

The most important characters in this section of the novel:

- Naka no Kimi—the Eighth Prince’s younger daughter, sister of Ōigimi
- Ukifune—the Eighth Prince’s unrecognized daughter, half-sister of Naka no Kimi
- Ukifune’s mother—whose second husband is the Governor of Hitachi
- Kaoru—once “The Fragrant Captain,” now “The Commander”
- Second princess—wife of Kaoru, daughter of the Emperor and a consort
- Niou—once “The Perfumed Prince,” now “His Highness of War”
- Wife of Niou—daughter of Yūgiri, now “His Excellency, Minister of the Right”
- Jijū and Ukon—Ukifune’s gentlewomen
- A nun who finds Ukifune—daughter of a Prelate

1. The Tale of Genji ends with a laser-like focus on the plight of Ukifune.
 - In what ways is she the example, *par excellence*, of the unprotected woman in this culture? What protection has her father offered? Why can’t her mother protect her? Can her half-sister, Naka no Kimi, protect her? What protection might Niou or Kaoru offer her? Do the nuns and Prelate protect her? What is the significance of her name, “drifting boat” (see the title of chapter 51)?
 - In what ways is she the example, *par excellence*, of the trapped woman—of which we have seen so many in this novel? Why can’t she just let one of her suitors take charge of her?
 - Where do the important people in Ukifune’s life (e.g. her gentlewomen, the nuns who later care for her, Kaoru, even her mother) lay the blame for her plight? Whom does Ukifune blame? Does the novel, as a whole, suggest that the blame for Ukifune’s plight lies elsewhere?
 - Unprotected, trapped, and blamed—how is Ukifune, in the end, erased? Why does she choose suicide? Why does she choose to become a nun, and continue to insist on her decision despite pressure from all sides? Why is it significant that Kaoru, at the very end of the novel and “after full deliberation, consigned her to invisibility” (p. 1120)?
2. What are Niou’s motivations in his pursuit of Ukifune?
 - How does his relationship with Ukifune begin?
 - What piques his curiosity and impels him to search for her once she is hidden away? Then, when he finds her, what spurs him to continue to pursue her, despite the impediments imposed by his position at court and the hazards of he must face in his escapes to her hiding places?
 - Does Niou love Ukifune? If so, in what way?
3. What are Kaoru’s motivations in his pursuit of Ukifune?
 - How is his pursuit related to his past love for Ōigimi and his present, extreme attentiveness to Naka no Kimi? Why does Naka no Kimi tell Kaoru of Ukifune’s existence?

- Why doesn't Kaoru consider taking Ukifune as a second wife, as Yūgiri took Kashiwagi's widow as a second wife? Why, instead, does he hide her away?
 - What seems to cause Kaoru the most anxiety as he considers how to manage his relationship to Ukifune?
 - What does Kaoru's reaction to his discovery that Niou has been visiting Ukifune reveal about his deepest concerns?
 - Does Kaoru love Ukifune? Or is she, perhaps for both Kaoru and Niou, a token of exchange in their relationship with each other?
4. The story of Ukifune brings to a climax the theme of surrogacy and substitution that we have followed throughout the novel. In one of Kaoru's conversations with Naka no Kimi—a conversation which reveals both his continued mourning of Ōigimi and his desire to take Naka no Kimi as a substitute—Kaoru says, "I would make a doll in her [Ōigimi's] likeness . . . and paint her picture, too, and pursue my devotions before them" (p. 954). Here Kaoru alludes to the practice of addressing a Buddhist rite to a sculpted or painted image. In a later conversation, Naka no Kimi tries to distract Kaoru from his overtures to her by telling him that the "doll" he had mentioned, Ukifune, is hiding in her house. He responds with this poem:
- If she is truly the double of her I knew, I shall keep her close:
she shall be my cleansing charm through the cruel shoals of love.*
- Here Kaoru alludes to a Shinto purification ritual in which malign influences are transferred to a doll by stroking it, then sending it down a stream or river to the sea.
- Might both these Shinto and Buddhist practices of using images help explain the pervasive seeking of substitutes and surrogates in the culture of Heian era Japan? If, from a Shinto perspective, spirits can be transferred from body to body (as we see in the novel's multiple descriptions of illness), AND if, from a Buddhist perspective, the endless cycles of rebirth continue until a state of enlightenment and liberation is achieved—then does the novel's portrayal of characters who obsessively seek surrogates and substitutes reflect a concept of personhood that is somewhat fluid?
 - How does this perspective on personhood differ from Western notions of personhood?
5. Does The Tale of Genji end abruptly to you, with no resolution of the plot that the novel is developing or the themes that the novel has addressed? If so, do you attribute this abrupt ending to external factors, like the death of the author or the loss of manuscripts?
- Or does the novel close in a manner consistent with a Buddhist representation of the futility of life's endless cycles of suffering and sin?
 - Or with a climactic representation of the inevitably tragic life of women in Heian era Japan?
 - Or with the triumphant resistance of a very unlikely heroine?
 - Or . . . ?