

## *JAPAN THE BEAUTIFUL AND MYSELF*

Yasunari Kawabata, translated by Edward G. Seidensticker, 1968

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The single flower contains more brightness than a hundred flowers. The great sixteenth-century master of the tea ceremony and flower arranging, Rikyū, taught that it was wrong to use fully opened flowers. Even in the tea ceremony today the general practice is to have in the alcove of the tea room but a single flower, and that a flower in bud. In winter a special flower of winter, let us say a camellia, bearing some such name as White Jewel or Wabisuke, which might be translated literally as “Help-mate in Solitude,” is chosen, a camellia remarkable among camellias for its whiteness and the smallness of its blossoms; and but a single bud is set out in the alcove. White is the cleanest of colors, it contains in itself all the other colors. And there must always be dew on the bud. The bud is moistened with a few drops of water. The most splendid of arrangements for the tea ceremony comes in May, when a peony is put out in a celadon vase; but here again there is a single bud, always with dew upon it. Not only are there drops of water upon the flower, the vase too is frequently moistened.

Among flower vases, the ware that is given the highest rank is old Iga, from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and it commands the highest price. When old Iga has been dampened, its colors and its glow take on a beauty such as to awaken one afresh. Iga was fired at very high temperatures. The straw ash and the smoke from the fuel fell and flowed against the surface, and, as the temperature dropped, became a sort of glaze. Because the colors were not fabricated but were rather the result of nature at work in the kiln, color patterns emerged in such varieties as to be called quirks and freaks of the kiln. The rough, austere, strong surfaces of old Iga take on a voluptuous glow when dampened. It breathes to the rhythm of the dew of the flowers.

The taste of the tea ceremony also asks that the tea bowl be moistened before using, to bring forth its own soft glow.

Ikenobō Sen'ō remarked on another (this too is in his "secret pronouncements") that "the mountains and strands should appear in their own forms." Bringing a new spirit into his school of flower arranging, therefore, he found "flowers" in broken vessels and withered branches, and in them too the enlightenment that comes from flowers. "The ancients arranged flowers and pursued enlightenment." Here we see an

awakening to the heart of the Japanese spirit, under the influence of Zen.

And here too, perhaps, is the heart of a man living in the devastation of long civil wars.

一輪の花は百輪の花よりも花やかさを思はせるのです。開き切った花を活けてはならぬと、利休も教へてゐますが、今日の日本の茶でも、茶室の床にはただ一輪の花、しかもつぼみを生けることが多いのであります。冬ですと、冬の季節の花、たとへば「白玉」とか「侘助」とか名づけられた椿、椿の種類のうちでも花の小さい椿、その白をえらび、ただ一つのつぼみを生けます。色のない白は最も清らかであるとともに、最も多くの色を持ってゐます。そして、そのつぼみには必ず露をふくませます。幾滴かの水で花を濡らしておくのです。五月、牡丹の花を青磁の花瓶に生けるのは茶の花として最も豪華ですが、その牡丹はやはり白のつぼみ一つ、そしてやはり露をふくませます。花に水のしづくを添へるばかりではなく、花生けもあらかじめ水に濡らしておく焼きものが少なくありません。

日本の焼きものの花生けのなかで、最も位が高いとし、また価値も高い、古伊賀（およそ十五、六世紀）は水に濡らして、はじめて目ざめるやうに、美しい生色を放ちます。伊賀は強い火度で焼きますが、その焼きもの（燃料）の藁灰や煙が降りかかって花瓶の体に着いたり流れたりして、火度のさがるにしたがって、それが釉薬のやうになるのです。陶工による人工ではなく、窯のなかの自然のわざですから、窯変と言つてもいいやうな、さまざまな色模様が生まれます。その伊賀焼きの洪くて、粗くて、強い肌が、水気を含むと、艶な照りを見せます。花の露とも呼吸を交はします。茶碗もまた使ふ前から水にしめておいて、潤びを帯びさせるのが、茶のたしなみとされてゐます。池坊専応は「野山水辺をおのづからなる姿」（口伝）を、自分の流派の新しい花の心として、破れた花器、枯れた枝にも「花」があり、そこに花によるさとりのあるとしました。「古人、皆、花を生けて、悟道したるなり。」禅の影響による、日本の美の心の目ざめでもあります。日本の長い内乱の荒廢のなかに生きた人の心でもありませう。