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Eternity Has No Elegy: A Zen-Oriented Commentary on Yasunari Kawabata's *Snow Country*  
and the Artistic Experience

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Maestría en Artes con Especialidad en Literatura Comparada

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## **Eternity Has No Elegy: A Zen-Oriented Commentary on Yasunari Kawabata's *Snow Country* and the Artistic Experience**

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## Abstract

This paper posits a Zen-oriented philosophical framework wherein it is assumed that haiku poetry and literary fiction, the combination of which makes up the *form* of the novel in question, are suitable grounds for the investigation of the artistic experience out of which such a novel has been conceived. It is understood from the outset that the artistic experience is not limited exclusively to the work of art as *oeuvre*; that, moreover, the work of art itself is an indefinitely consolidated correlate of actual experience; and that, so being, it is both subject to and exemplary of the same qualities whose philosophical elaboration Zen has inherited from the teachings of the Buddha which preside over the *phenomenic* nature of reality. The paper incorporates three principal theoretical sources: 1) philosopher Francisco José Ramos's second volume of the series "Estética del pensamiento," titled *La danza en el laberinto*, which deals with the artistic experience and its relationship to Zen; 2) Rev. Dr. W. Rahula's *What the Buddha Taught*, which expertly conveys an anthology of the Buddha's teachings; and 3) Kenneth Yasuda's *The Japanese Haiku*, for a thorough understanding of the history of the haiku and the conceptualization of its artistic possibilities, its form, and its direct relationship to natural phenomena.

## Biography

Rafael Rodríguez Planas was born in La Habana, Cuba in 1993. He earned his BA in English from the University of Pennsylvania in 2014. He is currently completing his Master's in Comparative Literature in the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, and will subsequently be attending Cornell University toward the completion of a PhD in Comparative Literature beginning in the Fall of 2022. His research interests include synergies between aesthetics and philosophy; philosophical thought as methodology for understanding artistic experience; ethics and ontology; modern and contemporary poetry; troubadour lyric traditions; Japanese haiku; various poets and writers from the Italian, Spanish and Latin American contexts. Additional interests include Japanese film and literature (Ozu, Kawabata, Murakami).



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ETERNITY HAS NO ELEGY  
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Experience

*Non voluntas sed occasio. – Francisco José Ramos*

*How do you know but every bird that cuts the airy way  
Is an immense world of delight, closed by your senses five?  
– William Blake (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell)*

*The river is within us, the sea is all about us – T.S. Eliot (The Dry Salvages)*

## Introduction

Alluding to the poetic encounters with nature experienced by the Zen monks Myoe, Dogen, and Saigyo, among others, Yasunari Kawabata's Nobel Prize speech (1968) reads almost like an account of nature's own perspectivism as it echoes back across the silent landscape, passes through the monks, and arrives at language. In the speech, we see as the movement of nature is allowed to take over whilst the monks, gathered in their meditative practices, stand stock-still. The disappearance of the monk becomes the occasion for poetry. This is exemplified by Saigyo's comment, cited by Kawabata: "Though I compose poetry, I do not think of it as composed poetry" (*Japan, the Beautiful, and Myself*).

Just as moonlight and season, wolf-howl and blossom are perceived to emerge from such stillness, so too do they take on human feeling, so that to bear witness to the transient beauty of nature, Kawabata says, also brings thoughts of those dearly loved. The movement of nature then simultaneously also becomes template for the internal feeling, and the visceral, human forces that have lain within the poet are momentarily allowed to well up, acquire form, and emerge.

It isn't that what does not grant us permission to dwell in the human world bequeaths it to us in the world of nature instead. It is rather that there is ultimately no separation between the two; that, just as nature is barren where man is not (Blake)<sup>1</sup>, so too is man barren without nature. One then discovers that the only possible dwelling place consists of the movement itself, and the task becomes that of approaching it from a place of utter stillness. None other is the significance of the well-known fragment by Heraclitus: *It is in change that things find rest*.

To speak of man in a poetic context brings forth the question of language, which derives its poetic function from aesthetic experience. Yet poetry itself is not confined to language. Were

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<sup>1</sup> "Where man is not, nature is barren." *Proverbs of Hell*.

it so, it could not meet, could not correspond<sup>2</sup> with nature. Experience, in this sense, implies encounter: the singular occasion or meeting point of an ongoing multiplicity. Aesthetic, in turn, implies intuitive, integral, “*Real*”: the understanding of what constitutes an encounter.<sup>3</sup> It has been said<sup>4</sup> that this is the foremost contribution that eastern aesthetics and philosophy are able to offer to the Western tradition (though the West is certainly not without its proponents). But even in the East, as another Kawabata novel, *Thousand Cranes*, suggests, the noble traditions which have hitherto acted as bridges for this communion may very easily become brittle and obsolete should they distance themselves from their original intention, and, as far as poetry is concerned, the noblest intention is not to have any.<sup>5</sup> In a recent documentary that explores, among other things, the rapidly increasing CGI<sup>6</sup> influence that threatens to supplant traditional hand-drawn animation, Japanese animated film director Hayao Miyazaki, whose artistic practice is deeply rooted in nature as well as influenced by Zen, hinted as much when he spoke the following warning: “I must battle my desire to avoid a hassle. All important things in the world are a hassle” (Sunada, “*The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness*”).

The same impoverishment occurs with language if it loses all sight of its primordial function, the poetic. It is this creative, active<sup>7</sup> function of language that is able to emancipate itself from itself precisely by restoring itself to the potency or trajectory of impermanence, at which point nature avails as metabolic reference point and outlet for expression. In reference to

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, in the sense of Baudelaire’s “Correspondences.”

<sup>3</sup> I am leaning here on several sources, namely, on the “Nirvana-like sense” with which Otsuji characterizes fully realized Haiku (Yasuda 11). Also, on Novalis’ famous aphorism: “the more poetic, the more real,” (Mitchell 172) and on Francisco José Ramos’ use of the concept *Real*, which parallels the Buddha’s term: *ultimate reality*, a.k.a. *the Unconditioned*.

<sup>4</sup> There is a multitude of teachers behind these words, but I am thinking, namely, of D. T. Suzuki, Alan Watts, Stephen Mitchell, and the great writers of the Kyoto School of Philosophy.

<sup>5</sup> “A realidade não precisa de mim.” Trans. “Reality has no need of me.” *Quando vier a Primavera*, by Alberto Caeiro (Fernando Pessoa.)

<sup>6</sup> Computer Generated Imagery

<sup>7</sup> *Poiésis* means both creation and action.

this creative principle, which in the Tantric tradition of Buddhism is analogous to the receptive capabilities of space and femininity, Chogyam Trungpa points out the following:

“Fundamentally, [it is distinguished by] having no desire to be born. There is a fertility of fickleness; you are willing to play with phenomena, there is a sense of journeying” (Rinpoche 435). And Rilke: “To work *with* Things in the indescribable/relationship is not too hard for us;/the pattern grows more intricate and subtle,/and being swept along is not enough” (261).

Being swept along is not enough because, as Trungpa goes on to explain, there is an element of self-annihilation inherent to the creative process, and without this element the pattern begins to identify itself (i.e. falls into duality), becomes self-conscious, and staggers (Rinpoche 442-445). In other words, without this element, there is no reckoning of what might be called the actualization of pure possibility, which is a kind of keeping-up with impermanence, a kind of not-knowing-itself that *fail-safes* the very integrity of nature.

Perhaps one of the most direct poetic allusions of this comes by way of T.S. Eliot, who in “Burnt Norton” refers to a co-existence between movement and stillness, wherein the former is both preceded and succeeded by the latter, as if rounded out or delimited—which is to say, defined—and therefore, inextricable [“Or say that the end precedes the beginning,/and the end and the beginning were always there/before the beginning and after the end./And all is always now” (12).] Such a quality of interrelationship is the very same that Zen identifies as the integrity of nature:

*‘In the spring, cherry blossoms, in the summer the cuckoo.  
In autumn the full moon, in winter the snow, clear, cold.’*

This poem, written by the Zen Master Dogen and quoted by Kawabata in his speech, may, at first glance, seem like a random stringing together of names. But it is really a poem about impermanence (*mujō/anitya*) and emptiness (*ku/sūnyatā*.) In other words, it is as much

about Dogen as it is about the images it conveys, as much about poetry as about whoever ends up reading it. The meaning, which the words themselves do not disclose but rather point to<sup>8</sup> as they revel in their own silence, is entirely outside the poem. But it is also incorrect to say that, strictly speaking, you can look for it outside the poem.

Here is another poem that Kawabata cites, this time by Ikkyū:

*“Then I ask you answer. When I do not you do not.  
What is there then on your heart, O Lord Bodhidharma?”  
“And what is it, the heart?  
It is the sound of the pine breeze in the ink painting.”  
(Japan, The Beautiful, and Myself).*

Bodhidharma was an Indian prince who traveled to China and is credited with being the founder of Chinese Zen (there known as *Chan*). The encounter between Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu of Liang is well known, and it often doubles as a Zen *koan*. According to the legend, the emperor was reputed to be a very pious, charitable man, who devoted great effort to promoting Buddhism. Having heard great things about Bodhidharma, he was naturally very excited to meet him. When Bodhidharma appeared before him, the emperor said to him: “I have built temples and ordained monks; what is my merit?” And Bodhidharma replied, “no merit.” The emperor, rather aghast, then asked Bodhidharma: “What is the first principle of the holy teachings?” Bodhidharma’s response was: “Vast emptiness. Nothing holy.” This time the emperor was really dumbfounded. But finally, he pressed on and asked: “Who is standing before me?”, and Bodhidharma said, “I don’t know” (*The Blue Cliff Record* 3).

Along the same lines, toward the end of his speech, Kawabata points to something not unlike what we have sought to understand on behalf of this paper: “If you meet a Buddha, kill

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<sup>8</sup> According to Heraclitus: “The Lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither reveals nor conceals, but points.”

him. If you meet a patriarch of the law, kill him.’ ‘I shall not take a single disciple.’ In these two statements, perhaps, is the rigorous fate of art.” It is precisely the *rigorous fate of art* that concerns us.

In his book, *La danza en el laberinto*, philosopher Francisco José Ramos refers to the artistic experience as “the effort to conjure up the pathos of impermanence” (433).<sup>9</sup> In the context of this book, which, like Kawabata’s speech, is a Zen-oriented meditation on human action and the artistic experience, this *pathos* is directly associated with the Buddhist term *dukkha*, meaning unsatisfactoriness or suffering. Using as framework the Buddha’s Marks of Existence, all three<sup>10</sup> of which have now been mentioned and without all of which there would be no art, the *rigor* that Kawabata ascribes to art’s fate in no way differs from the *right (samma)* element of the eight aspects that comprise the three essentials of Buddhism, which themselves constitute the Buddha’s Fourth Noble Truth, known as *Magga*, or The Path. *Magga*, like art, connotes *practice*. The essentials or pillars are: *sila*, meaning ethics or, alternately, self-reliance<sup>11</sup>; *prajna*, which means wisdom; and *samadhi*, which means concentration or meditative practice.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, in this sense, the *rigor* of art may be said to be directly proportional to its *nobility*, which presupposes a form of artistic endeavor or practice that is akin to the Noble Eightfold Path. This implies not only taking no disciples, but also killing the Buddha and killing the patriarchs of the law. “Listen to the hummingbird/whose wings you cannot see./Listen to the

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<sup>9</sup> “El esfuerzo por conjurar el pathos de la impermanencia.”

<sup>10</sup> Anitya, dukkha, anatta/shunyata. Suffering/unsatisfactoriness, impermanence, impersonality/emptiness.

<sup>11</sup> We may elucidate on the concept of *sila* via Emerson’s famous treatise on Self-Reliance. What Emerson defines as self-reliance in his famous essay constitutes, affirmed by the author in several different ways, the idea that there is no separation between a man’s actions and his environment. Thus, self-reliance implies the active dissolution of any notion of separation between self and other, as well as the immediacy of each and every action carried out by man not to be seen as a moral significance, but as an ontological contingency that is built upon all his other actions.

<sup>12</sup> *Sila* includes: right (*samma*) speech, right livelihood, right action. *Samadhi* includes: right effort, right concentration, right mindfulness. *Prajna* includes: right thought, right understanding. This is the Noble Eightfold Path which mirrors the practical aspect of the 4<sup>th</sup> Noble Truth: the path to the cessation of suffering.

hummingbird/don't listen to me,"<sup>13</sup> writes Leonard Cohen in like vein, himself also a Zen practitioner.

Closer to Kawabata, who has “been put in a literary line that can be traced back to seventeenth century haiku masters” (Seidensticker vii), such is also the nobility of Basho, the great haiku master in whom Zen and the Japanese Poetic tradition crystalize into the modern haiku. Like Basho, who instructed his students to “follow nature and return to nature” (Yasuda 169), leaving as witnesses the myriad of magnificent haikus that bear no trace of him save the fact of his authorship, Kawabata is never a moment short of complete dissolution and expenditure within his pages, so that only pathos/*dukkha*, desire, and indeed nature remain as witnesses.

“Without impermanence there is no poetry” (Ramos, *Estética II* 324). And wherever there is impermanence, like the Buddha said, there is also *dukkha* (*yad aniccam tam dukkham*) (Rahula 18). The relationship between *anitya* (impermanence) and *dukkha* (suffering) has long been referred to by the Japanese as *mono no aware*, the transience of things. It is precisely this ephemeral quality of beauty that beseeches art of the human condition. And it is in the beseeching itself that the motive is divested of its avidity (*tanha*), of its need for (self)-possession, thereby proving that all art is ultimately paving the way toward its own dissolution, toward the arrival of what is always only arriving. In the words of the great Spanish poet Antonio Machado: “hoy es siempre todavía” (201).

In this sense, it may be asserted that the great usefulness of art lies in its capacity to reenact the struggle, to reenact the drama, and in so doing, to shed light on *dukkha*. But what exactly is it about suffering that the artistic experience illuminates? And furthermore, how is it

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<sup>13</sup> “Listen to the Hummingbird,” from *Thanks for the Dance* (2019).



comparable to the methodology of Zen, and, by extension, to the Buddha's teachings, specifically when it comes to addressing the problem of suffering?

“What matters to Zen,” writes Kyoto School philosopher Shizuteru Ueda, “is movement” (quoted in Ramos, “Zen y poesía”). The practice of Zen gradually extends itself toward the observation of all phenomena, and what it discovers, as it fine-tunes its instrument, is that all phenomena, like Goethe said, “are their own doctrine.” Thus, when the Zen practitioner shines a lens on nature from a place of cultivated practice, he discovers it to be the perfect tutor, for nature cannot help but be spontaneous. The effort consists in suspending thought and/or motion so as to observe motion from stillness, so as to observe thought from silence. In like vein, the poetic function of language is the *logos* in its arising from and returning to silence: “Las más hondas palabras/del sabio nos enseñan,/lo que el silbar del viento cuando sopla,/o el sonar de las aguas cuando ruedan.”<sup>14</sup>

It is no coincidence that the literary tradition to which Kawabata ascribes is rife with poet priests who say much without saying very many things, or who, conversely, somehow manage to say nothing despite all that they say. Traditions such as that of tea ceremony, *chanoyu*, or flower arranging, *ikebana*, or the great oriental painting traditions, or the subtle practice of oriental calligraphy, or the famous asymmetrical landscape gardening arrangements, or *kyudo*, the art of archery, all of which Kawabata cites and explains in his speech, evoke *in practice* the “multiplicity and the vastness” of nature. In every single one of these artistic traditions, as they anchor themselves in spontaneous movement, it is understood that there is no separation between what is natural and what is spiritual. Accordingly, the Chinese characters for nature are *tsu-jan*, which translates as “of-itself-so” (Watts, *Nature, Man and Woman* 46). This harkens back to the

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<sup>14</sup> Antonio Machado, “The deepest words/of the wise man teach us/the same as the whistle of the wind when it blows/or the sound of the water when it is flowing.” (Trans. by Robert Bly)

concept of suchness in Mahayana Buddhism (*tathata* in Sanskrit), which points to the overlap between the physical and the spiritual, and refers as well to what is inexpressible or prior-to-thought. But, to reiterate, in order to cultivate this faculty of observation<sup>15</sup>, as Eugen Herrigel so aptly chronicled for the Western reader in his book, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, one must practice the don't-know mind.<sup>16</sup> Conceptually very similar to the Taoist term *wu-wei*, which means non-striving, the don't-know-mind implies a preemptive capacity for bypassing thought, since thought precludes spontaneity unless it is evinced from a place of no-thought. This place of no-thought is precisely silence/emptiness, the primordial language place from whence springs the poetic.

In Trungpa's seminars, the combination of the poetic potency—i.e. what potentiates as *form*—and the place of no-thought or space or emptiness, is conceptualized as the EVAM principle. The poetic potency is VAM, the masculine principle, warm, dynamic, all-embracing; and it is harmonized or integrated with E, which might stand for feminine receptivity, space, or emptiness (Rinpoche 440). Yet both must be understood as being equal and indivisible, and the one is always implying the other. In the implication is inherent the actualization. This is akin to Anaximander's granting of favor, as in accordance with the famous translation and interpretation given by Heidegger in *Holzwege*.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This is what Francisco José Ramos has referred to as perspectivism, a concept that he elaborates particularly throughout the second and the third volumes of his *Estética del pensamiento*. We will comment more on it toward part III of this paper, but namely, perspectivism refers to the aspect of interrelationship between phenomena. It is perhaps best evoked by that famous (anonymous) medieval phrase used to describe God by means of a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

<sup>16</sup> This phrase is coined by Zen Master Seung Sahn.

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger builds the greater part of his argument around the translation of a single word which he rescues from old German: *Ruch*. Its immediate English counterpart is "reck." From this we get the verb, to reckon, which is to say, to discern order or correspondence. Heidegger goes on to say: "Insofar as things which stay awhile are not entirely abandoned to the boundless fixation of aggrandizing themselves into sheerly persisting continuants—a craving which leads them to seek to expel one another from what is presently present—they let order belong" (*Off the Beaten Track*, 272).

EVAM may also be interpreted as the tantric way of emulating the core teachings of the Heart-Sutra, which states, namely, that emptiness is form and form is emptiness. Without emptiness, the notion of limits (i.e. the definition, precision, and relationship of form) is skewed. To illustrate the inseparability of form and emptiness, Trungpa cites the following example: “Consider the imprint of a bird in the sky. The sky is embellished by the bird and the bird is embellished by the sky because a bird cannot leave any trace behind it” (455). This is very similar to a passage written by Dogen in Genjokoan, a fascicle of the *Shobogenzo*, which states: “when [a bird or a fish] need a little water or sky, they use just a little; when they need a lot, they use a lot. Thus, they use all of it at every moment, and in every place they have perfect freedom” (*Moon in a Dewdrop* 70). For the same reason (i.e. because form is empty of itself), Herrigel eventually realizes that there is no fathomable contrivance or, put differently, that “the archer’s target is [always] himself” (65). The mature artist is privy to the same realization, and each work of art for him represents another endeavor and/or practice of self-targeting and self-annihilation: “[...] know the great void where all things begin, the infinite source of your own most intense vibration, so that, this once, you may give it your perfect assent. [...] To all that is used-up [...] joyfully add yourself, and cancel the count” (Rilke 245). In view of this, then, regarding the question of the relationship between suffering and the artistic experience, since the latter is uncontrivable and can only be fathomed from a place of emptiness, the following question now warrants further exploration, for which we may paraphrase it somewhat like a *koan*: on behalf of the artistic process and its uncontrivable requirements, what happens to the “sufferer” through the artistic experience?

It should come as no surprise, then, that among the Buddhist doctrines, none is more reliant on the practice of silence as Zen. Perhaps the reason why Kawabata, in his speech,

decides to comment generously on the various *ways* or *Zen practices*, and not at all on his own work—and considering that he would be addressing a mostly Western audience—, is to show “how influential Zen has truly been for the heart of the Japanese spirit,” and by extension, how indispensable it has been for his work. Like Bodhidharma, by such silence is the relationship between art and religion brought forth, stripped bare of all its iconographical baggage, and made safe against any form of adherence or appropriation. Instead, to whoever should seek to gain something from it, it bequeaths, also like a *koan*, nothing but the silent witness of a fate that links writer to reader, tea master to guest, archer to target, and indeed, to the dharma eye, those lone flowers in their *iga* vase next to the tea kettle, doused with dew, standing there, fulfilled in quiet company, redolent of Emerson’s roses.

The present investigation incorporates the Zen framework that we have thus far been alluding to as philosophical commentary toward the analysis of Yasunari Kawabata’s emblematic novel *Snow Country*<sup>18</sup> (original title: *Yukiguni*.)<sup>19</sup> This paper intends to trace the

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<sup>18</sup> As Edward G. Seidensticker, the novel in question’s remarkable English translator, kindly tells us, *Snow Country* was begun by Kawabata in 1934 and published piecemeal between 1935 and 1937, and then the final portion (the fire scene) was added later in 1947. Additionally, there exists a “Palm of the Hand” short story version that covers mostly the portion of the novel set in Summer (during which the two protagonists meet) in the collection of stories of the same name later published by Kawabata.

<sup>19</sup> A little way south from the island of Sado, between the coast and the western mountain range that splits the Japanese mainland at the middle, lies the *yukiguni*, or Snow Country, a place that for its latitude comprises the snowiest region in the world. Siberian winds pick up moisture over the Japan Sea, and the mountains, acting as a barrier, concentrate the snowfall over the region. From December to April, snows may pile on the ground for up to fifteen feet in depth. Before the early 20th Century, when railroads came from the West and connected Japan, the *yukiguni* was cut-off from the rest of the world for half the year, its “long, gray skies, tunnels under the snow, and houses with rafters blackened by winter smokes” (Seidensticker v) a constant sight for the villagers, Chijimi weavers, monks and nuns, and other natives that called this place their home. As soon as the railroads opened, however, the Snow Country also became a place “for the unaccompanied gentleman” (vi). Each season brought its own wave of guests with specific interests: in the summer, mountain climbing, solitude, vigor. In autumn, the viewing of the maple leaves as the foliage turns orange and falls. Also the egg-laying season for moths before they succumb to the coming chills. In winter, skiing, hot-springs, frozen beauty, time standing still. In spring, hanami, the blossoming of the sakuras and the chrysanthemums, renewal. And, present for every occasion, the mountain geisha. Unlike the city geisha, who could attain a position of great respect or renowned artistry, the mountain geisha was “perilously near being a social outcast” (vi). Often poorer in her art, she must go on entertaining weekend guests with little room for ascension, eventually drifting from hot-spring to hot-spring as she succumbs to her own decay.

relationship between desire and suffering as relayed through the artistic experience in *Snow Country*, and from there elaborate on its relevancy with respect to the human condition, namely with the intention of singling out the significance of the artistic experience as a way to *deal* with desire and suffering. More specifically, I have chosen *Snow Country* due to its being the singular case of a hybrid between the novel form and the haiku form of traditional Japanese verse. It is our understanding that the haiku form develops as an aesthetic practice in tandem with Zen influence in Japan. Given this framework, it should also be understood that the artistic experience is not limited exclusively to the work of art as *oeuvre*; that the work of art itself is an indefinitely consolidated correlate of actual experience; and that, so being, it is both subject to and a prime example of the same qualities whose philosophical elaboration Zen has inherited from the teachings of the Buddha which preside over the *phenomenic* nature of reality.

“You paint the branch well, and you hear the sound of the wind,” writes the Chinese painter Chin Nung (quoted in Kawabata, *Japan, The Beautiful, and Myself*). Kawabata, whose works “have been described as works of emptiness,” (*Japan, The Beautiful, and Myself*) manages in *Snow Country* an evocation of winter that does not hold winter as its object. One might say, as template, as receptacle, that in this novel the most intrinsic of human qualities, *communication*, is allowed its reenactment and its fulfilled return—albeit, as we will see, and in a manner that is

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Quite removed from these problems, one of various archetypes that comprise the unaccompanied gentleman, the city-dweller who leaves his wife and his children for holiday in the hot-springs, is the dilettante. The idler, who knows little to nothing of sacrifice because he has inherited his wealth, and therefore lives mildly, never quite alert, but floating. Thus, we have the setting, the heroine, and the hero of *Snow Country*. We have form: a fusion of the haiku and the novel. And together, these pieces are combined in thematic multiplicity to provide various cohabiting strands of meaning: a dark and desolate setting; escape from the bustling city; the decay of beauty, also known as *mono no aware* or impermanence; the clash of east vs. west; physical proximity and willingness to love vs. distance and idealization, a constant catering to denial and fantasy; “flashes in a void” (vii), or seemingly-isolated images suspended in a canvas or sheet of emptiness; and emptiness itself, like the Milky Way (Heaven’s River), enfolding and connecting all.

ideal for the *haiku* form, what is fulfilled is precisely the full account of what in the novel is being denied.

It is the latter that, comprising the novel's plot<sup>20</sup>, more than anything, proves to be an ideal fit for investigating the *necessity* that is art. It also hints at its fate. While art's *necessity* is instantiated by desire in the form of avidity, its fate lies in the self-overcoming of *Eros* that fulfills itself in departure in order to arrive at what Diotima called, in her conversation with Socrates in *The Symposium*, "the soul of beauty." It is the same wisdom that the Goddess bestows upon Parmenides in the latter's poem in order that it may safeguard his passage through the world of men. And it is *Sophia*, the divine wisdom, whose sole desire is to play with creation. Chogyam Trungpa very eloquently calls it "unbornness putting further embellishment on unborn" (Rinpoche 442).

Following in the footsteps of Professor Ramos, who in turn has followed in Dogen's, we have opted for alluding to it temporally, as with the enunciation in our title: *eternity has no elegy*. The artistic experience, however, it must be understood, resolves itself to play in the province of elegy (or, preferably, through it.) Yet, like Orpheus after composing the lament, there is a powerful insight to be derived from the experience of turning around, toward the incognizant Eurydice, and from painfully watching her walking back to Hades time and time again. Did the turning back not occur at the very beginning, perhaps, when it had led Orpheus into Hades in the first place, to retrieve his beloved from the domain of death? "On whatever sphere of being," writes Eliot, this time in "The Dry Salvages," "the mind of a man may be intent/at the time of death" (29). It is perhaps for this reason that, at the culmination of the decade-long howling that

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<sup>20</sup> The novel's plot, which is exceedingly simple, may be summarized in just two sentences: a dilettante travels to a hot springs village where he meets a geisha who falls in love with him. An attempt at romance ensues between them but ultimately fails.

gave us the *Elegies*, and during what must have undoubtedly been one of the most torrential outpourings of poetic surrender ever to have taken place, the mature Rilke implores the poet thus: “Be forever dead in Eurydice—more gladly arise/into the seamless life proclaimed in your song” (245).

It may be that no culture has collectively paid more homage to the soul of beauty than that of the Japanese, infused as it has been with the gems of the Zen tradition, which was itself enriched by the wisdom of the Taoists and that of the Ancient Chinese. *Being forever dead in Eurydice* does not, however, and contrary to some interpretations<sup>21</sup>, presuppose a rejection of Eurydice herself, so much as an overcoming of the interval that constitutes her death. Like the bird that does not anticipate the measure of its wing-stride, it stresses the poetic practice of *being ahead of parting*. In other words, if *eternity has no elegy* (and indeed, it doesn't), it is simply because it has never happened nor will it. This is what Francisco José Ramos has referred to in his book as “the perspective of eternity<sup>22</sup>” (*Estética II* 109). It is in no way different from the perspective of awakening or enlightenment, to which corresponds the Buddha's third Noble Truth: *nirodha* (cessation), and it presupposes, precisely, a thorough understanding of the three marks of existence *in practice*. “If being human entails the desire for self-recognition, then waking up means to transcend that same desire, leaving the recognition intact but transforming the pathos for contact with oneself” (i.e. the pathos of desire with its own wanting to keep desiring, of avidity with its own insatiability). “For that which is taken to be oneself can never be found anywhere. Unfastened the reins, the mirrors then will empty. The experience of awakening is the most intimate experience of impersonality” (110).

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<sup>21</sup> The poet Robert Hass, in his introductory essay on Mitchell's *Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, appears to take this position.

<sup>22</sup> Originally translated from: “La perspectiva de la eternidad.” All translations of Francisco José Ramos's works are my own.

For its part, the artistic experience, insofar as it engages with the three marks, is capable of retaining, out of its own expenditure, the possibility of arriving at a thorough understanding of the above, namely by reconstituting the stagnant terrain of avidity—of clinging to past and future, discordant with the *real* and with nature—into something navigable that may be traversed in order to be overcome, thereby leaving desire and suffering as exhaust or byproduct, and the navigability itself recorded as *oeuvre*. None other is the significance of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. "This is the use of memory," says the poet in "Little Gidding," "—for liberation, not less of love but expanding of love beyond desire, and so liberation from the future as well as the past" (39). The artistic experience is at bottom an act of unrealizing reality in order to "confront the paradox of dis-individuation or, if preferable, the destruction of the personality" (Ramos, *Estética II* 434). It is, in other words, an unmasking of the avidity for (self)-possession, which is, according to the Buddha's Second Noble Truth, the origin of suffering. The distinction that Eliot makes between love and desire corresponds, in this sense, to the difference between avidity and Eros. Because of impermanence, desire or avidity, in being identified with its object, cannot overcome it or actualize itself in tandem with *real* conditions that can never be retained or possessed. Loss is thereby incurred.

As far as the product of the artistic experience is concerned, the situation for the reader is no different. Both objectivity and subjectivity aside,<sup>23</sup> one is effectively made an accomplice, a witnesser of silence: the fairest overcoming. In *Snow Country*, as language is given over to remembrance, tracing, in wintry form, a multiplicity of persons, scenes and encounters, desire and its disavowals are staged via a corresponding, cohabiting game of mirrors. Toward the end, as in Eliot's poem, the feeling is akin to that of reading about Arjuna and his whole ensemble in

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<sup>23</sup> "Lo objetivo y lo subjetivo no son criterios de observación" (*Estética II*, 436).



the *Gita*: aided by the silence of the novel, one recognizes quietly that the conflict, having been entirely brought forth to bear witness in terms of the artistic experience, was already resolved ere it had begun. “The end is where we start from” (“Little Gidding” 40)—that is Orpheus’s lesson to learn. The sheer mark of the denial that *Snow Country* chronicles, beginning in summer, with the lovers’ first walk together (“once only, through the garden”<sup>24</sup>), ends in the winter, as Kawabata, having “passe[d his] polar bar,”<sup>25</sup> sets down his pen—the ink-thread come full circle—and leaves *the rigorous fate of art* crystallized in the significance of the *Yukiguni*<sup>26</sup>, as in Wallace Steven’s poem, “The Snow Man”:

One must have a mind of winter  
To regard the frost and the boughs  
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time  
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,  
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think  
of any misery in the sound of the wind,  
in the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land  
full of the same wind  
that is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,  
and, nothing himself, beholds  
nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

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<sup>24</sup> Rilke First Elegy 151.

<sup>25</sup> Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*: “He who shall train the horse to war shall never pass the polar bar.”

## Part I: Nature's Vacuity

*A stormy sea  
and stretching over Sado—  
Heaven's River.  
-Bashō*

Between the seasons and the human heart, the common denominator is still impermanence. To denote this movement externally bestows the possibility of having the same experience internally, and vice versa. In both cases however, in order for the inseparability of form and emptiness to be realized, the self, with all its identifications and avidity, must be dispensed with. It is extra.

The significance of nothingness in the above poem is what enables the mind immersed in winter to take on winter fully, without lack, and one imagines for this reason that it would be capable of doing the same in any of the seasons. To have a mind of winter is therefore to behold winter with the quality known as *mu-shin*, or no-mind, so that its spirit or movement is allowed its full recreation and expenditure. This spirit is its essence (*ousia*), but essence is only interrelationship. Kawabata's novel is perhaps most successful in how it manages to trace both this vantage point of nature's *and* the fictional element that follows the interactions of its protagonists—seasons *and* heart in tandem—upending the latter against the former in sharp, haiku-like flashes that bear the full witness of nature. Such a contrast is precisely what justifies and sets the stage for a successful meeting between the haiku form and the novel. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find another novel in which the human is as thoroughly blended in with the non-human, such that often the characterization process will take place on behalf of the non-human and will gravitate toward the human, while the human equally will take on the role of reflecting the natural.

From the point of view of the novel, Kawabata retains some symbolist tendencies, along with certain aspects in plot structure hailing from the I-novel tradition, which broke out as a literary form shortly after the Meiji restoration took place in Japan toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The latter is characterized by a first person narrative, which Kawabata obviously does not employ, and also by attributing great importance to a protagonist's inner reality, which he does, albeit with such significant differences as those mentioned above. Essentially a spiritual perspective, it adds in the case of *Snow Country* a certain layer of obscurity via radical subjectivity, and it is arguably juxtaposed by what I am going to refer to as the perspective of objects, or felt-things, wherein Kawabata most fully disappears so that the poetic may emerge—very much like Wallace's snowman: made of the same stuff that clads the landscape. As it emerges, it rebounds the movements of the heart (*pathos*) like a mirror externally placed to receive the passage of what has lain within. These movements are then brought forth, witnessed in their dissipation and expenditure. It is logically here that the haiku form interjects and predominates. The relationship between both forms will be explored by comparing examples of each within the text. Eventually, it is our intention that this relationship should give itself over to what we have drawn attention to above as art's fate, at which point the discussion will turn again to Zen. But first, it is necessary to go over the essentials of the haiku tradition, for which Zen itself also constitutes an important stage of historical maturation and development.

A haiku is a seventeen syllable poem in three lines following a 5-7-5 syllable pattern. The rigor and brevity of its form correspond both to a breath's length, from the point of view of rhythm and language, and to the peak moment of an experience, that is, to the crystallization of an encounter between the poet and the thing-felt that becomes the haiku. As such, haiku is "a poetry without ideas [that] should not mean but be" (Yasuda xix). The attitude of a haiku poet in

life denotes “a state of readiness for an experience for its own sake” (10), and his chief concern at the hour of composition becomes that of “set[ting] before him his insight so that he may know what it is” (27). For as relayed in the introduction, the relationship between art and experience is at bottom constituted by, in Basho’s words, “a going-back” (24).

A significant aspect of haiku is their relationship to time and impermanence (*anitya*), specifically with respect to their inclusion of what Yasuda calls *the seasonal element*. The seasonal element, says the great haiku writer and theorist Otsuji, “is the natural object in all its naturalness—its function is to symbolize nature” (quoted in Yasuda 11). In dealing with it, Otsuji goes on to say, “[the poet] will have to face the problem of the relationship between nature and himself. Here [he] should think deeply of the problem of the self” (i.e. desire and suffering) (23). The seasonal element proves indispensable for haiku because it cannot be divorced from what Yasuda calls “the haiku moment,” which he defines as “an aesthetic moment in which the words that create the experience and the experience itself can become one” (24). Every word in haiku *is* an experience. That is to say, an encounter; an experiential precedent brought forth and distilled as insight made possible through language. It is precisely for this reason that subjectivity and objectivity are not valid criteria, for the *logos* arises from nature and points to nature, which is to say that, as far as poetry is concerned, there is no separation whatsoever (“That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet”). But this encounter or return to nature cannot fructify unless the poet’s “mental activity almost merges into an unconscious state” (13), i.e., unless a union takes place between the poet and the experienced object, or the thing-felt. When this happens, judgment and expectation cease altogether and perspectivism takes the fold, which is to say, the entire experience is reduced to the simplicity of its movement and time itself becomes an experience (time, divested of its before-and-after, flows alongside interrelationship).

In other words, the thing-felt is *felt* ontologically. This is precisely the mark of *anitya* experienced as poetry. In Yasuda's words: "the nature of a haiku moment is anti-temporal and its quality is eternal, for in this state man and his environment are one unified whole, in which there is no sense of time" (24). It is in this way that nature as environment can grant expression to what is human, becomes template for human feeling. But this feeling is only able to emerge as it is, simultaneously intimate and impersonal, precisely because it has been stripped of all subjectivity and does not therefore "fall into cogitation" (Otsuji quoted in Yasuda 11). The possibility of achieving this obviously suffers no contrivance, which is also why it is reduced, delimited, or sharpened into an experience of time that unravels ontologically. Such lack of contrivance is precisely the mark of EVAM, as discussed above. It is what Francisco José Ramos in his book refers to, echoing Dogen, as the paradox of the time-being (*Uji*).<sup>27</sup>

To attempt to [dis]solve this paradox of what is both anti-temporal *and* eternal, we may equate each term, following Professor Ramos's approach, to two of the three Greek concepts of time: respectively *Kairos*, which means opportune time, and *Aeon*, which means indefinite or eternal time. The relationship between *Kairos* and *Aeon*, between the anti-temporal now (*Nikon* in Japanese) and eternity, may be said to be one of contingency<sup>28</sup>, and to understand it is to gain insight into *anitya*. The reason why "Eternity is in love with the productions of time," as Blake said, is because nature *is* time (i.e. process). This is precisely what Dogen expounds across *Uji*—meaning literally "The Time-Being"—, the fascicle of the *Shobogenzo* that most directly deals with time. "In essence, all things in the world are linked with one another as moments. Because all moments are the time-being, they are your time-being" (*Moon in a Dewdrop* 78). With respect to poetic composition, this is how experiencing is a going-back—*la memoria es un punto*

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<sup>27</sup> *Uji* is another fascicle of the *Shobogenzo*.

<sup>28</sup> I borrow this concept from Francisco José Ramos's conference "Zen y poesia."

*en el olvido*<sup>29</sup>—and it is also, to name another example, what Zen Master Shunryu Suzuki meant when he said, once more echoing Dogen, that “time goes from present to past.” It goes from present to past in order to actualize itself (*this is the use of memory*), and because it cannot start from anywhere else or end anywhere other than where it has started from.<sup>30</sup> Thus, to reiterate, the haiku moment is an instance of Kairos that creates its own form in becoming actual, and for this to be possible, with respect to the poet, both subject and object must be transcended. This “leap” between intellect and intuition, as D.T. Suzuki puts it, arrives at the heart of things—*Honi-i* from the Japanese poetic tradition that evolves into haiku—aided by the imposed limits of form which contribute in, among other things, negating the self, so to speak, and circumscribing thought, which is to say, language, to a series of Kairos that bestow on each other the favor of self-annihilation (for that has been the necessary advent point: *know the great void where all things begin.*) Since there is ultimately no separation between phenomena, and since phenomena are their own doctrine, in the moment that is crystallized as a result of this is also reflected the Aeon, which is none other than the seasonal element itself, granting an aura that displays the interrelatedness between the thing-felt that configures the haiku and the whole that envelops it. This is the primordial use of language which is based on movement, or action, and whose function is to create (*poiesis=creatio*).<sup>31</sup> Says Basho: “The thoughts within my heart of the beauty of the things that come with each season are like endless songs as numerous as the grains of sand on a beach. Those who express such feelings with compassion are the sages of words”

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<sup>29</sup> Trans. “Memory is a point in oblivion.” Jorge Luis Borges.

<sup>30</sup> Closer to Blake’s proverb (and hinting at the mark of *anatta* or no-self/insubstantiality—that there is creation but not a creator) Walt Whitman echoes the same notion beautifully in the following standalone image from *Leaves of Grass*: “A kelson of the creation is love.”

<sup>31</sup> I owe this detail too, like most of the concepts in this paper, to the teachings expounded by Francisco José Ramos.

(177). Blake echoes: “To see a world in a grain of sand/and a heaven in a wildflower/hold infinity in the palm of your hand/and eternity in an hour” (*Auguries of Innocence* 1-4).

That the haiku should attain to their definitive form with Basho, particularly emphasizing the indispensability of the seasonal element, is no surprise, for as we have said, the haiku attitude demands a unity of life and art that can stand alongside the measure of its rigor. A life that carries itself in practice as an art is one that has transcended the limits of the human condition. This is precisely the purpose of Zen. There is much to be said about this, but for the time being let us draw on a critical commentary, from the point of view of art, to allude once more to the relationship between form/content and emptiness.<sup>32</sup> Achieving form, says Aso, is associated with the artist’s effort “to master his art, by negating the self, not by flaunting his ego or his personal eccentricities. When such an attitude of self-refinement is present, the form for that man is not a mere dead thing. He will realize a wonderful state of inspiration as the result of self-discipline” (quoted in Yasuda 67). What Aso means by *no mere dead thing* is presumably the eloquence of creativity that takes place *viscerally* from the perspective of emptiness (*ku/sūnyatā*).

Understanding this demands rigor in the sense that anything that doesn’t kill the buddha (i.e. aims at finding him), anything that takes a disciple (i.e. aims at being him), or anything that submits to a law of composition<sup>33</sup> has to a lesser or greater extent fallen short of being “a work of emptiness.”

If Zen can be understood as the pinnacle of art forms, it is precisely because what it points to *in practice* is a marriage between art and life. “When gold and gems adorn the plow/to peaceful arts shall envy bow,” echoes Blake once again from his *Auguries of Innocence*. And one

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<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that there is no distinction to be made between form and content.

<sup>33</sup> The phoniness of this notion, incidentally, is the significance behind Poe’s bluff in “The Philosophy of Composition,” which reads as foil to the attempt of demystifying art of its otherness.

might in this context rephrase auguries of innocence as auguries of return. Of return to innocence. Nothing else is Zen. It is the overriding of thoughts of separation, or if preferred, the undermining or beatification of the ego. Having come to terms with the fact that the ego is empty of self, one sees through *tanha*, the avidity or thirst that conditions suffering and the desire to self-perpetuate, and this in turn allows one to see *in practice* into the true nature of phenomena, into their interrelation, and with it, into the implications of words with their opposites. “The selfish smiling fool and the sullen frowning fool shall be both thought wise,/that they may be a rod” (Blake, *Proverbs of Hell*). The rod is movement across, i.e., the insight that form effectively *is* emptiness, which is to say, that just as all individual meaning implies its opposite, so too, and for the same reason, all phenomena are empty of a separate self or entity (suffering included). This corresponds to what Basho calls “the unchanging truth in fleeting form.” And it is why, as D.T. Suzuki has explained, “zen can be anything from an insignificant blade of grass growing on the roadside to the golden colored buddha body ten feet six in height” (170). Thus, whichever one of them can go first, but either the sullen fool or the smiling one need to learn to bow to the other, recreating the other inside, that the other may then bow to them. Between them merely stand language, past-and-future, and the whole impasse of the human condition.

Let us now consider the following example of a haiku by Basho, translated into English by Yasuda:

On the withered bough  
A crow alone is perching.  
Autumn evening now.

Every word in this haiku is doused with the aura or *honi-i* of autumn. There is the solitude of the season in the scene, and there is also the nostalgia of the end of the day, with the quickly fading last hues of light that seem to close abruptly and silently around the stillness of



the crow. The crow, in turn, seems itself evocative of autumn in the sense of it being that which is at the close of its own cycle, that is, toward the end of its temporal domain, as crows are most active during the day and go to roost at night. And it is alone, perching, like the last leaves in a tree waiting to be carried yonder by a chilly breeze. But beyond this, in its unusual solitude, it mirrors the human, hinting at what must have been the poet's own feeling deriving its form from the crow. Similarly in a cyclical way, every word in the haiku is as redolent of the instantaneous as it is of the eternal: for, as mentioned above, the evocation of eternity comes from an awareness of the fact that there is no such thing as eternity (i.e. as a thing that remains) (Ramos, *Estética II* 128). And though there is nothing strictly human about the scene being depicted, there is nevertheless a profound feeling for the beauty of transience, for *aware*, the pathos of impermanence. This very much envelops the human experience and calls forth its sensibilities, for we see ourselves grappling with the same prospect, and nature teaches us what we are as it alone remains the same throughout all of its changing forms. Ergo another *koan*: what is it, if not a thing, that remains the same?

The fact that phenomena are their own doctrine, which is to say, they *are* what there is, opens the opportunity for poetry, the advent of naming, to hold them in the attention. This is what Rilke means when he says, in the *Elegies*, "Praise this world to the Angel."<sup>34</sup> The phenomenon of the metaphor takes this to the next level by instantiating a transference of meaning made up via the impossible bridge-over-no man's land that creativity may erect between words. It is by virtue of the interrelatedness of phenomena, and given also that

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<sup>34</sup> The angels are the invisible-world dwellers of Rilke's cosmology. Invisible may be understood as blended-with. For the angels, everything is already angelic i.e. *samsara* and *nirvana*, though distinguishable at first glance, are ultimately merged.

everything is ultimately devoid of selfhood, that this impossible bridge effectively succeeds in creating new meaning which, though fictional, is far from being false. Francisco José Ramos elaborates on this when he discusses the implications of the word *kotoba*, which means ‘word’ in Japanese. The term can be broken down into *koto* (meaning thing, word, happening) and *ba* (leaf, petal). Thus, the word alludes to the punctual moment of the blossoming of the *sakuras*, Japan’s famous cherry blossoms. Along the same lines, drawing on a comparison made by Kyoto School philosopher Nishitani, *koto* implies the momentous gathering or recovery<sup>35</sup> of the *thing* in the mind/heart, which in Japanese is called *kokoro*. So as the *sakuras* flower, so too do they flower in the mind. The momentous nature of this therefore suggests, in the context of poetry, that poetic language and, specifically, by its inherent creativeness, the metaphor, are comprised of what Ramos calls an ontological truth, whose nature is to rise to the encounter of what is being (Ramos, “Sobre la poesía”).

What is being, as we have said, is effectively the trajectory of *anitya*. *Anitya* is the relationship or changing-ness of what is being. Thus, what Dogen continually points out in *Uji* and elsewhere in the *Shobogenzo* is that impermanence *is* Buddha Nature. As Goethe said in his description of nature: “At each moment she starts upon a long, long journey and at each moment reaches her end.... All is eternally present in her, for she knows neither past nor future. For her the present is eternity” (Goethe quoted in Watts, *Nature, Man and Woman* 63). In other words, as Dogen states in *Shoji* (Birth and Death), “understand that birth-and-death is itself nirvana” (*Moon in a Dewdrop* 74).

Now, let us recall in simple terms the relationship between the Four Noble Truths: 1) there is suffering, *dukkha*. 2) *samudaya*, there is the origin of suffering, which is thirst, *tanha*. 3)

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<sup>35</sup> I am translating gather/recover from ‘recogimiento’, which, it must be noted, also connotes concentration i.e. *samadhi*.

there is the cessation of suffering, *nirodha*, which comes about via insight into the nature of phenomena as we have been referring to them by way of the three marks of existence. That birth-and-death is itself nirvana means seeing into impermanence, which is itself the time-being, moment by moment. And then finally 4) there is *magga*, the Path. There is a very illuminating essay by the Zen monk Takuan called “The Mysterious Record of Immovable Wisdom” which displays very well the relationship between the third and the fourth Noble Truth. Takuan is said to have been friend to Musashi Miyamoto, the famous swordsman who also wrote a book of the way, titled *The Book of Five Rings*. Upon a contemplation of swordfighting, Takuan says the following:

What is called Fudo Myo-o [a wrathful manifestation of the central Buddha Vairocana] is said to be one’s unmoving mind and an unvacillating body. Unvacillating means not being detained by anything. Glancing at something and not stopping the mind is called immovable. This is because when the mind stops at something, the breast is filled with various judgments, and there are various movements within it. When its movements cease, the stopping mind moves, but does not move at all....When you first notice the sword that is moving to strike you, if you think of meeting that sword just as it is, your mind will stop at the sword in just that position, your own movements will be undone, and you will be cut down by your opponent....[...] When the mind stops, it will be grasped by the opponent. On the other hand, if the mind contemplates being fast and goes into quick action, it will be captured by its own contemplation....Putting the mind in one place is called falling into one-sidedness. Correctness is moving about anywhere. The correct mind shows itself by extending the mind throughout the body. It is not biased in any one place....The effort not

to stop the mind in just one place—this is discipline. (Quoted in *The Book of Five Rings* 5)

*Discipline*, or practice, is inseparable from enlightenment. Dogen's actualization of Buddha Dharma is centered in this relationship. As Francisco José Ramos says, commenting on the *Shobogenzo*, “lo real es la práctica, y despertar a lo real es realmente entender lo que significa practicar.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> From course titled: “Nagarjuna y Dogen.” Class iv. Trans: “that which is real is practice, and to wake up to what is real is to thoroughly understand what it means to practice.”

## Part II: The Obverse of Anima

Whoever seizes the greatest unreality will shape  
the greatest reality. – Robert Musil

From *Snow Country*'s opening lines, we are plunged into its atmosphere *in medias res*. This has the effect, among other things, of suggesting a quality of *beginninglessness* which deprives the novel of a specific vantage point, and which also makes it possible for everything to be used as a vantage point. There is no concession or space in this form allotted for the reader's own cognizance or subjective interpretation: everything is already in play without anyone's participation or consent. Instead, as with haiku, there is something in the extreme selectivity and sparseness of the writing that forces the reader to *be* that which is taking place, with the sole window of possibility to do so being *as* it takes place. But what takes place is hardly ever more than the leanest encounter: nevertheless, this encounter plays not like a part that is suggestive of a whole, but as simultaneously part *and* whole.

In her thesis on the novel, graduate student Nancy Barrett has referred to this method as a *multiplicity*, where the reader is compelled to map each particular encounter like coordinates that collectively evoke relationship. She compares this approach to Deleuze's concept of the rhizome, which, like the *Net of Indra* in the Flower Garland School of Buddhism, connotes the interrelatedness of phenomena that characterizes their nature and which is the significance of emptiness. There seems to be a tendency to interpret such models of multiplicity like the rhizome and Indra's net as a kind of unity wherein everything is part of one overarching entity. This appears to run the danger of being beside the point, as what such models are really indicating is not so much a unity (in the sense of parts adding up to a whole) as a non-separation, which is to say, echoing Francisco José Ramos, a *unicity*. While unity suggests sameness, one constitutive entity, sum of parts, etc., unicity points to an *integrity* and is much closer to the famous statement

by Spinoza where he says that reality and perfection are synonymous. Professor Ramos has aptly described this as: “a multiplicity that declines into singular [in the manner of an asymptote]” (*Zen y la oportunidad del momento*).

Barrett correctly points out that to read the novel from a dualistic perspective, such as how critic Iraphne R. W. Childs approaches it in her essay, where objective form—i.e. the haiku—paves the way for subjective symbolism—i.e. nature as harmonious with human existence—, fails to appreciate that in the haiku form itself *is* meaning, since what haiku are ultimately pointing to is the experience of no-separation that bypasses any objective or subjective divisions (Barrett 8). Conversely, through the lens of the rhizome, the reader has both no space for subjectivity, and, paradoxically enough, endless spaciousness for deriving relationship *across* each thing that appears in the novel, so that ultimately all possible meaning is reduced to nothing more than relationship. Kawabata himself, as per the haiku tradition, explains nothing; he merely implies.

This, then, is how, in *Snow Country*, the stillness of cedar trees sing against the backdrop of a mountain (30), a river moves with a rounded softness (31), lips bud together like a circle of leeches (32), hair glows like heavy black stones (39), the sound of freezing snow roars at the earth (44), bright red cheeks pulse in the snow-clad depths of a morning mirror (48), a samisen’s notes lapse into mountain emotionalism (71), an abrupt departure leaves a woman looking like a stranded piece of fruit (85), the noise of train wheels turns into someone’s voice (86), a dead moth’s wings span the length of a woman’s finger (90), moonlit skin takes on the luster of a seashell (101), a girl bouncing a ball in her new orange-red kimono brings thoughts of autumn (109), while another girl flails at beans that jump like little drops of light, or sings in a voice so

clear that it is almost sad (109), or becomes a distant light that passes through an eye floating across the evening mountains (10).

Meanwhile, on the character plane, a young geisha who is “clean amidst corruption” (Seidensticker v) falls helplessly in love with a dilettante who is helpless before emotional proximity; another girl evokes distant beauty through her voice whilst simultaneously nursing a dying man with great devotion and attentiveness, only to take up the offer, after the sick man dies, of another man’s invitation to move to Tokyo without a second thought; a train bridges a hitherto isolated village in winter, yet abruptly brings foreignness and idiosyncratic conflict; an Oriental man is fascinated by Western dance, specifically by the fact that he has never seen it, and yet equally fascinated by Chijimi linen, an ancient Japanese tradition whose strains of production have outlived its utility; a woman with pleasure quarter proclivities is “clean to the hollows under her toes” and writes out the plot of every novel she reads; etc. The juxtapositions imply the forces that envelop each action of an otherwise very simple plot, suggesting with the very finest aesthetic subtlety that not only are things not what they seem, but that instead of solid characters we have fluid, interconnecting processes that cannot but be themselves, that is: bound by their desires which is the fleeting form that is caught in the temporal space that the novel chronicles: the form not yet (self)-actualized. The novel, in turn, as work of art, presides over this series of phenomena in simple, direct acknowledgement, its poetic layer co-existing as actualization.

By virtue of the rhizome, everything is seen to meet somewhere, suggesting ultimately that, not only is there no separate thing, but furthermore, that each thing brings with it its own cosmology and ripples out to every other thing. All of the ripples, from train to persons to dragonflies to sand moths to *sakura* blossoms to *kaya* grass to snow to ising-glass to house, all

display their willfulness, their energy, their spontaneous play, their desire. In many cases they evince desire in its limpid form, which is to say, stripped of all subjectivity and *caught* by the receptacle of the *felt-things* that open and close each movement in a way that parallels their own cycle, i.e. the seasons. And some, though not all, cling to their desires and, being subject to *anitya*, they trace an arc that rouses upon its own thirst, yet stops at its peak, passes into nature, and lands abruptly on itself.

The best example of this movement is Komako. It is truly a wonder to see how, throughout the novel, Komako and Shimamura, beginning at opposite ends of a spectrum, slowly close the gap of the threshold that separates them, and arrive at inevitable denouement, which in their case spells *denial*. Toward the end of the story, as we are made to see, simultaneously everything has been moving with them, the multiplicity declining into singular and displaying the same parallel metamorphoses of affectation in every interaction. Let us look at a few passages.

Near the end of the novel, there is a stage during which the relationship between Yoko, Komako, and Shimamura reaches a point of convergence or *inflexion*. Komako is talking with Shimamura right after the latter has had his first and only conversation with Yoko, the girl with the beautiful but sad voice that echoes back from afar, and whom Shimamura had been fascinated with up until this point. She becomes progressively less distant until the point of situationally coinciding with Shimamura since, Yukio, the man that she was perpetually nursing, and who had also been Komako's childhood friend, has by now died. "Whenever I look at her," Komako says, "I feel as though I have a heavy load and I can't get rid of it." She then leans into Shimamura and tells him: "why don't you take my load off for me? [...] I would know she was being well taken care of, and I could go pleasantly to seed here in the mountains" (142).



Shimamura, catching her bluff, replies to her by saying: “that’s enough,” and Komako says: “just leave me alone.” She then walks up to the door of her house to leave, but immediately, as is characteristic of her, she turns around toward Shimamura and says “come on in.” He walks in reluctantly, as it is the middle of the night and Komako does not live alone. After a bit, feeling uneasy, he gets up to leave. She says she will follow him only to the door of the inn where he is staying. Still, once they reach the inn, she follows him into his room. What follows is the point of inflexion. “Drink,” she orders him. For the first time in the novel we witness Shimamura drinking, and getting quite easily drunk at that. He starts to feel sick. Komako, who has hitherto always been the sick one, “puts her arms around him in alarm. [Then] a childlike feeling of security [comes] to him from the warmth of her body.” She, in turn, seems “ill at ease, like a young woman who takes a baby up in her arms.” Shimamura looks at her and says: “you’re a good girl.” Komako, taken aback, inquires on: “And what do you find good in me? The first day I met you I thought I had never seen anyone I disliked more. People just don’t say the sort of things you said. I hated you.” And later she adds: “when a woman has to say these things, she has gone as far as she can, you know.” They are silent for some moments, during which time Komako “seemed to be looking back on herself,” like a work of art, “and the awareness of a woman’s being alive came to Shimamura in her warmth.” Then, finally, he says to her: “you’re a good woman” (147).

This scene, redolent of the *mondo* or question-and-answer form that characterizes pre-haiku Japanese poetry, like the *katauta* and the *renga* or linked verse, traditionally composed by two people, depicts the full-circle of Shimamura and Komako’s relationship, with Yoko operating as the reference point which evolves alongside them and displays a co-habiting progression of arising and denouement wherein desire’s ultimately indiscriminate ripple is

antithetically fleshed out. For her part, Yoko, who had been burdened with Yukio—a burden that Komako herself appears to have deflected—is now the inheritance of that fate, resurfacing for Komako in the wake of her own flight of love’s falling action. If we go back to when each of these characters first met, we can see the hieroglyph of this fate beginning to be lived out, echoing Emerson, so that it may be apprehended as truth. Strictly speaking, avidity or *tanha* here takes on the quality of an echo, a voluptuousness or excess that sets out to die, to die with a quiet roar.

It is Yoko again who, toward the beginning of the novel, acts as foil for this movement between Shimamura and Komako which, as befitting the I-novel tradition, is ultimately revealed to be all about Shimamura, since it is he who cannot do anything against Komako’s love. Let us look at the novel’s opening lines: “The train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country. The earth lay white under the night sky. The train pulled up at a signal stop” (4). Now inside the train, Shimamura, who has been looking at Yoko, hears her voice for the first time. Yoko has been accompanying Yukio to and back from Tokyo for treatment. Shimamura, drawn to the scene, has been effectively spying on them, though his vantage point is once removed: he sees them from the reflection of his window, which, because it is dark outside, has become a mirror. Now Yoko calls out to the station-master in the platform of one of the stations. Shimamura is startled by this voice, “so beautiful that it struck one as sad,” and which, “in all its high resonance,” appeared to be “echoing back across the snowy night” (5). He had been reminiscing, while watching the pair, about the woman he had come to see. “Only his hand seemed to have a vital and immediate memory of [her.]” The lines that follow now are very beautiful: “[...] Taken with the strangeness of it, he brought the hand to his face, then quickly drew a line across the misted-over window. A woman’s eye floated up before him. He almost called out in his

astonishment. 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” (7). Then comes this passage, suggestive of the blending of nature—*thing-felt*—and feeling that we have been alluding to: “In the depths of the mirror the evening landscape moved by, the mirror and the reflected figures like motion pictures superimposed one on the other. The figures and 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 symbolic world not of this world” (9).

It is possible to read this, as well as all of Yoko’s interjections, as a symbolic negative, so to speak, of the same forces that play in Shimamura and Komako’s interactions. As the perspective during all such scenes is strictly that of Shimamura as voyeur, what connects the two is movement and, again symbolically speaking, silence, for it is the same inaction that takes place between him and Komako, except that instead of Komako’s speech, Shimamura appears to see his own situation externalized in the figure of Yukio as proxy, with Yoko’s care and devotion for a dying man being equally full of wasted effort.

The narrative goes on to depict a multiplicity of different perspectives of this same mirror image/motif, where interestingly the slight shifts of movement, carried out by subtle alterations in words and phrasing, denote a progression of feeling that may be interpreted as the now waxing, now waning phantasmagoria of avidity. Kawabata employs this device several times throughout the novel, sometimes in the same scene, as in this case and the end scene (which we explore in Part III), and sometimes spread out across the text, as with the slightly varying repetitions of the description of Yoko’s voice. Following then from the above reading of Yoko as symbolic receptacle, what I would like to highlight during these scenes is the movement itself traced by the alterations of the same image that is being depicted. As mentioned above, it is very

often this movement that carries the progression of plot which, in this case, is also the progression of form locked in its interplays of desire, and here is where the haiku form predominates in its singular capacity to capture the encounters between such frames of movement. Here there is no separation between what takes place externally, through the senses, and the processes that are going on within. Of such is nature's vacuity, revealing that what is human is not separate but subject to the same marks of existence, the same decays and shifts, and the work of art traces the passage of returning to nature upon the inevitability of this realization as it takes place through language.

Now let us look at the moment when Komako and Shimamura first meet—the beginning—told in flashback and alluded to once again during that final point of inflexion which we have just discussed, to depict the full circle of this echo and/or mirror, once more from Komako's end. Notice how in just this scene, in just one encounter, the entire plot of the novel (i.e. of what will ensue later between Komako, Yoko, Yukio, and Shimamura) is played out.

It is summer. Shimamura has come to the mountains above the village “to recover something of his lost honesty” (17). Komako, in turn, is not yet a geisha, but she helps out at parties, so when all of the geisha are busy, she is called by the inn's maid to tend to Shimamura, who has expressed his wish to “wash away the vigor of the mountains” with pleasurable company. Komako impresses Shimamura as “wonderfully clean and fresh,” though initially he feels only friendship for her, deeming her “an amateur.” She, in turn, appears to fall for him quite naturally, follows him out of the bath the next day, to talk. “She had barely taken a seat when he asked her to call him a geisha: ‘Call you a geisha? I didn't come here to be asked that (20).’” These moments are what she recalls later, in the scene we first discussed, when she says that she hated him. Eventually a geisha is called, but Shimamura, who has gone “his roundabout way,”

realizes by then that he had really only wanted Komako. Upon realizing this, he gives it all up, and starts to walk out of the porch of the inn and toward the mountains, “seduced by [it], strong with the smell of new leaves.” When he gets tired, he turns back around, and at that moment “two yellow butterflies [fly] up at his feet.” They climb above the range, “their yellow turning to white in the distance.” Komako, in turn, who has come out looking for him, is now standing by the shade of the cedar groves next to the inn, below Shimamura. “‘What happened?’ she asks him. ‘I gave it up.’” “Through the quiet, the sound of the rocky river came up to them with a rounded softness” (31). “El agua es emblema del devenir<sup>37</sup>,” writes Francisco José Ramos in *Estética III* (27). This then, is the summer, the one walk, and the garden. What happens here, temporally outside the novel and told in flashback, sets the stage for the play that will follow, the play of fire expending water.<sup>38</sup>

In the novel, later that same evening, Komako goes to help at a party, gets drunk, and returns to Shimamura’s room far into the night, as gradually becomes her custom. What then follows is aptly described in all its raw poignancy: “‘Shimamura, Shimamura,’ she called in a high voice. ‘I can’t see. Shimamura!’ It was, with no attempt at covering itself, the naked heart of a woman calling out to her man” (34). Komako struggles, trying to resist her impulses, at one

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<sup>37</sup> Trans. “water is emblematic of samsara.”

<sup>38</sup> This entire scene also warrants comparison with what Eliot seems to imply toward the beginning of “Burnt Norton,” particularly in the following lines: “And the bird called, in response to/The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery./And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses/Had the look of flowers that are looked at./There they were as our guests, accepted and accepting./So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,/Along the empty alley, into the box circle,/To look down into the drained pool./Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,/And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,/And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,/The surface glittered out of heart of light,/And they were behind us, reflected in the pool./Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty./Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,/Hidden excitedly, containing laughter./Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind/Cannot bear very much reality./Time past and time future/What might have been and what has been/Point to one end, which is always present” (27-45).

point even biting her arm “as if to fight back [her] happiness” (37). ““Didn’t you say you wanted to be friends?” but then once more resolute, saying: ‘I won’t have any regrets. I’ll never have any regrets.’” And later: ““You’re laughing, aren’t you? You’re laughing at me.’ ‘I am not,’ Shimamura replies. She goes on: ‘Deep in your heart you’re laughing at me’” (38). Shimamura returns to Tokyo the next day, and one hundred and ninety-nine days later, in plain winter, [his] *train [comes] out of the long tunnel into the snow country.*

The nature of desire, of *what is*, is cyclical. It is difficult not to imagine that Komako’s relationship with Yukio is only coincidentally so much like the under-fabric of what she experiences with Shimamura, or that her deflection of the burden of Yukio does not come back to tax on her once removed, as Yoko, by the novel’s end. Moreover, she might have known better, and yet she plunged, willing to meet herself, to have no regrets, so that she could “go to seed”: such is precisely the echo of exuberance, which by the power of art and Kawabata’s subtle mastery, gets traced out via the figure of Yoko, who seems to be there to pick up that which overflows. The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom (Blake, *Proverbs of Hell*). How else but through complete expenditure is anything to learn to find rest in change?

So then, like the rhizome<sup>39</sup> suggests, *shunyata/ku* implies the interrelatedness that we have been exploring: the fact that there is no separation between phenomena. They give rise to one another, arising mutually: it is a matter of time (i.e. of invariable nowness, of mutually dependent emergence all across the board.) This is also exemplified in the Buddhist doctrine of Conditioned Genesis, wherein it is made evident that for every this, there must be a that. Conditioned Genesis, or *pratityasamutpada*, can aid in explaining why *tanha*, or thirst/avidity,

happens to be the cause of suffering. This cause or origin of suffering is the Second Noble Truth (the first one being *dukkha*, the fact that there *is* suffering.) As the Rev. Dr. W. Rahula says, the function with respect to the first truth is to realize it; with the second, to eradicate it (50). Now, the fact of *shunyata/ku*, or emptiness, corresponds to the Mark of *anatta*, which means insubstantiality, egolessness, no-soul, etc. They imply one another, since a lack of separation or quality of interrelatedness, wherein everything is mutually interdependent, is clearly incompatible with the idea of there being a separate soul or entity. This is to say: there is no *me*, and moreover, thoughts of *me* that condition actions of *me* are the result of *avidya*, or ignorance, which is, strictly speaking, the root of evil. This evil that engenders unwholesome or ignorant actions produces in turn unwholesome karmic results. What is ignored is the thirst or avidity that desire has for possessing itself (where will *me* find *me* by imposing *me* on what there is?) This ignorance in the form of attachment to our own desire for self-possession is moreover exposed to the ignorance of the desires of others, so that it becomes very difficult, once caught in the tangle, to see *tanha* impersonally for what it is. Hence, all of the Buddha's teaching, wrote Stephen Mitchell, can in fact be summarized with the phrase: under no circumstance attach to anything as me or mine.

The best way to understand the interrelatedness that precludes the possibility of there being a separate entity is through the understanding of the concept of time, namely, that given the fact of impermanence, time is inseparable from space (space *is* time) and therefore, that everything that happens, happens *in* time, and that, as far as time is concerned, and as exemplified above with the concepts of *Kairos* and *Aeon*, there is only *one* time and that is *now* (*nikon*). From that point of view, it becomes easier to grasp the following formula of Conditioned Genesis:

When this is, that is;  
 This arising, that arises;  
 When this is not, that is not;  
 This ceasing, that ceases.

This is conditionality, relativity, interdependence. On this principle, the proper use of language—which, as Francisco José Ramos amply reminds us throughout *La danza en el laberinto* is inevitably hypostatic (i.e. it cannot help but assign entity value to a thing as it names it)—consists in knowing that it is conventionally designatory, but that ultimately a thing cannot be reduced to its name. The principle (*arché*), says Ramos, is not the verb (i.e. in the beginning is not the word) but the silence of the ineffable that governs the invention of language (*Sobre la poesía*). This silence, as we have said, is precisely *shunyata/ku*: emptiness. It is *E* from EVAM. *Poiésis*, which means creation as well as action, is inseparable from emptiness just as musical notes cannot be separated from the silence that accompanies them. This is how creation or creativity takes place, like Suzuki said, “constantly losing its balance against a still background” (31). Ergo, “there is language because there is poetry” (Ramos, *Sobre la poesía*).

Now, all of this is to say that, in a nutshell, desire in its manifestations displays a co-dependently originating principle that is ultimately phenomenic, that is to say, impersonal, redolent of naught but, as we have said, “its own doctrine.”<sup>40</sup> And it is karmic (i.e. action and reaction, cause and effect). Already this hints at the fact that there is ultimately no separation between the circle of *samsara* and that of *nirvana*, which is a staple of Mahayana Buddhism, i.e. Zen, and behind which lies the relationship between excess and wisdom [“you cannot know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough” (Blake, *Proverbs of Hell*)]; but also, it is for this reason that the poet, in recreating, through the artistic experience, what he has already

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<sup>40</sup> Goethe’s famous saying: “phenomena are their own doctrine,” taken from Watts’ *Nature, Man and Woman* and also from the second of four conferences under the title “Nagarjuna and Dogen,” given by Francisco José Ramos for the IEBH (Instituto de Estudios Budistas Hispánico)



lived, conceives of a work that is not subjectively his own despite his having lived it, but rather stripped, in its conception, of any notion of attachment or ownership, and made into a common experience, widely accessible beyond the confines of objectivity and subjectivity, that “passes through language and plunges into silence” (Ramos, *Sobre la poesía*). It is for this reason that fiction speaks to us, moves us, etc. And it is for this reason, and for the fact that as it waxes poetic it suffers no possible contrivance, that its role, its highest role, lies in the “unmasking of desire, that is: in the destruction of the personality” (Ramos, *Estética II* 318). A road back across the road of excess intended to distill exuberance into expenditure. Thus, the artistic experience, whether for the artist or for the reader/ beholder, etc. to whom it is thoroughly accessible, effectively constitutes, in its noblest form, an investigation of suffering as well as its origin: *tanha* and *dukkha*, what desire ignores of itself. As it passes through this (re)creative process, touching upon the aesthetic experience, form and emptiness may be witnessed as indistinguishable, and the ideal that Nietzsche proclaimed in Zarathustra, of art being a way of liberation from servitude, is revealed to be thoroughly what it is: *practical*. This is because, in retracing desire and its disavowals, a serious look affords the insight of what W.B. Yeats sought to express in his poem titled *Lapis Lazuli*: “All perform their tragic play/there struts Hamlet, there is Lear,/that’s Ophelia, that Cordelia;/yet they, should the last scene be there,/the great stage curtain about to drop,/if worthy their prominent part in the play,/do not break up their lines to weep./They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay.” For nature’s vacuity permeates just as well through the great turmoils of love as in the stone, the water, the mountain; and the poet, in recreating his pain as *other*, “dies with the dying,” “returns with the living” (“Little Gidding”), and this dying and this return *actualize* experience, so that the common space of language is also freed from the encumbrance of past and future, and every word can retain its proper place of

recognition of the world, having passed through time and conquered it. The stage curtain (or death) absolves Hamlet of his Hamlet-ness, and so on and so forth, because each part played is formed in relation to or delimited by each other part, and to gain insight into this mutual interdependency is to overcome the *cut* of separation by whose assumption each part has unknowingly expressed itself:

La cosa está en que no queda  
 remedio inteligente que no sea  
 usar las piezas que hay en los rompe-caminos,  
 e ir tirando por ahora, aunque más allá  
 persistamos en crear nuestra canción  
 con las piezas que queramos construir  
 que serán igual.<sup>41</sup> (Silvio Rodríguez *La cosa está en...*).

It is precisely in the inflexion point, so subtly hinted at, as Seidensticker points out, via the shift of one word: from “you’re a good *girl*” to “you’re a good *woman*,” that the artistic experience “passes through an infinity,” as Heinrich Von Kleist puts it in his famous essay of the marionette theatre, and to relive it comprises the abovementioned necessary actualization. It is useful to draw on the comparison because it also alludes to the image of the mirror, which in *Snow Country*, through the figure of Yoko and the scenes that we have been discussing, depicts the same movement. Says Von Kleist: “Just as a section drawn through two lines, considered from one given point, after passing through infinity, suddenly arrives on the other side of that [same] point; or as the image in a concave mirror, after vanishing into infinity, suddenly reappears right in front of us: so grace too returns when knowledge has, as it were, gone through an infinity. [...] ‘Does that mean,’ I said, bewildered, ‘that we must eat again of the Tree of

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<sup>41</sup> Trans. “The point is to know that there is naught/to do but salvage what we can from each wreckage/and to keep at it for now/even if the song composed later/will bear the same pieces we have chosen/and come to the same point.”

Knowledge in order to fall back into the state of innocence?’ ‘Certainly,’ he answered. ‘That is the last chapter in the history of the world’” (quoted in Rilke 323).<sup>42</sup>

From the same point of view, what Blake achieves in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, specifically via his proverbs of hell, several of which we’ve drawn on for the present discussion, is to effectively compile a map of excess, a map of *samsara*, as it were, not unlike the tantric cosmologies of the six realms of the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition, and not unlike certain psychoanalytical endeavors, so that this conventional world of the knowledge of good and evil—what we here have called the obverse of anima—may spur itself toward beatification by the aspiration of the *conatus* to attain to greater stages of perfection, i.e., joyful innocence, and to break with the rigid institutions of power that, like Leonard beautifully pointed out, so often tend to “rise above the rot” (Steer Your Way). This is the nobility as well as the subversive power of art. As Balzac has remarked in *Seraphita*, books are, in this way, no more and no less than “human actions in death.” Death cannot be separated from life. To do so implies duality. But death is the side of life that is not illumined, and so it must be brought forth. Impermanence *is*, as Dogen says, the Buddha Nature. The rigorous fate of art eschews the possibility of taking in a disciple because, just as Buddha Nature gets actualized, in the transmission, *between* teacher and student, so that there is really no separation whatsoever, and nothing whatsoever is attained, so too is art neither a salvation nor an escape, nor for that matter is it a means of succeeding in life. Art is not, like capitalism tries to make of it, a commodity. Art’s condition of nobility corresponds to the manner in which the artistic experience instantiates the perspicacity of what Francisco José Ramos calls ‘*la cosa mentale*’ (the mind-body-brain complex) into a perspective that actualizes itself in the moment in order to, from there, address the vestige of what has been

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<sup>42</sup> At which point the soul, as Yeats expressed, “learns that it is self-delighting, self-appeasing, self-affrighting, and that its own sweet will is heaven’s will.”

lived. In this way it is able to extract sense out of an experience via the creative impulse, effectively transforming it into an aesthetic experience. The purpose is noble because it derives, in such an artist as legitimately undertakes it, from the necessity, inherent to the *conatus*<sup>43</sup>, of moving from a lesser to a greater degree of perfection, which is the cultivation of beatitude according to Spinoza. Moreover, because of the peculiarity of poetry as both *action* and *creation*, and because we are inhabited by language, the *bringing forth* of what goes on to comprise the content of a work of art can only take place on behalf of a transformation of the *conatus* from that which had hitherto sought its own prevailing, to that which is able to viscerally recognize its insubstantiality in the very midst of the creative act.

It is necessity and only necessity, like Rilke said, that legitimizes a work of art (*Letters to a Young Poet* 13). The conception of a work of art may be understood, in this sense, as the gestation of a joy that is realized or brought forth through an agonic process, that is, via a foray through suffering. The fact that language is, as Professor Ramos informs us, an *affective organization principle*, yet also creative, active, metaphorical, poetic, provides a vessel for the possibility of transforming the longing that is so intrinsic to the human condition into an unexpected release of fixation and an overcoming. If life is the *real* itself, the innocent witnessing of which constitutes the illumined moment, then its averted half or under-fabric or obverse must be the bringing-forth of what is not illumined. The moment of conception of a work of art and its consequent elaboration into *oeuvre* imply one another in much the same way. Indeed, this is how books are human actions in death, or death's being-brought-forth. But both life-and-death must be overcome, which is to say, the idea of both must be overcome. Because the *real* is precisely that which is being by virtue of its being divested of the need to be (i.e. it is

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<sup>43</sup> This is the individual dynamism and energy that engender an impulse to prevail over adversity, including that of its own individuation (see Ramos, *Estética II* 154)

life-and-death divested of life and death.) “When I’m gone I’ll be yours/yours for a song,” cries Leonard Cohen in “Night Comes On.” To return to the place of summer, when Shimamura declines the geisha “woman” but is unable to receive the love that the girl Komako is giving to him, the obverse terrain must now be traversed, and Kawabata must unrealize himself—unrealize reality—in order to traverse it back up the ladder as no one. “For among these winters there is one so endlessly winter/that only by wintering through it will your heart survive” (Rilke 245). For this reader at least, the distant anima of innocence is what *almost* meets, and it is emblemized in the figure of Yoko. Yoko who, one presumes (though this matter remains entirely undisclosed in the novel: a mystery), begins to take over as the companion of Yukio the moment that Komako averts her head away from her childhood friend and toward Shimamura.

**Part III: Heaven's River**

Water and fire succeed  
 The town, the pasture, and the weed.  
 Water and fire deride  
 The sacrifice that we denied.  
 Water and fire shall rot  
 The marred foundations we forgot,  
 Of sanctuary and choir.  
 This is the death of water and fire.  
 - T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"

O Shooting star  
 That fell into my eyes and through my body—:  
 Not to forget you. To endure."  
 - Rilke, "Death"

Thus far, we have been proposing a reading of *Snow Country* that may perhaps strike as somewhat scarce, wherein it is taken for granted that both objectivity and subjectivity are beside the point and, moreover, wherein any interpretation is ultimately secondary to the vacuity of nature and its forms. These forms are in turn temporally interrelated via the cycle of the seasons: the cycle of impermanence. Put differently, if we were to amend Chin Nung's statement about "painting the branch well in order to hear the wind" so as to befit a literary mold, we might say that to write well these characters and their plights is to evoke the seasonal feeling that also accompanies all human endeavor. As we read, then, of their return, so too do we as readers return to nature. As has long been known in the East, nature is not a foreign thing that humans should or can prevail against or overcome. The usefulness of unrealizing reality in order to actualize experience on behalf of memory lies in the inevitable acknowledgement of impermanence that we must learn to live as. A novel fashioned out of haiku moments is perhaps especially keen in evoking this implacability of the *real*, and all of this is implicit in the readership experience. It is, moreover, precisely by virtue of its being implicit that haiku retain

the sparsest of forms: nothing whatsoever is explained in a haiku, and there is nothing to hold on to save the movement that is being traced in the image. Only poetry is capable of being this lean and this transparent, and it is this that Ryokan, the great Japanese poet and Zen monk, meant (just like Saigyō) when he said that his poems were not poems, and that only when it was understood that his poems were not poems would it be possible to talk about poetry. This is to say that poetry, in its expressing, very much like philosophy in its explaining, endeavors to invoke the *logos* at the point where it is returning back from the *real*. This is precisely the inflexion point. The reclamation of words, in this sense, is effectively silence.

As such, it should come as no surprise to the reader that the great final portion of the novel, to which we will now address ourselves, is as bereft of a satisfying conclusion and as little suggestive of anything as all that has led to it. Once again, as Kawabata employs his style of repeating the same image with small variations, it is the movement of these variations that stands out as the interesting point, since it takes place on behalf of or through the lens of the protagonist Shimamura, showcasing his own internal movement. Here, again, we may note how subjectivity is transcended as the I-novel is carried over to its final, inevitable conclusions, as if the external and the internal were reaching a point of recognition, of sameness, and as if the whole play of the novel were finally landing on itself in quiet acceptance.

The *honi-i* of Bashō's crow (from the haiku cited in part I) is the autumnal heart: anyone who has felt the images of a time of hope gradually turning into an encumbrance, or, say, the futility of writing certain kinds of letters, can recreate this crow inside them and experience the haiku moment. *Honi-i*, though it be cast off images in space and time, pervades across them, is nowhere in particular: a bridge-over-no-man's-lands, like the seasons that arrive everywhere at once. To give form to that which has no form: that too is poetry.

The fundamental aspect of the inflexion point, as also happens with haiku, lies in the cancelation of opposites. “Take your practiced powers and stretch them/until they span the chasm between two contradictions, for the god wants to know himself *in* you,” (261) writes Rilke. *Honi-i* is that internal binding element, the essence of which, we might say, is the relationship depicted by the movement as seen from a place of stillness. In the case of Basho’s poem, the words *withered*, *alone*, and *autumn* contain this binding element in their designation, but they are not enough to evoke the heart of autumn. Instead, it is the combination of these and the temporal frame they allude to with the notion of a crow that has seemingly overstayed its welcome—indeed, that is in all likelihood about to leave—which completes the feeling. Between this movement and the still evening background, all notion of time dissolves for a moment: all is now. The dissolution of any identification with plus and minus, or before and after, takes place herein. It is analogous to what Francisco José Ramos has called, evoking the words of Paul Klee, the *grey point* (*Estética II* 301-308).

A great kaleidoscopic precision of hues takes place from the entire field of spaciousness that opens between the absence of color and the fullness of color. Neither white nor black, neither this nor that, what remains for it but the trajectory? The specific coordinate of the continual inflexion between two poles, wherever it lies in the spectrum, is always defined in terms of the relationship between both poles. Therefore, the grey point is a symbol of the aforementioned concept of *perspectivism*, a *being-with* change wherein the perspective of change is the actualization of itself on behalf of the neither-this-nor that which is always the spectrum. Or, as Eliot writes in the culmination of his *Four Quartets*:

Not known, because not looked for  
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness  
    Between two waves of the sea.  
Quick now, here, now, always—



A condition of complete simplicity  
(Costing not less than everything)

What does not remain is always conditioned by the two poles. What is unconditioned is always actualizing itself, *ahead of parting*, and therefore knows better than to wish to remain. Better from what? From the fact that it no longer identifies with any point in the arising and passing of the wave. Coming from nowhere, going nowhere, wherever it is in the spectrum, it *others* itself to the spectrum. Completely expended, at every moment between expansion and contraction, it never ceases to stand still. Keeping in mind this framework, let us now take a look at the novel's resolution, which ends seasonally a little before in the cycle from where it began: with the approach of winter.

In winter, life learns to embrace departure, and to enjoy standing still. The heart of *Snow Country* is like the sturdiness of life in winter. A work of art, like a song, is also a kind of departure. It is the testament of an arrival that had already been conceived ere it was fully brought forth. Perhaps this is one reason why Musashi advised his disciples to “have no heart for approaching the path of love” (The Book of Five Rings xxxii). What could be more noble than externalizing this pathos, having come to know of its inevitability? After self is shewn to be other, what cause to trample further than the swiftest cut? Therein lies the significance of the rainbow, of tracing each ungraspable instant of the fragmentation of light from a place of darkness that avails it. Therefore, when the god abandons Antony<sup>44</sup>, listen, listen:

[Shimamura] leaned against the brazier....The innkeeper had lent him an old Kyoto teakettle, skillfully inlaid in silver with flowers and birds, and from it came the sound of wind in the pines. He could make out two pine breezes, a near one and a far one. Just

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<sup>44</sup> I am thinking of Cavafy's famous poem, *The God Abandons Antony*, but also, of its reinterpretation by Leonard Cohen in the song “Alexandra Leaving”, which is one of the more significant songs in the album *Ten New Songs*, dedicated to Leonard's own Zen Master, Sasaki Roshi.

beyond the far breeze he heard faintly the tinkling of a bell. He put his ear to the kettle and listened. Far away, where the bell tinkled on, he suddenly saw Komako's feet, tripping in time with the bell. He drew back. The time had come for him to leave. (155)

By this point, after realizing the above, Shimamura decides to go see his precious Chijimi weavers, native to the Yukiguni, located a few villages past the hot springs inn. Then, upon his return, at night, by taxi, when he sees Komako again walking outside, the last scene opens as the resolution after the inflexion point, with the internal departure coloring all external objects in the same spirit. Moreover, it is curiously tied in circumstance to the Summer scene (it is, once again, objects or felt-things, in this case a geisha's attire, that suggest this link).

Komako notices Shimamura returning by taxi, opens the door to the taxi, and climbs in. "Where have you been?" she asks. 'Nowhere in particular,' he answers. He notice[s] with surprise that she [now has] the geisha's way of arranging her skirts. The driver wait[s] silently. It was a bit odd, Shimamura had to admit, for them to be sitting in a taxi that had gone as far as it could" (163). A few moments later, their conversation gets interrupted by the fire alarm, ringing from the direction of the cocoon-warehouse, which in the village doubles as a social gathering place. The taxi has left them by the inn, which is at the foot of the mountain, a little ways off from the village, and when they see the blaze from a distance, Komako resolves herself to walk toward it, across the snowy evening. The fire scene now takes place, and the reference point of stillness in this scene becomes the Milky Way. Instead of a mirror (as in the beginning train scene), or a distant mountain echo, where there was perhaps a sense of something half-felt, appearing far away, the *honi-i* in this case feels more like inevitability and absolution: something that is imminently approaching, and yet approaching with utter stillness, as though it were already reconciled from the perspective of the Milky Way. Let us notice, then, the variations of

Shimamura's perspective with respect to this image as he comes to the same realization by looking at the Milky Way (and let us notice also what happens to Komako in tandem):

The fire blazed higher. From the mountain, however, it was as quiet under the starry sky as a little make-believe fire. Still the terror of it came across to them. They could almost hear the roar of the flames. Shimamura put his arm around Komako's shoulders. "What is there to be afraid of?" he asked her. [...] She had burst off weeping at the sight of the fire, and Shimamura held her to him without thinking to wonder what had so upset her. (163)

Now they start to walk across the icy path toward the village. Shimamura follows behind Komako.

"The milky way. Beautiful, isn't it," Komako murmured. She looked up at the sky as she ran off ahead of him.

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 Basho 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. 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. (165)

The two keep going on toward the fire, now dazed, now rousing, now frantic; like a stormy sea crashing against bare rock, each particle of foam dissolving into the night air (or words pouring out, telling a story). More variations of the same image:

"Is the milky way like this every night?" "The milky way? Beautiful isn't it? But it's not like this every night. It's not usually so clear" The milky way flowed over them in the

direction they were running, and seemed to bathe Komako's head in its light. [...] The light was dimmer even than on the night of the new moon, and yet the milky way was brighter than the brightest full moon. In the faint light that left no shadows on the earth, Komako's face floated up like an old mask. [...] He looked up, and again the milky way came down to wrap itself around the earth. And the milky way, like a great aurora, flowed through his body to stand at the edges of the earth. There was a quiet, chilly loneliness in it, and a sort of voluptuous astonishment. (168)

In this same way, every interval of conversation between the lovers opens up into the milky way, as if begun and ended with it, and the latter in turn bounces back their emotion, like a mirror that reveals the surface of its stars by the contrast of an endless depth. Shimamura cannot escape this progression, much as he wants to, realizing its nature. And, somewhat in inverse proportion, as the milky way grows more and more voluptuous, his own movement appears more and more confined (resigned?). Komako, in turn, seems to grow mightier alongside the milky way, as the latter itself seems to take on some of Komako's femininity.

'If you leave, I'll lead an honest life', she tells him. 'What's the matter? You don't have to stand there, do you?' But Shimamura stood looking at her. 'Oh? You'll wait, then? And afterwards you'll take me to your room with you.' She raised her left hand a little and ran off. Her retreating figure was drawn up into the mountain. The milky way spread its skirts to be broken by the waves of the mountain, and, fanning out again in all its brilliant vastness higher in the sky, it left the mountain in a deeper darkness. (168)

Eventually, they arrive at the village. Crowds of people are heading in the opposite direction. Then, face to face with the warehouse, they see as small pumps of water shoot their beams upward, toward the second floor, and a wall of people cluster around the perimeter.

Villagers call out the names of their relatives, but otherwise everyone is enveloped in “a sort of quietness, as though [...] voiceless before the flames. [...] A tongue [of fire] would shoot up from a quite unexpected spot, the three pumps would turn hastily towards it, and a shower of sparks would fly up in a cloud of black smoke” (171). The milky way remains their constant companion: “The sparks spread off into the milky way, and Shimamura was pulled up with them. Occasionally a pump missed the roof, and the end of its line of water wavered and turned to a faint white mist, as though lighted by the milky way” (172).

Now Komako comes up to Shimamura. She takes his hand whilst gazing at the fire. He notices that her hair is coming undone, and that her throat is bare and arched. His fingers tremble from an urge to touch her. Very much in tandem with this, or perhaps as part of the same feeling, he perceives that “a separation is forcing itself upon them.” Flames shoot up again. And once again, alongside the recurring image, the symbol of Yoko opens for the last time in the space between Komako and Shimamura, closing the circle of their relationship: “The crowd gasps as one person. A woman’s body ha[s] fallen through the flames. [...] Shimamura started back—not from fear, however. He saw the figure as a phantasm from an unreal world. With a doll-like passiveness, and the freedom of the lifeless, it seemed to hold both life and death in abeyance.” Now Komako screams. Shimamura gazes at the still form. “When did he realize that it was Yoko? [...] Two or three beams from the collapsing balcony were burning over her head. The beautiful eyes that so pierced her object were closed. Her jaw was thrust slightly out, and her throat was arched. The fire flickered over the white face” (174).

Once more, the figure of Yoko and that of Komako appear to meet, as if they were or had all the while been the working of an inseparable contradiction; inner and outer, physical and spiritual, two ends of the same pole, now arched out toward their extremes, now meeting.

Shimamura for his part seems to know this perfectly well: “[he] felt a rising in his chest again as the memory came to him of the night he had been on his way to visit Komako, and he had seen that mountain light shine in Yoko’s face.” The same mountain, we might point out, that had drawn out Shimamura during he and Komako’s summer meeting, when the two butterflies, like Yoko’s two eyes in the train, had started up the mountain slope. Thus: “the years and months with Komako seemed to be lighted up in that instant; and there, he knew, was the anguish” (174).

When *life and death are held in abeyance*, time stands still. Komako screams again, and goes forward to pick up her burden, Yoko, whose “face hung vacantly, as at the moment of the soul’s flight.” “‘Keep back. Keep back, please,’ cries Komako to the crowd. ‘This girl is insane. She’s insane.’” Shimamura then tries to move toward her, but he gets “pushed aside by the men who had come up to take Yoko from [Komako.] As he caught his footing, his head fell back, and the milky way flowed down inside him with a roar” (175).

If we take the artistic experience to be a looking back on actual experience in order to bring forth or distill such experience into essence, which is how we have been interpreting it all throughout this paper, then it is clear that the milky way acts here as symbol for what we stressed toward the beginning of the paper: that there can be neither buddhas nor witnesses where this looking back culminates, and that the entire process is in fact the process of their dissolution. “Joys impregnate and sorrows bring forth” (Blake, *Proverbs of Hell*). But we are changed by the process, such that it is the process in fact that matters the most, because the fruit of action actualizes itself by way of the understanding of suffering that comes from this distilling of the memory of what has been suffered, the death that has taken place. This is what Rilke must have meant when he wrote the last lines of his poem titled “Death,” which chronologically just about precedes the writing of the Elegies, and which we have selected as the epigraph for this portion

of the paper. Rilke himself wrote that loss was an internal acquisition just as intense as external possession had been<sup>45</sup>, and the arching star of his poem is described as falling in through his body in the same movement as that of the Milky Way boring inside Shimamura: alongside the loss that opens internally at the culmination of external possession. It is this loss that must be acknowledged and endured, as Rilke implores, if the entire perspectivism is to be made evident, the departure or fragmentation of light disclosed, and the experience of death actualized.<sup>46</sup> There is an old Zen saying that expresses a similar notion: “if you die before you die, then you do not die when you die.”<sup>47</sup>

The essence of haiku, as we have mentioned, is an intuitive insight into the real via the language-based tracing of the movement of a moment of time. Its proximity to Zen is then more than evident, as Zen is not bound by anything other than the cultivation of the attention toward an understanding of what, at any given moment, is being. It is for this reason that Zen training involves a kind of stilling or darkening process wherein the mind is purged of its excessive, habitual thought activity, since thoughts by definition identify or assign qualities of affection to experience, which are in turn based on memory. Thoughts are, for this reason, inherently dualistic (“lack one lacks both”, wrote Whitman.)

To be with experience makes all of the difference. This coexistence opens the occasion for opportune, noble, right action as the will and avidity fall back and no longer profess alterity of any kind upon that which is taking place. For what is taking place is at all times the renewal of nature, and so the lesson of haiku is clear: one must notice what is always taking place, governed

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted from the epigraph selected by Giorgio Agamben for his book *Stanzas*.

<sup>46</sup> There is a great collection of several letters written by Rilke that was compiled and translated by Ulrich Baer, which showcase just how significant the theme of death was for the poet throughout his life, and its embrace with respect to the artistic experience is depicted as a kind of boring in towards internal abysses in order to gain equal footing in darkness as that which has been witnessed in light.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Jon Kabat-Zinn from the paper “Dying Before You Die.”

by what the concepts of the three marks elucidate, since it cannot be any other way than it is, and since we are not separate from it except by the illusions of our thought activity. Spontaneity, therefore, and here let us remember that spontaneity is very closely associated with aesthetic activity of any kind, entails an element of self-annihilation inherent in every act, and it is this that the rigor of art ultimately demands, whether in a page or any of its other forms, or in life.

World is arriving to Shimamura. At first, he doesn't know, remains distant. Meanwhile nature's correspondences continue to creep in, and this narrative arc is traced in its ontological unfolding masterfully by Kawabata via precisely the haiku-like style that bears witness to what Shimamura only perceives as strange at the beginning of the novel. Then, gradually, world bores in, until Shimamura and world have caught up in the moment of realization that only closes the circle of what the point of inflexion between "you're a good girl" and "you're a good woman" had already anticipated. This comes about poignantly by way of the understanding of the cause of suffering, which is precisely avidity, as Shimamura confirms to himself: "there [is] the anguish." Then the epiphanic moment of complete recollection takes place in an instant, and that precisely is the instant in which the artistic experience is conceived, later to be crafted into the novel as it stands today. Yoko, Yukio, Komako, and Shimamura: both are both, opposites in the spectrum of desire and the expenditure of affection-oriented action. Thus, they can function as mirrors for what is ultimately both intimate and impersonal. They imply, engender, and draw one another out. None other is the significance of Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which, remarkably enough, prophesizes the necessity of acknowledging both good *and* evil as part of the human experience, since you cannot have one without the other, and since one implies the other and there is no other way of resolving the problem of duality but to acknowledge both. *Je est un autre*. We cannot contrive innocence or, as Krishna warns Arjuna in the *Gita*, resolve the



problem of desire by way of inaction. Instead, the cancellation of opposites must be allowed to play out, for it takes a thorough seeing-through the mutually arising nature of all conditions in order to pave the way for the understanding of the Unconditioned.

### **Conclusion: Water and Fire**

The dead may talk, if one listens well, all about their fiery dying. They impose themselves, the dead do, and circumvent with reason what they could not surrender to the fire. Then they fancy and go on about their way and keep on fancying. No one is any different, we are all born with the dead, but between death and life the dialectical engagement opens the space for words, for music, or for dancing. The elemental configuration is one of many ancestral ways of bestowing meaning to the world, by assigning role to part via emblemizing, that is to say, via symbolization. Narration can then ensue by relating each role to the other, and in the relationship itself, the whole is expressed.

Instead of performing on behalf of a reason, one must try to do it with no reason, that is to say, as no one. For it to speak, one must disappear, as with the river in *Siddhartha*. Truth is this disappearing; fiction, what speaks. Fiction is the negative of truth. We are the photography, but since we cannot remain still even for a moment, it takes this leap to go under.

Forgetting the self externally makes all of the characters in fiction dance the play of desire and none of it catches you. Internally, the “you” that is caught is exactly what needs to be evacuated in order for the dead to speak. The dead only speak from the origin, *kháos*: you cannot grab onto it anywhere else. But it is always the origin, and so it is always available. One must wait for the energy and one must expend the energy.

We have hoped to show with our reading of Yasunari Kawabata's emblematic *Snow Country* in the light of Zen's incorporation of the Buddha's teachings, particularly with respect to *haiku*, that there is ultimately no difference between the artistic experience and the experience of illumination. It is the barest bare; the place in which language is advent and conscious only of its relationship to itself, word by word co-existing, knowing *where it is with*, yet not itself conscious of anything. It is a nothing that is not "nothing". It is a nothing, or emptiness, that is the form *in res* of the entire universe. It has never happened before, and it will never happen beyond itself. It is always only emergent.

Every experience changes us, until we are changed into experience. After the experience of illumination and its descent have both been revoked, the transactions ensue but the light and the dark stand still. The dead are only spread.. Gather them. And if you must mourn, mourn *someone*. Do not mourn *eternity*.

## **Coda**

After Miyazaki was forced to acknowledge that he was getting too old to sustain the tremendous strain of hand-drawing everything, he decided to announce his retirement, but then he found that he could not stay still. He could not stop drawing. So he opted to give CGI a chance, even hiring a group of young animators to work with. Toward the end of this period, a team of investors, having heard of the legendary director's plight, presented him with a program they had been working on that was meant to infuse CGI technology with what is called deep-learning—vanguard software designed to emulate human animation via a kind of self-learning. They prepared footage for him that depicted a handicapped, zombie-like creature crawling and

incorporating alternating movements as it dragged itself across the floor. The old artist, after watching the whole thing quietly and expressionless, and whilst surrounded by the entire expectant production team waiting to hear his take, then briefly exclaimed: “Let me just say, every morning I used to see a friend who’s disabled. He would walk up to me. One leg’s turned outward so it’s hard for him to walk. His stiff hand and mine touch. I think of him, and can’t say I like this. Whoever made it gives no thought to pain. You can create horrible things if you want, but I want no part of it. This is an insult to life” (*The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness*).

The Buddha set out to discover the cause of suffering in the world. Was it not compassion, without which wisdom alone is brittle, that ultimately also could not be ignored? The traces of life—as Goethe famously dubbed his own work—that inevitably make up the content of a work of art, are as equally uncontrivable into content with respect to art as virtue is into action with respect to beatitude. What, then, is the secret role of art, if not ultimately to point to its own overcoming? Desire and suffering are inseparable. *Samsara* and *Nirvana* are inseparable. The nobility of art is a bodhisattva anchored in the flux of suffering, not unfazed and yet deriving praise of even the ugliest places, for he knows there is no other place from where he can do justice. Each aspect of the tall tales we inherit is a hurdle that we have to overcome. They are like the *koans* that dissolve: the idea of a God in heaven, the terror of a mechanical universe, and now this postmodern spin that eschews sincerity and eros for political correctness, for being nice, and for displaying everything as an identity. They do not acknowledge suffering, or death, life’s averted half, without which, again, there would be no poetry and no beauty to life. Impermanence may be a hefty pill to swallow, but how, other than by acknowledging it, can one know what is always at stake? “It is precisely because we are pulsations of desire that we are unmade and remade by suffering. And precisely because suffering does not respond to any form

of punishment or guilt, the love of freedom consists of creating the highest sense of responsibility for an encounter, without evasion or subterfuge” (Ramos, *Estética II* 29). *The cure for pain is in the pain* (Rumi). *Only through time time is conquered* (Eliot).

*Eternity has no elegy* because there is no such thing as eternity, just as emptiness is also empty of itself. Ultimately, the only way to realize reality is by realizing its unreality. Such is the rigorous fate of art. What is it then that gets played out, exactly, in an encounter, and what succeeds it? To feign the pain that is real in order to unrealize and reenact it, is to open the possibility of insight into the fact that such pain is also devoid of self or separateness. One tries to find the self in loss but acquires instead the notion of interrelationship that absolves or beatifies the origin or cause of the loss that has been incurred. The loss is then externalized, and inner space once more becomes available. Such a movement arguably comprised a great deal of Rilke’s poetic efforts—and indeed, one likes to think, the fruits of such efforts, for experiential understanding of this is precisely what bestows or recovers the capacity to be ahead of all parting. It has been erroneously interpreted by many a critic that such a call for the detachment of affective necessity is to be interpreted as an appeal toward disaffection. But a thorough exploration of the relationship between desire and suffering will show that, with respect to Rilke’s poetry and that of so many others who also “chose the Tao of suffering”, nothing could be further from the truth.

Upon his return home after turning down the investors, a resolved Hayao Miyazaki sat down in his workstation and quietly confessed to himself the following words: “I feel the end of the world is near. Humans have lost confidence. Hand-drawing is the only answer. I won't run from it anymore.”

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