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Trans-gender Themes in Japanese Literature From the Medieval to Meiji Eras

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Trans-Gender Themes in Japanese Literature from the Medieval to Meiji Eras

A Thesis Presented

by

Jessica Riggan

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

TRANS-GENDER THEMES IN JAPANESE LITERATURE FROM THE MEDIEVAL
TO MEIJI ERAS

MAY 2017

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The purpose of this thesis is to analyze various texts from Japanese literary history and extract the instances of trans-gender performances from those texts. I define “trans-gender” behaviors as actions that are culturally expected of the gender opposite that of the gender assigned to the performer at birth.

In each text, I identify which character or characters perform actions that go against the expectations of the gender they were assigned at birth. I analyze how their performance is portrayed within the narrative, as well as how other characters in the narrative react to their performance. In this way, nuances are extracted that relate to the trope of gender play in these four historical eras.

The literary representations of this trans-gender play respond to the needs and values systems of the time periods within which they exist. In the Heian period, this play is caused by external forces and ends due to sexual acts. In the Muromachi period, the character chooses to perform, but eventually revokes the world.

By the Edo period, performance is more widely accepted and culturally ingrained because of the availability of spaces where trans-gender performance is allowed. The performers in Edo period literature usually perform in the context of receiving privileges or being allowed into gendered spaces. Finally, In the Meiji period, heteronormative gender roles are strictly enforced, and the literature reflects negative reactions to non-normative behavior. Trans-gender performers in the Meiji period are often punished in the narratives they inhabit.

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CHAPTER I

DEFINING TRANS-GENDER

In Japan, there is an ongoing discussion concerning the definition of "transgender." According to Takeuchi Asuka at Ryukoku University, there are three categories of transgender identities within a greater umbrella of transgender identities: transsexual, transgender, and transvestite. Transvestite, of course, refers to those who dress in clothing that is not expected of the gender assigned to them at birth. Transgender refers to those individuals who might identify as a gender other than the one they are assigned at birth, but they may also retain identification with the gender assigned at birth, as well. Finally, the term transsexual implies that the individual completely identifies with a gender separate from the one they were assigned at birth. It also implies severe gender dysphoria that can only be assuaged through surgery.¹

Thus, performing as a gender separate from the gender one was assigned at birth need not necessarily be caused by dysphoria, in the Japanese context. Alongside Takeuchi, Mark McLelland argues that transvestitism and other forms of performance *without dysphoria* are valid transgender categories. For McLelland, even *onnagata*, female role-actors who became popularized in the Tokugawa period, are valid examples of transgender expression.²

¹ Takeuchi Asuka, "What the Medicalization of Transgender Did: A Study on the Birth of Center-Periphery Structure in the Transgender Community," *Shakaigaku: Shakai Fukushigaku* (2007): 2-11.

² Mark McLelland, "Living More 'Like Oneself': Transgender Identities and Sexualities in Japan," *Journal of Bisexuality* Vol. 3 (2003): 205-206.

Western scholars, as well, discuss the issue of transgender identity and what defines transgender. In her essay describing the history of the term, Cristin Williams argues that the term “transgender” has been used historically to refer to a multitude of behaviors that depart from the normative expectations of the gender an individual is assigned at birth. She argues that, since at least the 1970s, the word “transgender” has been used to identify “transsexuals, cross-dressers, and other gender-variant people.”³

Williams’ argument for a varied definition of the term “transgender” makes mention of the concept of including various forms of gender nonconformity. Furthermore, there is a long history of scholars who look at gender, not only in terms of birth sex, but also as a matter of the actions performed by the individual. Among many scholars of gender theory, Judith Butler is renowned for her studies in feminist theory and gender identity, and she describes gender as performative. She argues that gender is expressed through the repetition of social performances that are understood as being “characteristic” of one’s gender. For instance, wearing women’s clothing would be an expression of feminine performativity. People who observe these gendered actions attribute femininity or masculinity to the actor, and react accordingly.⁴

This concept, though, can be confusing to a Western layman, who may understand transgender as a concrete and non-shifting identity. A. Finn Enke, in their discussion of transgender identity and how it shifts, explains that the term itself carries certain connotations and does not on its own encompass a vast group of identities. Enke also discusses how many individuals are taught that transgender identity must be

³ Cristin Williams, “Transgender” in “Keywords,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* vol. 1 (2014): 232-234.

⁴ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* vol. 40 (1988): 519-528.

accompanied by dysphoria, a discomfort with the gender an individual was assigned at birth.⁵

Furthermore, the creation of a “trans umbrella” has been problematized in scholarly work. T. Benjamin Singer argues in the *Transgender Studies Quarterly* that a trans umbrella that encompasses all gender nonconformity runs the risk of erasing, for instance, the identities of those individuals who do not identify with the term “transgender.”⁶

S. P. F. Dale discusses a recently emerging term in Japan that attempts to circumvent the limitations of the term “transgender.” She describes the term *x-jendā* as a method of escaping the implications of “transgender” identity, particularly those implications that emerged following the recognition of Gender Identity Disorder. To escape this medicalization, *x-jendā* was developed by the Japanese LGBT community, the online community in particular. *X-jendā*, similarly to transgender, holds a multitude of connotations based on which individuals use it for what purposes. For instance, a person who does not identify with either side of the binary spectrum may use *x-jendā* to refer to themselves. *X-jendā* is a method of individualization and rejection of preceding terminology, which may not encompass nuance.⁷

Therefore, rather than utilizing the loaded term “transgender” and presuming a distinct identity upon the characters I analyze, I too intend to utilize a terminology that does not necessarily invoke the images associated with “transgender” alone. I shall from

⁵ A. Finn Enke, “Translation” in “Keywords,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* vol. 1 (2014): 241-244.

⁶ T. Benjamin Singer, “Trans Umbrella” in “Keywords,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* vol. 1 (2014): 259-261.

⁷ S. P. F. Dale, “X-jendā” in “Keywords,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* vol. 1 (2014): 270-272.

here on use the term "trans-gender" when referring to nonconformity in the context of this thesis. Building from McLelland, Butler, Williams, and others, I craft trans-gender as a term that encompasses non-conforming behaviors without trapping the “performers” within a transgender identity which they may not truly identify with.

To be more specific, I use trans-gender to imply a number of available behaviors that indicate gender nonconformity. Rather than argue that any individual in my argument “identifies” as transgender, I argue that the behaviors presented in the examples I use do not conform to the gender binary, and these behaviors are trans-gender in that they represent a departure from the expectations of the gender the individual was assigned at birth.

Why does it matter that there is room for gender performance to shift? In McLelland's article on transgender history titled “Living More ‘Like Oneself’: Transgender Identities and Sexualities in Japan,” he argues that Edo period *onnagata* are among the oldest and most “conspicuous” examples of transgender performance in Japan.⁸ Without employing the same terminology of “transgender” used by McLelland, it is indeed true that the fame of *onnagata* makes them recognizable as trans-gender performers to a wider audience. The Edo period, however, is not the first instance of trans-gender behavior in Japan. McLelland mentions “gender malleability” as a common theme throughout Japanese history, and there are multiple examples of trans-gender performance as far back as the Heian period, in both the world of reality, with regards to crossdressing entertainers like *shirabyoshi*, and the world of fiction.⁹

⁸ McLelland, “Living More ‘Like Oneself,’” 205-206

⁹ Ibid.

The point of this thesis is to analyze trans-gender themes in Japanese literature, starting with the Heian period and ending with the tumultuous Meiji period. I argue that the use of trans-gender themes in Japanese literature has changed tremendously during that time. Specifically, I argue that from the Heian period to the Edo period, trans-gender performances gradually developed as a way for marginalized or otherwise disadvantaged individuals to gain agency. However, in the Meiji period, trans-gender behaviors served more as a device to create a sense of the performers as “other.”

In my analysis, I will use the theory of gender as performance to form the foundation of my arguments. I will indicate which actions are indicative of trans-gender performance, focusing on how the characters “oppose” the gender that they were assigned at birth. In doing so, I will show that the history of trans-gender behavior in the literature I have chosen is deeply tied to the concept of gender as performative.

Chapter two of this thesis deals with the Heian period. In the Heian period, gender play was often used as a “catalyst” that caused complications in the lives of the characters. While these role-playing characters were not themselves villains, their behavior is the root cause of much grief. For instance, in both *Torikaebaya monogatari*, or *The Changelings*, and *Ariake no wakare*, or *Partings at Dawn*, the texts make multiple references to the elegance and refinement of the trans-gender performers. The trans-gender behaviors themselves are regarded as having been caused by supernatural or other external forces, as well as the will of the aristocratic or imperial family, and without any agency on the part of the performer. While the performer may flourish in the gender role they have been reassigned into, the behavior also causes problems that arise from the struggle between one’s natural body and their gender performance. However, it is having

to relinquish the trans-gender persona that causes the characters the most grief in the end. This is closely tied to a loss of power caused by a return to the gender assigned at birth, particularly in the case of women performing as men.

In Chapter three, I discuss the Muromachi period, which ranged from approximately 1333 to 1568. By the Muromachi period, the representation of trans-gender performance shifts. In *Shinkurōdo monogatari*, or *Tales of the New Chamberlain*, the character's trans-gender performance is self-motivated, as she expresses a desire to be a man rather than live as a woman. Thus, we see a shift to a character with more agency in deciding their performance. Similarly to the Heian period, this performance causes much grief and conflict, particularly between her gender play and her real body, which she cannot escape. However, her position as a man makes her more powerful. Of course, she does not have complete agency, though, and in the end, her performance hurts and disturbs those around her. Moreover, the story also maintains a stronger Buddhist influence than preceding works.

Chapter four deals with the Edo period, which began in 1603 and ended in 1868. In the Edo period, both men and women begin performing more frequently in gender play, as far as literature goes. In fact, half of trans-gender performers in the literature I will analyze are men, in the form of a category of male called *wakashu*. The main works of literature used for this chapter are *The Life of an Amorous Woman* and *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, works by Ihara Saikaku. The performances within, unlike those of their medieval predecessors, do not cause conflict between gender representation and actual body. In fact, to an extent, the actual body is made more attractive by the presence of gender play, and vice versa. The gender players also possess far more power than that

of their predecessors, using their manipulation of gender to meet their own ends. There is also little indication that the performance causes pain for the actor or those around him or her, unless they are using the performance to be manipulative.

Finally, Chapter five deals with the Meiji period. In the Meiji period, a dramatic change occurs. After Japan opens its harbors to foreign influence and begins the modernization process, trans-gender play and other forms of gender or sexual deviance meet strong resistance. Literature at this time begins to reflect this movement towards a more conservative morality. In Meiji literature, men were not allowed to be feminine and women were not allowed to be masculine without some form of recompense. In the rare case that there was a trans-gender performer in Meiji literature, they would suffer for their sins, meeting with a death or other unfortunate end that was usually celebrated. The text I will use to illuminate this shift is *Botchan* by Natsume Soseki.

Each chapter of this thesis will include relevant background information and references to supplementary literature. Using outside sources, I will highlight the cultural and historical backgrounds for each text, giving context to my arguments. Moreover, I will use Butler's theory of gender performance to provide a context by which trans-gender behavior can be understood. Not only is Butler's argument useful in identifying who the trans-gender players are, it can also help provide an understanding of the reactions to these trans-gender behaviors. Moreover, Butler's arguments compel me to use the term "trans-gender performer" outside of the context of theater. If gender is performative, after all, then the "theater" is a matter of the world itself, and the trans-gender characters are the actors. How well they perform their role, and how it affects them, is a matter of the time period in which they exist.

CHAPTER II

HEIAN EXPRESSIONS OF GENDER PERFORMANCE

As stated in the introduction, the emergence of *onnagata* in the Edo period is often the earliest or only example of premodern Japanese trans-gender performance provided by theorists.¹⁰ However, this does narrower focus elides earlier precedents for trans-gender behavior in Japanese literature. In her discussion of *asobi* dancers in the Heian period, Terry Kawashima provides the example of *shirabyoshi*, female dancers who, like *onnagata* in the later Edo period, were “associated with entertainment and prostitution.” Beyond that, they were also trans-gender performers, dressing in men’s clothing just as *onnagata* dressed in women’s clothing for their own profit.¹¹ In this sense, *shirabyoshi* appear as “female-to-male” predecessors of *onnagata*, proving the existence of trans-gender performance long before Kabuki plays were performed in Edo.

Where, then, does trans-gender performance figure into Heian literature? In the Edo period, there are multiple examples of *onnagata* in the popular literature. Likewise, there are famous examples of *shirabyoshi* in literature. Particularly famous is the story of Gio from *Heike monogatari*, a highly talented dancer who entranced, for a time, the military autocrat Taira no Kiyomori.¹²

¹⁰ McLelland, “Living More ‘Like Oneself,’” 205-206.

¹¹ Terry Kawashima, *Writing Margins: The Textual Construction of Gender in Heian and Kamakura Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center 2001), 28-29.

¹² Burton Watson and Haruo Shirane, *Tales of the Heike* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 16-25.

However, *Heike monogatari* was not written and compiled until long after the end of the Heian period, as it is impossible for the text to exist prior to the events it immortalizes. That is not to say, though, that there are not examples of trans-gender performance in Heian literature at all. The Heian period itself lasted from 794 to 1185 A.D., during which a vast literature was written. One must simply look outside the scope of performance as a career to find concrete examples of trans-gender behavior.

Before one can argue what it means to perform trans-gender behaviors, though, it is important to understand the gender roles of the courtiers in the Heian period. There were rigid gender roles in place that dictated where court men and women were allowed to be and what they were allowed to do. Sei Shōnagon's *Makura no Sōshi*, or *The Pillow Book* in English, provides multiple clues as to the expectations of men and women at the court. The notes provided by the translator, Meredith McKinney, help elucidate the examples Shōnagon provides.

As McKinney explains, the women at the level of the court were largely confined. They lived within “apartments” made up of sections of screens and curtains, surrounded by a veranda. The women were also, for the most part, not allowed to let themselves be seen by the men at court. The screens served a double function as quarters and partitions, concealing the image of the woman from any man who might visit her. When they were permitted to leave their chambers, for religious and festival observances, higher ranking women in particular were still required to remain concealed within carriages.¹³

¹³ Sei Shōnagon, *The Pillow Book*, trans. Meredith McKinney (Penguin Books, 2006), xiv-xv.

Men, in contrast, were granted more freedoms socially. As mentioned above, men were the ones involved in visiting women by approaching their screens. Similarly, men were able to move more freely and interact with one another openly. Furthermore, there were activities that were generally contained within the realm of men. For instance, men were the ones expected to study Chinese language and literature, while women in contrast were considered uncouth if they flaunted knowledge of Chinese.¹⁴ Archery and other physically active pursuits were also limited to men.¹⁵

Understanding the way gender roles are defined in the Heian period is essential to discovering which characters partake in the trans-gender performance that serves to violate these restrictions. It also is essential in understanding the power imbalance between men and women that is circumvented by trans-gender behavior, whether or not the actor decides for themselves to perform.

Two texts from the Heian period stand out as major examples of trans-gender performance: *Torikaebaya monogatari* and *Ariake no wakare*. The former title is translated as *The Changelings* by translator Rosette Willig, and the latter is referred to in English as *Partings at Dawn* by translator Robert Omar Khan. In neither text do the trans-gender characters act for a career. In fact, none of the characters have any choice in whether or not they engage in the performance at all.

This lack of agency is among the main points of this chapter. I argue that in Heian literature, trans-gender performance is characterized by a lack of agency and the will of

¹⁴ Shōnagon, *The Pillow Book*, xvii.

¹⁵ Rosette F. Willig, trans., *The Changelings: A Classical Japanese Court Tale* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 14-15.

other-worldly forces. I would also argue that the overall perception of trans-gender behavior in the Heian period is nuanced. While there is a great deal of anxiety caused by the necessity of trans-gender behavior, this does not exempt the performers from praise and adoration within the text. In other words, the heroes in the texts are exalted and wracked by trouble at the same time.

Moreover, I will demonstrate that the characters do not find happiness by returning to their “original” gender, either. While the characters in both texts I will analyze end up finding great fortune once they return to performing the gender they were assigned at birth, none of them are very happy with it, particularly the female characters. This is relevant to my argument in that I believe that trans-gender performance is used, partially, to contest limited social standing, a trend that will continue into the Edo period.

Beyond that, those who discover the “true” gender or biological sex of the trans-gender performers make their discoveries after forcing the characters into sexual situations. These men, as they are males, react negatively, often attempting to put an end to the performance and forcing the performers to behave in accordance with their biological sex. This highlights Butler’s theory in regards to reactions of those who encounter trans-gender behavior, or the actions of those who behave in a way not expected of the gender they were assigned at birth.

Torikaebaya monogatari, or *The Changelings*, is the first text I will analyze, and it stands as a powerful example of trans-gender performance. In my analysis of the text, I employ a linear format, pinpointing the major scenes that involve either trans-gender performance or the consequences of gender play. I will use these scenes to illuminate the argument that one: the characters have no agency in the decision to perform as trans-

gender, and two: the end of the trans-gender performance causes grief to the character born female in particular.

Troubling Children: The Siblings in Youth

In the opening sections of *The Changelings*, which was likely written in the late Heian period, readers are introduced to the Acting Major Counselor, whom the translator dubs Sadaijin in anticipation of his later rank as Minister of the Left. Two of Sadaijin's wives give birth to one beautiful child each, but his joy is cut short when the two children grow to develop peculiar behaviors. His son hides away like a woman behind curtains, and his daughter is so robust that the other courtiers take her for a boy. After waiting for years in vain for the children to grow out of their odd behaviors, Sadaijin relents and begins to raise them as the genders they present.

This text, in the *monogatari*, or tale, tradition, reveals the lack of agency that the children have in regards to their performance. Rather than say for themselves that they wish to perform a trans-gender role, they are made from a young age to perform in order to help Sadaijin save face. It is clear from the start that Sadaijin's son and daughter are going to be troublesome in regards to gender, and also clear that the children do not have much say in what happens to them.

The father's role in the children's performance is a recurring one, and appears within *Ariake no wakare* as well. In these instances, the father holds power over the children. It is his decision how they will be raised and whether they will be presented to the

court, regardless of whether the children actually identify with the genders they behave more like, or simply prefer to engage in non-normative behaviors.

The reason for the father's active role in the children's lifestyles can be likely traced to Confucian values. Confucian texts, as well as other ideas from China, entered Japan as early as the 400s. The concept of filial piety was quickly adopted on the political and social level, and obedience towards one's father was valorized. Laws centering around privileging the father were put into place by the state, and the father occupied the seat of power within the household.¹⁶

In the text, Sadaijin's daughter-turned-son, later called Chūnagon, delights in interacting with the men who visit her father away from the court. She shows a precocious ability in many of the fine arts, and "the noblemen... treated her with affection, and they became her teachers."¹⁷ At the same time, these noblemen had no clue that the child was a girl. The performative aspect of gender, in this scenario, convinces the noblemen that Sadaijin's daughter is actually a boy, because she participates in actions that are culturally understood to be masculine. They are not aware of her biological sex, and thus can only infer her gender through her actions, which are coded as male.¹⁸ It is clear from the text that both the daughter of Sadaijin and his noble contemporaries enjoy their relationship. Clearer still, though, is the fact that the daughter would never be able to have these interactions if she behaved as a girl.

¹⁶ Hiroko Sekiguchi, "The Patriarchal Family Paradigm in Ninth-Century Japan" in *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan*, ed. Dorothy Ko, JaHyun Kim Haboush, and Joan R. Piggott (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 27-32.

¹⁷ Willig, *The Changelings*, 15.

¹⁸ Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 519-528.

To prove this, one need only look at Sadaijin's son, who acts like a young girl. He is shy and easily intimidated, hiding behind screens even from his own father. Even in the company of other women, if they were unfamiliar, he "clung fast to the curtain screening him."¹⁹ Once again, the child's behavior is what informs the gender performance he is later expected to maintain, because he acts the way women are expected to act. If Sadaijin's daughter is exemplary of the way men behaved in Heian Japan, then his son's behavior depicts how young girls were expected to act in the Heian period. Concisely, they are expected to hide away, and while the Sadaijin's son-turned-daughter is comfortable with this, his daughter-turned-son is resistant.

Just these beginning passages reveal how Sadaijin's daughter feels about the expectations of womanhood. While she behaves when her father is looking, she will "promptly join the rest of the men and lark about with them," once his back is turned.²⁰ While she shows an interest in pleasing her father, at least on the surface, it is easy to see that she prefers to revel as a boy in the company of men.

The Performance: Chūnagon at Court

As the years pass, Sadaijin becomes increasingly aware of the fact that his children will not act according to normative behaviors. Because there is nothing else he feels he can do, he makes his daughter-turned-son enter court service as a man, where he would eventually earn the title of Chūnagon, or Middle Counselor. This begins a long and

¹⁹ Willig, *The Changelings*, 14-15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

complex manipulation of gender on the part of Chūnagon that is constantly challenged and threatened.

Initially, he has little problem posing as a male. His best male friend, Saishō, maintains a healthy rivalry with him comparable to that of Genji and Tō no Chūjō, the famous duo from *The Tale of Genji* who compete for everything, including women.²¹ There are only a few issues with his otherwise perfect male performance: his menstrual cycle and his forced celibacy due to his biological sex, which led to “many a forlorn lady” who longed for him at court, as well as concerns in regards to producing an heir with Yon no kimi, his cousin and wife.²²

Meanwhile, Chūnagon’s brother-turned-sister remains at home for some time. Sadaijin is afraid that if he were to present his biologically male daughter at court, his childrens’ secret would be revealed, for certainly someone would come to court his lovely daughter. However, he eventually must give in, and thanks to Chūnagon’s prestige, his daughter is installed as Naishi no Kami, head of ceremonies, and serves as the personal attendant to the Imperial Princess.

Once more, the stark differences between the lives of aristocratic male and female Heian Japanese are illustrated in the text. While Chūnagon woos the court with his talent and wanders as he pleases, Naishi no Kami stays hidden away at the Princess’s side, both of them kept chastely behind curtains even as they engaged in love affairs of their own. Chūnagon thrives as a male, and as will be explained, the imposition of female boundaries would cause him misery.

²¹ Dennis Washburn, trans., *The Tale of Genji* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2015), 36-88.

²² Willig, *The Changelings*, 24

Saishō's Meddling and the End of Gender Play

As an omen of what later comes to pass in the story, Chūnagon, the daughter-turned-son, begins to fall victim to the rigid gender roles of court life. Saishō, Chūnagon's friend and rival, after being spurned by Naishi no Kami, turns to her brother for a source of sexual comfort, and is "amazed at what he discovered," that is to say, a woman lying beside him.²³ He forces himself upon Chūnagon sexually, and as a result reveals the secret that Chūnagon tried so hard to hide.

From this point forward, he begins urging Chūnagon to begin living as a woman, and continues making sexual advances towards Chūnagon, as well. His efforts are redoubled when Chūnagon becomes pregnant with his child. Chūnagon tries to remain at court as long as he can, but it soon becomes impossible because of his condition, and Saishō eventually coerces him into retreating to a hideaway of Saishō's choosing.

Once in hiding, Chūnagon's misery at his situation becomes palpable. Saishō forces him to grow out his hair and behave like a woman, hiding away in a remote location away from the men at court with whom he had grown accustomed to interacting. At this point in the story, readers see the disintegration of male gender performance for Chūnagon. While the translation still refers to Chūnagon with male pronouns during his pregnancy and onwards, his behaviors begin to shift towards more feminine ones. Against his wishes, he is forced to perform as the feminine gender, and is regarded as female by Saishō.

²³ Willig, *The Changelings*, 72-84

Furthermore, Saishō's insistence that Chūnagon should behave "like a woman" informs the idea that there are cultural ideas about "male" and "female" behaviors. Butler argues that biological sex is tied to specific gender actions, and witnesses of trans-gender behavior will react if they know the actor's biological sex. This awareness shows in Saishō's behavior, as he attempts to "correct" the Chūnagon and make him behave the way women are expected to.²⁴

Eventually, Chūnagon runs away from Saishō, after tearfully parting with the child he bore by him. He flees to the home of the Yoshino Prince, a parallel to the devoutly Buddhist Third Prince of Genji fame, and bemoans his desire to take vows and escape the woes of the world. While this is not the first time Chūnagon has shown a desire to take vows, it seems now more than ever that he wishes to do so to escape the fate he has been forced into.

Hapless Children: The Curse of the Siblings

At a certain point in the story, readers are informed of the reason why the siblings acted so "strangely" as children. It is revealed in a dream that the Sadaijin's children were cursed by an evil spirit, which caused the children to behave in a way that would be troublesome to their father. The dream also reveals that the curse was broken thanks to the Sadaijin "having entered on the path of the Buddha and having had many prayers said."²⁵ The children are now expected to perform their "original" genders again.

²⁴ Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 519-528.

²⁵ Willig, *The Changelings*, 149.

This scene makes all the more evident the lack of agency discussed earlier in the paper. The children not only did not decide whether or not they wanted to perform trans-gender roles or not, they also had no say in their trans-gender behavior in the first place. The supernatural curse placed on them forced them to behave in the manner that they did, directing all agency to entities more powerful than they.

Furthermore, the utilization of supernatural forces to create an environment in which trans-gender behavior is necessary is not an uncommon theme in Heian literature. It occurs as well in *Ariake no wakare*. Willig, in her introduction to the translation of *The Changelings*, explains that the nature of gender non-conformity of the degree expressed in the tale was often, within the era, considered to be the result of negative karma and supernatural intervention.²⁶

Nonetheless, when Chūnagon's hiding location is discovered by Naishi no Kami, she goes to him to explain that their curse has been broken, and that they must return to the genders they were assigned at birth. At this point, they make the switch, and take on each other's titles and roles. Who was once Chūnagon is now Naishi no Kami, or the former Chūnagon, and the new woman is forced to take her brother's place at the Princess's side.

The new Naishi no Kami's misery as a woman does not end, though. The Emperor finds her to be quite beautiful, and forces her to spend the night with him. He further humiliates her by exclaiming with surprise and disgust at her lack of virginity, saying "Oh, god! What is this?"²⁷ It is important to note that the new Naishi no Kami is

²⁶ Willig, *The Changelings*, 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 195-202.

shamed for her “promiscuity” by the emperor, a man who, by grace of his title and gender alone, is permitted multiple concubines. Even once she bears a son by him, an imperial prince, he remains perplexed and disturbed by her past “romances.”

Gender Play as a Woman’s Escape

Throughout the earlier portions of the text, the daughter-turned-son Chūnagon thrives as a man. He excels in the masculine arts, and develops comfortable relationships with the other men at court, including the emperor. This is a feat that is impossible for women of the Heian period, who are expected to hide behind curtains and screens, never showing their face to men or engaging in manly activities like archery or kickball. The gender roles of the Heian period were rigid, and actions and behaviors were coded as masculine and feminine based on cultural ideas of gender.

When the former Chūnagon is forced to “become” a woman again, it brings her much suffering. She is made to hide away, reprimanded for her “deflowered” status, and forced into sexual relationships for the benefit of men. Her sudden loss of freedom vexes her, and she becomes deeply depressed.

In contrast, her brother, the former Naishi no Kami, settles fairly comfortably into the position of a man. He had already displayed behaviors that were typically male, having an affair with the Princess and eventually impregnating her, and while he is saddened that he cannot stay with her as a confidante as he did in the past, he manages his cooled relationship with her, as well as the relationship he must now pretend he always had with Yon no Kimi, with skill and grace. He is a more confident person now as

a man, in part due to his relationship to the Princess, and he easily embraces the masculine. Perhaps it is no wonder that it is easier to step into a male role, considering the benefits of a masculine gender presentation.

The stark contrast between the way the two siblings react to their reassignment to their “original” genders, I believe, paints a strong picture about the way the new Naishi no Kimi perceives the life of a woman in the Heian period. She revels in the freedoms of manhood, and when her position as a man is threatened, she struggles against the forces holding her back. Initially, she rejects the urging to embrace her womanhood, refusing to hide away even as Saishō’s baby grows within her. Her desperate fight to maintain her manhood shows her desire to avoid the confinement of feminine life.

The new Naishi no Kami also expresses a strong desire to take Buddhist vows, a common tactic used by women in Heian literature who want to escape their complicated situations. Becoming a nun would allow the character in question to leave society, but there were other advantages, as well.

The role of a nun is considered by some scholars, like Edith Sarra, to be genderless.²⁸ This is because nuns are not required to hide behind curtains, nor are they expected to maintain long, womanly hair. They are allowed to be seen, and look and act nothing like the standard Heian woman. Nuns are also expected to abstain from sex, the very act that in the end caused Chūnagon a great deal of suffering.

However, it has been argued that becoming a nun is akin to stepping into even a masculine role. A Buddhist nun cuts the hair that is so beloved on Heian women and

²⁸ Edith Sarra, *Fictions of Femininity: Literary Inventions of Gender in Japanese Court Women's Memoirs* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 36-38.

rejects sexuality, something no woman at the court had much power over. By stepping into this position of semi-masculine seclusion, the new Naishi no Kami would have been able to obtain both distance from the society that so troubled her and some sense of agency in her gender performance. Furthermore, she would gain an escape from the sexual advances that so plagued her.

Thus, I believe it can be said that the former Chūnagon's trans-gender performance, as well as her desire to maintain it, represent her dissatisfaction with the oppression of women in the Heian court. While her gender play began as a symptom of a curse, she did not magically lose her desire to avoid femininity once the curse was broken. Her brother is more able to accept his return to his "original" gender, but the former Chūnagon shares no such contentment. Rather, she is melancholy, trapped despite all of her struggling in the limited world of a Heian woman.

Partings at Dawn: Trans-gender Expression in *Ariake no wakare*

Ariake no wakare emerges as a text after *Torikaebaya monogatari*, and is considered to have taken inspiration from the earlier story.²⁹ As such, much of the story is similar to that of the previous text. However, there are also multiple differences between the stories that I will explicate within my analysis.

My argument is that *Ariake no wakare*, written in a similar fashion to *Torikaebaya monogatari*, also illuminates the Heian conventions of trans-gender

²⁹ Miller, *Partings at Dawn*, 21-22.

performance in literature. Those are: lack of agency on the part of the actor and trans-gender performance relieving otherwise rigid and oppressive gender roles.

In my analysis of *Ariake no wakare*, I will employ the same techniques I used to analyze *Torikaebaya monogatari*. Starting with the beginning of the story, I will use a linear model to appraise the text and indicate the parts that are relevant to my argument.

Divine Revelations: Reasons for Trans-gender Performance

Ariake no wakare, or *Partings at Dawn*, opens with the main character and trans-gender performer being reprimanded for not visiting one of his female lovers in a timely manner. The female lover in question composes a poem which scolds him for his neglect. She then elegantly responds to a letter he sent previously, despite her frustrations. Her response impresses him, and he thinks of her fondly.

The text begins, not with an explanation of the circumstances of the main character's childhood, but with a scene that is not unlike what we might see in *Genji monogatari* or other Heian romantic tales. To the unknowing reader, the main character, referred to mostly as Ariake in the text, is a man like any other, seemingly showing how comfortable he is in the male role. Because he is depicted initially as an adult, readers have no initial understanding that his "original" gender is actually female.

The previous story of the woman writing to Ariake makes up only the prologue before the first chapter of the first book of the text, of which there are three. Each book contains multiple chapters, each chapter, multiple sections. Book One, the main focus of my analysis, consists of seventeen chapters. The other two books focus more on the

generations after Ariake's, and are therefore less relevant to the argument. However, even in regards to the seventeen chapters of the first book, the prologue is only a very small part of a grand, tumultuous story.

In the first chapter of the tale, it is revealed that he “had never been beholden to anyone” and is not actually taking the women he courts to bed.³⁰ Instead, he seems to take a great pleasure in making women fall for him without consummating their love, and would “only go so far,” an unusual trait for an otherwise normative Heian lover.³¹ The description of Ariake's strange behavior begins a series of hints that slowly reveal Ariake's original gender.

The next hint about his biological sex is in chapter two. The text reveals that he is beautiful and charming in all respects, a figure comparable to the Shining Genji. Even the Emperor entertains thoughts of what he might do were Ariake a woman. This is not an uncommon sentiment in Heian literature. In *The Tale of Genji*, this same thought is entertained multiple times, such as in the “Broom Tree” chapter, where Genji's best friend looks at him with a sense of longing and wonders what it would be like if Genji were a woman.³² However, knowing Ariake's biological sex in retrospect lends irony and humor to the sentiment.

The reason that Ariake partakes in trans-gender performance is revealed in the same chapter, albeit in a subtle manner. Ariake's father, Sadaijin, who holds the same position as the father from *The Changelings*, had a “divine revelation” when his wife was

³⁰ Robert Omar Khan, *Ariake no Wakare: Genre, Gender and Genealogy in a Late 12th Century Monogatari* (University of British Columbia, 1998), 206-207.

³¹ Khan, *Ariake no Wakare*, 208.

³² Washburn, *The Tale of Genji*, 26.

pregnant with Ariake, and as a result, the child was raised “differently from what one would expect,” that is to say, as a male.³³

It is unclear whether the divine revelation was a dream or some other form of premonition, like an oracle, but it is clear that an intervention from supernatural forces caused Sadaijin to raise Ariake as a boy. This is similar to *The Changelings* in that otherworldly meddling caused trans-gender performance in that tale as well. However, in Ariake’s case, because Sadaijin had no male children to speak of, the revelation is seen as a blessing to an otherwise heir-less family. Rather than a curse, the trans-gender performance is the result of helpful other-worldly forces, already lending a more positive connotation to the performance in *Ariake* than in *The Changelings*. After all, it is as if the gods themselves gave Sadaijin a son, something he needed as an aristocrat, even though his child was born as a girl.

It is also clear that Ariake had no say in his upbringing as a male. While the text states that he excels in playing the *koto* in the typical men’s fashion, and he is also capable of performing other manly arts, there is no indication that his behavior as a child led to his trans-gender performance. Similarly, there is no indication in the text that he wished to be raised as a male. As in *Torikaebaya monogatari*, he is brought up as a boy due to supernatural intervention and his father’s wishes, leaving him no agency to decide whether or not to perform a trans-gender role.

Once again, the will of the father plays a large role in the way the child is raised. Although Ariake’s behavior is not caused by a curse, it was Ariake’s father who had the

³³ Khan, *Ariake no Wakare*, 212.

premonition, and therefore, it was his decision to introduce Ariake to the court as a man. Obeying the wishes of one's father shows not only the Confucian values that inform the power structure between parent and child, but also the lack of agency on the part of the child in regards to gender performance. The divine entities in charge of giving Sadaijin the premonition, as well, are in a position of power that allows, and forces, the trans-gender performance.

Flourishing Son: Ariake at Court

Despite his lack of agency in the decision to perform as trans-gender, Ariake, in a similar fashion to Chūnagon in *The Changelings*, flourishes in a way a woman at court could not. One could make the argument that he acts more like a standard Heian man than even Chūnagon, given that he is so intent on wooing women at the court.

Moreover, thanks to the intervention of supernatural forces, he is permitted even more freedom than a normal man at court. This freedom comes in the form of a “means of hiding” himself, presumably some sort of cloak of invisibility.³⁴ With his disguise, he is capable of travelling wherever he wishes, ignoring even the conventions that men must follow and spying on the romantic and intimate lives of others.

However, there are displays of femininity in his daily life. He is of a smaller stature than most men his age, due to his birth sex, and he worries that it will cause him shame and embarrassment as he grows older. More urgently, he is physically incapable of

³⁴ Khan, *Ariake no Wakare*, 212.

impregnating a woman, meaning that once again, his family is caught in a struggle to procure an heir.

At this point, the cloak of invisibility becomes important, because it allows him to see his uncle, the Sadaishō, sexually abusing his own stepdaughter. Disgusted by his behavior, Ariake bursts into a “feminine” stream of tears, sympathizing strongly with the young girl. In his fit of righteousness, Ariake steals her away from her house like a true Genji-style hero, installing her at his family home for her safety. She is already pregnant by her stepfather by this point, so Ariake both rescues her from a traumatic situation and secures an heir for his family.

The Setting Sun: The End Days of Ariake’s Gender Play

Ariake is incapable of maintaining his trans-gender performance indefinitely. Long before he is forced to stop, several omens occur that discourage him. One such omen is that, while playing the flute at a banquet held by his father, the clouds part and lightning flashes across the sky, leaving a remarkable fragrance behind. This incident is seen as an ominous omen, and the Sadaijin forcibly takes away Ariake’s flute. However, similar incidents occur several other times as Ariake plays different instruments on different occasions.

According to Khan, the translator and scholar responsible for the English translation, this is a recurring trope in Heian literature, but in this instance, it is used to indicate “the divine nature of the protagonist.”³⁵ Of course, it is dangerous for others to

³⁵ Khan, *Ariake no Wakare*, 257.

know of Ariake's connections with the divine, as it could lead to the discovery of the gender he was assigned at birth. Thus, the series of events discourages and frightens Ariake and his family.

Ariake's confusion grows as he realizes that he may be forced to give up his role as a man, and this feeling comes to a head once the Emperor discovers his "original" gender and sleeps with him. Ariake is greatly distressed and retires to his home, feeling ill. While he recovers enough to follow an imperial procession to the shrine, it is clear that he cannot continue his gender play any longer, and all at once, Ariake "dies."

Obviously, Ariake is not actually dead, but he is forced to return to performing the gender he was assigned at birth, and will henceforth be referred to as "she." He stops performing behaviors that are culturally coded as male, and starts performing feminine behaviors. The rest of the world, including his wife and the Emperor, believes the male Ariake to be dead, as orchestrated by his father, and the new Ariake takes the role of the "sister" that was mentioned but never revealed.

While it is difficult to indicate one particular catalyst that led to the "death" of Ariake's gender play, it is arguably the interference of the Emperor, who slept with her and discovered her secret. Thus, in a similar fashion to Chūnagon in *The Changelings*, Ariake was forced by the sexual desires of an imperial man to act as a woman. It is after being forced to perform as a woman sexually, by a friend or by an Emperor, that the male disguise for both characters begins to fall apart.

Once again, the trans-gender performer has no agency in deciding to end the performance, instead being forced by more powerful beings: The Emperor, her father,

and the natural and divine forces that govern her body. This lack of agency, parallel to the similar situation of *The Changelings*, indicates a trope in how trans-gender performers, particularly women performing as men, are stripped of self-governance in Heian texts.

Moreover, once more the protagonist of the story is made to give up their performance due to the reaction of the person who discovered his biological sex in the context of sexuality. The trans-gender actor is punished for his behavior, and is forced to stop thanks to the Emperor, who falls in love with the “girl” he believes Ariake to be. Butler, then, is right in describing gender as imposed by sociocultural boundaries that marginalize and punish those who do not perform in accordance with the gender they were assigned at birth.³⁶

The Aftermath: Ariake’s Return to Womanhood

Once the male Ariake “dies” and is replaced by his previously nonexistent younger sister, his father, Sadaijin, out of pity for the Emperor, sends his recently revealed daughter to court. The Emperor, upon seeing her, immediately makes her his consort, and she quickly becomes pregnant with his child. As she settles into the life of the Empress, she realizes that she will not be free to wander and mingle with the men of the court the way she did when she was a man, and becomes depressed, “listless and forlorn as she remained sunk in thought.”³⁷

³⁶ Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” 519-528.

³⁷ Khan, *Ariake no Wakare*, 313.

The text continues into the next generation and elaborates for a long time on the life of the children of Ariake and those around her. As the years pass, it seems that the pain of becoming a woman becomes no less heartrending for Ariake. During an imperial banquet, she plays the *biwa* alongside her son from her secluded chambers and finds herself preoccupied with “intensely moving thoughts of her former life” when she was a man.³⁸ There are multiple other scenarios in the text where she expresses a similar sentiment of longing for her former existence.

Just like Chūnagon in *Torikaebaya monogatari*, Ariake is disappointed in the life a Heian court woman is expected to lead. She misses and longs for the freedoms offered to men, particularly since she is no longer able to use the cloak of invisibility to wander anywhere she pleases. She wishes that she could be among the bustle of court life again, in a position of power, but as the Empress, she has to keep herself hidden away from the world, behind curtains.

The Tropes of Heian Trans-gender Performance

The masculine lives of both Chūnagon in *Torikaebaya monogatari* and Ariake in *Ariake no wakare* are complicated, and are fraught with the fear that they might be discovered. Both characters struggle to conceal their birth sex from the court. However, despite their anxiety, they both successfully perform as men. They are exalted by their peers and longed for by the women at the court, and both are capable of performing the masculine arts with a finesse that surpasses any other court man.

³⁸ Khan, *Ariake no Wakare*, 399.

It is not uncommon, in Heian literature, for the male protagonist to far surpass other men of his time. Genji, of course, is a “shining” example of a man who dazzles the court with his seemingly inhuman courtly skills and beauty. That the characters from *Torikaebaya monogatari* and *Ariake no wakare* were born female shows the performative nature of gender. The birth sex of the characters is irrelevant in that it does not affect their abilities to perform masculine behaviors and be seen by the public as male.³⁹

More importantly, the characters themselves prefer their masculine performance and the advantages they enjoy due to their performance, such as interacting with other men at the court freely. When they are forced to return to performing as women, neither Chūnagon nor Ariake can make peace with it. Both characters sink into melancholy once they are forced to return to the confinements of womanhood, where they can only long for the days where they were free to do as they pleased, as men.

This is one of the many common conventions between the two texts. Despite the stress placed on the characters as they performed, and the fears that emerged as they fought being discovered, the pain does not compare at all to the suffering of being a woman once more. As women, it is all they can do to sit behind their screens and long for times long past.

Another common convention, as already discussed, is the lack of agency the characters had in regards to beginning and ending their trans-gender performance. Both characters began their performance due to forces beyond their control, and were made to

³⁹ Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” 519- 527.

end their performances after being forced to sleep with men. At no point were the characters free to decide whether or not they wanted to perform trans-gender.

Moreover, they are forced to quit performing as trans-gender due to the cultural imposition of gender roles. Once their biological sex is discovered, those who forced the revelations, who are steeped in the cultural presumptions of how men and women are “supposed” to act, exert pressure on the actors to behave according to male and female roles. This informs the existence of culturally understood gender roles that impose restrictions upon the trans-gender performers.

This, I believe, marks the representation of trans-gender performance in the Heian period. The characters who must perform trans-gender have no say in the matter, and despite the suffering they must endure while performing, they excel at playing the role given to them. Beyond that, the return to the gender assigned at birth leaves the characters full of longing and despair for their former lives.

These tropes extend themselves into later periods of Japanese history, but are shifted and changed as newer literary generations appropriate them. In the following chapter, I will explain how trans-gender themes changed in the medieval period through the text *Shinkurōdo monogatari*.

CHAPTER III

MUROMACHI TRANS-GENDER PERFORMANCE

After the Heian period, the influence of the court began to wane, and as the world around them changed, the post-Heian authors wrote nostalgic works that recalled the aristocratic lifestyle of the glory days of court. Particularly during the Kamakura Period, but even moving forward, literary works contained allusions to and conventions of Heian literature. However, that is not to imply that literature and literary conventions simply remained the same.

Of course, shifts in culture contributed to changes in literary style. One very important change was the wider proliferation of Buddhism. While Buddhism had been in Japan for centuries prior to even the Heian period, it was during the Kamakura period and following eras that social discord led to the innovation of new Buddhist ways of thought. The spread and popularization of Buddhist ideals led to a new literary focus on Buddhism.⁴⁰

By the Muromachi period, which lasted from approximately 1333 to 1568 A.D., literary styles had changed greatly from the court literature of the Heian period, but mementos of past literature still lingered. For instance, a great many of the *nō* theater works from the Muromachi period are either based on or hold allusions to older works of literature. An example of this is seen in *Lady Aoi*, a *nō* play edited by Zeami, is based on

⁴⁰ Haruo Shirane, *Traditional Japanese Literature: An Anthology, Beginnings to 1600* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 2007), 568-572.

the story of Aoi from *Genji monogatari*. However, elements of the original story were revised to fit the needs of the *nō* author. For example, the play contains a much stronger Buddhist tone than the original work.⁴¹

I believe that this shift, translates into the way trans-gender performance is portrayed in Muromachi literature. The character involved in the performance, for instance, performs for her own desires, not because she is told to or forced by supernatural powers. Similarly to the Heian period, the character's performance does not continue indefinitely, and the performance itself causes a great deal of trouble for those around, but unlike Ariake and Chunagon, the character in this Muromachi text is able to find peace after forfeiting her role as a man. Even prior to the end of the character's performance, it seems that she is comfortable switching between male and female roles.

At the same time, the Buddhist nature of the text is much stronger than that of the Heian period texts. While both the protagonists of *Torikaebaya monogatari* and *Ariake no wakare* express the desire to take vows throughout their respective texts, neither character actually becomes a nun. In contrast, the protagonist of the following text becomes a nun after all the trouble she causes during her trans-gender performance, and she is rewarded greatly for it.

Also, as in the Heian texts, one can see the reactions to trans-gender performance within the text. As before, there are culturally understood boundaries that separate masculine and feminine behavior. These boundaries are resisted by the protagonist, and the reactions to the resistance are generally negative. Thus, in this text as well, one can

⁴¹ Shirane, *Traditional Japanese Literature*, 925-936.

see support—as I will show later—for Butler’s theory about gender identity and how society imposes gender roles.⁴²

The text in question is called *Shinkurōdo monogatari*, which can be roughly translated as *Tale of the New Chamberlain*. Only in recent years was this story translated into modern Japanese, and it stands as an exemplar of trans-gender themes in Muromachi literature. In my analysis of the text, just as before, I will use the story itself to illuminate the literary conventions mentioned above.

Shinkurōdo monogatari as a Tale

Shinkurōdo monogatari was originally written in *emaki* format, or as picture scrolls. Like many texts of the premodern period, exact dates are difficult to pinpoint, but scholars generally agree that it is a Muromachi text.⁴³ The modern Japanese version of the text maintains the original presentation of the tale by providing high-quality scans of each page of text and picture, alongside the modern translation. As is the convention of tales from the medieval period, the characters are referred to by their rank or role rather than their real name. Sannokimi, known by her rank within the family structure is the third daughter of three girls. Her older sisters are Nakanokimi and Ōigimi, and her brother is the Kurōdo, or Chamberlain of Archives.⁴⁴

⁴² Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” 519-528.

⁴³ Keiko Eguchi et al., *A Young Girl’s Revolution in the Muromachi Period: The World of the Picture Scroll “Shinkurōdo monogatari”* (Tōkyō: Kasama Shoin, 2014), 8-9.

⁴⁴ “Nakanokimi” and “Ōigimi” refer to the second oldest and oldest daughter of three daughters, respectively. These are also the names of two sisters in *Genji monogatari*. It is later revealed that they have a third, illegitimate half-sister.

Their father, the Shodaibu, characterized as permissive. From the very beginning of the story, he claims that the most important thing for a child to do is to “follow what their heart desires.”⁴⁵ He allows his eldest daughter, Ōigimi, to take the tonsure and become a nun. This decision prevents him from obtaining merit through marrying his daughter into a higher-ranking family. Despite that, he acquiesces to her wishes.

At this point in the text, the Buddhist influence already becomes clear. Ōigimi’s decision to become a nun is preceded by her musings on the transience of life, a theme common to Buddhist-inspired texts, as well as texts in the Heian period. Rather than enter the court and marry into a good family, she decides that her days would be best spent in Buddhist devotions. Later in the text, it becomes clear that her decision is valorized by the narrative.

The Shodaibu soon after allows his middle daughter, Nakanokimi, to enter court service as per the Emperor’s request. Thenceforth, she is referred to as her new rank, Harima no Naishi. While this action was intended to appease the will of the Emperor, it also provides the family with closer contact to the court. The Shodaibu’s heightened merit in regards to his daughter’s service enables Sannokimi to act on her own.

Following the success of Harima no Naishi, Sannokimi’s parents express their wish that she enter court service as well. However, she rejects the idea with disgust. Her true desire is to enter court service as a man. While her father rejects the idea at first, he slowly comes to terms with his daughter’s boyish behavior and gives in, once again

⁴⁵ Eguchi et al., *A Young Girl’s Revolution in the Muromachi Period*, 17.

allowing his child to do what she pleases. Thus, Sannokimi wears men's clothing and enters the court service under the title "Shinkurōdo."

It becomes clear from Sannokimi's actions that she already has much more agency than Ariake or Chūnagon. She is capable of deciding on her own that she wants to partake in trans-gender performance, and does so with very little interference from her father. While Ariake and Chūnagon are forced to perform trans-gender roles by external actors, Sannokimi's performance comes from her own desires, and shows her sense of agency in comparison to the characters from earlier texts.

Furthermore, it is important to note Sannokimi's father's role in her gender performance. In the Heian period texts, the father was one of two catalysts, the other being divine powers, that forced gender play on the part of the performer. In *Shinkurōdo monogatari*, there is a major shift on this theme, showing instead a permissive father who allows his daughter to do as she pleases. Unlike the Sadaijin of *Torikaebaya monogatari*, who makes his children enter court service at times of his choosing, the Shodaibu recognizes his daughters' desires and allows them to enter court service, or not, on their own terms. Thus, we see a reversal. Rather than Sannokimi obeying the laws of filial piety and acquiescing to her father's wishes, the Shodaibu obeys the whims of his children.

Life as a Man: Sannokimi's Decision to Play Transgender

The brief introduction to *Shinkurōdo monogatari* postulates that Sannokimi's decision to enter court service as a man stems from her distaste for womanly limitations. According to the text, a woman during the medieval period of Japan was generally

limited to either serving as a lady-in-waiting or becoming a Buddhist ascetic.⁴⁶

Sannokimi has no desire for either option, or a woman's lot in general. Similarly to Ariake and Chunagon, she finds the idea of being forced behind a curtain a miserable idea, and takes measures to defend herself from that life.

The main story clearly shows Sannokimi's displeasure with the limitations of a noble woman's "choices." During the scene in which Ōigimi's hair is being shaved in preparation for becoming a nun, Sannokimi reacts with disgust at her sister's bald pate. She complains that she cannot bear to look at her sister's lack of hair, and berates her, telling her that she will "become a beggar at this rate."⁴⁷

Sannokimi shows a similar displeasure when her parents ask her to go into service at the court. The idea of becoming a lady-in-waiting disturbs her, and she complains that the task would be boring. She is particularly unhappy when her parents discuss the idea of her becoming an attendant to her sister Harima no Naishi.

She explains to her family that serving under her sister would embitter her, and she would rather be allowed to serve the Emperor as a man.⁴⁸ She begins to wear male clothing and acts the way a man is expected to act. This, in turn, lead to her being perceived as a man at court, because of the performative nature of gender and the cultural expectations of Muromachi Japan. Because of this trans-gender performance on the part of the Shinkurōdo, I will assign male pronouns and designations to the character.

⁴⁶ Eguchi et al., *A Young Girl's Revolution in the Muromachi Period*, 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

The Troubles of Manhood: The Feminine within the Masculine

At the point when Sannokimi is allowed to enter the court as a man by her father, she is still young, around thirteen years old, so she is able to pass easily as a young boy. At the same time, her brother, the older Kurōdo, enters a marriage and becomes entirely devoted to his wife. He begins to neglect his duties at the court, so his sister-turned-brother, the Shinkurōdo, takes his place by the Emperor's side.

The Emperor, for his part, keeps the Shinkurōdo close to his side. Eventually, the Emperor, "drunk on some sort of alcohol or other," discovers the Shinkurōdo's secret.⁴⁹ Regardless of the homoerotic implications of the passage, it is clear that he finds the Shinkurōdo all the more intriguing once he realizes that he is actually a woman. He grows to adore the Shinkurōdo and visits him even more than Harima no Naishi, with whom he has already had a child.

Just as is the case with Ariake and Chūnagon, the Shinkurōdo's disguise is unveiled by the interference of a lustful man. Like Ariake, the Shinkurōdo earns the utter devotion of the Emperor's heart, but unlike Ariake, he takes to the affections with pleasure. The Shinkurōdo seems to love the Emperor just as much, and in this case, the desires of a man have no painful bearing on the trans-gender performer directly.

He is capable, it seems, of switching from her male exterior to her female interior at will, showing one gender to the world and another to the Emperor. While he did not wish to become a lady-in-waiting or a nun, being the Emperor's consort in secret does not bother him. Rather, he looks forward to his visits, where he plays the role of a woman

⁴⁹ Eguchi et al., *A Young Girl's Revolution in the Muromachi Period*, 44.

and gives the Emperor his affections. It is clear that he plays a woman at these moments because, when speaking to the Emperor, they talk as if he is a woman. For instance, the Emperor asks how he came to start “dressing in men’s clothes to serve,” implying that, at that moment, Shinkurōdo was a woman.⁵⁰ Because of his love for the Emperor and willingness to be his consort, it appears that neither his performance as the Shinkurōdo or as a consort brings him pain.

However, this does not mean that no one suffers by this turn of events. The Emperor’s neglect of Harima no Naishi is a catalyst that begins the major conflict of the story. Because the Emperor spends more time with the Shinkurōdo than his own consort, the people of the court start to find the situation distasteful. Everyone outside of Sannokimi’s family is unaware of the Shinkurōdo’s female body, and they find it unpleasant that the emperor spends so much of his time with a young boy.

It is relevant to note that in this case, the outcry is caused in part by the perception that the emperor is sleeping with a man. This behavior, in the eyes of the court, is unacceptable for men, and their revulsion is a negative effect of their perception of this behavior. As Butler notes, behaviors that go against the perceived gender of the actor lead to negative reactions from those who witness it.⁵¹ We see this reaction in the court, as well as from the slighted Harima no Naishi.

When Harima no Naishi eventually complains to her parents about the neglect, they give in to her complaints, telling the Shinkurōdo to refrain from serving at court for a time. It is their hope that in doing so, they will be able to prevent Shinkurōdo’s

⁵⁰ Eguchi et al., *A Young Girl’s Revolution in the Muromachi Period*, 47.

⁵¹ Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” 519-528.

inappropriate relationship with the emperor to continue. Unfortunately, the time apart only makes the Emperor long for his companion more.

The Emperor eventually grows desperate and threatens the Shinkurōdo's family, saying that he will not allow the older brother, the Kurōdo, to serve at court until the Shinkurōdo is allowed to return. The parents, in turn, are forced to allow the Shinkurōdo to serve at court again. The Emperor wastes no time and spends night after night with him. Afterwards, the Shinkurōdo's female role emerges once it is discovered that he is pregnant.

The pregnancy, perhaps, is the tipping point that eventually causes the Shinkurōdo's performance to fall apart. It certainly causes tensions between himself and his sister. The Emperor, afraid that the court will learn the Shinkurōdo's secret, asks Harima no Naishi to pretend that she is pregnant, so that he may present the new child as hers, rather than give away the truth about the Shinkurōdo's body. She begrudgingly accepts, but the scenario creates an even greater rift between her and her now-brother.

The Latter Chapters: The Masculine within the Feminine

It is after he gives birth that the Shinkurōdo begins to regret the consequences of his relationship with the Emperor. He realizes that he has caused Harima no Naishi much suffering, and feels as though he has embarrassed his family by maintaining a scandalous relationship that confuses and perturbs the people at the court. Thus he arranges a meeting with his eldest sister, Ōigimi, and confesses to her his determination to throw away his male identity and take the tonsure.

This determination appears as a complete shift from Sannokimi's younger days, when she looked at her sister becoming a nun with disgust. At this point, the Buddhist elements within *Shinkurodo Monogatari* become more prominent, as the protagonist redeems herself by taking vows and ending the performance that caused her family such suffering.

While both Ariake and Chunagon both entertained thoughts of becoming Buddhist nuns and ending their performance on their own terms, neither character actually summoned the means to do so. That Sannokimi was capable of actually taking vows shows, once again, her sense of self-determination in comparison to prior protagonists.

Near the end of the tale, there is a brief description of Sannokimi's time spent as a nun. Even at this time, she acts like a tomboy, similarly to how she behaved before she took on the role of the Shinkurōdo. People passing by her temple gossip that someone so boyish is living with nuns instead of priests, and Ōigimi reprimands her, telling her to dress appropriately lest she be mistaken for a man. Sannokimi waves the concerns away, claiming that “becoming a priest is similar to becoming a nun” and that people can “say whatever they like.” She finally mentions that rather than feeling as if she turned from a woman to a man, she feels as if she “shifted into a girl.”⁵²

This, I believe, shows Sannokimi's ability to exist as a woman in comparison to Ariake and Chunagon. While they suffer greatly as women, Sannokimi, who was capable of embracing her femininity even during her time as the Emperor's lover, seems to be

⁵² Eguchi et al., *A Young Girl's Revolution in the Muromachi Period*, 86-87.

completely comfortable with both her feminine and masculine roles. Moreover, as a nun, a position she once thought too unbearable to consider, she is at peace, and moreover well rewarded.

In the Heian period, the desire to take vows and become a nun reflected an interest in a genderless or pseudo-masculine state that eschewed sexuality. This same interest is present in *Shinkurōdo monogatari*, as Sannokimi takes vows following the birth of her child and the subsequent challenges she faces. However, she also feels a sense of femininity in her new role. There is also an interest, in this text, in using Buddhist vows to repent for trouble caused by one's actions. Thus, the usefulness of becoming a nun is twofold for Sannokimi.

Her role as a nun brings fortune to her and her family. Sannokimi and her sister are rewarded for their devotion, and the story ends with the family meeting “on the same lotus petal in the pure land” after death.⁵³ This final scene, I believe, succinctly describes the conventions of *Shinkurodo monogatari* and the Muromachi period as a whole. Although Sannokimi's trans-gender performance caused both herself and her family to struggle, it was not necessarily being a boy or being a girl in itself that troubled her or those around her. Rather, it was the futility of grappling with human relations in a transient existence, a world in which lives change in no time at all and nothing lasts, that caused suffering for everyone. In the end, she utilized the agency she had once used to become a man to submit to the Buddhist law, and helped alleviate everyone's suffering.

⁵³ Eguchi et al., *A Young Girl's Revolution in the Muromachi Period*, 88.

CHAPTER IV

TRANS-GENDER PERFORMANCE IN THE EDO PERIOD

By the end of the Muromachi period, or more specifically the Azuchi-Momoyama period, which ended in approximately 1600, Oda Nobunaga and his samurai contemporaries had succeeded in unifying Japan. The unification allowed the entire country to be ruled by the Tokugawa shogunate installed by Ieyasu. This ushered in the Edo period, which lasted from 1600 to 1868.⁵⁴

At this time, the capital of Kyoto remained the home of the Emperor, but he existed as a figurehead with cultural and ceremonial value. While the court and the imperial family did not disappear completely, their role in ruling was greatly diminished.⁵⁵

The true power lay in the hands of the Tokugawa shogunate, who set their base of operations in Edo, or modern-day Tokyo. Other cities began to flourish around Edo, and these economic centers were where the literary culture of the Tokugawa period sprouted and flourished.

On the official level, the Tokugawa period was heavily reliant on Confucian values and rigid power structures. The social hierarchy itself was dictated by the shogunate, placing the samurai at the position of most power and merchants at the

⁵⁴ Haruo Shirane, *Early Modern Japanese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 901.

⁵⁵ Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, "In Name Only: Imperial Sovereignty in Early Modern Japan," *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 17 (1991): 25-30.

position of least power. In reality, though, merchants were capable of attaining much more wealth and, as a result, consumed and influenced the print and commercial culture much more fervently than the samurai.

The preferred pastimes of many merchants of the Tokugawa Period were attending Kabuki theater and visiting the houses of prostitution. Both of these institutions were pushed to specific districts of cities at the order of the shogunate, which was attempting to curb the influence and overall presence of the theater and prostitution. This preference for the bodily entertainment of the *ukiyo*, or “floating world,” is reflected in the literature of the time, which was widely popular among the new literate merchant class. The focus in literature, in this era, shifts from the hands of the court to the hands of the common class, thanks to this emergent literacy.⁵⁶

Among the most renowned of Edo period authors is Ihara Saikaku, who was born in 1642 and died in 1693. He wrote a great number of works involving both the Kabuki theatre and the pleasure quarters. The protagonists of Saikaku’s stories were often Kabuki actors and prostitutes, and the merchants who lusted after both. Moreover, Saikaku’s literature put great power into the hands of these merchants and prostitutes, who, in some cases, were able to overpower and outwit members of the higher social strata.⁵⁷

How does this translate to the trans-gender themes in his works? First and foremost, it should be mentioned that by the time Saikaku was writing, trans-gender performances had already been normalized in the lower classes through the Kabuki

⁵⁶ Saikaku Ihara, trans. Ivan Morris, *The Life of an Amorous Woman, and Other Writings. Edited and Translated by Ivan Morris* (Norfolk: New Directions, 1963), 3-12.

⁵⁷ Saikaku Ihara, trans. Paul Gordon Schalow, *The Great Mirror of Male Love* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 1-3.

theater, which employed young males to perform female roles. This was done to circumvent the Shogunate's edicts banning female Kabuki performers, who were involved heavily in prostitution. Of course, the Shogunate continued to impose itself upon the Kabuki theater even after women were banned. The young men who played female roles, also involved in prostitution, were eventually forced to shave their pates to appear more like older men, but continually found ways to work around the edicts imposed by the Shogunate.⁵⁸

Saikaku also wrote, albeit less frequently, about female-to-male trans-gender performance. I will highlight below one text in particular that contains two examples of women partaking in trans-gender behaviors.

While the question of agency in regards to a male actor playing a female role is a little more nuanced, it is especially in the case of female-to-male performances that the actors have almost full agency. That is to say, the actors decide when to begin and end their trans-gender performance.

Beyond that, at least in the case of Edo popular literature, the performance can be used to actively benefit the performer. In the case of *wakashu*, a category of young man I will define later that includes *onnagata*, or males playing female roles on stage, their performance, both in the theatrical sense and in the sense of gender, gives rise to both their paycheck and the affections of the powerful merchant class, from whom they can gain patronage. For the female-to-male performers, the performances allow the actors to enter spaces otherwise closed to them, both physically and socially. At the same time,

⁵⁸ Donald H. Shively, "Bakufu Versus Kabuki," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* vol. 18 (1995): 326-334.

there are no negative consequences on the actor or the people the actor cares about as a direct result of their performances.

To illustrate my point, I will discuss certain sections of Saikaku's works *The Great Mirror of Male Love* and *The Life of an Amorous Woman*. I believe that the trans-gender performers in these texts illustrate my point, that trans-gender actors in Edo literature have agency and use their performance to their advantage. I will first analyze two stories in *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, then I will highlight two instances of trans-gender performance from *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, including a scene that is quite unique.

Saikaku's *Wakashu*: Male Trans-gender Play

As mentioned briefly above, *onnagata*, or female role-actors, are young men who take on the role of women in kabuki theater. *Onnagata* were also generally prostitutes. Joshua Mostow, in his analysis of *wakashu*, or young beautiful men, a category which includes *onnagata*, describes the young men as a distinct gender category that differs from adult men or women.⁵⁹ However, in describing this gender category, one must not ignore the trans-gender nature of *wakashu* and *onnagata*.

In the artistic depictions of young men that Mostow utilizes, they look almost indistinguishable from the women in the same series of paintings. Moreover, when they are depicted sleeping with men, they are invariably the ones being "penetrated." By

⁵⁹ Joshua Mostow, "The Gender of *Wakashu* and the Grammar of Desire," in *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field* ed. Joshua Mostow, Norman Bryson, and Maribeth Graybill (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 49-70.

existing as males while appearing as females on the surface and taking on the “female role” during sex, *wakashu* in general appear to be partaking in an almost constant trans-gender performance, even those *wakashu* who are not also *onnagata*.

Because of this, I would argue that, for *wakashu*, actual trans-gender performance occurs when sexuality is involved or when performing in a literal theater. To explain this, I turn back to Mostow, who provides a succinct explanation of sexuality in the Edo period. According to Mostow, sexual relations between men are not a natural part of the society, unless the relationship involves a *wakashu*. Two adult men were not likely to enter a relationship, although heterosexual adult relationships were normative.⁶⁰ The *wakashu* is supposed to enter the “female” role of a sexual relationship, as described by cultural norms. I would argue, then, that *wakashu* perform trans-gender roles during sex and sexual scenarios by entering a position that is normally only open to women.

Thus, the implication is that masculinity and femininity in the Edo period is deeply tied to what one wears, how one performs, and the ways one can have sex. Succinctly, the role of insertion is masculine, as is the appearance of, for instance, a shaved pate. Conversely, feminine clothing and hairstyles, as well as the passive sexual role, constitutes femininity.

This theory itself connects to my earlier discussions of Butler’s gender theory. For Butler, the performance itself is indicative of the actor’s gender.⁶¹ Thus, one can infer that it does not matter that *wakashu* are born male, or even that they are referred to as

⁶⁰ Mostow, “The Gender of *Wakashu* and the Grammar of Desire,” 50-52.

⁶¹ Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” 527.

male. It is their behavior that sets them apart as distinct from the average Edo male, and allows them to be considered trans-gender performers.

However, unlike the Muromachi and Heian periods, in the Edo period, there is less backlash against these trans-gender actors. That is to say, there are fewer negative reactions to the presence of trans-gender behaviors in this Edo period literature. In the Edo period, there is a cultural shift that allows certain gendered behaviors to be performed by people regardless of birth sex, provided they meet certain cultural criteria.

In analyzing Saikaku's story "The Bamboo Clapper Strikes the Hateful Number," which appears in *Nanshoku ōkagami* or *The Great Mirror of Male Love* written in 1687, I will illuminate the parts of the text that show the behaviors that set the *wakashu* apart as trans-gender actors. I will also argue that, when the *wakashu*'s sexuality is developed in the text, it is an example of employing agency to perform trans-gender to gain privileges or meet a goal.

In the beginning of "The Bamboo Clapper," the *wakashu*, here a group of *onnagata*, are on an outing with patrons and admirers to enjoy the beautiful sights of Mt. Shiroyama. As it grows late, they come upon the hut of a monk who is completely obsessed with *nanshoku*, or boy love. He lets them stay under his roof. He shows them an enchanted bamboo clapper that, when used, determine the users age by the number of claps they make. He gives them to one of the *wakashu*, who is embarrassed when they reveal that he is thirty-eight, terribly old for his profession.

This revelation and the actor's subsequent outrage deadens the mood of the room, so sake and food are brought out in an attempt to revive the spirits of the revelers. The

wakashu set to work entertaining their patrons, drinking with them and wooing them. After a while, they begin to ask for material goods as tribute to their love.

The actors are, in this scene, using their sexual capabilities as trans-gender performers to reach a desired end. Although they are not “performing” in the sense that they are *onnagata* on stage, they take on the “female” role as *wakashu* during a romantic outing to seduce their benefactors. The young men convince the merchants who are their patrons to offering them many presents, including, for one, a house. Because *wakashu* are capable of entering a position generally restricted to women and employing sexual interest to win over adult men, the young actors in the text are already using trans-gender performance to their advantage, even if they are out of costume.

At the climax of the story, the party is rudely interrupted by a rough and mean-spirited samurai. The protagonist, a particularly beautiful *onnagata* named Kichiya, is targeted by the forceful samurai, who acts harshly and foolishly in his wild desire to have Kichiya as his own. Rather than be afraid, though, Kichiya uses his position as a *wakashu* and trans-gender performer to seduce the samurai, enticing him to over-imbibe on sake until he falls into a deep sleep. He then shaves “the left side of the samurai’s face,” humiliating him and forcing him to give up his life of intimidation.⁶²

In the example stated above, the *wakashu* use their trans-gender sexuality to their advantage. The young men are showered in gifts by the patrons they have wooed, and Kichiya is able to cleverly escape the samurai hounding him by convincing him to get drunk. In both situations, the actors enter a trans-gender performance and attract adult

⁶² Saikaku, *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, 269-271.

men who would not be attracted to men their own age. Moreover, particularly in the case of Kichiya, the *wakashu* show agency in their off-stage trans-gender performances.

Kichiya employs the trans-gender performance at will to get the better of the samurai, and the young men employ their trans-gender performances at will for their own desires.

Non-Theatrical *Wakashu* in *Nanshoku ōkagami*

In other stories, too, *wakashu* are granted privileges as a result of manipulating to their trans-gender performances. As stated earlier, the position of a *wakashu* in the “woman’s role” during sex and courting, as well as their indistinguishability from women in romantic art, enables them to be understood as partaking in trans-gender performance by assuming feminine behaviors.

The story I use as an example is “A Sword His Only Memento,” which is in the same collection as “The Bamboo-Clapper.” The story begins as a first-person account written by a *wakashu* named Katsuya who, at fourteen, was taken as a lover by a certain lord. He was doted on and given numerous privileges for years, jealously coveting the lord’s attention and “enjoying the lord’s special favors.”⁶³

In his account, perhaps a diary, Katsuya makes a point of discussing his privileges in terms of his own capabilities. He claims that he is allowed to ignore people he does not like, and that he can say whatever he likes without being corrected or challenged. It is clear that his beauty as a *wakashu*, which was so remarkable that his lord stopped his carriage when they first met to greet him, is responsible for earning him his privileges.

⁶³ Saikaku, *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, 88.

Furthermore, his position as a trans-gender actor, playing the sexual role of a woman, allows him to monopolize the lord's affections and time.⁶⁴

When Katsuya turns eighteen, his lord starts ignoring him for another beautiful *wakashu*. Katsuya becomes depressed, and determines to kill himself. The day he plans to commit suicide, he is put off, and while waiting for his next opportunity, he comes across a letter from his mother. The letter, which is transcribed at the very beginning of the story, explains that his father was murdered by a man named Shingoemon. His mother, in the letter, pleads with him to avenge the death of his father.

It is clear that Katsuya suddenly endured much suffering, being abandoned by his lord and discovering the gruesome nature of his father's death. However, this does not mean that Katsuya's privileges end. The text shifts to third person, and the narrator states that on the path to avenge his father, now that he has the time to do so, Katsuya encounters a man who served the same lord named Gensuke. Gensuke is also completely taken by Katsuya, and despite his diminished status, he lavishes Katsuya with everything he can afford. He gives Katsuya his sword to aid him in slaying his father's killer, and when they lie together, "like a doting husband, he gave Katsuya most of his crude bed."

Even though Gensuke owns little by the time Katsuya encounters him, his adoration for Katsuya leads him to give what little he has left. In fact, it is clear that Katsuya, as a beautiful *wakashu*, has so much power over Gensuke that it leads Gensuke to eventually risk his life aiding Katsuya in his revenge plot. When they return to the home of their shared lord, the two are rewarded for their determination, and Gensuke is

⁶⁴ Saikaku, *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, 86-96.

rehired thanks to his dedication to Katsuya. At the very end of the story, Katsuya is rewarded by the lord and Gensuke for his behavior, not only as a samurai, but as a *wakashu*. The narrator himself claims that “young men would do well to follow Katsuya’s example in male love.”⁶⁵

Thus, the story “A Sword His Only Memento” shows the degree to which a *wakashu* can benefit from his trans-gender performance. As a man who takes the place of a female lover, a *wakashu* earns all of the boons granted to women. He gets essentially anything he wants, and even after being slighted, recovers and returns to a life of comfort. All this stems from his position as a *wakashu*, marking him as a trans-gender performer.⁶⁶

Otokogata: Women Playing Male Roles in Saikaku’s Literature

There are also instances of women performing gender play, but the circumstances involved are much different from those of the *wakashu* mentioned previously. First and foremost, it should be said that women were not allowed to perform in Kabuki theater after a Tokugawa ordinance banned them, eliminating the existence of any on-stage *otokogata*. Thus, there are no public spaces for women to perform in the theater, meaning it is not normalized in the same way. However, this does not imply that there are no cases of female trans-gender performance in Edo period literature. Much like with *wakashu*, trans-gender performance does not have to occur in the theatrical realm.

⁶⁵ Saikaku, *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, 96.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 86-96.

One such text that deals with multiple scenarios of gender play is *Kōshoku ichidai onna* or *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, written a year before *The Great Mirror of Male Love* in 1686. Within the text, two sections stand out as strong examples: “A Bonze’s Wife in a Worldly Temple” and “He Who Looked for Future Splendor.”⁶⁷ Both of these sections deserve to be looked at thoroughly to determine their significance within the argument of using gender play to one’s advantage.

The Amorous Woman

It is important to note that, in *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, the protagonist is a woman of “looser virtue” who lives, in her old age, in a remote hut. At the very beginning of the text, the protagonist is found living in a hut by two young men, who ask her to recount the tales of her sexual escapades. She agrees to their request and describes the episodes of her young life as a woman trying to find new and exciting sexual opportunities.

Within the same section as her introduction, “An Old Woman’s Hermitage,” the protagonist explains how she was interested in sex from a very early age. Because of her natural beauty, the protagonist was allowed to enter the service of a noble woman in the court. She explains that, at that time, her mind was preoccupied with thoughts of love, and she constantly received letters of affection from the men of the court.

Her amorous nature led her, at the age of twelve, to enter a scandalous affair with a low-ranking man. Her eagerness to sleep with him became the subject of gossip, and

⁶⁷ Saikaku, *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, 148-188.

once the affair was exposed, she was banished. Her lover, on the other hand, was “put to death” for daring to court a lady of such a high rank.⁶⁸

The protagonist quickly forgets about her first lover, though, and continues to have multiple affairs throughout her life. In the next section, “The Pleasures of the Maiden Dance,” she trains to become a dancing girl, and in doing so catches the attention of a sickly woman, who takes her into her home.

The woman and her husband look after the protagonist well and promise their son’s hand in marriage to her. However, she shares a bed with the couple, and soon becomes enamored with the husband. With the wife sleeping next to them, the protagonist seduces the husband and begins an illicit affair. Once she is caught, she is once again banished to her home.

It is evident from these two stories alone that the protagonist’s preoccupation with sex puts her in some unusual situations. Her desire is incorrigible and leads her to take dramatic actions. Furthermore, as discussed below, some of these situations are fraught with trans-gender behavior, both on the part of the protagonist and the part of those around her.

Beauty and the Priest: Female Infiltration of a Male Space

In the fifth section of the text, “A Bonze’s Wife in a Worldly Temple,” the protagonist devises a plan to infiltrate a temple and have her way sexually with the

⁶⁸ Saikaku, *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, 124-125.

wealthy priests within. Because she is aware of the tendencies of priests to sleep with their acolytes, she disguises herself as a young man, having even “shaved my head in the centre(sic) to look like a young man’s.”⁶⁹

This behavior, in theory, allows her to “pass” as a man in the eyes of the public and the priesthood. The shaved pate, among other traits, is a distinct trait that sets men apart from women. As mentioned before, the Tokugawa shogunate ordered *onnagata* Kabuki actors to shave the tops of their heads, making them appear more like adult men, in an attempt to make them less desirable as prostitutes.⁷⁰ This shaved pate, then, is a signifier of maleness. In other words, shaving one’s pate is what Butler might define as a male act.

While priests at the time were not allowed to sleep with women, they could train young acolytes that they were allowed to sleep with. The protagonist’s goal is not to replace the acolytes, however. Her only goal is to be allowed to slip into the temple without being questioned, so that she may sleep with the priests within. After all, she makes a point of describing the temple as “worldly,” meaning that the priests are more corrupt and less adherent to the rules that priests are expected to follow.⁷¹ This means that the priests of the temples she preys on would not object to sleeping with a woman, and her only concern is slipping past anyone who might question a woman for drawing near the priests. The other behaviors that the protagonist employs, as well, such as dressing in

⁶⁹ Saikaku, *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, 148.

⁷⁰ Shively, “Bakufu Versus Kabuki,” 326-334.

⁷¹ Saikaku, *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, 344.

men's clothes and carrying a sword, emphasize her desire to be seen as a man, even if it is just for disguise.

Her traveling partner introduces her as a young male to the priest, and she is able to gain intimate access to the temple hall. The priest recognizes her as a woman right away, and but her disguise is clever enough to fool others in the temple. Those not privy to her scheme would be more understanding of a bonze having sexual relationships with a young man than with a woman, which was forbidden of the priesthood.⁷² She eventually uses this trick to gain entrance to temples of all the major Buddhist sects.

In performing as a man, she is able to gain access to areas that are forbidden to women. She entices the priests with her body, and earns the money and pleasure she desired from it. Thus, from this scene readers see how the protagonist is able to use trans-gender performance to her advantage.

Moreover, it is clear that this kind of performance is of the protagonist's own volition. It is her sexual drive that urges her to attempt to sleep with men who are generally off-limits to women, and in order to do so, she dons her trans-gender disguise. There is no force urging her to perform trans-gender other than her own desire, and she maintains her agency in choosing to take on the role of a male, if only for a while.

An Elderly Trans-gender Performer

⁷² Saikaku, *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, 344-345.

Perhaps a more shocking example of gender play by a woman is found in the section “He Who Looked for Future Splendor.” This segment is interesting because the gender play is not external, per se. The player in question is not cross-dressing, and makes little attempt to conceal the gender she was assigned at birth. However, her behavior is what makes her so unique.

Initially, the female protagonist learns of the gender player when she is preparing to work for an unnamed, and more importantly, ungendered, employer. The protagonist takes to an agency in Nishiki-no-cho in an attempt to find work, and is eventually approached. During her conversation and interview with the employer’s elderly maid, she expects to be working for a man, and indeed, the things she hears about the elder employer all point to a man’s figure. The maid speaks of a person, utilizing the omission of pronouns permitted by the Japanese language, who “has put aside a considerable sum of money” and is “not long for this world.”⁷³ The protagonist decides she will seduce the elderly employer, still presuming the person is a man, and take his money once he dies.

However, the protagonist is shocked to find that an elderly, but energetic, old woman, still unnamed, is in fact her employer. She finds herself dismayed that her plan may fall through, as she does not expect the old woman to desire her sexually. However, the old woman summons the protagonist to her bed, where she “assumed that [sexual role] of a man and thus disported herself with me during the entire night.” The old woman then confidently states that “When I am reborn in the next world, I will be a man.”⁷⁴

⁷³ Saikaku, *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, 183-188.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 187-188.

This scene is fascinating in many ways, mainly that the old woman performing in gender play more strongly identifies with the gender that they are playing than the gender they are born with. However, this scene also shows the old woman's ability to manipulate her environment as a "pseudo-man." It is clear that the old woman is very wealthy, at least rich enough to hire maids and to purchase the finest foods. She is also influential enough to arrange marriages for her maids once their service is done, despite the fact that she is a single woman. She is also, clearly, sexually active. Particularly in the bedroom, the old lady's trans-gender performance wins her what she desires.

Of course, one might argue that the elderly employer is not actually partaking in a trans-gender performance, and that she only wishes she were a man. However, one must consider the discussion of sexuality mentioned earlier, in which sexual roles define a sense of gender nonconformity. The *wakashu* took the role of women during sexual intercourse, making them trans-gender performers. Likewise, taking the role of a man, in a sexual environment, can be considered a trans-gender performance on the part of the elderly female employer. Moreover, she has complete agency in the decision to perform the male role. No evident outside force is causing her to perform male roles.

Also important to note is that the old lady's trans-gender performance is resonant with Butler's theories. For Butler, the performance of gender-coded actions is indicative of a person's "true" gender, more so than birth sex.⁷⁵ Thus, one could argue that while the old lady's "sex" is female, her gender performance aligns more closely with masculinity, making her behaviors trans-gender.

⁷⁵ Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 519-528.

Thus, I believe that both *The Life of an Amorous Woman* and *The Great Mirror of Male Love* indicate similar conventions for trans-gender performance in Tokugawa literature. First and foremost, these trans-gender performers have agency in their roles, and can decide when to partake in trans-gender performance. Moreover, the performers use these roles to enter spaces otherwise blocked to them and to meet their own goals and desires.

CHAPTER V

GENDER IN THE MEIJI PERIOD

The Meiji period, which began in 1868 and lasted until 1912, marks an era of drastic change in Japan. Various foreign presences urged the shogunate to end *sakoku*, the policy that prevented the Japanese from leaving Japan and non-Japanese from entering. After some two hundred years of isolation, Japan's borders were forced open, bringing an influx of foreign ideas to the country. By being exposed to the wider world, Japan felt the pressure to adopt foreign customs, methodologies, and cultures. Once opened, they strove to become a modern nation on par with the rest of the world. The shift towards a Westernized society in Japan at this time is referred to as modernization.

With modernization, though, came regulations. The Meiji government and scholars had an interest in changing the way Japan functioned to reflect the influence of foreign ideals and concepts. There was also a push to strictly regulate media and prevent the release of disagreeable or detrimental material. These materials included, but were not limited to, political statements and novels that undermined Confucian or other moral values.⁷⁶

This move to censorship of the media impacted the way literature was written in the Meiji period. As early as the first year of the Meiji period, laws were passed to prevent books from being published without being cleared by a board of authorities. By

⁷⁶ Jay Rubin, *Injurious to Public Morals: Writers and the Meiji State* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), 3-7.

the next year, this rule extended to curtail “lewdness and debauchery” by more actively censoring texts that contained objectionable material.⁷⁷

Disagreeable material, by Meiji standards, included items that would incite conflict with the Meiji government, such as political texts that criticized those in power. They also included items that encouraged “loose morals” and sexual deviance. According to Jay Rubin, the interest of the Meiji government by the early 1900’s focused on a heterosexual family-based moral system that encouraged family units to exist as wholesome examples of the larger family system of the state with the emperor as a Father figure.⁷⁸

The Heteronormative System Regarding Sexuality and Gender

This heterosexual, procreative system of morals had repercussions on the way literature was written. As stated earlier, literature that encouraged extramarital sex or other “deviant” sexual activity was prone to censorship. This affected, of course, depictions of male-male sexuality. Men were expected to be heterosexual, and deviance from heteronormative standards, in literature, had to be portrayed in a negative light. For example, Jim Reichert points to works by Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935) and in particular *Tōsei shosei katagi*, or *The Characters of Students*, serialized from 1885 to 1886. The

⁷⁷ Rubin, *Injurious to Public Morals*, 15-20.

⁷⁸ Rubin, *Injurious to Public Morals*, 108-112.

text Reichert refers to contains a character who is interested in male-male sexuality, and this character is painted in a negative light, with traits that make him ugly and “unfit.”⁷⁹

How does this relate to trans-gender performance and how it is coded in the Meiji period? Reichert provides another example in his book *In the Company of Men*. The referent text that Reichert discusses is a book written in 1880 called *Sawamura Tanosuke akebono zōshi*, or *The Rise and Fall of Sawamura Tanosuke*, a story about an *onnagata* who defies Meiji standards of decency and intimacy and ultimately suffers for it. The text itself was written by Okumoto Kisen, whose brief life spanned from 1853 to 1882. According to Reichert, this early Meiji text is based on several Meiji tropes, including the “poisonous woman” trope. The poisonous woman trope referred involved a literary character who would use her seductive power to manipulate and abuse her partners, but even Sawamura, a male at birth, was considered such a “woman.” This means that, because of Sawamura’s status as an *onnagata*, he is able to be “read” as a poisonous woman despite his male biology.⁸⁰

The story of Sawamura has a moralistic ending, as he falls ill to disease and becomes horribly disfigured. The story itself claims that Sawamura was diseased as a form of karmic retribution for his mistreatment of others. Reichert argues that Sawamura’s end is retribution for his behavior as a “poisonous woman.” That is to say, the way he used his charms as an *onnagata* to manipulate and hurt men led to his horrible demise. I would argue that the vilification of Sawamura is intended to allow the book to

⁷⁹ Jim Reichert, *In the Company of Men: Representations of Male-Male Sexuality in Meiji Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 69-78.

⁸⁰ Reichert, *In the Company of Men*, 36-64.

sneak past the censors, because the Meiji government had a strong bias, as Reichert says, against cross-dressing and trans-gender play.

This bias against trans-gender behavior relates directly to Butler's theory about the perception of "gender abnormality." In a heteronormative society, people born with specific biological sex traits are expected to maintain a specific gender performance. "Biological males" are expected to perform masculine gender behaviors and "women" are expected to perform feminine behaviors.

Furthermore, those who do not maintain the heteronormative expectations of gender performance are punished. People who witness abnormal behavior, masculine behaviors in biological women and feminine behaviors in biological men, react with disgust or violence, or both.⁸¹

In both the case of *Sawamura Tanosuke* and *Tōsei Shosei Katagi*, characters who do not conform to the hetero-normative depiction of men are written as characters with undesirable traits, and become villains in their own texts. The punishment of these characters falls in line with the expectations Butler has for a heteronormative society like that of the Meiji period. I argue that this kind of internal censorship is the way that Meiji period authors discuss topics such as trans-gender performance while getting around the strict censorship laws introduced in their time.

To provide another example of a character with trans-gender traits being written as a villain who meets an undesirable end as a result of their villainy, I turn to the story *Botchan* by Natsume Soseki, one the greatest modern Japanese authors, who lived from

⁸¹ Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 519-528.

1867 to 1916. At first glance, *Botchan*, written in 1906, may seem like an ill fit for my argument, as the main character does not involve himself with trans-gender activity at all. However, one character in particular participates in trans-gender behavior, and could perhaps be considered yet another male-born version of the “poisonous woman” discussed in Reichert’s argument.

Botchan and Femininity in Men

The character in question is the Assistant Principal of the school where Botchan is invited to teach. Nicknamed “Redshirt” for his modern, fancy manner of dress, the Assistant Principal is introduced in the text as having a “gentle voice that had a strangely feminine tone to it.”⁸² Simply having a feminine voice and using feminine language does not, of course, imply that Redshirt identifies as a woman, but it is, partially at least, a trans-gender behavior.

In making this claim, I turn back to Butler. Butler’s idea that behaviors are culturally coded as being “feminine” or “masculine” is important to my argument, especially in a society like Meiji Japan, which became increasingly hetero-normative as time passed. One must remember, after all, that *Botchan* was written in the late Meiji period. During the late Meiji period, gender roles were stricter than in the early years of the same period. The same applies to censorship laws.⁸³

⁸² Natsume Soseki, *Botchan*, Trans. J. Cohn (Penguin Books, 2012), 20.

⁸³ Reichert, *In the Company of Men*, 39.

For example, in 1906, Makino Nobuaki, Minister of Education, began blaming politically extreme and obscene literature for corrupting the impressionable youths of Japan, turning them into degenerates and socialists.⁸⁴ One method of attempting to combat such degeneracy was the establishment in 1911 of the Committee for the Investigation of Popular Education, an establishment dedicated to providing the public with literature that contained moral guidance through the characters of “loyal warriors, filial children, and faithful wives.”⁸⁵

The goals of the Committee for the Investigation of Popular Education were to encourage men and women to behave in certain ways that did not contrast the moral expectations of the Meiji government. As cultural ideas of what constituted femininity and masculinity became more rigid, it became less acceptable for men to participate in feminine behaviors.

This idea that Redshirt is participating in trans-gender behavior is supported in later chapters, when Botchan internally scolds the man for his feminine manner of speaking. In the mind of the protagonist, a man “should talk like [a man],” particularly if he is educated.⁸⁶ For Redshirt to continue to maintain a feminine manner of speaking regardless of what is expected of him defies Botchan’s perception of men. Thus, while Redshirt may not be identifying as a woman, his femininity is a trans-gender behavior in that it is opposite of what is expected of his birth sex.

⁸⁴ Reichert, *In the Company of Men*, 171-172.

⁸⁵ Rubin, *Injurious to Public Morals*, 198-199.

⁸⁶ Soseki, *Botchan*, 47.

After all, for Butler and other gender theorists, gender lies in action more than it does in birth sex. Redshirt is a biological male, and he is marked with male pronouns. However, he partakes in feminine behaviors that, while not necessarily a sign of his identification as female, make him appear more feminine than the character of Botchan, who does not participate in behaviors that are culturally coded as womanly.

Botchan also takes notice of Redshirt's manner of laughing, which he considers mild-mannered and effeminate, and, more importantly, disturbing. When Botchan describes Redshirt's voice, he says that it "was so gentle that it made you feel creepy."⁸⁷ It is this idea that there is something inherently wrong with the way Redshirt behaves that Botchan reiterates again and again. In the chapter after the discussion of the way men "should" talk, Botchan continues to remark on Redshirt's feminine manner, wondering "how far beyond skin deep that soft, feminine manner of his went" and thinking that men like Redshirt "didn't amount to much."⁸⁸ This dismissal of Redshirt for his feminine behavior is frequent. All of this might not amount to much if there were only infrequent comments, but the consistent decrial of Redshirt's feminine traits makes that femininity important to the story, as well as clearly subversive in regards to Botchan's concept of gender.

In most cases, when Botchan mentions how effeminate Redshirt is, he follows it up with a comparison. He refers to himself as a "man" while, in contrast, Redshirt is not a real man. In Botchan's mind, it seems, Redshirt is certainly not a man, because of his behavior. In contrast, Botchan regards himself as a real man, someone who acts the way a

⁸⁷ Soseki, *Botchan*, 47.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

man should. Proper behavior for men, as discussed earlier, was a concept advocated by Meiji officials who were proponents of a hetero-normative national body.

The Troubled Existence of Redshirt

So how could Redshirt, who has so much power in the school that he rules over, continue to exist as a man who behaves more like a woman? The easy answer is that he cannot. Botchan continues to berate and scold Redshirt, albeit internally, for his feminine actions, which seem to extend beyond his voice and into his gentle, cowardly mannerisms. His handkerchief is not, as stated by Botchan himself, a proper man's handkerchief, and his spine is not the strong spine of a man.⁸⁹

In this sense, Redshirt becomes Butler's "transvestite in the seat next to us on the bus."⁹⁰ His feminine performance, as it is, takes place in the context of reality, not as an act on a stage, so it baffles and irritates Botchan, who expects biological men to behave normatively. Butler argues that those who perform as a gender other than the one expected of them are subject to punishment and violence.⁹¹ This, too, is evidenced within the text. Redshirt's behavior, with time, gives rise to violence, which is celebrated because he is the antagonist of the story.

Redshirt is often compared to the "real" men of the story, such as Botchan and Porcupine, who are strong-willed and have strong, healthy bodies. Redshirt is disrespected in other ways, as well. At one point, Botchan embarrasses him by catching

⁸⁹ Soseki, *Botchan*, 68.

⁹⁰ Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 257.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 257-258.

him with a woman he should not be seeing, a woman who was once the fiancée of another teacher. As the story continues, Redshirt is punished more and more for his sly, effeminate behavior.

After the victory march following the end of the war (that remains unspecified in the text but is probably the Russo-Japanese War), a quarrel breaks out between the students in attendance, because one student group runs into another and incites violence. Porcupine and Botchan enter the fray in an attempt to stop the fight before it escalates further. Later, the two learn that they were framed and forced to take the blame for the violence.⁹² It becomes clear that this is the fault of Redshirt, and the two “real” men plot their revenge. They wait patiently one night to catch Redshirt and his partner in crime and violently beat the two men for their misdeeds.

This scene in the story is certainly a triumphant one. Botchan, the protagonist and proper man, finally gets his revenge against the sly, womanly figure of Redshirt. The entire narrative culminates in what the text seems to say is a fitting punishment for a man who acts like a woman, someone who is sly and conniving but does not have the fortitude to lift a hand in his own defense.

In a sense, Redshirt is a character similar to that of the “poisonous women” that Reichert discusses. He behaves in a manner that is expected of women, speaking with a gentle tongue and laughing girlishly. While he does not seduce Botchan, he cleverly manipulates Botchan and others on multiple occasions. He tricks Botchan into believing that Porcupine is his enemy, and tricks another character, the Squash out of an impending

⁹² Soseki, *Botchan* xii

marriage. Redshirt does not use force; instead, he uses honeyed words and suggestion to harm innocent men.

As retribution, Redshirt is treated to a violent beating at the hands of his victim Botchan. The story ends on a triumphant note, with Botchan and Porcupine receiving no punishment for assaulting Redshirt and his partner, Hanger. Instead, Botchan returns happily to his beloved Tokyo, finding a comfortable job and caring for his family maid, Kiyō, until her death.

While Redshirt's fate is left open-ended, it can be inferred that he suffered great embarrassment after being attacked by Botchan and Porcupine. He makes no attempt, after all, to pursue legal action after the assault.⁹³ The triumph over the conniving character of Redshirt echoes, however faintly, the stories of poisonous women discussed by Reichert. Reichert describes one such story ending with a valorous claim that "evil" people suffer, and for that reason "people everywhere should raise a cheer!"⁹⁴

Had Redshirt been the triumphant protagonist of the text, it may have been difficult for the story to be published without censorship. Not only was Redshirt a corrupt and displeasing figure, he was also, according to my reading, a trans-gender actor. His behavior defied the standards of manhood exemplified by Botchan and Porcupine. He was feminine and acted like a woman, in direct contrast to the upright and manly behavior of the protagonist.

⁹³ Soseki, *Botchan*, 142.

⁹⁴ Reichert, *In the Company of Men*, 42.

Soseki and the Heteronormative State

Redshirt is not the only character of Soseki's who receives poor treatment for behavior that seems to be contrary to the standards imposed by Meiji ideals. Another book written by Soseki in 1907, *Nowaki*, or *Autumn Wind*, contains a character named Takayanagi, who is punished for his homoerotic yearnings.

It would be inaccurate to call *Nowaki* homosexual literature, because there are no references to homosexuality in it. However, Takayanagi's character is one that valorizes intimate relationships between men. As a result, he is, in the text, referred to as sickly, suffering from tuberculosis. He is also psychologically weak because of his obsession with male companionship, and he is often depicted as melancholy.⁹⁵

Reichert explains that, due to the heavy restrictions on media enforced by the government of the late Meiji period, Soseki could not have feasibly included blatant homosexual scenes within *Nowaki*. However, by utilizing subtle signifiers, such as Takayanagi's desire to maintain close relationships with men, Soseki hinted at a non-heteronormative story without censorship. Furthermore, by making Takayanagi a "degenerate" who was both physically and mentally unwell, Soseki manipulated the system and kept his book within the range of acceptable texts for late Meiji literature. Playing on the theory of degeneracy that was popularized in the Meiji period, which pathologized homosexuality and connected it to other illnesses of the body, Soseki made it possible for Takayanagi to exist in his story.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Reichert, *In the Company of Men*, 167-198.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 175-198.

I argue that Redshirt serves a similar function within *Botchan*. While he does not identify as a woman in any part of the story, there are subtle behaviors that make him a trans-gender actor. This subtlety allowed Soseki to create a narrative that involved trans-gender behavior without upsetting the heteronormative expectations of Meiji Japan.

Thus, I believe that Redshirt stands as an example of the way trans-gender behavior was portrayed in the Meiji period. In order to circumvent strict laws against crossdressing and other trans-gender behaviors, authors in the Meiji period had to employ subversive tactics to include characters like Redshirt and Sawamura in their stories. These tactics included a negative depiction of the characters involved and moralistic punishment for the “sins” they committed against the standards of Meiji Japan.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

It can readily be argued that none of the characters discussed above are “transgender” individuals in the sense that modern Western audiences understand the term. However, the characters perform trans-gender *acts*, behaviors that are culturally coded as belonging to the gender opposite of the one they are born into.

Highlighted within the analyses of the multiple texts within this thesis are the multiple forms that trans-gender performance take throughout the early history of Japanese literature. In each historical period, the way literature is written changes, and representations of trans-gender characters change alongside it.

The Heian period, for instance, marks a time in which trans-gender behavior is a result of external influences. The characters who perform trans-gender do so because of interference from supernatural forces that cause them to behave in a manner that defies general standards of the gender they were assigned at birth. In the same way, the trans-gender performances of these characters end, not by their own volition, but because they are made to by outside forces.

Moreover, Heian trans-gender performance is used, partially, as a way for the characters to escape the confines of typical gender roles. In both *Ariake no wakare* and *Torikaebaya monogatari*, the protagonists take great pleasure in the freedoms awarded to them as they perform trans-gender, and mourn the loss of freedom once it is taken away from them.

In the Muromachi period, there is a shift towards gaining agency on the part of the trans-gender performer. In *Shinkurōdo monogatari*, the protagonist expresses a desire to perform as a man after expressing her displeasure at the idea of being a woman at court. However, once the character returns to performing as female, she does not suffer in the same way the women do in the Heian texts.

This is likely due in part to the Buddhist influences and the didactic implications of the text, showing how happiness can be earned when a woman devotes herself to the Buddhist law. Because the protagonist joins her sister and becomes a nun, the stresses in her life disappear and she is reborn in the Pure Land. This Buddhist influence, of course, is another marker of medieval Japanese literature in general, and Muromachi literature in particular.

The Edo period, in contrast, is much more secular. Moreover, there is no punishment for the characters who perform trans-gender for the sole purpose of their performances. Beyond that, unlike in the preceding texts of the Heian and Muromachi periods, there is no conflict for the characters between the gender they are assigned at birth and the gender that they perform. The characters also have complete agency over their performances, and can choose to employ them at will. These characters use trans-gender performance to their advantage.

However, the Meiji period marks yet another era of drastic change, both for Japanese literature and the trans-gender performances within. Because of stricter censorship laws, as well as changing ideas of what gender means and how men and women are expected to behave, it becomes more difficult for authors to write about trans-gender themes. However, the authors of this period bypassed these barriers by adhering,

at least loosely, to the Meiji system of morals. Authors such as Soseki made non-normative characters antagonists in the texts and vilify them, marking the trans-gender performers as “unwell” and “unfit.”

Throughout hundreds of years of Japanese history, then, trans-gender representation in literature has shifted dramatically. While many conventions in Japanese literature are maintained and alluded to, they are also manipulated to account for the needs and interests of the time in which they are written.

Therefore, it would be wildly incorrect to claim that Japanese authors have ever been consistent about trans-gender performance in their literature. The truth is always nuanced, and it is imperative to analyze literary history to understand the subtle and major changes in the way trans-gender performance is represented.

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