
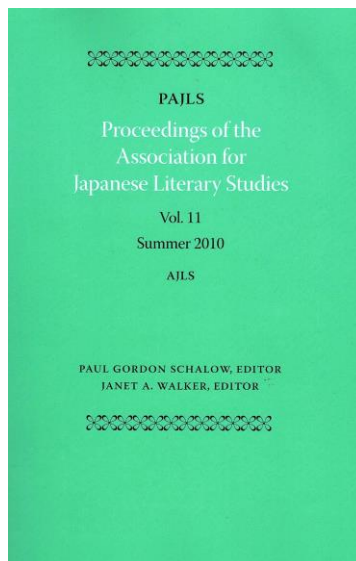


“Dial ‘L’ for Love: The Romantic Cell Phone Tones
of *Ren’ai Shōsetsu*”

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Dial “L” for Love

The Romantic Cell Phone Tones of *Ren'ai Shōsetsu*

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In 2002, literary critic Saitō Minako 齊藤美奈子 proclaimed that the contemporary writing of Japanese women should be named *L-bungaku*, L文学 or L-literature. She then went on to explain that L stands for “Lady, Love and Lib” and that one commonality in “all of these works” is “the fact that they cheer up women.”¹ For a nation suffering from a deflated economy, the popularity of such ‘healing’ literature was almost inevitable, and among these L-literary works, the soothing *ren'ai shōsetsu* 恋愛小説, or love novels, proved to be the most attractive to women writers and readers alike. The new millennium brought new technology, and advancements in that field nurtured the growth of the most contemporary of such ‘romantic’ writing and yet another subgenre of L-literature, *keitai shōsetsu* ケータイ小説 or the cell phone novel. Described as “the first literary genre to emerge from the cellular age,”² the cell phone novel continues to generate new categories in theme and subject matter, but it is the electronic expressions of ‘love’ that provide the latest in so-called ‘healing’ components. This time, the therapeutic effect caters to a generation of teenaged girls born and raised in a disheartened era; and the popularity of this genre is equal to, if not greater than, that of its romantic predecessors.

While the cell-phone novel phenomenon is a recent development, the medium through which it is conveyed is not as new. Cell phones became available to the general public over twenty years ago. According to a survey by ITU, the International Telecommunications Union, in 2007, “there were 3.3 billion cell phone subscribers in the world, with a global cell phone penetration rate of 49 percent.” Interestingly enough, the “first-ever cell phone” used was in Japan in 1979, and this nation now stands as one of the leaders in cell phone technology.³ With cell phones being used more widely than computers in Japan, the variety

¹Saitō 2002, p. 82.

²Goodyear 2008 and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cell_phone_novel.

³http://www.tjf.or.jp/clicknippon/en/jcn/t2jcn_e.html.

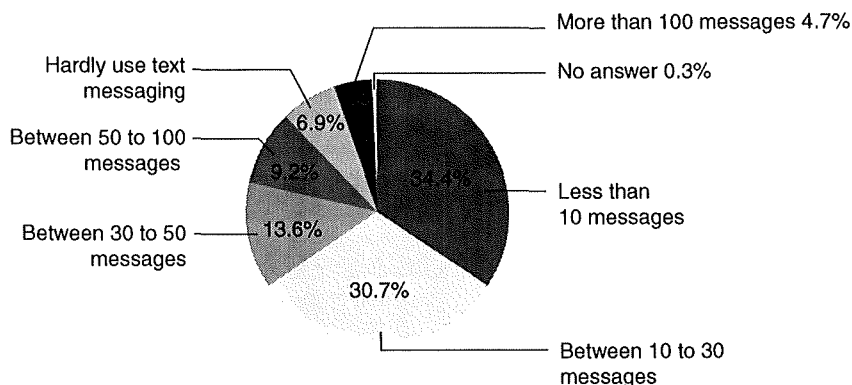


FIGURE 1 Average number of cell phone email messages sent and received per day.

Source: "Survey of Children's Use of Cell Phones, Etc." (2009, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology). Accessed at: http://www.tjf.or.jp/clicknippon/en/jcn/t21jcn_e.html.

of functions available has expanded rapidly, and it is this versatility that gave birth to, among other things, *keitai shōsetsu*, with the earliest of these cell phone novels, *Deep Love Dai ichibu Ayu no monogatari* *Deep Love 第一部アユの物語* (Deep Love Part 1: Ayu's Love Story) by Yoshi,⁴ appearing in 2000.

The publication process of cell phone novels is an important and distinguishing element of this genre. First, these novels are popularized via text messaging to an audience of high school and middle school students that consists mostly of girls. According to the 2008 Survey of Children's Use of Cell phones Science and Technology, 95.9% of Japanese high school students and 45% of junior high school students own a cell phone⁵ and one of their main usages is text messaging. High school students, in particular, send anywhere from ten to over one hundred messages a day, making text messaging a vital means of communication between friends. (Figure 1) And, two of the main reasons for having a cell phone are because "friends have one" and the desire to make life "more enjoyable." (Figure 2)

The popularity of cell phone novels has clearly spread by 'word of thumb,' but not only through friendly text messages. A 2005 study of children's use of information and communication technologies (ICT) revealed that, in addition to the 20.4% of the junior high school and 31.3% of high school students surveyed who use their cell phones to read novels and manga, an even greater percentage use this device to access the internet or play digital games. (Figure 3) These two activities are also closely related to the creation and popularization of cell phone novels. On the Internet, some of the most frequented websites provide

⁴Having part, if not all, of the title in English, like *Deep Love*, is typical of cell phone novels, A one-word pen name written in the romanized form, like Yoshi, is also the norm.

⁵http://www.tjf.or.jp/clicknippon/en/jcn/t21jcn_e.html.

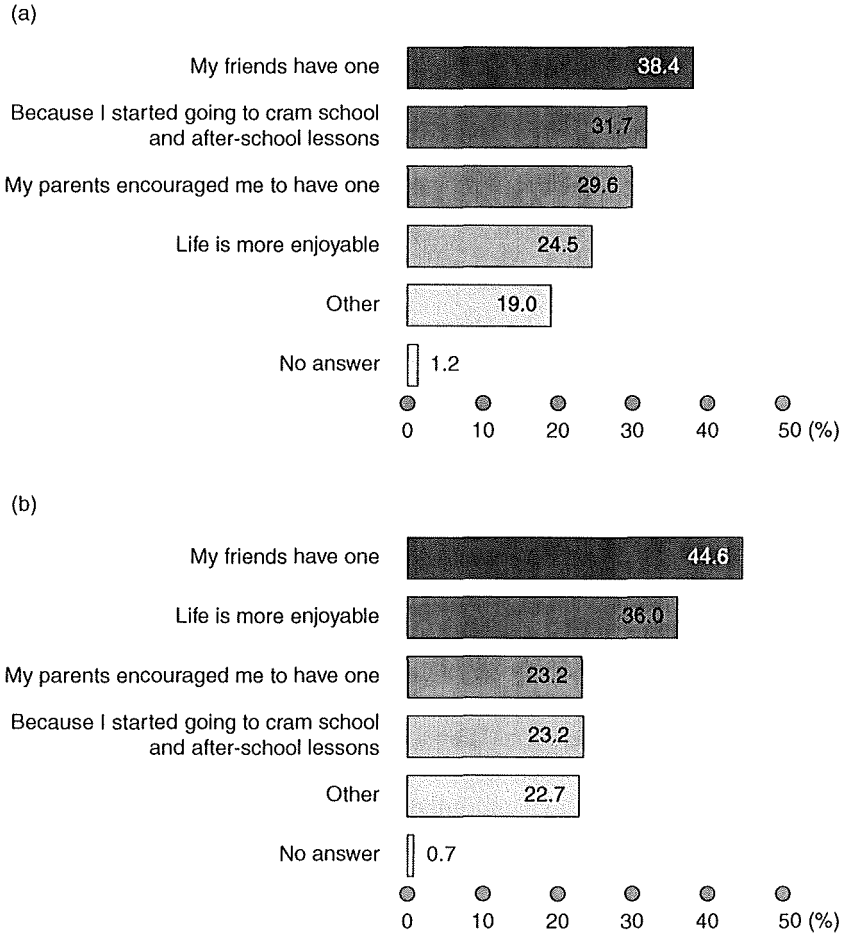


FIGURE 2 Reasons for owing a cell phone (a) Second-year junior high school students (b) Second-year high school students.

Source: "Survey of Children's Use of Cell Phones, Etc." (2009, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology). Accessed at: http://www.tjf.or.jp/clicknippon/en/jcn/t21jcn_e.html.

information about new releases and trends in this genre: *Mahô no toshokan* 魔法の図書館 (*Magic Library*),⁶ *No ichigo* 野いちご (*Wild Strawberry*)⁷ and *Gocco* ごっこ (*Gocco*),⁸ to name but a few. And, there are even sites where many high school students have started writing their own novels in the hope of being discovered and published; one of these is the largest cell phone website, *Mahô no i-rando* 魔法のいらんど (*Magic Island*), which boasts of over one million titles.⁹ Digital games, which

⁶ <http://ip.tosp.co.jp/p.asp?l=MAHOBOK>.

⁷ <http://no-ichigo.jp/>.

⁸ <http://gocco.jp/pc/index.do?ts=1273942978540&hash=a3d859>.

⁹ <http://company.maho.jp/novel/index.html>.

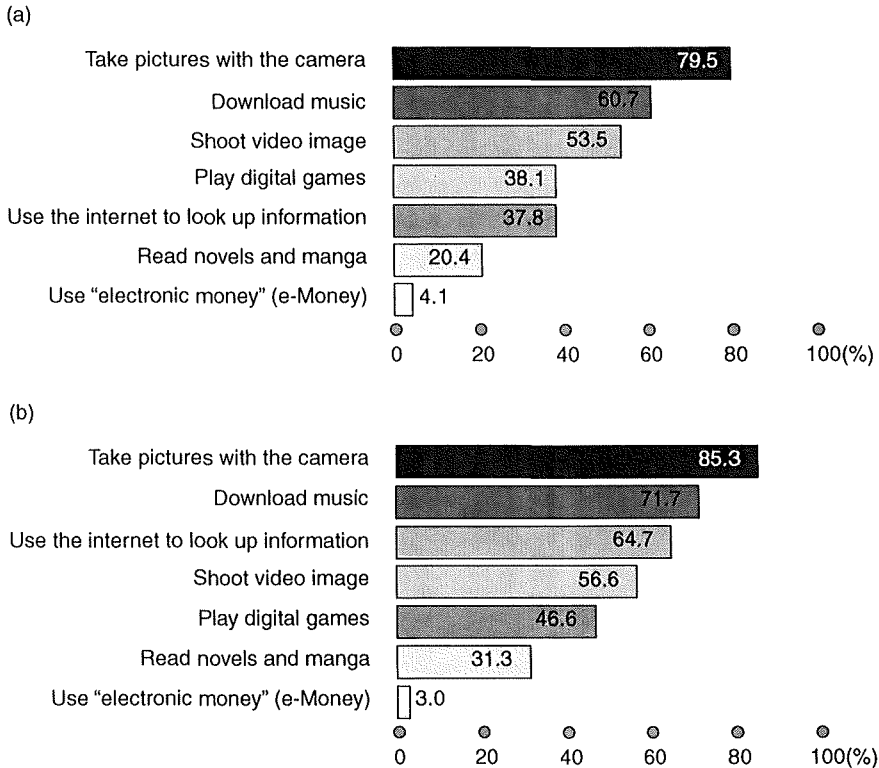


FIGURE 3 Cell phone functions used by (a) junior high school students (b) high school students.

Source: "Survey on Children's ICT Use" (2005, Benesse Educational Research and Development Center). Accessed at: http://www.tjf.or.jp/clicknippon/en/jcn/t21jcn_e.html.

likewise occupy a good deal of their time, are also often linked to cell phone novels. Consequently this new genre of L-literature clearly holds a vital place in the leisure time of Japan's young female population, which, according to a 2007 survey in the *Yomiuri shinbun* 読売新聞 (Yomiuri Newspaper), spends an average of two hours and four minutes a day texting or using the Internet on their cell phones.¹⁰

While questions about the literary quality of cell phone novels have already arisen, the popularity of these works is undeniable. Many originally thought that cell phone novels were part of a passing fad, but by 2007 it became apparent that this genre was here to stay. The place of cell phone novels in the literary arena has been enhanced by the phenomenal sales of the printed versions of these works. When the first cell phone novel *Deep Love* was published as a book in 2002, it soon secured a position in the top ten list of best-selling books. In 2005, when the trilogy of the same name was complete, it sold close to three million copies and

¹⁰ *Yomiuri shinbun* 12/12/2007.

held the top three spots on the best-seller list. In 2007, half of the ten best-selling novels were originally cell phone novels and three of the top spots were held by first-time cell phone novelists.¹¹ *Akai ito* 赤い糸 (*Red String*) by Mei held first place for the first half of that year and its publisher, Goma Books, surpassed the usual top runners in publications and long-established publishing houses, Tohan (literary works) and Nippan (fiction books). To celebrate these accomplishments, Goma Books held a reception with *Mahô no i-rando* in July and in his opening remarks, Yoshino Masayoshi,¹² president of Goma Books, expressed the joy of all cell phone publishers and writers:

We never imagined it would take off like this, and are just astonished. This all started the year before last, when we consulted with Maho i-land about a publication to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of our company. More than three million cell phone novels have been published so far this year. I want to establish this not simply as a fad, but as a new kind of culture.¹³

Indeed, this is a culture that cannot be ignored.

One of the most successful of cell phone novels, *Koizora: Setsunai Koi Monogatari* 恋空～切ナイ恋物語 (*Love Sky: A Sad Love Story*, 2006) by Mika sold over two million copies, and a year after its initial publication, the novel was in its twenty-seventh printing. The popularity of *Love Sky* is extraordinary and the novel is representative of the genre and related trends. Online, *Love Sky* had approximately 25 million readers by the end of its serialization, and in addition to the best-selling hard cover version, which appeared in two volumes, the novel was adapted into a film and a TV drama in 2007 and 2008, respectively. The film version grossed 3.9 billion yen, with 3.14 million people viewing it in the theater,¹⁴ and the DVD was released in April 2008. A manga rendition came out in 2007, and TBS broadcast the TV drama series in six episodes during primetime from August 2 until September, 2008. The audience ratings ranged from 5.6 to 7.6%.¹⁵ To date, no other cell phone novel has surpassed *Love Sky*, yet many still aspire to be masters of this high-tech literary form.

Most of the million or so titles carried by *Mahô no i-rando* are by novice writers, and the website is always seeking new talent. Boasting of over 3.5 billion hits each month, *Mahô no i-rando* offers templates for blogs and personal home pages and readers can post entries via their cell phones. As the site's founder, Tanii Akira 谷井玲 explains, this website provides its subscribers with tools "that allow them to publish novels, short stories and poems, chapter by chapter, just

¹¹ Onishi 2008.

¹² The article quoted gives the name of the President of Goma Books as Yoshino Masayoshi, but according to Goma Books' website, his name is read Ureshino Katsumi 嬉野勝美.

¹³ http://www.trannet-japan.com/ep/tjc_news_dtl.asp?dk=N0000174.

¹⁴ *Sankei Sports* 5/21/2008.

¹⁵ <http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/恋空>.

like a real book."¹⁶ The numerous prizes now available for cell phone novels further encourage young writers, especially women, to get their thumbs moving and upload their creations onto the web. The popularity of the cell phone novel is steady, with no indication of waning, and Japanese scholars are now trying to explain this current literary phenomenon. Matsuda Misa 松田 美佐, a professor of literature and sociology at Tokyo's Chūō University 中央大学 points out that "cell phones occupy pockets of spare time in people's daily lives—especially for exchanging non-urgent e-mails, playing games, visiting fortune-telling sites, and *keitai shōsetsu* ケータイ小説 fit in that tradition."¹⁷ Waseda University 早稲田大学 Professor of Japanese literature Ishihara Chiaki 石原 千秋 also suggests that these new young writers did not originally intend to write or publish, but "instead, in the course of exchanging e-mail, this tool called the cell phone instilled in them a desire to write."¹⁸ Whatever the explanation might be, as the writer and literary critic Honda Tōru 本田透 aptly states in his fascinating study *Naze keitai shōsetsu wa ureru no ka* なぜケータイ 小説は売れるのか (Why do cell phone novels sell?): "just as there was a gold rush, Japan is now experiencing a *keitai shōsetsu* rush."¹⁹

What the growth and popularity of the cell phone novel will mean for Japanese literature as a whole is, of course, yet to be seen. Some critics still view it as but a momentary craze. The literary journal *Bungakkai* 文学界 devoted its January 2008 edition to the cell phone novel phenomenon, and the cover boldly read: "Are *keitai shōsetsu* murdering novelists?" Yet, in the featured article, rather than merely criticizing this new genre, Kusano Akio 草野亜紀夫 discusses its unique traits, explaining "since these works are about the actual experience of the writer, readers are pulled into the story by a call for sympathy."²⁰ Honda Tōru also discusses the place of cell phone novels in the larger scheme of Japanese literature by stating: "*keitai shōsetsu* are not literature in the conventional sense, but instead, entertainment for the masses, novels for the masses, tales for the masses."²¹ He also adds that cell phone novels resemble the *shi-shōsetsu* 私小説 (I-novels) in that their writers seek to express the self, and he then describes them as being a new kind of personal tale, or *watakushi no monogatari* 私の物語.²² Honda's use of the term *monogatari* 物語 is interesting in that the cell phone novel can conceivably be viewed as a modern, visual version of that oral tradition. Writers and readers communicate via email, with fans sending their comments and writers relishing the feedback. Despite the contemporary nature of such dialogues, the ancient art of poetry exchange comes to mind, as does the private nature of the writing of the Heian court ladies,

¹⁶ Day 2008.

¹⁷ Matsuda 2008.

¹⁸ Ishihara 2008b.

¹⁹ Honda 2008, p. 54.

²⁰ *Bungakkai* January 2008.

²¹ Honda p. 184.

²² Honda p. 200.

suggesting that perhaps age-old traditions, or at least elements thereof, are being revived and adapted to present-day life styles.

Rather than considering cell phone novels within the context of the continuous debate over what is pure (*junbungaku* 純文学) and popular literature (*taishū bungaku* 大衆文学), it is important to first study this genre for its own worth and its cultural implications. John Whittier Treat notes in *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture* that “a failure to engage Japanese popular culture, commercial culture will mean a failure to take Japan seriously,”²³ and the same is clearly true of cell phone novels. Representative of and a key to understanding Japan’s new evolving culture, this genre is an important contemporary art form that fits perfectly into the definition set forth by Harriett Hawkins in her study *Classics and Trash: Traditions and Taboos in High Literature and Popular Modern Genres*: it “not only tends to give its patrons what they want” but also acts as a “creator of the culture by which it was created.”²⁴

Although cell phone novels may appear at first glance to be a kind of free form writing, there are indeed certain unwritten rules for their creation and set patterns seen within the genre. Serialization of the work is essential, with each segment written with approximately 1200–1600 characters. Writers use pen names, which are usually short, and hide their identity. By becoming what is known to some as ‘net transvestites,’ they thereby add to the mystique of the work. Readers, and often writers, are in the ten-to-twenty-year-old age group and consist mostly of women. The plot is not decided; rather, the story is built out of parts that eventually fall together to make a whole, and there is no detailed description of place. The language is simple, with few words and a variety of *emoji* 絵文字 (emoticon, or pictures made from keyboard characters) and *gyaru moji* ギャル文字 (gal’s alphabet) frequently used—the former expressing the mood of the protagonist, or writer, and the latter representing a secret language that is used for confidentiality among friends, i.e. the reader, writer, and protagonist. Spaces between lines, which are sometimes rather large, play the important role of indicating lapses in time or the character’s frame of mind and encouraging the reader to, in a sense, fill in the blanks.

Audience participation is thus essential and, as mentioned earlier, readers frequently send writers text messages, and writers use the same medium to popularize their work. Cell phone novelists seemingly appreciate instant feedback and will change stories to please their clientele. As a result, readers also obtain a sense of ownership and this enhances their devotion to the novel. The dedication of cell phone novel fans is unparalleled and while this, in general, is a positive factor, the combination of overzealous fans and conscientious writers has, at time, presented the most noticeable downside of the genre. In 2005, *Tenshi ga kureta mono* 天使がくれたもの (What the Angel Gave Me) became so popular that the author Chaco

²³Treat 1996, p. 3.

²⁴Hawkins 1990, p. xiii.

"was getting 25,000 unique online visitors a day," making her feel "pressured to update her novel and respond to comments every day to keep readers happy."²⁵ With her phone ringing at all hours of the night and unable to get much sleep, it is no surprise that the writer eventually moved from the community-based website, *Mahô no i-rando*, to a private site where she could better monitor the feedback and have the time to continue writing. This is one of the more recent trends in cell phone novel writing, one that many novelists are now following.

Several other developments in cell phone novel history are likewise noteworthy, the first being that while *keitai shôsetsu* were, for the most part, initially written by amateurs, there are now two categories of writers: the professional and, therefore, paid novelists and the amateurs who work for free. Secondly, as Yoshida Satobi 吉田悟美 explains in *Keitai shôsetsu ga ukeru riyû* ケータイ小説がウケる理由 (The Reason For the Popularity of Cell Phone Novels), although the male-authored novel *Deep Love* "gave *keitai shôsetsu* its name as a genre" and set the pace for future works, the majority of cell phone novelists are presently women.²⁶ In addition, although *Deep Love* employs the third-person narrative, beginning with its immediate successor, *What the Angel Gave Me*, writing in the first person and creating a personal diary of sorts became the norm. With this gender change in authorship, sexual descriptions became less graphic and the connection between writers, who profess that their stories are based on actual experience, and readers, who are mostly women, became stronger. Categorization of these novels as fiction or non-fiction seems incidental. More important to this audience is whether or not the reader is moved to tears by the 'reality' of a tale told by a writer who is a peer, or better yet, an almost chat room type of friend.

Yet, despite these shifts in authorship and content, it is actually *Deep Love* that created a format for future cell phone novels. Honda Tôru labels these features as the *nanatsu no tsumi* 七つの罪, or the seven crimes seen in *keitai shôsetsu*,²⁷ and he begins his list with prostitution. What initially appears in *Deep Love* as *enjo kôsai* 援助交際, or compensated dating, where middle-aged men pay young school girls for sexual favors, has more recently been introduced into texts as women paying men at host clubs for their favors. Another sex-related element is rape, and this is usually presented as group rape to emphasize that it is not consensual sex. Interestingly enough, however, not much is written about the emotional damage caused by the rape or about any counseling that might have been needed by the victim. Instead, this act frequently leads to the third so-called crime, or the pregnancy of a minor. Few of the men in cell phone novels seem to use protection, and there is rarely any mention of a possible abortion. The protagonist either becomes an unwed mother, or a miscarriage sends the unborn child to heaven like an angel.

²⁵Kane 2007.

²⁶Yoshida 2008, p. 47.

²⁷Honda pp. 12–18.

Not all of the seven crimes are sex-related, however. Indicative of a social issue that faces this young generation, drugs are frequently used by at least one of the characters. How this affects that entire group of friends, especially the protagonist, is for the most part of more concern than the moral principles involved in drug use by minors. Morality is, in fact, rarely discussed regarding any of the issues presented in cell phone novels, regardless of how outrageous they might seem to an older generation.

Death also plays a major role in this genre, with incurable diseases and suicide also included in Honda's list. The most common victim of illness is the protagonist's boyfriend. Yet, his terminal disease, which is usually cancer or AIDS, is never described in detail. Instead, it is merely presented as fact and used as a device that shows how, in coping with the inevitable outcome, the couple becomes even closer. Suicide is also presented as a parallel to love. Those protagonists, who in rare instances are also ill, have the power to physically recover, but wounds of the heart are not as easily cured. Most of the protagonists try to follow their boyfriends in death by cutting their wrists or doing some similar act, and even though in most cases they do not actually commit suicide, their loyalty, like that of the devoted wives of samurai warriors from the past, is undeniable. The protagonists might not feel guilty about the sex-related events presented in cell phone novels, but their heightened sensitivity towards death is made evident by the detailed descriptions intended to evoke sympathy from the audience. And, it is indeed the trauma of losing a loved one, be it her boyfriend or the baby they conceived, that helps the heroine to grow and, moreover, to win the hearts of her readers.

Since true love is the ultimate goal of cell phone novel protagonists, losing it is the climatic tragedy of these stories. In addition to the crimes experienced in the process of being awakened to true love, interestingly enough, Honda lists this love itself as the seventh and final crime in cell phone novels. This is because, while lacking any religious affiliation, protagonists frequently attempt to invoke the power of Christian entities, like *kamisama* 神様 (God) and *tenshi* 天使 (angels), for salvation from the trials and tribulations of love. Such prayers, Honda claims, "while not perhaps an unusual scene in a Japanese context, would probably seem like a 'crime' to someone from a Christian background." He also goes on to say that as a male reader, he finds it difficult to distinguish between what is and is not true love in these works²⁸—something that is clearly not an issue for this genre's young female fans.

Cell phone novels mirror contemporary Japanese society, like much of popular culture, and an important reason for their popularity is the sympathy that readers feel for the characters. As Glenwood Irons explains in *Gender, Language and Myth: Essays on Popular Narrative*, "important cultural, gender and language issues often lie hidden beneath the adventure mystery and romance of popular

²⁸Honda pp. 17–18.

stories."²⁹ And, that is indeed what we see in *keitai shōsetsu*. Few stories, other than *Deep Love*, are set in Tokyo and they consequently create small, unique virtual worlds in which readers can easily place themselves and identify with the protagonist's experience without becoming an actual victim of social tragedy. In a survey of high school students disclosed in the study of Hayamizu Kenrō 速水健郎 entitled *Keitai shōsetsuteki ケータイ小説的* (Characteristics of Cell Phone Novels), participants replied that "they want to know about the 'real' problems happening in the world, problems that are not actually a part of their own lives."³⁰ These young readers are clearly trying to make sense of their own lives by experiencing the detached reality presented in cell phone novels. Yet, ironically, it is the aloof nature of the protagonist and her friends towards the moral issues facing contemporary Japan that mirrors the detachment from society, as such, that is characteristic of this generation.

The perfect example, and as mentioned before, most successful of *keitai shōsetsu* is *Love Sky*, the story of an average first-year high school student, Mika, who falls in love with bad boy Hiroki, better known as Hiro throughout the novel. *Love Sky* tells the tale of Mika's coming of age and both the pain and joy she experiences during the maturation process. The pace of the novel is extremely fast, with the protagonist falling in love, having sex, being gang raped, attempting suicide, getting pregnant and having a miscarriage all within the first one hundred pages of the story. Drugs, death and awakening to true love all come before the close of the novel, as do conversations with 'God' where the protagonist asks for salvation from her misery. The only thing missing from Honda's list of seven cell phone novel crimes is prostitution, indicating a shift from the trend-setting prototype of cell phone novels, *Deep Love*.

The equally popular *Red String* presents a very similar story and reinforces, moreover, the importance of color in phone novels. The most obvious usage of color is, of course, in the titles of these works. For, just as the clear blue 'sky' embraces Mika in *Love Story* as she struggles with the death of her soul mate, Mei repeatedly stresses the importance of the 'red string' of fate that is traditionally believed to tie the destiny of two lovers together. Both writers thus use color to help their protagonists heal, and they carefully utilize the empty, and thereby white, space between lines to emphasize the purity of their protagonists' love. Most interesting, however, is that by associating color with the male-female relationships portrayed, these authors are, in a sense, reverting to the age-old tradition of having *iro* 色 (color) be associated with sensual pleasure and love affairs. Perhaps this aspect enticed Setouchi Jakuchō 瀬戸内寂聴, established writer of fiction and well-known translator of such classics as *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語 (The Tale of Genji), into writing the cell phone novel *Ashita no niji*

²⁹Irons 1992, Introduction.

³⁰Hayamizu.2008, p. 75.

あしたの虹 (Tomorrow's Rainbow) in 2008, and to do so under the suggestive pen name of *Paapuru* ぱーぷる (Purple).³¹ Either way, Setouchi explains in an interview that "it was exciting to secretly write a cell phone novel"³² and reveal her true identity only after the novel had appeared for twenty-four days on the website *No ichigo*. Readers were apparently equally thrilled about this work, since it received over 250,000 hits during the first four months of its installation on the web.

While cell phone novels are unique in many ways, the appeal and popularity of this genre clearly resembles that of the romance novels enjoyed in the West, as does much of the fundamental storyline. According to the Romance Writers of America, "the two basic elements of the romance novel are a central love story and an emotionally-satisfying ending."³³ As in the case of cell phone novels, the majority of the writers and readers of romance novels are women, and stories provide an escape from the boredom of daily life and an adventure in a sweet love story. In short, both genres are, to borrow Kay Mussell's definition of romance novels: "escape fantasy."³⁴ And, while cell phone novels do not have the 'happy endings' that are inseparable from romance novels, they do portray the development of male-female relationships and how love empowers the heroine to overcome all obstacles and difficulties faced in her search for true love. Moreover, they represent what John G. Cawelti explains in his study *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* are "more sophisticated types of love story" that "sometimes end in the death of one or both of the lovers, but always in such a way as to suggest that the love relation has been of lasting and permanent impact."³⁵

What, however, is probably the initial factor drawing readers to both romance novels and cell phone novels is the easy and affordable access to both genres. Inexpensive paperback editions of the former are readily available at grocery stores and airports, and electronic editions of the latter are easily accessed on the Internet. Cell phone novels can be read on the go and in the comfortable arena of a private and user-friendly screen. More recently, reasonably priced printed versions of cell phone novels have begun to be sold throughout Japan, providing yet another avenue of availability. And, what has encouraged publishing houses to market cell phone novels is that, like romance novels, these books clearly sell.

³¹Setouchi uses Purple as her pen name for her one and only, to date, cell phone novel. The name is written in both English and *hiragana* ひらがな. Although "purple" is obviously an English word and would usually be rendered in *katakana* カタカナ, Setouchi chooses a contemporary form for the *hiragana* version of her name by lengthening the first vowel with the long line traditionally used with *katakana*.

³²<http://www.47news.jp/CN/200809/CN2008092401000749.html>.

³³<http://www.rwanational.org/>.

³⁴Mussell 1984, p. 3.

³⁵Cawelti 1976, p. 42.

According to a 2009 *NY Times* article by Motoko Rich, "at a time when booksellers are struggling to lure readers, sales of romance novels are outstripping most other categories of books and giving some buoyancy to an otherwise sluggish market." Rich goes on to say that "the romance genre may also be especially attractive to consumers during difficult economic times because so many of the books are sold in mass-market format."³⁶ And, the same is true of *keitai shōsetsu*. While "book sales in Japan fell 15% between 1996 and 2006, according to the Research Institute for Publications,"³⁷ cell phone novels have continually shown exceptional sales since 2006 and have likewise helped boost the publishing market.

Yet, despite the charm *keitai shōsetsu* hold for writers, readers, and publishers alike, the position, if any, that this genre should hold in Japanese literature remains the question. A debate about whether these electronic works should be classified as 'pure' or 'popular' literature will inevitably ensue, and it will probably be years before a concrete conclusion, if any, is reached in literary circles. It should be noted, however, that as Glenwood Irons points out in the introduction to *Gender Language and Myth Essays on Popular Culture*: ". . . the arbitrary division between great literature and popular narrative has over time become ruthlessly exposed. Critics have come to see the division as an artificial construct that has little to do with quality and much to do with changeable notions of canonicity."³⁸ Exactly how the canon of Japanese literature might change is, of course, of the utmost interest. Cell phone novels represent writing indicative of the times, and the genre is already changing almost as quickly as it is being transmitted over the web. Subgenres in comedy and horror have already appeared, and audiences are consequently growing in diversity. There is no denying that the computer, and cell phone, age heralds a major shift from print to electronic media. As Setouchi Jakuchō replied when asked why she wrote *Tomorrow's Rainbow*: "some say that cell phone novels are ruining Japanese literature but there has to be a reason that people are reading these works."³⁹

Oblivious of that reason, fans will continue accessing cell phone novels online without any apparent concern for their literary categorization. Fearing only that their virtual 'escape' world might disappear into the cyber space of the Internet, readers will, moreover, keep on purchasing hard cover versions to preserve the memories they have shared with *keitai shōsetsu* and their creators. Cell phone novels will thus continue to heal both readers and the Japanese book market, and interest in this contemporary literary phenomenon will remain strong among readers, writers, and scholars alike—until, perhaps, the appearance of yet another genre of extraordinary popularity.

³⁶ Rich 2009.

³⁷ Kane 2007.

³⁸ Irons 1992.

³⁹ <http://www.47news.jp/CN/200809/CN2008092401000749.html>.

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