

Motifs in Image and Text: Narrative, Imagery, and Symbolism in Ariyoshi Sawako's novel *Shibazakura* (Moss Phlox) Part 1 “*Shibazakura* Chapter”

Karen J Mack

Synopsis

Ariyoshi Sawako first published Shibazakura (Moss Phlox) in the journal Shūkan Shinchō from January 1969 (Shōwa 44) to April 1970 (Shōwa 45) with illustrations by the artist Iwata Sentarō (1901-1974). The serialized novel, later reprinted in a hard cover edition with variances in 1970, narrates the tale of two frenemy geisha, Masako and Tsutayo, with Masako as the main protagonist. Several themes, or motifs, appear in the novel many of which were also chosen by Iwata Sentarō to be illustrated. Primary among them is the shibazakura (moss phlox) of the title, which aptly evokes the frenemy relationship between Masako and Tsutayo, where on numerous occasions, including the emblematic moss phlox incident, Tsutayo is overtly kindhearted while at the same time taking advantage of the circumstances to use to her own ends. Other motifs are generally considered more typical of the issues Sawako addresses in her works, such as a woman's choice between career and marriage, the social status of a married woman as opposed to a geisha, and romantic love versus financial security. Often the themes of the novel are represented more concretely by motifs such as the moss phlox emblematic of the two main protagonists' relationship or the diamonds emblematic of the episode treating the status of wife versus geisha. How these themes and the narrative interact, and how they are represented by discrete motifs, is the topic addressed in this essay. The primary source for this essay is not the republished and edited 1970 version of the novel, but the original serialized publication in the Shūkan Shinchō magazine with its attendant illustrations by Iwata Sentarō. Since the entirety of the novel was published over a period of 16 months, and in reprinted book form appears in two volumes of some 400 pages each, this essay too will also be written as a series. This current essay (part 1) covers the novel from its first installment of January 4 of 1969 to its fourteenth installment of April 5 of 1969 (episode 13 in the book edition). All notations refer to the magazine serialized edition, which not only differs from the book in the parsing of the episodes, but also on occasion has minor differences in text.

Introduction

Ariyoshi Sawako (1931-1984) is typically characterized as a female author who addressed women's issues and social causes in her works of fiction. She is known in the West primarily through her works in translation: *The Doctor's Wife* (*Hanaoka Seishū no tsuma*, 1966) translated by Ann Siller Kostant in 1978, *The River Ki* (*Kinokawa*, 1959) translated by Mildred Tahara in 1980, *The Twilight Years* (*Kōkotsu no hito*, 1972) translated by Mildred Tahara in 1984, and *The Kabuki Dancer* (*Izumo no Okuni*, 1969) translated by James R. Brandon in 1994. However, having written some 62 works including essays and short stories, her novels chosen for translation are not necessarily representative of her over all oeuvre. That her novels were primarily written for women is incontrovertible, since many were first published in serial form in women's magazines such as *Fujin Gahō* and *Fujin Kōron*. In addition to women's magazines, other of her novels were published in serial form in newspapers such as *Nihon Keizai Shinbun* and *Asahi Shinbun*, as well as other journals such as *Bungei Asahi* and *Shūkan Asahi*.

In addition to her works of historical fiction like the *Doctor's Wife* or the *Kabuki Dancer*, the series of river novels narrating the lives of women like the *River Ki*, or social problems like the *Twilight Years*, she also wrote a series of seven novels on *geisha* and denizens of the demimonde: *Dangen* (1957), *Kōge* (1962), *Tsuremai* (1963) and its sequel *Midaremai* (1967), *Ichi no ito* (1965), and *Shibazakura* in two volumes (1970) and its sequel *Boke no hana* in two volumes (1973). All except two of these (*Kōge* and *Tsuremai*) were also made into television series.

Shibazakura (Moss Phlox) was first published in the journal *Shūkan Shinchō* from January 1969 (Shōwa 44) to April 1970 (Shōwa 45) and was illustrated by the artist Iwata Sentarō (1901-1974), who studied under Itō Shinsui (1898-1972) and is recognized as the premier illustrator of the Shōwa era (1926-1989). *Shibazakura* takes place in the Taishō era (1912-1926) and concerns two *geisha** frenemies, Masako and Tsutayo, belonging to the same *geisha* house covering a three-year period from 1918 (eps. 6), when they are apprentice *geisha* at age 15 and 16 respectively. Tsutayo constantly takes advantage of her friend Masako using her at her convenience whenever circumstances allow, but on the other hand is also there to help Masako in her difficulties whether she likes it or not. The thread continues in the sequel *Boke no hana* published in 1973, and through to the end it is never completely clear whether

* Throughout this essay, the words *geisha* and *kimono* are purposely italicized to emphasize their meaning as Japanese terms, as opposed to the Westernized usage.

Tsutayo is guileless in her manipulations of Masako or not, but it does seem clear that Tsutayo had genuine affection for Masako.



(fig. 1) L: cover of *Shūkan Shinchō* January 4, 1969 (Shōwa 44) ; R: first page of first installment (episode 1) of *Shibazakura*

The Goldfish and the Moss Phlox

In the first episode published in the January 4th 1969 edition of the *Shūkan Shinchō* weekly journal, the personalities of the two are immediately laid out (fig. 1). Walking home from their lessons, Masako stops at a goldfish stall set out for the shrine festival. There she ends up spending an entire yen, the equivalent of over 3½ liters of white rice at the time, trying to scoop out a goldfish. While there are younger and smaller ones easier to capture, she sets her sights on the larger more attractive ones which constantly fall through breaking the paper scoop each time. When she eventually gives up with no ill feeling nor evident disappointment, Tsutayo picks up one of Masako's discarded scoops and starts to capture the smaller less well-formed goldfish. Then Tsutayo sees the owner scooping out the dead fish and asks what he is going to do with them. When he tells her that he is just going to throw them away, she says that's sad and asks if she can have them for a proper burial (*kuyō*) and in return won't take the ones that she had captured (for free with Masako's discarded scoop).

When they come to the flower stalls, and Tsutayo flits about carefully examining the flowers and

pestering the owners about the flower names, how much they cost, and how to take care of them, with little evidence that she is actually going to buy anything. Masako grows exasperated and wants to leave since they need to get home and change in preparation for their engagements that evening. In the end, Tsutayo finally decides on three forlorn batches of moss phlox, so wretched that the owner offers them to her at a discount (three small batches for the price of two), nevertheless she turns to Masako to borrow the money for the plants.

Reaching home, the *geisha* house (*okiya*), Masako immediately starts to run upstairs but is stopped when the mistress looks up from her newspaper to ask where Tsutayo is. Masako explains she is at the front planting flowers and the mistress sends her back to get her. Tsutayo assigns Masako to watering the moss phlox as she goes in to be reprimanded by the proprietress, and Masako wonders where Tsutayo put the burial for the goldfish.

Back upstairs when Masako asks Tsutayo how it went with the proprietress, Tsutayo tells Masako to never mind the proprietress when she is reading the newspaper, because she cannot read well and so takes it out on anyone who disrupts her. The proprietress, Ayahachi, has only rudimentary reading skills; she has to puzzle out the contents relying on only those characters she can recognize. Nor can she write; in episode 4 (S.44.1.25), when she is chiding Tsutayo on her lack of reading skills, the proprietress muses silently that she is not sure whether she herself could write the characters for *botan* (peony), which are not even particularly difficult. Tsutayo repeated mentions throughout the novel her inability to read, appearing to almost take pride in it. The differences in background and education between Masako and Tsutayo is another theme that runs throughout the novel.

The first episode ends with Masako asking Tsutayo what she had done with the goldfish. "I buried them under the moss phlox," she tells Masako. Masako turns to look at Tsutayo as she is putting on her lip rouge thinking how Tsutayo was too cheap to pay for the fertilizer and now the moss phlox is living by sucking the life essence out of the goldfish. Finishing her lips, Tsutayo turns to Masako and guilelessly says, "A flower grave, good right? Just right for goldfish."

The narrative, the imagery, and the symbolism are adeptly accomplished in this short introduction to the novel. Immediately, Tsutayo is presented as a parasite to Masako. The question of whether Tsutayo is actually guilelessly kindhearted, as in making a flower graveyard for the goldfish, or just a spendthrift exploiter, as in using the goldfish for fertilizer, remains a refrain throughout the novel con-

tinuing into the sequel *Boke no hana*. Tsutayo's foresight, whether intentional on her part or not, is aptly evoked; the reader is left wondering whether she acquired the dead goldfish planning from the start to use them as fertilizer or if that was just a lucky happenstance of the events that followed.

The contrast of the two is also immediately made apparent. Whereas Masako spends frivolously for high ideals but no material gain (the goldfish), Tsutayo spends sparingly for practical gain (the moss phlox and fertilizer). Similarly, the reader learns in episode 2 (S.44.1.11) that Masako is talented at all her lessons whether dancing or Kiyomoto music and the *okiya* proprietress has great expectations for her; Tsutayo on the other hand forgets her lessons the minute they end and constantly confounds the proprietress with her ostensibly flighty ways.

The moss phlox, *shibazakura*, of the title represents the two *geisha* in their youth, whereas the quince-flower bonsai, *boke-no-hana*, title of the sequel represents the story of the two in their middle age after they have retired from being *geisha*, but these flowers are most symbolic of Tsutayo herself since she is the one most closely associated with the them in the novels; she buys the moss phlox at the beginning of the *Shibazakura* novel and appears at the beginning of the *Boke no hana* novel with a present of a quince bonsai for Masako.



(fig. 2) second illustration by Iwata Sentarō for the first installment (episode 1) of *Shibazakura*. *Shūkan Shinchō* January 4, 1969 (Shōwa 44), p71



(fig. 3) second illustration by Iwata Sentarō for the seventh installment (episode 7) of *Shibazakura*. *Shūkan Shinchō* February 15, 1969 (Shōwa 44), p67



(fig. 4) second illustration by Iwata Sentarō for the second installment (episode 2) of *Shibazakura*. *Shūkan Shinchō* January 11, 1969 (Shōwa 44), p65

The goldfish and the shibazakura moss phlox of the title are so emblematic of the first episode and the book as a whole, that naturally Iwata Sentarō choose the motif as one of his two illustrations for this episode (fig. 2). In his illustration, one of the two of them is squatting down gazing at the moss phlox while below the goldfish swim in the ground in literally a dark place taking up two-thirds of the entire illustration. In stark contrast, the apprentice *geisha* is adorably rendered with a heart-shaped face, dressed in a striped kimono with black satin collar, and the *momo-ware* coiffure of a Tokyo apprentice *geisha*.

Coming of Age

If the first episode showed the exploitative capabilities of Tsutayo, the second episode depicts her caring side (S.44.1.11). Once again when the two of them are walking home from their lessons, Tsutayo runs up to Masako's back and tells her to walk as fast as she can back to the house. At the house, Tsutayo tells Masako to quickly take off her clothes, and that is when Masako realizes she had just gotten her first real period. Not only did Tsutayo shield Masako from anyone seeing her soiled kimono as they walked home, she also brought wet towels for Masako to clean herself and spot-treated the stains on Masako's kimono. While Masako is grateful for Tsutayo's ministrations, she also resents having become indebted to Tsutayo and in her mind the incident becomes permanently linked to the goldfish and moss phlox episode [eps. 3 (S.44.1.18)].

In other acts of devotion, besides the burial of the goldfish, Tsutayo also pays respect at the local shrine every morning, and then returns to help Masako dress for the day. In addition to her care of Masako, the reader also learns of Tsutayo's devotion to her mother. Tsutayo was sold off by her mother at the age of five or six when her construction-worker father left them, but instead of resenting her mother, does all she can to support her. Masako, on the other hand, muses how she herself resents her family for having sold her into becoming a *geisha* to pay off her father's debts after he committed suicide. In contrast to herself, Masako is dumbfounded by what she feels is Tsutayo's unwarranted love and dedication towards her mother [eps. 3 (S.44.1.18)].

With the arrival of her period, Masako knows what is coming: her *mizu-agé* deflowering ceremony by which she will officially have a *danna* sponsor, even though she is only fifteen years old and is so small that the *kata-agé* shoulder-tucks of her kimono have barely been let out at all. The man who will become her *danna* is not mentioned by name at first in the novel, but his genteel prematurely grey image appears in her mind. The reader is told that he had promised to become her *danna* when she first

came out as an "*oshaku*" (雛妓) apprentice-*geisha* at a banquet. He is also a wealthy man from a landowning family and a president of a railroad company in Tokyo. In contrast to Masako's insured future, their proprietress is worried over what to do about Tsutayo's *mizu-agé*. Tsutayo has yet to receive any offers, even though she is skilled in the performance arts, popular with the guests, and if anything, even more beautiful than Masako [eps. 2 (S.44.1.11)].

As it turns out, Tsutayo took care of her *mizu-agé* herself. One evening, Masako has too much to drink and in the end wobbles off home (the *geisha* house) without Tsutayo. Waking up in the middle of the night and worried about Tsutayo not having returned home yet, Masako hears a cry that sounds like Tsutayo's voice from upstairs in the proprietress' room, where as she later learns Tsutayo was being upbraided by the proprietress about what Tsutayo had done.

Tsutayo had earlier asked the proprietress of the third-rate *machi'ai* tea-house (house of assignation) Makimura in Shinmachi to introduce her to an appropriate customer. That night, Tsutayo had let Masako become inebriated instead of accepting customers' offers of drinks in her stead. Then Tsutayo, unbeknownst to Masako, went off to Makimura to have secret *mizu-agé* rendezvous, through which she personally received the payment for her deflowering instead of it going to the *geisha* house. On their way home from their lessons the next day, when Masako asks Tsutayo why she did not just borrow money for her mother from their proprietress, Tsutayo explains because then she would have acquired interest on her loan and ended up paying five times the original loan, once again demonstrating Tsutayo's financial savviness [eps. 3 (S.44.1.18)]. The proprietress attributes Tsutayo's financial savviness for her having learned it from lower-end *geisha* when she belonged to a different house before coming to their present Tsugawa house.

Since Masako already had a promise of a *danna* sponsor, because of his acknowledged support not only is she treated differentially at the banquet houses, but she also has nearly unlimited spending funds. Tsutayo, on the other hand, had to carry off her *mizu-agé* herself in order to acquire money to send to her mother and perhaps did not even have the spending money which she had to borrow from Masako for the moss phlox. It is only now that Masako notices that Tsutayo may well and justly so have been envious of their difference in status, and feels heavily weighted down by the thought [eps. 3 (S.44.1.18)].

For Love or Money

The issue of love-or-money, or even love-and-money, is another theme that runs throughout the book, and obviously a theme of particular importance to women in general and *geisha* in particular. Masako has a promised *danna* necessary for financial reasons, but loves another (the kabuki actor). Tsutayo's relationship with her customers appears to be strictly monetary, and yet the purpose of the money she acquires through that is to help support her mother.

In the context of Tsutayo trying to justify still sleeping with customers for money behind their proprietress' back, she makes an incongruous comment that since now even Buddhist priests can marry, *geisha* should not be tied by money and she should be able to meet her customers as she pleases. Besides her argument making little sense and that priests had been permitted by law to marry since the Meiji period, her reference is to the stage play *Shukke to sono deshi* (The Priest and his Disciples) by Kurata Hyakuzō that was published the year before in 1917 and became a best seller [eps. 4 (S.44.1.25)].

Tsutayo's reasons for wanting to become a full-fledged *geisha* as soon as possible (full-fledged *geisha* keep 30% of their earnings) were so that she could make enough money to become independent and have her mother come live with her. Tsutayo comments to Masako that two things *geisha* should avoid are falling in love with a kabuki actor and dedicating themselves to their arts. The latter, according to Tsutayo, is because *geisha* consumed by their arts just become prideful dried up old prunes who can never let go of their *shamisen*. The former is because supporting a kabuki actor is a wasteful expenditure of money [eps. 4 (S.44.1.25)].

Masako's promised *danna* thought of himself as a both a "sophisticate" and a "romanticist," delaying Masako's *mizu-agé* until she was old enough for it. In part, the influence was the "I novel" genre of love and romance, individualism, idealism, and humanism promoted by the Shirakaba-ha (White Birch Society) in their monthly literary journal, the *Shirakaba*, which reached its peak in popularity around the time in which *Shibazakura* is set. On the other hand, while Masako is feels apprehension concerning her upcoming *mizu-agé*, before she had her period and consciously considered its significance, she had looked forward to his visits at her banquets much like a child seeking attention from a parent.

When her soon-to-be *danna*, Etō, gives her a ruby ring seven weeks before he is to leave for a lengthy business trip to Europe, everyone expects that Masako's *mizu-agé* will take place that night.

However, Etō leaves the banquet early not wishing to be seen being paid in kind for the ruby ring to preserve his image, making the excuse that he needed to return home where his relations had gathered in preparation for his journey. That very night, Masako first encounters the kabuki actor with whom she falls in love [eps. 5 (S.44.2.1)].

Wishing to evade being dragged along to different banquet halls to be shown off with her new ruby ring, when Tsutayo escapes as their proprietress grows inebriated, Masako follows along. Tsutayo brings Masako to the Makimura house where the two young kabuki actors of the Kawamura house are present, Enjirō and Senshichi. While the former, the son of the kabuki star Yoshizawa San'en, lounges in drunken disarray, the star's other disciple Senshichi remains composed and reminds Enjirō that they should leave soon since they had a performance the next day. The older *geisha* joke with their patrons about how responsible the two young actors are unlike the profligate older actors. One jokes that she would be happy to volunteer for an affair with Senshichi, even though another said that Senshichi does not seem interested in *geisha* affairs, and in any case Kawamura is very strict about such things. One replies, "Hey, but aren't affairs of the heart free," and the other rejoins, "Ah, one of those 'new women' [*atarashii-onna*], you too?" [eps. 5 (S.44.2.1)].

One of the older patrons notices Masako's ruby ring along with her new gorgeous *kimono* and *obi* and surmises that she already had her *mizu-agé*. In embarrassment and in order to avoid further discussion, Masako runs out of the room planning on returning home, but is stopped in the corridor by another *geisha* who tells her that her proprietress was asking for Masako to come to another banquet house. However, when she arrives at the other banquet house the person awaiting her is not her proprietress, but the kabuki actor Senshichi.

She only fifteen and he only nineteen, in the end all they do is stare at each other. Masako has seen him on stage, and thought him the more handsome and talented actor of the two, but this is the first time she has met him in person. Senshichi has had experience with older *geisha*, but without Masako knowing how to make a coquettish invitation, he does not have an opening to start. Since San'en was absent due to illness and Enjirō had returned home because he had too much to drink, this was Senshichi's chance, but he had not considered what to do once he was alone with Masako. In parting, he only manages to say, "when you [next] come to a play, stop by the green room" [eps. 6 (S.44.2.1)].

After returning home, this time it is Masako's turn to be upbraided by the proprietress. Masako in-

sists that nothing had happened for which she should be chided, as is true. However, Masako had gone to a house of assignation to meet with a young actor on the very day she had received her ruby ring from Etō when everyone had assumed that she would have her *mizu-agé* that night. The proprietress, Ayahachi, is worried about the rumors getting around and is desperate for Masako to have her *mizu-agé* before Etō hears them. Ayahachi rebukes Masako, saying that it does not matter if nothing happened, because no one will believe it; “placing a *geisha* next to an actor is like throwing a cat and *katsuobushi* [dried tuna] into the same box” [eps. 6 (S.44.2.1)].

Etō returns three days later and that evening Masako’s *mizu-agé* is finally carried out. In contrast to Masako’s first encounter with Senshichi full of the frisson of unspoken meanings, her *mizu-agé* with Etō was merely a ceremonial rite. Off to a humorous start, Masako’s *obi* was tied too tight and she could not get it off; by the time Etō managed to help her untie it, he was covered in sweat. Etō tried to be gentle and keep the act to the minimum, but frozen in embarrassment Masako just wished to die. Afterwards, she wonders if this is really what the older *geisha* get so excited about and had thought it would have been something more beautiful akin to rapture. She comes to the conclusion that the *geisha* entertainments at a banquet are just a pretty veneer for the tawdry events of the bedroom [eps. 6 (S.44.2.1)].

However, while she was under house confinement for two days until Etō reappeared, she realized how fortunate she was to have a *danna* who was not only relatively handsome but also generous with his financial support. Surrounded by the *geisha* left at home because they had no engagements, Masako started to notice not only the difference in apparel but even the luster of the skin of the *geisha* who had little or no financial support, let alone those *geisha* who had to supplement their earnings by sleeping with customers in addition to their own *danna*. In the end, Masako concludes that money and obligation are just two faces of the same coin [eps. 6 (S.44.2.1)].

When Tsutayo offers to introduce Masako to the *machi'ai* Makimura so she can make more money while her *danna* is away on his business trip, Masako replies that that would be hateful, especially the money part. Tsutayo is taken aback by Masako’s *laissez-faire* attitude towards money, for after all it is because of money problems that they had to become *geisha* in the first place. Tsutayo further explains that just because their proprietress has promised to adopt Masako, that does not affect her financial debt, and neither of them is told to what extent their debt is being whittled down. While Masako is diligent in her lessons so she can become a top-class *geisha*, Tsutayo wishes to advance as quickly as possible so she can quit being a *geisha* and become financially independent [eps. 7 (S.44.2.15); eps. 11 (S.44.3.15)].

Masako does not have an opportunity to sleep with Senshichi for several months, not until after her *danna* Etō has returned from his trip abroad and Masako has made her debut as a full-fledged *geisha*. The contrast between the two men is painfully clear. If Etō is a relatively young and handsome man for a *danna*, he is still twice her age and prematurely grey, and in any case more of a parental figure than a lover. Senshichi is only three years older than Masako and a handsome *onnagata* (female role) actor with the lustrous fresh skin of a young man (fig. 3). Where Etō had trouble helping Masako untie her obi, Senshichi "knows only too well the clothes of a woman." With the ardor of a young man, the act is soon over, and though Masako notes to herself that he did not have the skill of Etō, nevertheless love accentuates the ardor on her part. [eps. 14 (S.44.4.5)]

Masako decides to savor the event by spending the whole night with Senshichi, which is quite obviously problematic because she is being unfaithful to her financially generous *danna* and what she has done will become painfully apparent to her proprietress. Once again, Tsutayo comes to Masako's rescue, while taking advantage of the circumstances at the same time. Just as Masako is worried about what to do the next morning, Tsutayo shows up with a change of clothes so that Masako does not have to make an embarrassing trip home in the same fancy banquet clothing as the night before (fig. 6).

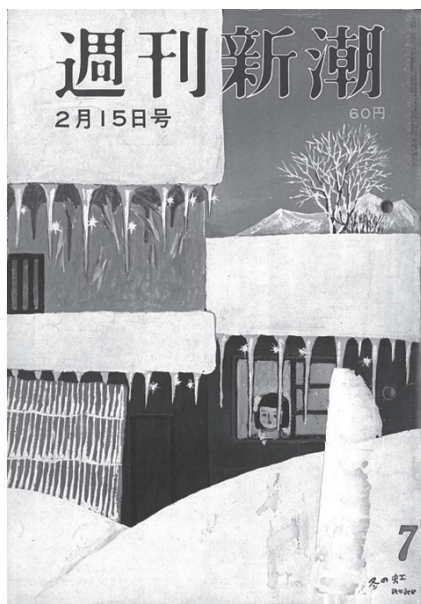
As it turns out, Tsutayo had also spent the night with a secret lover whose identity is not revealed until later in the book. However, unlike Masako, Tsutayo had had the forethought to have clothes delivered and to come up with the handy excuse that the two of them had become too drunk to walk home and so had stayed overnight together. When the proprietress, who is not fooled, asks Tsutayo then who had had the clothes delivered, Tsutayo obfuscates by replying she thought the proprietress had. [eps. 14 (S.44.4.1)]

After questioning Tsutayo, Ayahachi berates Masako for getting herself involved in Tsutayo's schemes telling her that Tsutayo will only cause her trouble and lower her own status by association. Masako tries to defend Tsutayo, and when about to explain it was only due to Tsutayo that their reputations were saved, Ayahachi stops her before Masako makes the mistake of admitting she spent the night with Senshichi, which the proprietress had already surmised anyway. Ayahachi is somewhat appalled at Masako's lack of common sense that she would actually admit what had occurred when it was already covered up, at least superficially. This incident also serves as a good example of the cultural concept of *tatemaie* (public façade) and *honné* (private truth) of great necessity in the world of *geisha*, but also common in society in general.

Of Diamonds and Couture

In addition to Masako and Tsutayo, there is a third apprentice *geisha* Koman of the Tsurumoto house, and taken together they were expected to become the three *geisha* stars of the era in a few years when they became full-fledged experienced *geisha*. Koman was described as a beauty with limpid eyes [eps. 2 (S.44.1.11)]. Whereas, Masako looked like a “*kimekomi*” doll, with a round face and large eyes with double eyelids clearly outlined with long eyelashes; Tsutayo looked more adult with a longer face and traditional Asian single eyelids [eps. 2 (S.44.1.11); eps. 3 (S.44.1.18)]. All three are depicted together in the illustration by Iwata Sentarō for episode 2 (fig. 4), although it is difficult to distinguish between the three in the illustration.

Etō had promised to become Masako’s *danna* when she became of age, and Koman was the next to have a *danna* committed. Masako’s proprietress does not consider Koman’s to be of the same level as Masako’s *danna*, but she was concerned about Tsutayo for whom she was not able to find a *danna*. Not only did Tsutayo arrange her *mizu-agé* herself, but she also managed to find herself a *danna*.



(fig. 5) L: cover of *Shūkan Shinchō* February 15, 1969 (Shōwa 44) ; R: first page of seventh installment (episode 7) of *Shibazakura*

In a letter to her mother, transcribed for her by Masako, Tsutayo describes her *danna* as a hand-

somely mustached lieutenant general, who is kind and generous. Tsutayo goes on to describe how her *geisha* house and the tea houses are all astounded and overjoyed with her good fortune of having made such a fine catch. Whereas in reality, Tsutayo had taken care of her *mizu-agé* herself; her *danna* is just a moneyed provincial, and a skinflint to boot. In contrast to the image described in the letter, Tsutayo's *danna* is around fifty years old and balding. Furthermore, Tsutayo's formal *danna*, Ōta, is not the man she had had her original *mizu-agé* with; believing her to still be a virgin, he pays for it again [eps. 7 (S.44.2.15)]. The illustration by Iwata Sentarō for episode 7, aptly depicts the fantasy versus reality of Tsutayo's *danna*, with the fiercely mustached general to the left separated from the portly provincial on the right by a writing brush (fig. 5).

In her letter to her mother, through Masako, Tsutayo also writes that she attends a banquet every evening dressed in new attire, moreover her *danna* gives her spending money which she is sending to her mother. Despite Tsutayo's assertions, her *danna* is far too stingy to supply her with new attire and moreover as an apprentice *geisha* even Masako with a generous *danna* does not yet wear formal *geisha* evening attire. In addition, even after Ōta has become Tsutayo's *danna*, he certainly does not pay for Tsutayo to appear at a banquet every night, and Tsutayo is still primarily invited to banquets as Masako's companion [eps. 7 (S.44.2.15)].

Competition is not just between the *geisha*, although for them it is their livelihood. For the men, entertaining with *geisha* is also about demonstrating one's wealth and prestige with one's peers in the male society. The men must go to establishments appropriate to their class; if caught being a spendthrift by going to a cheaper establishment, they would lose face and become despised for their criminal behavior. There could also be real-life financial repercussions. Koman's *danna* is a president of a shipping company that had been having problems due to a huge workers' strike, but when the gossip of him giving her an expensive emerald ring even reached the newspapers, the company's stock went up. No doubt it was because it was thought that if he could afford such extravagant expenditure, the company must not be in trouble [eps. 5 (S.44.2.1)].

Masako's proprietress, Ayahachi, pressures Etō into buying a similarly expensive ring for Masako as a promise of commitment before he leaves for his overseas trip. Seven days before he is to leave, Etō gives Masako a ring with a three-carat ruby encircled with diamonds. It is so large, not only does it overwhelm Masako's childishly small hands, but also her new *kimono* and gold-threaded *obi* commissioned for the event. For the same amount of money as the ring, one could buy a *geisha* house or two, but the

“pigeon blood” red of the ruby just reminds Masako of her coming of age and her up-coming *mizu-agé* that all had expected to take place that night [eps. 5 (S.44.2.1)].

A month later, when Etō returns from his trip to Paris, he gives Masako a diamond ring from the prestigious London-based jewelers Mappin & Webb as a souvenir. However, when she with her proprietress and several *geisha* had come to the port at Kobe to greet him on his arrival back, Masako had seen the far more grand diamond ring his wife was wearing. Masako refuses the smaller ring, jealous of the difference in status between wife and kept *geisha* as symbolized in her mind by the size of the ring [eps. 10 (S.44.3.8); eps. 11 (S.44.3.15)]. Here the symbolism of the diamond ring brings up a third issue of pertinence to women in general and *geisha* in particular, in addition to romantic love versus the financial necessity of a *danna*: that of the social status gained through marriage that is rarely attainable for a *geisha*. Even women who are not *geisha* must consider the age-old life choices such as career or marriage, or if marriage, for love or financial security.

Etō returned from abroad in September, and shortly after the rumors spread about Etō promising to buy a larger diamond ring for Masako, Ayahachi arranged with Etō to start preparations for Masako’s debut as a full-fledged *geisha* in early spring the following year [eps. 11 (S.44.3.15)]. Tsutayo convinced Masako to have their two debuts at the same time. Masako agreed with this because the two of them were considered by all as two peas in the pod of their *geisha* house, or the Japanese phrase, two matching flasks of an altar (*omiki-tokkuri* 御神酒徳利). In addition, Masako was reticent about having her debut before Tsutayo who was a year her senior in age.

Masako worries that there will not be enough time for Tsutayo to make preparations, but Tsutayo says she would be happy to borrow one of Masako’s *kimono* for the event. Instead of realizing that Tsutayo is once again taking advantage of her, Masako is concerned that Tsutayo’s feelings will be hurt if she does not have her own debut ensemble. In the end, not only does Tsutayo wear one of the three *kimono* that had been prepared for Masako, Tsutayo also talks Masako and the proprietress into letting her wear the smaller of the two diamond rings that Etō had given to Masako. The proprietress, Ayahachi, had intended to take the smaller ring as her own and deduct the cost of the ring from Masako’s debt, but once Tsutayo has worn it in public that is no longer possible. Likewise, even though Tsutayo has the borrowed *kimono* retailored and returns it to Masako, Masako can never wear the *kimono* again since Tsutayo had basically made it her own by wearing it so publicly, and eventually Masako just gives her *kimono* back to Tsutayo. Tsutayo also eventually buys the smaller diamond ring from Masako at a huge

discount, once again demonstrating her financial savviness.

The other *geisha* from a different house, Koman, was not able to hold her debut. Her *danna* who gave her the emerald ring was the president of a ship construction company; with the production reduced due to the end of the war, his company went out of business. On the other hand, the end of the war did not adversely affect Eto's railroad company nor Tsutayo's provincial wealthy merchant *danna*. However, Koman, being a beauty and supported by the upper-class Tsurumoto *geisha* house, would be able to find herself another wealthy sponsor and make her debut later [eps. 11 (S.44.3.15)].

Tokyo *Geisha* and Apparel

The style of *kimono*, let alone that of *geisha*, is different in Tokyo and Kyoto. In Tokyo they are called *geisha*, but in Kyoto they are called *geiko*; the apprentice *geisha* are called *oshaku* in Tokyo and in Kyoto they are called *maiko*. The make-up is worn heavier in Kyoto than in Tokyo, and the hairstyles differ between Tokyo *oshaku* and Kyoto *maiko*, among other subtler differences in dress and demeanor.

Their proprietress, Ayahachi, disliked heavy make-up it not being Edo-chic. Nevertheless, no matter how much she was chastised, Tsutayo consistently painted her face a thick white with deep red lips and heavily darkened eyebrows, so much so that Masako worried about the damage Tsutayo might be doing to her skin with such heavy white make-up [eps. 1 (S.44.1.4)]. Most likely they were still using lead-based make-up at this time, which had severe deleterious effects on the skin in addition to lead poisoning, since lead-based make-up was not officially prohibited in Japan until 1934.

Unlike Kyoto *maiko*, who go through a number of different hairstyles as they progress from a beginner to a more advanced level of *maiko* before becoming a *geiko*, Tokyo *oshaku* consistently wore the *momo-waré* hairstyle, a chignon with a large bun in back forming a ring thought to resemble a peach-seed.

京都では雛妓を舞妓と呼んで一本の芸者と区別して、横鬢をひつつめた独特の髪形に結い、例ののだらりの帯をしめているが、東京ではどこの土地も頭は桃割れである。関西では水揚げ前と後とでは髪形が変わるが、東京にはその習慣もない。

In Kyoto, *oshaku* are called *maiko* to distinguish from an *ippon* [full-fledged] *geisha*, their hair is

pulled tight in a special coiffure called the *yokobin*, and their obi is tied in the well-known *darari* bow; but in Tokyo, regardless of region, their hair is done in the *momo-waré* style. In the Kansai region, the hairstyle differs before and after the *mizu-agé*, but Tokyo does not have that custom. [eps. 5 (S.44.2.1)]

The full-fledged *geisha* in Tokyo, as in Kyoto, wore the *shimada* coiffure. As a proprietress of a *geisha* house, Ayahachi wears a *tsubushi-shimada*, a somewhat thinner and flatter appearance than the taller *taka-shimada* coiffure worn by Masako and Tsutayo when they debut as young *geisha*.

While towards the end of the Edo period, the Fukagawa *geisha* were known for wearing only their bare feet with *geta*, Tokyo *geisha* typically wore *tabi* with their *geta*. Indeed, in a number of occasions in *Shibazakura*, they are described as wearing white *tabi*. In one example, walking home from their lessons, the day after Tsutayo has taken her *mizu-agé* into her own hands, she is described as wearing black-lacquered fair-weather (*hiyori-geta*) with white *tabi* [Eps. 3 (S.44.1.18)].

When Masako and Tsutayo make their debut as *geisha* at the ages of 16 and 17 respectively what they wore is described in episode 12 (S.44.3.22).

The ensemble worn by Masako is described as:

重い縮緬を青だちの黒に染めて、紋は津川家の流水を白く抜いてある。帯は三越で三百円という値段の多彩な牡丹を織り出した唐綴れ。これを締めるのに女の内箱では心もとないというので、土地で最古参の箱屋に頼んで来てもらった。

Dyed a blue-black on heavy *chirimen* [crepe], with the formal white Tsugawa house crests of flowing-water. The obi was an expensive 300 yen one from Mitsukoshi, with peony blossoms in various colors rendered in a *kara-tsuzure* weave [resembling embroidery]. Because their *uchibako* [female *geisha* attendant] wouldn't be up to tying it, the longest established *hakoya* [male *geisha* attendant] of the area was asked to come to do it.

たっぷりした裾一面に数個の久寿玉が華やかに五色の房をもつれさせてひろがっている。一つ一つの久寿玉には梅、橘、桜、紅葉、菊、牡丹の模様が全部刺繍で重なり盛り上り、見事という他はないような贅沢な仕上りだった。

The entirety of the generous hem was full of auspicious balls exquisitely done in the five colors. Each one of these had designs of plum, *tachibana* [fragrant citrus flowers], cherry blossoms, maple leaves, chrysanthemums, and peony completely rendered in embroidery, making for a lavish finish like no other.

Where as the ensemble worn by Tsutayo, which she had borrowed from Masako, is described as:

帯は朱色地に葛の葉がちろちろと織り出た丸帯で、裾には勢いのよい立浪で、波しぶきだけ銀糸でぬいってある。〈省中略〉さすがに越後屋で波の色は鮮やかに染め上っていた〈省後略〉

The obi was a *maru-obi* [heavy, expensive obi; approx. 70cm width x 435cm length] in a cinnabar color with scattered kudzu leaves raised in the weave; the hem had surging waves with the spumes of foam alone embroidered in silver thread. The color of the waves was vividly dyed as only the Echigoya could.

Of the three *kimono* commissioned for Masako, Ayahachi makes sure Tsutayo borrows the least expensive one. Obviously, Masako's is by far the more gorgeous ensemble of the two, yet the overwhelming design coupled by the long 62.5cm length sleeves on Masako's small stature make her look like she is playing dress-up in a *geisha* costume. Tsutayo, on the other hand, with her taller figure dressed in a more subtle *kimono* becomes the epitome of Tokyo *geisha* chic. No one not in the know imagines that Tsutayo's *kimono* was merely a borrowed garb and not one specifically tailored for her. In the end, with her more subtle borrowed *kimono* and smaller borrowed diamond ring, Tsutayo far exceeds Masako in style and panache.

Ultimately, to be able to have such gorgeous *kimono* and *obi* as these commissioned at this time, right at the end of the war in 1918, is only due to Masako's *danna* Etō. Many had lived high during the war only to see their companies go out of business after they were no longer being funded by the war effort. Etō, on the other hand, was a president of a railroad company, so unlike many others his financial circumstances had not changed. If anything, he was being groomed for advancement since his company had sent him off on a month-long business trip to Europe.

Etō's stylish fashion is described when Masako and company go to Kobe to welcome Etō back from his trip abroad.

一等船客のデッキに純白の麻の背広姿で立っているのが江藤だということが分った。九月に入ったばかりで、芸者たちは緋から単衣に替り、迎える者の中にも白っぽい衣裳はなかったので、その中に降りてきた江藤のダンディぶりは一層目立つものになった。

The person standing on the first-class passenger deck wearing a pure white *asa* [linen or ramie] suit was easily recognized as Etō. Having just entered September, with the *geisha* having changed from *ro* [leno weave] to a *hito-e* [unlined kimono], there were none among the welcoming crowd in even whitish apparel. Disembarking among them made Etō's dandyism even all that more conspicuous. [eps. 10 (S.44.3.8)]



(fig. 6) L: cover of *Shūkan Shinchō* April 5, 1969 (Shōwa 44); R: second illustration by Iwata Sentarō for episode 14

Conclusion

Many of the themes and motifs in these first fourteen installments will continue throughout the novel, such as the moss phlox and the frenemy relationship. The “For Love or Money” theme will acquire new nuances as Masako takes over the financial support of her kabuki lover, while on the other hand, Etō continues his support fully cognizant of the circumstances out of affection for Masako. Indeed, the next installment of the novel continues with the repercussions of Masako having slept with Senshi-chi. Masako and Tsutayo will eventually go their separate ways, Masako to become the top *geisha* and

Tsutayo to become an independent owner of a disreputable establishment, but the two will also continue to be linked by their symbiotic/parasitic relationship.

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