



House of the Sleeping Beauties and Other Stories

Yasunari Kawabata, Edward G. Seidensticker (Translator), Yukio Mishima (Introduction)

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Nobel prize-winning author Yasunari Kawabata is noted for his combination of a traditional Japanese aesthetic with modernist, often surreal trends. In these three tales, superbly translated by Edward Seidensticker, erotic fantasy is underlaid with longing and memories of past loves.

In the title story, the protagonist visits a brothel where elderly men spend a chaste but lecherous night with a drugged, unconscious virgin. As he admires the girl's beauty, he recalls his past womanizing, and reflects on the relentless course of old age.

In One Arm, a young girl removes her right arm and gives it to the narrator to take home for the night; a surreal seduction follows as he tries to allay its fears, caresses it, and even replaces his own right arm with it.

The protagonist of Of Birds and Beasts prefers the company of his pet birds and dogs to people, yet for him all living beings are beautiful objects which, though they give him pleasure, he treats with casual cruelty.

Beautiful yet chilling, richly poetic yet subtly disturbing, these stories make compelling reading and reaffirm Kawabata's status as a world-class writer.

House of the Sleeping Beauties and Other Stories Details

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From Reader Review House of the Sleeping Beauties and Other Stories for online ebook

Huda Yahya says

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Algernon says

I have stayed away from Kawabata until now, out of some misguided belief that he is too gloomy, too downbeat, even suicidal. I am glad to be proven wrong, and to add another literary master to my future reading plans. I started with this novella both because it is a teaser / sampler of his style and because the synopsis sounded like a good companion piece to Gabriel Garcia Marquez and **Memories of My Melancholy Whores** .

The thematic is indeed similar: old men searching for the company of young women in bawdy houses, an occasion for reminiscing about past loves and about the coming of the final sleep. I love though how the personality of each writer and their cultural background are reflected in their respective prose. Marquez protagonist is earthy, passionate, even lubric in his eroticism, still bubbling with life at the age of 90. Old Eguchi, as he is described throughout the novella, is 'only' 67, is much more conscious of the approaching finnish line, not obsessed, but definitely preoccupied with thoughts of death. He is also restrained, analytical, introverted. Maybe contemplative is the closest attribute that defines him, a favorite pastime in Japan. Instead of Zen gardens with raked white sand, picturesue stones and bubbling brooks, Old Eguchi meditations are initiated by the proximity of bare naked young virgins, put to sleep for the convenience of old geezers with money to pay for the privilege.

Because the girl would not awaken, the aged guests need not feel the shame of their years. They were quite free to indulge in unlimited dreams and memories of woman. Was that not why they felt no hesitation at paying more than for woman awake?

I asked myself what I would do if I were offered a treat like that, and my instincts tell me I wouldn't go for it. Consensual relationship are still the norm in my book. But I'm not Japanese, and I don't really know if I would feel the same 20 years from now. In the meantime, I extend to Old Eguchi the benefit of doubt before condemning his lecherous ways, and follow his stream of conscience musings about women and love, youth and loneliness.

They were a strange light at the bottom of a deep darkness.

Eguchi is alone now, but as he gazes at, fondles and smells the young bodies beside him, we find out he has had a full life, with wife, grown up children, lovers and even casual sex encounters. He looks at his past with some regrets about 'the ones that got away' but without bitterness. Nostalgia and resignation are the major tonalities of his account, spiced with his own brand of fascination for the carnal aspects of love. Each girl he meets in the little room draped in crimson velvet curtains and bathed in moonlight, is different from the

previous one, uniquely attractive, each triggering a different kind of memory. (view spoiler) The novella becomes in this more of a celebration of beauty and womanhood than a sexploitation piece:

For Eguchi when he came to this house, there was nothing more beautiful than a young face in dreamless sleep. Might it be called the sweetest consolation to be found in this world?

The French say : *Vive la difference!* . Old Eguchi becomes aware than in his long life he has barely begun to understand women, and his regrets issue more from an awareness of the little time he has now left to continue his study:

Woman is infinite, thought the older man, with a touch of sadness.

There is no plot and precious little dialogue. But the prose is exquisite in its studied simplicity and in its elegance. I wish I was more familiar with symbols and metaphors specific to the Japanese culture, because I feel every gust of wind, every crashing of waves on the shore, every fallen petal from a blooming magnolia tree, every hand gesture from a sleeping girl, is a code for an emotion or a literary reference. I get a similar feeling from looking at albums of old Chinese and Japanese woodcut prints and from watching a movie by Yasujiro Ozu. I mentioned him because my favorite flashback scene is between Old Eguchi and his youngest, most dearly loved daughter. In an echo of the **Late Spring** script, the father has to give his young girl in marriage and takes a last trip with her to the temples in Kyoto, where they meditate in silence in front of a four hundred years old flowering tree. Are their thought in tune or at cross-currents? We don't know. The only certainty is the loneliness of the old man left behind:

Although she lived in Tokyo, the daughter seldom came to see them after she was married.

"How are you?"

"How am I? Happy, I suppose."

Despite the shortness of the text, I am left with a lot of emotions to sift through and some moral dilemmas to chew on. Mission accomplished for mr. Kawabata, who will probably see me again strolling through his lonely landscapes of mountain, sea, temple, moonlight. And even if the novella turned out to be morbid after all, I have come out of it with a more hopeful message than I expected:

The aged have death, and the young have love, and death comes once, and love comes over and over again.

Live goes on, with or without us.

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Diogenis Papadopoulos says

Ε?ναι απ? τις λ?γες φορ?ς που ?να "μικρ?" ?ργο (καθ?ς ε?ναι νουβ?λα κ?τω των 100 σελ?δων) μου ?κανε τ?σο "μεγ?λη" εντ?πωση και με κ?ρδισε απ? τις πρ?τες γραμμ?ς του. ?να σκοτειν?, εκκεντρικ?, εσωστρεφ?ς ?ργο που κρ?βει ?ντεχνα τον ερωτισμ? και την λυρικ?τητ? του. Ποτ? ο πνος δεν ?ταν πιο ερωτικ?ς!
?σο για τα ?λλα δ?ο διηγ?ματα, θα μπορο?σαν να ε?ναι σεν?ρια του Ντ?ιβιντ Λ?ντς.

Aminova says

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Ahmad Sharabiani says

Nemureru bijo = House of the Sleeping Beauties, Yasunari Kawabata

House of the Sleeping Beauties is a 1961 novella by the Japanese author Yasunari Kawabata. It is a story

about a lonely man, Old Eguchi, who continuously visits the House of the Sleeping Beauties in hope of something more. The titular house is an establishment where old men pay to sleep besides young girls that had been narcotized and happen to be naked, the sleeping beauties. The old men are expected to take sleeping pills and share the bed for a whole night with a girl without attempting anything of "bad taste" like "putting a finger inside their mouths". Eguchi is presented with a different girl each time he visits the house because of the short notice of his visits. He discovers that all girls are virgins which somehow compels him to comply with the house rules. Each girl is different and the descriptions of his actions are mixed with the dreams that he has sleeping besides the girls.

Rinda Elwakil says

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16-9-2014

[P] says

Recently, I have found myself daydreaming about my past partners, specifically the most intimate moments; not for masturbatory purposes, nor because I long to go back and be with those girls, but because I find the openness, the opportunity that was afforded me in those moments, extraordinary. That someone would let me, would want me to caress their bare skin, or kiss their thigh, still stuns me. Then it occurs to me, while wandering through these pointless daydreams, that someday the skin I once caressed will be shrivelled and sagging and old, and I am forced to acknowledge to myself that my own will be too, and that the desire to plant those types of kisses will seem ridiculous, if it even exists within me at all; and that likewise, the desire to be kissed by me will exist in fewer and fewer women.

In House of the Sleeping Beauties Japanese Nobel laureate Yasunari Kawabata explores many of these same

feelings, focussing on memory, death, old age, eroticism, innocence etc. Eguchi, a sixty-seven year old man, arrives at a house, that is something like a brothel, where one can pay so as to be allowed to sleep beside a young woman. And by sleep we mean sleep. The girls have been put under before you enter the room, and will not wake no matter what you do. Yet visitors must not engage in any ‘funny stuff,’ such as putting a finger in a girl’s mouth. It is only by behaving yourself that you will become a trusted customer. One of these trusted customers is Kega, who introduced Eguchi to the place, and who he describes as being so old that he is ‘no longer a man.’ It is not made explicit in the text but it is clear that what he means by this, at least in part, is that he can no longer have sex, and so he is of course no threat to the girls in the house, he is no threat to any woman anywhere.

“A poetess who had died young of cancer had said in one of her poems that for her, on sleepless nights, ‘the night offers toads and black dogs and corpses of the drowned.’”

Eguchi, although advanced in years, is not quite in the same situation; he is shocked by how beautiful the first girl is, and that shock, you could say, is the stirring of desire, a sign of life, of vitality. Moreover, he wants to violently rouse her, indicating that he isn’t ready yet to give up on life, to settle for a living toy, and get his kicks only in his mind. As is often the case with Kawabata’s work, the natural world could be said to further illuminate the author’s themes and mirror the main character’s emotional and mental state. Once inside the room Eguchi notes that the wind is bringing the sound of approaching winter, and winter is of course the final season of the year, the one that we would most associate with death, with barrenness, with unhappiness. The old man also hears the sound of crashing waves, which, again, suggests life and vitality, and even rage.

Tellingly, Kega confesses to Eguchi that it is only when sleeping beside one of the girls that he feels alive, which hints at the special allure of the house. The girls are not simply there to provide a passive kind of companionship. That could be got in any number of ways. The girls act as a reminder, they ferry the old men back to a time when they were in reality going to bed beside young women or at least when there was the possibility of doing so; they make the men feel young again, helping them to forget that they are eyeballing death...because who can think about the end when there is a beautiful, naked young woman in bed with you? Bearing in mind the emotional and physical state of these men, it is also important that the girls themselves are non-threatening; if they are not awake they cannot judge, even silently, and there can be no awkward conversation, no expectations, and no obvious, embarrassing generational gap. It is only when they are asleep that the fantasy can be maintained.

[Baron Raimond von Stillfried - Sleeping Japanese Woman 1870]

Had Eguchi been a Kega, had his experience of the house been as entirely positive, the story would not be as interesting as it is. Certainly in the beginning, far from finding peace in the situation, he feels disquieted by it, as indicated by the poem he recites to himself, which references drowned corpses. Moreover, one of the women is referred to as a ‘phantom.’ This could be understood as a reference to her white, unblemished skin, but the real significance of this comparison is in the girls being, like the men themselves, somewhere between life and death. Sleep, which is often called the cousin of death, is a strange intermediary stage between the two states of being, having much in common with both. The sleeping beauties are, in a way, like corporeal, touchable memories or fantasies; they are malleable, supple; they can be manipulated into being anything [imaginatively, not literally]. Sex dolls work in much the same way, in that anything can be projected onto them.

Yet, as with all great literature, it is possible to see more in the story than the specific situation Kawabata describes. Making my way through it for the second time I was put in mind of Jeffrey Dahmer, who claimed that he zombified his victims so that they wouldn't run away or refuse him. One could, therefore, interpret House of the Sleeping Beauties as a comment on human neediness, a neediness that isn't limited to the elderly. Also, more could be made of what I was discussing above, in relation to sex dolls. It is becoming increasingly the case that men [and women too perhaps] don't want and cannot handle real people; what they want is something perfect, something visually clean and pure, something always obliging. You need only look at the popularity of the dead-eyed, plastic princesses of porn; these women always look great, are never unavailable, and, crucially, do not ask anything from you. In contrast, reality is icky, it is disappointing; real people disagree with you sometimes, they have their own desires and demands.

♥

House of the Sleeping Beauties usually comes packaged with two other stories, One Arm and Of Birds and Beasts, which are much shorter. Both are fine, but I did not feel compelled to write about either of them.

οοο..ο..ο~ο.._.· ?????? Ροζουλ? Εωσφ?ρος ·_.·ο~ο..:° .:°°° ★:..~..★ ?????? ????????

?????? Ταμετο?ρο Αμ says

Αντ? το βιβλ?ο εξωρα?ζει το θ?νατο και προσπαθε? απεγνωσμ?να να ανακαλ?ψει την ταιριαστ? συν?παρξη ανθρ?που-φ?σης-και υπαρξιακο? χ?ους, στα ?ρια ψυχολογικ?ν διαταραχ?ν και ασθενει?ν.

Ε?ναι βαρ? και κλειστοφοβικ?. Νοσταλγικ? σε σημε?ο μελαγχολ?ας και θλ?ψης. Διαπραγματε?εται θ?ματα μοναξι?ς, γηρατει?ν, απ?γνωσης, ενοχ?ς, ρωτα και θαν?του.

Στην πρ?τη ιστορ?α μπα?νουμε σε ?να κενοτ?φιο που θεωρε?ται ξεχωριστ?ς ο?κος ανοχ?ς. Εκε? πηγα?νουν κατ?πιν ραντεβο? και υποσχ?σεις πλ?ρους εχεμ?θειας υπερ?λικοι ?νδρες που ?χουν τη χαρ? του νεκρ?φιλου. Νεκρ? η ανδρικ? τους φ?ση προσπαθε? να ανθ?σει π?νω σε ναρκωμ?να κοριτσ?στικα κορμι?.

?ταν ο θ?νατος που ?ρχεται συναντ? τον ?πνο προσπαθο?ν να πα?ξουν αισθησιακ? παραληρ?ματα. Η νεκρ? φ?ση με την ναρκωμ?νη ομορφι?. Απο?λεσμα αρρωστημ?νο με ?ρωμα βο?ρκου σαν τα μ?τια των γερασμ?νων ανδρ?ν.

Στη δε?τερη ιστορ?α προσπαθο?με μ?ταια θα ?λεγα να κατανο?σουμε την ακαταν?ητη αλληγορικ? και στοχαστικ? αισθητικ? του φετιχιστ?. Μπορε? και του ψυχασθεν?.

?σως και του μοναχικο? ?νδρα που παραληρε? βγ?ζοντας απεραντη θλ?ψη, λυρικ?τητα και παρ?νοια.

Το ακαταλ?γιστο σ?γουρα διαπν?ει τον ?ρωα μας που προσπαθε? να καλ?ψει τη μοναξι? του ?χοντας ως σ?ντροφο ?να γυναικε?ο μπρ?τσο.

Αντ?. Ναι. ?να μπρ?τσο που το ?βγαλε και του το ?δωσε μια κοπ?λα για να την ?χει μαζ? του.

?σως ?ταν αγαπ?ς πολ? να μη χρει?ζεσαι ολα τα μ?λη του σ?ματος σου για να λειτουργ?σεις σωστ?. Κι αφο? τα δυο χ?ρια περισσε?ουν, δ?νεις το ?να στον καλ? σου να του κρατ?ει παρ?α. Το χ?ρι χα?δε?ει. Αγκαλι?ζει. Ακουμπ?ει. Σφ?γγει. Ζεστα?νει μ?σα στη χο?φτα του ακ?μη και κρ?ες ψυχ?ς.

Τρυφερ? παρανο?κ? θλ?ψη. Σκοτειν? ατμ?σφαιρα. Αποπνικτικ? απο?λεσμα.
(?λα πα?ζουν στο μυαλ? του ?ρωα μας που εξομοι?νει διαταραχ? και ψυχασθενικ? ρεαλισμ?).

Και στην τρ?τη ιστορ?α μας γηρατει? και μοναξι? ε?ναι οι πρωταγωνιστ?ς. Ο ?ρωας μας, ?νας ηλικιωμ?νος ?νδρας απομονωμ?νος και λ?τρης των ζ?ων και των πουλ?ν.

?χει στην κατοχ? του δεκ?δες ζ?α που φροντ?ζει και αγαπ? ως υποκατ?στατο της γυναικε?ας παρουσ?ας.

Τα ζω?κια και τα πουλι? του δ?νουν απεραντη χαρ?, αφοσ?ωση και συντροφi?.

Μ?σα από τη δικ? τους ζω? μα και το θ?νατο τους λυτρ?νει το δικ? του πεπρωμ?νο, εξοικει?νεται με το θ?νατο και ξαναζε? τις αναμν?σεις των περασμ?νων. Τα ?νειρα του τα χαμ?να. Τις χαρ?ς που δεν πολλαπλασ?ασε.

Καλ? αν?γνωση!
Πολλο?ς ασπασμο?ς.

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A very beautiful book, forwarded by Gabriel Marquez. It digs deep into the human soul and asks bold questions about desires that are considered unethical. The beauty about Kawabata is that he doesn't refrain from giving unconvincing answers, as they, sometimes, are the best answers. He used sex in a very delicate and decent way; which I think is missed a lot in today's literature. I'm not sure how I'll think when I am in my late sixties, but I will definitely use this book to guide my soul then.

Thank you Kawahata

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Maria Thomarey says

Το δι?βασα πολλ? χρ?νια πριν . Η α?σθηση που μου ?φησε κρατ?ει ακ?μα ?μως .

Praj says

“The aged have death and the young have love, and death comes once, and love comes over and over again”.

To love is a game of a brave heart. To die; a desire of a sullen heart; a definite verb for the inevitable. Akin to the broken heart sitting by the sea, pleading the waves to carry it like a child; the loneliness of old age seeks the black sleet of death. The "*ugliness of old age*" that whispered in 'The Sound of the Mountain', roars in this book like the stormy waves Eguchi hears as he nestles in supple breasts of youth. A virginal body of a maiden in the pristine state as the day she was born, slept peacefully as it teased Eguchi's aged physicality. Day after day, the smell of the untainted youth in all its unfazed beauty, the warmth and the tenderness of an unpolluted woman brought a surge of sorrow in Eguchi's empty existence. The symbolic virginal magnificence encompasses both the freedom of an unadulterated youth and the possibility of its violation.

Had he not come to this house seeking the ultimate in the ugliness of old age..... ”

Why did it seem like Eguchi's existence was somehow vacant? He had lived a full life, as living would be defined. Like Shingo (Sound of the Mountain), he was a father, husband and a grandfather and had his share of affairs, yet when he slept besides the naked 'sleeping beauties' hearing the ocean, a beauty whom he could not violate, Eguchi was claustrophobic by the chaos of his own emotions. What makes a man to lose the very being of his existence for a woman? Is a penile erection the only viable proof for a man's existence? In the fight between the old and the young, at which point does a man find himself standing on the edge of humanity and inhumanity? Does the impotency of old age find an illusionary sanctuary in the potency of the youth?

True to his beliefs in Zen Philosophy, Kawabata puts the idea of 'Shunyata' (Zero); the emptiness that becomes necessary for a man to achieve freedom from emotional corruptibility. But, the author being known for his brilliance in the sinister caricatures of the deepest human sentimentalities uses his protagonists' (Eguchi, Kikuji, Gimpei. etc...) minds as the prime internal sensitive organ by showing the desperation of achieving the 'purity of life' through haunting ideas of eroticisms and death. The menacing sorrow of loneliness suffered by all the actors in this novel comes from the emptiness of being unable to achieve the 'unattainable'. To sleep like a child, serene, devoid of monstrous dreams is a novelty to a restless mind. To sleep with no dreams, no guilt, no trepidation; to sleep like the dead. The man who never knew the feeling of a tender, sweet sleep until, the warm, clean blood from a round and plump womanly arm flowed through his veins. However, in that blissful moment, the idea of his filth soiling the wholesomeness of another life form repulsed his existence at that very moment.

“The clean blood of the girl was now, this very moment, flowing through me, but would there not be unpleasantness when the arm was returned to the girl, this dirty male blood flowing through it?” **(One Arm)**

Through morbidness of death festers the thought of contemplative possession of death. In '**Of Birds and the Beasts**', the misanthropic living of the protagonists, again reflect and urge to achieve the unattainable – purity of life in its true form. It seems that the birth of animals brought elation to the protagonists as it was an "untainted life", with no mistakes and then when by putting the young ones with the old ones, the stark differences of life stages, brought certain viciousness to the permutation of events that made seem like a salvation from a foreseeable ugliness of life.

“Husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, the bonds were not easily cut even with the most unsatisfactory people”..... “On the other hand a certain sad purity in making playthings of lives and the habits of animals”....”

The commotion that arises from the man's desperate need to breed and kill animals once again delineates the lingering theme of passivity of a vacant existence of human conscious that sometimes shatter the fine line between humane and inhumane environments.

What are memories? They are reflections of our past actions, the passivity of existence that metamorphoses into inexhaustible shame. Kawabata emphasizes on this factor of human mind to accentuate the relationship of an individual with the existential world. The reflections of our past, the mistakes of our life, always come running back at the brink of death. And then, how we desperately yearn for that impossible chance of grabbing our youth, even for a briefest moment, to relive a clean existence. An impossible chance to

experience youth shamelessly. What if? The toughest part about life is living it. And, sometimes when I think about the possibilities of being marred by sorrowful loneliness for not having a full existence , I hide amongst the cerulean depths of the pool , avoiding to reach the surface, swimming for hours till I can no longer hear my thoughts. However, I crave to hear Kawabata even after the pages are closed because in his surreal depictions I find warm repose just like Eguchi did in the purity of the beauties.

*Coming, all is clear, no
doubt about it. Going, all is
clear, without a doubt.
What, then, is all?*

---Hosshin, 13th century.

Ema says

I value the books whose plot has managed to stay etched in my mind. Some of the novels I've read are pleasant, but they are soon forgotten. The ones that shape me and teach me are the most valued, of course; but I keep a special place for those that I remember. Kawabata's story is one of those. And incidentally, it talks about memory, among other things. It also speaks about the fear of death and the desire to prolong one's life through the elixir of youth; about regrets and unfulfilled desires wept at the feet of high priestesses; about the wish for peace and reconciliation with one's life.

In a peculiar house, which can't really be called a brothel, beautiful virgins lie in deep slumber, naked, innocent and unconscious. Old men come to lie down beside them, awake, troubled, full of desire. They can't harm the virgins, they are not allowed to wake them. They can only touch their bodies and sleep beside them. Such defenseless bodies and oblivious minds, at the whims and mercy of old men. If you look at the picture this way, the story might make you feel contempt; and yet, it has a beautiful and poetic vein, despite its grain of ugliness.

From ancient times, old men had sought to use the scent given off by girls as an elixir of youth.

Eguchi comes to the house lured by this strange kind of pleasure. On a couple of nights, in the enclosed space of a room, he contemplates the obedient, exposed bodies of the young girls. Deep slumber is reminiscent of death in a way; in their sleep, some of the girls seemed more alive than others. *Life was there, most definitely, in her scent, in her touch, in the way she moved.* Eguchi experiences an array of feelings and memories awaken by the sounds, the smells and the sights. He remembers his youth, his children, the women he had affairs with. He fights with melancholy, with unhappiness, but also with the urge to do harm.

In their hearts, as they lay against the flesh of naked young girls put to sleep, would be more than fear of approaching death and regret for their lost youth. There might also be remorse, and the turmoil so common in the families of the successful. They would have no Buddha before whom to kneel. The naked girl would know nothing, would not open her eyes, if one of the old men were to hold her tight in his arms, shed cold tears, even sob and wail. The old man need feel no shame, no damage to his pride. The regrets and the sadness could flow quite freely. And might not the 'sleeping beauty' herself be a Buddha of sorts? And she was flesh and blood. Her young skin and scent might be forgiveness for the sad old men.

The story impressed me to such an extent that it entered the realm of my dreams. I have one short but weird story to tell, and I write it here because I want to remember it over the years. One night, after reading the story, I woke up with the feeling that somebody was lying awake behind me, watching me in the dark, keeping a hand on my breast. I felt slightly frightened but then I fell asleep again, or maybe I was never awake in the first place. In the morning I woke up confused, because I wasn't sure if what I remembered had been a dream or reality. When I asked my boyfriend about it, he said he had been sound asleep the whole night. Weird. And yet it felt so vivid, like a lucid dream...

The strange thing about all this is that the scene I experienced is also happening in the novel. It felt like I was projected inside the sleeping girl's mind. Like I was perceiving through her skin, through her senses, even though they seemed to be asleep. Maybe they weren't, maybe she could sense what was happening to her. An unconscious yet alert consciousness.

Well, I couldn't write this review without confessing the connection I had with the story.

My review is only for *House of the Sleeping Beauties*. If you read this, then you should also consider *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* and see how Márquez made use of the idea behind Kawabata's story.

Fatema Hassan , bahrain says

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Phoenix2 says

I've got mixed feeling about this book. The first story was okay, with some good messages that the author had to share about the fear of getting old and the way people experience their sexuality. Though, the base of this story was repeated tiringly too much, with the old man visiting the place with the sleeping girls too much for it to keep being interesting. Actually, in the end, the author didn't have anything new to add when the man was recalling old lovers or observing the girls' bodies. Then again, there was the second story. All I can say about it is this : What have I just read??! The whole arm thing was weird and never actually explained. Finally, the third story was nice, with the man and his pets, an easy read after the two others. So, 2 out of 5.

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Mariel says

I read House of the Sleeping Beauties with a knife in back. It freaking betrayed to me too much feelings. And... yeah!

I didn't read in order. The book jacket flap said: "The protagonist of Birds and Beasts prefers the company of his pet birds and dogs to people, yet for him all living beings are beautiful objects which, though they give him pleasure, he treats with casual cruelty." For me! Skip to story #3.

Birds and Beasts

Casual cruelty isn't precisely right. Playing god is more like it. They make him happy in that stop and smell the flowers way. Treasure the moment, seize the day... but only the day. And seizing is definitely right. It was disturbing how he killed those birds in their bath and then took that effort to bring them back, only to run the same murderous bath on another set of birds.

The loneliness, what comfort he gets from the animals or his past mistresses, felt to me like an already dead kinda life with others. I keep coming back to the playing god idea trying to describe it. I'd picture him taking apart anything that matters to see what it looked on the inside. I felt like that reading it.

The suicide with a woman pact is in this story like it was in Kawabata's The Sound of the Mountain. The idea of a woman having to kill herself with a man is really disturbing me. She's not even killing herself this time. He was going to kill her before he backs out. His regard for the dancer's savage beauty (that fades after he's inspected it, taken it apart, too much) almost made me think of making something without doing shit for the whole rest of that life. Revering doesn't do much good... Let's pray!

Damn. The lonely/stop and smell the flowers shit is getting to me (now there's not a knife. It's a thorn in my paw! I'm feeling metaphorical 'cause this is feelings shit).

I was gonna segue into the first story until I realized I didn't mention the dogs. The dogs who eat their dead young... How he had no use for mongrels once he started breeding the dogs for show. And how the mother had the same creators lack of nurture into the life. (I've long time found it interesting that people are the only species that need to take care of their young for so long.) I was reminded of a lot of stuff... Like the story in J.D. Salinger's Nine Stories (the Eskimo one) with the girl who doesn't dispose of the dead chick for weeks. This guy forgets he even kills a puppy, just like the puppies moms. (This is upsetting! I have two puppies, one a baby baby.) So yeah, the keeping of the dead puppy reminded me of that. It's a kind of lack of reality holding onto shit feel...

This is the segway. No way!

House of the Sleeping Beauties

A friend recommended this book to me because I was fascinated by the prostitutes who just sleep beside their clients in Murakami's The Wind-up Bird Chronicle.

(I'm going to TRY to say something about what a story is actually about to make a nice change in my reviewing style.)

Sixty-seven year old man, Eguchi, visits the house of the sleeping beauties where senile old men pay enormous sums of money to sleep beside drugged up young women (some very young). He's not as senile as the men he imagines the other clients to be. He imagines a lot as he lies beside the women (a different one for each visit). The ugly things he has felt and done in his life. What time he may have ahead of him. The women don't know what could be happening and will not wake up. Eguchi is certain they are also virgins. That they are virgins says to him that he men are so sad and beyond even doing anything to the girls. He's also certain that they are prostitutes. I wasn't so sure that they knew what was going on, whatever the proprietress spoke about "experience". There were rules about what they couldn't do: no sex, no seeing the girls awake. To not break the "magic" of the house? The spell was the moment not connected to what came before or after. Well, what came before would be lost youth. Maybe I'm wrong about that last part. Definitely not the past. It's the not being able to hold onto the past or future feeling of being with girls so very young.

There's a forward by Yukio Mishima. He wrote something about Kawabata's fixation on virgins. The feeling I have about this is that it's that what hasn't happened yet moment. Like the no consequences passion moment of crime. Once it's over it really doesn't mean anything anymore. The girls could wake up. If he had sex with them, breaking the rules and thus banned from the house, he would not get his youth back. He wouldn't bring anything back to the other senile old men who had lost anything apart from their sadness. Yukio Mishima also said their virginity was "impossibility of attainment" and that also put death and eroticism forever at the same point. I agree with the timeless part. They are already dead, since they aren't going to do anything...

But there were girls... They weren't dreaming the same dream, were they?

Kawabata is freaking great. There are all of these wonderings going on about everybody. I feel like those old men with my books, trying to get shit back (shit I never had too) and trying to dream same dreams. The lawless loneliness of those dreams...

One Arm This is my metaphorical segue... Arm had a chip on its shoulder!

A girl gives her right arm to the dude in this story. Other women have given themselves to them. He hears their voices. He hears the arm talking to him as he takes it home. The arm urges him to replace his own arm with it, the girl's arm of love. With the new girl arm he sleeps the sweetest dream he had ever had. Upon awaking he is attacked by the most repulsive arm of his own. He has to rip it out and then the girl arm no longer moves or talks. Shit.

I don't like the "giving themselves" idea like women GIVE them whole selves. It's like the other stories, right? The timeless moment. It's not the past or future. The repulsive arm takes it back.

I really wanted to express why Kawabata is amazing in my review of The Sound of the Mountain. It's hard because these are translations. The imagery is playing god smell the flowers and the world around you what Yoda says binds us FORCE. It's also translated and diluted like there was some priest and we gotta talk to god through him. I'm not gonna be able to read Japanese, though (why couldn't I have been one of those language freaks? English kills me enough). But damn if I'm not sleeping beside all those dreams that are gonna make me think about the past, present, future, what could be for me and other people, some dark thoughts, definitely some playing god, wait maybe I shouldn't be an asshole and assume and not playing god, empathy...

Kawabata is amazing. I wish I could say all of this to anyone who may be reading this. It's easier to see what's missing than to know what you have. This time? It's both. This is a four star rating because it is both

and I'm too sad that I feel it (what?) missing when I'm done. I'm going straight to another Kawabata read.

P.s. This is the most bizarrely lusty book I've ever read and it isn't lust for sex.
