

The Function of Kimono in Nagai Kafū's *Bokutō Kidan*

Material Culture Communication: Nostalgia and Time Consciousness Expressed
through Kimono and Dress

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Synopsis

Nagai Kafū in his novel, Bokutō Kidan, used a number of methods not to merely evoke the past, but to superimpose it onto the present through sounds, smells, and material objects. As the narrator recounts, “even the foulness of the gully, and the sounds of the mosquitoes, stimulated my senses bringing back a shadowy image of a past.” For the narrator of the novel, the present is merely a veneer to be uncovered to reacquire a nostalgic past, as found in such observations as the description of the building in which O-Yuki resided, “from the outside it looked Western by its walls and windows, but inside it was a narrow Japanese house.” The narrator visits the used-book store by the Sanyabori canal, “not because of the old books themselves, but because of the character of the bookseller and the atmosphere of the back-street district outside the licensed quarters” and “from the shape his face, his mannerisms, his use of words, to his way of wearing kimono—to have kept this native shitamachi Tokyo style intact was in my eyes far more precious and nostalgic than any rare old book. O-Yuki charms the narrator, becoming his muse, due to her “old-style” manner of dress and hairstyle: her “hitoe (unlined) kimono with a suso-moyō hem-design that had been hanging on a kimono stand; with her red Benkei-jima datejime tied large in front, balanced by the slightly too big silver string of her tsubushi-shimada chignon, she looked to my eyes somehow like a strumpet of the Meiji era.” Although being seduced by the past is not without its dangers, as the narrator comments, “I was very nearly damned by an used nagajuban,” when O-Yuki changes to a modern hairstyle, the apparition of the past is lost for the narrator, who soon ceases to visit her. In many such instances given in detail below, Nagai Kafū pays particular attention to dress and hairstyle in his evocation of the past in the present.



Fig. 1: First Newspaper Installment of *Bokutō Kidan*, 1937 [Shōwa 12.4.16], illustrated by Kimura Shōhachi

Introduction

Nagai Kafū (1879-1959) wrote *Bokutō Kidan* (A Fantasy Tale from East of the Sumidagawa) in 1936 (Shōwa 11), a dreamlike tale of nostalgia inspired by a prostitute of the red-light district of Tama-no-i (玉の井) located across from the Sumidagawa river. The novel was serialized in the evening editions of the Tokyo and Osaka Asahi Shinbun newspaper from April 16th of 1937 to June 15th of 1937, for a total of 35 installments. Kafū produced a privately printed edition in April of 1937 (published by Uyūdō 鳥有堂), which included photographs of Tama-no-i taken by Kafū himself. The novel was soon republished by Iwanami Shoten in August of 1937.

Both the newspaper serialization and the first edition published by Iwanami Shoten was accompanied with illustrations by Kimura Shōhachi (木村 荘八, 1893-1958), who was known for his lyrical evocations of scenes of old Tokyo. That *Bokutō Kidan* was illustrated by Shōhachi greatly contributed to its popularity. Kafū himself is said to have been highly irritated by the praise of Shōhachi's illustrations that all but overshadowed the reception of his novel.¹ Besides the original newspaper illustrations to the novel, Shōhachi made three paintings with poems added by Kafū himself. In addition to these illustrations, the novel has been put into visual form as a movie three times *Bokutō Kidan* (1960, Tōhō), *Bokutō Kidan* (1912, ATG), and the R-18 rated *Iyashi no yūjo Nureshita no mitsu* 癒しの遊女 濡れ舌の蜜 (2010, Okura Movie Co.,Ltd), and even a NHK BS television special *Nippon no meisaku Bokutō Kidan* (2003). While Kafū has a reputation for eroticism, with a single exception of an unauthorized edition of *Yume no Onna* (夢の女), Kafū's works do not have graphic descriptions of sex.

Bokutō Kidan more closely resembles a long prose poem, than a typical novel (a plot with build-up, climax, and denouement). At first glance, it appears to be written completely in a stream-of-consciousness mode. The novel is narrated by "I" (*watakushi* わたくし), which forms

¹ Preface by Hayakawa Toshiyasu (早川利康) to *Bokutō Kidan Gafū*, Iizuka Shobō, 1979: 3.

the very first word of this novel, who visits a prostitute from the rainy season until the weather chills in the fall. The prostitute lives in the Tama-no-i area of Mukōjima, which is east of the Sumidagawa river. The narrator's excuse for visiting her is to escape the noisy radios heard through the open windows in summer, and to gain background for the novel he is in the process of writing.

Despite its deceptively artless impression, the novel has a sophisticated composition, if the word composition can be used in this sense. Instead of a purely two-dimensional linear narrative, it has three-dimensional layers built of references to the past. The format harks back to late Edo period literature, with poems and the semi-fictional author's voice interrupting the purported narrative in spots, in the manner of Tamenaga Shunsui (1790-1844), a *ninjōbon* (a genre of sentimental fiction) author of the late Edo period. Not only does Kafū quote Shunsui by name in this novel, Kafū also wrote a number of works related to Shunsui.²

But it is not just the references to literature of the past in form and language, nor the excerpts of the novel being written by the narrator, that form the three-dimensional layers of *Bokutō Kidan*; it is primarily the vignettes of the past superimposed on the present through the sounds, smells, and material objects—particularly kimono and dress—described in the novel.

Kimono and Dress as an Expression of Time Consciousness

From the opening line of the novel “I have almost never gone to see a moving picture,” the reader immediately knows that the narrator is stuck in the past.³ He recalls having seen a “moving picture” of a San Francisco street scene around Meiji 30 (1897), and later a friend had taken him out to see a film adaptation of a Maupassant story just after the Kantō earthquake of 1923. Even though the narrator knows there is a more modern term, he is determined to stick with “moving picture.” Yet, to be able to converse with people of the present era, early Shōwa (1930s), he makes the effort to observe movie billboards to get a gist of the popular movies. While the narrator exists in the present, he lives in the past, like a movie continually trapped in a dissolve scene

² Kafū mentions Shunsui by name in *Bokutō Kidan* on p. 45 (Iwanami Shoten publ., 2016 edition). Works by Kafū related to Tamenaga Shunsui include *Haru no Urami* (1895), a *ninjōbon* he wrote in verse at the age of 16 based on Shunsui's *Umegoyomi*; a newspaper serial titled *Shin Umegoyomi* which ended abruptly after 33 installments; a translation of three of Shunsui's *ninjōbon*, *Gendaigo-yaku Ume Goyomi* (Hibonkaku, publ., 1938); *Tamenaga Shunsui* (1941) and *Tamenaga Shunsui Nenpu* (1946), both republished in *Nagai Kafū Zuihitsu 3* (Iwanami Shoten, 1982).

³ Nagai Kafū, *Bokutō Kidan*, Iwanami Shoten (Iwanami Bunko), 1947 (2016 edition): 7.

where the present and past overlap. Both the author and the narrator seek out these “dissolve scenes” with a window in the present opening up into the past, frequently evoked through kimono and dress.

The Used-Book Store

Walking through Asakusa observing movie billboards, the narrator is accosted by a procurer for prostitutes. To fend off the man, the narrator blurts out that he is on his way to the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters, and decides he might as well head on in that direction. On the way, he stops in on an used bookstore near the Sanyabori canal, “not because of the old books themselves, but because of the character of the bookseller and the atmosphere of the back-street district outside the licensed quarters.”⁴

主人は頭を綺麗に剃った小柄の老人。年は無論六十を越している。その顔立、物腰、言葉使から着物の着様に至るまで、東京の下町生粋の風俗を、そのまま崩さずに残しているのが、わたくしの眼には稀の古書よりもむしろ尊くまた懐しく見える。

The bookseller was a small old man with his head completely shaven. His age was of course over 60. From the shape his face, his mannerisms, his use of words, to his way of wearing kimono—to have kept this native *shitamachi* Tokyo style intact was in my eyes far more precious and nostalgic than any rare old book.⁵

While at the used bookstore, a peddler of old goods stops by and the narrator, taken with the used kimono, decides to buy the *nagajuban* under-kimono along with some old books. The peddler was a shabby gaunt old bald-headed man also in his sixties, who brought a bundle of goods wrapped in a dirty old striped *furoshiki* cloth.

<前略> 実は今日鳩ヶ谷の市へ行ったんだがね、妙な物を買った。昔の物はいいね。さし当り捌口はないんだが見るとつい道楽がしたくなる奴さ。」

“... Well actually, today I went to the flea market at Hatogaya, right?, and bought an odd

⁴ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 10.

⁵ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 10. All translations my own.

thing. Old things are good, aren't they. I didn't have any particular customer in mind, but when I saw it, well, just for the heck of it kind of thing.”⁶

禿頭は風呂敷包を解き、女物らしい小紋の単衣と胴抜の長襦袢を出して見せた。小紋は鼠地の小浜ちりめん、胴抜の袖にした友禅染もちよっと変ったものではあるが、いずれも維新前後のものらしく特に古代というほどの品ではない。

Bald-Head opened the *furoshiki* bundle and laid out for them to see what appeared to be a woman's *hitoe* with a *komon* design and a *dōnuki nagajuban*. The *komon* was a grey *kohama-chirimen*, and the *dōnuki* with sleeves dyed by the *yūzen* technique was also a bit peculiar, but both were from around the time of the Meiji Restoration, and not especially of ancient vintage.⁷

Street peddlers used to carry their goods wrapped in a large square cloth, usually a sturdy cotton, called a *furoshiki*, often tied to carry on their back. Japanese traditional style clothes were seldom called “kimono,” which just means clothes, but rather were referred to by more specific names like “hitoe” or “komon” as seen here. A *hitoe* is an unlined kimono worn in the spring and fall months, and a *komon* is a kimono with an all-over design of various possible dying techniques, but usually either stencil-dyed or paste-resist dyed. *Chirimen* is one of many different types of Japanese crepe-woven cloth. *Kohama-chirimen* is a mid-size crepe, finer than regular *chirimen* but not as fine as *kinsha-chirimen*. *Dōnuki* is a type of *nagajuban* (full-length under-kimono) with the sleeves, and sometimes the hem, done in a different color, fabric, or design than the body of the *nagajuban*. *Yūzen* is a type of relatively expensive paste-resist dyeing; the origin of the technique attributed to Miyazaki Yūzensai around the 1680s in Kyoto. The more expensive type of *yūzen* has the paste-resist hand-painted, and the less expensive has the paste-resist done by stencil.

The quote above is where this installment (I-2) ends in the Asahi newspaper, but the next installment (I-3) picks up again with the same scene opening with the following quote.

しかし浮世絵肉筆物の表装とか、近頃はやる手文庫の中張りとか、また草双紙の帙などに用いたら案外いいかも知れないと思ったので、その場の出来心からわたくしは古雑誌の勘定を

⁶ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 13.

⁷ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 13-14.

するついでに胴抜の長襦袢一枚を買取り、坊主頭の亭主が『芳譚雑誌』の合本と共に紙包にしてくれるのを抱えて外へ出た。

But since I thought it might be surprisingly good for the mounting of an ukiyo-e painting, or a book-cover for those small *bunko-bon* books so popular nowadays, or even covers for the old-style *kusazōshi* picture books, on a whim when I paid up for the old magazines, I went ahead and bought just the *dōnuki nagajuban* as well, and had the bald-headed store owner wrap it up together with the bound copies of the *Hōtan Zasshi* magazines, and carrying it I stepped out.⁸

This opening quote leads into the incident where the narrator is taken to the police box for loitering around a park like a homeless person. The policeman was already suspicious, but when a sleeve of the *dōnuki* falls out of the narrator's bundle, it ratchets up his suspicions by more than just a notch. Not particularly relevant to this essay, but as an aside, the dialogue between the narrator and the policeman is absolutely hilarious in the original Japanese; one can easily imagine it as a modern *rakugo* story.⁹ In the course of this dialogue, we find out that the narrator paid 3 yen 70 sen for the *dōnuki nagajuban*, very approximately about 4500 yen in today's prices. The narrator is finally released without arrest because he just happened to have with him a copy of his family registry and his registered seal.

This episode (installment I-4) is nicely rounded out with the narrator's musing on his experience in contrast to the peddlers' earlier statement on how good old things are.

一体古着は気味のわるいものだ。古着の長襦袢が祟りそこねたのである。

What sinister things old clothes are. I was very nearly damned by an used *nagajuban*.¹⁰

The Rain Trope

The narrator wanders around the Tama-no-i quarters, east of the Sumidagawa river in

⁸ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 14.

⁹ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 15-21. In 1899, when he was 20, Kafū became a pupil to a master of *rakugo* story-telling, Asanebō Muraku VI (1859-1907), for under a year until his father found out about it, and he was dragged home.

¹⁰ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 23; The great fire that burned down most of Edo (Tokyo) in 1657, called the "Furisode Fire" (振袖火事), was believed to have been caused by a cursed *furisode* kimono.

Mukōjima, looking for a setting for a novel he is working on. In a sudden downpour, a woman of dubious repute commandeers his umbrella, opening another window into a scene reminiscent of the past.

<前略>いきなり後方から、「檀那、そこまで入れてってよ。」といいさま、傘の下に真白な首を突込んだ女がある。油の匂で結ったばかりと知られる大きな潰島田には長目に切った銀糸をかけている。わたくしは今方通りがかりに硝子戸を明け放した女髪結の店のあった事を思出した。

... suddenly from behind, “Hey, Mister, let me under just ‘til over there,” so saying the woman ducked her white neck under my umbrella. Her large *tsubushi-shimada* chignon, which from the scent of its oil one knew it had been freshly dressed, was tied with a long silver string. I remembered that I had just passed by a women’s hairdresser shop with the store-front screens left open.¹¹

The narrator feeling it would be a shame if her newly dressed chignon was ruined, and worried less about his own Western clothes, then being seen in public sharing an umbrella, offers her his umbrella.

「じゃ、よくって。すぐ、そこ。」と女は傘の柄につかまり、片手に浴衣の裾を思うさままくり上げた。

“Well, then, if you don’t mind. It’s right nearby,” so saying she took the umbrella handle, and with the other hand hiked up her yukata skirts with abandon.¹²

¹¹ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 37.

¹² *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 37.



Fig. 2: Rain Trope, painting by Shōhachi, poem by Kafū



Fig. 3: Rain Trope, *Bokutō Kidan*, 1st ed., illustration by Shōhachi



Fig.4: Cover to *Bokutō Kidan* Movie Pamphlet, 1969 [Shōwa 35]

It turned out to be not so close with twists and turns down various alleys and by the time they got to her place, the narrator was quite soaked. After she first wipes the raindrops off his coat, she dried off her bare feet, and then they go to the back room where she washes up and starts on her makeup. The narrator asks her if she has ever been a *geisha*, and when she ignores the question, he asks where she has worked before.



Fig. 5: O-Yuki Changing Kimono, *Bokutō Kidan*, 1st ed., illustration by Shōhachi

「宇都の宮にいたの。着物もみんなその時分のよ。これで沢山だわねえ。」と言いながら立上って、衣紋竹に掛けた裾模様の単衣物に着かえ、赤い弁慶縞の伊達締を大きく前で結ぶ様子は、少し大き過ぎる潰島田の銀糸とつりあって、わたくしの目にはどうやら明治年間の娼妓のように見えた。



Fig. 6: Ito Shinsui (1898-1972) *Datemaki no Onna*, 1921

“I was in Utsunomiya. All my kimono are from that time too. Now, that’s enough already,” she said as she stood up and changed into a *hitoe* (unlined) kimono with a *suso-moyō* hem-design that had been hanging on a kimono stand; with her red Benkei-jima *datejime* tied large in front, balanced by the slightly too big silver string of her *tsubushi-shimada* chignon, she looked to my eyes somehow like a strumpet of the Meiji era.¹³

A kimono with a design only along the hem is typically a fairly formal kimono, and probably served as one of her professional garments. A *datejime* is a narrow under-sash used to tie the

¹³ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 44.

kimono together before tying on the obi proper. Her *datejime* is a bit fancy with a large-check design called “Benkei-jima.” It is typical for a woman to tie the *datejime* in front, regardless of her profession.

The narrator interrupts the story in the manner of the Edo period novelist, Tamenaga Shunsui, whom he mentions by name. It is fairly likely when he says a fair maiden may be more forward than a *geisha* when she first falls in love, it is a reference to Ochō in Shunsui’s *Umegoyomi*. Likewise when he says a courtesan may behave like a blushing bride when reunited with her old love likely it refers to another character in the same work. In this digression, the narrator apologizes for the unlikelihood of a woman acting so familiar at a chance first meeting, as well as for using the well-worn trope of meeting in the rain.¹⁴

一体、この盛場の女は七、八百人と数えられているそうであるが、その中に、島田や丸鬢に結っているものは、十人に一人くらい。大体は女給まがいの日本風と、ダンスア好みの洋装とである。雨宿をした家の女が極く少数の旧風に属していた事も、どうやら陳腐の筆法に適當しているような心持がして、わたくしは事実の描写を傷けるに忍びなかった。

Generally, the women of this district can be numbered to seven or eight hundred, among them only about one out of ten wear their hair in a *shimada* or *marumage* chignon. Typically, there is the Japanese style of those who affect to be café maids, or the type of Western clothing preferred by dancers. Since the woman who gave me shelter from the rain at her house is one of the very few in the old style, I felt this cliché device was not only appropriate, nor could I bear injury to the truth of its portrayal.¹⁵

The Novel-within-a-Novel

In the installment before the “rain trope,” the narrator explains he is working on a novel about a man who walked away from his dreary home and family on the day he received his retirement allowance. The narrator was confounded about where to place the setting for the wanderings of this character, Taneda Junpei, and ended up in Tama-no-i as just described above. The story the

¹⁴ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 45-46. In Tamenaga Shunsui’s *Azuma no harusame* (吾婦の春雨), a man meets a women when they both take shelter from a sudden rain, *Nagai Kafū Zuihitsu* 3 (Iwanami Shoten, 1982): 325; in Shunsui’s *Harutsugedori* (春告鳥), Chōga ends up spending the night with O-Tami due to a sudden evening rain, NKBZ: 395 and 600.

¹⁵ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 46.

narrator tells and the novel-within-the-novel about Taneda form a close parallel, as indeed does Kafū's own diary. The episode after the "rain trope" returns to the novel-within-the-novel with an excerpt from this fictional work.

On the night of his retirement, Taneda goes to see Sumiko, a former maid who had worked at his house and now lives in a tenement house near the Akiba shrine.

外側の壁や窓は西洋風に見えるが、内は柱の細い日本造りで、ぎしぎし音のする階段を上り切った廊下の角に炊事場があって、シュミイズ一枚の女が、断髪を振乱したまま薬罐に湯をわかしていた。

From the outside it looked Western by its walls and windows, but inside it was a narrow Japanese house, and in a corner of the hallway where the creaky stairs lead up was a stove where a woman wearing only a single chemise, with her hair down in disarray, was boiling some water in a kettle.¹⁶

They go upstairs, where Sumiko has her own single room.

畳のよごれた六畳ほどの部屋で、一方は押入、一方の壁際には箆筒、他の壁には浴衣やボイルの寝間着がぶら下げてある。すみ子は窓を明けて、「ここが涼しいわ。」と腰巻や足袋の下っている窓の下に座布団を敷いた。

It was just a six-mat room of dirty *tatami* mats, on one side was a closet, and against the wall on the other side was a chest of drawers, on another wall was hanging a yukata or a cotton-voile nightgown. Sumiko opened the window, "It's cool over here," and spread out a *futon* cushion below the window hanging with *koshimaki* and *tabi*.¹⁷

The yukata here is sleepwear, not something to wear out and about outside the home. A *koshimaki* is a slip-like wrap worn around the lower torso as underwear under kimono, and *tabi* are the split-toe socks worn with *zōri* sandals.

Sumiko suggests that he stay the night. There is an empty room available at the end of the hall, but the landlady isn't in, so Sumiko suggests they stay up all night talking.

¹⁶ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 56.

¹⁷ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 56.

すみ子は真実夜通し話をするつもりと見えて、帯だけ解いて丁寧に畳み、足袋をその上に載せて挿入にしまい、それから茶ぶ台の上を拭直して茶を入れながら、〈後略〉

It appeared that Sumiko really intended to spend the night talking; she removed only her obi and folded it up carefully, set her *tabi* on top, and put them in the closet, then she wiped up the small *chabudai* folding-table, and made the tea ...¹⁸

Sumiko starts to explain how she got into this work, to get away from her thug of a father, and there this episode ends. The descriptions of what kind of kimono women of this ilk wore aside, and their gracious manners despite their profession, the Japanese tenement house hidden inside a Western exterior is yet another superimposed image conflating the present with the past.

The Dress of Terajima 7-Chōmé

With the end of the rainy season, came the summer heat. To escape the noisy radios heard through the windows open to let in the cool evening breezes, the narrator now spends nearly every night at O-Yuki's place in Terajima, close to the Tama-no-i quarters. Many of the establishments in that area actually came from the less reputable area around Asakusa, some forcibly moved by the authorities, others forced out when their establishments were destroyed by the Kantō Earthquake (1923). O-Yuki, of the umbrella, and the Terajima area is a window into another world allowing nostalgic glimpses of the past for the narrator.

いつも島田か丸髷にしか結っていないお雪の姿と、溝の汚さと、蚊の鳴声とはわたくしの感覚を著しく刺戟し、三、四十年むかしに消え去った過去の幻影を再現させてくれるのである。わたくしはこの果敢くも怪し気なる幻影の紹介者に対して出来得ることならあからさまに感謝の言葉を述べたい。お雪さんは南北の狂言を演じる俳優よりも、蘭蝶を語る鶴賀なながしよりも、過去を呼返す力においては一層巧妙なる無言の芸術家であった。

O-Yuki who always wore her hair in either the *shimada* or *marumage* chignon, and even the foulness of the gully, and the sounds of the mosquitoes, stimulated my senses bringing back a shadowy image of a past that had disappeared some 30, 40 years ago. If

¹⁸ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 60.

it could be done, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the agents of these peculiar visions. O-Yuki, more than any actor of one of Nanboku's plays, more than Tsuruga whoever's song of Ranchō, was a consummate nonverbal artist with the power to summon the past.¹⁹

O-Yuki's old-style appearance, with her hair in the traditional *shimada* or *marumage* chignon, summoned up the past more than the contemporary professional artists who actually performed stories of the past. Tsuruya Nanboku I (1755-1829) was a kabuki playwright active at the end of the Edo period who wrote ghost tales and *sewamono* domestic plays. Tsuruga Wakasanojō (1717-1786) was a *jōruri* chanter, who wrote "Ranchō" around 1772. "Ranchō" is a story of a tragic love affair that takes place in an entertainment district. Ranchō, a *geisha* himself, is in love with the courtesan Konoito, but married to another entertainer, Omiya.

Just like the proprietor of the old book store, O-Yuki's manager and owner of the house also wore kimono. When O-Yuki gets a toothache and sets off for the dentist leaving the narrator behind to mind the house in her absence, her manager shows up.

白っぽい浴衣に兵児帯をしめ、田舎臭い円顔に口髭を生した年は五十ばかり。手には風呂敷に包んだものを持っている。わたくしはその様子とその顔立とで、直様お雪の抱主だろうと推察したので、向から言うのを待たず、「お雪さんは何だか、お医者へ行くって、今おもてで逢いました。」

He wore a white yukata tied with a *heko-obi*, he had a round countrified face with stubble around his mouth, and his age was about 50. In his hand he carried a bundle tied in a *furoshiki*. From his face and demeanor, I immediately guessed he must be O-Yuki's manager, not waiting for him to speak, I told him, "About O-Yuki, huh? She said she was going to the doctor. I just saw her out front."²⁰

Now that one can buy a yukata in the US at Uniqlo or a Japanese festival, it may well not need to be described, but basically it is an informal cotton robe worn in the summer months. Although

¹⁹ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 74.

²⁰ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 82.

yukata are a bit more fancy nowadays, in the time of this novel, a yukata of this sort would only have been appropriate to wear around the neighborhood or to a local festival. A *heko-obi* is a long



Fig. 7: O-Yuki's Manager in Yukata, *Bokutō Kidan*, 1st ed., illustration by Shōhachi

soft fabric tied in a ribbon-bow in back, traditionally worn by adult men and children. A man's *heko-obi* would most commonly be made of silk and tie-dyed in a subdued grey, dark blue, or brown.

The narrator also describes what he wears to visit the Terajima area, which he modeled on what the people hanging around the night stalls wore.

これは別に手数のかかる事ではない。襟の返る縞のホワイトシャツの襟元のボタンははずして襟飾をつけない事、洋服の上着は手に提げて着ない事、帽子はかぶらぬ事、髪の毛はを入れた事もないように搔乱して置く事、ズボンはなるべく膝や尻のり切れたくらいな古いものに替る事。靴はかず、古下駄も踵の方が台までりへっているのを捜してく事、煙草は必バットに限る事、エトセトラエトセトラである。だから訳はない。つまり書斎にいる時、また来客を迎える時の衣服をぬいで、庭掃除や煤払の時のものに着替え、下女の古下駄を貰ってはけばよいのだ。

古ズボンに古下駄をはき、それに古手拭をさがし出して鉢巻の巻方も至極不意気にすれば、南は砂町、北は千住から西金町辺まで行こうとも、道行く人から振返って顔を見られる気遣いはない。

This required no great effort. A stripe collar shirt left unbuttoned without a tie; a Western suit jacket carried in the hand instead of worn; not wearing a hat; messy hair left untouched by a comb; a change of trousers to an old pair as well-worn at the seat and knees as possible. Not wearing shoes, but rather old *geta* with their teeth worn off to nubs; cigarettes limited to the cheapest Bat brand; etcetera, etcetera. No trouble at all. Just change out of the clothes I wore in the study or to receive guests into the clothes I wore to sweep the garden or clean the house, and borrow the old *geta* from the maid.

Put on an old pair of trousers with an old pair of *geta*, and tie an old *tenugui* towel clumsily around your head, and you can go from Sunamachi in the south, to Senjū

in the north, all the way to Kanamachi in the west and you don't have to worry about passerby's turning their heads to look at you.²¹

As the narrator explains:

この不様な身なりは、「じだらくに居れば涼しき二階かな。」で、東京の気候の殊に暑さの甚しい季節には最適している。

This unkempt dress, like the saying “the more disheveled the dress, the cooler the upstairs breeze,” is perfect for the climate of Tokyo, especially the ghastly hot season.²²

The local women were apparently equally lackadaisical in their dress, wearing a light cotton housedress similar in shape to a baggy Muumuu.



女子がアッパッパと称する下着一枚で戸外に出歩く奇風については、友人佐藤備斎君の文集に載っているその論に譲って、ここには言うまい。

Of the strange custom of women walking around out in public in just a shift of a dress called an *appappa*, my good friend Satō Yōsai has already written, and I need say no more.²³

Fig. 8: “The Popularity of *Appappa* for Cool,” Newspaper article, August of 1929.

This *appappa* housedress became popular in Tokyo in the inordinately hot year of 1929. It was a simple shift about shin length, with small sleeves and a round neck, made from light cotton or yukata fabric, typically white or light colored with no design. It may well have been introduced to Japan from the islands of Micronesia, where a similar Mother Hubbard dress was worn, after the first world war when Japan governed Micronesia as part of the South Pacific Mandate created by

²¹ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 102-103.

²² *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 103.

²³ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 103.

the League of Nations.

The Reflection of the Past Disturbed; The Spell Broken

When the narrator returns to Terajima in mid-September after an absence of three days, he finds that O-Yuki has changed her hairstyle. O-Yuki had earlier told him some time ago that it had already been “three months, *ne...*” since they first met.²⁴ O-Yuki drawing out the last syllable implies to the narrator that she was hoping for more to their relationship.

いつもの窓に見えるお雪の顔も、今夜はいつもの濃島田ではなく、銀杏返しに手柄をかけたような、牡丹とかよぶ鬢に変わっていたので、わたくしはこなたから眺めて顔ちがいのしたのを怪しみながら歩み寄ると、お雪はいかにもじれったそうに扉をあけながら、「あなた。」と一言強く呼んだ後、急に調子を低くして、「心配したのよ。それでも、まア、よかったねえ。」

It was the same O-Yuki at the same window, but tonight she didn't have her hair in the *tsubushi-shimada* chignon, but rather she had changed it to a something like a *ichō-gaeshi* chignon tied with a *tegara* fabric, called “peony” or something; as I drew closer, I peered at her face wary of the change it had made, when O-Yuki suddenly threw open the door, and called to me, “Anata!,” but immediately lowered her voice, “I was so worried! Well, then. That's a relief.”²⁵

O-Yuki's new hairstyle is in the style of a large Western chignon. “Anata” literally means “you,” but in this context it is more like dear or darling. It's never explained in detail, but there had been some incident reported in the newspaper and she was worried it was him. Once O-Yuki is no longer worried about his safety, she is then worried that he had been seeing another woman in his absence. The narrator surmises that she would like to leave her present lifestyle by marrying him, which he is loath to do due to his past experiences with women who became wives. When the reality of the present disturbs his vision of the past, he decides it is time to say goodbye to her, and it seems that she herself is already a thing of the past.

お雪は倦みつかれたわたくしの心に、偶然過去の世のなつかしい幻影を彷彿たらしめたミュ

²⁴ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 92.

²⁵ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 119.

ーズである。久しく机の上に置いてあった一の草稿はもしお雪の心がわたくしの方に向けられなかったなら、——少くともそういう気がしなかったなら、既に裂き棄てられていたに違いない。

O-Yuki was like a muse who just by happenstance brought to my weary heart a vision of the nostalgic world of the past. If she had not had feelings for me, or at least, if I had not felt she had, the manuscript that had sat on my desk for so long, would no doubt already have been torn up.²⁶

For the first time, or at least for the first time mentioned, O-Yuki asks him to take her out. Not that Asakusa where she wants to go is so very different from Terajima, but yet it would remove her from the bubble of nostalgia across the river from Asakusa.

「公園は具合のわるいことがあるんだよ。何か買うものでもあるのか。」

「時計も買いたいし、もうすぐ裕だから。」

「あついあついと言ってる中、ほんとにもうじきお彼岸だね。裕はどのくらいするんだ。店で着るのか。」

「そう。どうしても三十円はかかるでしょう。」

「そのくらいなら、ここに持っているよ。一人で行って詠えておいでな。」と紙入を出した。

「あなた。ほんと。」

「気味がわるいのか。心配するなよ。」

わたくしは、お雪が意外のよろこびに眼を見張ったその顔を、永く忘れないようにじっと見詰めながら、紙入の中の紙幣を出して茶ぶ台の上に置いた。

戸を叩く音と共に主人の声がしたので、お雪は何か言いかけたのも、それなり黙って、伊達締の間に紙幣を隠す。わたくしは突と立って主人と入れちがいに外へ出た。

“It’s a bit problematic for me to go to the park. Do you need to buy something?”

“I want to buy a watch, and it will soon be *awase* season.”

“While we’re saying, ‘It’s hot, It’s hot,’ it’s almost the time of O-higan. How much would an *awase* cost? Do you want it for work?”

“Yes. It would probably cost at least 30 yen.”

²⁶ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 128.

“Well if that’s all, I have it right here. Go ahead by yourself and order one,” I said and took out my wallet.

“Anata! Really?”

“You’re worried about the money? Don’t be concerned.”

Her eyes overflowed with unexpected joy, and I gazed long at her face so I would never forget it, then I took the money out of my wallet and set it on the *chabudai* folding-table.

There was a knock on the door along with the voice of O-Yuki’s manager, and whatever she was about to say, she cut off, and hid the bills in her *datejime*. I stood up at once, and passed the manger on the way out.²⁷



Fig. 9: O-Yuki Receiving the Money for Kimono, *Bokutō Kidan*, 1st ed., illustration by Shōhachi

Despite his intention not to see her again, he does visit her one last time. Although he had apparently meant the money to be a goodbye present, about four or five days later, he goes by her house. He sees her in her window from across the alley, and she has changed her hair back into the traditional Japanese style. He also sees a new girl in the window next to hers. After wandering around the bit, he decides he wants to explain

everything to her, what he is really like and why they cannot go on, to make a clean break. When he does arrive back at O-Yuki’s house, the manager, his wife, and the new cook are all there, so O-Yuki leads him directly upstairs.

「暫く独りでいたら、大勢だと全くうるさいわね。」急に思出したらしく、「この間はありがとう。」

「好いのがあったか。」

「ええ。明日あたり出来てくるはずよ。伊達締も一本買ったわ。これはもうこんなの。後で下へ行って持ってくるわ。」

²⁷ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 130-132.

“Since it had been just me for a while, with all this crowd around, it seems very noisy,” and then as though she had just thought of it, “Thank you for the other day.”

“Did you find a good one?”

“Yes. It should be finished and arrive about tomorrow. I also picked up a new *datejime*. Well, you see how it is. In a bit, I'll go downstairs and bring up [the tea].”²⁸



Fig. 10: O-Yuki Bringing the Tea Upstairs, *Bokutō Kidan*, 1st ed., illustration by Shōhachi

After O-Yuki goes and gets the tea, they sit by the windowsill for a while talking about nothing substantial. The manger and his wife do not seem to be about to leave any time soon, and a customer for O-Yuki arrives, so in the end, the narrator leaves without telling O-Yuki all he had on his mind.

The narrator was rather cavalier with O-Yuki's feelings. While to him, she may only have been a plaything, a muse for which he paid money, but since he visited her nearly every night for several months from the rainy season in June through the equinox in late September, and gave her a substantial amount of money to buy an expensive kimono, it would not be surprising if she had expected more, such as marriage, in the end. It was downright cruel to just suddenly disappear from her life. It seems the narrator never saw her as a real live human being, with thoughts and emotions of her own, but only as a medium who served to open up a window to the past.

軽い恋愛の遊戯とはいいいながら、再会の望みなき事を初めから知りぬいていた別離の情は、強いてこれを語ろうとすれば誇張に陥り、これを軽々に叙し去れば情を尽さぬ憾みがある。

While it might be said it was merely a game of light-hearted love, known from the start that there would be no hope of a meeting again, still the pain of parting, if I tried to describe it, it would be merely maudlin, but if I treated it lightly, it would fail to do it

²⁸ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 138.

justice.²⁹

Shortly before the quote above, the narrator explains that the season has become cool, and with the noisy radios behind closed windows, he can work at his desk again. But then begins the next passage, where the quote above is found, with “Perhaps here is where I should end this *Fantasy Tale from East of the Sumidagawa* and lay down my brush,” by which we know the “narrator” is Nagai Kafū himself.³⁰

Actually if one were paying attention, the reader already knew that the narrator was Nagai Kafū himself, back when the narrator gave his name as Ōe Tadasu (大江匡) at the police station.³¹ Ōe was the original surname of Kafū’s family before it became Nagai, and the Nagai family used the Ōe family crest of a line over a pyramid of three dots. Kafū’s grandfather’s name was Nagai Masatake (永井匡威), the “masa” being the same character as “tadasu,” and Kafū’s father, Kyūichirō (久一郎), also used Masaharu (匡温) as one of his artistic names. Also, Ōe no Masafusa (大江匡房, 1041-1111), from whom the family descends, was a court noble and Confucian scholar of the Heian period, one of whose poems appears in the *Hyakunin Isshu* (百人一首), the *Anthology of a Hundred Poets*.³²

In any case, the novel actually ends with the last phrase from a poem by the author.

君とわかれしわが身ひとり、
倒れ死すべき雞頭の一茎と
ならびて立てる心はいかに。

Having parted with you, I am alone again,
The single stalk of amaranth that must fall and die,
Is verily aligned with my heart.³³

Nevertheless, this work continues with a rather substantial afterword by the author, published in 1937 in the first edition of the book.³⁴

²⁹ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 144.

³⁰ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 142.

³¹ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 16.

³² *Bokutō Kidan* (Shinchō Bunko), 1951 (2012 edition): 124, note 12.

³³ *Bokutō Kidan* (2016 edition): 147.

³⁴ “Gosaku zeigen” (後作贅言), *Bokutō Kidan* (Iwanami Shoten), 1937 (original edition): 153-193; *Bokutō Kidan* (Iwanami Bunko), 1947 (2016 edition): 149-180; *Bokutō Kidan* (Shinchō Bunko), 1951 (2012 edition): 97-122.

The Afterword

The afterword begins with Kafū explaining the title of this novel. He explains that it was a record of his experiences at the pleasure quarters of Terajima in Mukōjima. He had initially thought to name it *Tama-no-i Zōshi* (玉の井草紙), but decided on *Bokutō Kidan* (墨東綺譚) instead.³⁵ Kafū borrowed “bokutō” (墨東) from Hayashi Shussai (林述齋, 1768-1841), who invented the character *boku* (墨) to represent the Sumidagawa river and used the character in his collection of poems titled *Bokujō Gyōyō* (墨上漁謡). Since Kafū thought Terajima was too far east of the Sumidagawa river to likewise be called “above the river” (*bokujō* 墨上), he adapted it to “east of the river.”³⁶

When Kafū was considering the title he says he had no one to consult with since his two close friends Inoue Āshi (井上啞々子, 1878-1923) and Kōjiro Sōyōō (神代帚葉翁, 1883-1935) had already died. Kōjiro Sōyōō was the artistic name of Kōjiro Tanesuke (神代種亮), a renowned editor and somewhat of an authority on Meiji period culture.³⁷ Kafū writes that Sōyōō was far more of an expert on Tama-no-i than he himself. According to his afterword, Kafū used to meet with Sōyōō almost every night in Ginza, and he narrates several incidents related to Sōyōō.

The Dress of a Street Entertainer

Kafū recounts how on one ghastly hot evening, while he was walking around Tama-no-i near the Inari shrine there, an attractive girl of about 16 or 17 carrying a shamisen called out to him familiarly, “Hey, Ojisan. Do you sometimes come over here too for entertainment?” Kafū failed to recognize her at first but then remembered that he had met her before in Ginza when he was with Sōyōō, and sometimes ran into her after that.

門附の娘はわたくしが銀座の裏通りで折々見掛けた時分には、まだ肩揚をして三味線を持たず、左右の手に四竹を握っていた。髪は桃割に結び、黒襟をかけた袂の長い着物に、赤い半襟。赤い帯をしめ、黒塗の下駄の鼻緒も赤いのをかけた様子は、女義太夫の弟子でなければ、場末の色町の半玉のようにも見られた。

³⁵ In the first edition of this book, published by Iwanami Shoten in August of 1937 (Shōwa 12), the *rubi* text to the title of this work has it as “Bokutō Kidan” (ぼくとうきだん): 153.

³⁶ *Bokutō Kidan* (Shinchō Bunko): 97-98.

³⁷ For more details on Sōyōō's life, see *Bokutō Kidan* (Shinchō Bunko): 116.

When I used to run into this young street entertainer on the back streets of Ginza, she was still wearing a kimono tucked-up at the shoulders, and instead of carrying a shamisen, held *yoddaké* clappers in her two hands. Her hair was in the *momo-waré* style, and her kimono had long sleeves with a black collar and red under-collar. Wearing a red obi and black lacquer *geta* with red *hanao* straps, she looked like she could be either a pupil of a female *gidayū* entertainer or a *hangyoku* apprentice at some pleasure quarters on the outskirts.³⁸

A kimono tucked-up at the shoulders is called *kata-agé* in Japanese; this style was worn by young girls and apprentice entertainers. *Yotsudaké* are clappers somewhat similar to castanets. The *momo-waré* coiffure, a chignon with a large bun in back forming a ring thought to resemble a peach-seed, was worn by young girls of about sixteen or seventeen years of age. She is wearing a long-sleeved *furisode* with a black collar and a *nagajuban* under-kimono with a red collar. All the red accents—collar, *geta* straps, and obi—are attire appropriate to a young girl entertainer. A *gidayū* is a type of performance artist, who chants a narrative in accompaniment to a shamisen. A *hangyoku* is the Tokyo expression for an apprentice *geisha*, so called because traditionally only paid half as much as a full-fledged *geisha*. This quote describes her when Kafū used to see her on the back streets of Ginza some four or five years ago, but now when he has run into her again, she has her hair done in the adult *shimada* chignon, and Kafū tells her she looks just like a *geisha*.

Sōyōō's Attire

Here and there, Kafū describes Sōyōō's attire. It was around 1932 (Shōwa 7) when Sōyōō would stand on the corner in front of the Mitsukoshi department store observing and taking notes on the passerby's, wearing an old hat and *Nikkō geta* (日光下駄).³⁹ Kafū adds later a bit more about Sōyōō's attire, and his impression of it.

帚葉翁はいつも白足袋に日光下駄をはいていた。その風采を一見しても直に現代人でない事が知られる。

³⁸ *Bokutō Kidan* (Shinchō Bunko): 100.

³⁹ *Bokutō Kidan* (Shinchō Bunko): 104.

Sōyōō always wore white tabi with his Nikkō *geta*. With just one look at his attire, one would immediately know that he wasn't a person of these times.⁴⁰

Nikkō *geta* are wooden *geta* sandals with the surface covered in straw made from bamboo. For paying respects at the shrine at Nikkō, where the first shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu was worshiped, one was technically suppose to wear *zōri* (a leather or straw sandal), but with the ice, and snow, and rocks the steep climb could be difficult, and hence the Nikkō *geta* were invented to resolve this problem.

The Bon-Odori at Hibiya Kōen and Japanese Dress

When exactly the Bon Odori, the dance held in summer for the Buddhist All Souls' Festival, started at Hibiya Kōen in Tokyo appears to be unclear, but the song Marunouchi Ondo was written in 1932, and was rewritten as the Tokyo Ondo the next year, so it is likely that the Hibiya Kōen Bon Odori started in 1932 or 1933. What is particularly interesting is that yukata publicity and the Bon Odori were intimately connected from the very beginning, although now, yukata is more associated with summer fireworks at least in the Tokyo area.

Kafū, of all people, seems oddly scandalized by this public dancing of men and women.

東京音頭は郡部の地が市内に合併し、東京市が広がったのを祝するために行われたように言われていたが、内情は日比谷の角にある百貨店の広告に過ぎず、その店でいの浴衣を買わなければ入場の切符を手に入れることができないとの事であった。それはとにかく、東京市内の公園で若い男女の舞蹈をなすことは、これまで一たびも許可せられた前例がない。地方農村の盆踊さえたしか明治の末頃には県知事の命令で禁止せられた事もあった。東京では江戸のむかし山の手の屋敷町に限って、田舎から出て来た奉公人が盆踊をする事を許されていたが、町民一般は氏神の祭礼に狂奔するばかりで盆に踊る習慣はなかったのである。

It is said that the Tokyo Ondo was held in celebration of the expansion of Tokyo when the outskirts were merged with the inner city, but the inside story is that it was just a publicity event of a department store on the corner of Hibiya, and if you did not buy a yukata at that store, you would not be able to get an entrance ticket. However that

⁴⁰ *Bokutō Kidan* (Shinchō Bunko): 106.

may be, there is not a single previous example of young men and women being allowed to dance at a public park in Tokyo. Even in the rural areas, the Bon Odori dance was forbidden from around the end of the Meiji period by the prefectural authorities. In Tokyo, with the exception during the Edo period of the estates around Yamanote where the Bon Odori was permitted for the town officials from rural areas, there was no custom of Bon Odori because the regular townsmen tended to get out of hand at Shrine festivals.⁴¹

Following the quote above, Kafū records a discussion he had with Sōyōō. Sōyōō explains to Kafū that Bon Odori is different from “dance,” but when Kafū protests that you still have a large group of men and women dancing together, Sōyōō tells him that the difference is that since for the Bon Odori people wear yukata, not Western clothing, their clothes are not revealing. Kafū responds that from the viewpoint of exposure, Western clothes only reveal the chest, but from the waist down is covered, where as yukata has loose skirts. Sōyōō chides Kafū that he can’t get all logical about this, and that in the aftermath of the Kantō earthquake, the night watchmen took the women wearing Western clothes into questioning, and there were rumors that they had to take off their clothes for inspection.⁴²

Kafū continues by noting that it was still unusual for women to wear Western clothes before the earthquake, but now maybe half of the women seen in the street are in Western clothes, and even the café maids wear Western clothes in summer. Sōyōō wonders aloud what will happened with women’s clothes under the military government. Kafū ponders that if yukata is worn for Bon Odori, maybe Western clothes won’t become all that popular, but if Western clothes become acceptable, the ability to dress well in Japanese clothes will be lost. Something once broken, can never be fully repaired.⁴³

Conclusion

From Kafū’s afterword to *Bokutō Kidan*, it becomes evident that he paid close attention to dress, and its changes with the times. Because of his careful observations, he was able to use kimono and dress as one aspect of time consciousness expressed through non-verbal markers such as

⁴¹ *Bokutō Kidan* (Shinchō Bunko): 112.

⁴² *Bokutō Kidan* (Shinchō Bunko): 112-113.

⁴³ *Bokutō Kidan* (Shinchō Bunko): 113-114.

material objects in general—from architecture to mosquito nets to rain-water ducts—including kimono and its many accoutrements—*nagajuban*, *datejime*, *zōri*, *geta*, etcetera—in particular. To the words of the narrator, “If it could be done, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the agents of these peculiar visions,” I would like to add, that so aptly express the nostalgia of the past in the kimono of yesteryears.

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List of Images

- Fig. 1: First Newspaper Installment of *Bokutō Kidan*, 1937 [Shōwa 12.4.16], illustrated by Kimura Shōchi. Asahi Shinbun Photo Archive 朝日新聞フォトアーカイブ蔵.
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