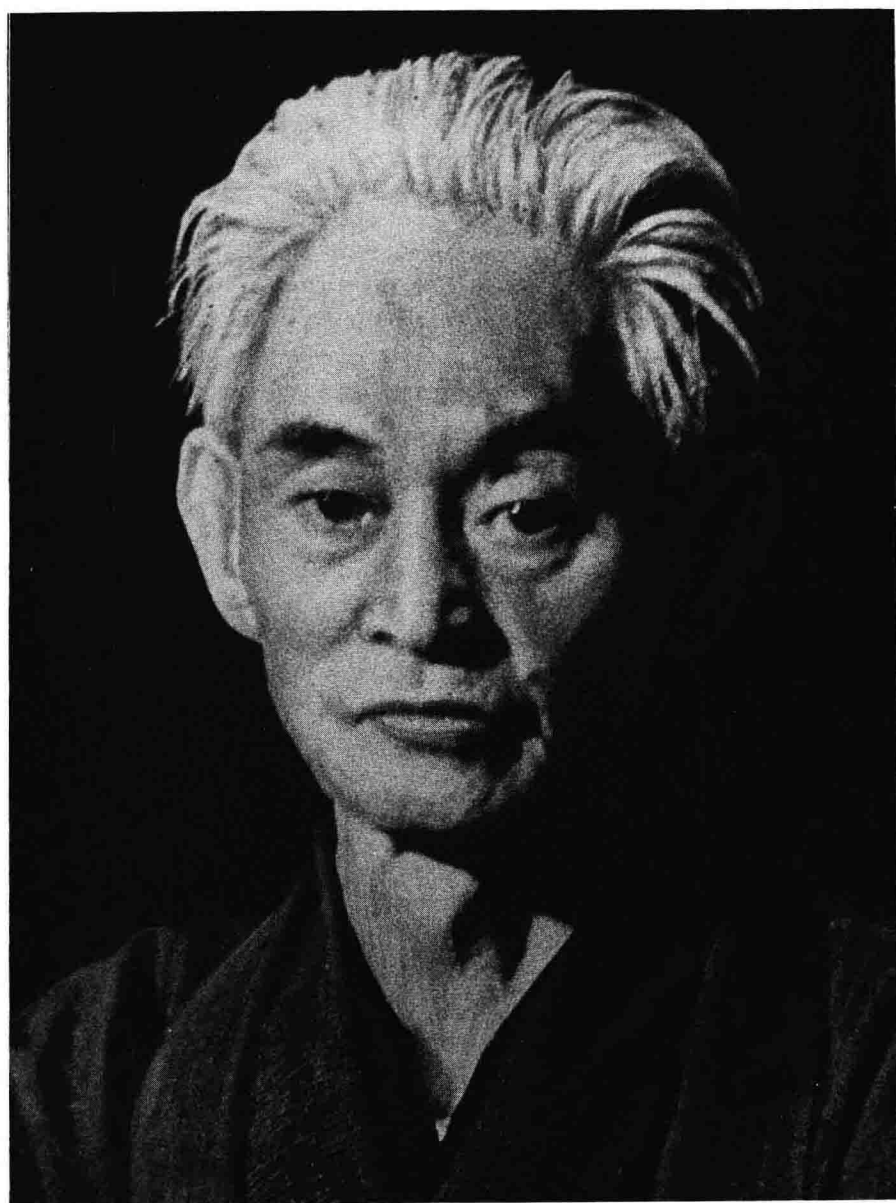
Kawabata's most recent work is also his most outstanding, the novel "Kyoto", completed six years ago and now available in Swedish translation. The story is about the young girl Chiëko, a foundling exposed by her poverty-stricken parents and adopted into the house of the merchant Takichiro, where she is brought up according to old Japanese principles. She is a sensitive, loyal being, who only in secret broods on the riddle of her origin. Popular Japanese belief has it that an exposed child is afflicted with a lifelong curse, in addition to which the condition of being a twin, according to the strange Japanese viewpoint, bears the stigma of shame. One day it happens that she meets a pretty young working girl from a cedar forest near the city and finds that she is her twin sister. They are intimately united beyond the social pale of class—the robust, work-hardened Naëko and the delicate, anxiously guarded Chiëko, but their bewildering likeness soon gives rise to complications and confusion. The whole story is set against the background of the religious festival year in Kyoto from the cherry-blossom spring to the snow-glittering winter.

The city itself is really the leading character, the capital of the old kingdom, once the seat of the mikado and his court, still a romantic sanctuary after a thousand years, the home of the fine arts and elegant handicraft, nowadays exploited by tourism but still a loved place of pilgrimage. With its Shinto and Buddha temples, its old artisan quarters and botanical gardens, the place possesses a poetry which Kawabata expresses in a tender, courteous manner, with no sentimental overtones, but naturally as a moving appeal. He has experienced his country's crushing defeat and no doubt realizes what the future demands in the way of industrial go-ahead spirit, tempo and vitality. But in the post-war wave of violent Americanization his novel is a gentle reminder of the necessity of trying to save something of the old Japan's beauty and individuality for the new. He describes the religious ceremonies in Kyoto with the same meticulous care as he does the textile trade's choice of patterns in the traditional sashes belonging to the women's dresses. These aspects of the novel may have their documentary worth, but the reader prefers to dwell on such a deeply characteristic passage as when the party of middle-class people from the city visits the botanical garden—which has been closed for a long time because the American occupation troops have had their barracks there—in order to see whether the lovely avenue of camphor trees is still intact and able to delight the connoisseur's eye.

With Kawabata, Japan enters the circle of literary Nobel prizewinners for the first time. Essential to the forming of the decision is the fact that, as a writer, he imparts a moral-esthetic cultural awareness with unique artistry, thereby in his way contributing to the spiritual bridge-building between East and West.

Mr Kawabata,

The citation speaks of your narrative mastery, which with great sensibility expresses the essence of the Japanese mind. With great satisfaction we greet you here in our midst today, an honoured guest from afar on this platform. On behalf of the Swedish Academy, I beg to express our hearty congratulations, and at the same time ask you now to receive this year's Nobel Prize for Literature from the hands of His Majesty the King.



Gasunori Kanabata

YASUNARI KAWABATA

Yasunari Kawabata, son of a highly cultivated physician, was born in 1899 in Osaka. After the early death of his parents he was educated in the country by his maternal grandfather. From 1920 to 1924, Kawabata studied at the Royal University of Tokyo, where he received his degree. He was one of the founders of the publication "Bungai Jidai", the medium of a new movement in modern Japanese literature. Kawabata made his debut as a writer with the short story "Izu dancer", published in 1927. After several distinguished works, the novel "Snow Country" in 1937 secured Kawabata's position as one of the leading authors in Japan. In 1949, the publication of the serials "Thousand Cranes" and "Sound of Mountains" was commenced. He became a member of the Art Academy of Japan in 1953 and four years later he was appointed chairman of the P.E.N. club of Japan. At several international congresses Kawabata was the Japanese delegate for this club. "The Lake" (1955), "The Sleeping Beauty" (1960) and "Kyoto" (1962) belong to his later works and of these novels "Kyoto" is the one that made the deepest impression in the author's native country and abroad. In 1959, Kawabata received the Goethe-medal in Frankfurt.

Yasunari Kawabata died in 1972.

JAPAN, THE BEAUTIFUL AND MYSELF

Nobel lecture, December 12, 1968

by

YASUNARI KAWABATA

"In the spring, cherry blossoms, in the summer the cuckoo.
In autumn the moon, and in winter the snow, clear, cold."
"The winter moon comes from the clouds to keep me company.
The wind is piercing, the snow is cold."

The first of these poems is by the priest Dōgen (1200—1253) and bears the title "Innate Spirit". The second is by the priest Myōe (1173—1232). When I am asked for specimens of calligraphy, it is these poems that I often choose.

The second poem bears an unusually detailed account of its origins, such as to be an explanation of the heart of its meaning: "On the night of the twelfth day of the twelfth month of the year 1224, the moon was behind clouds. I sat in Zen meditation in the Kakyū Hall. When the hour of the midnight vigil came, I ceased meditation and descended from the hall on the peak to the lower quarters, and as I did so the moon came from the clouds and set the snow to glowing. The moon was my companion, and not even the wolf howling in the valley brought fear. When, presently, I came out of the lower quarters again, the moon was again behind clouds. As the bell was signalling the late-night vigil, I made my way once more to the peak, and the moon saw me on the way. I entered the meditation hall, and the moon, chasing the clouds, was about to sink behind the peak beyond, and it seemed to me that it was keeping me secret company."

There follows the poem I have quoted, and with the explanation that it was composed as Myōe entered the meditation hall after seeing the moon behind the mountain, there comes yet another poem:

"I shall go behind the mountain. Go there too, O moon.
Night after night we shall keep-each other company."

Here is the setting for another poem, after Myōe had spent the rest of the night in the meditation hall, or perhaps gone there again before dawn:

"Opening my eyes from my meditations, I saw the moon in the dawn, lighting the window. In a dark place myself, I felt as if my own heart were glowing with light which seemed to be that of the moon:

'My heart shines, a pure expanse of light;
And no doubt the moon will think the light its own.'

Because of such a spontaneous and innocent stringing together of mere ejaculations as the following, Myōe has been called the poet of the moon:

“Bright, bright, and bright, bright, bright, and bright, bright.
Bright and bright, bright, and bright, bright moon.”

In his three poems on the winter moon, from late night into the dawn, Myōe follows entirely the bent of Saigyō, another poet-priest, who lived from 1118 to 1190: “Though I compose poetry, I do not think of it as composed poetry.” The thirty-one syllables of each poem, honest and straightforward as if he were addressing the moon, are not merely to “the moon as my companion”. Seeing the moon, he becomes the moon, the moon seen by him becomes him. He sinks into nature, becomes one with nature. The light of the “clear heart” of the priest, seated in the meditation hall in the darkness before the dawn, becomes for the dawn moon its own light.

As we see from the long introduction to the first of Myōe’s poems quoted above, in which the winter moon becomes a companion, the heart of the priest, sunk in meditation upon religion and philosophy, there in the mountain hall, is engaged in a delicate interplay and exchange with the moon; and it is this of which the poet sings. My reason for choosing that first poem when asked for a specimen of my calligraphy has to do with its remarkable gentleness and compassion. Winter moon, going behind the clouds and coming forth again, making bright my footsteps as I go to the meditation hall and descend again, making me unafraid of the wolf: does not the wind sink into you, does not the snow, are you not cold? I choose the poem as a poem of warm, deep, delicate compassion, a poem that has in it the deep quiet of the Japanese spirit. Dr. Yashiro Yukio, internationally known as a scholar of Botticelli, a man of great learning in the art of the past and the present, of the East and the West, has summed up one of the special characteristics of Japanese art in a single poetic sentence: “The time of the snows, of the moon, of the blossoms — — — then more than ever we think of our comrades.” When we see the beauty of the snow, when we see the beauty of the full moon, when we see the beauty of the cherries in bloom, when in short we brush against and are awakened by the beauty of the four seasons, it is then that we think most of those close to us, and want them to share the pleasure. The excitement of beauty calls forth strong fellow feelings, yearnings for companionship, and the word “comrade” can be taken to mean “human being”. The snow, the moon, the blossoms, words expressive of the seasons as they move one into another, include in the Japanese tradition the beauty of mountains and rivers and grasses and trees, of all the myriad manifestations of nature, of human feelings as well.

That spirit, that feeling for one’s comrades in the snow, the moonlight, under the blossoms, is also basic to the tea ceremony. A tea ceremony is a coming together in feeling, a meeting of good comrades in a good season. I may say in passing, that to see my novel *Thousand Cranes* as an evocation of the formal and spiritual beauty of the tea ceremony is a misreading. It is a