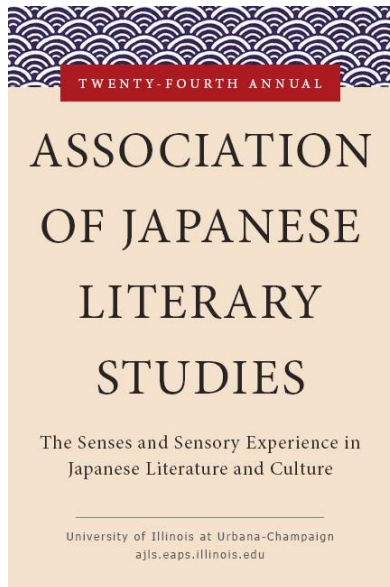


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Function in the Narrative Discourse”

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## COLOR IMAGES IN THE *SARASHINA NIKKI* AND THEIR FUNCTION IN THE NARRATIVE DISCOURSE

Pana Barova-Ozcan

This article discusses images of darkness and light in the *Sarashina nikki*, or the *Sarashina Diary*, a memoir written in the late Heian period by Sugawara no Takasue no Musume, the Daughter of Sugawara no Takasue (1058).

The *Sarashina nikki* utilizes a mixture of darkness and light in a contrasting and complementary relationship to create meaning in, and to structure the *memoir*. The images of darkness and light are achieved through choices of landscape and temporal setting. As a typical representative of the genre of *nikki bungaku* (female memoirs written during the Heian period), the *Sarashina nikki* abounds in landscape and nature descriptions. It is well known that in classical Japanese literature, nature and landscape are not mimetic but symbolically encoded in the poetic language. The encoding was culturally institutionalized and followed strict rules on the range of associations, which evolved over time. Therefore, the poetic language of the Heian period was based on a shared cultural vocabulary, which consisted of natural descriptions that were emotionally charged images and metaphors, expressing a particular feeling or thought. This article investigates the function and meaning of recurrent descriptions of landscape and nature in the *Sarashina nikki*, from the point of view of the poetic language of the period, focusing on shades of darkness/light and the colors black/white.

The image of darkness and light in the memoir consists of three main elements: the predominance of night settings, a preference for the season of winter, and an overwhelming presence of the moon.

The *Sarashina nikki* can be roughly divided into three parts according to the distribution of darkness and/or light. The first part is a travelogue, describing a trip from the provinces to the capital when the protagonist was thirteen years old. The travelogue is a playful display of the colors black and white, and dark and light shades. It can be said that light and white tones predominate in the travelogue, creating a feeling of lighthearted youthful joy and hope.

In the second part of the memoir, darker tones become more prominent with the setting being mainly at night and/or in winter. The third and final part of the memoir features a memorable concluding episode, which displays an intense contrast between light and darkness. I will briefly discuss the three parts and the meaning of the colors (shades) that they display.

The travelogue, which is the initial and longest part of the diary, takes place between late autumn and early winter. The most striking scenes throughout the trip happen at night.

As can be seen from the table below, the color white and light shades in the description of places, visited by the protagonist and her party during the trip, outnumber the color black and darker tones, suggesting a prevailing feeling of joy and hope.

Location	Black/Dark	White/Light
<i>Manoshitera</i> legend		Bleaching cloth
<i>Kuroto no hama</i>	Night, Kuroto (black) Beach	White sand, moonlight
<i>Matusato</i>	Dark night	White skin of dying nurse, moonlight
<i>Musashino</i>	Dirt (black)	
<i>Morokosi ga hara</i>		White sand
<i>Ashigara</i>	Dark, moonless night	Fire, white skin of female performers
Crossing <i>Ashigara</i>		White clouds
Mount Fuji	Deep indigo blue, dusk	White robe, snow, flames, smoke
Kiyomigaseki		Waves, smoke
<i>Ōi</i> river		White water (like white rice flour)
<i>Numajiri</i>	<i>Numa</i> , ‘swamp’ (black)	
<i>Tenchū</i> river	Black logs	High waves (white)
End of the trip	Several night scenes	Snow

It is notable that most scenes in the travelogue are set on winter nights, and the presence of the moon is significant. The meaning and importance of the moon in the memoir will be discussed further in the article. The travelogue highlights the importance of winter at the beginning of the protagonist’s story, which also ends on a winter night. The playful style of the travelogue is gradually replaced by an increasingly sober and serious tone in the rest of the memoir. However, the color contrast (combination) between light and darkness remains, with darkness gradually becoming dominant in the choice of landscape and nature descriptions.

Similar to the travelogue, in the rest of memoir most episodes are set at night and/or in winter, and the moon is a constant presence.

In fact, most memorable and important episodes in the *Sarashina nikki* take place on winter nights, and all new characters appear for the first time at night. The number of night scenes and the number of times the word “night” (*yoru*, *yo*) is mentioned in the *Sarashina nikki* is significantly larger than in other representatives of the genre, where night scenes are usually limited to romantic encounters.<sup>1</sup> However, in the *Sarashina nikki* there is only one indirect romantic encounter, which consists of a conversation on a rainy winter night. Night episodes where the date is specified are also very frequent, which testifies to the importance of those scenes in a memoir where dating is generally rare. Significantly, the most common date in night episodes is the month of October, which was considered as the first winter month during the Heian period.

<sup>1</sup> The use of the word night (*yoru*, *yo*) in the *Sarashina nikki* and other representatives of the genre in numbers: *Sarashina nikki* 『更級日記』: 56; *Kagerō nikki* 『蜻蛉日記』: 78; *Tosa nikki* 『土佐日記』: 14; *Izumi Shikibu nikki* 『和泉式部日記』: 20; *Murasaki Shikibu nikki* 『紫式部日記』: 24; *Tale of Genji* 『源氏物語』: 295 (data from Miyajima Tatsuo, *Koten taishō gōi hyō* [Tokyo: Kasama shoin, 1993]).

Interestingly, most happy events in the memoir happen on winter nights. Among them is the aforementioned single romantic episode in the memoir, along with peaceful and intimate conversations with other ladies in waiting during the protagonist's brief period of court service. Nighttime is when the protagonist famously reads her beloved *monogatari* – a central theme in the memoir. In addition, the numerous descriptions of trips and pilgrimages in the memoir are all set at night.

The constant presence of the moon illuminating the darkness of winter nights throughout the memoir creates the main contrast (combination) between darkness and light. The moon has an overwhelming presence in both the prose and poetry of the *Sarashina nikki*. It is mentioned forty-five times in total, a significant number compared to other representatives of the genre. Poems featuring the moon outnumber poems about the moon in other works of the same period, and poems about the winter moon specifically are the most numerous in the *Sarashina nikki*.<sup>2</sup> It is significant that all episodes featuring the moon culminate with a poem, with only two exceptions, pointing to the high poetic and emotional value of the moon in the memoir.

The moon has a very deep symbolic meaning in the culture, religion and poetry of Heian period Japan, and explaining its significance in the memoir would go far beyond the limited scope of this article. Therefore, I will focus only on the aspect of the moon as contrasting with and at same time complementing the darkness of winter nights in the memoir.

As already mentioned, the moon in the *Sarashina nikki* is usually shining on winter nights. Winter is the setting for the largest number of episodes in the memoir (61), with

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## <sup>2</sup> Frequency of Use of the Word Moon and Poems about the Moon:

Title	Word Moon in Numbers	Number of Poems about the Moon
<i>The Sarashina nikki</i> 『更級日記』	45	15 out of 87
<i>The Kagerō nikki</i> 『蜻蛉日記』	44	6 out of 259
<i>The Tosa nikki</i> 『土佐日記』	17	5 out of 59
<i>The Izumi Shikibu nikki</i> 『和泉式部日記』	22	15 out of 142
<i>The Murasaki Shikibu nikki</i> 『紫式部日記』	14	
<i>The Tale of Genji</i> 『源氏物語』	201	

(data from Miyajima Tatsuo, *Koten taishō gōi hyō* [Tokyo: Kasama shoin, 1993])

### Seasonal Setting and Number of Poems about Moon in the *Sarashina nikki*:

Spring 0

Summer 3

Autumn 3

Winter 6

Unspecified season 3

twenty-one one of them happening at night.<sup>3</sup> The choice of winter as a setting for most episodes is unusual for the genre, because winter was not a very popular poetic topic until the middle ages. For example, in the first imperial *waka* anthology, *Kokin wakashū* (A collection of Japanese poems ancient and modern, ca. 905) or *Kokinshū*, a model for seasonal poetic imagery during the Heian period, there are only twenty-nine poems dedicated to winter. This is a very small number, considering that the *Kokinshū* contains a total of 342 seasonal poems, and two of its long books are dedicated entirely to spring and autumn, the seasons with the highest poetic and cultural value.

As the harshest season of the year, winter in the poetic language was associated with darker and negative aspects of human emotion and existence, including uncertainty, loneliness, desolation, and old age. Snow, the main poetic association of winter, symbolized old age because of the word for “to snow”, *furu* (降る), is a homonym for *furu* 経る (“to pass”) and *furu* 古 (“old”). “Snow,” or *yuki* (雪) is also a homonym for the verb *yuki* 行き (“to go”), which suggests the idea of time passing. The whiteness of snow is another major source of poetic associations and was connected with the idea of *shiraga*, “greying hair” and therefore with old age. Winter is also associated with ending, because winter months come last within the annual cycle.

The choice of winter nights as a predominant setting in the memoir, with their poetic meaning of darkness and uncertainty, corresponds to the prevailing feeling of sadness and desolation in the *Sarashina nikki*. The poetic associations of winter with old age can be seen as part of the narrative structure of the memoir where the number of winter scenes and snowy landscapes increase in the second part of the memoir, mimicking the protagonist’s approaching old age. Thus the wintry settings, and the way they increase throughout the memoir, track the protagonist’s awareness of her increasing age. The special status of winter nights and the winter moon in the *Sarashina nikki* are highlighted in the memoir’s only romantic episode, which will be discussed below.

The primary significance of the protagonist’s evening with Minamoto no Sukemichi is that it is the only romantic encounter in the memoir. The second major reason for its importance is that it represents an extensive praise of snowy winter nights. Notably, the episode is the second longest and most beautiful in the memoir, giving it a special status in the narrative.

On a dark, rainy winter night a high courtier, Minamoto no Sukemichi, engages the protagonist and another lady-in-waiting in a conversation about the beauty of the seasons. Sukemichi describes a particular moving and memorable snowy moonlit winter night in Ise, when he felt as if he was “not in this world” (*kono yo no koto to*

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<sup>3</sup> Scene Setting and Number of Poems according to Season in the *Sarashina nikki*:

Season	Number of Scenes	Number of Poems
Spring	14	14
Summer	11	10
Autumn	32	20
Winter	61 (21 night scenes)	30
Unspecified	14	13

*mo oboezu*)<sup>4</sup>. That night made him aware of the special beauty of winter nights, the snow and the winter moon:

I could scarcely believe I was in this world, and I regretted even that the night was going to break into day. Thoughts of the capital were quite extinguished, and since that time when I was so moved, I have come to deeply appreciate nights in winter when snow has fallen.<sup>5</sup>

Sukemichi concludes his praise of winter by saying that his conversation with the protagonist is another reason for considering winter nights special.

*And now from this night on, nights when the winter drizzle falls into the deep darkness, my heart will be steeped in this same feeling. I certainly feel that tonight is not inferior to the snowy night at Ise.*<sup>6</sup>

The episode foregrounds winter nights in the memoir as an unusual setting for romance, since the customary setting for trysts in the literature of the period was spring. However, the romance in the memoir ends before it could even begin, consisting merely of a very emotional but brief verbal encounter between the protagonist and Sukemichi. Its brevity, incompleteness, and the feeling of disappointment it leaves in the protagonist complies with the poetic image of winter as a symbol of “ending, dying and sadness.”<sup>7</sup>

Sukemichi’s praise of snowy/rainy winter nights suggests associations with a famous episode from *The Tale of Genji*. In the chapter *Asagao*, Genji praises a moonlit, snowy winter night as “carrying his thoughts beyond this world” (*kono yo no hoka no koto made omoinagasare*).<sup>8</sup> Genji expresses his preference for winter over spring and fall, in the first known eulogy of the season in Heian literature, by saying:

More than the glory of flowers and fall leaves that season by season capture everyone’s heart, it is the night sky in winter, with snow aglitter beneath a brilliant moon, that in the absence of all color speaks to me strangely and carries my thoughts beyond this world, there is no higher wonder or delight. Whoever called it dreary understood nothing.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* (SNKBZ) vol. 26 (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1994), 337.

<sup>5</sup> Sugawara no Takasuke no Musume, *The Sarashina Diary: A Woman’s Life in Eleventh-Century Japan*, translated by Sonja Arntzen and Ito Moriyuki (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 296.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>7</sup> The episode ends with Sukemichi sending a note to the protagonist and the expression of her disappointed expectations: “On another occasion like the night of the winter drizzle, I would like to play for you on the biwa all the pieces I know. When I heard that, I eagerly awaited such a chance, but it never came.” (Arntzen and Moriyuki, 298).

<sup>8</sup> *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* (SNKBZ) vol. 21 (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 2006), 490.

<sup>9</sup> Royall Tyler trans., *The Tale of Genji by Murasaki Shikibu* (New York: Penguin Group, 2001), 373.

In both episodes, the striking contrast between the darkness of the night, illuminated by the moonlight and its reflection on the snow, creates an otherworldly feeling and suggests the idea that the winter moon is the point of contact between this world and the other world. The implied reference to *The Tale of Genji* makes the episode even more significant since *The Tale of Genji* has been recognized as a major influence on the *Sarashina nikki*.

The romantic conversation with Minamoto no Sukemichi offers an explanation for the preference for moonlit winter nights in the memoir and their function in the narrative. The cold, bleak landscape of winter, added to the clear and stark moonlight reflected on the snow, create together a surreal and otherworldly feeling of beauty, and symbolize the connection between this world and the next. The feeling of reaching beyond this world – the ephemeral nature of all things, suggested by the numerous episodes of death, parting and dreams – is part of the main themes of the memoir. Romance in the diary belongs to the winter season and is defined by its poetic image. It is beautiful but “frozen” in time and memory, like a flower, which could never experience spring and blooming.

The special function and meaning of winter nights and the moon in the memoir is highlighted in another episode, in which the protagonist goes home from court service on a snowy, moonlit night. The episode ends with the poem:

<i>toshi wa kure</i>	The year is ending
<i>yo wa akegata no</i>	the night begins to dawn
<i>tsukikage no</i>	this brief moment when
<i>sode ni utsureru</i>	the rays on the moon are reflected
<i>hodo zo hakanaki</i>	on these wet sleeves, how ephemeral <sup>10</sup>

The poem is an allusion to a poem in the *Kokinshū* (756) containing the image of the moon reflecting on sleeves:

<i>ahi ni ahite</i>	Matching its feeling to mine,
<i>mono omofu koro no</i>	When I am lost in melancholy,
<i>waga sode ni</i>	Even the moon
<i>yadoru tsuki sae</i>	Dwelling in these sleeves of mine
<i>nururu kao naru</i>	Has a face damp with tears <sup>11</sup>

The special significance of the episode lies in the use of the poetic word *tsukikage* (“shadow of the moon”) and the idea of the moon reflecting on sleeves. The poetic word *tsukikage* creates the idea of a union between light (produced by the moon) and darkness (in the word *kage*, “shadow”). In *Kokorozukushi no Nihongo*, Tzvetana Kristeva discusses the development of *tsukikage* from a mimetic image of the moon’s reflection into a poetic word that stands for human emotions. In the *Kokinshū* and later anthologies, *tsukikage* embodies a contrast between moonlight

<sup>10</sup>Arntzen and Moriyuki, 281.

<sup>11</sup>Laurel Rasplia Rodd and Mary Catherine Henkenius trans., *Kokinshū: A Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern* (Boston: Cheng and Tsui Asian Languages Series, 1996), 266.

and the darkness of the human heart, expressing the idea that even the brightest moonlight cannot bring light to the human heart. Kristeva further explains that the frequent image of *tsukikage* reflecting on sleeves wet from tears (which come from the heart) evolved into the poetic image of the moon, which “understands” the human heart because of being constantly reflected on sleeves soaked with tears. Ultimately, the poetic image of the moon in *tsukikage* gradually transforms into an image of the moon reflecting the human heart. In the Kamakura period the idea of the moon “knowing everything about the human heart” leads to the transformation of the poetic word *tsukikage* or *tsuki no kage* into the poetic word *tsuki no omokage* (“traces of the moon”). *Tsuki no omokage* implies that the moon is the human heart’s keepsake, its only memory of past feelings. The meaning of *tsukikage* as a repository of human feelings is evident in the poem from the *Kokinshū*, to which the poem in the *Sarashina nikki* alludes, where “the moon is matching its feeling to mine,” and therefore has a face “damp with tears.”<sup>12</sup>

The episode and the poem can be seen as a key to understanding the significance of the moon and the recurrence of darkness and light on winter nights and moonlit scenes in the memoir. The moon, which is a constant illuminating presence in the life of the protagonist, alone knows or reflects her feelings. Therefore it is both darkness and light. By knowing her heart so well, the moon also has the function of connecting past and present in the story of the protagonist, and serves an organizing function in the narrative. On the other hand, snowy, winter nights illuminated by the moon evoke an otherworldly feeling, and express one of the main themes of the *Sarashina nikki* – the fleeting and dreamlike nature of human life.

The idea of the fleeting nature of all things is suggested in the poem by the unchanging presence of the moon while everything else is coming to an end: the year, the night and the brief moment.

The image of *tsukikage* reappears at the end of the *Sarashina nikki*, where it functions with other poetic words to create the same image of harmony and conflict between darkness and light as a metaphor of human life.

The now aged protagonist, plunged into loneliness and sadness, dreams of Amida on a winter night. Surrounded by bright light, Amida promises to return and welcome her. The dream is followed by a poem about Obasuteyama. Given that Obasuteyama was a toponym associated with moon viewing, the complete darkness in the poem and the absence of moonlight is striking:

*tsuki mo idede*  
*yami ni kuretaru*  
*wobasute ni*  
*nani tote koyohi*  
*tadzune kitsuramu*

Not even the moon has  
 emerged in the darkness deepening over  
 Old Forsaken Woman Peak  
 How is it, then, that you  
 have come visiting this night?<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Tzvetana Kristeva, *Kokorozukushi no Nihongo: waka de yomu koten no shisō* (Tokyo: Chikumo shobō, 2011), 76-91.

<sup>13</sup> Arntzen and Moriyuki, 330



The absence of the moon at a famous moon-viewing location can be interpreted as a deliberate poetic choice intended to highlight the darkness of the human heart, and the despair of the protagonist. The text continues with a poem containing another powerful darkness/light contrast based on the image of *tsukikage*:

<i>hima mo naki</i>	Even to a heart
<i>namida ni kumoru</i>	clouded by tears that fall
<i>kokoro ni mo</i>	with no respite
<i>akashi to miyuru</i>	the light pouring from the moon
<i>tsuki no kage kana</i>	can appear so radiant <sup>14</sup>

The bright moonlight is the only thing that didn't change in the protagonist's life. However, it cannot illuminate the darkness of her sorrow. As Kristeva explains, the *kage* ("shade") of the moon in the notion of *tsukikage*, is created by the human heart and its pain.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the darkness and light in the poetic word *tsukikage* can also be interpreted in terms of the Buddhist idea of aspiring for enlightenment (symbolized by the moonlight), while being unable to free oneself from the darkness of human attachments and suffering. The poem suggests that the dream of Amida, which promised the light of religious salvation, could not reach the protagonist's heart and brighten its darkness. This idea is supported by the closing poetic exchange in the memoir between the protagonist and a nun, which reads:

**Protagonist:**

<i>shigeri yuki</i>	Mugwort growing
<i>yomogi ga tsuyu ni</i>	even thicker, sodden
<i>sobochitsutsu</i>	with dew;
<i>hito ni toharenu</i>	a voice sought by no one
<i>ne wo nomi zo naku</i>	cries out all alone

**Nun:**

<i>yo no tsune no</i>	In the mugwort of a
<i>yado no yomogi wo</i>	dwelling in the everyday world,
<i>omohiyare</i>	please imagine
<i>somuki hatetaru</i>	the dense grasses in the garden
<i>niha no kusamura</i>	of final renouncement <sup>16</sup>

The darkness in the final poetic exchange is suggested by the poetic word *yomogi* ("mugwort") in the poem quoted above, which carries the connotation of a "dark, overgrown, desolate place."

The memoir ends with an unresolved balance between darkness and light, which can be interpreted as the human heart always hovering between darkness and light, hope and despair.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>15</sup> Kristeva, 78.

<sup>16</sup> Arntzen and Moriyuki, 332

The co-existence and contrast between darkness and light throughout the memoir can be seen as part of a strong Buddhist theme in the *Sarashina nikki*, where the aspiration towards enlightenment is constantly overpowered by the darkness within and the impossibility to overcome worldly sorrow.