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Book review

Beauty and Sadness

Title & Author:

Beauty and Sadness by Yasunari Kawabata

Introduction

I selected *Beauty and Sadness* because I was drawn to Kawabata's stature as a Nobel Prize-winning novelist, and the title itself sounded poetic and emotionally rich. I anticipated a book that would be beautifully written but infused with melancholy. The novel delivered exactly that—a languid, haunting investigation of love, memory, regret, and revenge, expressed through lyrical prose and muted emotional changes.

Summary

The story revolves around Oki Toshio, an established writer in his middle age, who returns to Kyoto to listen to the New Year's bells and to look up Otoko, a painter and the girl he had an infamous love affair with when she was still a teenager. Their love culminated in heartbreak, with Otoko being mentally traumatized and having lost a child. She now lives in seclusion with her young and passionate partner, Keiko, years after that tumultuous affair.

Oki's visit reawakens old feelings—not only for himself, but also for Otoko and Keiko. While Oki is filled with nostalgia and perhaps guilt, Otoko remains passive and contemplative. However, Keiko becomes the force of revenge. She resents what Oki did to Otoko and decides to seduce Oki's son as a form of psychological retribution.

Throughout the narrative, Kawabata skillfully exposes the inner worlds of these characters. The action proceeds at a glacial pace but is charged with emotional tension as it examines how the past intrudes on the present. The novel concludes quietly, tragically, with echoes of beauty, loss, and the thin line between love and cruelty remaining in the reader's mind.

Analysis & Opinion:

Beauty and Sadness is as much its title as it could possibly be. Kawabata's prose is poetic, refined, and highly contemplative. He creates a world in which emotions are not screamed but spoken softly—much of the time through silence, gesture, and in between words. What was most revealing to me was how little the book depends on plot turns or action, but rather on the gravity of feeling and memory.

The actors are not likable at first glance, yet somehow interesting. Oki, for example, is drenched with nostalgia and idealizes his past misdeeds, never really taking responsibility for the effects of his actions. Otoko is shrouded in mystery with quiet suffering and persistent sorrow. Keiko, as physically lovely and charming as she appears on the surface, had an edge of cruelty to her that made her scenes uncomfortable yet compelling to watch.

One line that really stuck with me was: "The sad part of life was its beauty." It's such a poignant line that gets at the book's paradox—how instances of beauty tend to be so tied up in sorrow. Kawabata also discusses the idea of emotional inheritance: how love and trauma don't exist within a single individual, but trickle out into those around them in strange ways.

The Kyoto environment, with its changing seasons, old temples, and classic ambience, reflects the inner reality of the characters. The city itself seems to be mourning as they do.

Personal Connection :

Reading Beauty and Sadness reminded me of the richness of feelings—how individuals bear their pain privately and how unresolved past emotions can define the present. I found myself empathizing with Otoko, although she never really articulates her truth. Her silence was more compelling than any words.

The book brought me back to reality that love does not always come softly, and beauty has pain. The book made me reflect on the idiom, "Still waters run deep," because even if the characters are tranquil on the surface, their minds are not at peace. A suitable idiom for the book could be "Don't poke a sleeping dog," where Oki tries to go back in the past, and more hurt is opened up than healed.

I could identify with the notion of turning back and questioning the decisions we made, and wondering what we left behind. Keiko's strong desire to save someone she loves, even by harmful means, also made me consider how easily love can turn into obsession.

Conclusion :

I would recommend Beauty and Sadness to readers who enjoy literary fiction, emotional depth, and Japanese aesthetics. It's not a fast-paced novel, but one that rewards patience and reflection.

Kawabata's exploration of the fragile boundary between beauty and pain is profound and haunting. The book lingers in your thoughts long after it ends, like the distant sound of temple bells echoing in the winter .

Thank You.