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Medieval Japanese Writers

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Abutsu-ni

(1221? - 1283)

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PRINCIPAL WORKS: *Utatane* (circa 1240?);
Abutsu kana fuju (1275);
Izayoi nikki (1279–1280; expanded circa 1283);
Niwa no oshie (circa 1279; also a similar text titled *Menoto no fumi*);
Yoru no tsuru [also known as *Abutsu kuden*] (circa 1279);
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Kōtei Izayoi nikki, edited by Tamai (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1957);
Niwa no oshie, in *[Shinkō] Gunsho ruijū,* volume 21 (Tokyo: Meichō Fūkyūykai, 1978);
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Yoru no tsuru [facsimile edition], in *Shoku gosen wakashū, Tameie kagaku,* annotated by Satō Tsuneo (Tokyo: Reizeike Shigure-tei Bunko/Asahi Shimbunsha, 1994).

TRANSLATIONS INTO ENGLISH: Edwin O. Reischauer and Joseph K. Yamagiwa, "The *Izayoi Nikki,*" in *Translations from Early Japanese Literature,* edited by Reisehauer and Yamagiwa (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951), pp. 1–151;
John R. Wallace, "Fitful Slumbers: Nun Abutsu's *Utatane,*" *Monumenta Nipponica,* 43, no. 4 (1988): 391–416;
Steven D. Carter, "Nun Abutsu," in his *Waiting for the Wind: Thirty-six poets of Japan's Late Medieval Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 78–84;
Helen Craig McCullough, "The Journal of the Sixteenth-Night Moon" [*Izayoi nikki*], in *Classical Japanese Prose: An Anthology,* compiled and edited by McCullough (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 340–376.

Nun Abutsu stands as one of the major literary figures of the mid Kamakura period, and she is without a doubt one of its most dynamic women, at least within the terms afforded by her times. Robert Brower and Earl Miner claim that "[Fujiwara no] Tameie and Japanese Court poetry might have passed serenely into extinction had he not shortly before this time taken to wife a most remarkable woman, commonly known by the religious name she took after his death, the Nun Abutsu." Perhaps the rhetoric overstates historical fact, but it does justice to the strength of Abutsu's character.

As well as can be determined Abutsu's life spans the years from about 1221 to 1283. (Her date of birth is

estimated to be between 1221 and 1226.) In her sixty years she saw the reigns of six competing emperors: Go-Horikawa, Shijō, Go-Saga, Go-Fukakusa, Kameyama, and Go-Uda. While the imperial family was thus in increasing disarray regarding succession rights, the imperial government in the capital city of Kyoto was contending with strained relations with the military government independently situated in Kamakura. In this uneasy milieu Abutsu was one participant in a serious conflict within the Mikohidari house, the major poetic family of her day, that would result in the emergence of three rival factions of the house–the Nijō, the Kyōgoku, and the Reizei–who never resolved their differences. Indeed, through a lawsuit she pursued, she was one of the central precipitators of that conflict. These rivalries became a major feature of medieval poetic activity, resulting in, as Steven Carter states, "one of the longest and most all-encompassing literary disputes in world history."

Abutsu-ni (Nun Abutsu) is the name she took along with the Buddhist tonsure upon her husband's death, and this name most frequently appears on her works. She was also known as Ankamon'in Echizen, Ankamon'in Uemon no Suke (between 1265 and 1275), and Ankamon'in no Shijō (from 1278). She is the author of two diaries, *Utatane* (Fitful Slumbers, circa 1240?) and *Izayoi nikki* (The Journal of the Sixteenth-Night Moon, 1279–1280); *Abutsu kana fuju* (Abutsu's Eulogy in *Kana,* 1275), a memorial for her husband; *Yoru no tsuru* (The Crane's Night Lessons, circa 1279), a work of literary criticism; and an essay of advice to one of her daughters, *Menoto no fumi/Niwa no oshie* (Letter from a Wet Nurse/Domestic Instructions, circa 1279). She was also a poet of considerable activity, leaving behind a total of 877 poems. There are one hundred poems in *Ankamon'in no Shijō hyakushu* (One Hundred Poems by Ankamon'in no Shijō), a collection based on the poetic subjects listed in the *Horikawa hyakushu,* and 506 poems collected in *Ankamon'in no Shijō gohyakushu* (Five Hundred poems by Ankamon'in no Shijō), which represents what remains of the hundred-poem sequences composed for each of ten shrines around Kamakura as prayers for a successful outcome of her lawsuit. In addition there are forty-eight poems in imperial anthologies; fifty-nine poems in the *Fuboku wakashō* (The Japanese Collection, circa 1310), a large, private anthology; twenty-one and eighty-nine poems in *Utatane* and *Izayoi nikki,* respectively; and fifty-four in other sources. While Abutsu is best known for her impact on literary history as the mother and advocate of Reizei Tamesuke, her own contribution as a poet and critic should not be overlooked.

There is no information available about Abutsu's paternal lineage, although scholars do know that at a young age her mother remarried to a provincial governor, Taira no Norishige, and that this man became her adoptive father. Her mother passed away while Abutsu was a child. In the course of his career her adoptive father was appointed governor of Sado, assistant commander in the left division of the Gate Guards (*Saemon no jō*), and governor of Tōtōmi. He died at senior fifth rank, upper. Both Sado and Tōtōmi were outlying provinces; such posts were not regarded as the best of possible appointments. These appointments and rank indicate that Norishige was within the social tier of provincial governors, a middle-ranking aristocratic level that produced nearly all women writers of Heian and Kamakura Japan. Norishige's family line, the Kanmu Taira, were primarily warriors, and part of Abutsu's strong individualism may be related to being raised in a military household. In recent generations, however, the Taira had become close to Fujiwara no Teika and Tameie of the Mikohidari family, and their literary activity had also increased. For example, Norishige's older brother, Nobushige, was anthologized in the *Shin chokusenshū* (New Imperial Collection, 1234) and *Shoku gosenshū* (Later Collection Continued, 1251). Nobushige's son, Shigemochi, was also anthologized in the *Shoku gosenshū.*

Abutsu began service for the imperial princess Ankamon'in, second daughter of Retired Emperor Go-Takakura, around the age of fourteen or fifteen. This appointment would have been the decision of her adoptive father. For three generations Norishige's family had been close to the Go-Takakura line of the imperial family. Norishige's aunt on his father's side was wet nurse to either Ankamon'in or her mother. Ankamon'in was a woman of considerable political backing who became senior consort in 1221 at age thirteen. From 1235 she was a nun. Abutsu worked for Ankamon'in most of her life, even after marriage and after her husband's death, which explains why Abutsu was also known by the sobriquet Ankamon'in no Shijō (Ankamon'in of the Fourth Avenue).

Abutsu had at least two sisters, one elder and one younger. The elder sister was married to Nakano'in no Chūjō, the identity of whom is still debated but who at the least was a man of considerable rank, supporting the view that Abutsu's family, or second family through Norishige, was well placed. Abutsu's younger sister was also placed in service to Ankamon'in, again doubtless through the recommendation of Norishige. This sister was known by the name Mino while she was in service at court. Both sisters were close to Abutsu even late in her life, for when Abutsu spent several years in Kamakura pursuing her lawsuit she asked that her sisters look after her two young sons, Tamesuke and Tamemori.

While at court Abutsu evidently had a brief love affair with a high-ranking courtier, an affair that she describes in her literary diary *Utatane* as exceedingly painful. "It wasn't that I hadn't already learned that a man's inconstancy is like the easily fading dye made from the dayflower, but my heart had gone out to his, and his had dyed into mine. It was a time of careless and unfortunate confusion. Just as in the poem 'I expected it,' I didn't realize how painful losing him could be."

Though scholars disagree on the date of composition, *Utatane,* or an early draft of it, was most likely written when the author was about eighteen, making it the earliest of her works. Coming near the end of a rich tradition of diaries written by court women in the vernacular, *Utatane* looks back toward a literary golden age approximately two hundred years earlier and consciously relies on that era's literary conventions. Abutsu's favorite sources for quotation and allusion are *Ise monogatari* and *Genji monogatari,* but she draws frequently from other works as well. Mostly she evokes the romantic situations in these works to describe her own. Comparing hers to earlier women's literary diaries, scholars characterize the allusive technique utilized in *Utatane* as undeveloped and rather heavy-handed.

The diary focuses almost exclusively on the young Abutsu's romantic disappointment. While there is indeed, as Tsugita Kasumi has described it, an "artlessness and nervousness" about the text, one can already see the forceful personality that will become Abutsu's hallmark. In thorough despair about the unreliability of her lover, she makes the extreme decision (for someone so young) to run away from the court and become a nun. She goes out at night, alone in search of a temple the whereabouts of which are not entirely certain to her. In the extremely dangerous zone of the hills outside the capital she presses on: "As I was walking under the cover of the trees, I wondered what it was going to be like to travel alone along these hill paths that lay dreamlike in front of me. I became quite frightened when I thought of the great risk I was taking. I avoided the gaze of local people and walked along in a distracted state. It was hard to believe that this was really happening." Abutsu did not exaggerate the difficulty of the journey, undertaken in the darkness on hilly, unpaved paths, no doubt with the awkward bulk of court dress weighing her down.

Utatane is a brief diary and covers only a short time in Abutsu's early life. Later, according to *Genshō waka kuden* (Genshō's Oral Teachings on *Waka,* circa 1293–1299), a chronicle of poets and poetry written by monk Genshō, who was the second of her husband's sons by his first wife, Abutsu spent time as a nun at Nara's Hokkeji and was close to Attendant Noble Matsuo no Kyōsei as well. During this apparently rather unstable period in her life, it seems that something other than what is recorded in *Utatane,* perhaps another failed love affair, occurred to cause Abutsu to once again enter a nunnery.

Through someone she met at that time, she was invited around 1252 to work as a copyist of *Genji monogatari* for Fujiwara no Tameie's daughter, Go-Saga'in Dainagon no Suke. Tameie was heir to the preeminent poetic tradition of the Mikohidari house started by his grandfather Fujiwara no Shunzei about one hundred years earlier and consolidated by his talented father, Fujiwara no Teika. Tameie had his father's strong support and was favored by Emperor Go-Toba as well. He eventually exceeded his father in court rank, rising to the elite level of acting major counselor of senior second rank. Tameie's branch of the Fujiwara clan had established itself as the dominant poetic force at court but by 1246 was involved in open literary disputes with rival houses. In part this conflict was the result of Tameie's weak poetic leadership. In *Sasamegoto* (Murmured Conversations, 1464), the poet Shinkei relates how Teika would chide his lackadaisical son with exemplary stories of Shunzei's seriousness in composing poetry.

Abutsu and Tameie came to know one another intimately around 1253 when she began to work for him as secretary for his private correspondence and writings. Their first child was probably a boy, Jōgaku (or Jōkaku), who was born so soon after the beginning of the relationship that some speculated that there may have been a different father. Abutsu, however, clearly regarded Jōgaku as Tameie's child. Abutsu had at least one son, Azari no Kimi, and one daughter outside her relationship with Tameie. The daughter's birth seems to have fallen between those of Jōgaku and Tamesuke (born in 1263).

Tameie already had at least three sons by his first wife, the daughter of Utsunomiya no Yoritsuna, who died sometime during the decade when Abutsu came to work for Tameie's daughter–although the Utsunomiya family would maintain a close relationship with the Nijō house for many generations. The first born, Tameuji, eventual founder of the dominant and conservative Nijō house, became the object of Abutsu's quarrel over the inheritance rights of the Mikohidari estate. The second son, Genshō, became a monk at twenty. He wrote a treatise defending the Nijō school, *Genshō waka kuden,* which is critical of Abutsu, sometime between 1293 and 1299, after Abutsu's death. Later, the third son, Tamenori, would found the third major division of the Mikohidari

house, the Kyōgoku branch, which often allied itself to Tamesuke's Reizei branch.

In 1256 Tameie suffered an illness from which he believed he would not recover. He took the Buddhist tonsure and wrote his will, giving to his first son, Tameuji, the proprietary (*ryōke-shiki*) and income (*jitō-shiki*) rights to an estate in Harima Province, the Hosokawa-shō, which was one of the four major estates of the Mikohidari family and the source of much of Tameie's income. The will also included the important family library accumulated by Shunzei and Teika comprised of rare manuscripts of early works, copies of classics by Teika (relied on by twentieth-century scholars as some of the highest quality annotated versions of early texts), Teika's own poems and critical writings, and the works of Tameie. Some of this material was secret, and whoever possessed it was essentially the inheritor of the poetic tradition of the house.

Tameie, however, recovered from his illness, and in 1263 Abutsu gave birth to a second son, Tamesuke. Tameie and Abutsu began openly living together in Saga, indicating she was his first wife, even though about the same time Tameie fathered a son, Tameaki, with a mistress, Naishi no Onna. During this period Abutsu established herself as a poet in her own right. At a poem contest in 1278 she was seated in the privileged first position, to the immediate right of Tameie. Two years later the couple had another son, Tamemori.

The Kamakura period saw an increase in the development of individual "houses" (*ies*) that preserved and transmitted authority and power, including those specializing in artistic activity. In this context the mother of the house had a central role as the source for the next generation as well as educator and advocate for the children. Her responsibilities differed from those of the salon-based court attendants such as Izumi Shikibu, Murasaki Shikibu, and Sei Shōnagon who authored memoirs in the Heian period. Abutsu took seriously her connection to Tameie's poetic tradition. Her pride in the Mikohidari house is apparent in Asukai no Masaari's journal *Saga no kayoi* (Visits to Saga, 1269):

> The seventeenth. I go there during the day. A lector is about to begin *Genji monogatari;* the mistress is summoned. The lector recites from behind the blinds. Her performance is outstanding. She does not recite as people ordinarily do–she must have received special instruction. She reads as far as 'Wakamurasaki.' That evening we drink sake. The master has two women serve it. The mistress of the house calls to me from near the blinds. 'The master of this house is the grandson of a compiler of the *Senzaishū,* the son of a compiler of the *Shin kokinshū,* and the *Shin chokusenshū,* and himself a compiler of the *Shoku gosenshū,*' she tells me. 'He inherited a famous villa on Mount Ogura from a poet who carried on the ancient family waka traditions. . . .' I am moved that she solaces herself by speaking of such elegant matters. She continues, and so adds charm to the occasion. 'People today are not the same. At the villa, one has the feeling of being at one with the great poets of the past.' The master of the house [Tameie], an elderly gentleman of sentiment, has drunk enough to shed tears of joy.

In 1271, after a minor disagreement between Tameie and his designated heir, Tameuji, Abutsu of her own accord transferred the important poetic documents of the family from Tameie's Saga residence to Jimyō'in no Hokurin, which would become her residence after Tameie's death. Claiming that Tameuji was narrow-minded, Abutsu argued to Tameie that he should give his inheritance to her son Tamesuke. In 1272 Tameie wrote a letter transferring the family poetic papers and materials to Tamesuke; in two further letters in 1273 he regretted his decision to give his estate to Tameuji and gave the rights to Tamesuke instead.

Despite Tameie's change of mind concerning his will, Tameie and Tameuji seem to have maintained a fairly close relationship. Tameie even recommended Tameuji to be selected as compiler for the next imperial anthology, the *Shoku shūishū* (Collection of Gleanings Continued, 1278), which was commissioned by Retired Emperor Kameyama. Abutsu fought against this appointment and nearly won, but Tameie recommended his son a second time, and Tameuji was at last designated compiler.

Abutsu's prose work, *Abutsu kana fuju,* was written for the Buddhist memorial services performed for Tameie on the fifty-seventh day after his death in 1275. It is a short but moving piece, valuable both as a Buddhist work and for certain historical information that appears therein. What began as a passionate relationship twenty-two years before was certainly the single most important historical factor in establishing her place and the place of her children in society and in literary history. Her memorial opens: "Purifying my heart, I offer these words to all Buddhas. While I study the impermanence of this world and know that all is from the beginning empty, my heart continues to follow the dark path of dreams that have no dawn, grieving unbearably the parting that I myself saw. Unaware of the passing days and months, it is now the fifty-seventh day. The smoke that once rose is now perhaps rain, is now perhaps clouds; I cry endlessly into the wide sky, and as we do not share as much as a word in a dream, I do not know even if his spirit is there or not."

Twenty years earlier, in the classic style of the informal *uta* love poem, the two had exchanged such letters as these (anthologized in *Gyokuyōshū,* 1455–1456):

akebono no toki ame ni nurete onna no moto yori kaerite, ashita ni tsukawashikeru

kaerusa no
shinonome kuraki
muragumo mo
waga sode yori ya
shiguresometsuru

kaeshi

kinuginu no
shinonome kuraki
wakareji ni
soeshi namida wa
sazo shigure kemu

(Sent in the morning after he had left the woman's side on a damp dawn:

How could the thick clouds
of this dark dawn
of my parting
be better soaked in rain
than these, my sleeves?
–The Late Major Counselor Tameie

Her reply:

What followed upon that path of good-bye
on that dark dawn
of our farewell
must have been the rain
of my tears.
–Ankamon'in no Shijō)

After Tameie's death the dispute between Tameuji and Abutsu on behalf of Tamesuke escalated. A lawsuit began in 1275, and both Abutsu and Tameuji left for Kamakura in 1279 to argue their cases before the shogunate. The legal matter was a complicated one because *ryōke* rights were the province of the imperial court while *jitō* rights were under the jurisdiction of the Kamakura shogunate. While in many ways *jitō* rights exerted more direct control over a piece of land, the ultimate ownership was determined by *ryōke* rights. Thus the lawsuit pointed directly to the complicated distribution of power between the imperial and military government. In addition, apparently the two governments had different laws about whether or not one's will could be rewritten. According to Robert Brower, imperial law did not recognize the right to change one's will, but Kamakura law did. The poetic materials, however, may have been regarded under another category since Konishi Jin'ichi asserts that "contemporary inheritance law decreed that the treatises be given to the eldest son, Tameuji."

Sometime after her arrival in Kamakura, Abutsu was ordered by Retired Emperor Kameyama (who had selected Tameuji to compile his imperial anthology) to return the poetic documents in her possession to Tameuji. The shogunal court also ruled that while the Hosokawa estate should remain with Tamesuke, the poetic materials should be given to Tameuji. (The Hosokawa estate portion of the decision was appealed, and in 1313 a final decision regarding *jitō* rights, in favor of Tamesuke, was issued. All rights were finally given to the Reizei line in 1416.) However, Abutsu did not return all the materials. Kitabatake no Chikafusa's *Kokinshū chū* (The Annotated *Kokinshū,* 1346–1370) states:

> There are two chests with writings about *waka* composition by Lord Teika. One has a picture of a cormorant inlaid on the lid, the other a picture of a heron. The chests, called 'Cormorant' and 'Heron,' did not leave Lord Tameie's side. When he died, her ladyship, the nun Abutsu, took the poetic treatises with her when she went to Kamakura. The heir, Lord Tameuji, later lodged a suit against her, and because of this Kameyama'in issned a proclamation to the military government in Kamakura. When the time came for the disputed documents to be given to Tameuji, an old catalogue was used to ensure that all the documents were handed over. But the papers contained in the Cormorant and Heron must not have been well known to his lordship, because they were kept back while other papers were substituted and passed over in their place.

The documents withheld were finally given to the Heian Museum in Kyoto in 1981 when the Reizei family opened their storehouse, the Shigure-tei.

Abutsu's strength of personality and tenacity can easily be seen in these later years of her life. Though not the main wife or mother to the senior sons of the family, she effectively gained for her sons considerable material possessions as well as significant poetic status and authority. Though Nijō Tameuji's branch came to dominate the poetic scene, Abutsu helped to create a substantive and interesting poetic alternative in the Reizei and Kyōgoku houses. The Nijō house was successful not because of weakness on Abutsu's part but because the branch of the imperial family with which Nijō allied itself, the Daikakuji line, became dominant for a period of time.

Izayoi nikki is Abutsu's travel account of her time in Kamakura. Although some think it overrated as a literary work, its significance has been generally recog-

nized since the eighteenth century. The circumstances of the trip–Abutsu's advanced age, the arduousness of the journey, the length of time she spent away from her children, awaiting a court decision that only would be made after her death–reflect her dedication to the Mikohidari heritage. In Heian diaries women writers hesitated to write of politics, choosing to focus instead on more-private matters such as the vicissitudes of their romantic aspirations. The mother of Fujiwara no Michitsuna, author of *Kagerō nikki* (The Gossamer Journal, after 974), states that she should not write of current political events (though she does, briefly) in a journal such as hers. Murasaki Shikibu says in her *Murasaki Shikibu nikki* (Journal of Murasaki, after 1010) that she should not write of others close to her (though she does, eloquently) lest they read what she has written and misunderstand her intent. The opening lines of *Izayoi nikki* offer a sharp contrast to the delicacy of those earlier writers:

> Young people nowadays seem to be completely unaware of the connection between themselves and the name of a certain book that is reputed to have been taken from a wall in antiquity. My late husband's written injunctions were as numerous as flutterings of kudzu leaves, and quite beyond dispute, but parental admonitions availed nothing. I came to realize, moreover, that I was the one person who had suffered exclusion from the all-embracing benevolence of the sovereign's rule, the only one who had failed to win the generous sympathy of His Majesty's loyal ministers. I could not reconcile myself to a situation that was a source of inconsolable grief and worry.

Abutsu was about fifty-seven years old when she began the trip to Kamakura, and she surely considered the prospect that she might not see her children, aged sixteen and twelve, again. In the journal she bids goodbye to her firstborn and then to Tamemori, the younger:

> Tamemori, accustomed to being always at my side, was distraught when he learned that I was going off without him. I observed that he had written a poem as calligraphy practice:
>
> harubaru to
> yukusaki tōku
> shitawarete
> ika ni sonata no
> sora o nagamen
>
> (With what emotions
> shall I gaze toward those skies,
> yearning for the one
> who embarks on a journey
> to a far-off destination?)
>
> Touched as by nothing else, I jotted down some words of consolation on the same piece of paper:
>
> tsukuzuku to
> sora na nagame so
> koishikuba
> michi tōku tomo
> haya kaerikon
>
> (Do not gaze sadly
> at the heavens above for
> if you should miss me,
> I will return in haste,
> no matter how long the road.)

Abutsu died about four years later, in 1283, probably in Kamakura, although there are grave markers in both Kamakura and Kyoto.

In her later years (probably after she completed *Izayoi nikki,* since there are textual indications that the writing took place in Kamakura), Abutsu wrote a short treatise in the style of a letter on the proper composition of poetry called *Yoru no tsuru,* a metaphor of the time that evoked an image of parental love. The treatise is also known as *Abutsu kuden* (Oral Teachings of Abutsu). In this essay Abutsu explains in simple terms intended for a novice her understanding of poetry composition. The identity of the person for whom the essay was written is not known. One argument suggests the primary wife of the shogun Prince Koreyasu; another suggestion is that it was meant for her son Tamesuke. The essay is concise, carefully organized, and thoroughly illustrated with examples. Though written in the humble language used when corresponding with one of especially high rank, the author's confidence regarding her subject matter is fully evident. She often echoes her husband's opinions as well as those of his paternal ancestors. Though she mentions neither Tameie by name nor his only major poetic treatise, *Eiga no ittai* (The Foremost Style of Poetic Composition, 1270?), one of the poems she uses as an example appears in that treatise as well, and some of her remarks are close to his. Still, at times she seems to take a position supporting an approach to composition that would invite slightly greater individual freedom of expression.

In the essay Abutsu speaks of the importance of reading the works of past poets and of understanding the essence of a poem's topic, which comes in part from following the example of classic poems. She discusses proper allusive variation (*honkadori*) and advises as to whose poems one should study, warning against using the words of poor poets of the past and present. She recommends Buddhism as a basis for composition, asserts that one should keep in mind above all the emotional content of the poem, discusses insincerity or

falseness as an artistic flaw, and warns that using too many subjective phrases such as "I was happy" or "I was sad" is the mark of an immature poet. Finally she discusses in some detail her understanding of famous imperial anthologies. An excerpt shows the concrete level at which she gives her advice:

> When constructing a poem, one does not begin with the first half of the poem, one begins with the last half. Again, when constructing a poem, to begin with the first five syllable line and work toward the end seems obvious. But one cannot think like that. The established way is not so. As has been said, "After one has the last two seven syllable lines clearly in mind, one should compose the second and third lines, then finish with the first line, taking great care that it will bring nicely together the second and third lines with the fourth and fifth lines." If one begins at the beginning, then the final lines are weak. This should be avoided.

Niwa no oshie, another essay, was perhaps written after *Yoru no tsuru.* It is written as a letter addressed to a woman called "Ki no Naishi." The identity of this woman has not been determined, except that she was a daughter of Abutsu's in her twenties and employed at the imperial court; further, since it is signed only as "From one who is far away as the clouds," the text's authorship itself is not entirely certain. To complicate matters there is a second text, *Menoto no fumi,* which closely resembles it. Which text is the primary one has also not yet been determined.

Despite such issues of authorship and textual provenance, *Niwa no oshie* remains an important document from the time period. In this long letter, three-quarters the length of *Izayoi nikki,* Abutsu gives clear advice for a young woman's success at court. She covers a wide variety of interesting and important topics ranging from human relations to the arts in their many facets. Matsumoto Yasushi points out that the author of *Towazugatari* (Confessions of Lady Nijō, circa 1313) would certainly have known of this essay or something similar and that readers who wish to understand the writings of court women of the medieval period should be familiar with the contents of such essays. The following passage, for example, illustrates well the shift in aesthetic values of the imperial court from the Heian to the Kamakura period. With respect to color, Abutsu recommends that the brilliance of Heian court dress be replaced by subdued colors, a suggestion consistent with the aesthetic notion of *hie* (chill beauty) that was becoming prevalent under the influence of Buddhism: "Icy colors that are pure as frost on a winter's night pierce the heart more than the clear hues of moonlight, or autumn. Superior to the brilliance of the flowers of spring, or those of the leaves of autumn are colors of fading, frost-bitten grasses . . . that are buried just as they are beneath the snow. The forlorn view of the withered field is particularly moving. . . ."

Abutsu-ni was remarkably productive on several literary fronts–as a diarist, a critic, and a poet. She also composed critical essays at a time when women rarely did. Her poetry was also valued, as can be deduced from the fact that she sat at the first place in a poem contest of import and received favorable judgment at the event. Further, she fought successfully for her son's place in the literary world of the time. Though this latter facet of her life is usually interpreted as typical of a mother's love for her child, it should also perhaps be seen as her effort to defend, expand, and amend the ideals of her husband through energetic political and critical activity. Abutsu is one of a handful of central figures in the mid Kamakura period who exerted a significant influence on the direction of poetics.

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