

Princeton Library of Asian Translations
Advisory Committee: Marius Jansen, Earl Miner,
James Morley, J. Thomas Rimer

Murasaki Shikibu
Her Diary and Poetic Memoirs

A Translation and Study
by
RICHARD BOWRING

1982



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
Princeton, New Jersey

Even so, it still falls well. *Suso mo sasuga ni hosorazu.* Hagitani here adopts the *Kurokawabon* in preference to the *Kurokawabon*, which actually reads *homorazu* instead of *hosorazu*. This would give: "You can't really praise its length."

An old stick in the mud. *Kotoji ni ni-hana sasu yō nite.* A free translation of a Chinese phrase which means "to stick glue on the bridge of a koto" or "to play a single tune."

59. Lady Chūjō. Rumor had it that Lady Chūjō was the mistress of Murasaki's brother Nobunori, hence the criticisms that follow. The "someone" may well be Nobunori himself.
It was dreadfully affected. Behind this

apparent criticism and ill will toward Lady Chūjō and the open discussion of a personal letter lies in fact an apology for her own companions and Shōshi's household, an apology that spans sections 59-63. Murasaki skillfully uses the comments of another to enter into a criticism of her own world. The discussion concentrates on the effect that different environments can have on the cultural life of two small communities. The Priestess' household, it will be noted, is pictured as a kind of arcadia where poetry is the natural form of conversation, in great contrast to her own very worldly life at court.

spring I first saw her, has now thinned out in places as though someone had done it deliberately; you would hardly credit it. Even so, it still falls well and reaches to the ground and a little farther.

The woman known as Koma had very long hair too. In the past she used to be a marvellous young lady-in-waiting, but now she has become an old stick-in-the-mud and immures herself at home.

Well, now, I have discussed their looks, but people's characters—that's quite a different matter. Everyone has their quirks and no one is ever really evil. Neither is it possible for everyone to be all things all of the time: attractive, restrained, intelligent, tasteful, and trustworthy. Everyone is different and it's often difficult to know whom to praise. But I should stop myself rambling on like this.

Someone who heard there was a Lady Chūjō serving in the household of the High Priestess of the Kamo Shrines happened to show me in secret a letter which Lady Chūjō had written. It was dreadfully affected. She seemed to think that no one in the world was as intelligent or discerning as she, that everyone else was spiritless and insensitive. When I saw it I could hardly contain myself and I became quite worked up, as I believe the saying goes. How could she be so odious? I realize it was a personal letter, but she had actually written: "When it comes to judging poetry, who can rival our Princess? She is the only one who could recognize a promising talent nowadays!" There may be some point in what she says, but if she claims that much for her circle of friends, then how is it they produce so few poems of any merit? Admittedly they do seem to be very elegant and sophisticated, but were you to make a comparison, I doubt they would necessarily prove to be any better than the women I see around me.

They keep very much to themselves. Whenever I have visited them, for it is a place famous for beautiful moonlit nights, marvellous dawn skies, cherries, and the song of the wood thrush, the High Priestess has always seemed most sensitive. The place has an aura of seclusion and mystery about it, and they have very little to distract them. Rarely are they ever in the rush we are whenever Her

Indeed the place naturally lends itself to poetry. *Moketsuke, omozakura shika konomu takoro to narinuraba.* The Kunitakabon reads *omozakura shiriyonomu takoro* here, and many commentators translate *modestly* not as "what is more" or "indeed" but as "behavior." Nakano, for instance, has: "It is the kind of place where one naturally behaves elegantly."

I am certain I would be able to relax. *Kokoro yurugashite.* This follows Akiyama and Nakano in interpreting *yurugasu* as "to relax." Hagitani, however, agrees with Sozawa/Morishige that it means the opposite and shifts the subject of *hito no onaki na o satsudekinarazu nado* from Murasaki to the man, giving: "I am certain I would automatically absorb much of the elegance of the place and be at great pains not to cause him any disgrace."

60. The men strike up relationships with this kind of woman. *Soyô no hito no yasuki mama ni tachiyotte uchikataraba.* Sozawa/Morishige have the women as the subject of this sentence, which, leads to an entirely different interpretation: "And those women, being naturally easy going, visit the household of the High Priestess and give away all our secrets."

It's quite disgraceful. *Migurashi tomo mihiberi.* Note here how Murasaki suddenly criticizes women like Lady Sasibo and Lady Dainagon whom she has just been praising for their good looks and their intelligence. Admittedly she softens the blow in the next section, but the reversal is symptomatic of the equivocation that pervades the whole "letter" section; it is almost as if she were jolting down her feelings as they came, with little attempt to set them in any coherent pattern. This habit of saying things and then immediately qualifying them to the point of negating them gets stronger as we read on, until by section 73 it appears as though Murasaki's style is actually breaking down. This could be seen as a sign of intense emotional strain, but it could also be due to the fact that we are dealing with a raw, unpolished piece of writing.

61. Know all there is to know. Reading *kaku shiritehabetu yo narado.* Murasaki is here referring specifically to those women of upper and middle rank whom she has just mentioned. The Kunitakabon has *kaku otihabetu*, which would give: "It may seem that I have picked out these women for criticism on purpose."

Majesty visits the Emperor, or His Excellency decides to come and stay the night. Indeed, the place naturally lends itself to poetry. Amid such perfect elegance, how could one possibly fail to produce anything but excellent poems?

What if a decrepit old fossil like myself were to take service with the High Priestess, and say I met a man I did not know and exchanged poems with him; I am certain I would be able to relax, automatically absorbing much of the elegance of the place, secure in the knowledge that no one would give me a bad name. And if one of our young women, who have nothing to be ashamed of either in terms of beauty or age, were to take it into her head to act the gracious lady and converse by means of poems, I am convinced that she would compare very favorably with them.

60. But here in the Palace there are no other consorts or empresses to keep Her Majesty on her mettle day and night, and there are no ladies-in-waiting in any of the other households who can really challenge us, with the result that all of us, men and women alike, lack any sense of rivalry and are far too easygoing. Her Majesty frowns on any seductive behavior as the height of frivolity, so anyone who wants to get on takes care never to seem too forward. Of course that is not to say that we do not have women of quite a different persuasion, women who care nothing for being thought flirtatious and lighthearted, and getting a bad name for themselves. The men strike up relationships with this kind of woman because they are such easy game. They must think us either as dull as ditchwater or just plain feckless. Not that the upper- and middle-ranking women do anything to enhance Her Majesty's reputation either; they are far too self-satisfied and full of themselves. It's quite disgraceful!

61. It may seem as if we now know all there is to know about these women close to Her Majesty, but then everyone has her own personality and no one is really that much better or worse than anyone else. If they are good in one aspect they are bad in another, it seems. Mind you, it would, of course, be most improper for the older women to act foolishly at a time when the younger ones themselves are apparently trying to appear serious and dignified; it's just

that as a general rule I do wish that they were not quite so unsociable.

Her Majesty, you know, is so refined, so graceful in all she does, but she is by nature a little too diffident and is convinced that there is no point in admonishing them, and that even supposing she did so, very few could be relied upon in complete confidence. She is right, of course: to do something rash and silly on an important occasion is worse than doing nothing at all. Once, when she was much younger, Her Majesty heard a lady-in-waiting, who tended to be careless and who thought rather too much of herself, come out with something rather unfortunate at an important event; it was so dreadfully out of place that she was deeply shocked. So now she seems to think that people are good enough as long as they can get by without making a really big faux pas. It is precisely because her women, naive creatures that they are, have all fitted in so well with her designs, that they have become so very reticent.

62. Her Majesty has matured of late and now understands the ways of this world: that people have their good points and their bad, that they sometimes go to excess and sometimes make mistakes. She knows very well that the senior courtiers have all become bored with her household, doubtless pronouncing it lacking in any sparkle.

This is not to say that her women are always so genteel; if they forget themselves they can come out with the most indiscreet verses. Nevertheless, Her Majesty's requests that those of her women who are so unconscionably complacent be somewhat more open are in vain; the habit is too ingrained. What is more, the nobles these days are spineless; while they are with us they all act with great seriousness, whereas if they were somewhere like the High Priestess's household they would naturally feel the urge to compose elegant poems in praise of the moon or the blossoms. Here, where people traipse in and out day and night, there is little elegance; women who can make the most ordinary conversation sound intriguing or who can compose a passable reply to an interesting poem are very difficult to find, or so the men seem to be saying. Not that I have ever heard them actually say it myself, of course.

62. It is ridiculous to come out with something to which they will take offense. *Nikui koto o hikidemu zo ayashiki. Ito yō sake mo arubeki koto nari.* This interpretation follows Akiyama, Sotawo/Morishige, and Nakano. Hagitani sees *nikui*, as meaning the same thing as *kokoro nikui* ("enviously good") and so translates: "It is absurd to expect to be able to conjure up a brilliant verse every time," but the initial as-

sumption is highly suspect. Hagitani reads the last phrase as *Ito yō sake mo arubeki koto nari* which gives: "and there is really no need for it."
63. Try to make themselves as invisible as possible. Reading *honoka naru kenwai o mo miyji*, which necessitates adding some phrase like *to suranu*. Hagitani reads *miyji* as *miishi* and translates: "Hiding behind the screens though they be, that much must be obvious!"

Whenever someone approaches you and you wish to reply with a quick poem, it is ridiculous to come out with something to which they will take offense. One should take care to give an appropriate response. When people say that true character is a rare commodity, it is this kind of flexibility that they are talking about. Why should it always be considered wiser to turn one's back smugly on others? And, conversely, why should some people always poke their noses into other people's business? It does seem that people find it very difficult to adapt themselves to differing situations.

63. For instance, whenever the Master of Her Majesty's Household Tadanobu arrives with a message for Her Majesty, the senior women are so helpless and childish that they hardly ever come out to greet him, and, when they do, they seem unable to say anything in the least appropriate. It's not that they are at a loss for words, and it's not that they are lacking in intelligence; it's just that they feel so self-conscious and embarrassed that they are afraid of saying something silly, so they refuse to say anything at all and try to make themselves as invisible as possible. Women in other households cannot possibly act in such a manner! Once one has entered this sort of world even the highest born of ladies falls into line, but our women still seem to act as though they were little girls at home. If a woman of a lower rank comes out to greet him, Major Counselor Tadanobu takes it in very bad grace, so there are even times when he leaves without seeing anyone, either because the right woman has gone home or because those women who are in their rooms refuse to come out. Other nobles, the kind who often visit Her Majesty with messages, seem to have secret understandings with particular women of their choice and retire somewhat crestfallen if they happen to be absent. It is hardly surprising that they take every opportunity they can to complain that the place is moribund.

The women in the High Priestess' household must obviously look down on us for this. But, even so, it makes little sense to ridicule others by saying: "We are the only ones of note. Everyone else is as good as blind and deaf

It is very easy to criticize people. Is this comment ironical or not? It is difficult to tell, but there seems to be no other signs that Murasaki realizes that this truism applies just as well to her as to Lady Chūjō. Note the tone of didacticism that has been creeping into the work, going hand in hand with an increasing sense of a reader who is being addressed personally.

64. Now someone who did carry on a fascinating correspondence. *Izumi Shikibu to nu hato koso, omochitō kakuwa-shikuru*. Murasaki may have been led on to the subject of Izumi Shikibu because she was Lady Chūjō's aunt, but the main associative link here is the subject of interesting letters and their authors. Izumi entered the service of Shoshi in the late spring of Kankō 6(1009) and so was a companion of Murasaki's by the time this passage was written. There is, however, no other evidence as to any direct correspondence between the two, and Murasaki is probably referring in general to Izumi's notorious love affairs and the poems that stemmed from them (her "unsavory side"). This, incidentally, raises the interesting question as to exactly how these essentially private poems ever reached a wider audience. Did the women keep copies of their own poems? Were they all written with half an eye to eventual inclusion in an imperial anthology? It has been suggested that Murasaki is actually referring here to the *Izumi Shikibu Nikki*, but this is rather unlikely and difficult to prove. See Cranston (1969) for discussion of this question

and further details of when and by whom the *Izumi Shikibu Nikki* was written.

65. The wife of the Governor of Tanba. Oe no Masahira was made Governor of Tanba in Kankō 7(1010), 3.30, and so this passage must have been written after that date. Masahira's wife, Akazome Emon, who had served with Michinaga's wife Rinshi even before her marriage, was the mother of Takachika, who, it will be remembered, read the classics at Prince Aisuhira's first bath (see section 17). She is also reputed to be the author of the *Eiga monogatari*.

66. Sei Shōnagon. Author of the *Pillow Book*. Served Teishi until the latter's death in childbirth in 1000. If she was still alive at this time—and there is no way of telling—she would have been about forty-five.

Come to a bad end. Reading *Yukusue uide nomi haberu wa* rather than *kakureba*. Why the emotional outburst against Sei Shōnagon? Hagiwara points out that the *Pillow Book* contains at least two passages where men close to Murasaki are mentioned somewhat slighly: her husband Nobutaka (Morris, 1967:1.124-25) and her cousin Nobusune (Morris, 1967:1.112-24). There can be little doubt that Murasaki had read the *Pillow Book*, and such passages may have been a contributing factor to her quite venomous criticism, but it is the sense of bitter rivalry with Sei Shōnagon's reputation as a writer that comes through most strongly in this passage.

when it comes to taste." It is very easy to criticize people, but a far more difficult task to keep oneself in check, and it is while one forgets this truth, lauds oneself to the skies, treats everyone else as worthless and generally despises others, that one's true character is often clearly revealed.

It was a letter such as I would have loved to have shown you, but the person who stole it from where it was hidden showed it to me in secret and took it back—such a pity!

64. Now someone who did carry on a fascinating correspondence was Izumi Shikibu. She does have a rather unsavory side to her character but has a genius for tossing off letters with ease and can make the most banal statement sound special. Her poems are quite delightful. Although her knowledge of the canon and her judgments leave something to be desired, she can produce poems at will and always manages to include some clever phrase or other that catches the eye, and yet when it comes to criticizing or judging the work of others, well, she never really comes up to scratch; the sort of person who relies on a talent for extemporization, one feels. I cannot think of her as a poet of the highest quality.

65. The wife of the Governor of Tanba is known to everyone in the service of Her Majesty and His Excellency as Masahira Emon. She may not be a genius but she has great poise and does not feel that she has to compose a poem on everything she sees merely because she is a poet. From what I have seen, her work is most accomplished, even her occasional verse. People who think so much of themselves that, at the drop of a hat, they compose lame verses that only just hang together or produce the most pretentious compositions imaginable are quite odious and rather pathetic.

66. Sei Shōnagon, for instance, was dreadfully conceited. She thought herself so clever, and littered her writings with Chinese characters, but if you examined them closely, they left a great deal to be desired. Those who think of themselves as being superior to everyone else in this way will inevitably suffer and come to a bad end, and people who have become so precious that they go out of their way to be sensitive in the most unpromising situations, trying to capture every moment of interest, however slight, are

I still retain the conviction. All texts actually read *Kokoro sugi moetsu mi zo to dani omoharaji. Sono kokoro. I have adopted Hagtani's suggested amendment, namely . . . omoharaji to no kokoro.*

"Is this the moon." The rhythm here suggests a poetic allusion, but none has been found. The personification of the moon as a man is not that unusual.

I am making precisely that mistake.

Yo no hito mo miu to iikoburu loga o mo hanayasu wataribakari namu. The phrase *loga o . . . wataru* is unclear; Hagtani follows Sozawa/Morishige in believing it must be equivalent to *loga ni aru*, but he still reserves judgment. Nakano's substitution of *tori* for *loga* does not help. The "mistake" refers to a belief that it was dangerous for a woman to look at the moon too often, it promoted nostalgia, grief, and hence premature ageing.

67. "Adding to the sadness of it all."
"Yagokuhawawaru" to *kiishiru hito ya aramu.* A reference to Kokinshū poem

985 by Yoshimine no Munecada

(Bishop Hengō): "While on his way to Nara he heard a woman playing a koto in a dilapidated house. He wrote this poem and sent it in: *Wakibito no sumirebi yado toriuru nabe ni sugakuhawawaru hito no ne zo suru.*" ("It seemed to be a dwelling where you might expect someone dejected to be living, and now I hear the sound of a koto that adds to the sadness of it all.")

Old poems and tales. Reading *furu-uta, monogatari, Furu utamonogatari* (old poem-tales) would also be a possibility.

"But I've never seen anyone who lived longer." *Mononimi hito no yukusue, inochi nagakameru yoshi demo metaru tamashi nari.* This is interpreting *mononimi* in a very general sense. Most commentators prefer to restrict it to the reading of Chinese. Hagtani has a completely different approach; seeing *mononimi* as referring to the taking of Buddhist vows, he translates: "But those who have taken their vows never live very long, do they?"

bound to look ridiculous and superficial. How can the future turn out well for them?

I criticize other women like this, but here is one who has managed to survive this far without having achieved anything of note and has nothing to rely on in the future that might afford her the slightest consolation. Yet, perhaps because I still retain the conviction that I am not the kind of person to abandon herself completely to despair, on autumn evenings, when nostalgia is at its most poignant, I go out and sit on the veranda to gaze in reverie. "Is this the moon that used to praise my beauty?" I say to myself, as I conjure up memories of the past. Then, realizing that I am making precisely that mistake which must be avoided, I become uneasy and move inside a little, while still, of course, continuing to fret and worry.

67. I remember how in the cool of the evening I used to play the koto to myself, rather badly; I was always worried lest someone were to hear me and realize that I was just "adding to the sadness of it all." How silly of me, and yet how sad! So now my two kotos, one of thirteen strings and the other of six, stand in a miserable little closet blackened with soot, ready tuned but idle. Through neglect—I forgot, for example, to ask that the bridges be removed on rainy days—they have accumulated the dust and lean there now against a cupboard, their necks jammed between that and a pillar, with a biwa standing on either side.

There is also a pair of large cupboards crammed full to bursting point. One is full of old poems and tales that have become the home for countless silverfish that scatter in such an unpleasant manner that no one cares to look at them any more; the other is full of Chinese books which have lain unattended ever since he who carefully collected them passed away. Whenever my loneliness threatens to overwhelm me, I take out one or two of them to look at. But my women gather together behind my back. "It's because she goes on like this that she is so miserable. What kind of lady is it who reads Chinese books?" they whisper. "In the past it was not even the done thing to read sutras!" "Yes," I feel like replying, "but I've never seen anyone who lived longer just because they obeyed a prohibition!" But

68. Search through old letters. *Furuki hongo hikasugashi*. Interpreting *hongo* as old letters and manuscripts rather than books. Hagiwara suggests that Mura-saki is thinking of someone using the paper to copy out a sutra. This was often done on old letters, partly to save paper and partly to accumulate merit for the original letter writer.

69. So I seem to be misunderstood. *Sore, kokoro yori hoka no waga omokage o hazu to miredo*. This follows Nakano rather than Hagiwara, who has: "Now although I am ashamed at such unexpected duplicity on my part." So-zawa/Morishige are closer to Nakano but understand *hazu* differently: "Although I know that these women think quite wrongly that I am difficult to approach."

I am so perversely standoffish. Punctuating *Kusagushaku yasashidachi, hajiraratawatasuru hito ni mo sobomedeite*

rarede haberamashi. Notwo commentators can agree on the meaning of this passage. The *Kunitakabon* used by So-zawa/Morishige differs somewhat here, but their interpretation is close to the one given in this translation. *Hajirare* is probably best seen not as a passive but as a *yikasu* form, literally: "someone superior to me with regard to whom I have feelings of shame." Nakano believes that *hajiraratawatasuru hito* means: "those who are regarded with shame by someone superior to them," and so translates: "If only I can avoid the censure of those idiosyncratic, elegant ladies-in-waiting who are regarded with respect even by Her Majesty." Hagiwara has essentially the same view, but restricts *hito* to one person, perhaps Rinshi. In view of the context, however, it seems wiser to keep Muraasaki as the subject of the phrase.

that would be inconsiderate of me, for what they say is not unreasonable.

68. Everyone reacts differently. Some are cheerful, open-hearted, and forthcoming; others are born pessimists, amused by nothing, the kind who search through old letters, carry out penances, intone sutras without end, and clack their beads, all of which I find most unseemly. So aware am I of my women's prying eyes that I hesitate to do even those things a woman in my position should allow herself to do. How much more so at court, where I do have many things I wish to say but always think better of it. There would be no point, I tell myself, in explaining to people who would never understand, and as it would only be causing trouble with women who think of nothing but themselves and are always carping. I just keep my thoughts to myself. It is very rare that one finds people of true understanding; for the most part they judge everything by their own standards and ignore everyone else's opinion.

69. So I seem to be misunderstood, and they think that I am shy. There have been times when I have been forced to sit in their company, and on such occasions I have tried to avoid their petty criticisms, not because I am particularly shy but because I consider it all so distasteful; as a result, I am now known as somewhat of a dullard.

"Well, we never expected this!" they all say. "No one liked her. They all said she was pretentious, awkward, difficult to approach, prickly, too fond of her tales, haughty, prone to versifying, disdainful, cantankerous, and scornful. But when you meet her, she is strangely meek, a completely different person altogether!"

How embarrassing! Do they really look upon me as such a dull thing, I wonder? But I am what I am and so act accordingly. Her Majesty too has often remarked that she had thought I was not the kind of person with whom she could ever relax, but that now I have become closer to her than any of the others. I am so perversely standoffish; if only I can avoid putting off those for whom I have genuine respect.

70. The key to everything is to be pleasant, gentle, properly relaxed, and self-possessed; this is what makes for charm and

70. Those, of course, who tend to contradict themselves. *Monoi sukoshi uchawazu narinuru hito*. Following Akiyama, Sozawa/Morshige, and Nakano. Hagitani prefers: "Those who tend to disagree with others."

Those who go out of their way to hurt others. This follows Nakano's punctuation, namely: *Hito susumite, nikui koto shiidesuru wa, waroki koto o ayomachitaramu mo, iwawawamu ni, hakakarino oboehaberi*. Akiyama translates this: "There is no harm in ridiculing someone for intentionally annoying someone else, even if it has turned out badly by mistake." Hagitani punctuates the sentence in an entirely different manner: *Hito, susumite nikui koto shiidesuru wa waroki koto o, ayomachitaramu mo iwawawamu ni, hakakarino oboehaberi*, with the main break coming between *waroki koto o* and *ayomachitaramu*, and translates: "To be spiteful to someone else on purpose is a dreadful thing to do, but if someone has done it quite

inadvertently there is no harm in subjecting them to a little ridicule." I have preferred to keep the parallelism wherever possible.

71. She must have read the Chronicles of Japan. The Kurokawabon actually reads *Nihongi o koso yomitarabekere*, which is undoubtedly a mistake for *yomitarabekere*, but this would mean that the Emperor was not only being excessively polite to Murasaki but was in fact saying: "She should read the Chronicles of Japan instead!" Indeed Sozawa/Morshige translates: "She should give me lectures on the Chronicles of Japan instead!" Hagitani's emendation to *yomitarabekere* is not original with him, but even so is rather difficult to justify on purely textual grounds and must be regarded with suspicion.

Flaunting my learning. Reading *imijū namu zaogaru* rather than Sozawa/Morshige's *imijū namu zae aru* or Nakano's *imijū namu zae ga aru*.

composure in a woman. No matter how amorous or capricious one may be, as long as you are well-meaning at heart and refrain from anything that might cause embarrassment to others, you will be forgiven.

On the other hand, women who think too highly of themselves and act in a pretentious and overbearing manner become the object of attention, even when they take great care over their least move, and once this happens, people are bound to find fault with whatever they say or do, going so far as to criticize how they sit down or how they take their leave. Those, of course, who tend to contradict themselves when they talk and disparage their companions are watched and listened to all the more. As long as you are free from such faults, people will be prepared to give you the benefit of the doubt and show you good will, no matter how superficially.

Those who go out of their way to hurt others deserve to be ridiculed, as do those who act thoughtlessly even though they may not mean to. Some people are so good-natured that they can still care for those who hate them, but I myself find it very difficult. Does the Buddha himself in all his compassion ever argue that one can insult the three treasures with impunity? How in this sullied world of ours can we expect those who are hard done by not to reciprocate in kind? And yet there is a difference in how people will react: some glare at you openly with malicious intent and spread the most dreadful rumors hoping to enhance themselves thereby, whereas others hide their feelings and appear to be quite friendly on the surface; thus are true natures revealed.

There is a woman called Saemon no Naishi, who, for some strange reason, took a dislike to me, I cannot think why. I heard all sorts of malicious rumors about myself.

His Majesty was listening to someone reading the *Tale of Genji* aloud. "She must have read the Chronicles of Japan!" he said. "She seems very learned." Saemon no Naishi heard this and apparently jumped to conclusions, spreading it abroad among the senior courtiers that I was flaunting my learning. She gave me the nickname Our Lady of the Chronicles. How utterly ridiculous! Would I, who hes-

Secretary at the Ministry of Ceremonial. *Kono Shikibu no Jo to Iu Hito*, Murasaki's brother was called Secretary at the Ministry of War (*Hyōbu no Jo*) in section 53. When he changed is not known. It is possible that Shikibu is a simple mistake here; a mistake that arose because Murasaki's father, who was at one time called *Shikibu no Jo*, is mentioned later in this same passage.

Po Chū-i. (772-846). Tang poet, whose collected works known in Japanese as *Hakushi monjū*, were extremely popular in Heian Japan.

Because she evinced a desire. *Saru sama no koto shiroshimesamashige ni oboutarishikaba.* Hagitani uses the Ekotoba variant here ("desired to know about") rather than *shiroshimesamashige* ("desired to cause her to know about"), which is standard to both the Kunitakabon and the Kurokawabon versions. Using this last version, Sozawa/Morishige see Michinaga as the subject of the whole sentence: "But then His Excellency made me read to Her Majesty here and there from the Collected Works of Po Chū-i, and because he desired that she should know more about such things." In view of what follows, however, this would not seem to be very satisfactory.

The summer before last. *Okotoshi no natsu goro.* If Murasaki is writing in Kankō 6(1099), then this is the summer of Kankō 4(1007), but if she is writing in Kankō 7(1010), then this refers to the summer of Kankō 5(1008). Hagitani suggests that Murasaki is probably referring to this latter date. Shoshi would have been five months pregnant at that time and the

reading of erudite works may have been part of the practice of *taigyō* or "educating the womb," whereby the mother was expected to do all she could in the middle and late stages of pregnancy to ensure an intelligent offspring. This would be additional evidence for claiming that Murasaki had been taken on in service as a kind of cultural companion rather than as a simple lady-in-waiting.

72. The time too is ripe. Ripe for what? Hagitani agrees with most other commentators that Murasaki is talking about becoming a nun here—"ripe for retiring from the world." But Kajimoto (1974:73), in line with his general thesis that Murasaki was far too involved in matters of this world to think seriously of taking religious orders (see commentary to section 27), argues that she is referring to her trust in Amida (Amitābha) and her interest in studying the sutras, neither of which necessarily entailed actual retirement. This makes much more sense of the hesitation that she expresses about becoming a nun, and of her subsequent remarks about losing her eyesight and "going through the motions of a true believer." It also highlights a contrast that might otherwise go unnoticed, that between becoming a nun, on the one hand, and relying on Amida, on the other; the latter would assure salvation without having to take orders. Despite the fact that Murasaki talks of salvation in this passage, then, it is important to note that she stresses the easier, more worldly Amida's path and in fact rejects religious orders as inappropriate to her nature.

iate to reveal my learning in front of my women at home, ever think of doing so at court?

When my brother, Secretary at the Ministry of Ceremonial, was a young boy learning the Chinese classics, I was in the habit of listening to him and I became unusually proficient at understanding those passages which he found too difficult to grasp. Father, a most learned man, was always regretting the fact: "Just my luck!" he would say. "What a pity she was not born a man!" But then gradually I realized that people were saying, "It's bad enough when a man flaunts his learning; she will come to no good," and ever since then I have avoided writing even the simplest character. My handwriting is appalling. And as for those classics, or whatever they are called, that I used to read, I gave them up entirely. Still I kept on hearing these malicious remarks. Worried what people would think if they heard such rumors, I pretended to be unable to read even the inscriptions on the screens. Then Her Majesty asked me to read to her here and there from the Collected Works of Po Chū-i, and, because she evinced a desire to know more about such things, we carefully chose a time when other women would not be present and, amateur that I was, I read with her the two books of Po Chū-i's *New Ballads in secret*; we started the summer before last. I hid this fact from the others, as did Her Majesty, but somehow His Excellency and the Emperor got wind of it and they had some beautiful copies made of various Chinese books, which His Excellency then presented to Her Majesty. That gossip Saemon no Naishi could never have found out that Her Majesty had actually asked me to study with her, for, if she had, I would never have heard the last of it. Ah what a prattling, tiresome world it is!

72. Now I shall be absolutely frank. I care little for what others say. I have decided to put my trust in Amitābha and immerse myself in reading sutras. You might expect me to have no compunction in becoming a nun, for I have lost what little attachment I retained for the trials and pains that life has to offer, and yet still I hesitate; even if I were to commit myself to turning my back on the world, there might still be moments of irresolution before he came for

Someone with as much to atone for as myself. Murasaki is probably thinking of the fact that she has been born a woman. The question as to whether women were eligible for salvation constantly taxed the minds of many Buddhist ecclesiastics. Murasaki's contemporary, Genshin (942-1017), considered to be the model for the Bishop of Yokawa in the *Tale of Genji*, provided a theoretical basis for a more popular form of Amidism in his *Ôjô yôshû* (Essentials of Salvation) in 985, and part of the undoubted attraction of this belief was its deemphasis of the more esoteric, exclusive aspects of Tendai, together with its acceptance of women. It must not be thought, however, that Murasaki was espousing a populist religion at this point. She talks much of studying sutras, and the invocation of the Buddha's name—*nembutsu*—would have been only one element in her observances. Genshin, whom she never actually refers to by name, was a traditionalist who still considered contemplation to be of prime importance. The essentially monotheistic Pure Land School that was to stress the *nembutsu* above all as the key to salvation was a somewhat later phenomenon.

73. I want to reveal all to you. *Onyumi ni shikisuzuhaberonu koto o . . . nakorazu hikosotokamashoi haberu zo kashi.* This assumes that *onyumi* refers indirectly to the letter that Murasaki is writing at the moment. It is possible that she means a letter totally unconnected with the diary, in which case one would translate: "Things I could not discuss in my letter to you." Note the extremely humble *hikosotsu*. This may point to the fact that Murasaki is addressing a superior or it may be nothing more than a conventional politeness one would expect to find in a letter. It would be wrong to use this as "proof" of the status of the addressee.

No matter how objectionable the person. *Keshiharanu hito o omoi, hikosatsu tote mo, kakarikeri koto yo uoi haberu.* This

involves keeping *omoi* and *hikosatsu* distinct. Sozawa/Morishige treat *keshiharanu* as if it were an adverbial *keshikarazu* and so have: "No matter how outrageously I felt about and wrote about others to you, should I ever go this far?" Hagiani is alone in interpreting *keshiharanu* as "illustrious" or "eminent," a very rare usage, and in treating *hikosatsu* as an auxiliary. His translation reads: "No matter how illustrious a person I was writing to, I would never dream of revealing such things."

Just look how fretful I am! *Mata, tsuzure no kokoro o goranzyo.* Interpreting *tsuzure* more in the sense of "irritated" than "bored" or "listless." Hagiani again has a highly idiosyncratic view of this passage, translating: "Yet you must try and get to the heart of what I write so boringly."

But there is so much more I want to tell you. *Mata, mata mo ôku zo haberu.* Hagiani prefers to emphasize a breakdown in style at this point and so has: "But, but I keep on repeating myself." One version of the *Kunihakobon* tradition reads *Mimi mo ôku zo haberu*, which would mean: "Even walks have ears."

So I'm afraid this will look very shabby. *Ito yatsuretaru. Koto warabi kuse ni uoi haberazu. Kokosara ni yo.* There are numerous other versions of this. Akiyama offers: "Feeling that I should not write on new paper I chose old, so I'm afraid it looks rather shabby. But it is not improper for me to use old paper (for such useless chatter as mine). Rather I did it intentionally." Sozawa/Morishige and Nakano both have: "I felt as though I should not write on new paper because I really did want to avoid attention. It's not that I am ashamed of it; I did it intentionally." The fact that Murasaki is using old paper raises the interesting possibility that this "letter" section may have actually been written on the back of the earlier record part that stopped at sec-

me, trailing clouds of glory. The time too is ripe. If I get much older my eyesight will surely weaken to the point that I shall be unable to read the sutras, and my spirits will fail. It may seem that I am merely going through the motions of being a true believer, but I assure you that I can think of little else at the present moment. But then someone with as much to atone for as myself may not qualify for salvation; there are so many things that serve to remind one of the transgressions of a former existence. Ah the wretchedness of it all!

73. I want to reveal all to you, the good and the bad, worldly matters and private sorrows, things I cannot really go on discussing in this letter, but, no matter how objectionable the person one is describing, perhaps one should never tell all. You must find life irksome. Just look how fretful I am! You must write to me with your own thoughts; no matter if you have less to say than all my useless prattle, I would love to hear from you. Mind you, if this letter ever got into the wrong hands even for a moment it would be a disaster, but there is so much more I want to tell you.

Recently I tore up and burned most of my old letters and papers. I used the rest to make dolls' houses this last spring and since then I have had no correspondence to speak of. I feel I should not use new paper so I'm afraid this will look very shabby, but I am not trying to be rude; I have my reasons.

Please return this as soon as you have read it. There may well be parts that are difficult to read and places where I have left out a word or two, but just disregard them and read it through. So you see—I still fret over what others think of me, and if I had to sum up my position now I would have to admit I still retain a strong sense of attachment for this world. But what can I do about it?

* * *

74. Just before dawn on the eleventh Her Majesty went over to the Hall of Dedication. Her Excellency was with her in the carriage and the ladies-in-waiting crossed by boat. I myself went over much later in the evening. They were in the process of distributing the lotus petals and intoning the