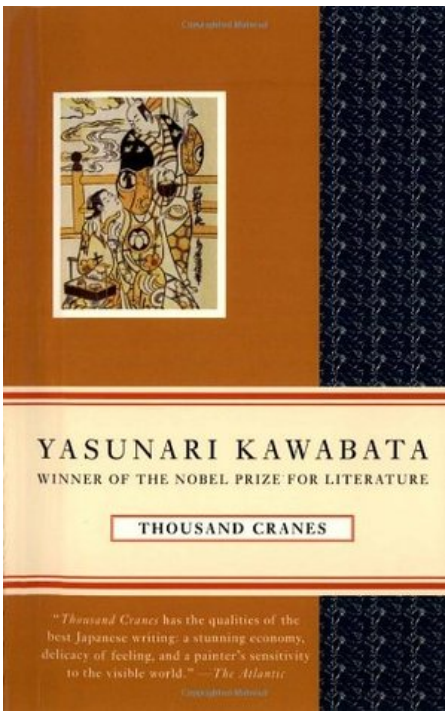

Thousand Cranes

Yasunari Kawabata , Edward G. Seidensticker (Translator)

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An alternate cover of this ISBN can be found here.

Nobel Prize winner Yasunari Kawabata's *Thousand Cranes* is a luminous story of desire, regret, and the almost sensual nostalgia that binds the living to the dead.

While attending a traditional tea ceremony in the aftermath of his parents' deaths, Kikuji encounters his father's former mistress, Mrs. Ota. At first Kikuji is appalled by her indelicate nature, but it is not long before he succumbs to passion—a passion with tragic and unforeseen consequences, not just for the two lovers, but also for Mrs. Ota's daughter, to whom Kikuji's attachments soon extend. Death, jealousy, and attraction convene around the delicate art of the tea ceremony, where every gesture is imbued with profound meaning.

Thousand Cranes Details

Date	:	Published 1996 by Vintage (first published 1952)
ISBN	:	9780679762652
Author	:	Yasunari Kawabata , Edward G. Seidensticker (Translator)
Format	:	Paperback 147 pages
Genre	:	Cultural, Japan, Fiction, Asian Literature, Japanese Literature, Classics

From Reader Review Thousand Cranes for online ebook

Mariel says

I've been reading most of the day. Yesterday, too. I've been distracted, if not altogether impatient, and wanting (need? want?) an urgent yet unassuming emotional life in books. All the reflection my brain can eat. The situation was right; thunderstorms and a day off and nothing I couldn't put off for another day. It still felt wasteful. Shouldn't I be doing something else with this luxury? I was really waiting for my Kawabata books to arrive in the mail. The mail doesn't come until around 4:30 p.m. where I live. (The mail hasn't been this exciting in ages. No love letter ever received such a hopeful welcome from me.) I tried to savor the 147 pages. I've got another Kawabata for this evening. I'm not feeling any different so far.

I didn't want everything told to me. What I wanted was that one two three four punch of allowing something different to drift over me; the breathlessness as... Yeah, I can't do analogies about physicality. It did that and... Roughed me up a little. This is what will happen to you next time and we mean business!

I don't know... Thousand Cranes is about Kikuji representing his dead father to lover Mrs. Oto. Mrs. Oto allows him to be his father in the nighttime of their lovemaking (he doesn't get a say in how she seems him. She's his own willing excuse, I should say). When Mrs. Oto dies, her daughter Fumiko takes on her mother like there was a Mrs. Oto shape left in her body like one of those Loony Tunes cartoons. I've had deaths in the family. They were all different. Mostly other people's grief overwhelmed any that I felt myself. I've known people that it was like the "rules" changed when their fathers died. The parts that were themselves receded into the background as if compensating for not giving enough attention in life. Looking for the dead person within themself? Everyone in Thousand Cranes is looking to act out ghosts within everybody else. Everybody loses themselves in everybody else in a game that no one could ever win. What the hell is fair?

The thing is that the ghosts were so much, well, ghosts that the after flavor in my mouth is instead of the sickness. There's another person left behind in queen mixer and mistress of tea, Chikako. She became sexless (at least in the eyes of Kikuji). She's really fucking bitter that Kikuji's father passed her over after a brief affair. Chikako has a birth mark on her breast. Apparently this ruled out any prospects for her with men. The image of her took on the grossness while everyone else got to live as romantic figures of tragedy. (It would be tragic to be Chikako, I would think.) She spends the rest of her days trying to use the Mrs. as a mouthpeice for her grievances (the mom is the most shallow figure of all. Position is all she ever gets). Isn't the harlot Mrs. Oto just the worst sleeping with a married man?! She's a total bitch. Right. Likewise, Kikuji and the others feel a restless disgust for the now middle aged woman that didn't become them any more than it did her. The meanness surrounding her has a stronger flavor like um a stronger cup of tea. (Right, Chikako? You'd pour that cup with a dismissive air to let us all know exactly how you feel about that.) It seems weird that the creepiness stands out more than the grief... It shouldn't have. At least Chikako came the closest to admitting that Mrs. Oto and her lover acted out their affair as if no one else had anything to do with it.

The tea stuff is incidental, to me. I didn't need the attachments to their ancient bowls to understand that they were looking for stand-ins. I guess I feel the washed over feelings and not enough of the punch in the gut. Maybe I wanted to be woken up out of my lazy day a bit more, after all. (Jesus. A diary entry review, Mariel?)

P.s. I love that scene in The Rutles when the Paul McCartney counterpart, Dirk (played by Eric Idle), confesses to "taking tea" (for the people who are not Beatles nerds, Paul McCartney publically admitted to

doing drugs). "I do take tea. Lots of tea. Biscuits, too." I'm retarded. I kept quoting that line to myself. Tea = pot! I'd be an embarrassing American and disturb the tea rituals with lots of giggling. I can't take me anywhere! Not even in books.

P.s.s. What's up with the wikipedia entry on Kawabata? According to this disaster of wikipedia, Kawabata did not write about suicide in his works (Kawabata committed suicide, although there are some who would insist it was an accident). Um.... did they read any of his books? Three of the five I've read were more than a little about suicide. I'm probably going to end up spilling my brains out about my feelings on suicide in the Kawabata books. One of these days.

Mahsa says

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> *Does pain go away and leave no trace, then?*

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> *Is that impossible? Are we seeing our reflections in our own hearts?*

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Mizuki says

Thoughts before reading:

I have a burning question to ask after reading two Yasunari Kawabata's novels and on my way to read the third: **Is that just this Kawabata guy, or is it common for men in general to keep thinking about this perfect but unreal phantom of a beautiful woman (whom they can't be with for one reason or another), even when they already had a solid but flawed wife or girlfriend (they are flawed because all humans are flawed) by their sides?**

Any menfolk bothers to answer me?

Thoughts after reading:

3.5 stars.

I think it's fitting to share with you one of the messages I think Mr. Kawabata might want to express through this story: **love can be hellish.**

Also I want to add photos from a band called Moran and a music video of theirs: ?????? (translation: Rosy Colored Hell)

Link to music video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVt_H...

After reading *Snow Country* and *The Old Capital*, I notice a major change in Kawabata's themes: the sense of guilt and karma dominate *Thousand Cranes* like it has never been in the previous two books.

The plots are rather straight forward and easily understandable: the main story is centered around a young man (Kikuji) and his relationships with a few different women: Mrs. Ota, a long term mistress of the man's late father (who was a master of tea ceremony), Miss Ota, her daughter. Chikako, Kikuji's father's less favored former mistress and Yukiko, a young woman whom Chikako tries to match-make with Kikuji. After a chance meeting with Mrs. Ota and her daughter, Kikuji started a (slightly incestuous) affair with his father's former mistress, but this relationship soon attracts unexpected jealousy, death, misunderstanding and loss among the characters.

Honestly, I once again have problem with Kawabata's treatment with his male character and relationship. I mean, why must the women (totally three of them, I mean three!) in the story just fall right onto the guy's laps? What had they seemed in this man anyway? I don't even know!

Okay...to be fair I do know why Mrs. Ota is into this guy...because she seems to mix Kikuji, his late father and her own late husband together when she was with the young man.

Still, I like Kikuji's memory about his late father and his mistresses, I also like his relationship with Mrs. Ota and how this relationship provokes a lingering sense of guilt between them. Kikuji's interaction with Miss Ota is also well written.

However, I really don't like how Chikako is being painted into a bitter older woman who acts only out of

malice and jealousy to a point she is entirely two-dimensional.

Among the three Kawabata's books I've read, here is my rating:

The Old Capital >> Snow Country >> Thousand Cranes.

(Link: http://vampirekiki.deviantart.com/art...)

Edited@04/01/2017:

This re-read is a strange experience for me, the translator--a Japanese language major I guess, had translated the text very closely with its original Japanese form--theoretically it should be a good thing for a translation to be close to its original text, right? But the problem is, when reading this translated text I feel I'm reading Japanese instead of Chinese...and the structure of some of those translated sentences makes the text quite difficult to understand...in short, in my opinion it isn't a very good translation. I understand the translator might want us to experience the text as close to its original form as possible.....but I do think such manner of translation fails to bring out the beauty and lyricism of the writing.

I also need to make a complaint on how a female lead's name, Yukiko, was translated in this version. As many of you might know, 'yuki' means snow in Japanese and since Yukiko represents purity in the story so logically her name should have been translated into 'snow', but the translator just ignored it entirely.

So this is the second time I read *Thousand Cranes* and I noticed a number of small details I failed to catch on in the first reading, and this time I also read the second half of the story: turns out Mr. Kawabata had written one novella/sequel and a few short stories about the same set of main characters from *Thousand Cranes*, and for decades we Chinese readers had only seen the first half of the story about these MCs. As for the sequels, it had only been recently translated into Chinese for the first time through this version (which was published in Taiwan).

To be honest, I think the first half of Thousand Cranes (which starts with the MC goes to a tea party and meet the three female leads for the first time and ends with Miss Ota's disappearance) is far better than the second half (starts with the MC's honeymoon with Yukiko and 'ends' with the sudden death of an unlikable supporting character, Chikako).

To be fair, the second half of the story is unfinished so we never get to see the true ending of Thousand Cranes ---supposedly the author Mr. Kawabata planed to let his MC divorce his wife Yukiko and let him get back togehter with Miss Ota and then the two commit suicide. Sounds like one hell of a melodrama, right?

Still.....I like the romances in Thousand Cranes to an extent, first we get the complicated love-square (or even a love-heptagon, if we added the dramas among the MC's late parents and Mrs. Ota into the equation?) among the MC with Mrs. Ota, Yukiko and later Mrs. Ota's daughter Miss Ota; then we got the MC's longing for Miss Ota and his shame when facing his lovely, innocent newlywed wife, Yukiko.

I actually like how Mr. Kawabata displayed the complication of human's emotion and how his characters deal with longing, shame and guilt; all of the human dramas and interaction among lovers are also played out with outermost elegance.

After reading the second half of the story, I do believe the MC would eventually go back to Miss Ota.

PS: the relationship among the MC, his wife and Miss Ota also reminds me of Eileen Chang's short novel *Red rose, White rose*.

Review for *Sleeping Beauties* by the same author: https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...

Inderjit Sanghera says

Like the slow blooming of a lotus flower, Kawabata’s decorous and delicate prose unravels and unfurls itself, exuding a fragrance of melancholy, mellifluous and harmonious, like the tea ceremony which plays such a central role in the story, whose every movement and step is imbued with an inner meaning. However the outer poise and calm belies the bubbling of emotions which are shimmering on the surface of the novel, feelings of violence and revenge, of lust and jealousy which lie beneath the tranquil mask of the novel.

The novel follows the story of Kikuji and his relationship with various women; Mrs Ota, her daughter Fumiko and a servant Chikako. There is a heavy dose of symbolism in his relationship with these characters; the tea bowl’s which form part of the tea ceremony which plays such an integral part of the novel represent the relationships not only between Kikuji and Fumiko but between their parents, they are imbued with the entanglement of their past and current relationships, with the smear of Mrs Ota’s lipstick, repugnant and powerful red, acting as a smear on the outer tranquillity of the ceremony and leading to Fumiko’s destruction of the bowl which, like Mrs Ota herself, is irretrievably broken, shattered into a thousand pieces. Death and decay permeate the novel, as the characters struggle to escape the actions and histories of dead characters-at one point Kikuji speculates to Fumiko that the tea bowls are possessed with the spirits of their parents and just as Kikuji grows to love Mrs Ota after her suicide so the shadow of Kikuji’s virile and dominant father looms large over the cast of characters who inhabit the novel. In many ways the novel is about their inability to escape from his shadow.

Beneath this Kawabata is able interweaves a series of delicate patterns and images;

“The shadow of the young leaves fell on the paper-panelled door. One noted a soft reflection from the shoulders and the long sleeves of the grey kimono. The hair seemed luminous.”

“When a red oleander floods into bloom, the red against the thick green leaves is like the blaze of the summer sky; but when the blossoms are white, the effect is richly cool.”

The pale, opalescent calmness of a moonlight night, the gentle fall of sunlight through the verdant greenery, the rumbles of a thunderstorm and blossoming of irises in the alcove, these are the symbols and images which stay with the reader, which off-set the lachrymose nature of the story, which emphasise the poise and delicacy of a world of emotional turmoil.

Edward says

Note on the pronunciation of Japanese names

--Thousand Cranes

Agir(????) says

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Praj says

With emerald shades,
Dance eternal cranes.
In the pristine rains,
A warm *koicha* shared.
Upon poignant chests.
Tranquil prayers knelt

Just as Bolaño teases my psyche, Kawabata plays with my rhythmic senses. In his words I find songs of a wintry heart waiting for a prosperous spring. I cannot refrain myself from scribbling lost thoughts in the shadows of Kawabata's characters. Speaking of shadows; what an enigmatic delusion? The more you walk into it the more it grows; a loyal companion who never departs your physicality no matter how much you want it to leave. And then somehow, on a rainy day you crave for the sun, once again to be able to walk with your humble silhouette. Kikuji lived in and among numerous shadows of his past and present. Like the serpentine birthmark on Chikako's breast, Kikuji's past was conspicuous as warts on a toad. The ugliness of the birthmark that marred Chikako's luminous skin spewed venomous ghosts through the intoxicated brew. The novel opens with Chikako inviting Kikuji to meet a prospective bride in pretense of a tea ceremony. The purplish mark on Chikako's breast was all Kikuji remembered about his father's mistress. As if the mark was an effigy of his father's betrayal, the anguish of his mother and yet somehow it made him desire its touch in a bizarre way. Yukiko Inamura , a girl with the thousand cranes patterned kerchief was chosen for Kikuji's *miai*(matchmaking).

Kawabata interlaces the complex emotions in simple characterizations; analogous to the meticulous procedures that of a tea ceremony. Sen no Riky? is considered as a profound historical figure in the tradition of *wabi-cha*(the Japanese Way of Tea). In the early 1500s, Riky? integrated the teachings of Zen philosophies with the simplicity of tea to achieve aesthetics with pristine lucidity. Based on the four Zen principles of Harmony, Respect, Purity and Tranquility; the tea ceremony is more of a spiritual experience than mere drinking of tea. The ceremony that commences with the cleaning of the tea utensils before the tea is whisked, is symbolic to achieving stillness of mind and heart, by eradicating the worldly filth and strives for simplicity. Kawabata however fills the beauty of the tea ceremony with repulsiveness of human complexities and rigid destinies; a befitting paradox to the traditional Japanese art of Tea. Regarding his novel, Kawabata once said, *"It is a negative work, and expression of doubt about and warning against the vulgarity into which the tea ceremony has fallen."*

Unlike other tea masters, Mr. Mitani left a legacy of guilt and melancholic irregularities to his son (Kikuji). With the passing of tea utensils through generations, Kikuji not only inherited the embellished porcelains but

also his father's revolting past and his women. Kawabata uses various tools of the tea ceremony as pictures on a nostalgic wall of grotesque sentimentalities. When Chikako serves tea to Kikuji in his father's favourite Oribe(a black bowl) for the first time, Kikuji snubs the wistfulness brought by the kitchen-ware.

"But what difference does it make that my father owned it for a little while? It's four hundred years old, after all – its history goes back to Momoyama and Riky? himself. Tea masters have looked after it and passed it down through the centuries. My father is of very little importance.' So Kikuji tried to forget the associations the bowl called up.It had passed from Ota to his wife, from the wife to Kikuji's father, from Kikuji's father to Chikako; and the two men, Ota and Kikuji's father, were dead, and here were the two women. There was something almost weird about the bowl's career."

The same outlook is displayed when Fumiko brings the Shino Jar over to the cottage.

"A jar that had been Mrs. Ota's was now being used by Chikako. After Mrs Ota's death, it had passed to her daughter, and from Fumiko it had come to Kikuji.It had had a strange career. But perhaps the strangeness was natural to tea vessels. In the three or four hundred years before it became the property of Mrs Ota, it had passed through the hands of people with what strange careers?"

The ceramics that once were proud of their serene concoctions were now symbols of forlorn tragedies. Kawabata delineates the corruption of sanctimonious tea ceremony by whisking in human greed and viciousness. Resembling the serene tea that gets muddied by loosened clay particles., the essence of chaste spirituality vanishes into emotional turmoil ridden by jagged history of the human soul In this book, the tea ceremony upstages the mortals as it takes the centre stage of vanishing traditions and escalating materialistic vulgarity transforming into a laudable protagonist.

Furthermore, when Fumiko brings the red and the black Raku bowls over to Kikuji's cottage, the molded clay become symbols of an incomplete love. The love between Mrs. Ota and Mr. Mitani that was haunted by immoral ramifications; Mrs. Ota's love for Kikuji as she could not detach herself from his father's memories; Kikuji's love for Fumiko that dwelled in sinister shadows of his bedding Mrs. Ota; Fumiko's apprehensions in reciprocating the warmth burdened with her mothers sins and the malice of Mr. Mitani in Chikako's sexless existence. In a peculiar way all of it appeared to juxtapose the ghosts raised from the antique bowls.

"Though they were ceremonial bowls, they did not seem out of place as ordinary teacups; but a displeasing picture flashed into Kikuji's mind. Fumiko's father had died and Kikuji's father had lived on; and might not this pair of Raku bowls have served as teacups when Kikuji's father came to see Fumiko's mother? Had they not been used as 'man-wife'...."

With artistic perfection Kawabata paints the red and black Raku giving a heart to these lifeless objects. The crimson love blackened by shame. The dreaminess of a man's love and a woman's devotion perished in morbid fancies.

Kawabata does not romanticize suicide. He explores death in depths of salvation for it being the definitive pardon to mortal transgressions. Mrs. Ota's untimely death or rather suicide brought closure to several irregularities. Her guilt that lived in the Raku bowls churned venom in a sorrowful Shino. Even though one forgives the dead ; the viciousness of the past becomes sorrows of the present. An urge to spit out all the

venom.

“Death only cuts off understanding. No one can possibly forgive that”....."Guilt never goes away but sorrow does."

Gravely haunted by her mother’s death; *”Maybe mother died from not being able to stand her own ugliness”*; Fumiko could not bring herself to love Kikuji for she felt the burden of acquiring the touch that once belonged to her mother. Even the smashing of the Shino did not mitigate Fumiko’s grief of her mother’s ignominy.

Conversely, the “death” of the Shino in some way freed Kikuji from the paralytic curse induced by Mrs. Ota’s bond to him. Now, he sensed freedom and for the first time saw Fumiko in a pristine cleanness detached from the all the repulsiveness that once followed her existence. Fumiko was then an enlightened soul achieving the primitivism of the tea ceremony.

“He could think of no one with whom to compare her. She had become absolute, beyond comparison. She had become decision and fate."

Leaving traces of the *mono no aware* concept(Beauty and Sadness), Kawabata puts forth the idea of 'perishability' being the essence of nature. The indigo morning glory that hung on the gourd in Kikuji’s cottage, in its short life span bestowed flavor in the morning tea fading in the watery oblivion.Chikako’s greed for the antique tea bowls and Kikuji’s guilt over Mrs.Ota’s suicide and his intriguing affinity to the lipstick stained Shino creates a nauseating sense of filth; contradicting the simplistic spirit of the tea ceremony that Kawabata speaks so fondly; gradually disappearing in human greed. The aesthetic transience of beauty that envelops the *wabi-sabi* concept of accepted transience and imperfection is vivid through the quixotic words of this text and the flawed existence of its people.

“Does pain go away and leave no trace, then?’‘You sometimes even feel sentimental for it.”

Personally, the picture of thousand cranes is synonymous with Sadako Sasaki, a book that I had read years ago. Sadako, a victim of the Hiroshima bombing, prepared thousand origami cranes as a prayer for her recovery from leukemia. Legend has it that Sadako could not finish the said number of paper cranes; however, her brother Masahiro Sadako asserts that she indeed completed the 1000 paper cranes and it was during her second origami cycle that her youthful life was cut short. In the Japanese culture the crane stand for longevity and good fortune. The tradition of folding 1000 cranes is done when someone has a wish for better health, peace and happiness. Sardonically, the kerchief of patterned crane that the Inamura girl held represented the tragedy of missed chances and missed chances of luck and hope that eluded Kikuji’s fated destiny. The ‘bird of happiness’ after all did not nest in Kikuji’s life .

In his Nobel Prize speech Kawabata commented:-

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

against the vulgarity into which the tea ceremony has fallen.

As the fragrant tea emits transitory life into the tinted ceramics, Kawabata brilliantly bring beauty in the dynamism of nothingness exposing the conundrum veiled within the peaceful periphery of mortality.

B0nnie says

> *The memory of that birthmark on Chikako’s breast was concrete as a toad.*

The sins of the fathers is an old theme, found in the Bible, Euripides, Shakespeare, and countless other works. It's used here too in this slim book of Kawabata's but this is probably the only time it is acted out using bits of pottery, cloth and tea. True, the characters aren't exactly holding these items and making them talk. There's a sparse background on which they have plenty of room to act on the imagination. Kawabata is famous for leaving a lot of blank space. From his Nobel lecture.

> Here we have the emptiness, the nothingness, of the Orient. My own works have been described as works of emptiness, but it is not to be taken for the nihilism of the West. The spiritual foundation would seem to be quite different.

Senbazuru - or one thousand cranes - is the Japanese tradition of folding 1,000 origami cranes in order to have a wish granted. That idea is not addressed directly in this story. Rather, it's the Japanese tea ceremony (chanoyu), and its place in forming the Japanese mind. The setting is just a few years after WWII. Western culture is being embraced, leading to loss of respect for the ceremony. Kawabata sees its degradation as a symbol of the loss of traditional values. Also from his Nobel lecture,

> I may say in passing, that to see my novel Thousand Cranes as an evocation of the formal and spiritual beauty of the tea ceremony is a misreading. It is a negative work, and expression of doubt about and warning against the vulgarity into which the tea ceremony has fallen.

Thousand Cranes has no origami magic, but instead a kerchief with the thousand crane pattern which was once carried by a young woman named Yukiko. That kerchief is important - we are told Yukiko is beautiful, but the kerchief is the only actual description we get of her. This novel is full of such associated images. Understanding them feels a little bit like learning another language, with the symbolism being a sort of grammar. It's well worth the effort.

Paul says

2.5 stars
My first venture into anything by Kawabata; this novella centres on the tea ceremony. Kikuji has lost his father and mother; he is a young man and there is the question of his father's two mistresses and the possibility of whether he ought to marry. There is a great deal of consideration, in an oblique way, of the importance of inheritance and the continuation of tradition. The novel is set in the 1950s in a time of great change in Japan. The prose is precise and describes well the sense of decay and degeneration, especially in relation to Kikuji's garden and tea house. Subtlety and intricacy are two of the words that the reviews seem to throw up regularly. It is a novel about ideas and people rather than a linear plot; actually it could also be said that it is a novel about Kikuji's love life!
Loneliness and disorientation are themes, but it is impossible to avoid contempt Kikuji has for older women in particular; neither Mrs Ota nor Chikako ae portrayed positively. There is an extended description of a birthmark in the shape of a mole that Chikako has on her breast; this is early in the book and is designed to ensure the reader has it in mind whenever Chikako is present. I get a sense of women being demeaned and worshipped; the descriptions of the two younger women are in sharp contrast to the older women. Take note of what Kikuji thinks of himself when he has had a sexual encounter with Mrs Ota, "the conqueror whose feet were being washed by the slave." Quite.
Whilst I can appreciate the intricacies of the tea ceremony, the discussions about pottery and the wonderful prose, even the analysis of a changing society. I also like the lack of ending, Kawabata didn't like writing endings. All these are strong themes, but just as strong are the motifs relating to the women, especially Chikako and her birthmark, which seems to be a symbol of malevolence and Chikako's character seems to be linked to it. But the issue is much more visceral;
"Not that. No, the trouble would be having the child look at the birthmark while it was nursing. I hadn't seen quite so far myself, but a person who actually has a birthmark thinks of these things. From the day it was born it would drink there; and from the day it began to see, it would see that ugly mark on its mother's breast. Its first impression of the world, its first impression of its mother, would be that ugly birthmark, and there the impression would be, through the child's whole life."
And
"It was not just the fear of having a brother or sister born away from home, a stranger to him. It was rather fear of that brother or sister in particular. Kikuji was obsessed with the idea that a child who sucked at that breast, with its birthmark and its hair, must be a monster."
There is a link here that I almost missed; the pottery of the tea ceremony must be flawless and beautiful; lesser pieces and those that are flawed degrade the ceremony. Kawabata's descriptions of the younger women's flawless necks reminded me of some of his descriptions of the tea ceremony pottery. Too much objectification for me I'm afraid.

Jr Bacdayan says

There used to be a time when the beauty of a single flower was enough to give a man pleasure, a time when a lone star in the dark expanse of the night gave delight to a wanderer gazing up above, a time when the exquisite beauty of a piece of pottery was enough to evoke the feeling of longing, when the graceful movements of a woman pouring tea stirred the heart. Those times have passed. Appreciation for the elegance found in the simple is now dulled by the seduction of the exciting, the novel, and the vulgar. It wasn't as if it instantaneously disappeared, it shattered piece by piece, like shards of tea vessel, one by one plucked by the

invisible hands of time until no trace of it remained.

In his 1968 Nobel lecture Kawabata expressed regret:
"A tea ceremony is a coming together in feeling, a meeting of good comrades in a good season. That spirit, that feeling for one's comrades in the snow, the moonlight, under the blossoms, is also basic to the tea ceremony. I may say in passing, that to see my novel Thousand Cranes as an evocation of the formal and spiritual beauty of the tea ceremony is a misreading. It is a negative work, and expression of doubt about and warning against the vulgarity into which the tea ceremony has fallen."

Kawabata believed that the tea ceremony has regressed into a game of deceit, of cat-and-mouse that he highlights with his use of Chikako as a character. He creates a cunning and manipulative woman who makes use of the tea ceremony to influence people to her advantages and thus depicts the soiled mud into which the grand tradition has fallen. Kikuji, a bachelor, is interesting as a character because he rejects the inherited culture of tea ceremony yet he is drawn to it because of Mrs. Ota and Fumiko. At first it was the mother, his bridge to the past, that draws him back to appreciate the traditions of long ago, but when he lost her he found traces of her in the daughter. To him Fumiko represented the good in the tea ceremony, an ode to the traditions of the past, evoking her mother, evoking the ancient practice that highlights the reticence, the humbleness, the peace, and grace of the Japanese people. Thus even though the contemporary beauty of Yukiko appealed to him, Kikuji was still drawn to Fumiko like a waft of floral fragrance lingering under his breath. However the glare of the present-day was too much for the faint Yukiko and broke the wistful dream. In the end Kikuji's expression saying Fumiko has no reason to die is the voice of Kawabata muttering in regret that the noble traditions of the fading tea ceremony should not disappear.

At the surface Thousand Cranes is a tragic novel of love and longing but at the same time it is a sentimental look and a disdainful scowl at different pasts of the tea ritual. Its lyrical prose enchants the reader into a peaceful lull, its symbolisms whisper of the dark and light and the blur we often find ourselves in. An enchanting book through and through, one that is bound to stay with me in the depths of my dreams.

Maybe in my dreams a mournful voice expressing grief will reach my consciousness because the proud traditions of the past have now become merely decorative, like a thousand cranes in a kerchief, wanting to soar, but forever stuck in portrait.

Issa Deerbany says

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Tfitoby says

Thousand Cranes by Yasunari Kawabata

My rating: 4 of 5 stars

Yasunari Kawabata was the first Japanese author to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1968 "for his narrative mastery, which with great sensibility expresses the essence of the Japanese mind." In awarding the prize, the Nobel Committee cited three of his novels, Snow Country, The Old Capital and this novel, Thousand Cranes. In 1972 he joined the list of celebrated Japanese authors (including Akutagawa, Dazai and Mishima) to have comitted suicide when he apparently gassed himself.

A beautiful and deceptively simple piece of Japanese Literature

Blurb: Set in a post World War II Japan, the protagonist, Kikuji, has been orphaned by the death of his mother and father. The novel is divided into five episodes: "Thousand Cranes", "A Grove in the Evening Sun", "Figured Shino", "Her Mother's Lipstick" and "Double Star" and follows several relationships via the interactions of the traditional tea ceremony.

Thoughts: The weight of tradition and the powerful influence of family life lie at the heart of this tale of ill-fated love. Kikuji reconnects with his dead father's mistress at a tea ceremony only to find his life becoming intwined with all four of the women present, in a series of meetings with these women Kawabata uses the intricacies of the tea ceremony to weave "a tale of desire, regret, and sensual nostalgia, every gesture has a meaning, and even the most fleeting touch or casual utterance has the power to illuminate entire lives, sometimes in the same moment that it destroys them."

I particularly enjoyed the comparison between the ghosts of Kikuji's nameless parents and the 300 year old tea bowls; the fact that these items can survive that long despite life being so fleeting serves as a fine metaphor whilst at the same time confirming the weight of tradition on the protagonist. Kawabata was indeed a talented poet.

> *"Now, even more than the evening before, he could think of no one with whom to compare her. She had become absolute, beyond comparison. She had become decision and fate."*

Thousand Cranes is filled with individual passages of beautiful imagery yet taken in its entirety achieving a real sense of melancholy, with his calm style and his short sentences Kawabata has the ability get into your mind and, I feel certain, will leave you thinking about his work for days after.

It wasn't until the conclusion that I realised the potentially heavy influence on the work of Haruki Murakami but then this approach towards lost love may just be typical of Japanese culture, perhaps I should read more Edward G. Seidensticker as an education?

There's no need to write more on the subject, it's a tiny yet powerful novel and to go in to too much detail

will spoil it for you. Go now, enjoy Kawabata.

Further viewing suggestions

Tony Takitani Sound of the Mountain Tokyo Twilight

Additional reading

Snow Country & Tokyo From Edo to Showa 1867 - 1989

Originally posted at blahblahblahgay

N. says

Thousand Cranes offers a compelling study on the interplay of *tatemae* (the public face that one puts on for propriety's sake) and *honne* (one's true feelings and desires), as well as on the present's constant struggle against the constraints of the past. The novel is very much about the quiet tempests raging underneath the seemingly peaceful and polite surface of a propriety-obsessed society.

The intricacies of the characters' relationships are presented with the grace and extreme subtlety of traditional tea ceremony, which the novel takes as its theme. There are also subtle splashes of humor here and there, which I hadn't seen much of in the other Kawabata I've read (namely, Snow Country). This, however, only underscores the claustrophobic sense of gloom that lies in the novel's quiet beauty.

Particularly intriguing was Chikako Kurimoto (for all intents and purposes, the book's antagonist), whose brazenness is unmatched by any character in any other modernist Japanese text that I've read.

Parastoo Ashtian says

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Gearóid says

What a curious and unusual book!
It is a very short read and there is a real sense
of calm and peace reading it.

It is really beautifully and simply written.
But even though it is very calming and nice to read it
is jam packed with symbolism and some really complex emotive
stuff.
I can't even begin to understand it all but I would gladly
read it again and again and each time I think I would understand
the symbolism and complexity of these characters relationships more.

It really is very captivating and unusual.

Ian "Marvin" Graye says

Traditional Values

"Thousand Cranes" is about the continuity of tradition and the conformity by individuals with traditional values.

At the heart of the novel is the Japanese Tea Ceremony. While tea has been drunk in Japan since the ninth century, it only became a part of a formal ceremony with religious significance around the 12th century.

An elaborate set of equipment is used in the Tea Ceremony. Often the equipment, such as drinking bowls, is artisan-made and is kept in a family for periods as long as four hundred years.

These drinking bowls are treated like art works and have great sentimental and economic value.

Empty Vessels

By participating in a Tea Ceremony, a person honours and perpetuates not only the traditional Way of Tea, but their own family tradition.

The tea bowls are important vessels in the ceremony. Alone, they are empty, but must be filled with tea and hot water.

In the same way, people are empty vessels until they are realised and shaped by the right traditions and influences in accordance with the precepts of Zen Buddhism.

Remove the tradition and ceremony, and the process of personal growth and socialization stalls.

Born under a Bad Sign

Kawabata uses the Tea Ceremony as a symbol of the tradition and legacy of a family, only the portrait he paints is of a family that has lost its way, partly due to the premature death of both of the protagonists' parents.

The Tea Ceremony for Kikuji's family is conducted by Chikako, a woman who was once his father's mistress, and ended up having a role in his household.

In the only aspect of the novel I didn't like, Chikako has a birth mark across her chest. This is regarded as a bad sign. It denies her the possibility of a husband, and after joining the household as a servant, she becomes quite "sexless".

Her birthmark heralds ill, when she effectively takes control of the family's future via her control of the Tea Ceremony. She attempts to use the formalities of the Ceremony to find a suitable wife for Kikuji.

Kikuiji, on the other hand, has other plans. He isn't necessarily looking for a wife yet. He seems to be much more independent than most Japanese. Like his father, he is prone to be tempted by mistresses, and he is unable to make a prompt choice between the rival brides Chikako has in mind for him.

Inherent Vice

Although Kikuji and Chikako are pitted against each other in the novel, they are both part of the same problem: the breakdown of tradition and the social expectation that we will all conform to the same standards.

Kikuji rebels against tradition in pursuit of his own desire and satisfaction. Marriage and family are secondary to him.

In contrast, marriage, family and the Tea Ceremony are important to Chikako, but only as a means of perpetuating her own role in life. She embraces the Tea Ceremony selfishly and purposively as a vehicle.

Thus, in this family, two important vessels for perpetuating tradition, the family and the Tea Ceremony, have flaws in the glass.

Chikako represents an inherent vice, a threat to the authenticity of the Ceremony.

Kikuji, on the other hand, represents the inherited vice of libertinism that possessed his father.

Vice-Like Grip

Kawabata paints this portrait with such grace and economy, yet like the early stages of a painting, it took me a while to see it taking shape.

For almost half of the novel, it just didn't grab me. When it did, it took hold of me with a vice-like grip and wouldn't let me go. Then when it ended, it ended too soon. I could not see where Kikuji was headed, but nor could he. This is the beauty of Kawabata.

VERSE:
Her Mother's Lipstick
[In the Words of Kawabata and Shakespeare]

In her hand, her mother's tea bowl.

The white glaze hinted of red.
The colour of faded lipstick,
The colour of a wilted red rose,
The colour of old, dry blood,
The colour of love’s labours lost,
The colour of families long gone
And of families yet to come.

OTHER KAWABATA REVIEWS:

I read "Thousand Cranes" straight after reading and reviewing "Snow Country":

https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...

Dolors says

In my country, there is a generalized tendency to glorify the heritage left to us by our ancestors. With the loss of God, children are regarded as the bearers of eternal life that infuse meaning into our perishable existence. But what about the sins of the parents? Are they also bequeathed to their children in order to be atoned for? Kawabata explores the ongoing dichotomy of love versus duty to our progenitors through the prism of the Japanese ancient traditions, mining the deceptively simple story with recurrent imagery that creates a rhythmical pattern reminiscent of minimalistic poetry. A girl who brings the faint perfume of morning glories and whose pink kerchief displays a thousand-crane pattern, the virulent storm and cleansing rains that wash out the dirtiness of betrayal and Machiavellian machinations, the sun setting on the grove of the *Hommonji Temple* and the thousand cranes flying from the piece fabric as if escaping from unavoidable calamity. Bad omen or the full acceptance of the transcience and imperfection of beauty?

In Kamakura, a woman called Chikako hides a horrendous birthmark as large as the palm of her hand that covers her left breast. Haunted by a shameful past, she gets hold of some precious objects used in the Tea Ceremony that are endowed with the power to transfer the burden of eroticism from generation to generation. Thus, tea bowls, water jars and flower vases glint with the ghost of Kikuji’s deceased father, an expert of such ritual and a man whose extramarital affairs marked the lives of two women with contrasting personalities that conjure up the eternal dichotomies in *The Tao Te Ching*. Chikako is as manipulative as she is resentful, Mrs. Ota, as fragile as guilt-ridden, and Kikuji, used as a surrogate for his father, will find himself dragged away against his will by the currents of an obsessive love triangle that will end in tragedy.

The Tea Ceremony acquires symbolic transcendence and acts like a connecting point between life and death, memories and presages, corruption and purity, nature and aesthetics. The storyline flows in a neverending continuum where time is suspended and the reader floats along Kikuji’s preordained destiny. Kawabata’s novels have no end and no begining precisely because they could be over in every chapter. Only the insinuation of a gradually increased intensity electrified by a melancholic undertone is noticeable, but no preconceived plan or definite purpose is made explicit. And so the dramatic explosion is deferred indefinitely and only the lingering voices of characters are left after the last page is turned, like the fluttering image that a haiku poem leaves on the reader’s mind.

A novella that explores the sensuality of nostalgia, the clashing forces of remorse and desire condensed in a wishful tale where every gesture has a meaning, and even the slightest touch or breath has the power to illuminate entire lives, sometimes right at the instant they are about to be destroyed, but never fallen into oblivion. The thousand cranes might have taken flight, but the feeling of their soft plumage brushing against velvety skin will keep us warm even in the coldest night.

***A thousand cranes for peace**. Peace Memorial, Hiroshima.*

Brina says

A Thousand Cranes is a novella by Japanese Nobel Prize winner Yasunari Kawabata. Unfortunately the book was not my taste, but I did glean much from this short book that many consider a gem. The book follows Kikuji Mitani as he copes with the deaths of his parents. He is left in the care of his meddlesome housekeeper who attempts to arrange his marriage, even though Kikuji is not interested in marriage at this point in his life. Each meeting with a perspective bride occurs at a traditional tea ceremony. The imagery of these traditions evoked thousands of years of Japanese history and was actually quite moving, especially the scarf one young woman wore which depicted a thousand fluttering cranes. I took these cranes in motion to symbolize this novella, one in which ancient and modern Japanese culture were at a crossroads.

Each of the four women in this novella were depicted sexually and whether or not Kikuji could gain from a relationship with any of them. I found this to be demeaning, and, as a result, I was unable to empathize with the main protagonist or mesh with any of the flow of this book. Especially revolting to me was the open treatment in which Kikuji and his father discussed a hideous birthmark on their housekeeper's breast, as though this diminished her character. Even if she was of a high moral fabric, which I found to be revolting in its own right, the thought that men would think low of her due to a physical defect was depressing to me, especially as I seek to find quality books written by female authors from around the globe. That a male author would only depict women in a sexual manner was alarming to me, given that this book is modern and women's role in society has shifted to one in which they have more roles than that of mother and housewife.

From this novella I can see where Kawabata's writing would garner him Nobel consideration. This particular story did not move me and was frustrating given that a man only viewed women as sexual objects, and even still, the ending did not fit, at least to me, with the rest of the story. I did learn about the Japanese tea ceremony tradition and how even clothing and dishes were supposed to associate with the four season. I had selected this book think it was the modern story about the one thousand paper cranes and, ultimately, I was much disappointed. I hope that if I ever decided to read Kawabata again that I will enjoy an uplifting experience.

2.5 stars

Luís C. says

In this novel we follow the destiny of Kikuji Mitani, a well-off thirty-year-old whose parents died today. He does not really know what to do with his life, caught up in the wanderings of modernization at the work of

Japanese society and nostalgia for ancient rites.
Kikuji is forever marked by the image of horrific brown spots seen on the chest of Chikako Kurimoto, who was briefly one of the mistresses of his late father, who loved his rival Mrs. Ota more.
Kikuji is attached to the ritual of the tea ceremony, and will regularly meet these two women who knew his father... Chikako is intrusive, without embarrassment, jealous and mean, and will work, as if to avenge his father, to rot in Kikuji's sentimental life in a kind of poisonous friendship. This one will not miss, as formerly his father, to fall under the spell of the sweet Mrs. Ota. But that's not to mention the presence during a tea ceremony, of the very young and pretty Yukiko Inamura, as if coming out of a dream and all haloed by her pink silk silk furoshiki (square of fabric) 'white birds, as well as the very discreet girl of Mrs. Ota, Fumiko, who looks too much like his mother not to generate some emotion at Kikuji... As often in the great classic Japanese novels, Kawabata offers us a very psychological game where the male hero is the toy of women sometimes perverse and evil, sometimes fragile, mysterious, evanescent.
The atmosphere here is heavy, we feel that dramas will arise from a situation from the unhealthy start... Kikuji relives the same emotions with the women who have marked his father, as a kind of fatality, destiny almost hereditary and somewhat vicious.
The pace is slow, the story seems little rich in events, we can find that the author makes mountains of things without much interest to build his dialogues and relationships between his characters... Yet it works, as soon as we do the effort to project oneself into Japanese psychology and traditions... We are particularly struck by the central role of the tea ceremony and the objects attached to it, such as the cups, presented as true works of art, which constantly convey the memories, transmit the feelings from generation to generation, arousing the imagination and emotions of the characters.
Despite a reservation on the end semi-open not neat enough for my taste, I found there a beautiful novel, not boring, as the pleasure of tasting the style of great classical elegance and poetic was powerful. It is a great vehicle to share with us the art and the sensory experience of the tea ceremony, the emotions that animate the characters, and give a strong acuity to the images that strike the imagination of the reader (Chikako's stains , precious objects, dress and accessories of Yukiko...)

A pleasant reading moment to enjoy as a precious green tea from Japan.

RK-ïsme says

What happens when traditions start to fall apart? when a new generation has let the old ways of their parents drop. What was the value in those ways? How can the value be retained when the tradition has been smashed?

The pieces cannot be put back together. When we try, like Nietzsche, to philosophize with a hammer, we may be left with only shards and those shards can leave painful wounds.

There's a love story here but in the new world, the love must remain unrequited. It becomes impossible and is also left in shards.

Such is the message of this gently told, poignant novel. There is a musty beauty about it that has left me wanting more. Luckily, I bought four of Kawabata's novels. This is my first. Thanks to William1.
