“Crossing the Threshold: Genre, Gender, and Reading in Ema Saikō’s Poetry”

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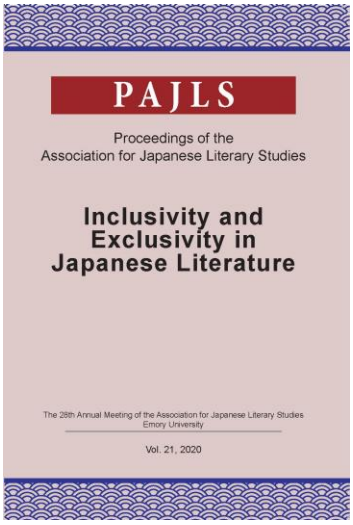

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CROSSING THE THRESHOLD: GENRE, GENDER, AND READING IN EMA SAIKŌ'S POETRY

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This paper examines how literati (*bunjin*) painter and poet Ema Saikō (1787–1861) transgressed the genre of *kanshi* (Sinitic verse, a genre of traditional Japanese poetry composed in classical Chinese) and challenged the social expectations of a woman poet in the early nineteenth century. I show how Saikō did this in a *kanshi* in which she represents one reader's experience reading *The Tale of Genji* (eleventh century; Genji monogatari) in the early nineteenth century. I argue that Saikō uses Chinese poetic form ironically to show how reading *Genji* affords the reader the ability to free her mind from binary, categorical, and ideological thinking.

Saikō's *Genji* poem raises a number of questions that speak to the 2019–2020 AJLS Conference theme, "Inclusivity and Exclusivity": How do we read *kanshi* as a genre of traditional Japanese poetry? How do women *bunjin* navigate the challenges of writing in a male-dominated genre? How does the process of reading allow one to transcend categories such as genre and gender? How does poetic form afford a space for open interpretation, free from the grips of ideology?

By addressing these questions, I continue a conversation started by Atsuko Sakaki, who once used the metaphor of "sliding doors" to describe the door that slid open in the Edo period (1603–1867), inviting Saikō and the other women to join men in the literati arts. Sakaki writes that the same door was shut in the Meiji period (1867–1912) when Edo women's literature was "conveniently forgotten in order to invent the notion of women's liberation in modern Japan."[2]

In this essay, I remove the "sliding doors" from their rails and examine Saikō through another metaphor, "Crossing the Threshold," which has three meanings. The first speaks to the way Saikō challenges the social expectations of women by writing in Chinese poetic form and transgressing the *kanshi* genre by composing a poem on *Genji*. The second is specific to her *Genji* poem, namely the way it represents the vicarious experience of romantic courtship that is afforded by reading *Genji*, a work that invites the reader to feel or empathize with all of its characters. This

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[2] Atsuko Sakaki, "Sliding Doors: Women in the Heterosocial Literary Field of Early Modern Japan," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 17 (1999): 3–38.

experience includes imagining oneself, among other things, being carried across the threshold, as it were, in the arms of a shining prince. The third meaning is what Saikō's *Genji* poem can do as a poem that opens doors to new ways of thinking about reading, a process that need not be determined by ideological discourse.

THE FIRST THRESHOLD: SAIKŌ AND *KANSHI*

Allow me to say more about the way Saikō crosses the first threshold by briefly placing her in literary history. Saikō was an affluent samurai (*bushi*) woman, the eldest daughter of Ema Ransai (1747–1838), who was a physician and scholar of Confucian thought and Dutch learning (*rangaku*). She learned how to paint in the Chinese literati style at the age of six. At age twenty-seven she learned how to compose *kanshi* under the tutelage of Confucian scholar Rai San'yō (1780–1832), who served as her mentor until his death.[3]

Although Saikō primarily considered herself a painter, her experiments in *kanshi* reveal how a woman could use Chinese poetic form to participate in literati culture by embracing it ironically and transgressing the gender norms of the Late Edo period (1750s–1867). Historically *kanshi* was a genre dominated by men. By Late Edo, the proliferation of the arts and sciences gave rise to women intellectuals, including samurai women like Saikō.[4]

On her tombstone, Saikō is described as a woman who defied social expectations: "woman but not a wife / female but not domestic."[5] Saikō may not have conformed to the social expectations of a Japanese woman in real life, but, to a certain extent, she did conform in her poetry. She was expected to perform as a *keishū*, or "talented woman of the inner chamber," a poetic persona related to the archetype of the lonely, abandoned woman in "palace-style poetry" (Ch. *gongti-shi*) of the Chinese Six Dynasties (220–589), which saw a revival in the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. In Chinese literary history, male poets had articulated themselves through feminine tropes for centuries, and more women poets had followed suit by the late imperial period.[6] In Japan, however, male

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[3] See Patricia Fister, *Japanese Women Artists, 1600–1900* (Lawrence, KS: Spencer Museum of Art, 1988), 100–103. For more Saikō and her works, see Patricia Fister, "Female *Bunjin*: The Life of Poet-Painter Ema Saikō," in Gail Lee Bernstein, *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 108–30.

[4] Nakamura Shin'ichirō, *Edo kanshi* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1998), 221–245.

[5] Sakaki, 29.

[6] Paul Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early*

kanshi poets did not routinely take the voice of a woman. As a result, Saikō had to look for models beyond the Japanese tradition, in women's poetry from Late Imperial China, making her performance as a *keishū* a challenging endeavor.

Saikō mastered the artifice of this feminine persona under San'yō's guidance, but her poetry was not entirely fictional. Since the late eighteenth century, theories of Chinese lyricism, including the poetics of "natural sensibility" (J. *seirei*; Ch. *xingling*), called for *kanshi* poets to represent personality by writing from personal experience of everyday life. In accordance with these poetics, Saikō composed poems that represented events from her own life, while simultaneously meeting the expectations of the *keishū* persona, so that her poetry would be recognized (by her mostly male and Confucian readers) as "genuinely feminine." Mari Nagase has pointed out how Saikō's *kanshi* reveals the contradictions of this poetics, which, on the one hand, valued truthful self-representation and, on the other, the performance of conventional feminine ideals.[7] I would argue that Saikō was aware of these contradictions and used them to craft her own brand of irony.

If we think of the speaker in Saikō's *kanshi* through a more contemporary idiom, she might be called a "crossdresser" of sorts, impersonating a Japanese male poet performing an idealized image of a woman. Treating *Genji*, a Japanese classic, in Chinese poetic form added to the irony of this performance. We might even call Saikō's *kanshi* "Reading Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji*," then, a Japanese poem dressed in Chinese drag. And in the way that Saikō represents a reader imagining herself as male and female characters, she suggests that reading itself is a form of drag.[8]

To be sure, Saikō was not the only poet in Japanese history to treat *Genji* in Chinese poetic form, but she was likely one of few women (if not the only woman) in Late Edo to do so.[9] Late Edo *kanshi* gave rise to many

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Chinese Texts (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001); Xiaorong Li, *Women's Poetry of Late Imperial China: Transforming the Inner Chambers* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2012).

[7] Mari Nagase, "'Truly, they are a lady's words': Ema Saikō and the Construction of an Authentic Voice in Late Edo Period *Kanshi*," *Japanese Language and Literature* 48: 2 (Oct. 2014): 279–305.

[8] I thank Ken Ito, Lani Alden, Daryl Maude, and Keith Vincent for helping me think through this idea.

[9] Confucian scholar Hara Kosho (1767–1827) produced two collections of *Genji* poems: "Ten Miscellaneous Poems on Reading *The Tale of Genji*" (1812) and "Fifty-Four Poems on Reading *The Tale of Genji*" (1815). All the poems are pentasyllabic quatrains (*gogon zekku*). Kosho is the father of woman *bunjin* Hara

poems on material objects, including books and paintings, and practices of the everyday, such as reading. Such poems represented the thriving book culture of the time. Women's participation in this culture was represented by ukiyo-e artists.[10]

By and large Saikō's poems on books and reading concerned works written in classical Chinese, from ancient texts like Sima Qian's (145? – 90? BCE) *Records of the Grand Historian* (Shiji) to anthologies of Ming women's poetry. Saikō also composed on contemporary works in literary Sinitic (*kanbun*), including her mentor San'yō's *Nihon gaishi* (ca. 1826; An Unofficial history of Japan), a text that Robert Tuck describes as a nineteenth-century "blockbuster."[11] For Saikō, composing on *Genji* was an exception, as it was a work of vernacular classical Japanese (*kana*). In Late Edo, *Genji* was also a blockbuster of its own, and a controversial one at that.

In Japanese literary history, *Genji* was long upheld as a required text for aristocratic women to read. During the Edo period *Genji* was not universally accepted as a text that was suitable for all women. [12] This ambivalence stems from the novel's varied reception in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Orthodox Confucian and Buddhist scholars found the amorous content in *Genji* obscene, warning that it would corrupt the common reader.[13] In the eighteenth century, scholars of Confucian thought and scholars of National Learning (*kokugaku*) both shared the humanistic view that literature represents human emotion, using the Chinese and Japanese traditions, respectively, to promote this view. Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) argued that *waka* (traditional court poetry)

Saihin (1798–1859). See Kotani Kikue, "Hara Kosho *Doku Gengo gojūshishu* nitsuite: kanshijin no *Genji monogatari* e no kanshin," *Nihon Daigaku daigakuin sōgō shakai jōhō kenkyūka kiyō* 13 (2012): 165–175.

[10] P. F. Kornicki, Mara Patessio, and G. G. Rowley, eds., *The Female as Subject: Reading and Writing in Early Modern Japan* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2010).

[11] Robert Tuck, "*Nihon Gaishi* Goes Global: A Translation History of a Nineteenth-Century Blockbuster," *Monumenta Nipponica* 76: 1 (2021): 69–115.

[12] Satoko Naito, "Beyond *The Tale of Genji*: Murasaki Shikibu as Icon and Exemplum in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Popular Japanese Texts for Women," *Early Modern Women* 9: 1 (2014): 47–78; P. F. Kornicki, "Unsuitable Books for Women? *Genji Monogatari* and *Ise Monogatari* in Late Seventeenth-Century Japan," *Monumenta Nipponica* 60: 2 (2005): 147–193.

[13] Lawrence Marceau, "*Ninjō* and the Affective Value of Literature at the Kogidō Academy," *Sino-Japanese Studies* 9: 1 (1996): 47–55.

and *monogatari* (tales), especially *Genji*, had the power to form empathic communities and foster a harmonious society.[14]

Saikō engaged with these intellectual currents in her *Genji* poem. Although it is unknown how Saikō came to have read *Genji*, there were plenty of versions for her to choose from. By Late Edo, *Genji* had been transformed by and transmitted across popular print media that continued to combine text and image, including woodblock prints (*hanga*), vernacular prose books (*kana zōshi*), and collected volumes (*gōkan*).[15] As Michael Emmerich has argued, *Genji* was in a perennial state of "replacement" by such popular media.[16]

Through San'yō's intellectual network, Saikō likely had access to scholarly commentaries on *Genji*. Kado Reiko has speculated that Saikō had read Norinaga's commentary *The Tale of Genji: A Little Jeweled Comb* (1799; Genji monogatari Tama no ogushi).[17] It is also possible that Saikō came across senior councilor Matsudaira Sadanobu's (1759–1829) essays on *Genji*, compiled in *From Blossoms to Moonlight* (1818; Kagetsu zōshi).[18]

THE SECOND THRESHOLD: READING *GENJI*

At this moment when *Genji* was circulating in various forms—vernacular adaptations, woodblock paintings, and scholarly commentaries—between 1829 and 1831 Saikō composed a series of heptasyllabic quatrains on selected chapters, the first two of which she compiled under the title "Reading *The Tale of Genji*" (Doku Gengo / Gengo o yomu).[19] Upon reading these initial quatrains her mentor San'yō left words of encouragement:

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[14] Peter Flueckiger, *Imagining Harmony: Poetry, Empathy, and Community in Mid-Tokugawa Confucianism and Nativism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

[15] For images see John Carpenter, et al., *The Tale of Genji: A Japanese Classic Illuminated* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2019).

[16] Emmerich uses the word "replacement" to "describe the creation of a new 'place' in the present for the imagination of a canonical work, and to describe the realignment of textual relationships that occurs as a new image of the original settles into the contemporary literary field." See Michael Emmerich, *The Tale of Genji: Translation, Canonization, and World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 17.

[17] Kado Reiko, *Ema Saikō: Kaseiki no joryū shijin* (Tokyo: Fujiwara Shoten, 2010), 279–292.

[18] For translations see Thomas Harper and Haruo Shirane, eds., *Reading The Tale of Genji: Sources from the First Millennium* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

[19] Twelve quatrains on selected chapters from *Genji* can be found in Saikō's

> Glancing at the title "Reading *The Tale of Genji*," I expected the poems therein to offer a proper and formal argument about the work with some unique and exceptional insights, and after reading the poems I found that they amount to no more than this. But it is still a good topic. If you do this, then how about composing one poem for each chapter, making a total of fifty-four quatrains. Afterwards, how splendid it would be to compose a pentasyllabic ancient-style poem as a coda [*batsu*], concluding the collection with sober language.
>
> 瞥見讀源氏物語、題意必有正論卓異者、及讀之、唯是如此、然亦好題目、苟作則毎篇一詩、成五十四絶句亦可耳、然後以五古一首為跋、用莊語終之盡善矣[20]

In recommending that Saikō compose a poem for each chapter of *Genji*, San'yō likely had in mind Confucian scholar Hara Kosho's (1767–1827) "Fifty-Four Poems on Reading *The Tale of Genji*" (1815; Doku Gengo gojūshishu), which San'yō had read, leaving an epilogue expressing his praise.[21]

In 1834 Saikō followed her mentor's suggestion and concluded her quatrains with a coda, although San'yō did not live to see it. In lieu of his recommended pentasyllabic ancient-style poem (*gogon koshi*), she composed a heptasyllabic ancient-style poem as a coda (*batsu*) entitled "Reading Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji*" (Doku Shishi / Shishi o yomu), treating *Genji* as a whole.[22]

Below I offer my translation of the coda poem. I also include the *kundoku*, or "Japanese reading gloss," alongside Saikō's original Chinese to show how a Late Edo reader might have read the poem aloud in Japanese and to disabuse readers of the notion that reading out in Chinese is the

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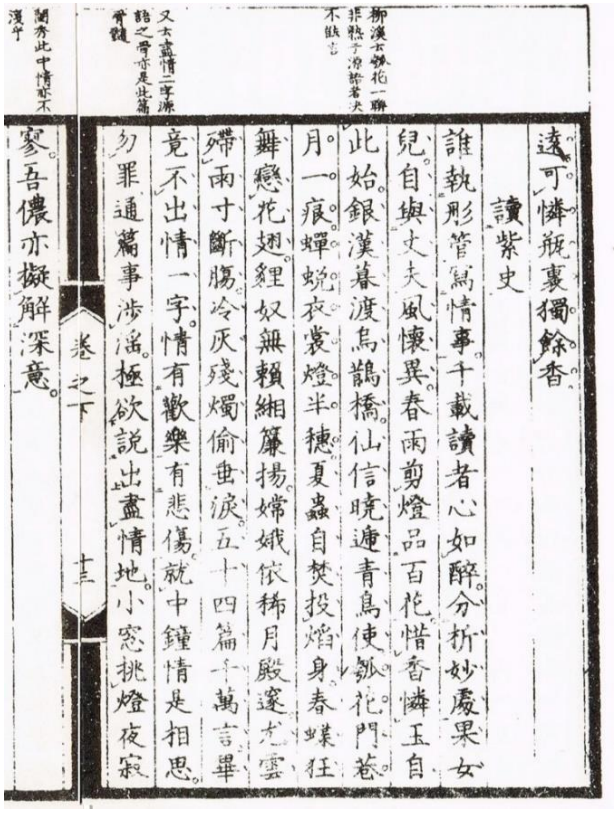
manuscript *Shōmu shisō* (Poetry collection of the dreamer of Xiang) with Rai San'yō's annotations. See Ema Saikō, *San'yō sensei hiten shōmu shisō* (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1997). I examine five of them in "The Reader is Hooked: Ema Saikō's Poems on *The Tale of Genji*," forthcoming in *Early Modern Women*.

[20] Iritani Sensuke and Kado Reiko, eds., *Ema Saikō shishū Shōmu Ikō* (Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 1992), 2: 263. From here on *SI*. In this article I have retained the traditional form of Chinese graphs, as they appear in *Shōmu ikō* (1871; Posthumous manuscript of the dreamer of Xiang). This posthumous collection compiles 350 of Saikō's *kanshi*. Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations are mine.

[21] See Note 9.

[22] For an earlier English translation of this poem and the five quatrains on *Genji* with selected commentary, see Hiroaki Sato, *Breeze Through Bamboo: Kanshi of Ema Saikō* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 152–153 and 117–121.

default or preferred form for *kanshi* composed by a Japanese poet.[23] When a Japanese poet composed *kanshi*, he traditionally did not include *kundoku* because the poem's implied readers would be able to read it according to Japanese convention. In some cases *kunten* (notations) are provided so that the reader can parse the line with ease. These notations were included in Saikō's posthumous manuscript *Shōmu ikō* (1871) (See Figure 1).


讀紫史

遠可憐瓶裏獨餘香

誰執彤管寫情事千載讀者心如醉分析妙處果女兒自與丈夫風懷異春雨剪燈品百花惜香憐玉自此始銀漢暮渡烏鵲橋仙信曉通青鳥使瓠花門巷月一痕蟬蛻衣裳燈半穗夏蟲自焚投焰身春蝶狂舞戀花翅狸奴無賴繩簾揚嫦娥依桂月殿邃尤雲殢雨寸斷腸冷灰殘燭偷垂淚五十四篇千萬言畢竟不出情一字情有歡樂有悲傷就中鐘情是相思勿罪通篇事涉淫極欲說出盡情地小窓挑燈夜寂寥吾儂亦擬解深意

Figure 1: Ema Saikō, "Doku Shishi / Shishi o yomu" 讀紫史 in recent facsimile of *Shōmu Ikō* 湘夢遺稿 (1872; Manuscript of the dreamer of Xiang). Courtesy of the author.

[23] I thank John Timothy Wixted for encouraging me long ago to include *kundoku*. In his work on modern *kanshi* Wixted has shown how including the *kundoku* alongside the Japanese author's Chinese poem demonstrates that *kanshi* were voiced in Japanese, even though their composition followed the rules of prosody of Chinese poetic form. See John Timothy Wixted, "The *Kanshi* of Mori Ōgai: Allusion and Diction," *Japonica Humboldtiana* 14 (2011): 89–107.

One poem allows for several *kundoku* readings, each varying slightly from the other, yet all together representing the poem's sounds and meanings in a state of simultaneity. To address this différance or deferral of Chinese poetry proper, scholars starting with Matthew Fraleigh have referred to the genre as "Sinitic," a term that recognizes the alterity of *kanshi* and recovers the locality that gets lost when readers treat *kanshi* as "Chinese poetry," which it is and is not.[24]

My translation divides Saikō's poem into four parts, representing the shifts in thought: the speaker's comment on female authorship, her recollection of the novel distilled into a mosaic of allusive images, her engagement with intellectual discourses about the meaning of *Genji*, and finally her own process of reading:

Reading Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji*

Who wields a red brush and depicts the truth of human emotion,
Intoxicating the hearts and minds of readers for a thousand years?
Discerning the nuances of its beauty, sure enough, she is a woman;
Her elegant sensibilities naturally differ from those of a man.

Spring rain falling, he trims the lamp, and ranks a hundred blossoms,
Whereupon his tales of cherishing scent and pitying jade begin.
At dusk he crosses the Milky Way on the bridge of magpie wings;
By dawn he entrusts the blue bird to deliver a letter of immortal love.
The gourd vine flower by the gated villa, traced by the waning moon;
The molted cicada's shell, a sheer gown, in the half-light of the torch.
Summer insects burn on their own, throwing themselves into the flame;
Spring butterflies dance about madly, their wings wooing the blossoms.
A mischievous cat lifts the green brocaded blinds;
Chang'e is indistinct, hidden in a palace on the moon.
Romances lasting as long as cloud and rain broke their hearts into pieces;
When all but cold embers remained of the flame, in secret they shed tears.

Fifty-four chapters comprising tens of thousands of words,
And in the end, nothing departs from the word "emotion."
In emotion there is joy and pleasure, pain and sadness;
Above all, the emotion most resonant is longing for the other.

[24] See the discussion "*Kanshibun*: What to Call it?" in Matthew Fraleigh, *Plucking Chrysanthemums: Narushima Ryūhoku and Sinitic Literary Traditions in Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016), 20–28.

Do not condemn the entire work for straying into indecency;
The intent is to speak all there is to speak of human emotion.

At my little window I hold up a lamp, the night is desolate and still;
I, too, will attempt to plumb the profundity of mind and heart.

	Shishi o yomu	讀紫史
	tareka tōkan o torite jōji o utsusu	誰執彤管寫情事
	senzai dokusha kokoro yoeru ga gotoshi	千載讀者心如醉
	myōsho o bunseki suru wa hatashite joji	分析妙處果女兒
	onozukara jōfu to fūkai kotonaru	自與丈夫風懷異
	shun'u tō o kirite hyakka o hinsu	春雨剪燈品百花
	kō o oshimi gyoku o awaremu wa kore yori hajimaru	惜香憐玉自此始
	ginkan kure ni wataru ujaku no hashi	銀漢暮渡烏鵲橋
	senshin akatsuki ni okuru seichō no tsukai	仙信曉遞青鳥使
	koka monkō tsuki ikkon	瓠花門巷月一痕
	senzei ishō tō hansui	蟬蛻衣裳燈半穗
	kachū mizukara yaku hono'o ni tōzuru mi	夏蟲自焚投焰身
	shunchō kuruimau hana o kouru tsubasa	春蝶狂舞戀花翅
	rido burai ni shite shōren agaru	貍奴無賴綢簾揚
	kōga iki toshite getsuden okubukashi	嫦娥依稀月殿邃
	yū'un tei'u sundan no chō	尤雲殢雨寸斷腸
	reikai zanshoku hisoka ni namida o taru	冷灰殘燭偷垂淚
	gojūshihen senmangen	五十四篇千萬言
	hikkyō idezu jō no ichiji yori	畢竟不出情一字
	jō ni kanraku ari hishō ari	情有歡樂有悲傷
	nakanzuku shōjō naru wa kore sōshi	就中鍾情是相思
	togamuru nakare tsūhen koto in ni wataru to	勿罪通篇事涉淫
	kiwamete jōchi o tokiidashitsukusan to hossu	極欲說出盡情地
	shōsō tō o kakagereba yoru sekiryō	小窓挑燈夜寂寥
	ware mo mata shin'i o satoran to gisu	吾儂亦擬解深意[25]

[25] See Fukushima Riko, ed., *Joryū: Ema Saikō, Hara Saihin, Yanagawa Kōran*, vol. 3 of *Edo kanshisen* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1995), 73–79. From here on *Joryū*. The *kundoku* above is by Fukushima in *Joryū*, with one modification: I have modified Line 22 to reflect the vernacular and prosaic register of the Chinese. For *kundoku* with slight variations see *SI*, 2: 366–367.

The poem demonstrates how Saikō crosses the threshold in the second sense I use in this essay: she ironized the *keishū* persona, representing the speaker outside the conventional poetic topos of the inner chamber and imagining herself as the author Murasaki, male and female characters in the novel, and *Genji* critics in Late Edo intellectual history.

By directly referencing Murasaki Shikibu's name in the title of the poem, Saikō emphasizes the work's authorship, alluding to the way Murasaki had become an iconic and idealized figure in vernacular prose books intended for women in Late Edo. As Satoko Naito describes, Murasaki is "constructed as a seemingly perfect woman—one who is beautiful, intelligent, chaste, and religiously devout" and is also presented as a historian.[26] In her poem title, Saikō refers to *Genji* as "Shishi," or "Murasaki's history." This title also alludes to the early idea of fiction in the Chinese tradition as a history or biography of historical figures. But as the poem unfolds, Saikō portrays Murasaki not as a historian or idealized woman, so much as a masterful woman artist, and *Genji* not as a biography, so much as a mosaic of vivid images that invite the reader's empathy.

As the speaker self-identifies with Murasaki's gender and literary sensibility, she forms an imaginary relationship with the author in the empathic meeting of minds. [27] She merges with author Murasaki, beginning with the couplet formed by Lines 5 and 6: "Spring rain falling, he trims the lamp, and ranks a hundred blossoms, / Whereupon his tales of cherishing scent and pitying jade begin." This couplet alludes to the second chapter "Hahakigi" (Broom cypress), in which Genji, his brother-in-law Tō no Chūjō, and other men have an intimate conversation about women, discussing the politics of courtship and finding a suitable woman to marry. Spring rain falls outside, and the men chat inside by the candlelight, ranking "one hundred blossoms," a metaphor for women. The scene also

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[26] Naito, 49.

[27] Such an opening parallels what Lawrence Kramer has described as the rise of "absorbed reading" in nineteenth century European reading culture where readers formed imaginary relationships with authors, and looked to them for "advice, emotional support, approval, and wisdom." He writes: "Poring over the pages of a favorite author became a means of cultivating what I have elsewhere called 'the private, hermeneutically active, emotionally varied subjectivity that became the favored model of the era.'" Kramer argues that in the nineteenth century "[l]iterature flourished primarily not in the monumentalized form of the work but in the personified form of the author." Lawrence Kramer, "Liszt and the Literary," in *Liszt: A Chorus of Voices*, edited by Michael Saffle, et al. (New York: Pendragon Press, 2012), 220; Lawrence Kramer, *The Thought of Music* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 125.

comments on Murasaki's project as a whole, and through the act of reading the reader is conscripted into ranking fictional characters.

Lines 5–16 move freely in and out of allusions to represent the experience of reading. *Genji* is filled with allusions to poetry, philosophy, and myth, including the legend of the oxherd (Hikoboshi) and the weaver maiden (Orihime), as represented in Line 7: the two lovers are separated by the Milky Way and reunite by crossing a bridge formed by the wings of magpies on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month (the Tanabata festival). The allusion summarizes the drama of romance depicted in the novel: Genji consummates his romances in the evening; by morning he has fled, whereupon he sends his messenger boy to deliver poems to the woman with whom he spent the night.

Lines 9 and 10 represent women whom Genji courts early in the narrative: Yūgao (The Lady of the Evening Faces) and Utsusemi (The Lady of the Cicada Shell). Lines 11 and 12 allude to the untoward romantic advances suffered by Tamakazura (Tō no Chūjō's daughter) in the "Butterflies" and "Fireflies" chapters. The allusions in Lines 13 and 14 speak to the method by which the heart and emotions of characters are revealed to the reader: some exposed like the Third Princess (Onna San no Miya) after a cat raises the blinds, giving Kashiwagi a glimpse of her beauty, and some women (perhaps Oborozukiyo) hidden like Chang'e, the goddess of the moon in Chinese mythology. Through these allusions, the poet revisits the complexity of romance and courtship in *Genji*, empathizing with the novel's characters, especially the women.

As the speaker lists allusions to *Genji* in this long middle section of the poem, the mosaic of images suggests that the process of reading involves remembering and reimagining scenes from the narrative. In the reimagining of *Genji*, Saikō's poem also challenges the limits of the *kanshi* genre. Some of the images are beautiful as poetic images on their own; but for readers who are not so familiar with *Genji*, the meaning of these images may be opaque. For example, physician and *kanshi* poet Kanda Ryūkei (1796–1851) commented on Lines 9 and 10, "The gourd vine flower by the gated villa, traced by the waning moon; / The molted cicada's shell, a sheer gown, in the half-light of the torch": "Only someone familiar with *The Tale of Genji* could have composed the gourd flower couplet (瓢花一聯非熟于源語者決不能言)."[28] Ryūkei's remark speaks to Saikō's skill as a poet in representing a reader absorbed in the novel, reimagining two memorable encounters with beautiful women as a beautiful yet elusive couplet.

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[28] *SI*, 2:368.

Lines 5–16 exemplify Saikō's representation of reading *Genji* as a transactional event where the absorbed reader gives life to the literary text. In her monumental work on the transactional theory of literature, Louise Rosenblatt writes: "the intrinsic value of a literary work of art resides in the reader's living through the transaction with the text."[29] By transaction, Rosenblatt means "an ongoing process in which the elements are . . . each conditioned by and conditioning the other."[30] Echoing Rosenblatt, Lines 5–16 are not merely reproducing or interpreting, both of which are one-way streets; rather, Saikō's poem is arguing that the process of reading is an event at a particular time and place in which the reader conditions the text and the text conditions the reader. Saikō has used Chinese poetic form to represent the reader recalling iconic and climactic episodes from the novel, simultaneously reimagining them anew through Chinese metaphor. Deploying these Chinese tropes breathes new life into *Genji*.

The mosaic of images ends with the couplet formed by Lines 15 and 16: "Romances lasting as long as cloud and rain broke their hearts into pieces; / When all but cold embers remained of the flame, in secret they shed tears." Although there are no pronouns in the original Japanese, I have added "they" and "their" in my translation to clarify the poem's implicit argument that broken hearts and tears are shared by both male and female characters in *Genji*.

The tearful heartbreak in Lines 15 and 16 serve as a pivot to the speaker's next point: the novel's structure of feeling. The word that addresses this structure of feeling is *jō* 情, translated as "emotion." Confucian scholar Gotō Shōin (1797–1864) left commentary lightly praising Saikō for representing the *jō* of *Genji* in her poem: "Talented woman of the inner chamber, the *jō* here [in your poem] is not shallow either (閨秀此中情亦不淺乎)."[31]

By repeatedly deploying the term *jō*, Saikō engages with Norinaga's theory that the essence of *Genji* is *mono no aware* (lit., "the pathos of things"). Thomas Harper, echoing Hino Tatsuo, has argued that for Norinaga *mono no aware* meant "to empathize or sympathize with the feelings of others."[32] Saikō's speaker makes a similar argument with the word *jō*, using it as a metaphor for *mono no aware*. She argues that while all the emotions can be found in *Genji*, "longing for the other" (*sōshi*) is

[29] Louise M. Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 132.
[30] Ibid., 17.
[31] *SI*, 2: 368.
[32] Harper and Shirane, 415.

the most resonant. Feelings of longing abound in *Genji* since all the relationships end in separation, and in most cases the woman is portrayed as longing and misunderstood. These moments of longing especially invite the reader to empathize and sympathize with characters.

This section of the poem ends with a couplet in Lines 21 and 22 addressing the reader, a kind of apostrophe to the absent critics of *Genji*: "Do not condemn the entire work for straying into indecency; / The intent is to speak all there is to speak of human emotion." The speaker's claim in Line 21 mimics the authoritative and accusatory rhetoric of Confucian- and Buddhist- inflected criticism (e.g., *nakare*), which found the sexually suggestive or salacious scenes in the novel enough evidence to accuse the work of moral indecency (*in*). She contends that these so-called indecencies are essential to the work's intent to express the full range of human emotion.

In defense of the novel and its author, the speaker shifts from the moralizing tone in Line 21 to a lyrical voice in Line 22 with echoes of Chinese vernacular (e.g., *tokiidashitsukusan to*), simulating, as best as one can do in *kanshi*, the vernacular Japanese language in which *Genji* was originally composed. It was common for Late Edo *kanshi* poets to incorporate vernacular Chinese and Japanese words into their poetry. The word in question is *jōchi* 情地 (Ch. *qingdi*): in medieval Chinese histories the word referred to "the political rank of kin [in the court]," or, more generally, "circumstance; predicament." By deploying this word in her poem, Saikō may be alluding to the representation of Heian social and political life in *Genji*, but Japanese scholars Fukushima Riko, Iritani Sensuke and Kado Reiko do not take this interpretation, likely because the line and Saikō's poem as a whole concern the representation of emotion. In a similar vein, I propose that Saikō deployed this Chinese word to pun the Japanese word *kokochi* 心地, or "feeling, emotion, affect," which appears in *Genji* and other classical literature. In Japanese, the Chinese graphs *jō* 情 and *shin* 心 are metonyms, as both can be read (in *kundoku*) as *kokoro*.[33]

After distilling Murasaki's tens of thousands of words into a mosaic of allusive images, Saikō's poem opens up a poetic space to engage with literary discourses, including Norinaga's theory of *mono no aware* through the Chinese idiom of *jō*. It also opens a space that invites the interpretation of others, including male critics such as Ryūkei, who remarked that Lines 21 and 22 point to the crux of Murasaki's novel and Saikō's poem: "The

[33] I thank Ikezawa Ichirō for bringing this interpretation to my attention.

word *jinjō* (to speak all of emotion) is the essence of *The Tale of Genji*, and also the heart of this poem (盡情二字源語之骨亦是此篇骨髓**).**"[34]

THE THIRD THRESHOLD: TOWARD A THEORY OF READING

By engaging with Late Edo critiques of *Genji*, namely Norinaga's theory of *mono no aware*, Saikō's poem crosses another threshold, showing how the act of reading invites multiple interpretations. In this way she speaks to Rosenblatt's idea that the text can be a form of communication among different readers:

> Perhaps we should consider the text as an even more general medium of communication *among readers*. As we exchange experiences, we point to those elements of the text that best illustrate or support our interpretations. We may help one another to attend to words, phrases, images, scenes, that we have overlooked or slighted. We may be able to reread the text and revise our own interpretation.[35]

Rosenblatt points out that the reader may be able to "reread the text and revise our own interpretation." Saikō's speaker does exactly that in the final couplet. The poem concludes with a scene of the speaker reading *Genji* by candlelight. Through the process of reading, the speaker's lonesome persona as a woman of the inner chamber joins author Murasaki and the characters in her novel. This empathetic and sympathetic union made possible by reading is poly-perspectival and inter-subjective: as writer, the poet becomes Murasaki; as an abandoned woman, she becomes the women characters in the novel; and as reader she becomes Prince Genji, who reads and responds to the feelings of the women he courts.

The final line "I, too, will attempt to plumb the profundity of mind and heart" reveals the speaker's desire to reread the text and perhaps revise her interpretation. By deploying the word *shin'i* 深意 (translated as "the profundity of mind and heart") Saikō alludes to Matsudaira Sadanobu's two essays on *Genji*, "The Profundity of *The Tale of Genji*" (Gengo no shin'i) and "A Critique of *The Tale of Genji*" (Gengo no hyō).[36] Sadanobu ends the second piece admiring and questioning Norinaga's humanist claim that *Genji* represents the full range of emotion:

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[34] *SI*, 2: 368.
[35] Rosenblatt, 146; emphasis in original.
[36] Harper and Shirane, 506–508.

> Motoori's thesis is interesting—that this tale is but an exposition of the varieties of human feeling and is not meant to exemplify any philosophical principle. But there can be no doubt that here and there she [Murasaki] writes with some more particular purpose in mind.[37]

Saikō's final lines challenge Sadanobu's political critique by claiming that the author's intent is for the reader alone, not a discourse, to determine.

By stressing that she *too* has an interpretation to offer, the speaker opens a new space for the production of meaning. By the end, Saikō's poem comes full circle: it returns to the topic of reading, and conveys the message that the process of reading, where the reader conditions the text and is also conditioned by the text, through an empathic union with the minds and hearts of characters and author, is essential to understanding the feelings of others, or *jō*.

To conclude, I return to the first word in the poem's title: "*yomu*," which means "reading" or "to read." Saikō's poem, in its form, has shown how in the process of reading, binaries like male and female, writer and reader, and Chinese and Japanese, certainly appear as initial frames of interpretation; but as most of the poem has shown, such binaries are not as important as engaging in a transaction with the text, an event where the absorbed reader can feel the essence of the work as a whole, which Norinaga argued is *mono no aware*, and in Saikō's Chinese idiom *jō*, or "emotion."

And if we still have preoccupations or preconceptions of what a literary work is and should be (other than literature), Saikō's poem concludes with the reminder that the reader should reread and think for herself. Only then can the reader challenge the dominant trends and discourses that seek to determine the meaning of literature, what Sadanobu described as "a particular purpose." Saikō's poem suggests that we leave that purpose open.

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[37] Trans. Harper. Harper and Shirane, 508.