



The Sound of the Mountain

Yasunari Kawabata , Edward G. Seidensticker (Translator)

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By day Ogata Shingo is troubled by small failures of memory. At night he hears a distant rumble from the nearby mountain, a sound he associates with death. In between are the relationships that were once the foundation of Shingo's life: with his disappointing wife, his philandering son, and his daughter-in-law Kikuko, who instills in him both pity and uneasy stirrings of sexual desire. Out of this translucent web of attachments - and the tiny shifts of loyalty and affection that threaten to sever it irreparably - Kawabata creates a novel that is at once serenely observed and enormously affecting.

The Sound of the Mountain Details

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Author : Yasunari Kawabata , Edward G. Seidensticker (Translator)

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From Reader Review The Sound of the Mountain for online ebook

Inderjit Sanghera says

The Sound of the Mountain' is perhaps the weakest of Kawabata's great works; perhaps because it typifies a lot of the negative elements of his work. Weird characters whose neuroses and fantasies are so unrelatable that the reader feels slightly disengaged, a kind of kooky dialogue which sounds more like the broken thoughts of the demented than real human dialogue and a sense of detachment which renders the inner lives of the characters to be slightly incomprehensible.

Yet the latter at least is intentional-Kawabata is attempting to capture the languor of Shingo, his inner ennui faced by his vapid and vulgar son Shuichi, the streak of lust which runs through his feelings for his daughter-in-law and his detachment from his wife and daughter, Shingo is a man who is dominated by a sense of emptiness, whose nightmares and sexual fantasies fill the emotional gap which has formed in his soul, a gap which is perpetuated by the looming sense of his own mortality, as the relentless reek of death hovers over Shingo.

As with Kawabata, a series of delicate images adds to the atmosphere; the mountains emit noises reminiscent of the sea, the dripping of dew-drops between leaves lacerates his soul, moon-light emphasises and highlights the boundless emptiness of the night;

"But the clouds, and the moon too, were cold and faintly white. Shingo felt the autumn come over him.

The moon, high in the east, was almost full. It lay in a blaze of clouds, it was dimmed by them.

There were no other clouds near the blaze in which the moon lay. In a single night after the storm the sky had turned a deep black."

As always with Kawabata atmosphere and symbolism play key roles in bringing about the mood and theme of the story and it is Kawabata's unique style and descriptive powers which perhaps 'The Sound of the Mountain' in becoming an exercise in self-obsessions, Kawabata's ability to craft delicately structured sentences and imagery is his key strength as an author even when other aspects of his stories are lacking.

Raul Bimenyimana says

Shingo is a, self-described, office worker in his sixties. He loves the picturesque, is also committed to the welfare of his family. In other words, a very ordinary man who one might argue has been made sentimental with age.

Kawabata however tells a beautiful story through this ordinary character, and through his family. Of a paterfamilias who looks out for his children and grandchildren, who finds beauty in puppies, trees, birds, flowers and people.

An observation I made in the book is the contrast between twos. Shingo mostly compares what he finds beautiful and pure with that he finds 'homely'. His beautiful sister-in-law to his homely wife, his beautiful daughter-in-law to his homely daughter and so on. And thus he tends to ignore the people he finds homely for

those he finds beautiful and this affects the relationships he has with his family members.

Kawabata narrates of love, beauty, poetry, marriage, old age, loss and redemption and healing in a well paced beautiful tale.

Hadrian says

A painfully beautiful book.

Like the other works by Kawabata I've read, it is not so strictly concerned with plot and action. Instead this is a novel which works slowly and quietly, with description of gesture and emotions, or subtle changes in the weather or in conversation.

It centers around an older man, Shingo, who is distant to his wife and sons. There is a tremendous magnitude of emotion told here, but with the bare minimum of words, even just fragments of sentences. We see the weather pass as a bellwether of mood, and Shingo's quiet acceptance.

A subdued yet compelling book.

Mariel says

I started reading *The Sound of the Mountain* late at night all alone in my bedroom. It kinda scared the crap out of me in the oppressive lonely way I get when I think too much about what other people want from other people. Is it always going to be that way? Trying too hard? Making up stories is more real. The first half I read this lonely way. The second half I read at the beach (my first beach read of 2011). I think it made it a different experience for me to be read that way, where I didn't know anyone. It became my staring into the windows, closed doors (thumb slammed in those doors) blah blah of the soul book. The sound of the waves was my sound of the mountain! Cheeeeese, Mariel. Hey, I like nature. If I were dying I'd hear songs in my head like when I was dreaming. I've always wished I could remember my dream songs when I awoke (when I was a teen I dreamed the best Cure songs Robert Smith never wrote). Maybe it'd be the river where I was born in Mississippi "the singing river". If geographical connections are made when big stuff like being born happens. So supposedly you can hear the indians singing as they were drowned by the evil white man. I'd sing some pissed off tune about dying (or relief). [NO ONE is going to understand this review, Mariel.]

The Sound of the Mountain is HUGE (not in size). I've got so many thoughts about this and there's no way I'm going to be able to touch on all of it. (Why do I have to be an idiot during important times like these?) It's one of the best books I have ever read. I may have missed a lot... That's also kinda the point (I'm not just saying that to make me feel better). It's the times when you can give more of a shit about strangers than someone who knows them or knows you could. It's not about what they can do for you.

Shingo is an old man. He's dying and the people who shouldn't be strangers to him are total strangers to him in love and affection. Shingo is losing his memory. It is telling that only his daughter-in-law, Kikuko, cares about the signs of him losing the life that flashes before his eyes in confusion. If I were his family I might not have cared either. But I'm not. It's this human thing and it doesn't matter if he was a stupid bastard who lived a whole life not living with the people he was living it with. His memories are stories of things he built

outside of that, that same stranger connection. Like when you're on the train and you make up stories about the couple sitting in front of you. Books you've read.

It is depressing how much the appearance of the females in his family mean to him. Shingo wants beauty. This might have depressed the utter shit out of me if 'Sound' wasn't so so good. Shingo, his homely wife, everyone in here- it's reaching for definitions to explain what isn't there. Why strangers are able to see someone losing their life and that's the point, instead of the shit baggage of that life. They think if only their daughter had been pretty, the missing affection would have been there. They search each other for what they don't feel themselves.

Before I forget I should say that every character in this book is given life. Shingo's son, Shuichi, cheats on his wife. She has an abortion and doesn't fight for the child that she wanted. The mistress would do anything to have her own child. That was one of the HUGE things this book touched on that I wondered about a lot. One woman knew what she wanted and could have, the other wanted it all and got nothing much (Eyes in wonder here.) Her coworker who is as invested in that affair as Shingo is haunted by it.

I started writing down page numbers with meaningful passages (if this were Moby-Dick I'd be worried). "with a heart that lay cruelly naked" Yes. (I'm really not making sense now!) Shuichi comes home drunk and desperate for something from his wife. Shingo can only make up reasons for what he may or may not hear in his son's voice. He's observing these people in his own family he doesn't really know. What Shuichi wants... who has the right to inflict that kinda painful shit on someone, ask that much? If I were Shingo, I'd have been laying awake in the dark, listening and disturbed over how much could be asked... He'd been wasted and cheating and she was just waiting.

Page 130... It's the entire page! Pick something, Mariel. This story that he dreams may have been my favorite part of the whole book.

"A girl who had an abortion at fourteen or fifteen and was at the same time a holy child was something of an oddity; but there had been a long story. Shingo's dream had read a masterpiece about pure love between a boy and a girl. His feelings were still with him when he woke at the end of the reading."

and

"A forgotten dream could not be put together again. And his feelings upon reading the novel were a dream."

I know this...

"Had a flicker of youth given him a dream of pure love in old age?"

That's also what is so huge about The Sound of the Mountain. He took that story about the abortion and he was wondering about the moments before it. Life, not consequences.

There was an awful lot of shit in this book that made me wonder about stuff I've wondered about in the past. Not all of it Japanese cultural stuff.

The suicide thing is. That husbands leave the suicide note and the wife lets the husband's note speak for her? Wow. Shuichi insulted his wife when he asked if she'd write her own note (as if they were not one). It gave the stranger feel something more that this cultural thing was outsider as being outside someone's family.

I did grow up around a very subservient marriage. My grandmother was a podperson until her husband died.

They, and their children (my mom), were also as looks obsessed as Shingo. It does bug the crap out of me the necessity for a beautiful daughter. They don't want to fuck the daughter, right? So why? Shingo thinks a foreigner who is there to have sex with a Japanese boy child a monster. I couldn't help but think he was pretty creepy himself.

I've read studies about pretty babies getting held more than not pretty babies. My mom somehow decided that I was ugly and my identical twin pretty. She didn't have much to do with baby me. Looking at photos of us as kids... We were identical! What the hell? This kinda bothered me this aspect of 'Mountain'. I felt so bad for their baby granddaughter when her family give her the total shaft because they don't like how she looks. It's more than a little bit heartbreaking. The same thing happened to the elder generations of women (Shingo is still obsessed with his wife's pretty older sister who had died in her twenties. His life, in his mind, should have taken a path with her. Yiiiikes).

I couldn't help but think of Mervyn Peake's Titus Groan and Gormenghast about the grotesquely beautiful Fuchsia and Steerpike. The almost twist of doing the right thing that could have changed everything... It's not really about the looks, for all of Shingo's burning desires and soaked up sheets. Or Kikuko's generosity of kindness because it had been shown to her (it does help. I can't stand to be hugged to this day). She'd been the pampered daughter in her family and Shingo's attention is what her husband wouldn't ever give her (he only needs). I said this already, didn't I? The looks are the twist in the direction, or at least what someone can come up with explain it. I've suspected that people just make up reasons to explain where there is love and where there isn't. Just because they are blood doesn't mean it is.

The Sound of the Mountain was for me the sounds of that not listening, and those empathy times that are dreams and not your life. When the two ever get to be one. And I got hard times doing that. This did it.

It's huge though. I had more. It is hard to describe these undercurrents of relationships. What's there, imagined, how it is all real because it was real to someone. I loved how all of those were all lying next to each other.

P.s. What's with the "traditional Japanese" reputation? That's so misleading. It isn't ever traditional to dream when you're awake that you're aching feet in someone's old shoes.

RK-isme says

I am currently caught in a Kawabata spell. WilliamI put a list of four Kawabata books into a review and I bought them all. I will take a Kawabata a break because I don't want to overindulge but the urge is strong to go on the fourth.

Kawabata writes ambience. He writes inner thoughts. He writes of outer change and reaction. Often little is outwardly happening but the world of change swirls around the reader who is caught up in the web Kawabata has so carefully created. The reader cannot escape, cannot reach out to reach the world that's spinning by because the strands of words bind her arms making any struggle futile. Struggle only binds the reader more.

The Sound of the Mountain is about a man getting old. He is getting old in a world where values are changing rapidly and he is no longer sure as to his own role in this world. He feels the need to retain the ways he grew up with. At the same time, he sees his children abandoning those ways.

“Shingo was astonished at his son’s spiritual paralysis and decay, but it seemed to him that he was caught in the same filthy slough. Dark terror swept over him.”

Such is my experience in reading "The Sound of the Mountain". The story is simple, hardly a story. More of a photograph of a moment in time. An aging (62?) businessman, Agato Shingo, lives with his family: his wife; his son; his daughter-in-law; and, is soon to be imposed upon his daughter, estranged from her husband, and her two young children. Other characters come and go. Throughout it all, Shingo struggles to comprehend, to remember, to do the right thing in a world that he does not quite understand as the values he knows seem to be slipping away making it almost impossible to act correctly. He would prefer to be sitting and contemplating the beauty to be found around him.

Shingo realizes he is aging. His memory is fading and he cannot keep track of what is going on around him. One day he finds that he cannot remember how to tie his necktie. But his ‘aging’ is much more than that. As in the other Kawabata books that I have read, there is the implacable march of social change that keeps shifting the ground beneath his feet. His aging is a shift from what he values into another era, another age, that troubles him. Welcome to my world.

“Perhaps because of the pressure at the base of his skull, he felt a little giddy, and a golden mist of snow flowed past his closed eyelids. A mist of snow from an avalanche, gold in the evening light. He thought he could hear the roar. It was an avalanche he had seen in the mountain home of his boyhood.”

Whitaker says

I read this book shortly after finishing Kazuo Ishiguro’s *An Artist of the Floating World*. Both books cover similar ground: a man in the twilight of his years reflecting on his past. I was going to write a review about how the book deals with old age and coming to terms with our life, about how Kawabata writes luminous prose with each chapter a beautiful image fading into the next.

But then I read a comment by Ishiguro. He said he didn’t get Kawabata because he was too plotless, too Japanese. And this is something that I’ve been struggling with: whether it’s even possible to communicate across beliefs, time and cultures.

I confess I had problems with this book. It’s by no means an easy read for a reader more used to Western modes of narrative. Almost nothing seems to happen. And if it does, it is barely set off by an act of the protagonist, Shingo. We see him trying to deal with his children’s problem marriages, but resolution takes place outside of his involvement. At best, we see an unfolding of a quiet acceptance towards himself and the waning of his years. And this communicated not directly but through very Japanese-based allusions and imagery. I had to spend some time googling to even get a rough sense of what the novel was about.

In the end, I enjoyed it. But what did I enjoy or even understand? A friend of mine once remarked how much he enjoyed *Brideshead Revisited* and its coruscating criticism of the Church and religion. Waugh, I’m afraid, would have rolled in his grave. He was Catholic, devoutly so, and *Brideshead Revisited* was his encomium, paean even, to the loving embrace of the Bride of God. A Catholic friend, reading the same book, talked of how it aptly captured the strong Catholic belief in the need for self-sacrifice and self-denial. Words of anathema of course to the me-generation who see the depiction of self-denial as a trenchant put-down of religion’s repression rather than as the path to salvation.

It's like listening to an Indian raga or Indonesian gamelan music. My ear hears only noise. I'd have to spend time training myself to understand it before I'd be able to appreciate it. So, I ask this, is it even possible to understand the art of another culture, without at least some work towards an immersion in that culture? And even then, are we seeing through a glass darkly, or worse, reading only a warped image of our own reflection?

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Stephen P says

The quiet prose and acutely calculated distance, set and carried the first part of this book. The micrometers of measures opened a precise distance allowing the reader, inviting the reader, to slip within. During the second half the narrator, laid there as an obstacle, was sent on an ill fated mission to rev-up events Becoming pesky and sliding into a troublesome invasiveness. Possibly the contrast accents it more or is it intended and I have missed its calling?

A sixty two year old man, considered an old man in Japan of this time (Post WWII), awakens to his sexual desires drained, his male vitality escaping as time passes. Time takes with it not only his vigor, faulty memory, but his way of life and bringing with it the confusion of new standards and its complications. The arranged marriage of his daughter failed, landing in divorce, and though grown she returns to his home with her two young children. His own son separating from his pregnant daughter-in-law. This daughter-in-law who remains in the house even though the son has left to be with his mistress. She lovingly cares for Shingo who replaces her father. He feels a growing connection, affection for her. He can experience the mental idea of a relationship with a woman along side the absence of the physical.

It is all disarming to him. This aging and the passing of time, the passing of the way of life he knew. What of this philandering, accented by his son who's mistress is pregnant with Shingo's grandson(?) but refuses an

abortion and has separated from his son. Shingo is too old to philander and it becomes easy for judgement to be passed. Yet when younger, and it still continues amongst some of his peers, being with a geisha was and is a regular activity. His marriage of many years ago too was arranged(?) but existed in aridity since he was in love with his wife's beautiful sister who died young. This love continued throughout the years and still maintains its place among his mental images, appearing and fading at times.

What will he be leaving? Death lurks all about him. Trees, plants, flowers, whisper their cycle of life loud enough for him to hear

The book in part seems a legacy of men's fears of nearness and mistreatment of women who exist as objects for his convenience. Hmmm. Is that why the narration changed half way through? Returned by the end to its original style? A growing plea for the intimacy missed and now too late? A poignant moment; he with a teenage geisha and what he does is hold her face, this child, against his chest, protective. The plea desperate.

I hate it and love it this writing about a book and by so doing learning about it as I go along, wiping out my ideas, plans, for what I thought I would write.

This book lends itself to this with the quietude of its prose containing breath and the pulses of life.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

The Sound of the Mountain, Yasunari Kawabata (1899 - 1977)

The sound of the mountain, Snow country, Thousand cranes?

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Lynne King says

The theme of death permeates this lyrical and poetic book. It is as if the author is preparing himself for his own demise, especially running in tandem with another theme, that of suicide. And that Kawabata is in fact searching for a way in which to make that ultimate separation from life as we know it on this planet of ours. Thus I was not at all surprised to read that Kawabata committed suicide in 1972.

There are distinct pros and cons to this work and regrettably the latter prevail.

The positive points demonstrate the unique writing style of Kawabata and the way he demonstrates his love of nature.

The negative point is that the rhythm is incredibly slow and pedestrian. I had the odd sensation too as if I

were straddling an ancient giant tortoise on its way to die. I'm amazed in fact why I didn't abandon the book but something kept me going – intrigue I believe for the final outcome, which nevertheless disappointed me no end as it tailed into nothing

The characters:

Shingo, sixty two years old, losing his memory somewhat, is coasting downhill towards that ultimate destination (that age at the time was considered old – I believe this book was first serialized between 1949 and 1954). He suffers from disappointment with his daughter Fusako, who has a failed marriage and two children and is back at the family home. He doesn't appear to like her.

Yasuko, a rather dull wife a year older than Shingo and is really quite boring.

Fusako, who has not been granted great looks and it is evident that Shingo doesn't love her as one should a daughter.

Shuichi, Shingo's son, showed initial promise but he was cheating on his wife Kikuko and soon became thoroughly annoying and boring.

Now Kikuko, Shuichi's wife, well she's a really interesting personality and definitely with hidden depths. She was, I believe, the catalyst in the book and not Shingo. I often wondered about her feelings for Shingo – were they in fact fatherly or not and vice versa with Shingo? There are delightful dialogues between them but my, so slow moving, like feathers in a slight breeze. In fact at one stage I fell asleep.

I did nevertheless find the geishas mentioned in the book to be quite fascinating.

There were some rather old-fashioned phrases such as “they were in their cups” - inebriated.

I see that many people love this book and evidently Kawabata was a great Japanese writer getting the 1968 Nobel Prize for Literature, which is no mean feat. So this doesn't mean that I will not read any of his other works. It is just that this one was not to my satisfaction.

Tsung says

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.

This is an intricate, poetic, beautiful novel which my clumsy review cannot do justice to. It is highly sensory and satiates all the five senses. I'm appreciating nature through the experience of Shingo (pampass grass and cherry trees, buntings and sparrows, the seasons and more). Suddenly I'm transported to post-war Japan, right into the Ogata household. I'm there, a witness to the triumphs and tribulations of a three generation family. I'm experiencing Japanese culture and tradition (geishas and Noh masks). I'm taking a train on the Yokosuka line. I'm taking a peak into forbidden love. But first,

Ageing

'A trout in the autumn, abandoning itself to the water.' 'Trout swimming down the shallows, not knowing they must die.'

At the centre of the book is Shingo Ogata who is in his sixties. He experiences all the trappings of age, grandchildren, white hairs and worst of all, failing memory. All these do not seem to bother him much though. Perhaps the worst reminder of his own senescence was the woman who was growing old beside him, Yasuko.

On nights when he was not in good spirits he would be repelled by the sight of the aged flesh with which he had lived for so long.

Beyond ageing, Shingo also grapples with the issue of mortality, even as he encounters the deaths of several of his peers, ranging from an enviable death in the arms of a young woman to an ignominious suicide.

Family

While Shingo is at the centre, it is his family that makes him who he is. The family bond is strong, dominated with a sense of duty, even if favouritism rules. It is remarkable that as polarized as they are, they are irresistibly drawn together as a family. As patriarch of the family, Shingo takes personal responsibility for the success of his children's marriages.

Relationships

"Even when natural weather is good, human weather is bad."

Each character has depth and the relationships are even more complex.

Shingo the patriarch. Ageing, philosophical, patient, longings but minimal regret.

Yasuko, his wife. ...*for Yasuko self-immolation became a career.*

Fusako, his daughter. Frumpy, unrefined, bitter.

Kikuko, his daughter-in-law. Beautiful, pure, refined. But there's more to her.

Shuichi, his son. Philanderer.

Kinu, the mistress. Geisha, war widow, aggrieved, trying to reclaim the life that she lost.

Shingo and Yasuko. Shingo was smitten by Yasuko's younger sister and was haunted by the memory of the unattainable sister even through to his old age. Yasuko was a consolation prize, but to his credit: *Now more than thirty years had passed, and Shingo did not think the marriage a mistake. A long marriage was not necessarily governed by its origins.* But even Shingo himself was not top choice as a suitor, outshone by Yasuko's handsome brother-in-law.

Shingo and Kikuko. This was the most complicated and delicate relationship. Between father-in-law and daughter-in-law, it was beautiful in its symbiosis, two souls which dovetail naturally into each other's emptiness. Teetering with its sensuality towards impropriety but never quite crossing that boundary. Shingo's attraction to Kikuko was the only thing which was not overshadowed by his obsession with Yasuko's sister. Kikuko felt loyalty and affection toward Shingo, but whether as a substitute for her wandering husband or as a father figure, it's not entirely clear.

Kikuko was for him a window looking out of a gloomy house. His blood kin were not as he would wish them to be...His daughter-in-law brought relief. Kindness toward her was a beam lighting isolation. It was a way of pampering himself, of bringing a touch of mellowness into his life. For her part, Kikuko did not indulge in dark conjectures on the psychology of the aged, nor did she seem afraid of him.

Shingo and Fusako. It was obvious that Shingo favoured Kikuko over his own less attractive daughter, who was a reminder of Yasuko and hence of her younger sister whom he could never be with. To Shingo, she represented the ordinary rather than the dream. Still he sheltered Fusako and her two daughters in the wake of her own failed marriage.

Kikuko and Shuichi. Was she really that oblivious to his affair or simply resigned to it? (view spoiler)

Shingo and Eiko, Shingo's secretary. Shingo has a curious relationship with Eiko. To him, she is "not fully developed" as a woman. He dates her and makes no qualms about it. Is there a boundary? As for Eiko, despite the discomfort to her, she goes all out to help Shingo dissolve Shuichi's affair with Kinu.

And of course, the marriage relationships.

A marriage was like a dangerous marsh, sucking in endlessly the misdeeds of the partners.

...the two might come together again, they might make a new start. Human beings were capable of such things.

Metaphors and allusions

There are plenty of these but I doubt that I caught them all. Then there are Shingo's many dreams, which he tries to interpret.

This book is going to haunt me for a while....

Paul Christensen says

I
Shingo hears the mountain roar.

II
Shingo asks a woman out to dance.

III
Shingo's son is clawed in a storm.

IV
Shingo's old acquaintance goes to the grave unknowing.

V
Shingo has a dream of renewed youth beyond the 'moss-grown shell of the ego'.

VI

Shingo hears more roaring coming from the mountain.

VII

Shingo drinks from an antique well.

VIII

Shingo hears a groaning in the night.

IX

Shingo thinks old women more 'fertile' than younger ones; his nipple itches.

X

Shingo is aghast at his daughter-in-law's abortion.

XI

Shingo discovers a large park.

XII

Shingo wonders if limbs from the cherry tree's roots are still branches.

XIII

Shingo feels the mysterious weight of things.

XIV

Shingo tries to persuade his son's mistress to abort because the child will grow up to be a delinquent or degenerate.

XV

A lotus seed lives a very long time!

XVI

A golden mist of snow.

Oziel Bispo says

Otago Shingo já está com mais de sessenta anos, percebe que a velhice está chegando, percebe que todos os seus amigos da sua geração estão morrendo, esquece as coisas facilmente, até o nó de sua gravata esqueceu como se faz. Diz ouvir sons de uma montanha próxima, acredita ser a morte lhe chamando. Mas não para por aí; é casado com yasuko, vive praticamente como irmãos (na juventude fora pela irmã de Yasuko que se encantara) tem um filho, Shuichi, que trai sua nora kikuko, a qual ele gosta muito com apenas dois meses de casado. Tem uma filha Fusako que acaba de se separar do marido que tenta suicidar-se, vem para sua casa com dois filhos.

Como podem perceber ele tem uma família tumultuada e ainda tem mais dramas que não vou contar para aguçar vossa curiosidade de ler o livro. Mas não resisto vou contar mais 2: há aborto e sonhos eróticos de

Shingo com quem? Com sua nora, com sua cunhada que se encantou no passado? Com ambas?
Num Japão pós segunda guerra mundial , com as feridas ainda abertas ,Shingo passa por esses problemas da velhice , dos relacionados familiares. O tema do suicídio também é frequente no livro. O próprio autor do livro,
Yasunari Kawabata , se suicidou inalando fumaça tóxica. Ele ganhou o prêmio Nobel de literatura de 1968. Esse livro é uma obra prima, recomendo também a leitura de "Beleza e tristeza" do mesmo autor.

Nathan says

Recently, after about a year of constant badgering, I convinced a friend of mine to read one of my favorite novels, *To the Lighthouse*. I figured that once he picked it up, it would need no more selling, Woolf is such an innovative novelist that I could see no way anyone could not fall in love with its lyrical stream of consciousness style. It turns out I was wrong. He hated it. He told me he was bored the whole way through, called the book plotless, and decided that we have very different tastes. I was shocked.

In the same way, I'm shocked that *The Sound of the Mountain* gets called boring. While reading Woolf and Kawabata are two dramatically different experiences, he with his sharp, short sentences and paragraphs, she with her several page paragraphs and wide scope, the content is incredibly similar. Each operates with a reverence for the complexity of human thought and feeling, showing life in terms of normal people doing normal things, which reflects what, in my eyes, it means to be alive.

Reading *The Sound of the Mountain* is nothing less than aggravating. Shingo shows the toxicity that lives in many traditions. He values his wife less when she is in menopause. He values his daughter in law less when she decides she is not emotionally ready for children. He values his daughter less when she seeks a divorce from an unhappy marriage. At night, he dreams of loving women, but he can't even remember their faces or names, just their bodies.

But through this all, no matter how frustrating he is, Kawabata never lets Shingo be any less than human. I can see in pieces of him my father, my brothers, and often myself. The ability he has to tear down the walls of convention is amazing. The fact that someone so often disgusting can show me pieces of myself is brilliant. It is only when I recognize what is flawed in me that I can fix it and make any self improvement.

So maybe the people rushing out to buy *The Secret* or *What Color is Your Parachute?* should pick this up instead.

Pavle says

Ono na šta me je ovaj roman podsetio najviše je Ozeov film Tokyo Story, sa tom ključnom razlikom da gde se Oze oslanja na retku, ali prisutnu ljudskost u svojim likovima, Kawabata je daleko ambivalentniji. Možda su se i, direktno ili indirektno, Oze i Kawabata međusobno inspirisali, pošto su njihova dela tu negde u slično vreme i ugledala svetlost dana.

Reči da je ovo neuspešan roman je sve sem tačno. Kawabata svojom vitkom i elegantnom prozom (paragrafi su obično dužine dva-tri reda) piše o starosti, o porodici, o tremorima koje trpi Japan suočen sa vesternizacijom društva. Šingo, protagonista i najstariji član svoje porodice, pokušuje da zaboravlja i pokušuje

da ?uje zvuk planine – sopstvene smrti. Te ne dolazi zaklju?ak da ovo nije baš najveselije štivo niotkuda. A meni je možda ta veselost (ili makar humanost – Kavabata je i po tom pitanju dosta štur) u ovom trenutku i najviše bila potrebna. I greota, znam, da dobar roman (možda ?ak i odli?an) profilterisan kroz trenutnog mene ostane *za mene* tako nedore?en, tako gotovo prazan, da ne mogu da kažem da mi se stvarno dopao.

Možda ?u mu se opet vratiti, u nekom drugom trenutku u vremenu, i možda to tad bude neka druga (tokijska) pri?a.

3

Nicole~ says

Kawabata uses Ogata Shingo as his narrator and prime character to tell the story of a 62-year-old man immersed in unhappiness, who feels death closing in on him. Shingo lives with his wife, Yasuko (the plain sister of the beautiful woman who was, in his youth, his one true love); his son, Shuichi who ignores his wife for his mistress; and resentful daughter whose own marriage has failed. He has long ceased to love Yasuko, more highly regarding the relationship with his young and innocent daughter- in- law, Kikuko, as the only bit of life and happiness in his aging years. Kawabata's sympathetic treatment warms Shingo's character in spite of his flaws ; his natural sense of life allows us to see his world, and empathize.

*Stopped in his path to gaze:
The crown of a sunflower's head,
A wish for Renewal.**

Through Kawabata's beautifully written Haiku-style prose: the marital struggles of Shingo's daughter Fusako; the loneliness and melancholy of Kikuko's disappointing marriage to Shuichi, whose aloofness and unfaithfulness are shaped from the male-egoist facility of Japanese society of the time: are closely observed.

*Deep are their hearts in sadness;
Spring blooms have left the garden,
And weeds are sown instead.**

Shingo who , in a fleeting moment, might forget how to fasten his tie or recall the day's activities with difficulty, yet with the minutest detail, could conjure up with vividness a love long dead. Life in Shingo's perception moves in a flow of days, events and actions that waltz back and forth in time, as the placement of sounds are linked with a slip of the mind; a dim remembrance; a glimpse of a bygone association; a shadow of an earlier scene; a memory evoked by a flash of light or resonating timbre.

*Faint echoes blow in the wind.
The distant mountain rumbles;
An old man's faded memory.**

The Sound of the Mountain is a heartfelt psychological study of the dynamics of a multigenerational family, seen through the eyes of an aging patriarch who feels the burden of responsibility for his children, and tries unsuccessfully to fix their problems.

*Autumn has begun;
The buds from the ginkgo tree
Cannot be mature.**

Kawabata's novel is a poetic tapestry of human relations, of the beauty and sadness inherent in nature, of life and death, of memories and lost loves fading in and out. The Sound of the Mountain is a cluster of allusions beautifully presented in haiku tones. This was the best I've read so far of Yasunari Kawabata -it is truly an artistic literary gift!

* my-aiku

Read Sept 2014

Praj says

As the last smell of spring faded in a flowery envelope at a nearby bin, it was time to bid adieu to Shingo Ogata. I wanted to escape from his loneliness, as if it was mine to hold to; the prospects of designing uncharted ideas somehow enticed me more than Mr. Ogata. Unaware of my goodbyes, Shingo sat in his veranda, greatly immersed in a probability of a possible quarrel between the sparrows and the buntings nestled in the majestic ginkgo tree. All he heard was the peculiar yet familiar roars of the mountain. Why would he bother about me closing a page on him when he could hardly remember the name of the girl he saw in his dreams, last night.

Summer has gone; and the new window did not bring the joy I thought it would. The smell of fresh paint although quite endearing, still made me reminisce my old room. The walls are same but the paint is different, the furniture has changed a bit, and the only old thing in that room besides the clock is me. I wanted to meet Shingo once again. I yearned to dwell in his loneliness, hear Yasuko snore and see Kikuko weep silent tears because of Shuichi. Shingo made me wonder the thoughts that my wrinkles would bring some day. Would my facial creases read out my wisdom or scream my fear of being old and ignored? Will it be egotistic on my part if I let go the roles I play in my family and the society as a whole and for once shine in my individuality? From the very moment a child lets out a cry in midst of a joyous room, it enters a social stage where it plays numerous roles enmeshing the tribunals of life and finally death. And during those performances, behind those responsible masks, a mere human gets lost through the fuddles voices of helplessness. Mr. Ogata gifts these thought to me, when he himself reflects between the possibilities of benevolence, love and sadness.

“It was like the wind, faraway, but with a depth like a rumbling of earth..... He had heard the mountain. It was as if a demon had passed, making the mountain sound out”.

Shingo, a man in his sixties was still fighting the demons thriving in his life. Although married to Yasuko for decades, he could not bring himself to understand his wife and the marriage in its entirety. His heart belonged somewhere, to someone from his past. A true family patriarch (as seen in many Asian familial cultures), he donned the responsibility of cementing his family and his children's life to a happy trouble-free structure. Yet, somehow on the path of playing the roles of a husband, a father and grandfather; Shingo stopped searching the true essence of being an individual. Unlike the ginkgo tree up in the mountain that puts

out new leaves in place of its weathered typhoon marred branches, Shingo was afraid of the changes that his life years were bringing in. Kawabata delineates the landscape of Kamakura thriving on the cusp of Japanese modernization and the aftermath of WWII. The old generation makes way for the new and along with the reigning youth comes a vast package of new ideals and life style. The intricacies of arranged marriages that sometimes become more of carried social responsibilities rather than a lovable union. The secrecy of abortion, the pressure of a fertile womb, the pain and anger for a burgeoning fetus in a strange womb and the onset of divorce; was seeping into the traditions threatening the foundation of being a 'successful father'.

Shingo finds himself stuck between the *“selfish bonds of his blood”* and his loyalty to his family when he tries to comfort himself with the ending of Shuichi's (his son) extramarital affair.

“Shingo was astonished at his son's spiritual paralysis and decay, but it seemed to him that he was caught in the same filthy slough. Dark terror swept over him.”

Although Shingo's loyalty was towards his children, he also felt an immense sense of guilt towards Kikuko (Shuichi's wife), a woman who understood Shingo and his sentimentalities.

“In all his life no woman had so loved as to want him to notice everything she did”.

Kawabata crafts the relationship between Shingo and Kikuko beautifully on the cutting edge of sensuality and sympathy. Both the characters thrive separately in their miseries and still somehow in a bizarre way find a spiritual connection with each other, making the reader curious for the unheard. At times kindness becomes the nectar that saves from the trenches of loneliness. Maybe, Kikuko's subtle pampering of Shingo's needs and a most awaited ear to listen to his dilemmas, in some ways shielded Shingo from hearing the deathly roars of the mountain and marvel at the rows of blooming acacias.

“What had been killed by the war had not come to life again. It seemed too that his way of thinking was as the war had left it, pushed into a narrow kind of common sense....”

Kawabata metaphorically symbolizes the ending of the war with the conclusion of old and beginning of the new. With it comes the demise of youthfulness and the seclusion that overwhelms old age. The *“ugliness of old age”*, the desperate need to find refuge in death, the loss of will to live and the nakedness of dying while being loved rather than living without love; it is all so disheartening. A reality that is far shoddier from being a mellow isolation. As the novel deepens into the torrid mind of Shingo, one can see the disabilities face by the aging generation with questions looming over them, whether being successful parents with happy families or the illusion of a rearing youth would make them senile or just a divine sanctuary from life's tragedies.

“Turning a Noh mask slightly downward is known as “clouding,” explained Suzumoto, because the mask takes on a melancholy aspect; and turning it up is known as “shining,” because the expression becomes bright and happy. Turning it to the left or the right, he added, is known as “using” or “cutting” or something of the sort.....“Children were precocious in those days. And a real child's face would be wrong for the Noh. But look at it carefully. It's a boy. I'm told that the jido is a sprite of some sort. Probably a symbol of eternal youth”.

Kawabata symbolizes the embellished Noh mask as the symbol of eternal youth, a facet of life that haunted

the characters in this book. One can cheat by dyeing the hair black or plucking white hairs, but as Shingo says, *“the ugliness of old age is more horrid than adultery”*. In a “marsh-like” arranged marriage where the wife automatically dissolves in her husband’s identity to become one solid societal structure it is sometimes better to *“die when you still loved”*.

Rather than putting Shingo as an operational actor in this novel, Kawabata deliberately lets Shingo’s perception about life and its nuances acts as the protagonists and making the psyche take the centre stage rather than the body. Similar to the solitary crow that descended on a naked branch on an autumn evening, mulishly waiting for spring to come and the great Gingko tree that shoots buds after a stormy night, Shingo Ogata stood tall through all the guilt, responsibilities and skepticism that life bestowed upon him.

Comprehending ‘Sound of the Mountain’ is like looking in the mirror. At the very first sight you see a visage generally viewed by people. And as you keep staring at the portrayed image, you start noticing the deep embedded colour of your eyes when it is lit amid the sun rays, the smallest freckle on your forehead, the imperfect mole on your cheek, the tapering end of your mouth that curves when you smile with sheer joy , the lines in between your eyes that deepen each time you frown and lips that are dying to mouth the word “crazy” while you keep staring into the mirror, and ultimately it hits you that the image of your face is full of stories and memories of the past and is never afraid to display new changes over the course of your life irrespective to your struggles to accept it. At first it may scare you, it may saddened you but, at the end it will make you understand the very nature of being YOU.

** Shingo and Kikuko portrayed by Japanese actors in Mikio Naruse aesthetically brilliant rendition of Kawabata's novel.

Agnieszka says

Seemingly nothing is happening. Shingo Ogata goes to his office , on his way back does shopping, for a while thinking about the girl who used to work for him but now apparently forgot her name. Nothing special .Ordinary life.

But something’s happened. Shingo heard a sound of mountain and its voice awaked in him old memories .Its sound symbolizes impending death.

Shingo takes us then on a nostalgic journey to the past,to the world of memories and unfulfilled dreams .Painfully aware of loss so many things takes a trip down memory lane, meditates about passage of the time ,observing nature and the changing seasons , world of plants, bonzai and flowering cherry trees , clones .

Kawabata in detail depicts the world of dreams and daily rituals of old man , drinking tea, daily toilets , images observed during the train ride to his office. Explores the loneliness of the old man and the story of his family with its difficult relationships. Shuichi ,Shingo's son is having an affair , daughter Fusako leaves her husband .

Special attention Shingo gives to his daughter in law Kikuko . Both are a very dedicated to themselves , and Shingo is enchanted by the beautiful and fragile son's wife, not only her beauty , but still inherent in her childishness and innocence.This feeling overlaps with memories of his youthful love.

This is a poignant story with unhurried narration , almost meditative pace .Style is laconic and brief, language plain ,no embellishments ,no sudden twists . Tale runs quietly , as the days go by life. We can almost feel elusiveness of the life. Something remains unsaid .The book , so subtle and nostalgic , awakes your sensitivity.

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Gaurav says

It's been a while since I've written any reviews, for I always kept postponing them for one reason or another however the book- *The Sound of the Mountain* - has pushed me so hard to overturn this, for it was so compelling, that's why I made an attempt (futile though) to review (or rather to write something) this little gem in Japanese literature, all these things may probably give an impression (perhaps appropriate though) that it's not like returning back to some arena I enjoy. Well, let's try to write something after all that verbose rambling of words, I've started this book late night, probably thought that I would read a few pages on the first day however I couldn't have kept it down till (very) early in the morning, of course only after I fainted due to lack of sleep, I finished the book in two days (or rather nights), in just two sittings, such was the hypnotic spell cajoled by its marvelous prose around me. While leafing through the pages, for the pace it maintained, I felt as if the book was following my thoughts, as if I'm part of this magnificent world created around this majestic arrangement of words, instead of I'm going after its patterns, for the thoughts seemed to be emanating from the text.

The narrator, Ogata Shingo, a 62-year old man seemed to keep losing track of life, it looks something has saddened him, probably the fact that he couldn't remember the name of maid, however, it's normal to forget things when you're losing time with every passing year but, perhaps it's not that normal for Shingo, his old memories seemed to surfaced from the deepest layers of memories on hearing sound from *The Mountain* , well it's perfectly normal to feel awkward when remembrances of the bygone times haunt you but the reverberation of reminiscences of past from the mountain probably symbolizes something else, something very profound, probably an omen of his impending death. The of *Death* has always been close to Japanese tradition, for we see the most aesthetic ways to deal with the poignant mystery death holds for human kind, for we know it's the our ultimate mingle with *nothingness* , which is probably our origin too, and there would be no trace of us after this most beautiful *event* in the entire cosmos yet we seemed to be pulled away towards it by an unknown (unseen) but profound energy, probably it's the ultimate desire of consciousness to meet the super-consciousness as it's believed in some of the Zen traditions.

Human relationships are also of those daunting conundrums which have been haunting human kind since we

became *civilized*, or at least we think so for human beings have done most uncivilized things thereafter, or perhaps even before that, we're the most astonishing of all forms of life, as we know them, since we've first made demonic social systems over the struggle of thousands of years to be civilized, and then those systems haunt us, rob us of our natural instincts to live an inauthentic existence, probably it's a necessity to create those systems to live as a herd, which is again contrary to human instincts, such a irony history of human evolution has been. Shingo's world has his wife, Yasuko, who is a year older than him which I don't think is of importance but its mention here probably reflects the patriarchy of society; a son- Shuichi- who showed no evidence of deprivation in matters of love and desire; his daughter-in-law, Kikuko whose relationship with Shuichi severed over the course of time due to infidelity of her husband who leaves his wife for his mistress; his daughter- Fusako and two grandchildren. His relationship with this son was hollow as trunk of a tree which is losing life, as a dying star loses energy, and perhaps become just a log of wood, erected though somehow due to the roots as they still have some last traces of dying life in them and which you know will die off eventually, Shingo braves himself between the heartless affairs of his son and his son's severed relationship with the family, relationship which he tries to comfort and restore by managing the infidelities of his son. The relationship of Shingo with Kikuko has evolved over time, initially the bond occurs to be made up of sympathy and deep sensuality between both of them but gradually it evolves as a deep bond of some strange human emotions, for the author do not give ample time to let it graduate to something our nomenclature of relationships relate to, however this conscious decision of the author to not to let it come out in full bloom kept interest in readers for its possible ends.

There's an intriguing irony in the book which emerges through the relationship of Shuichi with two women- while his wife has to abort her children for she feels it's superfluous to have them in a relationship which is shallow but his mistress decides to give birth her child, even though Shuichi thinks otherwise, for she thinks it her personal choice and her decision doesn't require approval of someone with whom her relationship is like a fever whose every trace evaporates as soon as the cloud of infatuation is dispersed by the light of reality.

The journey through Kawabata's masterpiece is like peeling off an onion, for human emotions are like an onion- layered, from the outer skin you got introduce to the salient features of people of Shingo's life, he may seem to have a healthy life, with a closely knitted family however as you delve yourself deep into prose by peeling off layers by layers, you found yourself deep down in the very heart of human relationships, for they are tumultuous, they are just tied with a delicate thread (of emotions) which could tear apart as we go down into their very core, the troubled life of Shingo started to feel like story of everyone with his existence exposed naked in the light of sun, where his loneliness permeated and he found solace in his unusual and curious relationship with his daughter-in-law who evolves to be his unsaid *mistress*, but gradually it occurs to you if it's not your life itself, if it's not the story of everyone, if it's not that you merely looking at the reflection of your own life via that of Shingo.
