

ONE

Alone [Ukifune] decides to die; alone she sets out toward the place of her death. She sets out to part from all those whom she loves, all those to whom she is close. She keeps the sorrow of parting sealed in her breast, where she strives to bear it. Ukifune is strong. She is not swept on by fate; she decides her own fate...The movements of her own heart, the situation in which she has been placed: these things she can observe coolly, objectively...She certainly deserves pity, but the death that awaits her is a death that she has chosen herself, and the appearance of a young woman who can in this way, on her own, choose her own fate, suggests new possibilities for women.[4]

TWO

Tomikura Tokujirō remarked in a roundtable discussion in 1948, “When we moderns read Genji, we feel the youth or maturity of the author’s development and grasp the evolution of this great work from that standpoint.”[96] He seems to have meant that the later parts of the book convey the author’s increasing maturity, which, for Saigō Nobutsuna as for others, culminates in Ukifune. Saigō wrote at about the same time:

I believe that the instant in which the author finished the Uji chapters must have been the very instant in which she plunged herself wholly into Pure Land teaching, and the instant, too, when monogatari literature approached complete dissolution of self [jiko hōkai]. One can say that the value of Genji monogatari lies in its critical depiction, to the extent possible at the time and thanks to trueness of spirit [tamashii no shinjitsusa], of the downfall of the aristocratic class.[97]

Saigō saw in Ukifune the author’s attainment of true Buddhist devotion and clairvoyant social awareness. Akiyama Ken wrote, “The attitude reached by Ukifune, that is to say, the position reached by the author through the evolution of the world of the tale, is none other than a critical attitude toward aristocratic society”[98] and Enomoto Masazumi considered the figure of Ukifune to reflect the author’s “life experience.”[99] More recently, Setouchi Jakuchō and Kawai Hayao gave this kind of interpretation mass prominence. Setouchi wrote that in describing Ukifune’s ordination the author was really describing her own; that through her the author expressed her own deep longing for salvation; and that by writing Ukifune’s story as a nun the author herself was saved.[100] Kawai (a psychologist) meanwhile argued that through Ukifune the author herself achieved full psychological individuation.[101] For Setouchi and Kawai, Murasaki attained full mastery and wisdom by creating a character dedicated to reaching that goal.

ŌIGIMI

Ōigimi (大君) "The senior/greater princess"

"Kimi" means princess or just distinguished lady. The "greater" is used to designate seniority.

Brief description:

She is the eldest daughter of Hachinomiya, The 8th Prince, that is, the 8th son of the Kiritsubo Emperor and, as 8th son, he is very far from the line of imperial succession. Ōigimi's mother (daughter of a Daijin 大臣 "Great Minister") is dead, having died when giving birth to Ōigimi's little sister Naka no kimi (中の君 "The middle princess"), which is a "sinful" act in the sense that Naka no kimi is stained with the impurity of death at the time of her birth. After a fire that destroys the family estate, Hachinomiya moved to Uji and is living in a mountain villa, studying Buddhism.

Kaoru sees the two daughters in a "fence peeking" (kaimami 垣間見) scene and becomes interested in them.

After Hachinomiya dies, Kaoru begins to pursue Ōigimi. Ōigimi refuses this and seeks instead that he select her sister Naka no kimi.

Kaoru brings his friend Prince Niou with him to Uji since Niou has been showing an interest in Naka no kimi thinking this might help Ōigimi allow herself to give herself to Kaoru. Not only does she continue to refuse him, Ōigimi is not happy that he is facilitating the relationship between her sister and Niou, who has a reputation as a playboy. For his part, although Niou has deep feelings for Naka no kimi, as the 3rd prince of Emperor Kinjo, it is not easy for him to go frequently to Uji. When she learns of the relationship between Niou and Yūgiri's 6th daughter (Yūgiri is Genji's son, as you will remember), she falls further into despair and ultimately dies.

NAKA NO KIMI

Naka no kimi (中君) "The middle princess"

Actually, I had never really thought about what "naka" ("middle") means in this case. It does NOT mean there is a third sister and she is the one in the middle. I think it is a rank designation.

Brief description:

She is the younger daughter of Hachinomiya and seems to contrast, in terms of personality, with her older more serious sister. She helps connect the stories of her sister Ōigimi in the earlier Uji chapters and that of Ukifune in the latter Uji chapters. Although Niou marries her, it is not long before he rarely comes to see her as he has a wife, the eldest daughter ("First Princess") of Emperor Kinjō. She moves to Niou's Nijō estate after her sister dies. There, she gives birth to a child. She is the one who tells Kaoru about Ukifune's existence since Kaoru continues to show an interest in her. Ukifune is her half-sister for whom she is caring at the request of Ukifune's mother.

UKIFUNE

Ukifune (浮舟) "Floating Boat"

The name clearly indicates the uncertainty of her fate in life. "Uki" also is derivative of "uku" (憂く, to be depressed) and resonates with "Uji" as well.

Brief description:

Ukifune is the daughter of Hachinomiya and a woman who served him (and who was married to someone else). Hachinomiya, The 8th Prince, is the 8th son of the Kiritsubo Emperor and, as 8th son, he is very far from the line of imperial succession.

She is reared far from the Capital, then sent by her mother to Uji to be cared for by Naka no kimi. She attracts the attention of both Kaoru and Niou.

She goes on an erotic sojourn with Niou for two days to an island.

She jumps into or falls into the Uji River but doesn't die. She is found by a priest and becomes a nun. However, at the end of the narrative, Kaoru has discovered where she is.

She has 26 poems in Genji.

Names used in translations

Seidensticker and Washburn use "Ukifune", when being more specific than "daughter", etc.

Tyler uses "a young woman".

Appears in chapters ...

Mentioned in about 58 sections across 6 chapters beginning with Chapter 49 and going through the end of the work (Chapter 54). She is the primary character in all of these final chapters except Chapter 52, when she has gone missing.