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Reading the Rhetoric of Seduction in *Izumi Shikibu nikki*

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*I*ZUMI *Shikibu nikki* 和泉式部日記 (ca. 1007?) is usually described as a story of romantic passion told in large part through poems exchanged between two lovers. This essay argues that the *nikki* in addition provides an opportunity to consider various aspects of the rhetoric of seduction, both rhetoric employed within the narrative by the protagonist and intended for her lover, and that employed by the author for her readers.¹ The explicit agenda of the protagonist is to negotiate an amorous relationship of pain and anxiety due primarily to a lover's inconstant heart while the implicit agenda of the writer is to explain away, redefine, or neutralize gossip which is critical of the author herself. Considered together, these agendas

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¹ I have used as the basis for reading *Izumi Shikibu nikki* the annotated texts of Komatsu Tomi 小松登美 in her three volume work *Izumi Shikibu nikki*, Kōdansha gakujutsu bunko, nos. 473–75 (Kōdansha, 1980–85); Nomura Seiichi 野村精一, *Izumi Shikibu nikki / Izumi Shikibu shū*, Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei, vol. 42 (Shinchōsha, 1981); Enchi Fumiko 円地文子 and Suzuki Kazuo 鈴木一雄, *Zenkō Izumi Shikibu nikki*, rev. ed. (Shibundō, 1983); Fujioka Tadaharu 藤岡忠美, et al., *Izumi Shikibu nikki / Murasaki Shikibu nikki / Sarashina nikki*, *ShinpenNKBZ* 26 (1994); and Edwin A. Cranston's English translation, *The Izumi Shikibu Diary: A Romance of the Heian Court*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series, vol. 19 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).

and the rhetoric used to advance them provide a framework for exploring mechanisms of seduction, especially those having to do with the excitation of rivalry and the plausible manipulation of a statement's meaning. In the process of an analysis of the text's rhetoric in this regard, an aspect of *Izumi Shikibu nikki*'s sophisticated language is highlighted.

POSSIBLE WRITING CONTEXTS AND READERSHIPS

Izumi Shikibu nikki is generally grouped with other major Heian period texts such as *Kagerō nikki* 蜻蛉日記 (after 974), *Murasaki Shikibu nikki* 紫式部日記 (dates unknown, covers events of 1008–10), *Sarashina nikki* 更級日記 (ca. 1059), *Jōjin Azari Haha no shū* 成尋阿闍梨母集 (ca. 1071–73), *Sanuki no Suke nikki* 讃岐典侍日記 (1107, portions later), and sometimes *Makura no sōshi* 枕草子 (995?–96?, substantial portions later) into a genre (or quasi-genre) styled in the twentieth century as Heian period women's memoir literature (*Heianchō joryū nikki bungaku*).² These texts have been associated in English language criticism and annotations with the terms “diary” or “literary diary,” but all are texts whose narrative voices address readers directly, and with intimacy and care. *Nikki*, like Western diaries, are indeed a type of private composition, but private in this case means a thematic focus on matters of the heart offered from the beginning as intimate communication rather than a private text which the author might desire be kept from view. The anticipated readership that is implied by the manner and grammar of the narrative voice is not general, inadvertent, or haphazard; rather, it gives the strong im-

² For a full translation of Sei Shōnagon's *Makura no sōshi* see Ivan Morris, trans., *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967). For a full translation of *Murasaki Shikibu nikki* see Richard Bowring, trans., *Murasaki Shikibu: Her Diary and Poetic Memoirs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). Two full translations of *Izumi Shikibu nikki* are available: Cranston, *Izumi Shikibu Diary*, and Earl Miner, trans., *Japanese Poetic Diaries* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969). Two full translations of *Kagerō nikki* are available: see Edward Seidensticker, trans., *The Gossamer Years (Kagerō nikki): The Diary of a Noblewoman of Heian Japan* (Tokyo, Japan & Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1964), and Sonja Arntzen, trans., *The Kagerō Diary: A Woman's Autobiographical Text from Tenth-Century Japan* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1997). There is in addition a translation of Book I only, see Helen Craig McCullough, compiler and ed., *Classical Japanese Prose: An Anthology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

pression of a select group (or in cases perhaps even a single individual) with whom the writer had a special relationship. Knowledge about readership is important to the argument that one of the reasons Izumi Shikibu 和泉式部 (b. 977?) wrote her story was as a rhetorically strategic act to repair or enhance relationships with those in her immediate circle, who would also be its readers. Unfortunately, we can only posit probable relationships based on biographical information that in part is deduced from the very text we are trying to understand (a situation typical of biographical research for this time period).

An even greater conundrum is that, of the Heian *nikki*, *Izumi Shikibu nikki* has been the most contested regarding authorship itself. While the large majority of scholars now consider it best to conclude that Izumi Shikibu was the author, all would admit that no argument on either side is conclusive.³ My own reading of the *nikki* deduces an authorial agenda designed for a specific readerly effect that would be more plausibly desired by Izumi Shikibu than by a different author, especially one somewhat distant from the time frame of the narrative, as most evidence requires.

There is insufficient evidence to conclusively determine a time of composition for *Izumi Shikibu nikki*, but most scholars suggest that definitely after 1007 and probably before 1010 is the most likely period of time within which the work was both initiated and completed. (The date 1010, however, is based on a rough estimate of the start date of Izumi's second marriage, and further assumes that once married Izumi would not have written such a text.) Similarly it is not absolutely clear when Izumi Shikibu began her service at the imperial palace, but it was probably 1009. Thus we cannot be sure

³ Morita Kaneyoshi 森田兼吉, "Izumi Shikibu nikki no seiritsu," in *Joryū nikki bungaku kōza*, vol. 3, *Izumi Shikibu nikki / Murasaki Shikibu nikki* (Benseisha, 1988), pp. 32-38. In 1953 Kawase Kazuo challenged the theory of Izumi Shikibu as author. He was not the first to do so, but he based his argument on a not yet widely known colophon at the end of one of the *Izumi Shikibu nikki* texts, a colophon implying that Fujiwara no Shunzei 藤原俊成 (1114-1204) was the author. This would place the writing of the work in an entirely different historical context (from the early eleventh to late twelfth centuries and from an imperial literary salon to the desk of a male literary critic, scholar, and patriarch of poetry). The colophon was thoroughly debated and now is regarded as probably erroneous. However, the debate Kawase initiated encouraged other arguments against Izumi Shikibu as author, some of which, while far from being conclusive, are difficult to entirely ignore. Edwin Cranston evaluates in detail the debate regarding authorship. See Cranston, pp. 44-90.

whether *Izumi Shikibu nikki* was written from within or apart from the special context of the imperial literary salon. It would be most helpful if historical scholarship could establish some firm dates, because the various possible writing contexts are quite different: if Izumi Shikibu wrote the *nikki* in 1007, she is writing immediately after the death of her lover and before she knows what her next step in life might be; if she wrote in 1009, two years have passed since her lover's death and she is now surrounded by a proud and talented group of women writers, a group of which she was far from being a veteran member and where many likely regarded her with a less than welcome attitude; finally, if she wrote still later, after her remarriage, then it suggests that gossip (perhaps especially among her own salon group members) had not abated even with the passage of years, and further suggests an author who, though married (or perhaps *because* married), remembers with great intimacy and fondness a previous love, and writes about that for others to read. It would also be interesting if both *Murasaki Shikibu nikki* and *Izumi Shikibu nikki* had shared the same primary reader, which would be a possibility if both texts were written while their authors were in service to Chūgū Empress Fujiwara no Shōshi (Akirako) 中宮藤原彰子 (988-1074).

However, whether or not Izumi was officially a part of Shōshi's salon by the time she wrote her story in 1007 or later, it is certain that she had already for some time been the subject of unpleasant discussion and gossip regarding her affairs with two imperial princes. The first of these affairs began around 999, just after she had married, and was with the third son of Retired Emperor Reizei, Danjō no Miya Tametaka Shinnō 彈正宮為尊親王 (977-1002). This affair apparently precipitated divorce by her husband and her father disowning her. The affair ended suddenly, however, with the early death of the prince. The second romance (from 1003 to 1007) was with the fourth son of Reizei, Prince Atsumichi 敦道親王 (981-1007). This relationship caused the angry departure of Atsumichi's primary wife, a woman of considerable political connection, at the encouragement of an even more politically powerful elder sister.⁴ Her

⁴ The Kita no Kata mentioned in the *nikki* is Atsumichi's second (not secondary) wife. She was a daughter of Dainagon Fujiwara no Naritoki 大納言藤原濟時 (d. 995). Naritoki had been a powerful figure until he died during the plague of 993-95 along with many other lead-

affair with Atsumichi in particular was publicly discussed since he brought Izumi to major social events. ("Prince Atsumichi and Izumi Shikibu shared a carriage in a most interesting way during the Kamo Return one year: the front blind was cut down the middle so it could be raised on the Prince's side and lowered on the lady's. Izumi's sleeves trailed out through the apertures, and her red trousers hung to the ground, emblazoned with wide red ritual seclusion signs. Everyone seemed to be looking at the two of them instead of watching the procession."⁵) In an undated part of her journal (the "letter section," sandwiched between passages dated 1009 and 1010) Murasaki Shikibu says that Izumi Shikibu has an "unsavory side" to her character.⁶

Literary salons such as the one Izumi joined were attached to women of high station (high priestesses [*saijū* 齋宮], empresses, princesses, and imperial consorts) usually to enhance the imperial back chambers (*kōkyū* 後宮) or the attractiveness of a young girl backed by a politically ambitious family who could be considered a potential partner in love for an emperor.⁷ Thus, a member of a literary salon was also a "lady-in-waiting" (*nyōbō* 女房). Among her responsibilities, she was expected to display her talents as both poet, writer, participant in public events and companion for men all towards the goal of enhancing the aura of culture, elegance, and romance of her mistress's apartments. These salons, whose nuclei were *nyōbō* but who were supported and visited by men of literary reputation and political influence, competed with one another at various levels, including and especially with their art. In the case of Izumi Shikibu, her mistress Shōshi had been consort (*nyōgo*) to Emperor Ichijō

ing political figures. His sister Hōshi 芳子 had been one of the many consorts (*nyōgo* 女御) to Emperor Murakami 村上天皇 (r. 946-67). At the time of the *nikki*'s narrative, his first daughter Jūshi ("elder sister" in the story) was consort (*nyōgo*) to Crown Prince Iyasada 居貞親王 who would soon become Emperor Sanjō 三条天皇 (r. 1011-16). When Sanjō became emperor, Jūshi became Kōgō Empress. For further details see Komatsu, vol. 3, p. 141.

⁵ Helen Craig McCullough, trans., *Ōkagami, The Great Mirror: Fujiwara Michinaga (966-1027) and His Times*, Princeton Library of Asian Translations (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 165-66.

⁶ Bowring, p. 131; *ShinpenNKBZ* 26:201.

⁷ For various features of imperial women's courts (*kōkyū* 後宮) see *Kokubungaku—Kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū*, supplementary publication *Kōkyū no subete* 23.10 (1980). For a detailed history of imperial women's courts see Tsunoda Bun'ei, 角田文衛 *Nihon no kōkyū / Empress and Court Ladies in Japanese History* (Gakutōsha, 1973).

一条天皇 (r. 986–1011) since 999 and empress since 1000. Shōshi was the first daughter of Great Minister of the Left Fujiwara no Michinaga 左大臣藤原道長 (966–1027). She arrived dramatically at court with forty *nyōbō*, other female attendants, and a dazzling array of clothing.⁸ Shōshi was still very young (in 1000 she was twelve and the Emperor twenty-one) and Ichijō's interest was primarily in the first daughter of Regent Fujiwara no Michitaka 関白藤原道隆 (953–95), Kōgō Empress Teishi (Sadako) 皇后藤原定子 (976–1000), who was twenty-three at the time Shōshi arrived.⁹ Teishi had more education than the young Shōshi and possessed a very active literary salon which included Sei Shōnagon 清少納言 (b. 966?, d. 1021–28?). Teishi died, however, in 1000, and her salon had been disbanded by the time of Izumi Shikibu's entry into Shōshi's group. There remained, however, other romantic rivals to Shōshi. Michinaga promoted his daughter vigorously by sponsoring a wide variety of cultural events via her apartments, including supplying her with many of the best writers of the day. These included Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部 (b. ca. 973?, d. 1014? or later) who was her personal tutor, Akazome Emon 赤染衛門 (b. 957–64?, d. shortly after 1041?), and Ise no Taifu 伊勢大輔 (d. after 1060). Akazome Emon was with Shōshi when she was installed at the palace. Murasaki Shikibu joined in 1005 or 1006. Ise no Taifu joined in 1008. Arriving as she did in 1009, Izumi was junior to these other writers.

Ichijō's other consorts (*nyōgo*)—Gishi (Yoshiko) 義子, Genshi (Motoko) 元子 and Sonshi (Takako) 尊子—deferred to Michinaga's political ambitions. For much of the time between 1000 and 1008 they were absent from court.¹⁰ In 1008, Shōshi gave birth to Prince Atsuhira 皇子·敦成, the son who assured Michinaga's control over the government and who became the long-reigning Emperor Go-Ichijō (r. 1016–36).¹¹ Thus Izumi arrived at court at a time when Shōshi's literary salon was flourishing and its members were flush with a confirmed sense of political superiority. There remained the well-

⁸ Tsunoda Bun'ei, 角田文衛, "Kōkyū no rekishi" in *Kokubungaku—Kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū*, supplementary publication *Kōkyū no subete* 23.10 (1980), pp. 50–51.

⁹ This was the first time an emperor conferred the titles of *chūgū* and *kōgō* to separate women, attesting to the intense competition between the backers of the two girls. See Helen C. McCullough, *Ōkagami*, p. 353, n. 12.

¹⁰ Tsunoda, *Nihon no kōkyū*, p. 215.

¹¹ This is the birth described in *Murasaki Shikibu nikki*.

established literary salon of High Priestess and Princess Dai-Saiin Senshi 大斎院選子内親王 (964–1035), a very long-lived salon spanning the reigns of five emperors, but the balance of power was with Michinaga and his most favored daughter Shōshi.¹²

The salon provided an extremely literate potential readership. Members participated in poetry matches, fiction readings, and other functions or pastimes focused on the arts. Many also engaged in sophisticated amorous correspondence similar to that in *Izumi Shikibu nikki*. If *Murasaki Shikibu nikki* is correct, ladies-in-waiting were also expected to perform well in the extemporaneous recitation of poetry. (When Lady Saishō and Murasaki were trying to escape a rowdy party, Michinaga caught them in their hiding place: “His Excellency pulled back the curtains and we were both caught. ‘A poem for the Prince!’ he cried. ‘Then I’ll let you go!’ ”¹³) Further, if the literary prose written by Heian women reflects the social conditions (or ideals) of its writers and readers, there was potentially a high level of intimacy among aristocratic women. The period’s prose is full of understanding women with whom one could talk, friends with commonly held values and concerns. This intimate link (real or desired) between writer and reader is a hallmark of the Heian memoir’s narrative voice and generally present in the period’s fiction and historical narrative (*rekishi-monogatari* 歴史物語) as well. This and these writers’ super-refined education in the arts is, in my opinion, the single most important set of factors for the form that this remarkable literature of Heian *nikki* took, a literature with an unusual if not unique balance in expression between the honest and intimate on the one hand and the controlled and censored on the other. That being said, however, *Izumi Shikibu nikki* stands out as perhaps the Heian *nikki* with the least intimate of narrative voices (not of theme, but in how it addresses the reader). It is the only one of the Heian *nikki* that is unambiguously in the third person, and is the only one that includes no scenes that could have been as easily

¹² The five emperors were En’yū 円融 (r. 969–84), Kazan 花山 (r. 984–86), Ichijō 一条 (r. 986–1011), Sanjō 三条 (r. 1011–16), and Go-Ichijō 後一条 (r. 1016–36). For a discussion of this salon, see Mitamura Masako 三田村雅子, “Jōcitachi no saron—Dai-Saiin o chūshin ni,” *Kokubungaku—kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū* 34.10 (1989), pp. 63–67. As a lady in service to a Shintō shrine, Senshi could not participate fully in sexual and marital politics.

¹³ Bowring, 91; *ShinpenNKBZ* 26:165–66.

peopled by the readers as the protagonist. She therefore had available to her a highly sophisticated discourse where minute nuances of expression and implied meanings would not be lost on readers, and this she employed to its fullest. It is with this potential for personal prose that she proves to be as innovative and skillful as she was in poetry composition. However, the discursive potential to fully include the reader in her most vulnerable moments is passed over. Thus the “select group . . . with whom the writer had a special relationship” mentioned above need not necessarily imply a harmonious or easy relationship, just a significant and unique one.

CAUSES FOR RHETORIC

Izumi Shikibu nikki is the story of an aristocrat whose love affair with an imperial prince, Ko-Miya 故宮 (Tametaka), had already ended due to his early death. The *nikki* relates a brief period of time (1003.4.10 to early in 1004) after this lover’s death when Onna (“the woman” but to be understood as Izumi Shikibu) is approached by the lover’s younger brother, Sochi no Miya 師宮 (Atsumichi).¹⁴ Onna and Sochi no Miya exchange amorous poems (well over one hundred) and share a few secret nights. Imperial politics restricted Sochi no Miya’s choices of publicly recognized brides and consorts to women belonging to a fairly specific list of families. Izumi Shikibu’s family was not one of those choices both in terms of social class and political position. Thus, theirs remained a private and most indecisive relationship. Both lovers test the other’s level of commitment and seek to gain a firmer grasp on the relationship even as they fall prey to skepticism and doubt. The story moves towards a resolution as the result of two factors: Sochi no Miya’s deepened romantic involvement with Onna and an idea provided by a third party external to the romance. Concerned about the political ramifications of Sochi no Miya’s romantic interest, his wet nurse Jijū no Menoto 侍従の乳母 suggests that he place Onna in his service as a personal attendant (*meshūdo* 召人) in a wing of his sprawling mansion rather than go out in the streets to meet her secretly at night. Shortly after the long, emotional, and quite beautiful “com-

¹⁴ For a detailed outline of events described in the *nikki* and their possible historical dates, see Cranston, pp. 72–86.

position practice'' (*tenarai no fumi* 手習の文) section of the *nikki* where Onna stayed up late and wrote of her loneliness—a carefully crafted composition she then sent to Sochi no Miya—Sochi no Miya proposes Menoto's plan. (Sochi no Miya is thus shown to act on the basis of the words of two women.) After a period of anxious uncertainty, Onna allows herself to become a member of his household. However, Sochi no Miya does not install her there with sufficient skill. As noted above, his primary wife angrily moves out. This final scene of the *nikki* describes one of the several reasons Izumi Shikibu's reputation became so notorious. Indeed, the entire text may be on the one hand a loving memorial to two past lovers and on the other an explanation of the author's inculpable role regarding the scandal surrounding Kita no Kata's departure. The final scene, after which the narrative so abruptly stops, may be the *raison d'être* of the story.

CONFLICT, STRATEGY, AND RHETORICAL VIRTUOSITY

Izumi Shikibu nikki describes two people who, while loving, nervously judge their lover's love and seek their lover's greater commitment. A number of rhetorical strategies intended to fathom or enhance the other lover's passion can be identified. In this sense, *Izumi Shikibu nikki* narrates romantic conflict between two people. The following analysis focuses on the efforts the woman undertakes to create a romantic bond that would satisfy certain critical personal needs, and especially on the differing needs of the two lovers and a romantic balance that is forged through *pressure and compromise*. Romantic relationship—including that in *Izumi Shikibu nikki*—might also be said to be predicated on a type of *magical* risk-taking, a leap of faith perhaps only possible through the power of a truly selfless act (a sacrifice), in this case Onna's choice to entrust her future security to Sochi no Miya's love for her. Additionally, love can also be, perhaps always in part is, the flowering of one's passion. Nevertheless, I will emphasize *conscious strategy* in order to explore the sophistication of Onna's words and actions directed at Sochi no Miya, an analysis which then leads us to examine the rhetorical skill of the writer as she addresses us, her readers.

This emphasis is meant to resist a common (though perhaps

weakening) reading disposition that regards Heian court women as nearly immobilized by a polygynous society under the control of romantically irresponsible men. *Zuryō* women such as Izumi Shikibu indeed were confronted with painful realities where often the best or only course of action was to do no more than endure psychic and physical suffering. But a reading which genuinely respects the various possible literary capacities of the writer of *Izumi Shikibu nikki* needs to employ a hypothesis that the narrative figure Onna confronts her romantic situation with a full range of volitions, including a sophisticated capacity to respond *strategically* to her plight. Onna confronts serious personal challenges with a delicacy, courage, and skill that to my mind can only be regarded as superlative. For me, this generates a more interesting reading than one which sympathetically regards Onna as someone trapped in her situation. Further, focusing on strategy in *Izumi Shikibu nikki* accords well with Izumi's widely recognized rhetorical virtuosity.

Assumptions regarding seduction

“Seduction” in this essay means first the Latin sense of the word *seducere*, namely, “to lead aside or away.” Both Onna and Sochi no Miya wish to lead their partner away from one place or action to another of their own making, and for their own advantage. The seducer offers, or appears to offer, something of enough apparent personal value and pleasure to “lead aside” the seducee from his or her original intention. Erotic and sexual appeal is probably nearly always active at some level in seduction. However, appeals to other desires or pleasures of human relationship such as comfort, security, and the happiness of caring and understanding companionship can also be a factor. The less overtly sexual aspects of seduction are the primary focus of this study.

To “seduce” is also usually taken to mean away from something morally right towards something morally wrong. Classical psychoanalysis would suggest that such a definition is socially normative because seduction encourages a move towards the anti-social, self-oriented pole of human behavior. Psychoanalytic theory itself attends more to the transgressive, potentially disruptive qualities implied in seduction. Seduction is considered a complicit act that resists public rule because two (or more) individuals decide—while

aware of social norms, duties or “*common sense*”—for their own individual private pleasure. This transgressive element is a critical part of the joy of seducing and allowing oneself to be seduced. The same structure of complicity and transgression, however, can as easily cause the seducer and seducee to maintain their own individual position in relationship to one another (if they place their own needs first and those needs are not those of their partner). Thus while they appear to act in tandem, they are basically still apart. This gap between them is the necessary “secret” (as Derrida calls it¹⁵) within the structure of transgressive acts including seduction—a secret to which we might attend, though not with the intention of *exposing* it since, as psychoanalytic theory broadly claims, the unrevealed and unrevealable are an essential part of humans relating to one another, whether or not the issue is seduction. This gap is manifest in the missed opportunities and misunderstandings of the *Izumi* narrative, and forms an important emotive component of the work, as well as an engine for the advancement of the plot. But rather than explore the dynamics that originate from and function to protect such secrets (a psychoanalytic project), we will consider seductive strategies effected via language, bearing in mind that they are predicated on the existence of such secrets.

Seduction is by necessity duplicitous at its deepest level but not always so at the level of intention; seduction can be more effective when the seducee knows he or she has become the object of desire. But the arousal of desire in the seducee always occurs in response to a *representation and promise* and operates in the charged field of anticipation, not real events, and in this sense embodies the distance between signifier and signified. (The English psychoanalyst Melanie Klein would say that desire is *future tense* and a part of object-relations, not “real” relationships.¹⁶) Manipulation of the *representation* of things is the foundation of all discourse, and strategies that walk the line between representation and misrepresentation such as those

¹⁵ The considerations on “secrets” are not based on, but are made in reference to Jacques Derrida’s fascinating considerations of secrecy, responsibility, and faith in his *Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), especially the first chapters.

¹⁶ Hanna Segal, *Klein* (London: Karnac Books and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1989), p. 49.

we see in acts of seduction can hardly be considered an isolated phenomenon. Seduction is a functional part of discourses of desire, discourses that manage and manipulate the representation of things. Thus, to look at the mechanism of effective seduction is one way to consider how language makes meaning.

Izumi Shikibu nikki is, in some respects, both a transgressive text and a text that describes acts of transgression. Moral transgression holds an attraction in and of itself, and seduction's appeal depends on this pleasure. Georges Bataille argues that as a social act, moral transgression (it would be precise to include *contemplated* transgression) identifies and upholds social rule.¹⁷ Such transgression no doubt confirms one's private sense of being in that it defines individual existence by delineating the limits of its social context, just as a *narrative* of passion constructed by and between two lovers—the private love story they build in order to linguistically embrace, if not maintain and enhance that passion—includes the coordinates of transgressive dreams in reference to public norms, that is, their story helps to define a new individual entity, “us magically in love,” that gains a sense of reality in part due to its contrast with ordinary daily life. Thus the earlier mentioned “something of enough apparent personal value and pleasure” can be as much the opportunity to *transgress* as it is the opportunity to *acquire* the object that one thinks one desires.

In the analysis on seduction offered below, seduction is presented as if the structure had only one orientation—a seducer attempting to seduce another. In fact in *Izumi Shikibu nikki* seduction is mutual, a dialectic where the seducee appears seductive to the seducer due to the art of the seducee. Ultimately, this important additional level of intricacy to the text needs to be included in any full discussion of the topic, but it has been left aside almost entirely in order to manage an already complicated topic.

Finally, if this analysis of seduction at times has an uncomfortable heaviness, perhaps it is because a private romantic discourse—and a very beautiful one at that—is being submitted to skeptical, analytic, and *public* scrutiny. Such critical analysis inevitably appears to

¹⁷ Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death & Sensuality* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), pp. 63–65.

be a subversive and largely unwelcome challenge to common notions of trust and love. It is surely not the type of reader that Izumi Shikibu postulated, and so we step out, at least temporarily, from a more natural readerly space for the work. It is important at some point to return to that space and enjoy the text more on its own terms, but the excursion out helps make accessible the many aspects of this rhetorically rich work. The tension between these readerly positions is part of the character of the space within which this essay operates.

A reading hypothesis

My hypothesis is that the words and actions of the *nikki*'s central figure and narrator, Onna, derive from intentions not immediately evident to the reader due to the *deliberate* obscuring effect of the *nikki*'s well-calculated messages and descriptions. The empirical writer/narrator would like us to believe that Onna is swept into a passionate situation by an ardent and persistent prince, Sochi no Miya, a man of higher status and greater power than herself. Readers should conclude that it is Sochi no Miya, not Onna (in other words, not Izumi), who bears responsibility for the course of events described in the *nikki*. The writer sets up most of her strategic, rhetorical possibilities by inviting us to conflate and confuse three figures: the empirical writer of the work, the narrative voice of the work, and the protagonist of the narrative, Onna. What is of interest, though, is that despite the smoke screens, we can catch the glimpse of an Onna who does more than let a course of events lead the way, a most private Onna that may be either an intended or inadvertent effect of writerly choices. Either case provokes thought.

Onna *is* a sympathetic figure, at least to the minds of potential readers contemporary to the writing of the *nikki*.¹⁸ She is presented

¹⁸ It is my personal opinion that of the major Heian *nikki* only *Izumi Shikibu nikki* actively addresses male readers. The other *nikki* strike me as discourses intended to be shared primarily among women; unlike them, this *nikki* does not include a preponderance of scenes where women communicate with each other, spend time together, or are even presented in a positive light. There is no sense of a feminine "we," very common in the other *nikki*, except indirectly in that women readers could well understand Izumi's plight and her frustrations with her lover. Further, the work seems, even while exceptionally smooth in style, more guarded in its speech in particular ways that resemble the circumspect speech patterns of women conversing in the presence of men, at least as we read it in the period's literature. For example, it is the

as an amiable, well-intentioned individual who has met hard times. Onna is associated with no man of significance who could restore her (and her young child) to the social level from which she has fallen, and it is almost entirely men who determined an aristocratic woman's social position. While Sochi no Miya eventually brings her into his mansion, the narrator presents Onna as one who is driven into that situation by an intense loneliness (romantic and social) which forces her to look to him for survival. Further, such acquiescing to his (imperial) decisions would be considered proper behavior for a lady in her position.

However, if we hypothesize for the moment that the narrative is not innocent but rather written so that we will *naturally* come to see Onna along the lines just mentioned, we are able to imagine an Onna who is at minimum a highly skilled tactician in matters of romance. Indeed, though my own conclusions are not this radically contrary, she may even be an *exuberant actor* enjoying on some level the transgressive moments of challenging (successfully) social norms of the time, Sochi no Miya's romantic commitment to his wife, and his political commitment to his reputation, as well as playing with readerly expectations.

By supposing an active role in confronting her dilemmas, we construct an Onna in possession of consistent, sophisticated strategies of seduction that by their presence question the narrator's implicit claim of a forced situation for which Onna need not be held accountable. The narrator wishes that we assign to circumstances beyond Onna's control responsibility for Onna's romantic recovery and some of the socially criticized effects of that recovery (especially the displacing of Sochi no Miya's primary wife, Kita no Kata). If we conclude that Onna brilliantly confronts a serious challenge to her happiness and well-being from a position of weakness and disadvantage then we postulate a fuller creative being operating within the narrative than the passive Onna merely drawn into Sochi no Miya's

only *nikki* that does not mention any part of the protagonist's physical body aside from hair. However, the logic of this conclusion leads into interesting and complicated issues. If men were also targeted as potential readers, who might they have been, and why? Perhaps it was Michinaga, in addition to Shōshi, who was one of the expected readers. (Some scholars believe Michinaga may have had romantic interest in Izumi, an item that might support such speculation.) Or, perhaps there was indeed a male author after all.

sphere by emotion and circumstance. But in the process of supposing this new Onna, doubt is also cast on the implicit narrative claim of helplessness that would partially release Onna from the responsibility for her actions. (“Since her existence brought her nothing but pain in any case, she would simply trust to fate [*sukuse ni makasete aramu*]. And yet she had no fundamental desire to enter his household. . . . But how would she cope with the melancholy that might come to haunt her?”¹⁹) Such a reading replaces a morally inculpable and helpless Onna with an Onna who operates with awareness and intelligence, but less innocently.

Taking this as the base hypothesis, I postulate that the relationship thus discovered between Onna and her lover may exist as well between the writer and us as readers. It is along these lines that we will explore the text’s rhetoric.

STRATEGIC AGENDAS

There are two broad sets of strategies in *Izumi Shikibu nikki* that I wish to explore for this essay. The first set is effectuated by Onna and meant for Sochi no Miya. These occur entirely within the bounds of the narrative. The second set is engineered by the writer and meant for the *nikki*’s readers. These strategies are of course deployed through the medium of the narrative but are concerned with the relationship of the reader to the writer as mutually imagined by both. Aside from these sets of strategies there are other strategies and agendas we will not discuss, such as Sochi no Miya’s attempt to manage Onna’s interest in him, and Sochi no Miya’s wet nurse’s successful effort to redirect Sochi no Miya’s intentions with Onna. These are left aside primarily to help manage the complexity of the topic.

Agendas between Onna and Sochi no Miya

The agendas of the first set of strategies, those by Onna for Sochi no Miya, can be posited in several ways. If we take the narrative at its face value, Onna is drawn into the relationship with Sochi no Miya by her desire to relieve her boredom (*tsurezure*), and her

¹⁹ Cranston, p. 175; *ShinpenNKBZ* 26:68-69.

longing for Ko-Miya, his brother whom Sochi no Miya resembles. After they have begun to exchange poems, Onna pauses to consider whether she should continue the correspondence. The narrator concludes: “Being someone who didn’t think matters over too deeply, and having had her fill of leisure time that did not agree with her, she allowed her gaze to linger on his amorous letter, and then answered . . .”²⁰

Overtly her agenda is basically to follow her heart’s longing. However, if we consider Onna’s position, one that has become very difficult in the period just before the narrative time frame, and if we assume that she is confronting a natural anxiety over the future of herself and her child, her agenda may sensibly be founded on the desire and need to secure that future. In this case her more immediate goal is to make it likely that Sochi no Miya will choose a substantial commitment to her and her well-being, or to press him to do so with the intelligence available to her. A “substantial commitment” would include the best case scenario of private and permanent quarters in his residence.

The elements of strategies that would advance this agenda are

- [1] Onna sharpening Sochi no Miya’s passion by positing and inviting rivals to him;
- [2] Onna withholding “rights” over her, which are desired by Sochi no Miya, through her control of access to her body;
- [3] Onna retaining skillful rhetorical control of the romantic discourse;
- [4] Onna on the one hand making appeals of sympathy and on the other offering comfort and security; and,
- [5] Onna challenging the depth of Sochi no Miya’s emotions, goading him towards ever more substantive enunciations of love and commitment.

The fourth and fifth of these appear regularly in the narrative but are more generally recognized and don’t require much attention. I would like to discuss only the first three. But before setting these last two aside, I would like to suggest that the fourth works through the social structure/norm of (provisionally) unguarded reliance on another (*amae* 甘え). This structure of *amae* is quite telling about vital aspects of Heian period romance and well worth further study. Also, regarding the fifth, I wish to note that Onna’s reluctance to

²⁰ *ShinpenNKBZ* 26:19.

trust her lover at every stage may or may not indicate genuine distrust because expressions of such concern are a standard part of the etiquette of Heian love. For the woman to say that she doubted the depths of a man's feelings was tantamount to confessing her own longing and the natural hope that his would equal it. It was an indirect way of saying, "I love you."

The first and second of the above strategies (sharpening passion by using rivals and withholding the granting of "rights") are distinctly different as narrative phenomena, but their strategic effects on Sochi no Miya are similar. For Sochi no Miya, the rivals identify Onna as an object of desire similar to the manner of René Girard's "mimetic desire" (defined below). They also represent that which would neutralize his claim on Onna. Onna delicately maintains herself as the relay on which runs Sochi no Miya's competitive urge to take from others what they desire (and display that possession before these others), as well as his paranoia that these rivals will do the same to him. Onna achieves the more effective position in the relationship by calculating and allowing the transformation of her in Sochi no Miya's heart to an object of desire capable of being possessed in this way.

Rivals appear in two distinct forms in the *nikki*—as other suitors and as the institution of Buddhism. Buddhism will be discussed shortly, but first I would like to turn our attention to the question of other men who are apparently courting Onna.

With regard to these suitors, Onna never sufficiently eases Sochi no Miya's concerns that men other than Sochi no Miya himself are visiting her. This is a delicate issue, for what passes as acceptably sufficient explanation at the level of etiquette (women were not either expected or allowed to make excuses for themselves in that culture) remains insufficient explanation for the jealously insecure Sochi no Miya who knows well of Onna's reputation. The following is an example. (In all the translated passages, single underlining of romanized words indicates words shared by the two lovers; single quotation marks of English words indicate the same thing. Double underlining of romanized words indicates words borrowed from *uta* external to the text [*honkadori* 本歌取]. Single quotation marks indicate the English translation of these *honkadori*. Sentence breaks have been kept close to the original to help mark off what are meant to be

taken as units of a certain logically associated string of events or thoughts. All passages are marked and translated to make as evident as possible the craft and tightly woven nature of the exchanges of rhetoric.²¹)

The Prince had come in his usual secret way. Onna, thinking it unlikely that he would come and, wearied from the recent religious ceremonies, was dozing, so when there was a knock at the gate there was no one who might notice the sound. His Highness had heard various rumors and, surmising that another man might be inside, noiselessly retired and the next day there was:

akezarishi
maki no toguchi ni
tachinagara
tsuraki kokoro no
tameshi to zo mishi

“While standing
before the wooden door
that was not opened
I experienced
a cruel heart

—So this is what it is like to be wretched, I now know. Look at my pitiful state.”

“It appears that His Highness *did* announce himself last night! How heartless [*kokoro mo naku*] it was for me to be sleeping!” she thought. She replied,

ikadeka wa
maki no toguchi o
sashinagara
tsuraki kokoro no
arinashi o mimu

“How can you ‘experience’
whether or not
that ‘heart is cruel’?
You just left untouched²²
my ‘wooden door’

—His Highness is perhaps being presumptive. ‘If I had shown [*misetaraba*] . . .’^{23, 24}

Though privately Onna is dismayed that she was unaware that Sochi no Miya came to her mansion, she is less explicit to Sochi no Miya than the narrator is to her readers. She doesn’t explain that no

²¹ Most translations in this essay are my own, though the translations by Cranston and Miner are both excellent. The translations made here are specifically, and narrowly, designed to emphasize rhetorical step and strategy.

²² The phrase *sashinagara* more literally means “even though locked.” This translation is meant to preserve the accusatory tone directed back towards the Prince.

²³ Quoting from *Shūi waka shū* (compiled 1005–7, in general circulation in 1008) I:672 (anonymous), in *ShinNKBZ* 7 (1990):198.

hito shirenu
kokoro no uchi o
misetaraba
ima made tsuraki
hito wa arajina

“If I had shown
of my heart
what I had secreted away,
surely he would not have been
always so heartless”

²⁴ *ShinpenNKBZ* 26:26–27.

one was there. She only says Sochi no Miya failed to try to find out whether or not someone was. In a context of mutual trust, this poem might be taken as sufficient explanation; however, this is anything but such a context. Sochi no Miya does not know how to receive her words. Are they just honest protestations? Or do they just appear that way, when in fact someone *was* in her chambers. Onna placed her words in a perfectly ambiguous space.

René Girard has argued that we desire not what we independently encounter as desirable but rather that we follow in the footsteps of another's desire. We find desirable precisely that which another, the "model," desires first. Girard calls this "mimetic desire." Rivalry does not arise because of the fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single object; rather, the subject desires the object because the rival desires it. In desiring an object the rival alerts others to the desirability of the object. The rival, then, serves as a model for the subject, not only in regard to such secondary matters as style and opinions but also, and more essentially, in regard to desire itself.²⁵ In such a structure, desire always includes rivalry because the "model" and its imitating, competitive "disciple" are oriented towards the same object, with each desiring to make it primarily or solely its own.

This view casts an interesting light on romantic discourse in Heian period texts in general, but especially in the case of *Izumi Shikibu nikki*. If one looks at cause and effect in the narrative, it is the modulation of Sochi no Miya's desire in terms of his rivals that is Onna's single most effective strategy in sharpening his passion and resolve.

Onna's other suitors (aptly styled by Enchi Fumiko as *kage no otokotachi* 影の男たち, "men present but out of view/in the shadows"²⁶) are the primary reason for Sochi no Miya's decision to bring Onna into his mansion. (The deceased Ko-Miya could be regarded as a special case of these men as he is the one who initiates Sochi

²⁵ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 145. A more recent essay refining the same notion can be found in the introduction to his *Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

²⁶ Enchi and Suzuki, p. 163.

no Miya's attraction towards Onna. Though obviously he cannot take Onna away from Sochi no Miya physically, his memory does lay claim still to her heart.) Sochi no Miya incessantly complains that he feels reluctant to visit Onna at night because he doesn't know if there may be another man preceding him. Ultimately he concludes that the only anxiety-free way to visit Onna will be if she is securely in a wing of his mansion. While the narrator is quite willing to tell us, the readers, that no man is in the bed chamber, Onna does not extend the same courtesy to Sochi no Miya. She allows his jealousy to work to her advantage.

Aside from Onna's other suitors and their role as rivals, Onna also periodically reminds Sochi no Miya of the possibility that she may take the Buddhist tonsure. For example, during a period of long rains, a time in the *nikki* when the mood of the text is particularly bleak, she hints at taking the tonsure by mentioning the other "shore" of Buddhism:

Fureba yo no
itodo usa nomi
shiraruru ni
kyō no nagame ni
mizu masaranamu

"Finding I 'know' 'only' more
the pain of this world
as the days of 'rain' 'pass'
—if only today's 'endless scenery'
would be a flood to wash me away

—Is there a shore [*kishi*] waiting to catch me?" which was seen by His Highness who replied immediately . . .²⁷

Sochi no Miya's response is quick and supportive. In Heian period prose, Buddhism is often a rival of great authority and power. Even Hikaru Genji, not one to restrain himself very well in risky situations, acknowledged the authority of Buddhism to censure sexual relationship. Though he slept with Fujitsubo no Chūgū when she was his father's consort, he respects the protection afforded her once she takes religious vows. Fujiwara no Kaneie, husband of the narrator of *Kagerō nikki*, was a man of burgeoning political fortunes, but he, too, could not easily force his wife to leave the Naritaki Bosatsu Temple grounds. It took several visits and the combined pressure of her father, son, and attendants in Kaneie's service.²⁸ The narrative in *Izumi Shikibu nikki* shows Sochi no Miya as always

²⁷ *ShinpenNKBZ* 26:28-29.

²⁸ *ShinpenNKBZ* 13 (1995): 224 ff.

more considerate to Onna in the wake of her expressed interest in Buddhism. Were she to become a nun, Sochi no Miya would lose all claims of authority over her. Izumi's interest in Buddhism reminds Sochi no Miya of her power to entirely nullify his romantic plans. She also makes what is to Sochi no Miya the man a frightening statement of her freedom, a freedom that hobbles the sensation of authority and possession that the rivalrous and paranoid Sochi no Miya (a man in love?) seeks to allay his insecurity and confirm his authority.

The second strategy, that is, control of access by Onna to her body, is also regulated by means of rivals. The power of this strategy comes not primarily from the disconcerting (to Sochi no Miya) possibility that he will not be able to enjoy sensual or erotic pleasure, but from the more troubling thought that he may lose his *rights* of access to Onna's body. The motivating issue to consider is "rights," not sexual satisfaction. Sochi no Miya seeks to possess Onna *before the eyes of his rivals*. His sense of possession is directly derived from the deprivation of rights that he imposes upon those rivals. Or, to state it from Onna's strategic point of view, she can more fully satisfy Sochi no Miya's need to possess her by first raising the specter of rival claim but then acquiescing to Sochi no Miya. Onna's body is the intersection of Sochi no Miya's and other suitors' competitive urge; Sochi no Miya's erotic pleasure happens within this competitive, essentially public, context but it is not the *cause* for Sochi no Miya's ardor. The cause is Sochi no Miya's mimetic desire to *establish claim before* (first, and in the presence of) another's identical claim.

Onna's first two strategies, both her religious pilgrimages and her open door to other suitors, are exactly the language in which Onna *interdicts* Sochi no Miya's efforts of full possession. In the case of the *kage no otokotachi* Sochi no Miya takes extreme measures for securing the right to censure romantic access. In the case of Buddhism, he struggles to be the final authority to Onna, to make their relationship preeminent in order to deny the freedom Buddhist authority would afford her. The presence of rivals inaugurates and intensifies Sochi no Miya's passion. Further, Onna's resistance under the "protection" of rivals is the prohibition that makes possible the pleasure of transgression (of Onna's and rivals' rights).

Onna, for her part, *seeks* to be possessed by Sochi no Miya—as long as his commitment is reliable. The nervousness of Onna's indecision in committing herself to Sochi no Miya is the issue of his reliability; she has no reservations about being possessed. (We might simply say that she loves him.) This anxious indecision is a major theme of the narrative. If, as modern readers, we feel her anxiety to be over-pronounced, perhaps we might take it as a rhetorical technique intended to highlight the unpredictable nature of male commitment rather than meant to emphasize an inability (as in “weakness”) on the part of Onna to come to a decision about trust and commitment. It is in part because Sochi no Miya is cast in the light of Onna's considerable anxiety that he appears a novice to love, hesitant, inexperienced, and buffeted by the force of others rather than someone in control of his own romantic destiny. (Based on what we know of Atsumichi's life, however, it is probable that he was indeed a rather indecisive individual.²⁹) Onna's anxiety is reflected in the expressions of this indecisive man who may become her future sponsor (and shield to society's already caustic attitude towards her). This is her descriptive technique.

The third strategy in the above list, rhetorical control of the romantic discourse, is technically complex; that is, it involves the minutiae of nuances. Onna's primary strategy is to maintain control over the direction of discourse at its every stage, constantly bringing the focus back to Sochi no Miya's hesitations and away from her own. Throughout the *nikki*, Onna exhibits remarkable clearheadedness in keeping exactly to her agenda and not allowing Sochi no Miya to excuse himself with tangential comments or smoke screens. In addition, Onna at times intentionally misappropriates a wrong or different meaning of something Sochi no Miya said in order to advance their conversations into deeper waters involving more powerful emotions and more substantial commitments.

The different interpretations the two take regarding the term *sakizaki* 先々 is a good example of his attempting to find out more of

²⁹ See Komatsu Tomi, “Izumi Shikibu *nikki* no Sochi no Miya to genjitsu no Sochi no Miya,” in *Ronshū—Nikki bungaku: Nikki bungaku no hōhō to tenkai*, ed. Kimura Masanori 木村正中, Kasama sōsho, no. 236 (Kasama shoin, 1991), pp. 322, 328-29, paragraph numbered “8.”

her situation with other lovers while she keeps the topic squarely on just the two of them. Sochi no Miya has come to visit Onna for the first time, and is still being kept out on the veranda. They are talking through screens. It is a romantically charged situation. He makes several arguments as to why he should be allowed into her chambers.

“It is so very bright [referring to the moonlight]. Being old-fashioned, I pass my time indoors and so I cannot feel at all comfortable out here. I feel miserable; please allow me to sit there as the lady’s companion [*suetamae*]. She will surely see I am definitely not like those others who might have been visiting the lady [*sakizaki mitamauramu hito*],” so His Highness spoke and the woman exclaimed to the effect, “What are you saying! I have thought to only converse with His Highness this one night. To when does His Highness refer when he says, ‘one those occasions when visiting the lady [*sakizaki*]?’”³⁰

Onna’s ability to evade Sochi no Miya’s inquiry into the status of her private life issues from the exploitable ambiguity of the phrase *sakizaki mitamauramu hito*. (This phrase also harbors grammatical contradictions of tense that suggest something curious might be going on with the text at this point.³¹)

³⁰ *ShinpenNKBZ* 26:21.

³¹ *Sakizaki*, which in later literature can mean either “from now on” or “from some point in the past” almost certainly indicates the past (in this case, the men that Onna has seen in the past) since Morita Kaneyoshi surveyed in 1977 the prose of the period (12 texts, 85 examples) and could find only this meaning. “From now on” is a Kamakura period and later usage. However, as the date of the text is not fixed, and as some portions have certainly been altered over time, an argument based on period usage is not completely secure. (Indeed, texts of the *Kangenbon* 寛元本 textual line are missing Onna’s *sakizaki wa* altogether, thus reading only, “To when do you refer [*itsuka wa*]?”)

Nevertheless, despite the weight of meaning for the word being on the side of *past* indication, the remaining portion of the phrase, *mitamauramu* would normally refer to the future since an auxiliary verb usually meaning future surmise, *ramu*, is used. If we take that phrase as ambiguous at the level of tense, Sochi no Miya and Onna’s sparring with words is equally as interesting, but somewhat different. We could interpret the passage as:

“. . . The lady will surely see I am definitely not like those others who have visited,” so His Highness speaks and she exclaims to the effect, “What are you saying! I have thought only to converse with His Highness for this one night. To when does he refer when he says, ‘From now on [*sakizaki*]?’”

Enchi and Suzuki, Komatsu, and Cranston all apply themselves to the problem at length. Komatsu, vol. 1, pp. 152, 156–60 covers this in more detail, with greater breadth, and with the advantage of newer scholarship than Cranston, pp. 239–40, n. 38. Enchi and Suzuki resolve the contradiction rather too neatly by treating the second as an interjection that occurs at a different narrative level. Enchi and Suzuki, p. 92.

However, the more common rhetorical technique for Onna is to challenge or subvert the strength of a declaration of love made by Sochi no Miya so that he must restate himself more clearly and more forcefully. Here is a selection from the *nikki*. (This technique develops over a relatively large portion of text.)

It was the Fifth of the Fifth Month. The rain was all the more relentless. His Highness [Sochi no Miya] was moved as it occurred to him that yesterday's letter [from Onna] was more troubled than usual and on the morning of that rainy night when he had written, "The sound of rain [*ame no oto*] this night has been truly upsetting [*odoroshikaritsuru o*] . . ." and she had written,

yo mo sugara
nani goto o ka wa
omoitsuru
mado utsu ame no
oto o kikitsutsu

"Listening to
the 'sound of the rain'
at my window'
I 'have been' brooding—all night.
What type of thing is this?"

—"though deep inside my quarters' I am strangely soaked," His Highness thought that this lady was, after all, not at all a waste of his time [*nao iu kai naku wa arazu kashi*], and he replied,

ware mo sazo
omoiyaritsuru
ame no oto o
saseru tsuma naki
yado wa ikani to

"With the sound of rain
I have just sent you my 'thoughts'
—you in that house wanting eaves,
locked and without husband:
And how might you be?"

Around noon the river flooded and many went to see. Miya went as well and then there was a letter from him, "Are things all right with you? I have come to see the flood;

ōmizu no
kishi tsuki taru ni
kuraburedo
fukaki kokoro wa
ware zo masareru

I gauged
the deluge overrunning
the 'shore'
Yet my feelings for you
are by far the deeper

—I wonder if you know that?" She responded,

ima wa yomo
kishi mo seji kashi
ōmizu no
fukaki kokoro wa
kawa to misetsutsu

"I know only that
he will certainly not 'shore' here
—this person
who claims his 'heart'
to be 'deep' as a 'deluge'

—this is 'wasting our time' [*kai naku namu*]."³²

³² *ShinpenNKBZ* 26:29–30.

As is the case in several portions of the *nikki*, these passages are unified through the repetition and exchange by the two lovers of key words. (The most famous examples of this are the *tamakura no sode* 手枕の袖 poems earlier in the *nikki*.³³) In the text at hand one of the repeated terms is the auxiliary verb *tsu* in its form *tsuru*, used here to give a sense of the immediate past. (In order to preserve some sense of the exchange using this word, I have kept its presence with the phrases “has been” or “have been.”) Other shared phrases in this highly interwoven portion of the narrative are *ame no oto* (sound of rain), *omoi* (thinking), *kishi* (shore), *fukaki kokoro* (deep heart), and *kai naku* (pointless). *Kishi* also refers to an earlier point in the text (see above, “Is there a shore [*kishi*] waiting to catch me?”), as does *saseru* (see above, “You just left untouched . . .” *sashinagara*).

Onna’s letter (delivered prior to the above translated passage) described her sense of loneliness. Sochi no Miya’s response is considerate and well-timed, which should please her except that it lacks an accompanying poem. By the standards of the time his effort is half-hearted. She repeats the theme of her letter from the day before in an especially impressive poem marked by the nearly self-congratulatory narrative comment, “His Highness thought that this lady was, after all, not at all a waste of his time.” Her poem alludes to a Haku Kyoï (Bo Juyi 白居易, 772–846) poem about the abandoned concubine Jōyōjin 上陽人—the rain beating against the window (*ame no mado o utsu koe*)³⁴—while doubling as a reference to the Prince’s knocking at her gate. Her “What type of thing is this” refers to the unusually heavy rain while of course doubling as a reference to the state of their love affair. Onna follows her poem with a quote from a recently anthologized poem by Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之 (870?–945?): “though deep inside my quarters”³⁵) that underlines the depth of

³³ *ShinpenNKBZ* 26:53–60.

³⁴ Komatsu, vol. 1, p. 285. For the full poem as anthologized in *Wakan rōei shū* (compiled 1013) and attributed to Jōyōjin with slight modifications, see Kawaguchi Hisao 川久雄, *Wakan rōei shū*, Kōdansha gakujujutsu bunko, no. 325 (Kōdansha, 1982), pp. 181–82. See also *NKBT* 73 (1965):106. The phrase could come either from this poem (most likely in circulation before anthologized in 1013), or Bo Juyi’s private collection. Fujiwara no Kintō (966–1041), the compiler of *Wakan rōei shū* and one of the leading literary figures of the day frequented Shōshi’s salon. Izumi Shikibu’s source could conceivably be him rather than a textual reference.

³⁵ *Shūi waka shū*, V:958, in *ShinNKBT* 7:274.

her loneliness, anxiety, and faltering financial status (since she could be soaked while indoors, either by her own tears or due to the poor condition of her rooftop).

Sochi no Miya responds promptly with a poem of more than his usual sympathy. He says perhaps the three things Onna most wants to hear. First, he recognizes that her current situation is a truly lonely one and that on a stormy night he spent his time in loving thoughts, worrying for her. Second, he acknowledges that her present living situation is insufficient shelter for her both in terms of the material condition of her apartments and the reality that she has no husband or male patron. Finally, by referring back to her *sashinagara* in an earlier poem where she reprimanded him for not even bothering to check whether her door had been locked on one (aborted) night-time visit, he indicates that now he believes her assertion that she was alone that night.

This poem expresses a new level of commitment by Sochi no Miya, again announced by the narrator with the phrase, "His Highness thought that this lady was, after all, not at all a waste of his time." By explicitly acknowledging her difficult situation, including the reference to the fact that she has no husband, he has chosen consciously to expose himself to the responsibilities that would answer to her needs. This pair of poems is juxtaposed to the preceding set (not translated above).³⁶ In contrast, here Sochi no Miya does understand Onna's reference to Tsurayuki's poem. The earlier set ended with a sense of loneliness when Sochi no Miya entirely missed Onna's *honkadori* and their messages (or behaved in front of her as if he had).

Sochi no Miya's next poem ("I gauged the deluge . . .") is self-satisfied if not smug. Two things about this poem elicit from Onna her biting response, the poem "I know only that . . ." First and most important is that the poem is not accompanied by any promise

idetemo nurenu
waga sode no
kage ni inagara
hichi masaru kana

not into the soaking rain,
 and though deep
 inside my quarters,
 my sleeves are wet through"

³⁶ See *ShinpenNKBZ* 26:28-29, the four poems beginning with his *okata ni* . . . and ending with his *nani semu ni* . . .

of a visit that night, or an excuse as to why such a visit will not happen. This makes his declaration unpleasantly hollow. Second, his poem attempts to neutralize Onna's earlier suggestion that she might take tonsure ("Is there a shore [*kishi*] waiting to catch me?") Here the word *kishi* (which she used to suggest the other world of Buddhism to which she may always turn if she so chooses) is drowned under the power of the flood waters which he says are yet again shallower than his love for her.

Onna's strategy, as often is the case, is to keep the debate between them squarely focused on the reality of his few visits, not allowing him to substitute romantic words for meaningful action. And, as usual, she pits his own words against him. Here she rereads *kishi*, "shore," as *kishi*, "to have come" (translated in her poem with the English verb 'shore'). Further she makes a double use of *kawa*. While it does mean "river" (as metaphor for a deep heart), it also means "that [distant heart of yours] . . ." (*ka wa* 彼は), casting the Prince as a third person distant to her, and placing a chilling distance between them.³⁷ Her choice of words that follow the poem, "this is 'wasting our time' [*kai naku namu*]," function in direct contrast to his earlier "His highness thought that this lady was, after all, not at all a waste of his time [*nao iu kai naku wa arazu kashi*]." (This contrast is meant for the reader, not Sochi no Miya, as in the narrative Onna does not know that he has thought this—a good example of how carefully the writer of *Izumi Shikibu nikki* addresses her readers and manages her narrative.)

³⁷ This distance is established by Onna reversing a *Kokin* love poem that had a man longing for his lover though he could not go to see her due to a concern about rumors. She resets that poem as a critical woman's voice, watching the man who cannot find the courage to ignore public opinion. *Kokin waka shū* (commanded in 905 or 906, compiled in 914 or 920?) XIII(Love III):659. In *ShinNKBT* 5 (1995):202. Trans. by Helen Craig McCullough, *Kokin Wakashū: The First Imperial Anthology of Japanese Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), p. 147.

omoedomo
hito me tsutsumi no
takakereba
kawa to minagara
e koso watarane

"Burning with passion,
 I shrink before the high dike
 of other men's eyes.
 My heart is set on the stream,
 but how am I to reach it?"

Agendas between the writer and her readers

The agenda of the second set of strategies, meant for the *nikki's* readers, is to secure in the reader's mind at least a sympathetic and forgiving attitude towards Izumi/Onna, if not a romantic interest in the reader's own heart. The elements of this second set include

- [1] the writer indirectly advancing claims of innocence regarding rumors and conclusions about her romantic activity;
- [2] the writer displacing responsibility for the affair from Izumi/Onna to Sochi no Miya and his wet nurse Jijū no Menoto; and,
- [3] the writer skillfully controlling tone and narrative discourse in order to portray Onna as warm, deserving, reasonable, and in dire straits.

One overall characteristic of these strategies different from the first is their *covert* nature—all operate under the cover of a narrative that distracts the reader away from pondering them at length. They are meant to encourage readerly conclusions that seem reasonable and generated by the *reader* not the writer. If one follows the intended conclusions of the narrative, Onna is not someone who is particularly active sexually; on the contrary, most of the time she is alone in her quarters. Further, it is not Onna but Sochi no Miya and his ally Jijū no Menoto who conceive the idea of placing Onna in Sochi no Miya's mansion. By Onna's apparently critical and anxious judgment, this should have been done more discreetly because Onna appears in the text as a) deeply distressed that Sochi no Miya's wife Kita no Kata leaves in anger, and b) innocent to any planning that might have caused this scandalous exit.

The reason this set of strategies possesses this covert characteristic while the first set does not is simply that the writer has no special motive to conceal from us the various strategies in Onna's romance with Sochi no Miya. However if one looks at Onna's words and actions through the eyes of Sochi no Miya, one can see that from *his* vantage point much of what she does is obscured by her discourse with him. Now, as targets of her strategy ourselves, *we* are in a similar position. In trying to win us to her way of seeing herself, Izumi as writer does have reason to conceal her methods.

The primary technique of this set of seductions is the writer's attempt to capture control over a damaging discourse about her by first neutralizing opposing, competing voices and then offering in

an appealing package an attractive substitute for those voices. For seduction to be effective the seductive voice must override that of others since one can only be “led aside” when the resisting voice of one’s original intention fails in the presence of that of the seducer. Clearly one will make this switch only if the seducer’s voice (and offer) is for whatever reason sufficiently attractive.

The voices that the writer wishes to neutralize would belong to individuals of Izumi’s time who were passing on rumors and criticisms regarding Izumi’s sexual promiscuity (specifically indiscreet adultery), inappropriate sexual behavior (establishing romantic liaisons with imperial figures beyond the social norm), and the affronts caused to Sochi no Miya’s officially recognized wife, Kita no Kata. It is impossible to judge from the text itself whether these voices were few or many in number. Perhaps at the time only Kita no Kata’s family was genuinely displeased. Perhaps Izumi Shikibu wrote the story for the more straight-laced Shōshi as an elaboration of her behavior prior to her membership in Shōshi’s salon. What we can say though is that Izumi was the object of unpleasant rumor and that the marks of a keen awareness of criticism can be seen across the text.

The writer attempts to neutralize these voices first by the authoritative third-person pose of the narration most of the time (not an alien narrative mode for Heian *nikki*, but never sustained throughout the narrative in the way it is in this text). In this way, the contents of the *nikki* are garbed in a claim of privileged knowledge since the speaker of a story makes such a claim through the very act of narrating. If the narrative is meant to be received as a *monogatari*, this truth claim is provisional; in other words, it becomes a story that need be regarded as “truthful” only within the terms of itself. However, in the case of a *nikki* the narrative proposes an empirical reality that is meant to be received as true historical event and to which the narrative refers with integrity. (*Izumi Shikibu nikki* has been considered both *monogatari* and *nikki*—perhaps indicating that the text is not entirely convincing as founded credibly and conscientiously on external empirical events.) By becoming the narrator, the writer moves to place her voice authoritatively first before individuals who are circulating rumors about her. (This by the way

is a rivalrous position.) As narrator she is the individual most proximate to the events that have become the gossip of the moment. Part of the shifting point of view that Miner has observed may be a result of the need to narrate from this proximate and privileged position.³⁸

At the same time, the narrator offers us an attractive and reasonable alternative voice. The prose of this *nikki* differs considerably from that of the other three major Heian *nikki*—*Kagerō nikki*, *Murasaki Shikibu nikki*, and *Sarashina nikki*. None of these have the same agenda as *Izumi Shikibu nikki*. *Kagerō nikki* in particular with its sometimes immoderate, could-care-less-what-you-think prose, comes across as seeming to find it less crucial to capture the reader's heart. In contrast, the seamless, logical procession of the narrative in *Izumi Shikibu nikki* enhances its credibility (ease of consumption), while its warmth and disarmingly vulnerable pose adds to its accessibility and attractiveness. (This reader-oriented, soothing tone stands in amusing contrast to the tone of the poems Onna sends off to Sochi no Miya, poems often meant to *increase* his anxiety.) Second, Izumi appeals to an ethical prescription of *amae* where one's weakness requests the sympathy and support of another, and where by taking a position of need one grants to another the important satisfaction of being needed. Izumi's Onna is burdened with the tragedy of two lovers' deaths, and the writer has positioned the time frame of the narrative almost exactly between these two events. We know of this Onna (when we read her as Izumi Shikibu) that she has lost father, husband, and lover in one series of unfortunate events and will lose Sochi no Miya, of whom she speaks so passionately, not long after the period described in the *nikki*. In this way, the narrator—the author really—seeks a relationship of *amae* with the reader.

Nevertheless, the *nikki* would not be a very interesting literary work if its writer were not also displaying her considerable rhetorical and poetic skill. Onna is not just someone who has met hard times, she is a poet who spars with highly placed imperial figures and makes their poems look lame in comparison. Sometimes *Izumi Shikibu nikki* strikes me as a showcase of the writer's remarkable capacity to, as Murasaki Shikibu put it, “toss off letters with

³⁸ Earl Miner, *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 194–97.

ease.’³⁹ In the terms of an elite society which placed emphasis on literary skill for its women, Onna (Izumi) offers herself as a desirable correspondent.

The writer also ensures that we are aware of Onna as the object of many men’s desire, including the impressive fact that she has enjoyed ardent, excessive endorsement from two imperial princes. The structure of mimetic desire works not only for Sochi no Miya regarding Onna but for us where Onna refers back to Izumi.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this essay I have looked at *Izumi Shikibu nikki* as notable in its rhetorical achievements as well as rich in what it suggests about the dynamics of romance, rivalry and seduction. In choosing to read *Izumi Shikibu nikki* (and the love therein) as a strategic effort (though it nevertheless remains first a very beautiful record of deeply felt passion), I focused on rhetorical skill and some mechanisms of seduction. One of the interests of this text is without a doubt located there, at the intersection of language and desire, where they formulate each other and set the course of a romance.

I have been primarily interested in the complexity of the text’s structure—how it addresses various needs and proceeds with different agendas simultaneously, especially how it strategically engages the reader with the purpose of repairing the writer’s social position. However, a consideration of these complexities is linked to interesting extra-textual issues. Among these is the important role of a third mediating element to cause or intensify desire, as well as to affect or at least confirm possession (including a notion of romantic “rights.”) When looking at the conflictual or strategic aspects of romance, triangular formations, at least in *Izumi Shikibu nikki*, abound. In addition to these considerations having to do with romantic meaning that derives from (essentially rivalrous) mediations, I have touched on considerations which are more nearly philosophical about representation and meaning suggested by *Izumi Shikibu nikki* where the gap between the lovers’ hearts is the result of an unrevealable “secret,” and is also the enabling link that makes

³⁹ Bowring, 131; *ShinpenNKBZ* 26:201.

desire (and so seduction) possible. This, I would suggest, is a crucial aspect not only of romantic attraction, but of the production of meaning itself. What has not been discussed is another entirely different definition of love that the text also embodies very nicely, namely, uncommonly fine-tuned mutual understanding that assimilates emotional conflict through the careful exchange of words. *Izumi Shikibu nikki* indeed suggests that Ki no Tsurayuki was correct when he wrote that poetry “brings harmony to [*yawarage*, “softens” “eases”] the relationship between men and women.”⁴⁰ Just as *Izumi Shikibu nikki* blends a positive narrative of dreams achieved with a counter-text of the brevity of love and the difficulties that ensued, it also blends quite skillfully a view of love as shifting powers within rules of conflict and compromise with a view of love as the flow of heart and body in passionate tandem. On these topics, the writer of *Izumi Shikibu nikki* speaks better than most.

⁴⁰ McCullough, *Kokin Wakashū*, p. 3; *ShinNKBT* 5:4.