

## ONE WHO PREFERRED NETTLES (A Note on Tanizaki as Novelist)

SILVINO V. EPISTOLA

### THE PREVALENT VIEW

No Japanese novelist in the twentieth century is perhaps more intimately linked in the popular imagination or even in the literate mind to the geography, the history, the culture and tradition of his country, to the national experience of his people in his own day and age than Tanizaki Jun'ichiro.

No critic on either side of the Pacific basin, it seems, can write fifty words about Tanizaki without mentioning the fact that after the 1923 Kanto earthquake he had abandoned the Bluff in Yokohama and moved to the Osaka area. This migration is always given the significance usually conferred upon such events as the Prophet's flight to Medina or the Lord's entrance into Jerusalem. The argument is that the Tokyo area is the most Westernized part of Japan and Osaka, the most Japanese of Japanese cities. Therefore, when Tanizaki migrated to Osaka, he had in effect forsaken what was Westernized and returned to the splendid traditions of his own culture. From that point on, it is held, Tanizaki ceased to be just another writer. He was transformed into a major novelist. To support this argument, it is pointed out that his pre-earthquake novels are inconsequential, being firmly based on literary ideas borrowed from the West, and the post-earthquake novels are important, being securely anchored in the cultural traditions of Japan.

The trouble with this argument, impressive though it appears, is that it is entirely based on a subjective evaluation of what Tanizaki had chosen to write about rather than on a critical examination of what he has written. It ignores the fact that Tanizaki regards himself as a novelist and that he honestly works seriously at the art of the novel. His novels are taken into account only as so many case histories out of which some astonishing generalizations ought to be drawn. Inevitably, the consideration of his novels is usually limited to speculations regarding his ideas about women, men, Japanese culture, the "West," and such, as though he were a thinker, a sort of Japanese Bertrand Russell with unconventional notions about all kinds of things. Worst of all, he has been damned or praised for many things which have nothing whatsoever to do with his craft as a novelist or with his works as novels.

To the extent that this argument does not lead to a clear-cut appraisal of Tanizaki's worth as a novelist, it is specious. If he is to be judged at all, it must be in terms of the responsibility he took upon himself the day he turned his prodigious energies and his not inconsiderable talent to the writing of novels. This means that critical attention will have to be focussed on his success or lack of success as a novelist. In effect, this means that the proper objects of the critics' attention are the novels themselves. These should be examined on the basis of whether they stand as novels or not.

#### THE FRAME OF AN INQUIRY

But, then, what is a novel? One answer which is still very much to the point in spite of its ancientness, is that which Murasaki Shikibu put in words spoken by Prince Genji in *Genji monogatari*. Its relevance is to the proper understanding of the novel as an art form, for it permits the novel to be considered as an object in itself to be examined and appraised on its own terms. Speaking to Tamakatsura whom he had come upon "hardly able to lift her eyes from the book in front of her," Prince Genji states:

. . . But I have a theory of my own about what this art of the novel is, and how it came into being. To begin with, it does not simply consist in the author's telling a story about the adventures of some other person. On the contrary, it happens because the story-teller's own experience of men and things, whether for good or ill—not only what he has passed through himself, but events which he has only witnessed or been told of—has moved him to an emotion so passionate that he can no longer keep it shut up in his heart. Again and again something in his own life or in that around him well seem to the writer so important that he cannot bear to let it pass into oblivion. There must never come a time, he feels, when men do not know about it. This is my view of how this art arose.<sup>1</sup>

This art of the novel, then, is the presentation of an emotion, and a novel is itself the externalization of this emotion.

In the context in which it occurs, "emotion" has a meaning which is so general, encompassing as it does not only "the story-teller's own experience of men and things" but "even events which he has only witnessed or been told of," that it is impossible not to understand the term in its broadest possible sense. It would, therefore, cover not only physical sensations like pain, comfort, excitement, and tranquility but also feelings as complex as intellectual tension, which inevitably go with the conscious life. The outer world impinging on the consciousness of a story-teller in the form of experience personally undergone or witnessed or heard about from others produce this emotion. It is this emotion which the story-teller must snatch from

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Waley, Tr., *A Wreath of Cloud* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1923), pp. 256-257.

oblivion that there may "never come a time . . . when men do not know about it." And so he tells his story or writes his novel. It is in the story or the novel, then, that the emotion the author has so keenly felt is embedded and preserved against oblivion.

There is nothing in Prince Genji's remarks which might lead to the notion that a novel or a story is symptomatic of an emotion, as tears are symptomatic of grief. Seeing tears trickling down another's cheeks will not lead one to a knowledge or even an understanding of that person's feelings. The nearest one may get to that individual's grief is expressible in the pretty obvious statement: "The man is in pain." The most one may feel is pity but never that other person's grief. To know or understand this, one must be able to perceive it, and one does through the medium of the novel. In this sense, the novel does not signify any particular emotion, for "to signify" is to refer to an external meaning. A novel articulates an emotion. It formulates the objective appearance of an emotion. It is both the formulation and an instance of an emotion, presented for contemplation, recognition, understanding.

It is this formulation, this articulation, of an emotion which the novelist creates. The fact that he uses words need not mislead anyone into thinking that a novel is an arrangement of words. Words are the materials which the novelist employs to create his fictional elements. The elements are what he fashions to make his novel. The only purpose which words serve is the creation of the fiction, the illusion of experience, and the disclosure of the appearance of life being lived so it evokes the significant emotion rather than the other emotions which form part of the work's elements.

Understood in this fashion, Prince Genji's theory of the art of the novel reveals itself as a critical standard for the evaluation of novels. For one thing, it holds the critic to the novel, posing as it does the questions: "What has the novelist created? How did he create it?" To appraise the worth of Tanizaki's novels, these are the pertinent questions. Indeed, these are the only questions which need be asked.

Within the framework set by these questions, two aspects of the novelist's art may be discussed: (1) the use of words for creating the illusion of reality, and (2) the fictional elements themselves, the manner in which they are developed, balanced, intensified or diluted, and the emotional significance they convey. A novelist's use of words is now studied by specialists who draw on the analytical techniques which have been developed in Linguistics, and the subject is known as "Stylistics." But the consideration of the fictional elements a novelist creates and fashions into a novel remains the principal concern of literary critics. The literary critic, therefore, must not only identify these fictional elements, he must also deal with what the writer makes of these elements.

## SASAME-YUKI: VARIATIONS ON A THEME

Take *Sasame-yuki*, then.<sup>2</sup>

For its length alone (three volumes in the original 1946-1948 edition), the novel is impressive. It is even more impressive for the breadth it encompasses with such a wealth of detail. One easily remembers the night of terror a typhoon brought to the inhabitants of that flimsy wooden house in Shibuya, the sense of danger and the anxiety which gripped individuals as well as families in "the most disastrous flood in the history of the Kobe-Osaka district," the German family next door, the dinner at the house of the Russians, Itakura's illness and death, the departure of Tsuruku and her household from the Osaka railway station, the cherry blossom-viewing excursions to Kyoto.... Indeed, this can go on for pages and pages and still remain a far from exhaustive list. So rich is this book in fascinating particularities of this kind that it is not difficult to become absorbed in these and as a result completely miss the import of the book. However, in retrospect it is just as easy to realize that these are the fictional elements which Tanizaki has created and fashioned into his novel and that all these come to a head in a resounding paean to life.

It is as though Tanizaki were saying: This is how people in Japan live in these, "the last good times on earth." Here are their anxieties, their fears, and these are their joys, their shining moments of gladness. These are their problems, and here are the dangers that threaten their continued well-being. At this point here everything looks so dark and gloomy, a desperate time. You would think that everything is coming to an end. But things will go on, and everybody will survive. The hard-line traditionalists will soften and come to terms with the modern age; the wayward modernists will find stability at last and they will live—not happily, perhaps, but they will live. The choosy old maid will finally accept life and the uncertainties of living in the world as a wife, and the moderates will continue to live and pick at life for all that is meaningful and good. And there will always be Japanese.

Tanizaki says this much in a mighty orchestration. So complex is the whole novel that its organization may not be properly characterized except as thematic development. *Sasame-yuki* unfolds but not along narrative lines. To explain the novel solely in terms of plot and sub-plot, main line and branch line, would leave too many things unaccounted for. An instance is Sachiko's miscarriage. Not only is this difficulty worked in painful detail into one of Yukiko's *mi-ai* episodes, it is even referred to at various places in the course of the novel's development, the narrative flow being interrupted

<sup>2</sup> *Sasame-yuki* first appeared in the January and March numbers of the *Chuo Koron* in 1943 but its serialization in this magazine was suspended by military censors. The novel was finally issued one volume at a time between 1946 and 1947 by the Chuo Koronsha. Edward G. Seidensticker's translation of *Sasame-yuki* was published by Knopf in 1957 as *The Makioka Sisters*.

and the brief reference interpolated. The presence of the Stolz family as well as that of the Russians' clearly have no place in the novel, for they often impede the narrative flow. If this were to be regarded as a plotted work with a plainly straightforward narrative line, these and all the other elements like them are clearly superfluous, but they do in fact have a function to fulfill in *Sasame-yuki* but in a *Sasame-yuki* understood as a thematically developed piece. The major theme is introduced, repeated in everyone of the various keys until all the possibilities have been exhausted. Then the piece comes to its close.

### *The Statement of the Theme*

The theme of *Sasame-yuki* is life. This is introduced in a passage depicting the sisters getting ready for the first of Yukiko's *mi-ai* related in the book. Here, the theme's constituent elements are suggested by dialogue.

"Koi-san, we have another prospect for Yukiko."

"Oh?"

"It came through Itani."

"Oh?"

"The man works in an office, M. B. Chemical Industries, Itani says."

"And is he well off?"<sup>3</sup>

Yukiko is the as yet unmarried Makioka girl, and Koi-san is the youngest of the sisters. She may not get married until Yukiko has had her match. Consequently, the marriage of Yukiko is a matter of great concern to her, an interest which she masks by her monosyllabic responses. When she finally breaks out with the question, "And is he well off?" she is in effect touching on a matter that lies heavily on her mind. She might as well have asked, "Will she now get on with life, so I can get on with mine?" But to think that this is what the novel is about is to be grossly mistaken. *Sasame-yuki* is not the story of how Yukiko eventually got married in spite of great difficulties. Rather, it is the orchestrated presentation of the feeling that it is great to be alive.

The "prospect for Yukiko" represents another chance to get involved in life at its most vital of levels—marriage, family life, procreation, the preservation of the species, the continuance of the Japanese nation. "It came through Itani" indicates that the entrance gods, whose duty it is to usher the still uninvolved Yukiko into full participation in the business of living, have already begun to act. "And is he well off?" is the more mundane way of asking, "What possibility is there that this involvement will work out?" The possibility that it will is explored in the following pages. But then there is also the possibility that it may not. And the presence of the little girl, Etsuko, is a constant reminder of what is at stake—con-

<sup>3</sup> This and the other quotations are from Edward G. Seidensticker's translation of *Sasame-yuki*. The present study however relies on the Japanese edition published by the Kadokawa Bunko (Tokyo, 1957).

tinuing vitality, the future generations. In the end, the three sisters sally forth to go to the *mi-ai*, which Itani has arranged, and there meet life and all its uncertainties. Thus, the opening seven chapters of *Sasame-yuki* state the major theme of the book, a theme which is restated in every possible variation throughout the whole work.

These chapters articulate a sense of life in such a way that they evoke joy in living rather than gloomy pessimism. The sense of life is here shown to spring from the sustained effort of living beings to preserve a functioning equilibrium in a world of chance, of danger and bright possibility, which could destroy or maintain this balance. The world in which the Makioka sisters live is an extremely complex one. Like the world in which real people like ourselves move and act. It is not made up only of people and things with which one like Sachiko is in perceptual contact. She is involved not only with others who are present but also with those who are absent, or even dead. Events which take place outside of her field of perception, influence her conduct as profoundly as those which spring and run their appointed courses under her eyes and within her hearing. The ability she shares with all human beings to construct symbolic forms extends this world beyond her perceptual limits, further increasing the number of elements to which she must respond. It is a greatly extended and immensely complicated world. Within this complex framework, she must, like any other human individual, order her behavior to sustain the vital equilibrium against everything which would disturb it. And out of this unceasing activity springs the sense of life, which is objectified in all its variations by this novel.

#### *The Russian Variation*

The Russians who appear in Chapters 16 and 17 of Book One present one variation of the theme. These are displaced persons living in a country not their own. The Communist Revolution had overturned the old equilibrium of their lives, driving them out of their home near the Czar's palace at Tsarskoe Selo near Petrograd (they would not call it "Leningrad"), and they had ever since been trying to restore the familiar balance.

Of the Russians, "the old one" best represents their conditions. She alone remembers what the old equilibrium had been like. This is how she appears to her friend, Taeko:

"She seems to have been very remarkable. She was a doctor of laws in Russia. 'I no good Japanese,' she says. 'French, German, I speak.'"

"She must once have had money. How old is she?"

"Past sixty, I would say. But you would never guess it. She is as lively as a young girl."

In the old days in Russia, she was a doctor of laws, and she must have had money, but all that is now lost. "I no good Japanese," she declares.

"French, German, I speak." Thus, she testifies to her own alienness in the country where she has chosen to live. But the experience has not defeated her at all. "She is as lively as a young girl." Even in these changed circumstances, there is life still, and it seems she would go on serving its needs. And, lively as a girl, she sails into the world as a skilled skater might on entering the rink.

But the astonishing one was "the old one" herself. The moment they were on the rink she sailed off with complete aplomb, straight and confident, treating them now and then to a truly breathtaking display of virtuosity. All the other skaters stopped to watch.

Here, then, is life triumphant over everything which might have ended it. The Revolution had disturbed the vital equilibrium. The disturbance has not been totally compensated for, the old balance has not been entirely restored, but there she was — sailing into life "with complete aplomb, straight and confident."

Vronsky, "the Russian who likes children," represents another variation on the same theme. He is quite like "the old one" but in a different sort of way. He, too, has irretrievably lost something of vital importance. As Taeko recounts it,

. . . It is really very sad. It seems that he was in love when he was young, but he and the girl were separated at the time of the Revolution. He learned some years later that she was in Australia, and he went to Australia himself. He did find her, but almost immediately afterwards she died. And with that he decided he would never marry.

But this decision never to marry is by no means to be understood as a decision to withdraw from life. As Taeko has observed,

. . . He is terribly fond of children. . . . Everyone in the neighborhood knows about "the Russian who likes children". They call him "the Russian who likes children" more often than they call him Mr. Vronsky.

By this fondness of children, Vronsky continues to maintain his attachment to life. Tenuous though it might be, still this fondness is an attachment, an involvement as intensely personal as Sachiko's yearning for the child she had lost in that miscarriage.

Of course, the world of the Russians is different from that of Teinosuke and Sachiko and Taeko but it is no less complex. This world is nearly objectified by the tiny house in which the Japanese have been received by the Russians who are now entertaining them. From the walls, framed portraits of the last Czar and his Consort and of the Japanese Emperor and Empress look down on them all, inexorably reminding the Russians of their past as well as of their present. Just as implacably, the picture of the Tsarskoe Selo palace recalls to them their home in the old country and the joyous life that went on there even as they sit here in the comfortable

warmth of this small house on this chilly March evening in Japan. But the wall around them do not circumscribe their world. Events taking place far beyond these enclosing walls have their impact on the lives of these people. "What do you think will happen in China?" "And of what happened last December in Hsian?" As Teinosuke observes,

. . . But for these people, driven from their homeland and forced to wander, the international question was one they could not forget a single moment. It was their very life. For a time they debated among themselves. Vronsky seemed to be the best informed, and the other Russians would listen while he developed some point at length. They used Japanese as much as possible, but Vronsky, when the discussion became complicated, tended to lapse into Russian. Occasionally Kyrilenko would interpret for Teinosuke and the rest. "The old one" was an accomplished debater, and not one to listen quietly while the men argued. She had no trouble holding her own, except for the fact that when she became excited her Japanese collapsed, and neither the Russians nor the Japanese had any idea what she was talking about.

Intense as it is already, this intimate involvement in the world is further heightened by passionate interests and desires.

Presently, for some reason that the Japanese did not understand, the discussion became a quarrel between Katharina and "the old one." The latter quite indiscriminately assailed the English—English character, English policies—and Katharina fought back. She had been born in Russia, she said, but when she was driven to Shanghai she lived on the generosity of the English. She was educated by the English and she paid not a cent in return, and it was the English who had helped her make her way as a nurse. What could be wrong with such a country? But "the old one" answered that Katharina was still too young to understand. Soon the two were glaring at each other, and Kyrilenko and Vronsky interceded to prevent a real fight.

Of course, the past to Katharina is different from what it is to her mother. To "the old one" the past is the home next to the Tsarskoe Selo palace, Czarist Russia, but the Revolution had broken up her family and scattered her children. Katharina had been taken by her grandmother to Shanghai, where she had grown up. The past for her, therefore, is English Shanghai, and it is this past which she offers to her Japanese guests in the form of an album.

"Look at this," Katharina took out an album of photographs from her Shanghai years. "Here, my husband. Here, my daughter."

"How pretty. She looks exactly like her mother."

"You think so?"

"I do indeed. Do you never feel lonesome for her?"

"She is in England. I cannot see her. That is all."

"Do you know where in England she is? Could you see her if you were to go there?"

"I do not know. But I want to see her. Maybe I will go to see her." There was nothing sentimental in Katharina's tone. She seemed quite philosophical.

It is quite easy to see that Katharina has accepted the past in which she had had a husband and a daughter and had lost them both. She might try to regain the daughter at least, as her Japanese friends are suggesting she should do. She herself wants to see her child, although she is not sure if this were at all possible. Then she puts a "maybe" to her going to see the child. This could only mean that she has accepted what she has lost as already lost. For the present, at least, there is no use struggling to regain the lost equilibrium, as there is still the rest of her life waiting to be lived. From her unsentimental tone and her philosophic stance, it appears that Katharina will not let these reverses sour the rest of her years. And she will live to the very last one of these as energetically as she had answered her mother's unexplained attacks on the English.

For Katharina, it seems, life is the vigorous pursuit of life. This had taken her from Russia where she had been born, to Shanghai where she had grown up, then to Japan which she soon leaves for Germany on her way to England for the express purpose of finding a rich husband and getting back her daughter. Ten months after sailing away from Kobe, she had caught her man, a young business executive of more than ample means, and gotten back her child. On her own, she had braved the world and, trusting her good looks, taken her chances, and she had won. In the end, it is against Katharina's success in life that Sachiko measures her own and her family's lack of success in finding a husband for Yukiko.

It would be mistake to compare a White Russian refugee with a cloistered lady from an old Osaka family. But how ineffectual they all seemed in comparison with Katharina! Even Taeko, the scapegrace, the venturesome one, did in the final analysis fear criticism, and had not succeeded in marrying the man she wanted. And Katharina, probably younger than Taeko, had left her mother and brother and home behind and set off across the world, and promptly made herself a future. Not of course that Sachiko envied Katharina—Yukiko was far better than any Katharina—but how feeble and spineless they seemed, two older sisters and two brothers-in-law, unable to find Yukiko a husband! Sachiko would not want her quiet sister to set about imitating Katharina—the fact that she could not do so even under orders was what gave Yukiko her charm—but should not Yukiko's guardians, the people at the main house and Teinosuke and Sachiko herself, feel humble before the Russian girl? They were utterly useless, Katharina might laugh, and what could they answer?

But already Katharina had taught them what they needed to learn: that the vital balance can be maintained only by vigorous action against all the impersonal chances in the world, which would overturn this functioning order and defeat life. Life, as Sachiko now realizes, is to the venturesome and courageous.

This is, perhaps, where Katharina differs from her mother, "the old one." Katharina would venture out into the unknown, take a ship and sail out to Europe where she had never before been and there seek her fortune without any assurance that she would find it. "The old one" is certain only

of what she had known once upon a time in the old country. Just as she had never learned Japanese, she will not try anything new. She has accepted what she has lost as irretrievably gone, and she will now make do with what she still holds. But Katharina will struggle to regain the balance she had once upon a time known. "The old one" will not. She will go on without any further attempts to regain the old equilibrium.

### *The Traditional Variation*

In contrast with the Russians, the world of Tsuruko and Tatsuo is circumscribed by Osaka. As far as she is concerned no city can be finer than Osaka, and when circumstances force them to go to Tokyo, Tsuruko is utterly disconsolate. She tells Sachiko "how distressing it was to reach the age of thirty-six and suddenly be asked to leave a city from which one had not ventured in one's whole life."

Relatives and acquaintances came around with congratulations, said Tsuruko, and no one took the trouble to imagine how she felt. When, occasionally, she let fall a hint, they only laughed and told her not to be so old-fashioned. It was indeed as they said, Tsuruko tried to tell herself: she was not going off to a foreign country, or even out to some inaccessible spot in the provinces. She was going to the capital, she would be at the very feet of His Imperial Majesty. What was there then to be sad about? But Osaka was her home, and she wept sometimes at even thought of having to leave. The children were all laughing at her.

Tsuruko's feelings are, perhaps, best summed up by Sachiko.

. . . Not long before his death, Sachiko's father had moved his family there from Semba; it had become the fashion for merchant families to have residences away from their shops. The younger sisters had therefore not lived in the house long. They had often visited relatives there even when they were young, however, and it was there that their father had died. They were deeply attached to the old place. Sachiko sensed that much of her sister's love for Osaka was in fact love for the house, and, for all her amusement at these old-fashioned ways, she felt a twinge of pain herself—she would no longer be able to go back to the old family house. She had often enough joined Yukiko and Taeko in complaining about it—surely there was no darker and more unhygienic house in the world, and they could not understand what made their sister live there, and they felt thoroughly depressed after no more than three days there, and so on—and yet a deep, indefinable sorrow came over Sachiko at the news. To lose the Osaka house would be to lose her very roots.

Osaka and the old house, then, is the past, tradition, all the old habits of thinking and doing things. To the Russians, the past is also a house, but the only remembered association it holds for them is the memory of the Czar riding in his carriage out of the Tsarskoe Selo palace. To the Japanese, particularly, to Tsuruko and to a lesser extent to Sachiko, the past is memory of a more personal order. Sachiko thinks no darker and

more unhygienic house can be found elsewhere in the world. She complains it is depressing to stay there for even three days, but Tsuruko has happily lived in that house all of her thirty-six years, and now that she must leave it she feels that she is somehow being evicted and she is disconsolate. Sachiko realizes that in losing the old house she is losing "her very roots" and she feels "a deep indefinable sorrow." But Tsuruko is losing much more than her roots. She is losing the only life she has known, the life she had been happy with.

When she finally departs with her husband and her children, it is as tradition would have it. "A guide was posted in the waiting room from early in the evening, and among the hundred well-wishers were old geishas and musicians who had been patronized by Sachiko's father. Though perhaps not as impressive a gathering as it might once have been, still it was enough to honor an old family leaving the family seat." And she goes, as it were, taking along as much as she could of the traditions she has lived with. Though leaving the family seat, here is still the main branch of the Makioka family, and she has not the slightest intention of leaving behind the responsibilities that tradition says are the responsibilities of the family's main house. So she sends her Aunt Tominaga to lay down the law: "although in Osaka, it would be better for them now to go to Tokyo. After all, they belonged in the main house." And with the urging of Sachiko, Yukiko dutifully goes as dictated by Osaka tradition.

In Tokyo, the children who owe no particular allegiance to the Osaka past, quickly learn the ways of the capital and pick up its language. At home, however, they have to speak the Osaka dialect. For her part, Tsuruko strives to live in accord with Osaka tradition. One responsibility which this tradition imposes is the duty of the main house to its still unmarried women. This responsibility, Tsuruko takes with intense seriousness, and she is very much put out when she finds that it cannot be happily fulfilled. As Teinosuke reports,

. . . They had been truly delighted, Tsuruko continued, at Aunt Tominaga's success and Yukiko's quiet return, and they had not dreamed that to be with them would be unpleasant. If indeed they drove her to tears, perhaps they should change. But why should they be so disliked? Tsuruko herself began to weep.

Having lived happily within the framework of the traditions of Osaka's society, she does not understand how anyone could be so lonely and forlorn, as Yukiko has been, so Tsuruko could only weep. Nevertheless, she would continue to adhere to the impositions of tradition and live accordingly.

This attachment to tradition is even reflected in Tsuruko's physical appearance. Now thirty-seven years old, with a husband and six children ranging in age from fourteen to three to look after almost single handedly, she still looks extremely well-preserved and more youthful than she should

at her age, as should a proper Makioka. Looking at Tsuruko as she nursed her baby, Sachiko remembers how her sister had been on her wedding day.

. . . Clean featured and rather long of face, Tsuruko had worn her hair—when loose it trailed to the floor and reminded one of the long-haired Heian beauties of a thousand years ago—in a high, sweeping Japanese coiffure. One thought, looking at the figure, feminine and at the same time grand and imposing, how the robes of the ancient court lady would have become her.

But even now, after all those years and in these less easy times, something of her beauty on that day still remains.

However, this does not mean that no deviation is to be made with respect to tradition. The move to Tokyo has been one adjustment.

. . . Some eight or nine years before, it was true, Tatsuo had almost been sent off to Fukuoka. He had pleaded family reasons for staying in Osaka, even at his old salary, and, although there had been no clear understanding on the point, it had seemed afterwards that the bank would respect his status as the head of an old family. Tsuruko had somehow taken for granted that they would be allowed to live forever in Osaka, but the bank had had a change in management and policy, and then Tatsuo himself wanted to get ahead in the world, even if it meant leaving Osaka. He was most dissatisfied to see his colleagues move ahead while only he stayed behind. He had many children, and while his expenses were growing, economic developments were making it more difficult for him to rely on the property he had inherited from his foster father.

Tradition dictates that the head of the old Makioka family stay in Osaka and look after the ancestral seat, perform the necessary memorial services in honor of the dead, and marry off the still single members of the family. However, now that tradition has begun to make living less easy, adjustment becomes imperative, and the adjustment is made. Yukiko tells her sisters at Ashiya how life is now in Tokyo.

Yukiko then told them something surprising. These were her own inferences, she said. She had heard nothing directly from Tsuruko or Tatsuo. It was a desire to advance in the world that had made them resolve to move, however, much though they disliked the prospect; and since one might say, with but a little exaggeration, that this desire to advance had been brought on by certain difficulties in the supporting of a family of eight on the property left by the sisters' father, might it not be that, though they complained at first of the tiny house, they had learned that it was not at all impossible for them to endure even such cramped quarters? The low rent, only fifty-five yen, they found most alluring. It was not at all odd that they should be moved by such considerations. Whereas in Osaka they did have to maintain certain forms for the sake of the family, in Tokyo no one had ever heard of the Makiokas, and they could dispense with ostentation and accumulate a little property.

Tsuruko and Tatsuo have indeed changed, as Yukiko has observed. Their move from Osaka to Tokyo has freed them from the need of keeping up appearances, and now they have become clever at economizing. The purchase of a single vegetable is planned in advance, and the menu is always

built around the one-dish meal. Meat is now a rarity, and it is to be encountered only in stray pieces "floating here and there in the stew." Regarding this change, Teinosuke comments, "And why should anyone object? Tatsuo has his opportunity to stop worrying about appearances and to concentrate instead on building up a little capital."

If Tsuruko's letter of January 18 to Sachiko is any indication at all, there has also been a change in Tatsuo's attitudes. Regarding Yukiko's *mi-ai*, he will raise no more objections of the sort that he used to put up. What is important to him is that the prospective groom should have an income sufficient for the needs of life. But even with regards to this matter, he would raise no objections if Yukiko raised none. Still, the forms of tradition must be observed. A *mi-ai* will still have to be arranged for Yukiko, and a decision will still have to be arrived at after due consultations between the branch house and the main house. This is the procedure tradition has worked out for coping with such problems of importance concerning marriage. It simply will not do for Yukiko to go off and find herself a husband as Katharina has done.

In spite of the adjustments that Tatsuo and Tsuruko have wrought, therefore, the system of ideas which fashion the patterns of traditional behavior, remains unchanged. Tatsuo and Tsuruko still think of themselves as the main house of the Makioka family. In this role, they regard the marriage of their still single sisters entirely their own responsibility. They have some very definite ideas about what these sisters should do or should desire to do, and they expect them to behave accordingly. "It may sound strange from a relative," Tsuruko writes in a letter to Sachiko about Taeko, "but Tatsuo says that with her looks, training, and talent he can guarantee her a very good marriage indeed, and that she is absolutely not to worry." The letter also makes it of record that Tatsuo is "quite opposed to her becoming a working woman." By this, he means that Taeko is not to become a couturier. "He hopes that she will always have it as her goal to make a good marriage when the time comes, and to become a good wife and mother. If she must have a hobby, doll-making will do. Dressmaking is out of the question," Tsuruko writes.

All this which reflects the thinking of both Tatsuo and Tsuruko, is of course entirely in accord with tradition. The vital balance has been set by others long ago, and together Tatsuo and Tsuruko will do nothing to change it. They have adjusted to changed circumstances in the modern world, but they have done so only to compensate for the difficulties of meeting their basic needs as biological beings. The really big issues which are concerned with the order of the universe and their places in it as social beings, they leave quite untouched. Tsuruko and Tatsuo are people who will strictly in harmony with tradition in a world which tradition has shaped and circumscribed and defined for them. Tatsuo for one will

never be caught wondering aloud to his friends about what is happening in China, and Tsuruko will forever be unaware of England and Germany as actual places.

### *The Contemporary Variation*

For Sachiko and Teinosuke, Osaka is not the whole world and Osakan traditions do not entirely make the complete life. Just as they recognized Osaka as their home, their point of origin, they regard tradition as a reservoir to be drawn upon for inner sustenance. But their personal involvements extend far beyond the limits of Osaka or the reach of its traditions. The power politics being played by the nations in Europe is a matter of personal concern for them, for they realize that sooner or later this will have its effect on friends who now live in England and Germany. And they follow the events in China out of their realization that these will surely have an impact on their own affairs. Even after the main house had thrown Taeko out of the family, Sachiko and Teinosuke keep a lively interest in her affairs on their understanding that many of her needs are not among those provided for by Osakan traditions.

Much of what is significant and vital in the married life of Sachiko and Teinosuke stems from tradition. Take the sea bream, for instance. Teinosuke had laughed on learning that this is Sachiko's favorite fish, for it is much too common to be anybody's favorite fish. Her explanation is that in appearance as well as in taste the sea bream is the most Japanese of all fish. A Japanese who dislikes sea bream is simply not a Japanese at all. But then, as Teinosuke suspects, Sachiko is probably only boasting in secret of her native Osaka. He thinks that what Sachiko is really driving at is that the Osaka region, being the producer of the best sea bream, is the most truly Japanese. In the final analysis, the sea bream or the Osaka region or both define for Sachiko the fundamental uniqueness of her individuality, her Japanese-ness. It is, therefore, quite understandable why the disappearance of the sea bream from Tsuruko's table should arouse enough attention as to be mentioned in a discussion about life in the main house after its move to Tokyo.

Where the sea bream links Sachiko to a definite geographical area, which truly characterizes her as a Japanese, viewing the cherry blossoms in and only in Kyoto connects her to a past that reaches back to very ancient times, a past which defines even more profoundly her own Japanese-ness.

All these hundreds of years, from the days of the oldest poetry collections, there have been poems about cherry blossoms. The ancients waited for cherry blossoms, grieved when they were gone, and lamented their passing in countless poems. How very ordinary the poems had seemed to Sachiko when she read them as a girl, but now she knew, as well as one could know, that grieving over fallen cherry blossoms was more than a fad or a convention.

She grieves, as the ancients had grieved, but her grief over the passing of the spring and the falling of the cherry blossoms are intertwined with something very personal.

. . . For Sachiko there was besides pleasant sorrow for the cherry blossoms, sorrow for her sisters and the passing of their youth. She wondered whether each excursion might not be her last with Yukiko, at least.

And then, in the manner of the ancients, she sets her feelings down on paper in a poem.

This is a link with tradition that she shares with her husband. He, too, finds satisfaction in viewing cherry blossoms, although he seems to have a broader view of where blossoms may be viewed. And it is at his urging that Sachiko takes up the writing of poems in the ancient manner. As a matter of fact, it is in these poems that the closeness of their relation as husband and wife reveals itself. Each has his own individual temperament, but this fact does not seem to preclude the possibility that one may understand the other well enough to possess the other's feelings completely. However, they reveal themselves to each other only in their poems. There is no outward manifestation of the close ties that hold each to each. Sachiko does not make a practice of throwing herself into the arms of her husband, and Teinosuke does nothing equally demonstrative. They do not even discuss their poetry with each other, preferring to let the poems speak for themselves.

In his own poetry, Teinosuke evinces a sunnier disposition than his wife. While she sees the viewing of cherry blossoms as a time for mourning over the fallen blossoms, he regards cherry blossom viewing as a festive occasion. In this vein, Teinosuke writes,

Near Kyoto, on a day in April:  
 "The beauties gather in festive dress.  
 For the cherries are in bloom,  
 At Saga in old Miyako."

"The beauties" obviously refers to the three sisters, Sachiko, Yukiko, and Taeko. In these lines, he has sought to hold them fixed in all their gay finery in a moment lifted from the relentless flow of time. Sachiko's "to mourn the spring" is an allusion to her sorrow over the passing away of the season.

Under the falling flowers, at the Heian Shrine:  
 "The cherry blossoms that fall  
 And leave us to mourn the spring—  
 I shall hide them here in my sleeves."

Teinosuke takes this sorrow and heightens it by presenting spring as something whose passage has already been accepted as inevitable.

"Let me hide at least a petal  
 In the sleeve of my flower-viewing robe,  
 That I may remember the spring."

This reveals as nothing else can how total is Teinosuke's understanding of his wife's feelings different though these may be from his own. Here, the image presented by Teinosuke and Sachiko is clearly that of lovers in the Heian fashion.

For all their involvement in the past, however, Sachiko and Teinosuke are by no means prisoners of that past. Though they write poetry and communicate their feelings to one another in poetic exchanges such as this one, they are surely not Heian "characters" anachronistically living in the twentieth century. There is no doubt that they are modern Japanese living in the present. At almost every moment of their days, they are most keenly conscious of the present. The events of the present have an impact on their lives, and they are constantly reacting to these as no Heian "characters" might be expected to react. And just as constantly they continue to make adjustments to preserve the vital balance on which the continuance of life depends.

For Sachiko, there is nothing absolutely sacrosanct about tradition which are, after all, only old habits of doing things which, by their long persistence, have become sanctified. When Tsuruko complains to her in a letter about the cold in Tokyo, Sachiko remembers the old house in Osaka.

. . . As she read of Tsuruko's "frozen" fingers, she remembered how the main house in Osaka, true to the old fashion, has been almost without heating. There was of course the electric stove in the guest parlor, but that was rarely used except for special guests on the coldest days. The main family for the most part was satisfied with a charcoal brazier, and Sachiko herself felt as though someone "had poured cold water" on her when she made her New Year call and sat talking with her sister. Too often she came home with a cold. According to Tsuruko, stoves had at length become common in Osaka in the twenties. Even her father, with his taste for the latest luxuries, had put in gas heaters only a year or so before he died. He then found that the gas made him dizzy, and the daughter had thus grown up knowing only the old-fashioned brazier. Sachiko herself had done without heating for some years after she was married, indeed until she moved into this Ashiya house; but now that she was used to stoves and fireplaces, it was hard to imagine going through a winter without them. She could not believe that she had really passed her childhood with only the primitive brazier. In Osaka, Tsuruko had persisted in the old fashion. Yukiko, with that strong core of hers, could stand the cold, but Sachiko was sure that she herself would very soon have come down with pneumonia.

While there is much Sachiko finds beautiful in tradition, she is not unaware of the comforts which modern inventiveness has created, and she has never hesitated to get them, so now she finds it difficult to believe that she had grown up with just a brazier.

Teinosuke and Sachiko, therefore, live in both the past and the present. Their interests range far and wide, for their world is not circumscribed by Osaka and its traditions. They have friends in England and Germany, and, keenly aware of the events developing in Europe, they wonder how they

are faring, exactly as though they were still living in the house next door. Consequently, their involvement in the affairs of the world is at once intensely personal as well as global. To Sachiko, the Japanese advance on Hankow and the Sudeten question are problems, and her interest in them have been such "that she could hardly wait for the morning newspapers." However, these are not in any way academic interests.

Meanwhile the world was shaken by new developments in Europe. In May came the German invasion of the Low Countries and the tragedy of Dunkirk, and in June, upon the French surrender, an armistice was signed at Compiègne. And what, through all this, had happened to the Stolz family? Mrs. Stolz had predicted that Hitler would manage to avoid war, and what would she be thinking now? And Peter must be old enough for the Hitlerjugend. Might Mr. Stolz have been drafted? But perhaps all of them, Mrs. Stolz and Rosemarie too, were so intoxicated with victory that they refused to let family problems bother them. Such speculations were always on Sachiko's mind.

In her thinking, events are not disembodied entities but things that happen to people, to friends in whose personal fortunes she appears to be genuinely interested. It is in this vein that she thinks of England and of Katharina.

. . . And then one would never know when England, cut off from the continent, would be attacked from the air, and the possibility of air raids brought up the problem of Katharina, now living in a suburb of London. How unpredictable human destinies were! No sooner had the Russian refugee, until then living in a tiny doll's house, made everyone envious by marrying the president of a large company and moving into a house like a castle, than the English people found themselves facing an unprecedented calamity. Since the German attack would be concentrated on the London area, Katharina's castle might be reduced to ashes overnight. Even worse disasters were in prospect: she might find herself without food or a rag to wear. Might she not be thinking of the distant skies of Japan?

Teinosuke is no less interested in international events, and he knows enough to be able to tell who is well-informed and who is not in the course of a discussion of the affairs of the world. However, his grasp of the situation in these troubled times is even such that he would keep his opinions to himself rather than invite disaster by being too free with them.

Under the impact of all these events, their world soon begins to change. In a letter to the Stolzes, Sachiko recounts how each time they read about the war in Europe, "they thought and talked of the Stolz family; the Makiokas were well, although with the China Incident dragging on they were gloomy at the thought that they too might soon find themselves in a real war; they could not but be astonished at how the world had changed since the days when the Stolzes were next door, and they wondered wistfully if such happy times would ever come again." As a matter of fact, difficult times are just now beginning.

. . . They considered the possibility of a special celebration by which to remember these last days, but celebrations were harder and harder to arrange. Caught by

the austerity edicts, they were unable to have new wedding kimonos dyed, and finally had to have the kozuchiya hunt up old ones. That month rice rationing began. Kikugoro was not making his usual spring visit to Osaka, and they had to be satisfied with an even quieter cherry viewing than the year before. But it was an annual rite, and summoning up their determination and taking care to dress as unobtrusively as possible, they made a one-day trip to Kyoto on Sunday the thirteenth. After a look at the weeping cherries in the Heian Shrine, they rushed out to the western suburbs and went through the form of seeing the cherries there. This year they did without their party at the Gourd Restaurant. Taeko again was missing. The four of them spread a sad little lunch by Ozawa Pond and had a rather solemn drink of cold sake from the lacquer cups, and when the excursion was over they hardly knew what they had done.

The world has finally touched the very mainspring of their nature, altering it with such force that it does not seem to be the same afterwards. Be that as it may, Sachiko and Teinosuke will continue to survive. The impression is strong that they will know how to cope with every change every new development may bring.

Their sense of life is much too healthy. Desiring the son she knows Teinosuke wants, Sachiko suffers a miscarriage, and the composure she has always maintained in the face of adversity completely breaks down. She suffers in body and in mind, and he lends her the comfort of his peculiar attitude towards life.

"It makes no difference. And there is nothing to be done now."

"You forgive me?"

"For what?"

"For being careless."

"Oh, that. No, as a matter of fact this makes me more hopeful."

A tear spilled down over Sachiko's cheek. "But it is such a shame."

"Say no more about it. We will have another chance."

Sachiko treats the miscarriage as a tragedy in which life has met its fate and come to its end. But Teinosuke does not see it that way. For him, it is only a temporary set-back, which can later be overcome. They will, therefore, not be defeated. What is lost is lost. Nothing more can be done about it. No use weeping over the whole thing. But that is not yet the end. "No," he says, "as a matter of fact this makes me more hopeful." Then when he speaks again, he says, "We will have another chance."

### *The Modernistic Variation*

If there is anything at all that can be learned from Taeko's sufferings and misfortunes, it is this: for one to be truly modern, he must live in total disregard of traditional values, adhering in all strictness only to those of his own making. The modern one, therefore, is he who stands at the very edge of the world. He has turned his face outwards where lies the utter blackness of the still unexperienced life, the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller has yet returned. He has left behind him the familiar

lights of traditional ideals which guide human conduct in society in much the same way that the lighthouses on the rocks and shoals guide the coast-wise steamer safely into the port of Kobe. But the modern one is the ocean liner which turns its bow towards the dark expanse of the Pacific. The flashing white lights along the shore are of no further use to the navigators on the bridge of the ocean-going ship. Traditional conventions and ideals hold for the modern one no real meaning. He is at last on his own, and there is nothing he may depend upon except his own skill to see him through the unknown that lies before him.

Taeko had started out when she was nineteen years old by eloping with one of the Okubata, an old Semba family who kept a jewelry store. Being the youngest of the Makioka sisters, she may not marry until a husband had been found for Yukiko, in accordance with tradition. She had rebelled then against this old custom and, finding it unreasonable, had promptly violated it by running off with the man she thought she loved. However, both their families took a dim view of the whole affair. The two young lovers were quickly discovered, separated, and restored to their respective families. Now, after several years, they are seeing each other again. The young Okubata even comes around to Ashiya to speak with Sachiko. He explains that his family no longer regards Taeko as a juvenile delinquent and that he would be permitted to marry her as soon as this may be arranged. They are in no great hurry, he says, but they want her to know what they have promised to each other, hoping that she would take their side and plead their cause with the main house when the proper time came. Sachiko sees this as not unreasonable, and she now regards the whole matter settled for the time being.

However, it is not until very much later when her affair with Itakura comes to a head that she finally realizes what it means to be truly modern. Until the flood, Itakura had simply been a sort of a servant as far as Taeko is concerned.

. . . With the flood, her feelings toward him underwent a very quick change. She knew that Sachiko and Yukiko would think her frivolous, but they had never known how it was to be saved when you had given yourself up for lost. Keiboy said that Itakura had his reasons. Very well, suppose he had. He had still risked his life; and in the meantime what was Kei-boy doing? Far from risking his life, had he shown even a trace of real concern, of real affection? It was the flood that killed the last of her love for him.

Nevertheless, she is not totally unmindful of family and position, and she tries to hold herself back. Her heart, however, works against her mind. In spite of that, her feelings have not overwhelmed her reason.

. . . Particularly because of her failure with Okubata, she looked far into the future and weighed the profit and loss, and after examining the balance as coolly as she could, she concluded that her happiness lay in marrying Itakura.

She had discovered in Itakura a kindred soul. Her conclusions that her happiness lay in marrying Itakura proceeds from this discovery. In her eyes, Itakura cannot but be ranked as a man several grades above Okubata, "the pampered child of wealth."

. . . His physique was splendid, and he would not hesitate to plunge into a fire if it seemed necessary. And best of all, he could support himself and his sister—he stood in sharp contrast to a man who lived by begging from his mother and brother. Going off to America without a cent, he had made his way with help from no one, and learned his trade—and art photography required not a little intelligence. Although his formal schooling left much to be desired, he had his own sort of intelligence and sensibility.

This, then, is Itakura the man. However, Taeko does not accept him except on her own terms. She has a very definite idea of what it is that she wants from life. This is "happiness." And she has formulated in her mind the qualities of the man with whom she expects to find this "happiness." These, however, stand in sharp contrast with those which the conservative people in the main house are keeping in mind in their search for a husband for Yukiko.

. . . Family and inherited property and diplomas had lost their appeal for her; Okubata had been enough to show her how worthless they were. She meant now to be quite practical. She asked only that her husband satisfy three conditions: he must have a strong body, he must have a trade, and he must be willing to offer up his very life for her. In Itakura all three conditions were satisfied, and there was another point in his favor: with three brothers back on the farm, he had no family responsibilities. (The sister who kept house for him would go home once he was married.) She would have his affection to herself. Her position would be far easier than that of the wife of the oldest and wealthiest family imaginable.

In the face of all these considerations, Taeko then makes the once-and-for-all decision. She will marry Itakura.

. . . When it became clear that Taeko was actually proposing marriage, Itakura seemed unable to believe his ears—perhaps he was but making a show of propriety, perhaps he was indeed caught by surprise. He said that he had not dreamed of such good fortune, and that he would like two or three days to think matters over. Beneath his surprise and hesitation there seemed to run another vein: it was such a stroke of luck that considerations of personal advantage and disadvantage had no meaning. But ought not Koi-san to make sure that she would not regret her decision? He himself would no longer be able to see the Okubata family, he said, and Koi-san would probably be cast out by the main branch of her family and even by the Ashiya branch. And they would be misunderstood and even ostracized. He could fight his way through, but could Koi-san?

Taeko feels that she could. And yet when the time came for her to act, she hesitates. There are two reasons. One is that they are not quite prepared to fend for themselves financially. But more important than that, she does

not feel she can let Yukiko be caught in the aftermath of the affair which will surely break out as a scandal in Osaka society. She will, therefore, wait until after Yukiko is married. And so in the end, fear of criticism holds her back, and she fails to become a truly modern woman. It is as though the navigators had lost their courage and cannot bear to move out of sight of the flashing lights ashore and sail on into the darkness that envelops the ocean.

This hesitation later proves to be her undoing. During the long wait for Yukiko to make up her mind and be married, Itakura dies. However, Taeko will always remain in the shadow of Itakura. Even when she goes off to live with Okubata and manages to get herself thrown out of the Makioka family, she is in the shadow of Itakura. When she herself falls seriously ill in Okubata's house, it is not Okubata whom she calls in her delirium but Itakura. And when she finally succeeds in breaking away from tradition, the man she chooses is Miyoshi, who is in many respects very much like Itakura. In this affair, she behaves differently from the way she had previously behaved. Having decided that she likes Miyoshi, she wastes no time in thinking of consequences and future contingencies. Now, she acts with decisive quickness and presents Sachiko and Teinosuke with a *fait accompli*, her pregnancy.

. . . What sort of man was he, asked Sachiko. A young man who made a surprisingly good impression, said Teinosuke. They had talked for less than an hour, and Teinosuke had not been able to study him in any detail, but on the whole he seemed more honest and sincere than Itakura. Quite of his own accord he admitted his responsibility, and he apologized most politely. Teinosuke suspected that Miyoshi had not taken the initiative, but had been seduced by Taeko. Though it would seem cowardly of him to be making excuses, said Miyoshi, and he should certainly have had more will power, he hoped Teinosuke would understand that he had not gone out aggressively after Koi-san, but had found himself in a position from which he could not retreat, and so the mistake had been made. If Teinosuke were to ask Koi-san, he would find that Miyoshi was not lying. Teinosuke added that he believed the story. The man accepted Teinosuke's proposal, and even seemed grateful. He was not qualified to take Koi-san for his bride, he said, but if the Makiokas would agree to the marriage he would swear to make her happy. Aware of his responsibilities, he had been wondering what to do if they should indeed give their consent, and he had saved a little money. He meant to open a tiny bar—a not-too-vulgar bar catering to foreigners. Koi-san would go on with her sewing, and they would not be a burden to the Makioka family. All of this Miyoshi said, and Teinosuke passed on to his wife.

However, the baby does not survive her birth. But Taeko is free at last. In time, she leaves the hospital and goes to start life with Miyoshi in rooms they had rented in Kobe. And shortly before Yukiko's return to Tokyo to be married, Taeko appears in Ashiya. Quietly, she bids good-bye to the Ashiya household and to Yukiko. Then she hurries off once more to Kobe, where waits the life she has chosen for herself.

*The Development of the Theme*

Yukiko is the most complex of the Makioka sisters in the sense that she is a mixture of qualities which characterize one or the other sister. She has a little of Taeko's rebelliousness, something of Tsuruko's respect for traditional values, and a bit of Sachiko's admixture of Japanese and foreign tendencies of thought and behavior. The result is, therefore, a rather puzzling individuality.

To begin with, Yukiko is perfectly capable of saying, "No!" to a decision taken in her behalf by Tatsuo. However, it never occurs to her to question his right to make decisions for her, as Taeko has most emphatically done. To Tatsuo's objection against her dressmaking, "Taeko said that she was no longer a child, that she did not need the guidance of any Tatsuo, that she understood her affairs better than anyone else. And what was so wrong with a woman who worked?"

Yukiko is supposed to be the most Japanese of the younger sisters but where Taeko takes up the classical Japanese dance and gets to be good enough to perform in a public recital, Yukiko remains no more than an interested spectator at best. She does not even have half the talent which Sachiko displays to such advantage in her poems. It appears that Yukiko's Japanese-ness is nothing more than her clinging to old-fashioned ideas of what is proper and what is not. This much rises to the surface when she registers her objection to Taeko's marrying Itakura in her most strongly worded statement in the novel: "In any case, Itakura is not a brother-in-law for me." When Yukiko finally does get married, it is to a man of Sachiko's and Teinosuke's choosing. However, she gives her assent to this match "only because Teinosuke had ordered her to make up her mind overnight, she announced peevishly. She took care not to show the slightest pleasure, and above all, not to let slip a word of thanks to those who had worked so hard for her." After that, however, the events run their traditionally fixed course from the *mi-ai* through the formal betrothal to the wedding itself. Yukiko does not even once raise a finger to influence the direction or the speed of events. One would indeed think that she is really a conservative woman who is here yielding up herself to the conventions in the traditional manner.

There is, however, another side to Yukiko. One observation is that: "People who did not know her well took Yukiko for a thoroughly Japanese lady, but only because the surface (the dress and appearance, speech and deportment) was so Japanese. The real Yukiko was quite different. She was even then studying French, and she understood Western Music far better than Japanese." But, as she herself says, she studies French "only to keep my sister company." There is nothing in the novel which might lead one to disbelieve that. As a matter of fact, there does not seem to be any compelling reason for her to study the French language. Itani

says that Yukiko plays the piano, but nowhere in the novel is she encountered actually playing a piano, and the only recitals she ever goes to are those to which her sisters take her.

It is, therefore, not possible to categorize Yukiko as a modern woman as one might Taeko. Neither may she be called "conservative" in the sense that someone like Tsuruku is conservative. Nor may she be regarded as a child of the contemporary era, alive in the present but inextricably linked with the ancient modes of living as one might Sachiko. She does, however, have very firm ideas of what she wants from life, and in those cases where alternative courses of action are open to her, she invariably acts not wilfully but in accordance with these ideas of hers.

Nowhere is her partial rejection of tradition more clearly evident than in her own behavior in Tokyo. After the transfer of the main branch of the family to that tiny house in Shibuya, she finds herself compelled by circumstances to leave the Ashiya house and take up residence with Tsuruko and Tatsuo in conformity with convention. Accepting the demands of tradition, she dutifully goes off to Tokyo, but it is soon clear where her own feelings lie.

. . . When they first arrived, Yukiko had cheerfully helped with the house and with the children, but—not that she refused to help even now, of course—but sometimes she would shut herself up in the little room upstairs. When Tsuruko began to wonder what might have happened and went up to investigate, she would find Yukiko at Teruo's desk, lost in thought, sometimes even weeping. This was happening more and more often—at first it had been only once every ten days or so. Sometimes even after Yukiko came downstairs she would pass a half day without saying a word, and occasionally she would be unable to hide her tears from the others.

Of course, she is homesick for Ashiya, for here in Shibuya she is really no more than a prisoner. This tradition-bound house is not and cannot be home to her. Home is the house in Ashiya where life is less stiff and formal, less burdensome.

The Ashiya house holds many attractions for Yukiko as it does for Taeko, too. For one thing, the master of the house, Teinosuke, is less of an authority figure than Tatsuo. Sachiko herself is generally the very personification of tolerance and trust. While due respect is always accorded to convention, neither Teinosuke nor Sachiko expects it to be followed to the letter under all circumstances. For instance, when Teinosuke worries what the main branch will think of Yukiko's and Taeko's protracted stay in Ashiya, Sachiko says, "I imagine Tsuruko is glad to have them away now and then. Her house is not half big enough any more, with all those children. Let Yukiko and Koi-san do as they like. No one will complain." The balance between tradition and personal desire is struck right there—"No one will complain." And this works out generally in favor of the

individual. Thus, in Ashiya Yukiko and Taeko are free to pursue their interests in pretty much the same way that Sachiko herself is free to go about.

Two of the refusals that Yukiko has handed out to candidates presented at her *mi-ai* indicate quite clearly that she is herself striving for just such a balance between tradition and individual freedom. One of those refused by Sachiko is Tatsuo's own candidate, the heir of the wealthy Saigusa family and an executive of a bank in Toyohashi. "The social position of the Saigusa family of Toyohashi was unassailable, indeed a little too high for what the Makioka family had become." From the traditional point of view alone, Tatsuo is indeed not mistaken in urging his sister-in-law to accept the man. Nevertheless, Yukiko turns him down on the ground that he is "countrified" and intellectually her inferior. Her acceptance of the man could have opened for Yukiko the life of a provincial lady of means in the traditional manner. "Although Tatsuo for his part admitted that Yukiko was not unintellectual, he had concluded that, for a thoroughly Japanese girl whose reserve was extreme, a quiet, secure life in a provincial city, free from needless excitement, would be ideal, and it had not occurred to him that the lady herself might object." This is not the ideal she wants, however, and she objects.

The other man whom Yukiko declines is Hashidera, Teinosuke's own candidate, a man whom he had grown to like. Here, again, they have a good man.

. . . Sachiko told Teinosuke afterwards that of the many prospective husbands they had inspected for Yukiko, this man seemed the best. All of their conditions were satisfied, and family, his position, his way of living were neither ridiculously high nor ridiculously low by Makioka standards. Such a candidate was not likely to come again.

Hashidera himself is a physician, a profession which has traditionally stood for modernity and progress in Japan. He had been a student in Germany, specializing in internal medicine and the gastroscope. However, on his return he had joined this pharmaceutical company which he now runs himself. His regard for the proprieties is entirely beyond reproach. His one fault, however, is the telephone call. He invites Yukiko for a walk with him through one of the more populous sections of Osaka. She declines in a most direct manner. With that the whole negotiations come to an end. Sachiko thinks Yukiko should have accepted the invitation or at least declined gracefully. Teinosuke comments, "It happened because Yukiko is what she is."

Saigusa and Hashidera are opposites. Where Saigusa is "countrified" and dull, Hashidera is cosmopolitan and intelligent. Saigusa comes with all the wealth of a rich family, but he promises no more than a quiet life in a provincial city, unruffled by excitements and the like. Hashidera comes as a man who has seen the world in which he is now making his way rather successfully as the actual head of a flourishing enterprise. He respects the conventions but will not permit them to contain his desire for life. Yukiko

feels quite rightly that she cannot respect Saigusa, and Hashidera shocks her with his directness. She has no regrets, therefore, in breaking off negotiations with either men.

The man she finally accepts stands between these two extremes. This man, Minoru, is a son of Viscount Mimaki by a concubine. From the Peers School, he had gone to study physics at Tokyo University which he soon left to go to France where he studied painting for a time, and French cooking for a time, and numerous other things, none for very long. In America, he studied aeronautics in a not-too-famous state university and possibly graduated with a diploma. Then he roamed the United States, Mexico and parts of Latin America. When his allowance was cut off he made his living as a cook and even as a bellboy. Now, back in Japan, he is trying to get himself established, after the China Incident had put an end to his brief but brilliant and lucrative career in architecture. He recognizes that his tastes are turning to things Japanese, and he confesses that it has occurred to him that the Kobe-Osaka area would be most congenial to him. "With but a little exaggeration, then, one might say that his future lay in Osaka and Kobe."

Here, then, is the man Yukiko finds exciting enough to acquiesce to. He comes with the weight of the Mimaki name and the wealth of the family but he also comes with proof of his own intelligence and of his ability to make his own way in the world. But it is with his wit and finesse that he wins Yukiko. Though Yukiko only smiles and says nothing at the dinner given by the Viscount, Sachiko sees in her sister's eyes an excitement not usually detected there.

Life has at last come to Yukiko.

### *Recapitulation*

In a sense, Katharina with her vigorous pursuit of life sets the tone of *Sasame-yuki*. Saku, the old teacher of the Yamamura school of the classical dance, provides an unforgettable contrapuntal element. Everybody says that Osaka culture must be preserved, but only Saku does something about it. She sticks to tradition without compromise, and she dies a pauper. She has in effect only succeeded in keeping faith not with life but with death.

Tatsuo and Tsuruko do indeed attempt to be faithful to Osaka traditions until they find it more and more difficult to keep faith with life, with their obligations to their children. Then they leave Osaka for Tokyo. In the end, even the slight hold that they have on tradition, they eventually relinquish. When Yukiko finally gets married, it is Teinosuke who makes the arrangements and pays the expenses, which are the responsibilities of the main house. All the forms are to be observed, Teinosuke promises, but it is clear that the reality is that the Ashiya branch house has assumed the duties.

It does seem clear that keeping to the tradition will not lead to life or to its vital continuation. However, it will not do to reject tradition altogether. Much of what is good and meaningful in life still springs from tradition. Taeko's rejection of tradition eventually brings her a future in rented rooms with a man for whom the ultimate in life is a not-too-vulgar bar catering to foreigners. Nevertheless, she has shown that a life of freedom is possible. Yukiko's future is with a man who will work as an aeronautical engineer even as he prepares for the day when he can once more be an architect, a builder, who will combine what is beautiful in Japanese traditional architecture with what is modern and perhaps even novel. Together, Teinosuke and Sachiko provide a picture of what such a future will be like. Indeed, these two have shown that to live fully and significantly, it is necessary to live both in the past as well as in the present.

#### ONE WHO PREFERRED NETTLES

In *Sasame-yuki* Tanizaki has provided not only an image of life and a sense of its vital rhythms, he has also supplied a number of answers to the question, "How is a Japanese to live in the modern world?" He makes it quite clear that a categorical answer cannot be given to this question. It all depends on what you want in life. He can only give alternative answers.

It is often said that a novelist is an artist, not a thinker. His real business is to tell stories, not to develop ideas. To some extent, such an assertion may be accepted as justified. However, to tell stories about people, even if they are only created beings, is to tell of human actions, but human actions are almost always generated by ideas. Most people take one course of action rather than another because of an idea they have that one is preferable to any other. How then is an author of novels to avoid ideas?

It is precisely by not avoiding ideas that novelists have written meaningfully of life. What Tanizaki has done in *Sasame-yuki* is to take a few ideas and to show what their implications are. For this purpose, he has created some characters, and he has presented them as they go about choosing between alternative courses of action, according to this or that idea. Then he has left us to judge for ourselves which idea is fruitful and which sterile. Our reaction, however, is not intellectual. We judge not with our reason but with our feelings. We approve of an idea because its consequences make us happy. We reject an idea not because it is logically unsound but because it produces a situation we cannot be happy about.

Tanizaki's worth as a novelist lies essentially in his ability to make these consequences appear so real that we react to them emotionally. From the very beginning of *Sasame-yuki*, our emotions are engaged. At every step, we are reacting. By turns, we are angry, disappointed, sad, and happy. And then at the very end, Tanizaki writes that Yukiko's stomach trouble persists even on the train which is now taking her to Tokyo and her wed-

ding. Some people smile when they read this. Others have been known to explode with laughter. After those disappointments of hers and with this rosy future practically in sight already, Yukiko now suffers from an upset stomach. But we are relieved. It is as though we have just stepped out into the road after fighting our way through a patch of nettles. We might be attacked by mosquitoes, but that is nothing like the nettles. Besides there is the road now before us.

It is a comfortable feeling to be out of reach of nettles, but we know we will never appreciate this feeling if we do not know what it is like to be among nettles. But we know. For this reason, we are richer because in writing *Sasame-yuki* one had preferred nettles.

NEW ASIAN CENTER PAPERBACK

## MODERNIZATION IN ASIA

(Annotated Bibliography of Selected Materials)

*Compiled by* CAROLYN ISRAEL & LAURELLA DIMALANTA