

Motifs in Image and Text: Narrative, Imagery, and Symbolism in Ariyoshi Sawako's novel *Shibazakura* (Moss Phlox) Part 2 "Madara Neko" Chapter

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Abstract

*This essay is a continuation on the novel *Shibazakura* (Moss Phlox) by Ariyoshi Sawako (1931–1984), addressing the themes, or motifs, in the “Madara Neko” (Calico Cat) second chapter of the novel, illustrated by the leading Shōwa illustrator Iwata Sentarō (1901–1974) in the *Shūkan Shinchō* magazine in which the novel was originally serialized. Many of the themes and motifs of the first chapter continue into the “Calico Cat” chapter, and throughout the novel as a whole, such as the symbolism of the moss phlox and goldfish episode seen in the first chapter and emblematic both of the book as a whole, as well as the problematic relationship between the two main characters, the geisha Masako and Tsuta. The themes of love and marriage as well as the status of wife versus geisha likewise continue into the second chapter, but other themes, such as jealousy and competition, play a more significant role in this chapter. The kimono motifs, in particular, are highly symbolic of the characters and the events narrated in the “Calico Cat” chapter. This current essay (part 2) covers the novel from the 21st installment of May 24 of 1969 to its 37th installment of September 13 of 1969 in the *Shūkan Shinchō* magazine (“Madara Neko” episodes 1–17 in the book edition). It might be noted in passing that the book edition differs from the original serialized version in the parsing of the episodes, and also on occasion has minor differences in text.*

Introduction

The second chapter of the novel *Shibazakura* (Moss Phlox) by Ariyoshi Sawako (1931–1984), which ran from May 24 to September 13 of 1969 (Shōwa 44) in the *Shūkan Shinchō* magazine, begins with the reappearance of Tsuta at the Tsugawa *geisha*¹ house. The previous first chapter had ended with

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

Tsuta retiring from the *geisha* world to become the second wife of her country politician, who as it turns out is a man of some importance, and moving off to join him in the countryside, where she could keep her own household and have her mother live with her. His wife had been severely ill and when she dies, Tanimura wishes to make Tsuta his legal wife, but Tsuta will have nothing of it and manipulates him into marrying the *geisha* he had been the sponsor of in Tokyo in Tsuta's stead.

In the five intervening years between Tsuta's retirement at the end of the previous chapter (Shibazakura) and her return in the second chapter (Calico Cat), Tokyo has suffered from the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 (Taishō 12), necessitating the rebuilding of the Tsugawa *geisha* house, and it is now 1925 (Taishō 14). Masako is 22 years old and Tsuta 23 years old [eps. II-1(21) (S.44.5.24)]. Masako has been with both her first and only *danna*, Etō, and her kabuki lover Senshichi for seven years [eps. II-6(26) (S.44.6.28)]. The third of the three leading *geisha* (see fig. 4 in previous essay), Tsuruya, is now on her third *danna*; her first she lost when his shipping business failed because of which she had to postpone her debut [eps. I-11(12) (S.44.3.22)], her second was a president of a successful drug company allowing her to debut and change her name from the apprentice Koman to the *geisha* Tsuruya [eps. I-17(20) (S.44.5.17)], and now five years later she has a wealthy politician *danna* with yakuza connections who will not permit her to attend any banquets where he is not present [eps. II-11(31) (S.44.8.2)].

The impetus for Tsuta's return is the death of Ayahachi, who had been the owner of the Tsugawa *geisha* house. With Ayahachi's death, Masako as Ayahachi's legally adopted daughter inherits the *geisha* house. Tsuta avails herself of the opportunity of imposing on Masako's good will to allow herself to return to the *geisha* world under the banner of what has now become Masako's Tsugawa *geisha* house. Masako, despite her misgivings about Tsuta's opportunism and her concerns in regard to Tsuta's past nefarious conduct (such as secret assignments for cash behind their proprietress' back), and somewhat against her better judgement, she does allow Tsuta to reenter the *geisha* world under her house banner.

The calico cat (*madara neko*, まだら猫) of the chapter title does not make her appearance, oddly enough, until episode 4 [eps. II-4(24) (S.44.6.14)], (fig. 1). The *shibazakura* (moss phlox) and goldfish motif of the previous chapter served as a superb overreaching emblem of the chapter, and the book as a whole, of the frenemy relationship between Masako and Tsuta, with Tsuta's self-imposed friendship with Masako through which Tsuta serves as both a protector and exploiter of Masako. The sym-

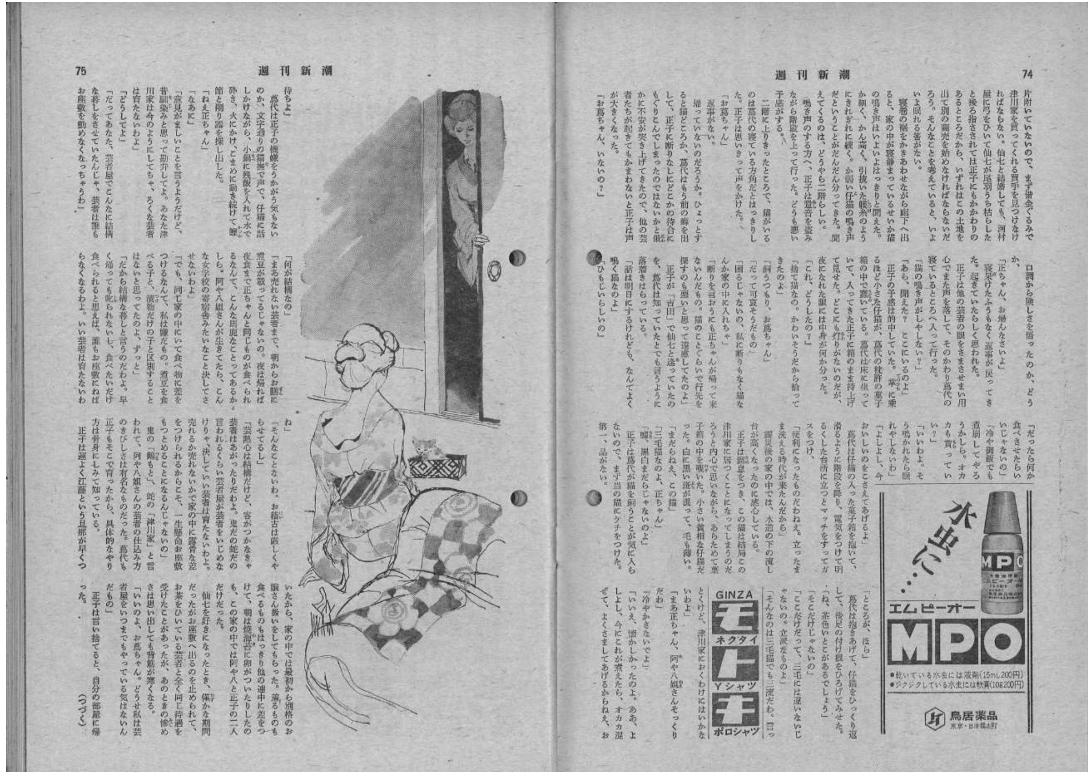


Fig. 1 Masako finds Tsuta with the stray cat [eps. II-4(24) (S44-6-14) p74-75]

bolism of the calico cat is less evocative. Similar to the *shibazakura* and goldfish incident of the first chapter, when Tsuta buys some feeble *shibazakura* for a discount and also acquires some dead goldfish to bury out of ostensive kindness but in the end serve as free fertilizer for the *shibazakura*, Tsuta adopts a stray kitten and insists it is a refined calico cat.

One night, after Tsuta has been installed as a guest in a corner room in Masako's *geisha* house, Masako wakes up to a mewling sound and eventually realizes it is coming from Tsuta's room upstairs. Although Masako has no wish to adopt the straggly kitten, she resigns herself to it becoming the house cat. Tsuta insists that it is a precious three-color calico cat, even though its third brown color is only a few hairs on one paw, and that she was lucky to find it after its owners must have discarded it not recognizing it worth. Masako insists that it is only a two-color Jellicle piebald, with not even attractively placed spots at that. Despite Tsuta naming it Mi-chan (after its purported three colors), when Masako calls it Nisuke (after its two colors), it runs up to her and purrs. Masako muses how fitting for the cat of a *geisha* house to recognize its two names, for after all *geisha* all have two names,

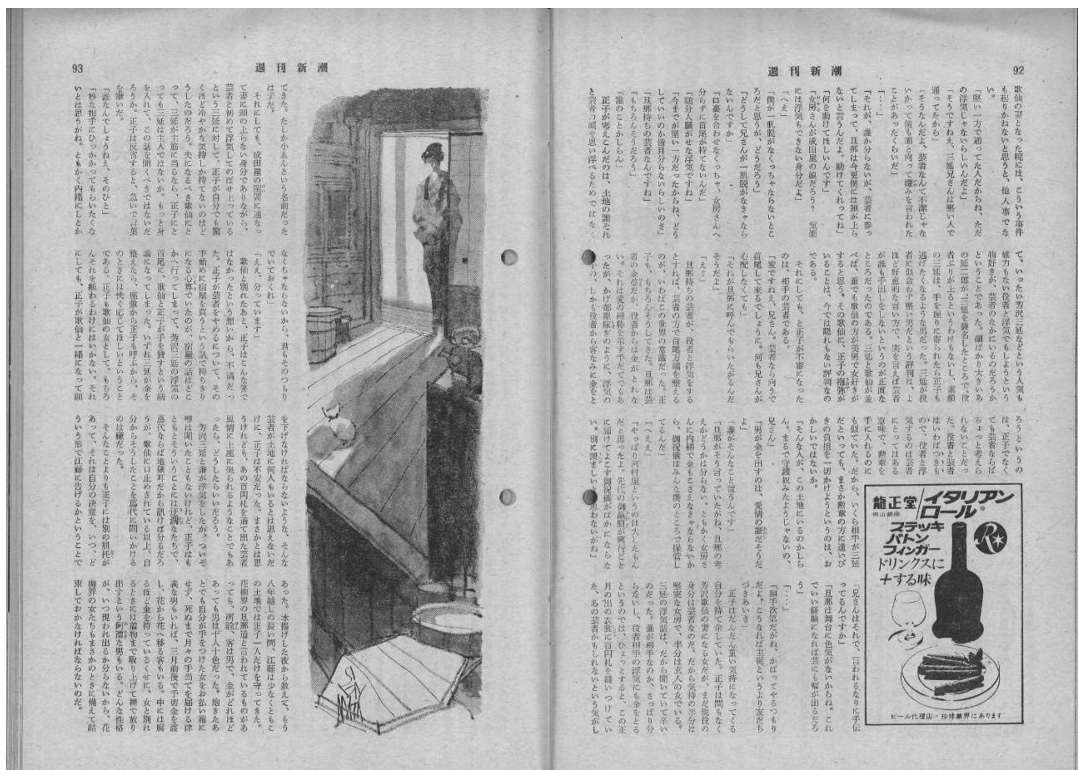


Fig. 2 The cat suddenly appears at Massaro's geisha house [eps. II-11(31) (S44-8-2) p92-93]

their “real” name and their *geisha* name. [eps. II-5(25) (S44.6.21)]

One significant episode concerning the calico cat is when it shows up at Masako's *geisha* house, after Tsuta has moved out, wearing filthy diapers [eps II-11(31) (S44-8-2)], (fig. 2). When Tsuta appears the next morning in search of the cat, Masako asks why she had swaddled the cat, and Tsuta explains that just like for people, the first sexual encounter is of great importance since the quality of the first mating will affect both the quality of the mature personality and the quality of any offspring, hence she had swaddled the cat to prevent it from having any untoward sex with mere strays. If considered in parallel to the *geisha* world, probably from whence Tsuta got the idea in the first place, the prestige of the *danna* sponsor for the deflowering establishes the status of the *geisha*. In Masako's case it was the handsome and gentlemanly Etō, with whom she had sex before her kabuki lover, but in Tsuta's case she arranged her own deflowering with some third-rate customer.

The vast majority of the “Calico Cat” chapter revolves around Masako's desire to retire from being a

geisha and marry her kabuki lover. One of the major themes is Masako's rather unrealistic image of marriage, and her desire to attain this idyllic state. Running in parallel is the low social status of *geisha* and how they are regarded in society, despite actually having more wealth and independence than even an upper-class housewife. In addition to the frictional relationship between Masako and Tsuta, there is something akin to a love triangle with Etō and Tsuta both vying for Masako's attentions. It is their jealousy for Masako's attentions that drives their machinations leading to the grand denouement at the end of the "Calico Cat" chapter.

The Enchantment of Marriage

In the first chapter, the diamond ring served as an apt symbol of the social status of marriage and Masako's jealousy of that status. Etō gives Masako a diamond ring from the prestigious London-based jewelers Mappin & Webb as a souvenir from his trip abroad. However, Masako had already seen the far grander diamond ring worn by Etō's wife, and she refuses his gift of the smaller one. Etō even asks Masako rhetorically if she really thinks the size of the diamond symbolizes the status of wife versus *geisha*. [eps. 10 (S.44.3.8); eps. 11 (S.44.3.15)]. In the end, Etō presents her with another diamond ring, so large that it overwhelms Masako's small physical stature. Tsuta talks the proprietress, Ayahachi, into allowing her to wear Masako's smaller diamond ring for her coming-out ceremony, even though Ayahachi had intended to acquire it for herself and deduct its price from Masako's debt. Tsuta eventually buys the smaller diamond ring for a fraction of its worth, paying Masako in installments so that Masako can support her kabuki lover. Tsuta, always savvy when it comes to money, has her *danna* repurchase the ring for her through a consignment agency as a present when she retires from being a *geisha* to become his mistress. At the end of the first chapter, when Tsuta departs the *geisha* world, she gives part of the profit she had made off the ring to Masako as a farewell present. In contrast, when Masako does finally marry in the third chapter, her stock-salesman husband can only afford to give her an opal ring.

No discrete motif such as the diamond ring, although it continues to be mentioned in passing, represents Masako's image of marriage in the second chapter, although the theme of marriage continues to be a major thread throughout. It may seem that Masako wishes to marry because she is in love with the kabuki actor, but as it turns out Masako was really in love with the idea of marriage. At the end of the chapter, her *danna* Etō feels compelled to ask her, "So anyone would have done, if only you could marry him?" [eps. II-15(35) (S.44.8.30)]

Masako would probably have happily married Etō if he was not already married, and in any case her social status would not have permitted it. Several times Masako muses to herself on her fondness for Etō; thinking back on their relationship, she realizes he was quite a gentleman, but nevertheless, as a *geisha* she is only entertainment and it is not like he ever seriously loved her, certainly not enough to forsake home and family to run off with her. Earlier she had wondered why if even a daughter of the nobility could run off her lover, which caused quite a scandal at the time (the "Byakuren Incident"), while Masako has not yet been able to free herself of the *geisha* world to marry her kabuki actor [eps. II-1(21) (S.44.5.24)].

In 1921, [Byakuren] Yanagiwara ran off with socialist Ryūsuke Miyazaki, son of the political activist Tōten Miyazaki. This incident came to be called the "Byakuren Incident". At the time, adultery was a crime under the criminal law, punishable by up to two years of imprisonment. Yanagi announced her Dear John letter to the Itō family on [sic] the Osaka Asahi Shimbun, and two days later, a protest statement by Denemon was published on [sic] the Osaka Mainichi Shimbun, making it a sensational incident.²

Adultery was only a crime for women; many wealthy men had second wives, or kept a *geisha* or a mistress. Masako, for however much she wishes to attain the status of marriage and devote herself to being faithful to a single man, instead of needing to be shared between Etō and her kabuki lover, as a *geisha* she was in an unusual position for women in that she, like a man, could also openly keep and financially support a lover [eps. II-6(26) (S.44.6.28)].

In contrast to Masako, Tsuta has no ideals about marriage. When Tsuta's explains why she left her position as second wife to her politician, she voices her opinions on marriage. Unlike a *geisha* or a mistress, who can spend money at will, a wife has to be conservative. Furthermore, a politicians' followers are always coming to the house, and the wife has to prepare and serve them dinner, let alone entertaining them, all without earning a cent of money. In response to Masako's comment that being a wife is not supposed to be a business, Tsuta continues on to explain that a wife is responsible for raising the children and keeping her husband in good spirits, and yet if she gets sick (like her politician's wife did), the husband leaves her side for a mistress. In the end, a wife is no more than just a retainer to her husband. [eps. II-1(21) (S.44.5.24)]

² [https://en.wikipedia.org > wiki > Byakuren_Yanagiwara](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byakuren_Yanagiwara) (accessed 2021/12/19)

When Masako lets it slip that she plans to retire from being a *geisha* to marry her kabuki lover, Tsuta warns her that taking an actor as a lover is one thing, but marriage quite another. Masako insists that their love is mutually genuine and pure so they will be fine, but Tsuta reproaches her lecturing that love and marriage are totally different: “Whether pure or not, love is a twisted ballad. Marriage cannot last based on the purity of love. For a man and a woman to live together under one roof, Masako-chan, is really a perverse circumstance.” [eps. II-5(25) (S.44.6.21)]

The Status of *Geisha*

Geisha have so a low status in society, at least in the Taishō – early Shōwa era, that they are even looked down upon by café maids (*jokyū*, 女給), and cannot walk proudly down public streets, however top-class they may be in the *geisha* world [eps. II-9(29) (S.44.7.19)]. Hence, Masako despairs of being a *geisha* and wishes to attain the status of a properly married woman. The contrast between the status of a *geisha* and a properly married wife is another theme introduced in the first “Shibazakura” chapter that continues throughout the “Calico Cat” chapter.

After the Great Kanto Earthquake, Etō rather kindly evacuated all the *geisha* of the Tsugawa house to his winter house in Atami. Although Masako realizes she owes a debt of gratitude to Etō for taking them in when they lost their home due to the earthquake, she still feels resentment because even in this case the difference between *geisha* and wife is apparent. While the Tsugawa *geisha* are sweltering at his Atami villa near the sea, Etō evacuated his wife and children to his cool summer home in Karui-zawa. [eps. II-1(21) (S.44.5.24)]

Several times in the “Calico Cat” chapter, *geisha* in general and Masako in particular are described as being mere belongings or possessions. Etō does not really love Masako, according to her, but just regards her as a prized possession, often being proud that his *geisha* (Masako) is far superior to anyone else’s [eps. II-6(26) (S.44.6.28)]. The men themselves appear to be in competition over who has the best possession, adorning their possessions in extravagant *kimono* to demonstrate their money and power [eps. I-8(8) (S.44.2.22)]. Etō himself does not wish to let Masako go, despite his ire over her being unfaithful to him with her kabuki lover, because he is unwilling to allow her to become a possession of another.

In contrast to Tsuta’s description of what she thinks is the role of a housewife, Masako muses on what makes a successful *geisha*. Naturally beauty and artistic talent like dance are important, but

those two qualities alone will not guarantee success, quick wit is also a prerequisite. Since the customers are wealthy powerful men, they are constantly surrounded by sycophants on a daily basis, and also there are already men called *hōkan* (辯問) who serve that purpose; a *geisha* who just praises a customer at every opportunity will merely bore them. A beauty who cannot entertain customers with sparkling repartee will not be called to a banquet, but a less attractive one who is a good conversationalist will become a popular *geisha*. Even an unpopular lesser beauty lacking quick wit, if she has any common sense, can still increase her earnings by getting herself invited to a banquet by being a companion to a popular *geisha*, in the same way in which Tsuta while still an apprentice had attended Masako's banquets as her companion. Nevertheless, acquiring a *danna* sponsor is of utmost importance. Having a *danna* will ensure she will be invited to at least his banquets and allow her to afford more lavish *kimono*, through which she will gain greater confidence which in turn will even affect her looks, increasing her beauty. [eps. II-2(22) (S.44.5.31)]

If to a *danna* sponsor a *geisha* is merely a possession, to a *geisha* (Tsuta in particular), the *danna* is a money tree. Tsuta is consummate at manipulating her *danna*. She got him to pay for her *mizu-agé*, even though she had already previously carried it off in secret with a different customer; she got him to (re)purchase the smaller diamond ring for her; she convinced him to buy her out of *geisha*-hood and take her on as a second wife. Even after she has left him and returned to Masako's house, she convinces him to buy *yukata* for all the *geisha* at Masako's entire house, and even has him buying theater tickets to help Masako support her kabuki lover. When the rather idealist Masako says she does not wish to rely on her *danna*, Etō, to help her sell her *geisha* house to buy an inn to support her kabuki lover, but rather wishes to do it under own power, Tsuta rhetorically asks, "Isn't getting your *danna* to do it for you not using your own power as a *geisha*?" [eps. II-9(29) (S.44.7.17)]

Although *geisha* are relegated to the shadows of the demimonde, they often have more wealth and freedom than a closeted upper-class housewife. Yet, the prejudice is real, with real-life implications. Should a *geisha* have a child, she cannot register it in a family register, so it must either be raised fatherless or become a child of another family. Nevertheless, some *geisha* bear children purposely to secure their relationship with their *danna*. Even if a *geisha* is able to marry and rejoin normal society, she will always be labeled as a "former *geisha*" (*geisha-agari*, 芸者上がり). [eps. II-7(27) (S.44.7.5)]

The Extremes of Jealousy

By the end of the "Calico Cat" chapter, Masako is able to retire from the *geisha* world and marry, just

not to her kabuki actor because of the shenanigans of Tsuta and Etō done behind her back. Both Etō and Tsuta wish Masako to stop seeing her kabuki lover, Etō because he does not wish to share her with another and Tsuta ostensibly because she believes marrying the kabuki actor would be harmful for Masako, but both seem unduly obsessed with Masako and want to be the most important person in her life.

It is clear that Tsuta, despite her exploitation of the relationship, has genuine affection for Masako. Masako is certainly not a means to the end for Tsuta, rather it is the male customers who serve that purpose for Tsuta, nor for that reason does Tsuta regard Etō as competition for Masako's affections. Like a pesky friend, which she is, Tsuta is always taking or using Masako's belongings. Obviously, this is advantageous to Tsuta since it saves her money, but Tsuta's inordinate pleasure in having Masako's things implies that there may well be more to it than simple taking advantage of Masako. It is as though there is such an aura around Masako that even her things have a special quality, and Tsuta seeks to be close to Masako even through her objects.

In the first chapter, "Shibazakura," we saw Tsuta borrowing Masako's *kimono* for her debut, acquiring Masako's smaller diamond ring, and even using Masako's imported soap in the bath. Although Tsuta returned the debut *kimono* expensively laundered and retailored, Masako realizes she can never wear the *kimono* herself and just hands it back to Tsuta. In this chapter, "Calico Cat," Tsuta is exceptionally delighted when Masako lets Tsuta have her imported lace handkerchief scented with the Guerlain Mitsouko perfume and quickly inserts it into her *kimono* close to her heart, [eps. II-9(29) (S.44.7.19)]. If Tsuta is obsessed with Masako's possessions, Etō is obsessed with Masako as his possession. We have already seen how gratified Etō is to have the best *geisha*, and that he neither wishes to share her with her kabuki lover, nor does he wish to give her up and lose her to being a possession of another *danna*. As a result, the two join forces to work together behind Masako's back to rid her of her kabuki lover.

Tsuta does not want Masako to give up being a *geisha* and sell her *geisha* house to marry the kabuki actor because she thinks it is a reckless idea. She makes an offer to Etō explaining that she has come up with a plan to rid Masako once and for all of her kabuki lover, but it will require some financial backing from him. Etō has no idea what Tsuta's plan is, and perhaps never does learn what Tsuta had done. Tsuta's scheme is to become the lover of San'en, the kabuki brother-in-law and senior to Masako's lover. San'en, who is rather unattractive despite being an *onnagata* (female-role actor), be-

comes totally besmitten with Tsuta. San'en requests a meeting with Masako and her kabuki lover to ask for advice on keeping a *geisha* mistress, because he needs to keep it secret from his wife since she is a daughter of a famous Narita actor, at which he will reveal who his *geisha* lover is.

Masako is of course completely ignorant of Tsuta's scheme. She is rather taken aback at how excited her kabuki lover is to be consulted by his older brother-in-law. Masako had thought the two of them were to run away together, her to quit being a *geisha* and he to become independent and change kabuki houses, for which reason she was planning on selling her *geisha* house and buy an inn to support him. Instead, along with San'en being given a name change and promoted to the head of the kabuki house (previously run by his mother-in-law after his father's death), her kabuki lover has also received a name change to Kasen and is now pandering to his in-laws instead of aspiring to become independent as he had promised. Moreover, Kasen shows far more concern with growing closer to his brother-in-law than Masako's efforts to buy an inn in preparation for their marriage.

Since this meeting is apparently of great importance to her lover Kasen, Masako wavers over what *kimono* to wear, made even more difficult because she does not know the identity of San'en's *geisha* lover and hence cannot guess the proper formality without knowing their respective status in the *geisha* world. Masako decides on her favorite *hanada-iro* (a dusky medium blue) *kimono* which has the three-circle layered crest of Kasen's kabuki house with the "sen" (仙) character of his name written in the center, and the hem area decorated with scattered fans having poems of the "Six Immortal Poets" (*rokkasen*, 六歌仙) written on them as a motif related to Kasen's name, with only the poem by Ariwara no Narihira done in embroidery of the same color. [eps. II-13(33) (S.44.6.18)]

When Masako arrives at the meeting room, her blood freezes cold, for who is sitting there but Tsuta herself. Kasen shows no sympathy and scolds Masako for being dazed and failing to offer *saké* to San'en, making Masako feel like she has just been slapped in the face. As mistress to San'en, Kasen's senior, Tsuta now has acquired seniority over Masako as well. San'en, for his part, is completely oblivious to the import, simply delighted that the two actors' *geisha* are such seemingly close friends that both appeared wearing *kimono* of the same matching color. After an exchange of *saké* cups proffered by San'en to Kasen bonding their senior-junior brother relationship, San'en then tells Masako to make a similar exchange with Tsuta to bond their superior-subordinate sister relationship, Masako becoming the subordinate sister. Masako freezes, her hand stopping in mid-place, then when suddenly scolded by Kasen again, the cup falls from her hand spilling *saké* across her *kimono* from shoul-

der to breast, leaving a slowly spreading dark blue stain. Fleeing from the meeting, Masako wanders around outside, concluding she is now even more committed to retiring from the *geisha* world, but at the same time, instead of marrying the Kabuki actor as she had planned, she will end their relationship too without regret. [eps. II-13(33) (S.44.6.18)]

On her way back from her dance lessons, Masako runs into Komori by chance and they have lunch together, which serves as the impetus of their relationship. Masako had actually first met Komori back in the previous chapter, when Komori was teaching the *geisha* how to play the *hanafuda* gambling card-game and Masako had to kiss him by default when she lost the game. Komori had been besotted with Masako from the beginning, but rarely was able to appear at the *geisha* banquets because he did not have to financial resources to do so; Etō describing him as a man of little importance who was merely a salesman of stocks and bonds. Masako leaves from her lunch with Komori, thinking to herself that he is a pleasant man, not yet realizing the impact he is soon to have on her life, [eps. II-15(35) (S.44.8.30)] (fig. 3).

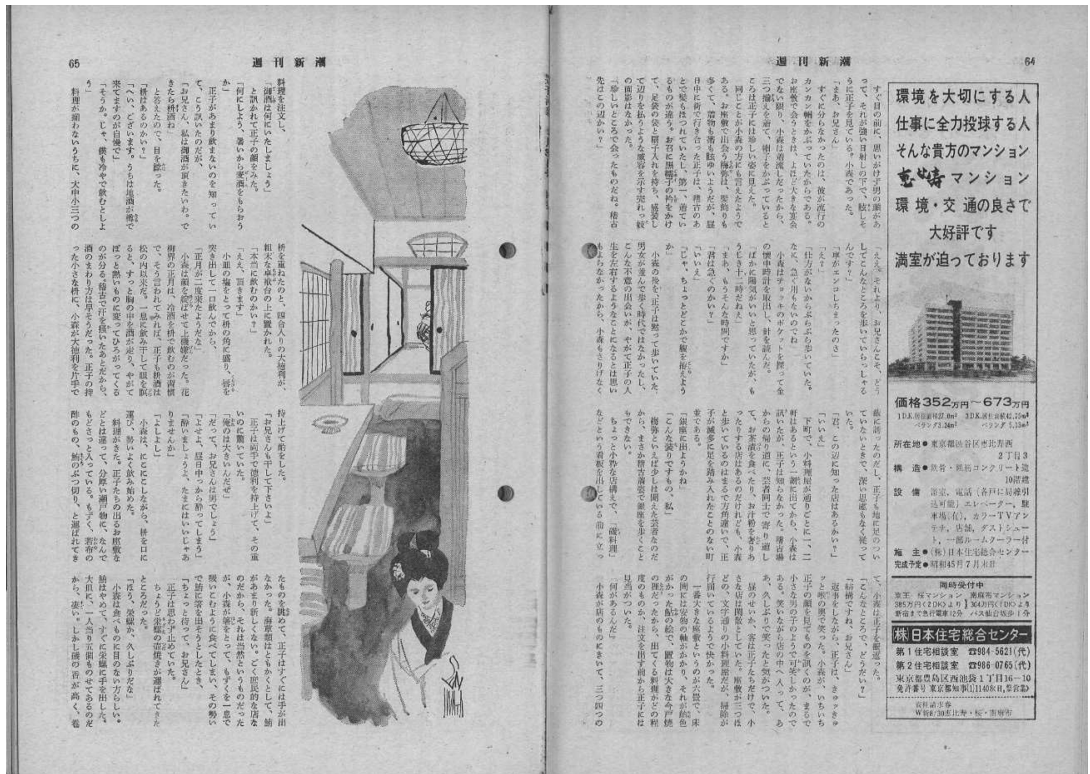


Fig. 3 Masako musing on Komori after leaving their lunch [eps II-15(35) (S44-8-30) p64-65]



Fig 4 Masako separates from Etō after his confession [eps II-17(37) (S44-9-13) p62-63]

When Masako meets with Etō to finally tell him she is about to retire as a geisha and marry, she accidentally lets it out to him that the person she will marry is Komori. Etō is shocked by her choice of husband, telling her that even the kabuki actor would have been preferable. Naturally, all feel a mismatch in status between Masako and her soon to be husband Komori, but as Masako muses to herself, any man of her equal would have a prearranged marriage and, in any case, social mores would not permit a marriage with a former *geisha*. Etō confesses to Masako that it his fault that things had come to this end. Explaining why he feels responsible, Masako learns from him that her separation from her kabuki lover was a scheme hatched by Tsuta and supported by Etō. As a result, Masako separates from Etō forever, and believes she has rid herself of Tsuta as well. But, as we shall see, the two are eternally entwined throughout their lives, (fig. 4). [eps. II-17(37) (S.44.9.13)]

The Import of *Kimono* Motifs

When Masako went to the meeting that ended up splitting her from her kabuki lover, as described above, the *kimono* she wore was covered in designs related to Kasen's name. Masako had a number

of *kimono* made with motifs related to her lover, at first more subtle such as the auspicious motif of mice in a granary (the granary symbolizing wealth), which related to the year of the rat in which Kasen was born, and later more obvious designs clearly related to Kasen after their relationship was no longer secret. It was not just her *kimono* that were covered in designs related to Kasen. After their breakup, Masako surveys her room, and notices how nearly everything, from her mirror cover to her cushions, is covered in related designs.[eps. II-15(35) (S.44.8.30)]

Likewise, Tsuta's ensemble that she had worn at the infamous meeting was covered in designs carefully chosen for the event. Tsuta's *obi* had scattered designs of the layered three-circles (*sanjūmaru*, 三重丸) crest of the Kawamura kabuki house to which San'en was shortly to succeed as head. Moreover, it was woven in the *tsumetsuzure* (爪綴れ) technique, which is a type of tapestry hand-woven by weavers using their fingernails and takes months just to weave a few centimeters, let alone the long length of an *obi*, and the artistry is of course reflected in its expense. Tsuta's *kimono* was a formal long trailing banquet-wear with a design of a cherry blossom branches in full bloom at the shoulder and petals floating in a river at the hem. Tsuta's *geisha* name is Sakura (cherry blossom), and the combination of *kimono* and *obi* was a visual expression of her relationship with San'en. After she flees, Masako thinks to herself that she probably could have laughed off the incident had it not been for the care and planning put into Tsuta's ensemble, which obviously had been ordered months in advance and financed by Etō. [eps. II-13(33) (S.44.6.18)]

When Tsuta requested Masako to allow her to return to being a *geisha* under the Tsugawa house banner, they needed to decide a new *geisha* name for Tsuta who wanted something obvious and easy remembered. They settled on Sakura written in the *hiragana* syllabary, along with the design of the *kimono* she would wear for her *geisha* debut, a *kimono* with cherry blossoms decorating the hem perfectly appropriate for the season of Tsuta's debut to be held in March. [eps. II-2 (22) (S.44.5.31)] Tsuta's *kimono* is described in more detail when she makes her debut. It is very nearly the same design as what Tsuta wore at the infamous meeting, branches of double - cherry blossoms (*yaezakura*, 八重桜) with a flow of water along the hem, however this *kimono* is described as an *Edo-zuma* (江戸褌), which is a style of *kimono* that only has a design along the hem flowing along the edges up to waist height. Here, Tsuta pairs this *kimono* with an *obi* of *karatuzure* (綴れ) weave that has a *saracha* (更紗) design. [eps. II-3 (23) (S.44.6.7)]

Their *geisha* names, Umeya for Masako and Sakura for Tsuta, aptly reflect their personalities; the

“ume” (plum blossom) of Umeya after the subtly fragrant plum blossom and the more ostentatious cherry blossom for Tsuta. Sakura also resonates with the *shibazakura* (moss phlox) of the title of the novel and the emblematic incident of the moss phlox and the goldfish at the start of the novel. Masako is herself fond of the plum blossoms and often works a subtle design of them into her *kimono* such as part of a design of flowers of the four seasons with only the plum blossoms in embroidery. Tsuta, however, wears *kimono* with flamboyant designs of cherry blossoms regardless of season as a walking advertisement for herself. [eps. II-13(33) (S.44.6.18)]

Conclusion

Many of the literary motifs, or themes, introduced in the first chapter of the novel, such as love and marriage as well as the status of wife versus *geisha*, continue into this chapter. Other themes, such as jealousy and competition, play a more significant role here. The *kimono* motifs, in particular, are highly symbolic of the characters and the events narrated in the “Calico Cat” chapter. The illustrator, Iwata Sentarō, as always chose the most vivid images to illustrate, just as we saw in the first chapter. In the following chapter, Masako divorces from her husband, Komori, whereas Tsuta and Masako are reunited.

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