

# A Journey through Meiji Tokyo: Reading Nagai Kafū's *Fukagawa no uta* (2)

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## INTRODUCTION

One December afternoon in 1908, Nagai Kafū, the barely disguised narrator of *Fukagawa no uta*, boards a tram at Yotsuya-mitsuke, and proceeds to describe both Meiji Tokyo and his fellow passengers as he travels east across the city, through Hanzōmon, Hibiya, Ginza, Tsukiji and Shintomichō. Just before reaching Kayabachō, a power failure brings the tram to a halt, and, as the conductor apologises for the delay, all of the passengers get off (Brown, 2022). Thus abruptly ends the first half of Kafū's narrative.

The second half begins with the narrator being handed a transfer ticket, which allows him to take another tram across the Sumida River to Fukagawa. As the second tram approaches Eitai-bashi he sinks into reverie, reminiscing about the trips he made to Fukagawa when he was younger, before he went abroad, and before the new bridge was completed. He recollects the boat journey there, and a year-end temple fair that he once witnessed; but as the description progresses, the narrator's own memories seem to merge with an older, deeper past. The steamboats that plied the rivers and canals of Meiji Tokyo give way to rowing boats, the electric trams to rickshaws. The people he recalls, their songs and their clothes and the things they carry, belong more to Edo than to the Meiji era. These Fukagawas of the past – the *fin de siècle* Fukagawa of Kafū's youth, the imagined Fukagawa of Edo fiction – and present – the narrator's apparently unplanned visit to the temple grounds may have coincided with the year's last fair – coalesce and drift, so that we seem to lose our temporal bearings. The reimagined boat journey, temple fair, and nocturnal trip

along the canal to Susaki are lent an immediacy by the use of the narrative present; but the descriptive reverie is punctuated by a moment of conjecture, the narrator exclaiming ‘how beautiful it must have been’ (*ika ni utsukushikatta de arō*), as if to indicate that the vision of the past that he attempts to recall, or even return to in the present, ultimately evades him, slipping away into the realm of distant, improbable, memory.

Thus Fukagawa becomes the first of those down-at-heel districts east of the river that become a recurring motif in Kafū’s work. Like Honjo and Tamanoi, Fukagawa serves as a site of nostalgia, a neglected Shitamachi backwater where, despite (or perhaps because of) the drabness of its streets, he can still find traces of a cherished past, traces that have been expunged from the modern city west of the Sumida River by the forces of Civilisation and Enlightenment. In *Fukagawa no uta* this all but vanished past is personified by the shamisen player who sings an old Edo *hauta* on the temple grounds. Kafū’s narrator expresses a desire to remain here in Fukagawa, listening to the man’s songs; but, just as he briefly comes back to his Meiji self when he crosses the new bridge at Eitai-bashi, he knows that he cannot stay.

Although he aspires, like Saitō Ryoku’u, to be a Meiji-born poet of Edo (*Meiji ga unda Edo shijin*), he acknowledges his fate, and his thoughts turn to the journey back across the river, to the modern city, his Yamanote home, and his Western books. This is what Kawamoto Saburō has termed Kafū’s paradox (Kawamoto, pp. 87-88). Much as he cleaves to Shitamachi and the old ways, Kafū knows that, for all his aversion to the shallowness of Meiji culture, he remains a child of Yamanote Tokyo. Kawamoto notes how the last lines of *Fukagawa no uta* anticipate Kafū’s life, as well as much of his later work. Just as he resigns himself here to his fate, and leaves Shitamachi behind, so he would later abandon a brief attempt at living in Shitamachi when he came to realise that he didn’t belong. Returning to Yamanote, he lived in Azabu until his house was razed in the American air raids. After the war he moved to Chiba, remaining there until his

death in 1959. If, like the narrator of *Fukagawa no uta*, Kafū could not remain in Shitamachi, he would nevertheless continue to return here, year after year, decade after decade, 'finding remnants of Edo to almost the end of his life, usually near the banks of the Sumida' (Seidensticker 1985, p. 182).

## A Song in Fukagawa [Part Two]

by Nagai Kafū

### II

As I mentioned earlier, I had no particular destination in mind. Caught up in the commotion as everyone got off the tram, I stood up without thinking, whereupon the conductor, even though I hadn't asked for one, handed me a transfer ticket for Fukagawa.

In the street, cast into shadow now by the houses along one side, the maroon-painted trams stretch for two or three blocks. In the sunlight slanting in from the Kayabachō street<sup>1</sup> the western-style buildings arranged haphazardly on the opposite corner, some of them tall, some short, look shabby, and seem to lack depth or weight. This might be because they are all roofs and windows, without any hint of decorative carving.<sup>2</sup> The mesh of crisscrossing wires extending over the street,<sup>3</sup>

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1 Just to the north of Sakamoto Park the road along which the tram has been travelling crosses Eitai-dōri (Kafū's Kayabachō street). At the intersection here the Fukagawa tramline branched off the Hibiya-Ryōgoku loop.

2 In a later version of the text, published in 1919, Kafū would compare the buildings here to sheds (*mono-oki goya*), recalling the utilitarian (*jitsuriteka na*) appearance of the western-style buildings glimpsed in Ginza (*Kafū Zensha* vol. 6, p.467). Contemporary photographs suggest that not all of the western-style buildings in this district were so unprepossessing. See for example the illustrations in the first volume of *Tokyo annai* of the Bankers' Assembly Rooms (*Ginkō Shakaijō*, by Tatsuno Kingo, architect of Tokyo Station) located by the Sakamoto Park tram stop (p.581); and the French neoclassical Tokyo Stock Exchange in Kabutochō (p.632), just beyond the Kayabachō intersection.

3 '[E]verywhere overhead is a network of telegraph, telephone, and electric light wires' (Chamberlain & Mason, p.115). This mesh of wires is a distinctive feature of Meiji photographs and prints, and features in the lyrics of one of the popular 'tram songs' (*densha shōka*) first published in 1905: '*denshin denwa dentō no / sen wa kumode to irimajiru*': 'telegraph, telephone, electric-light wires coalesce in a cobweb' (Hayashi & Yoshikawa, p.147).

needless to say, spoils the view of the clear winter sky. Telegraph poles made of untreated logs that look as though they were brought down from the mountains only yesterday stick up unabashedly, blocking the view along the street.<sup>4</sup> The poles are plastered with garishly coloured advertisements,<sup>5</sup> devoid of any artistic merit. In between the bamboo leaves of the grimy, shrivelled New Year decorations each household displays its own banner or streamer; but they have all opted for red or purple or some such extremely simple colour.

Indignant, I thought back to the Fukagawa of old. By good fortune, I have a transfer ticket in my hand. I was overcome by the irrepressible urge to escape to Fukagawa; to leap in one bound from the middle of this wretched city to Fukagawa.

Until a few years ago, up until I left Japan, Fukagawa with its waterways was for a long time the place that satisfied all of my inclinations, raptures, sorrows and pleasures. Even though there weren't yet any trams,<sup>6</sup> throughout Tokyo<sup>7</sup> the city's urban charms had already been utterly destroyed, and only here, amidst the sad, deserted alleys of this one remote corner across the river, could the beauty – an

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4 The Telegraph and Telephone Line Construction Ordinance of 1890 (*Denshin-sen Denwa-sen Kensetsu Jōrei*) granted the Ministry of Transport and Communications the right to place telegraph and telephone poles at any point along a public highway. The demand for timber in Meiji Japan led to widespread deforestation, which the government began to address with the Forest Law (*Shinrinhō*) of 1897. The timber merchants of Edo and of Meiji Tokyo were concentrated at Kiba (lit. 'lumber place'), just to the east of Fukagawa, a district 'noted for its trade in timber, the town being here intersected by numerous canals communicating with the river, down which come the timber-laden rafts from the inland provinces' (Chamberlain & Mason, p.136).

5 Advertising on telegraph poles belonging to the Tokyo Electric Light Co. (*Tokyo Dentō*) was permitted from 1890. The first adverts were for the *Jiji Shimpō* newspaper. Utility-pole advertising (*dencha kōkoku*) remains a source of revenue for Japan's power and telecommunication companies.

6 Kafū sailed for America in September 1903, a month after electric trams started running in Tokyo.

7 Although *Fukagawa no uta* functions as a kind of itinerary, this is the only reference in the text to the modern name of the city. Kafū instead employs the toponyms Yamanote and Shitamachi, and the historic Edo, as his narrator progresses through the Meiji city. Otherwise he simply refers to 'the city': *shicha* 市中 or *tokai* 都会.

inexpressibly pure, consistent and harmonious beauty – of decrepitude and decay be experienced at every turn.<sup>8</sup>

In those days there was no tram service to take you from the bustling city to Fukagawa, and rickshaws were simply too expensive; and since the streets surrounding Eitai-bashi were hemmed in during the construction of the new bridge<sup>9</sup> by bamboo fences, and strewn with rocks and gravel that made walking difficult, for I don't know how many years everyone, all and sundry, would take a small, oil-powered steamboat that plied the canal<sup>10</sup> through Tsukiji from Shiodome, or board a rowboat on the canalside at Minami-Hatchōbori,<sup>11</sup> where the boatman would ring a little bell like the ones used by tofu sellers, calling out “Now leaving! Now leaving!” without showing any sign of setting off; and then, looking across to Ishikawajima<sup>12</sup> as we make our way along the Echizenbori bank,<sup>13</sup> we soon drift on

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8 Kafū's eulogizing of the forlorn decay that he discovers east of the river, a central feature in much of his work from *Fukagawa no uta* onwards, draws on the late Edo fiction of Tamenaga Shunsui. See for example the opening passage of *Shunshoku umegoyomi* (1832-33), where we find the pitiful protagonist, Tanjirō, hiding out in a ramshackle house in Honjo (Shirane 2002, p.765). Western visitors were less enthralled with this corner of the city: ‘The S.E. part of Tokyo, consisting of the district of Fukagawa on the l. bank of the River Sumida, is a maze of narrow streets, chiefly inhabited by the lower trading and artisan classes, and offers little for the sightseer’ (Chamberlain & Mason, p.135).

9 Superseding the Edo-period wooden bridge, the new Eitai-bashi, Japan's first steel road bridge, was opened in 1897 (Meiji 30), when Kafū would have been 17. Damaged by fire in the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake, the Meiji bridge was replaced by the present-day bridge.

10 In 1919 Kafū (*Kafa Zensha* vol. 6, p.467) specifically names the Sanjukken-bori canal (earlier crossed by the narrator's tram at Mihara-bashi), which ran northwest from the Shiodome-gawa to the Kyōbashi-gawa, which in turn emptied, via the Sakura-gawa (or Hatchō-bori) and the mouth of the Kamejima-gawa, into the Sumida. A steamboat already plied the Sanjukken-bori canal in early Meiji (Sugawara Kenji, p.58).

11 Minami-Hatchōbori: The district flanking the right bank of the Hatchō-bori canal, which the narrator's tram had crossed at Sakura-bashi. In early Meiji, according to city records, 145 boats operated from here (Sugawara Kenji, pp.56-57). Although Hatchōbori survives as a place name, the canal was filled in between 1960 and 1972.

12 An island situated in the shallow waters at the mouth of the Sumida, adjacent to Tsukudajima, and location during the Meiji period of the Ishikawajima shipyards.

13 The Echizen-bori canal, which looped around the *naka-yashiki* residence of the Echizen Matsudaira clan, entering the Sumida River at each end, was filled in during the Meiji period. The canal however gave

the ebb and flow of the tide as if we are sailing across the Indian Ocean,<sup>14</sup> until at last, crossing the river<sup>15</sup> below Eitai-bashi, we enter the Hamaguri-chō canal from Etchūjima.<sup>16</sup> Women with the chignon of their butterfly hairstyles set low,<sup>17</sup> and men in padded jackets emblazoned with their guild's crest<sup>18</sup> mingle with people bearing various playthings and gifts – New Year shuttlecocks,<sup>19</sup> branches festooned with little cakes,<sup>20</sup> Narita lanterns,<sup>21</sup> straw dolls of Sumiyoshi dancers<sup>22</sup> – as they

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its name to the district (now known as Shinkawa) that it had encircled. After heading down the Hatchō-bori canal, boats heading for Fukagawa would have emerged into the mouth of the Sumida, facing the islands of Tsukudajima and Ishikawajima. Turning left, the boats would then have travelled upstream along the right bank of the river (the Echizenbori bank) before crossing the river higher up, within sight of Eitai-bashi and opposite the mouth of the Ōshima-gawa canal.

14 Kafū had sailed across the Indian Ocean only a few months earlier, on his voyage back to Japan from Europe.

15 There is no explicit reference to the Sumida River in the text, which merely states that the crossing was made downstream from Eitai-bashi. The closure and reconstruction of the bridge allowed for a brief reversion to older, waterborne modes of transport. Edo townsfolk heading for the pleasure quarters of Fukagawa would often make the journey by boat, in the same way that pleasure-seekers bound for Yoshiwara would sail up the river to Imado.

16 Boats would have entered the Ōshima-gawa (now the Ōyoko-gawa) canal on the left bank of the Sumida. This canal separated Fukagawa proper from the then-sparsely populated Etchūjima, which forms the left bank of one of the channels of the Sumida as it debouches into Tokyo Bay. The short Hamagurichō-bori (now filled in) entered the Ōshima-gawa canal from the north.

17 Geisha preferred to have the chignon of their butterfly or ginkgo-leaf (*ichōgaeshi*) hairstyle set lower on the back of the head. Young women from more respectable backgrounds, presumably including the apologetic passenger on the tram, positioned the chignon higher, towards the crown.

18 *Shirushi-banten*, worn by artisans and tradesmen since the Edo period.

19 *Tsukubane*, named after the wind-borne seeds of the tree (*Buckleya lanceolata*) from which they derive their shape. Made of coloured feathers, and smaller than a badminton shuttlecock, they are used with the decorated, rectangular wooden paddles or battledores known as *hagoita* to play a gentle game at New Year.

20 *Mayudama*, another New Year decoration, made by attaching small ricecakes shaped like silkworm cocoons (*mayu*), along with various other New Year's charms, to bare mulberry or willow branches.

21 Paper lanterns with the auspicious characters for 'Narita-san' (成田山) painted on them in thick brushstrokes. (For the significance of Narita-san, see note 23.)

22 In *Sumiyoshi-odori*, which originated in Osaka, a group of men or women holding fans would dance in a circle beneath a large parasol. In Tokyo, Sumiyoshi dance transformed into a song and dance routine known as *kappore*, performed by bands of street entertainers. The 1919 text (*Kafū Zensha* vol. 6, p.467) has dolls

make their way home in the afternoon from the Fudō temple's thrice-monthly fair,<sup>23</sup> while a number of small boats, their oars sounding in rhythm as the boatmen call back and forth through the gaps between the moored lighters, follow the flow of the gentle current. The colours of the people's clothes and playthings and lanterns all reflected in the water: how beautiful it would have been to look at them while leaning over the railings of a mouldering wooden bridge encumbered with old traffic bollards and noticeboards.<sup>24</sup>

For as long as I live I will never forget the scenes glimpsed from my boat late at night, at the hour when, in summer, the lanterns are lit in the Suzaki pleasure quarter.<sup>25</sup> Dim lamplight filtering through rush matting falls on the naked figure of a boatman, drunkenly shouting. At the back window of one of the little houses

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made of clay (*doro-zaiku*) rather than straw (*wara-zaiku*).

23 The Fukagawa Fudō-dō is a branch temple of the Narita-san Shinshō-ji temple in Narita, Chiba, one of the major Buddhist temples in the Kantō region. A popular cult developed around the Buddhist protective deity Fudō-Myōō (Sanskrit *Acala*) in Edo, following the portrayal of the deity by the kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjūrō. Commencing in 1703, the statue of Fudō-Myōō housed in Narita was periodically brought to Edo for display (*degaichō*) at the Eitai-ji temple in Fukagawa, adjacent to the Tomioka Hachiman-gu Shinto shrine. The *degaichō* saw huge crowds flock to Fukagawa to pay their respects at the temple, and to visit the market stalls and fairgrounds that sprang up in and around the temple precincts. Eitai-ji was destroyed in early Meiji following the new government's anti-Buddhist *Shinbutsu-bunri* decree, its grounds turned into a park.

However, as local belief in Fudō-Myōō remained strong, a new temple, Fukagawa Fudō-dō, was erected on part of the former grounds of Eitai-ji in 1881. The Handbook for Travellers in Japan (Chamberlain & Mason, p.136) briefly describes the temple, and lists the three days per month on which temple fairs (*ennichi*) were held: 'The Buddhist temple commonly known as *Fukagawa no Fudō*, in Tomioka Monzen-chō, is subsidiary to the great shrine at Narita; and in imitation of the latter the grounds are laid out in rococo style, with inscribed stone slabs and numerous bronze statuettes. It presents a lively appearance on the 1st, 15th, and 28th of each month.'

24 The city's bridges were often the setting for romantic encounters. See for example Kafū's *Sumidagawa* (Seidensticker 1965, pp.188-189). Kafū would later replace 'how beautiful' (*ika ni utsukushikatta*) with 'how picturesque' (*ika ni kaigateki*) (*Kafū Zenshū* vol. 6, p.468), echoing the earlier description of the palace moat, and the subsequent sight of figures on the distant Aioi-bashi, both described as 'picture-like' (*e no yō ni*). The Traveller's Handbook describes the view of boats moored off Ishikawajima – a scene that Kafū's narrator will shortly observe – as 'picturesque' (Chamberlain & Mason, p.137).

25 The pleasure quarter (*yūkaku*) at Susaki – Kafū uses an alternative pronunciation – was built on the eastern fringes of Fukagawa in 1888, surviving until the Prostitution Prevention Law came into force in 1958. Edo-period Fukagawa was known for the cultured geisha who inhabited its unlicensed pleasure quarters.



along the canal,<sup>26</sup> a woman in a lascivious state of undress drinks saké with a bare-skinned, tattooed man. From a garden wall a pine tree extends a limb out over the canal, a water-gate topped with wall-spikes behind it,<sup>27</sup> while from the second-floor of a restaurant, the light flickering gently inside, I can hear a song sung by a geisha. The moon comes out. On one side of the canal, cast into darkness by the warehouse roofs, somebody croons a Shinnai ballad<sup>28</sup> as they make their way along the pitch-black embankment. A rickshaw with a paper lantern crosses over a wooden bridge visible in the moonlight reflected off the water. I was young then and free of worries, and so filled with poetic feeling that I found such scenes indescribably beautiful and sad. Utterly entranced by the charms of Edo, my soul was truly at peace. I believed that the artistry of the Ken'yūsha writers<sup>29</sup> was new and wonderful. I was confident that in the writings left behind by Chikamatsu and Saikaku<sup>30</sup> could be found the expression of every passionate feeling. Such things as the vibration of soundwaves, the intensity of colours and the heaviness of air did not stimulate me in the slightest.<sup>31</sup> I never imagined that such things should

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26 Perhaps the Hirano-gawa canal, a continuation of the Ōshima-gawa, along which small boats transported visitors to Susaki.

27 The wall-spikes seen by the narrator earlier at Tsukiji-bashi may have triggered memories of the boat journey to Susaki. Wall-spikes, board fences and pine trees form a kind of iconographic grouping, a visual motif repeatedly invoked by Kafū and his fellow Edo-nostalgists: 'There were board fences topped by spikes, and above the spikes the branches of pine trees' (Seidensticker 1965, p.195).

28 *Shinnai-bushi* was performed in Edo by itinerant performers who sang in a distinctive nasal style, and who were usually accompanied by a shamisen player. 'Door-to-door performers were most likely to appear immediately before and after the New Year, driving out evil spirits at year's end, and ushering in auspicious spirits for the year to come' (Groemer, p.269).

29 A group of writers prominent in late Meiji, including Ozaki Kōyō (1868-1903) and Yamada Bimiyō (1868-1910), whose work drew on both modern European realism and Edo fiction, particularly the *ninjōbon* of Tamenaga Shunsui (Shirane, p. 762). In 1898, when he was 18, Kafū served a brief apprenticeship with the Ken'yūsha novelist Hirotsu Ryūrō (1861-1928), author of *Imado shinju* (Imado Double Suicide, 1895).

30 Edo-period writers Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1724) and Ihara Saikaku (1642-93), authors respectively of *Love Suicides at Sonezaki* (*Sonezaki shinjū*) and *Life of a Sensuous Woman* (*Kōshoku ichidai onna*).

31 Kafū here alludes to the scientific materialism that informed the fiction of Zola and the other naturalists. As

enter the realms of art. I never doubted that Japan would forever be my home, that Japanese would forever be the language in which I could freely express my feelings.

Now I have a moustache, and wear western clothes. Boarding an electric tram, at Eitai-bashi I cross over a bridge made of steel. How can one not feel the drastic changes of our time.

From the Echizenbori bank, crowded with lighters and masts, all the way out into the distance, everything is blurred into a bright haze by the evening glow. The sides of the many sailing ships moored as ever before the black silhouette of Ishikawajima are dyed bright red by the rays of the sun.<sup>32</sup> The coal-smoke that rises up from below drifts over the bridge, at times so thick that we can't see in front of us.<sup>33</sup> The view thus far was still the same as ever; but a moment later I was taken aback when I spotted a long bridge stretching from distant Tsukudajima across to

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Mitsuko Iriye notes (Kafū, *American Stories*, pp. ix-x), Kafū began to read Zola soon after becoming Ryūrō's pupil, and developed a passion for French literature that would deeply influence his work, and induce him to leave Japan.

32 The Traveller's Handbook (Chamberlain & Mason, p.137) remarks on the picturesque sight of ships sailing into the mouth of the Sumida off Ishikawajima. The view from Eitai-bashi was one of the classic sights (*meisho*) of Edo, and the crowded masts of the boats moored off Ishikawajima and Tsukudajima feature in numerous Edo and Meiji prints. A few days before the publication of *Fukagawa no uta* the illustrated magazine *Fuzoku gahō* issued the latest in its series of district guides to the capital's sights, *Shinsen Tokyo meisho zue*. Devoted to Fukagawa, Supplement no. 63 includes a double-page print by Yamamoto Shōun that depicts Eitai-bashi in the snow (Yamamoto, p.38). Beneath one of the bridge's girders a signalman stands with red and green flags, directing a tram approaching out of picture from Fukagawa. A sentry-box, lamppost and iron railings complete the scene's Meiji superstructure. Signalman apart, the figures on the bridge hark back to Edo: the women and children wrapped in winter kimono, sheltering from the snow beneath paper umbrellas; the man in sedge hat and straw cape hauling a handcart weighed down by an ornamental New Year's pine tree; the fishmonger with his wares balanced on a yoke across his shoulder; the three salesmen or delivery men with black lacquer chests strapped to their backs; the workman in *geta* and *shirushi-banten* carrying a wooden trestle. On the Fukagawa bank, willow trees and board fences likewise evoke Edo, while beyond the bridge railings bare-masted ships lie moored together in tight clusters in the mouth of the river, snow blanketing the decks and the roofs of the houses on distant Tsukudajima.

33 The smoke perhaps comes from steamboats passing beneath the bridge; or from cooking fires aboard boats moored nearby.

Fukagawa.<sup>34</sup> I could clearly see, as in a picture, the avenue of small pines along the embankment,<sup>35</sup> and even the figures of people on the bridge. I got off the tram on the far side of Eitai-bashi.<sup>36</sup> Back then, I knew almost all of the establishments on the Fukagawa high street.<sup>37</sup> There used to be a vivacious woman in the *hamaguri* clam shop; and I wonder what became of the girl in the store selling the famous rice-crackers.<sup>38</sup> For a while I glanced all around me as I walked, trying to summon back memories of when I was twenty,<sup>39</sup> memories that had vanished without leaving a trace.

Of course it was unlikely that I would spot anyone who looked like either of those two women. Yet the Fukagawa high street was still as gloomy as ever, and somehow chillier than other districts; and the bamboo fronds of the New Year decorations were rustling in the wind, even though there hadn't been any breeze

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34 Opened in March 1903, a few months before Kafū left Japan, the wooden Aioi-bashi connected Etchūjima with the industrial island of Tsukushima, a recently reclaimed extension of the older Tsukudajima. In 1923 the bridge was damaged by fire following the Great Kantō Earthquake, and was replaced by a concrete bridge (itself later replaced).

35 The pine trees are visible in the picture-postcard of Etchūjima reproduced in Ishiguro, vol. 2, p.249.

36 The tram stopped immediately after crossing the bridge at Aikawa-chō. The next stop, at Fukushima-bashi, was closer to the Fudō temple. From Fukushima-bashi the line (at this time) turned northeastwards, towards Honjō.

37 Although the road linking both banks via Eitai-bashi is officially known as Eitai-dōri, the stretch of road approaching the Fudō-dō and Tomioka Hachiman-gu is known by the name of the district, Monzen-Nakachō. Kafū uses neither term.

38 The large clams that gave their name to the district where the younger Kafū had disembarked from the boat, and which were gathered from the mudflats off Fukagawa at low tide, are a key ingredient in Fukagawa-meshi, rice served with a topping of steamed or stewed clams. Fukagawa *sembei* rice-crackers remain a local speciality.

39 Bored with academic studies, the young Kafū apprenticed himself in turn to the novelist Hirota Ryūrō, to a rakugo master, and to a playwright at the Kabuki-za. It was while assisting the rakugo master, carrying his equipment between the city's theatres and variety halls, that the nineteen or twenty-year-old Kafū enjoyed a 'pleasant idyll', as Seidensticker (1965, p.11) puts it, in Fukagawa: '[O]ne winter night, he and a pretty girl, a fellow [rakugo] disciple, saw with a simultaneous insight that they could not make it back across the city in the snow, and put up together at an inn. The episode, said Kafū, who was to recount it more than once, was like something out of a *ninjabon*....'

in the city. Since the sole, forlorn-looking banner of the Fukagawa-za theatre,<sup>40</sup> which I immediately recognised, still stood on the streetcorner as before, I barely noticed that the road had been widened,<sup>41</sup> and in my mind I was able to travel back a decade to that fondly-remembered past.

After crossing a little bridge<sup>42</sup> – the name of which I can't recall – the lane soon makes a left turn, where I notice some cotton hand towels strung up like banners. In this utterly drab and rundown district, the combination of black, brown and dark blue is all the more striking. Remembering that the famous Fudō shrine<sup>43</sup> is in Fukagawa, I promptly turned in that direction.

A stone bridge crosses a narrow channel<sup>44</sup> to an iron gate that bears the words 'Inner Sanctuary: Shin-Yoshiwara Association' in gilt characters,<sup>45</sup> and beyond the

40 The theatre (rebuilt after the 1923 earthquake and later converted into a cinema that was demolished in 1968) was located on a side street that intersects with the main road at Monzen-Nakachō, a hundred metres or so north of the crossing. The text seems to suggest that the theatre displayed a banner on the crossing, aimed at passing traffic.

41 The road may have been widened for the extension of the tramline through Fukagawa to Susaki, marked 'under construction' on the *Tokyo-shi kubun chizu* of January 1909. The municipal authorities were at this time carrying out street-widening schemes across the city. In *Sumidagawa*, published ten months after *Fukagawa no uta*, the protagonist's mother informs her brother that they will have to relocate their father's grave due to road-widening work in Komagome. The Mitsukoshi department store had to temporarily vacate its premises for the same reason, returning to its position on the newly widened road through Nihonbashi in 1908 (Seidensticker 1985, p.111).

42 Kafū's narrator may have turned north off the main road, wandered past the Fukagawa-za, and reached the Abura-bori canal (filled in during the 1970s); or crossed one of the many other canals that in the Meiji era still branched through the back lanes of Fukagawa.

43 *Fudō no yashiro*. The Fudō-dō is actually a Buddhist temple rather than a Shinto shrine or *yashiro*. Until the ideologically motivated separation of the two faiths in early Meiji, temples and shrines often shared the same precincts, and even honoured the same deities. Kafū would not have cared to follow the imposed distinction.

44 The Hachiman-bori enclosed the precincts of the Fudō temple and Hachiman shrine, joining the Abura-bori canal at its eastern and western ends. It was filled in after the war.

45 The *Shin-Yoshiwara kō*, made up of Yoshiwara brothel owners and related businesses, was one of the sixteen *kō* or Buddhist associations that funded the construction of the Fudō-dō. Although the gate, along with the rest of the Meiji-period temple, did not survive the 1923 earthquake and the American air raids, modern stone monuments in the temple grounds commemorate the sixteen associations. The Shin-Yoshiwara *kō*

gate, the tea-stall curtains and the dedicatory cotton hand towels<sup>46</sup> form vivid lines on either side of a straight, flagstoned path, at the far end of which the main hall of the temple<sup>47</sup> stands on a low platform above stone steps, the dark roof rearing up to catch the evening sun. At the foot of the stone steps, up and down which worshippers constantly make their way in twos and threes, sit the tables of fortune tellers,<sup>48</sup> and two or three booths selling festive shuttlecocks. Nursemaids, children and other people have formed a crowd beside the booths, and going over to have a look, I saw an old, shaven-headed man beating a wooden block<sup>49</sup> as he recited a mock Buddhist sutra.<sup>50</sup>

Next to the mock sutra performer, a blind man, hair unkempt and clothes grey with dust, cradled a shamisen as he crouched on the ground, making himself small.<sup>51</sup> When, from the sound of footsteps on the gravel, the blind man discerns

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donated funds to many temples and shrines in the city.

46 Local enterprises advertised their sponsorship of a temple, shrine or festival with these printed cotton cloths or *honō no tenugui*. A picture postcard reproduced in Ishiguro (vol. 2, p.248) shows the tea-stalls flanking the flagstoned path.

47 *Tokyo annai* (vol. 2, p.734) has a photograph of the Meiji-era temple. The current main hall originally belonged to a temple in Chiba, and was dismantled and transported here after the war. Immediately to the rear of the hall concrete pillars carry a branch of the Metropolitan Expressway above the route of the filled-in Abura-bori canal.

48 Fortune tellers still wait for customers on the *nakamise*, the lane of shops and stalls that leads to the Fudō temple. Tamai & Ishiguro (p.311) reproduce a Meiji-era photograph of a fortune-teller's booth in Fukagawa (p.311). The same volume has photographs of Sumiyoshi dancers and a Shinnai balladeer (pp.306, 307).

49 Buddhist priests keep rhythm during sutra recitations by beating a *mokugyō* (lit. 'wooden fish'), a hollowed-out wooden block.

50 *Ahodara-kyō*, 'fool's sutra'. As Gerald Groemer (pp.269-70) explains, *ahodara-kyō* was 'not a sutra at all but rather a spoof on Buddhist recitation, invented during the early years of the nineteenth century by a bogus priest doubling as a public entertainer,' and by the end of the Edo period 'it had become the stock-in-trade of *gannin bōzu* (petitioned monks), itinerant monkish figures [who]... were bunking down at flophouses in the city, supporting themselves through street performances.'

51 For Kafū the blind, impoverished singer personifies the rejection of Edo culture and tradition by 'enlightened' Meiji Japan, the man's lowly position, crouched on the ground, emblematic of his loss of status. 'Throughout Japanese history the blind were believed to possess innate musical ability,' observes Philip Flavin, who notes that during the Edo period the Tokugawa shogunate provided financial support for members of

that three or four people bored of listening to mock sutras have come to a halt, he fishes a plectrum from his pocket, and, after tuning the third string a touch,<sup>52</sup> swiftly breaks out into a short lead-in: *chin, ton, shan*. Filling his throat with a deep bass voice, he begins to sing, drawing out<sup>53</sup> the opening words of ‘Autumn Night’:<sup>54</sup>

*Aki-ii no yo-o...*

The whites of his discoloured eyes glare when he breathes in, his face turned upwards as he cranes his neck to one side.

*...yo wa-a...*

he continues. He has a husky voice. There isn’t the slightest hint of vibration<sup>55</sup> from the shamisen’s first string. From the setting of the opening words, the song is correctly divided into three parts, and the pacing of the tempo that sustains the voice – something no Yamanote geisha<sup>56</sup> could emulate – makes him sound like a master of the Utazawa school.<sup>57</sup> I simply stared intently at the man’s face, filled not

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the *Tōdō*, a guild of blind musicians originally founded in the fourteenth century. ‘The modernizing Meiji government abolished the *Tōdō* in 1871, requiring the musicians to seek new sources of income’ (Flavin, pp.170-171). Kafū’s portrayal was perhaps also influenced by his teacher, Hirotsu Ryūrō, who ‘created a new genre with a sensational, dramatic flair and exaggerated romanticism, featuring highly colorful characters who were disinherited, mute, blind, lame or otherwise disabled, but pure-hearted, all of whom come to a sad end’ (Frédéric, p.320).

52 Positioned beneath the first and second strings, the third string (*san no ito*) is the highest-pitched of the shamisen’s strings.

53 The blind man is about to sing a late-Edo *hauta* or short verse in the style of the Utazawa school. In Utazawa performance ‘the primary musical interest is the extended melismatic vocal line’ (Flavin, p.188). *Hauta* and certain other forms of Edo popular music were closely connected with Fukagawa.

54 *Aki no yo* 秋の夜. The song, which opens with the words *Aki no yo wa nagai mono* – ‘The autumn night is long’ – describes the despondent feelings of a woman longing, under a full moon, for her absent lover. For the Japanese lyrics see Kurata, p.36. For an English translation see Jones & Watanabe, p.438.

55 *Sawari*, a distinctive feature of *gidayū* and other types of shamisen music, is ‘a reverberation or drone created by allowing the lowest [bass] shamisen string to vibrate against the edges of a shallow cavity at the top of the neck while the other two strings rest atop a metal bridge and pass over this cavity untouched’ (Flavin, p.184).

56 The narrator is perhaps recalling the tooth-sucking geisha he encountered earlier on the tram.

57 When sung in the style of the Utazawa school, which arose in late-Edo Shitamachi, *hauta* are ‘slow-paced

so much with nostalgia, but rather with an immense feeling of respect.

He wasn't particularly old. He was certainly born in the Meiji era. I had the impression, somehow, that he hadn't been born blind. Perhaps he had studied geography and mathematics at primary school; or, in the old elementary school system, he may even have begun learning English in senior classes.<sup>58</sup> The traditional tastes of Edo, however, could not be reconciled with those of the Kyūshū foot-soldiers<sup>59</sup> who presided over vulgar, chaotic 'Meiji', and he went blind when his family's fortunes were lost.<sup>60</sup> He then probably fell into the pitiful situation whereby he had to support himself through an art that in more prosperous times had been largely pursued for pleasure. Entranced by the sights of the past – the throngs in the theatre tea-shops, the red felt rugs in the rehearsal rooms, the festivals with their votive lanterns and flower-bedecked hats – those eyes, plunged into complete darkness, have never experienced the misery of looking up at wretched streetcar cables, or flimsy Western-style buildings. Even if he had seen such things, as a man of Edo he would not be filled, as we moderns are, with an intense loathing and rage. Unlike myself, he is not weighed down by an anguished incomprehension. Edo people quickly resign themselves to their fate. This is because they possess the ability to laugh at themselves.

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and subtle', characterised by a weak beat, and by 'a vocal melody in free rhythm' (Groemer, p.275).

58 A nationwide elementary school system was established in 1886 (Meiji 19). The first generation of Japanese children to undergo compulsory education studied at elementary school (*shōgakkō*) between the ages of six and ten, after which some children continued to senior school (*kyōtōka*, roughly equivalent to middle school or junior high school), for a further two, three or four years.

59 The Meiji government was dominated by members of the clans that had instigated the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate and the restoration of imperial rule. It became customary for defenders of Edo culture such as Kafū to disparage these natives of the Satsuma and Saga domains (in Kyūshū) and the Chōshū domain (in western Honshū) as boorish, unsophisticated parvenus, ignorant of and insensitive to Edo's urbane traditions. The Shitamachi-born Tanizaki was still beating the same drum in the 1960s (Seidensticker 1985, p.28).

60 Many families dependent upon the Tokugawa shogunate were ruined at the restoration, losing almost everything – their positions, homes, income and status. Tokugawa retainers and their families abandoned the city that no longer belonged to them for the former Tokugawa domains in the provinces, where they began to adjust to the new order.

The third string, the highest, reverberates continually. When he comes to  
*Otosuru mono wa-a...*

the blind man suddenly thrusts his neck forward and, grimacing, sings

...*kane-e-e ba-a-kari*.<sup>61</sup>

Aware, as he reached for the song's highest notes, of how dry his throat was, he skilfully lifted his voice and managed to carry it off.

The light of the setting sun, streaming through the grove of plum trees to the left, shines on the side of the man's face. His pitiful, crouching shadow falls ever so faintly on the stone fence behind. On each of the stones that make up the fence the names of temple donors are engraved in red characters. Geisha, performers, firemen,<sup>62</sup> theatre attendants,<sup>63</sup> gamblers: the names of people who have nothing to do with the present age.

I happened to look behind me. Beyond the plum grove, in the expanse of western sky that rises over the low rooftops outside the park, the rays of the sinking sun blaze like dripping blood through chinks in the dark blue evening clouds that are banked up like an immense wall. Despite its astonishingly rich crimson hue, the light weakens and fades. I was suddenly struck by a sad thought. That sun must be setting over the woods around Waseda.<sup>64</sup> Or perhaps over the heights of Hongō.<sup>65</sup> How far away I seem to be, now, from the *Quartier Latin* of the East.<sup>66</sup> Having

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61 *Oto suru mono wa kane bakari*, 'The only thing that makes a sound is the temple bell.'

62 Edo *tobinomono* had little in common with modern firefighters. Lacking fire-engines and high-pressure hoses, they attempted to prevent the spread of fires by clambering onto rooftops and removing flammable materials with their metal-hooked poles.

63 Although Japanese theatres no longer employ them, attendants can still be seen at sumo tournaments, hurrying back and forth with refreshments for spectators.

64 *Waseda no mori*. Waseda University was established in the then-suburban Waseda district, on the northwestern fringes of the city, in 1882. The phrase 'Waseda no mori' appears in the opening line of the university's song, composed in 1907.

65 The main campus of Tokyo University is located in Hongō.

66 Kafū likens Fukagawa, the once-decadent pleasure district on the left bank of the Sumida, to the Latin Quarter on the left bank of the Seine, which he writes about in *Furansu monogatari*. When the narrator states that he senses himself to be far from Fukagawa, we should read 'far' in terms of time, rather than



finished one song, the blind man started singing another.<sup>67</sup>

*Fukete au yo no kigurō wa....*

I wanted to stay there forever, bathed in the fading Fukagawa sunset, lingering in the hallowed grounds beneath the sanctuary's stone fence, listening to Utazawa *hauta* songs. The thought of going back across Eitai-bashi was unbearably painful. I felt that I would rather perish, like the Meiji-born poet of Edo, Saitō Ryoku'u.<sup>68</sup>

In the end, alas, I have to go back. That is my fate. Leaving the river behind, crossing the canals and climbing uphill, I shall go far away, to the gloom of the Ōkubo woods,<sup>69</sup> where, on the desk in my study, beneath the portrait of Wagner,<sup>70</sup> the first volume of Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*<sup>71</sup> lies open, awaiting my return....

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geographic distance. The narrator is anticipating a journey that will return him to the present, where culture is represented by the seats of learning in Waseda and Hongō, rather than by Shitamachi districts like Fukagawa, relic of a past that he has been able to glimpse – and hear – as a result of his fortuitous ride across Eitai-bashi.

67 The blind man sings the opening line of another *hauta*, *Fukete au yo* (Late Night Tryst). For the song's lyrics, see Kurata, p.30.

68 Saitō Ryoku'u: Born in 1868, the satirist Ryoku'u helped publish Higuchi Ichiyō's stories after her death. He himself died in 1904, while Kafū was in the United States. Perhaps in light of this reference, Seidensticker (1985, p.119) compares him to Kafū, and writes that Ryoku'u outdid Kafū 'in his fondness for the Edo tradition.'

69 Kafū's family moved from Koishikawa to Ōkubo-Yochōmachi in Ushigome Ward in May 1902, when Kafū was 22, a year before he left Japan. He moved back in with his family upon his return to Japan in July 1908. He describes the neighbourhood in *Kangokusho no ura* (Behind the Prison), published a month after *Fukagawa no uta* in March 1909.

70 Kafū's admiration for Wagner may have derived from the French poets. Baudelaire requested that Wagner's music be played at his funeral, and a book on Beethoven and Wagner was found open on Mallarmé's desk at his death. Mallarmé also wrote about Wagner in his *Divagations* (1897).

71 *Also sprach Zarathustra*: Since the first Japanese translation of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, by Ikuta Chōkō, would not appear until 1911, Kafū presumably possessed an English or French translation. Kafū would have known of Wagner's deep influence on Nietzsche; but the young Nakajima Atsushi (cited in Kawamoto, p.88) considered these references to figures with whom most of Kafū's contemporaries would have been unfamiliar the pretentious affectation (*kiza*) of a privileged returnee showing off his newly-acquired Western knowledge.

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## 明治東京を周る： 永井荷風の『深川の唄』を読む(2)

Phillip Brown

『深川の唄』の前半で、荷風(というより荷風自身であることが明らかなナレーター)は、1908年12月下旬に、路面電車で東京を周り、近代化が進む明治時代の東京とそこで暮らす人々を仔細に観察する。そして後半では、荷風と思しき人物が隅田川を渡って深川に足を踏み入れる。ここでは、急速に近代化されていく新しい都市の中で、時代に取り残され老朽化していく下町が、不動堂の境内で江戸時代の端唄を歌う三味線奏者に具現化されている。この三味線奏者、そして彼の歌声は、日本が文明開花に邁進する中で捨て去った、古き日本の情景を荷風の心に呼び起こす。荷風は、この消えゆく古い日本の町に、軽薄な物質主義からの避難所とも言える安らぎを見出すが、それでも自分がこの場所に属していないことを認識し、結局、再度隅田川を渡り、現代の明治の都市に、そして洋書に囲まれた彼の書斎に戻ることを決める。「東京の下町を散策し、過去を呼び起こす」、それはパリから戻った若い荷風が『深川の唄』で初めて取り上げた手法である。彼はその後の作品においても、このテーマに立ち返り、古き日本と近代化の狭間に生きる20世紀の日本人作家のジレンマを描いていくことになる。