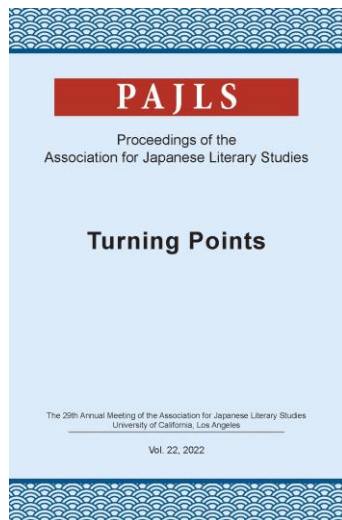


“Poetry, Grief, and Trauma of the Genpei War and
Jōkyū Disturbance”

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POETRY, GRIEF, AND TRAUMA OF THE GENPEI WAR AND JŌKYŪ DISTURBANCE

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Scholarship has tended to approach popular narratives of the armed political conflicts that mark the historical “turning point” from the Heian to the Kamakura period through a dialectic of defeat, in which the narratives function to memorialize the losers and demonstrate the authoritative power of the winners. Such framing focuses on the past (the dead) and future (continued rule of the victors). The temporality embedded in this dialectic of defeat distracts us from narration of the turning point itself.

In this paper I focus on the gap between communicative memory—memories of the recent past held by those who witnessed them—and cultural memory, or the sociocultural transmission of meaning that gives a culture its cohesion.² I do this by examining less well-received texts, which attempt to describe an uncertain present moment, and analyzing linguistic and experiential barriers to the narration of early medieval traumatic events. I focus on two texts poetically narrating political unrest at the turning point into Japan’s medieval period—the Genpei War (1180–1185) and Jōkyū Disturbance (1221)—and investigate how aristocratic female attendants serving the imperial family depict the trauma of these events through poetic grief in *Kenreimon’in Ukyō no Daibu shū* (The Poetic Memoirs of Lady Daibu, ca. 1220) and *Tsuchimikado’in nyōbō nikki* (The poetic memoirs of a female court attendant of Retired Emperor Tsuchimikado, after 1231).³ The former relates Lady Daibu’s life serving empress Kenreimon’in (Taira no Kiyomori’s daughter), the horror of the fall of the Taira clan during the war—including their exodus from the capital and subsequent death of her secret lover Taira no Sukemori—and a return to life serving at court with lingering memories of those lost. The latter describes grief related to the exile and subsequent death of Retired Emperor Tsuchimikado after the failed Jōkyū Disturbance.

A key theme in each text is the difficulty in describing what is happening. The authors were limited to aristocratic poetic language, which lacked literary precedent for the circumstances that they faced.

¹  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9452-0549>

² Assmann, 5–6, 36.

³ I use Phillip Harries’s translation of Lady Daibu’s memoir.

Additionally, the emotional ties the authors held to those they lost made these historic moments personally traumatic. I draw on trauma theory, from Cathy Caruth and others, to highlight the textual evidence of the difficulties the narrators face in fully grasping events as they unfold, i.e. how the nature of trauma resists narration and the acrobatics the narrators perform to understand the event and their experience of it. My aim in using this analytic lens is to show that unlike other retrospective texts that focus on commemorating the dead and/or pointing to future political power arrangements, i.e., focusing on the past or the present, these texts include attempts to convey the (present) moment of trauma itself.

THE INEXPRESSIBLE

There are numerous instances in *The Poetic Memoirs of Lady Daibu* in which the protagonist notes her inability to express what is occurring. For instance, after the Taira flee the capital in advance of the Genji troops' arrival, Lady Daibu finds it difficult to contextualize her lover Sukemori's absence within the traditional poetic vocabulary available to aristocratic women. She laments that the usual phrases do not seem to express what she is feeling:

騒ぐ心に覚めたる心地、言ふべき方なし。⁴

I woke [from a dream with Sukemori] with a throbbing heart; I **cannot even begin to describe my feelings.**⁵

ここかしこと浮き立ちたるさまなど、伝へ聞くも、すべて言ふべき方ぞなき。⁶

It was **too frightful for words** to hear of him straggling from place to place...⁷

These examples with 言ふべき方なし (no [proper] way one should say) suggest there are no available literary expressions Lady Daibu could use to express her emotions or the situation of the fleeing Taira.⁸ According to

⁴ Kubota, 103.

⁵ Harries, 195.

⁶ Kubota, 203. Kubota Jun's annotation notes that this passage refers not just to Sukemori but all the Taira, floating from place to place after fleeing the capital.

⁷ Harries, 193.

⁸ Aya Nakamura analyzes the use of a similar phrase that Lady Daibu uses to express this sense of inexpressibility, namely いはむかたなき. Nakamura does not distinguish between these two phrases, but the use of む in the latter highlights Lady Daibu's intention and desire to say *something* and a sense of being thwarted.

some forms of trauma theory, the very definition of trauma is that which resists narration. For example, Cathy Caruth, drawing on Freud, explains how trauma occurs when there is a temporal disjunction in which an event is not fully realized or processed in the moment that it happens.⁹

As the trauma theorist Roger Luckhurst notes, the very inability to articulate what happened ironically spurs more attempts to do so: "...if trauma is a crisis in representation, then this generates narrative *possibility* just as much as *impossibility*, a compulsive outpouring of attempts to formulate narrative knowledge."¹⁰ Even the declaration of an inability to express the traumatic circumstances or the affect that results from them are attempts to convey the (present) moment of trauma itself.

To give another example of the insufficiency of words, Lady Daibu explicitly complains about the word "sad":

ほど経て人のもとより、「さてこのあはれ、いかばかりか」
 と言ひたれば、なべてのことのやうに覚えて、
 Eventually, someone sent me a letter saying, "How dreadful this
 must be for you." I felt, however, that it was done merely out of
 courtesy:

| | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| かなしとも | If only, oh, if only |
| またあはれとも | We could use some |
| 世の常に | Common, ordinary words, |
| いふべきことに | And call this |
| あらばこそあらめ ¹¹ | Pitiable or sad! ¹² |

In contrast to Lady Daibu's memoir, the shorter *Tsuchimikado'in nyōbō nikki* relies more on standard poetic mourning conventions. While it does not as directly lament the fallibility of language, one poem alludes to a lack of words:

While Nakamura touches on the seeming lack of preexisting literary forms to capture the intensity of Lady Daibu's emotions about historic events, she does not explain why the experience didn't fit in with set patterns or explore what literary options *were* available and how Lady Daibu engaged with them. Another possible phrase, 思ひのほか (unexpected/beyond imagining) is almost exclusively used to describe her relationship with Sukemori. Kubota 40, 70, 73, 131, and 147. Harries notes the frequent use of this term: 282, note 1.

⁹ Caruth, 3–4, 117.

¹⁰ Luckhurst, 82.

¹¹ Kubota, 112.

¹² Harries, 207.

The kerria (in the garden) in front of my room had bloomed beautifully, but on a morning when I could see it had wilted with dew—

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| くちなしに | though its orange-yellow |
| 物こそいはぬ | is the color of |
| 色なれど | speechlessness, |
| 露にもしるし | the dew makes clear (its grief)— |
| 山吹の花 ¹³ | kerria flowers |

The poem relies on a pun on くちなし, which can be read both as “orange-yellow” and “mouthless.” Dew is an extremely common reference to tears. The poem suggests that even without speaking, grief can be quite apparent. The poetic pairing of kerria flowers and speechlessness was established in the *Kokinwakashū* (poem 1012),¹⁴ but this poem is the earliest extant to also include dew and use the kerria imagery in a context of mourning. While starting from conventional poetic associations for natural imagery, the text pushes them to expand the scope of grief poetry to better capture the author’s situation.

LIMITATIONS OF POETIC CONVENTIONS: EXISTENTIAL UNCERTAINTY ABOUT OBJECT OF AFFECTION

Why was it so difficult for Lady Daibu and Tsuchimikado’in’s female attendant to poetically describe their circumstances? I argue that the formal constraints of *waka* as it had developed during the early 13th century—typified both through poetic categories as defined by the organization of imperial poetic collections into books, and through the literary devices available and accepted within any one poem—did not permit an author to write a poetic text that both historically narrates a forced physical separation such as fleeing from war or imperial exile from an outside perspective *and* follow conventional *waka* rhetoric. This line of reasoning questions the limiting contours of *waka*, outlining the types of experiences that cannot be conventionally expressed within them.

Proper precedent of poetic topics—the kinds of poetry that existed and what images and phrases typically appeared within them—was established within the imperially-commissioned poetic anthologies. There was accepted precedent for exiled men to write poetry but less for women

¹³ Poem 30, Tabuchi, 378.

¹⁴ Tabuchi commentary notes. Ibid.

writing poetry about those men. The ways of poetically discussing a man's "absence" were limited to the categories of (a) love poems (恋歌), which imply a man's agency and choice to not visit, in effect showing disinterest in or severing a relationship; (b) parting (離別歌), which was mostly limited to men departing on bureaucratic assignments, implying a just, governmentally-sanctified separation and likely eventual return; and (c) mourning (哀傷歌), which marked a permanent absence beyond anyone's agency. The themes of someone else's exile or fleeing from war do not fit neatly into any of these categories. Both authors maintain their relationships with these men—implying a desire from the men to return—and do not treat the men's travel as governmentally sanctioned reassignment. Using what expressions are available, then, they commit to a *mitate*-like overlap between exile and death: the absence of these men can only mean that they are dead, and this requires mourning.

DOUBLE DEATH (PHYSICAL/EARTHLY DEPARTURES) AND THE REPETITION OF TRAUMA

Two problems arise from this choice to use mourning poetry for Sukemori and Tsuchimikado' in after they depart the capital: first, there is existential uncertainty about the state of the men during their initial physical separation, and second, if grief expressions are used while they are still alive, what language can the authors use regarding the men's actual deaths?

Lady Daibu's memoir addresses the first issue of existential uncertainty very clearly. Before Sukemori leaves the capital, he tells Lady Daibu to think of him as "**one already dead**":

かかる世の騒ぎになりぬれば、はかなき数にただいまにてもならむことは、疑ひなきことなり...もし命たとひ今しばしなどありとも、すべて今は心を昔の身とは思はじと、思ひしたためてなむある...人のもとへ、『さても』など言ひて文やることなども、いづくの浦よりもせじと思ひとりたる身と思ひとりたるを、『なほざりにて聞こえぬ』などな思しそ。よろづただ今より、**身を変へたる身と思ひなりぬる...**¹⁵

These troubles have now reached the point where there can be no doubt that I, too, shall number among the dead... Even if, perchance, my life is spared for a while longer, I am resolved in my heart not to think of myself as the person I once was... I have

¹⁵ Kubota, 100–101.

made up my mind not to send you even the briefest of messages
from whatever distant shore I find myself upon. Don't think,
however, that my love for you is weak merely because I send no
word. In all that concerns this world I have come to think of
myself as one already dead.¹⁶

Here Sukemori stresses that his absence from her is not by choice—his love isn't "weak"—and therefore their separation cannot fall into traditional love poetry conventions.

The phrase 身を変へて implies transformation into a different person or state of being.¹⁷ Precedents include *Genji monogatari* (The Tale of Genji, ca. 1008), where it is used both in relation to taking the tonsure and reincarnation.¹⁸ The phrase also appears in *Torikaebaya* in reference to a pregnancy preventing someone who had dressed and behaved as a man from returning to a male gender presentation and role.¹⁹ Sukemori so strongly highlights the small likelihood of his return to the capital alive that 身を変へて can be read here as implying "living while dead," i.e., indicating his transformation into a different physical and social space—one who will soon die.

Lady Daibu later uses the same phrase (身を変へて) in a poem describing Taira no Shigehira's capture by the Genji:

かへすがへす (重衡の) 心の内おしはかられて、
Over and over I imagined what was in his heart:

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| まだ死なぬ | While not yet dead, |
| この世のうちに | Still of this world, |
| 身を変へて | But in how changed a state! |
| 何心地して | With what thoughts in your heart |
| 明け暮すらむ ²⁰ | Do you pass your days, your nights? ²¹ |

From this liminal state as a prisoner of war described by Lady Daibu, Shigehira was eventually released into the custody of the Tōdaiji monks, who executed him for burning their temple.

¹⁶ Harries, 199.

¹⁷ See entry for 身を変える in Kitamura et al.

¹⁸ Matsukaze and Asagao chapters, respectively. Akio Abe et al., 408, 484.

¹⁹ Yōichi and Ishino, 375.

²⁰ Poem 214. Kubota, *Ukyō no Daibu shū*, 107.

²¹ Harries, 199.

This state of being—or rather, the ambiguous state of the fleeing Taira being or not being, their “living while dead”—is also the subject of a poetic exchange Lady Daibu and Sukemori have after he leaves the capital. She questions his existence while absent from her during his battles with the Genji clan:

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| おなじ世と | How wretched it is |
| なほ思ふこそ | To think that this is still |
| かなしけれ | The same world as before, |
| ある があるにも | A world where life itself |
| あらぬ この世に ²² | No longer counts as life. ²³ |

Sukemori’s response echoes her poem with its intense focus on the matter of existence (*aru*, in bold) of his “living while dead,” speaking also of his brothers who recently died in battle:

先立ちぬる人々のこと言ひて、
He talked of those who had gone before him:

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ある ほどが | This is wretchedness— |
| ある にも あらぬ | To see such tragedy, |
| うちになほ | While I yet live |
| かく憂きことを | In the midst of life |
| 見るぞかなしき ²⁴ | That is not life at all. ²⁵ |

This is the last thing that Lady Daibu hears from him before she receives news of his death. The purposeful, rhythmic repetition of the existential verb (ある) recalls the previous existential uncertainty of 身を変へる and foreshadows his impending death.

Next, let us turn to how *Tsuchimikado'in nyōbō nikki* deals with a similar issue of existential uncertainty about Tsuchimikado'in during his exile by prefacing it with more context about the text and author. *Tsuchimikado'in nyōbō nikki* is the only extant source of information about its author. She served Retired Emperor Tsuchimikado'in (1196–1231, r. 1198–1210), who was exiled in 1221 to present-day Shikoku after his father Retired Emperor GoToba's failed Jōkyū Disturbance, an attempt to

²² Emphasis added. Lady Daibu #217. Kubota 109. Itoga 107.

²³ Harries 203.

²⁴ Itoga 109, Kubota 111.

²⁵ Harries 205.

overthrow the Hōjō shogunal powers and reclaim direct political authority for the imperial line. Tsuchimikado'in was not allowed to take many attendants with him into exile; the female author of this poetic collection is left behind in the capital. Her text focuses on her experiences in the aftermath, recounting Tsuchimikado's reign while lamenting his exile, which she treats through mourning poetry as a kind of death. Tabuchi Kumiko notes the text may have been influenced by Lady Daibu's memoir in this choice to use mourning expressions in relation to his forced departure from the capital.²⁶ Hearing of Tsuchimikado'in's death in exile, the author's sense of grief deepens, but there are no further poetic expressions available to articulate it.

The formal constraints of *waka* as it had developed during this time did not permit the author to write a poetic text that both expressed a historical narrative about Tsuchimikado's exile and followed conventional *waka* rhetoric. As I have noted, someone else's long-term exile was not a topic directly addressed by any of the standard categories of *waka* as defined within imperial poetic anthologies. Tsuchimikado's initial departure from the capital could fall into the "Parting" section (離別歌), but those poems as standardized in *Kokinshū* most frequently refer to an official traveling to the provinces on administrative assignment, and in *Shinkokinshū* imply their eventual return. Tsuchimikado never returned to the capital alive, and there was little to suggest at the time of his departure that such a return was possible.

The text distinguishes this excursion into exile from his previous trips as an imperial figure:

御興の寄る程には[]さぶらひあはれたる人[]泣く気色のき(こ
ゆ)れば、ことわりに悲し(く)て

Hearing the crying of those who came to present themselves as
the imperial palanquin approached near dawn, I was of course
saddened—

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| ありしにも | even just thinking |
| あらぬ(み)ゆきと | how this trip |
| 思ふにも | is not like any that came before, |
| つら(ぬる)そでは | the sleeves of those lined up [to see him off] |
| さこそぬるらめ ²⁷ | are so drenched through |

²⁶ Tabuchi supplemental note, 357.

²⁷ Tabuchi, Poem 4, 342. Following Tabuchi's transcription, [] indicate unreadable portions of text, while () gesture to what is likely to appear in the gap.

This sense that things are not as they were in the past—ありしにもあらぬ—rises to prominence, and the narrator’s dominant expression is clearly one of grief. Because Tsuchimikado was still alive, like Lady Daibu, the narrator is considerably constrained in what is available to her within the realm of grief poetry. She cannot write in conventional terms about the black smoke (煙) from a crematorium fire, nor about the black robes that match the smoke and hide the wetness of her tears. There is no body to grieve.

The conflation of exile with death creates a crisis later in the text when the narrator receives word that Tsuchimikado has actually died: what words can she now use to describe his situation, when she has already used grief-laden poetics to describe his exile? A play at confusion between death and exile—compounded by the one-day difference in the anniversary of the days—is played out in a sequence of four *waka* before the culminating ending *chōka*:

都を立たせおはしましし日は今日ぞかしと思ふ、悲しくて、
Thinking that today was the [anniversary of the] day that
[Tsuchimikado’in] departed the capital, I was saddened.

| | |
|---------|-------------------------------|
| 数ふれば | counting, I see |
| 憂かりし今日に | we’ve come back around |
| めぐりきて | to this grief-filled day, and |
| さらに悲しき | isn’t the sky at dusk |
| 暮れの空かな | even sadder |

十月十一日に隠れさせおはします。つごもりに暮れゆく空をみれば、うらめしくて、
On the eleventh day of the tenth month, [Tsuchimikado’in] passed away. Gazing at the sky at nightfall on the last day of the month [at the absent moon] with bitter regret—

| | |
|---------|---------------------------------------|
| 十日余り | feeling sad |
| ひと目過ぐるも | that the tenth day |
| 悲しきに | has already passed by, |
| たつさへ惜しき | ah, the bitterness also of the end of |
| 神無月かな | the godless month |

御果ての日、聴聞して出づれば
On the day when mourning ended, after hearing [Buddhist rituals] and leaving [the temple]

| | |
|--------|----------------------|
| 帰るさは | on the way back |
| いとど物こそ | somehow growing even |
| 悲しけれ | sadder, |
| 嘆きの果ては | the end of grief |
| 猶なかりけり | isn't here yet |

猶うつつの事とおぼえて、猶はるかに御わたりあるとおぼえて、

Now not able to think about the reality (that he is dead), and thinking he's just on a journey away from the capital:

| | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 忘れては | forgetting |
| 同じ世にある | and feeling like |
| 心地して | we're in the same world— |
| さはさぞかしと | the sadness at realizing |
| 思ふ悲しさ ²⁸ | he's gone ²⁹ |

The first three poems are written around the one-year anniversary of his death, which shows a continued conflation of his exile with his death—in this case, the date of his anniversary of departing the capital (10th intercalary month, 10th day) with the one-year anniversary of his death (10th month, 11th day). The end of mourning referred to in the third poem here refers to the one-year anniversary of his death.

The confirmation of Tsuchimikado'in's death in the second of the four poems is, in effect, marking a double loss. It's re-enacting the trauma of the original separation when Tsuchimikado was exiled. Similarly, when word reaches Lady Daibu of Sukemori's death, it is a second wound on top of their initial physical separation. In both cases there is, in effect, a double death—both a physical and an earthly departure—and a repetition of the trauma of loss.

CARUTH AND THE REPETITION OF TRAUMA

Earlier I noted how trauma theory can explain the inexpressibility of events. Another element from trauma studies is helpful here, that of the *repetition* of trauma. In trying to grasp what one missed in the initial moment of trauma, the mind replays the scenario later through different

²⁸ Tabuchi, poems 39–42, 390–395.

²⁹ Yamasaki notes an influence from *Kenreimon'in Ukyō no Daibu shū* #217 (included above), 204.

means to try to (re)experience and process the event simultaneously.³⁰ Lady Daibu and Tsuchimikado'in's female attendant could see the previous losses of Sukemori and Tsuchimikado'in not just alongside but underlying the more permanent loss of them both to death.

The narrators' strongest reactions, emotions, and inability to distinguish between the two events (departure from the capital and physical death) occur in the immediate aftermath of the deaths. Like the situation of the initial loss, both authors are constrained by what they can write in the language of courtly grief poetry. Sukemori's body is lost entirely, and Tsuchimikado'in is cremated while in exile, so there is still no body to mourn over. This prevents the use of many conventional poetic mourning topoi, such as a discussion of crematorium fire smoke or comparisons between a corpse and the empty shell of the *utsusemi* (cicada).³¹ So the repeated second loss does not "look" poetically different from the (similarly body-less) first.

Caruth discusses how a new, repetitive trauma has the possibility to overwrite the old one:

What is communicated through the theory of traumatic repetition is thus not the 'unrepresentability' of an experience or event... nor is it... traumatic 'silence' or 'unspeakability'... Repetition is never simply a representation or its absence but rather the reenactment—and potential erasure—of a history that refuses recognition. Trauma is not a question of whether there is or is not representation but rather the question of whether there will or will not be (the possibility of) history.³²

In other words, according to Caruth it is only through repetition that the trauma can become "known" in terms of being experienced and processed simultaneously. However, this very process of repetition has the potential to further obscure memory of the original event through replacement. The possibility of history, or the movement from communicative to cultural memory—of Lady Daibu or Tsuchimikado'in's female attendant describing their experiences of these historical traumatic moments—ironically both depends on later traumatic repetition and is put at risk of being transmuted by it. These later repetitions of the trauma, the jolting out

³⁰ Caruth 64.

³¹ Fukuko Shimizu describes these contemporaneous conventional comparisons in *waka* grief poetry.

³² Caruth, 131–132; emphasis mine.

of her present moment into past memory of the moment of loss, threaten to overwrite the original experience.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, there are subjective historical events—such as being witness to exile, or death related to extraordinary upheaval—for which the scope of the language for grief within *waka* poetics fails. Iwasa Miyoko has argued that because the main purpose of *nyōbō nikki* was to glorify patrons, they excluded material irrelevant to this purpose.³³ This does not mean that female authors did not try to write about these subjects. To narrate outside of conventions, however, they had to stretch the limits of *waka* poetics, such as when trying to narrate existential uncertainty or the repeated trauma of a double loss.

These texts thus struggle to express a present-moment positionality due to sociolinguistic constraints alongside the possibility of traumatic inaccessibility. The repetition of trauma further calls into question narratability of the original event. As Luckhurst explains, “No narrative of trauma can be told in a linear way: it has a time signature that must fracture conventional causality.”³⁴ Even while later striving to narrate from the confusion and uncertainty of an eye-of-the-storm present moment, then, other temporalities may be inadvertently drawn in. Nevertheless, these narratives offer valuable insight into how aristocratic women who lived through the violent and traumatic power shifts in early medieval Japan viewed their own experiences in the language available to them, and additionally show how the boundaries of *waka* could be pushed to describe extraordinary historic circumstances.

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³³ Iwasa, “*Tamakiharu kō*: Tokuissei to sono igi,” *Meigetsuki kenkyū* 8 (2003): 182–183; *Iwasa Miyoko serekushon* 1 (2015), 243.

³⁴ Luckhurst, 8.

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