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Watching Commoners, Performing Class: Images of the Common People in *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*

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"Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively."

– Homi K. Bhabha (1994: 2)

A common refrain in criticism of the eleventh-century work *The Pillow Book* is that Sei Shōnagon had nothing but disparaging words to say about the lower classes. This study re-examines this idea through an in-depth review of the passages in *The Pillow Book* that mention commoners, and it finds that the situation is somewhat more complex. This paper begins by looking at the language that identifies people of the lower classes, specifically the noun *gesu*, the adjective *waroki*, and the prefix *ese-*. Next the paper examines the scenes in which commoners make appearances. While some passages contain negative portrayals, others express curiosity and interest in the world of the commoners, compelling us to revise the notion that Sei Shōnagon merely disdained the working classes. Embedded within each of these passages, however, are a number of mechanisms that reinforce differences between the social class of the narrator and those of the objects of scrutiny. This paper examines why the narrator uses this combination of both positive and negative images and concludes that they serve as elaborate performances that ultimately reinforce the illusion of the narrator's superior social and aesthetic acuity.

Keywords : THE PILLOW BOOK, SEI SHŌNAGON, CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS, AESTHETICS, AESTHETIC PERFORMANCE, COMMONERS, LABORERS, HEIAN PERIOD, *GESU*, *WAROKI*, *ESE-*

INTRODUCTION

In reading the literature of the Heian Period from the vantage point of the early twenty-first century, it is easy to be caught up in visions of elegant courtiers whis-

pering words of love from opposite sides of brocaded curtains, court women making pilgrimages through misty mountains to rustic country temples, or carriages lavishly bedecked with flowers returning to the capital from outings in the countryside. Moved by these rich visions, one may forget that the social class portrayed in these works consisted of only the tiniest fraction, around one-thousandth, of the population of Japan at that time (Morris 1964: 93). For the remainder of the five million people in Japan a millennium ago, life was radically different, centering primarily on manual and agricultural labor. Even though the workers provided the rice that served as the source of wealth and food for the nobility at the apex of the social scale, they seemed to hardly register in the imaginations of the writers of the time. As Ivan Morris notes, "Heian literature, which gives such a detailed and vivid picture of how the gentry lived, has hardly a word to say about the masses, and it is only by conjecture and reconstruction that we can draw even a tentative picture" of how they might have lived (*ibid.*: 98).

There is no evidence of a literate peasantry during this period; the overwhelming majority of the working people were unable to leave written records about their own lives. Meanwhile, the courtiers, who tended to live apart from the common folk, wrote for themselves primarily about the world they knew, a rarefied world populated by people like themselves. The result is a scarcity of texts that depict the lives of agricultural and manual laborers in any systematic fashion. One of the most celebrated genres of mid-Heian literature, *monogatari* (tales), written by court women, speaks primarily about people of rank and socioeconomic standing and thus provides few images of common people. The vernacular *kana* diaries and memoirs of the same era would seem to provide more fertile ground. The women who wrote them, though not necessarily of the highest echelons of the Heian system of rank, generally had enough time and economic privilege to venture outside of their homes on pilgrimages and excursions, bringing them in contact with members of the lower, working classes. Of course, descriptions of travel do not always involve depictions of people seen along the way. For instance, Takasue's daughter, the author of the *Sarashina Diary* (*Sarashina nikki*, translated as *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams*) describes traveling hundreds of miles from her childhood home in eastern Japan to Heian-kyō, the capital, but her narrative is organized almost exclusively around the famous places that she saw along the way. Only rarely does she mention the peasants, guides, innkeepers, or working folk that she must have encountered.

The *kana* diary that most frequently mentions the common people is Sei Shōnagon's *The Pillow Book* (*Makura no sōshi*). This work focuses primarily on the salon of the Empress Teishi[1] and the court of her time, and therefore its chief object is not to describe the common people in any systematic way, but nonetheless, its lists, diary-like passages, and essays do occasionally give us glimpses of a

world outside of the boundaries of the court. This paper will examine these passages, not in order to draw a tentative picture of the lives of the common people — there is far too little depth in her descriptions to attempt such a project — but rather to examine how the lower classes registered in the imagination of one particular writer, Sei Shōnagon, and to examine how her text portrays herself in relation to them. How does *The Pillow Book* depict people of the lower classes? How are differences in class brought to the forefront? What are the rhetorical effects of including these passages in her work?

In mid-Heian society, every aspect of life at court was governed by minute gradations of rank, and in fact, one of the major motifs of the book is the need for behavior to be commensurate with social rank. In relative social terms, the peasantry, of course, fell below even the lowliest of courtiers. Since they were only on the fringes of the sociopolitical system of rank that provided the social grammar governing Sei's society, we might ask why she even mentioned the lower classes in a work that deals so extensively with customs and happenings at court. If, as Naomi Fukumori has convincingly suggested, one of the functions of this work is to present a celebratory re-visioning of the glorious, bygone days of Empress Teishi's salon, why then does *The Pillow Book* even choose to describe people that fall so clearly fall outside of the realms of the salon? (See Fukumori 1997a.) What function do these descriptions have in the work as a whole? Is it merely for comic relief or to serve as a cursory nod at the different and grotesque figures populating the margins of Sei's world?

Perhaps it is not terribly surprising that Sei should mention manual laborers, peasants, and servants in a work that mentions everything from babies' faces to cats' ears. On the other hand, however, Sei Shōnagon's encounters with the marginal, poor, and working classes, which do not feature prominently in most mid-Heian literature, provide her with the opportunity to confront a group that her own class conventionally regarded as their ultimate aesthetic and socioeconomic "Other." As the examples below will show, Sei portrays the lower classes in a strikingly ambivalent fashion, oscillating between abhorrence and admiration. In the end, she appears to reject the notion that class is inherently linked to aesthetic value, showing us numerous places in which the two are not commensurate. Rather, she focuses on individual behavior as an important reflection of one's position in the hereditary system of rank and class. In Sei Shōnagon's own act of writing *The Pillow Book*, she is also careful to "perform" class, demonstrating that she belongs to the highest echelons of society and possesses superior aesthetic acuity.

GESU, *WAROSHI*, AND *ESE-*

A good place to begin in examining the depictions of the lower classes in *The Pillow Book* is with the terms typically used to describe these classes. Then we can examine the semantic baggage that each word carries. *The Pillow Book* uses several terms to mark people or things as belonging to lower socioeconomic classes, but the most common are the noun *gesu*, the adjective *waroshi*, and the prefix *ese-*.

The frequency of these words differs slightly among editions of the text. Sei's original manuscript had disappeared by the end of the Heian period, and for centuries, scribes reproduced the text by copying other copies by hand. Over the course of generations, transcribers made countless changes to the text, sometimes reordering it, omitting certain sentences or sections thought apocryphal, or even inserting their own opinions and anecdotes into the text they were copying. Ikeda Kikan has found that four major divergent textual traditions evolved with these changes (Ikeda and Kishigami 1958: 16-30). Each textual tradition has unique passages and its own order, thus rendering it impossible to reconstruct Sei's *Urtext* with absolute certainty. The parts of *The Pillow Book* that diverge the most are those that consists of lists, because it was easiest in those places for copyists to make modifications, either deliberate or accidental, without attracting attention. These lists or "catalogues," as Mark Morris has called them, list wide assortments of things linked by only a loose theme, and therefore, they form virtual grab bags of items and people from all walks of life (1980). A significant percentage of references to the common people appear in these list or catalogue-like passages which differ from edition to edition, and therefore, it is impossible to discuss these passages without considering which variant of the text is under scrutiny. This paper looks at two of the most common variants of the text, namely the Sankanbon and Nōinbon versions available in Ikeda and Kishigami (1958) and Matsuo and Nagai (1974), respectively. Though this paper will note a number of differences between these two textual variants, it nonetheless finds relatively consistent patterns in the types of language and attitudes used to describe people of the lower classes.

Gesu, the first of the words that the text uses to describe commoners, appears in *The Pillow Book* either in hiragana (げす) or in one of two sets of Sino-Japanese characters, the first consisting of the characters meaning "lower" and "populace" or "multitude" (下衆) and the second set consisting of two characters meaning "lower" and "types" or "breeds" (下種). The word *gesu* appears in Sankanbon variants of *The Pillow Book* twenty-three times.[2] A close look at these appearances reveals that the term *gesu* was used in two fashions: a specific fashion indicating servants (who were of low social standing compared to the courtiers that they served) and a general fashion indicating people of relatively low social standing. There are a number of places in *The Pillow Book* in which the term

gesu could only mean a servant. For instance, NKBT 310 "*okashi to omou uta o*" (M 289 "Once I Wrote Down a Poem") reads, "Upon writing in a notebook a poem that greatly appeals to one, it is really awful when one of the lower-class people (*gesu*) rattles it off without any proper feeling" (Adapted). In this instance, the term *gesu* must refer to a servant because other commoners living outside the boundaries of the court would not have access to the intimate writings of court ladies such as Sei. Here, the servant is clearly able to read. Servants, even those that served women such as Sei who in turn waited upon the Empress, were often from the lower ranks of the aristocracy, and therefore, they held a social position superior to the illiterate folk who engaged in manual and agricultural labor. In short, the word *gesu* sometimes refers to servants who had a modicum of social rank.

Another instance of the word *gesu* appears in NKBT 278 "*Kanpaku-dono, nigachi hatsuka amari tsuitachi ni* " (M 256 "On about the Twentieth of the Second Month").

> Just then a crowd of attendants and lower-class people (*gesu*) and such people arrived from the Chancellor's residence. They rushed up to the tree and tore down all the blossoms. "His Excellency said we should remove them while it was still dark so that no one would see us," I heard one of the attendants say (Adapted).

Here the term *gesu* is included along with the word "attendants" (*saburai no mono-domo*) in a list of people that are clearly employed within the Chancellor's home, suggesting that the *gesu* are some type of servant. The fact that the text specifically differentiates between attendants and *gesu* suggests that the servants described as *gesu* fall especially low within the hierarchy of servants, maybe gardeners or other menial laborers that work at a remove from the Chancellor himself.

The Pillow Book also contains passages that seem to use the term *gesu* as a general appellation for the common people. For instance, the following appears in NKBT 267 "*Yo no naka ni nao ito kokoro-uki mono wa*" (M 249 "To Feel that One is Disliked by Others"). "Not only among people of good birth (*yoki hito*), where it goes without saying, but even among commoners (*gesu nado no hodo mo*), children who are adored by their parents naturally attract the attention of outsiders, and everyone makes a fuss over them." This passage compares the behavior of people of superior social standing (*yoki hito*) to that of people of lower social backgrounds (*gesu*) in order to prove a general rule about humanity, namely that particularly well-loved children are likely to attract attention.[3] The use of *gesu* here does not appear to have any explicitly derogatory intent. In modern Japanese, the noun has acquired a negative nuance meaning something

like "crude fellow," which associates foul behavior with low socioeconomic class. (In this way, the term developed in a fashion much like that of the English word "vulgar," which comes from a Latin word connoting something associated with the common people but which has since come to mean in English "coarse," "indecent," or even "lewd.") In classical Japanese, the term seems to have been free of the deprecating content it carries today.

The antonym of the term *yoki hito* introduced above is *waroki hito*, a term created from the noun *hito* meaning "person" and the modifying adjective *waroshi* (わろし), which can mean in various situations (1) "bad," (2) "of inferior appearance" or "unimpressive," (3) "unskilled," (4) "inappropriate," (5) "economically inferior" or "poor," or (6) "not fresh" or "damaged." Each of the various meanings of *waroshi* has to do with something that is substandard or below a certain perceived level of acceptability. The adjective *waroshi* is used in Sankanbon variants of *The Pillow Book* thirty-eight times, only four of which seem to have to do with socioeconomic class.[4] When used to refer to people, their dwellings, or their behaviors, the multiple meanings listed above often are brought into play simultaneously in order to connote inferiority in multiple yet overlapping arenas; for instance, a single usage could connote both socioeconomic and aesthetic inferiority at once. One example comes in NKBT 40 "*Hana no ki naranu wa*" (M 42 "Trees"), which discusses non-flowering trees and their attributes. It states, "The hemp palm is an ill-shaped tree; but it is in the Chinese style and does not appear to belong to a common house (*waroki ie*)" (Adapted). Sei has apparently noted that the tree known as *suronoki* happens to grow in the yards of houses inhabited by the poor, and even though these trees do not grow into the finest shapes, they somehow are reminiscent of Chinese style and have an aristocratic air about them. To her, therefore, the hemp palm is at odds with both the aesthetic and economic inferiority of its *waroki* location.

The prefix *ese-* (えせ or 似非) appears twelve times in *The Pillow Book* in various compounds, such as *eseushi* ("lowly cow"), *esekatachi* ("vulgar, lowly form"), *ese-naru* ("being lowly"), or *esemono* ("lowly/insincere person" or "lowly/fake thing").[5] *Ese* is generally understood in two ways: (1) having to do with something false or unreal or (2) having to do with something, humble, lowly, or trifling and thus not associated with the highest social circles. Various theories have been advanced for the etymology of the prefix *ese-*, including that it might be derived from the word *nise*, meaning "fake," or might be related to the word *oso,* meaning "dull" or "lowly" (Ōno 1974, Seki 1977, Tai 1978). Whether or not these theories are correct, the fact the prefix *ese-* has been tentatively linked to *nise* and *oso* reflects the pragmatic affiliation between it and the two seemingly disparate concepts of disingenuousness and lowliness. When the prefix is applied to specifically to people, *esemono* (*ese-* plus the word meaning "person" or "thing") is often understood as (a) people who are disingenuous or insincere or

(b) people of social status that is not very high. NKBT 305 "*Uchitokumajiki mono*" (M 285 "Times When One Should Be on One's Guard") consists of a brief list of things about which one cannot be too careful. It begins, "People who have a bad reputation (*esemono*). Such people often give a more sincere impression than those of good repute" (Adapted). *Esemono* here represents something that is not quite what it seems, and the prefix *ese-* seems to operate in a fashion closer to "phony" or "fraudulent" than "vulgar" or "lowly."

The latter meaning of *ese-*, however, does come into play when the word *esemono* refers to people who do not have the highest social standing. Several passages in the text suggest that the term is relative and that the referent can belong to various stations in life provided that the word is used in a comparison, either explicit or implied, to another person of higher status. For instance, in NKBT 23 "*Seiryōden no ushitora no sumi no*" (M 22 "The Sliding Screen in the Back of the Hall"), Empress Teishi tells a story about how a daughter of a courtier of old had memorized virtually the entire *Kokinshū*, one of the imperially commissioned volumes of *waka* poetry. The Emperor, upon hearing of this, comments, "I doubt whether I could get through three or four volumes. But of course things have changed. In the old days even people of humble station (*esemono*) had a taste for the arts and were interested in elegant pastimes." Clearly, when the Emperor uses the word *esemono* here, he intends to designate someone of a lower rank than himself, but on the other hand, it is unclear whether he means members of the aristocracy or some of the relatively humble servants and workers who composed some of the poetry in early anthologies such as the *Man'yōshū*.

NKBT 156 "*Esemono no tokoro uru ori*" (M 154 "Trivial Things That Become Important on Special Occasions") gives a better idea of who these *esemono* might be. The following is an excerpt from the Sankanbon variant of the text.

> Ladies of the Escort when they accompany the Emperor on his processions.
> The Ladies in Charge of the Emperor's Keys during the imperial accession ceremony.
> Lady Chamberlains during the breaking of the knots on the last days of the Sixth and Twelfth Months.
> Masters of Observances during the seasonal Sacred Readings. What skill they display as they kneel in their red surplices, reading out the roster of the priests!
> Assistant Officials of the Emperor's Private Office when they decorate the hall for the Sacred Readings, the Naming of the Buddhas, and other ceremonies.
> Imperial Attendants at the Kasuga Festival.
> The procession that takes place during the Banquet.
> The girls who taste the Imperial wine in the First Month.

> The priests who present the Emperor with hare-wands [as symbolic offerings].
> The women who dress the hair of the girls during the rehearsals for the Gosechi dances.
> Palace Girls who serve at the Imperial Table during the Palace Festivals. (Adapted)[6]

As Fukumori points out in her reading of this passage, none of the people described have positions that are ordinarily very high within the court system of rank, but through the auspices of fate, each person gets an opportunity to bask in the limelight for a moment (1997b). It is important to note that the types of servants enumerated in this list all work within the court, and therefore, they are again probably from low-ranking aristocratic origins, not the peasantry. Again, the crucial point is that *esemono* is a relative term. Though it ostensibly means people of humble station, when used by a figure such as Sei who served the Empress directly and therefore had a relatively privileged place in the court, *esemono* may refer to people in the lower ranks of the court who were still above the laboring class. The list-like passage NKBT 125 "*Mutoku naru mono*" (M 118 "Things That Have Lost Their Power") confirms this. One of the items in the list reads, "A man of no importance (*esemono*) reprimanding an attendant." Even though the *esemono* doing the scolding may have little power in the eyes of Sei, the fact that he even has an attendant indicates that he is at least of enough consequence to have a manservant and therefore is probably a member of the lower aristocracy.[7]

The Nōinbon version of NKBZ 160 "*Esemono no tokoro uru ori*" includes several items absent in the Sankanbon text. Among them are "Lower officials of the Great Council on the occasion of a Minister's Banquet," "*Sumō* wrestlers in the Seventh Month," and "The helmsman during a boat journey." Here, the figures described come from a wider range of social statuses than the people found in the Sankanbon list. Even lower-ranking members of the Great Council (*Daijōkan*), probably secretaries in this case, were not without some social rank. The fact that the author includes them in a passage about *esemono* demonstrates that *esemono* is a relative term; the author is able to include even people of quite high status when there is a contrast between them and people of even higher stations. The Nōinbon also shows that the term *esemono* can refer to people of quite humble backgrounds, such as *sumō* wrestlers, who were recruited from the provinces, or boatmen, who engaged in physical labor for a living and were not of aristocratic origins.

Interestingly, NKBT 159 "*Toku yukashiki mono*" uses both the words *esemono* and *gesu* within the same sentence. "When a woman has just had a child, one is in a hurry to find out whether it is a boy or a girl. If she is a lady of quality (*yoki*

hito), one is obviously most curious, but even if she is a person of humble station (*esemono*) or a servant (*gesu*), one still wants to know" (M 157 "Things That One Is in a Hurry to See or to Hear," Adapted). Clearly, the purpose of this passage is to point out that the desire to know about the sex of an acquaintance's child is universal, regardless of one's social class, but how is one to understand the apparent differentiation between *gesu* and *esemono* here? Annotators Ikeda Kikan and Kishigami Shinji concur with Ivan Morris that the term *gesu* here refers to a servant, but another possibility more in keeping with the above discussion is that the three levels of *yoki hito*, *esemono*, and *gesu* represent a descending hierarchy of rank. In other words, *yoki hito* means people in the higher registers of the social hierarchy, *esemono* refers to people somewhat lower but not at the bottom of the social system, not excluding the lower aristocracy, and *gesu* designates the general, common people, both servants and otherwise, who are at the bottom of or outside the system of rank.

THE COMMON PEOPLE IN *THE PILLOW BOOK*

As two of the above passages have demonstrated, Sei at times mentions the behavior of common people in order to prove the universality of a general rule about humanity. In what other fashions does Sei evoke the common people? This section will examine the scenes in which the text mentions people of the lower classes. As various commentators have noted, there are a number of places in *The Pillow Book* where Sei haughtily or even disgustedly describes the appearances or behaviors of commoners. As a result, these critics have characterized Sei as having a viciously sharp tongue and her attitudes towards the lower classes as profoundly conventional and obeisant to the hierarchical structures of her era. At odds with this view of Sei, however, are other moments in which she looks upon the common people with curiosity or even discovers a degree of courtly elegance in their humble worlds. This being the case, it is important that we reevaluate the thesis that Sei had primarily disparaging words to say about the poor, working inhabitants of Japan.

(1) "Negative" Images

Critic Kobayashi Shigemi reflects the common view of Sei Shōnagon. Kobayashi notes that in over ten places she writes about *gesu* in a tone that reveals displeasure or derision, and in most, the lower classes are described as detestable or loathsome. In Kobayashi's view, Sei has internalized the dislike for the common people embedded in the hierarchical class system and finds aesthetic fault with anything having to do with them. Kobayashi comments, "In her whole-hearted

dedication to patricianism, in which discrimination based on class becomes the basis for evaluating the worth of a human being, one finds Sei Shōnagon's aesthetic limits — the coldness that her aesthetic narrow-mindedness entails" (Yūseidō 1975: II 211-2).

A similar through slightly less damning interpretation comes from Kishigami Shinji. In a discussion of the general characteristics of "wifeliness" in Sei's time, he writes that one seems to be "a derisive attitude toward people of lower status than oneself" (1967: 17). He suggests a sociological reason, noting that the overwhelming majority of wives came from the middle and lower ranks of the aristocracy; indeed, Sei's own father, Motosuke, was a provincial official, and though he was an aristocrat, he occupied a position that was far from the top of the official totem pole. Kishigami writes that Sei's attitude toward people of lower status "is often interpreted as a personal weak point," but it appears "to be a manifestation of an inferiority complex" rooted in insecurities about her social position (*ibid.*: 18). Kobayashi suggests that her belittling of people of lower social status allows Sei to bolster her own self-confidence and display her importance to others. Class-based elitism was undeniably a part of the aristocratic world and was possibly related to Sei's own insecurities. The purpose of the present section is not to argue that Sei was blessed by freedom from feelings of insecurity or to deny the existence of these "negative" portrayals, but rather to examine the motivations and rhetorical effects of incorporating these portrayals into the text.

Kobayashi and Kishigami both name NKBT 45 "*Nigenaki mono*," the list of unsuitable things mentioned above, as one example of Sei's deprecation of the lower classes, but here, as in many similar problematic places, she may have said the things she did for reasons subtler than a categorical hatred of the lower classes or the need to assuage personal insecurities. In this passage, she includes "snow on the houses of common people (*gesu*)," apparently because she saw the extraordinary beauty of the snow as incongruous with the banality of the people on whose roofs it has fallen (M 47 "Unsuitable Things"). She continues, "This is especially regrettable when the moonlight shines down on it." As Kobayashi and Kishigami maintain, a general dislike for people of lower status or general insecurity might explain these sentences, but there is another possible, more specific reason why Sei may have included this on her list of unbefitting things. For a Heian courtier, the ability to appreciate the beauty of the scene was virtually identical with the ability to seize the moment and immortalize it in poetry. Of course, for a commoner unschooled in the finer points and recent developments in court poetry, the composition of fashionable and passably elegant verse would be difficult, and therefore, in the view of an aesthetically inclined courtier such as Sei, the beauty of moonlight on a snowy roof would be wasted on a poetically unskilled member of the lower classes. In other words, the *performative* act of appreciating beauty — the turning of it into some outwardly visible substance

that will testify to one's own aesthetic prowess — is a critical feature separating the upper and lower classes. It is not merely the simple appreciation of beauty that marks the dividing line between classes (since presumably anyone, illiterate or otherwise, could enjoy the scene) but the ability (or more accurately the peasant's *lack* of ability) to express appreciation for it in an outward, performative fashion. Because of the educational limits imposed by class, the peasant cannot properly express this beauty though a performative act, and so the moonlit, snowy roof would be much better suited to the home of a courtier who could.[8]

In the same passage, one finds that Sei has listed "a woman of the lower classes (*gesu*) dressed in a scarlet trouser-skirt" as something unsuitable. "The sight," she continues, "is all too common these days." Shioda Ryōhei comments that during this period, women of the lower classes did not concern themselves with the details of aristocratic taste but just tended to imitate elements of court culture, here the red *hakama*, in a haphazard fashion, resulting in something that seems unsuitable to Sei's eyes (Yūseidō 1975: II 211). If this hypothesis is correct, Sei is not disgusted with the lower classes *per se* but with situations in which behavior does not match what is expected, thus resulting in "unbefitting things." Of course, this is not to say these sections are free of elitism, for certainly Sei does find this and other examples of cross-class behavior unbecoming. In NKBT 310, which was discussed above, Sei remarks how unpleasant it is when people of the lower classes (*gesu*) read poems without the proper feeling. It is clear that there are certain correctly aristocratic ways for people to read poetry and wear red *hakama*, and when people of different stations in life attempt to perform these actions in a fashion that deviates from aristocratic expectations or standards, she finds the result most unbecoming.

The most striking example in *The Pillow Book* of a commoner aping the behaviors of the courtiers is that of the old beggar woman who comes to the Empress's Office in NKBT 87 "*Shiki no onzōshi ni owashimasu koro*" (M 83 "Once When Her Majesty Was Residing"). During a time of Buddhist prayer, Sei and the other court women hear the voice of a common-sounding woman (*ayashiki mono*) asking for some offerings from the veranda. Her clothes were filthy, and Sei feels somewhat sorry for her when she affects a polite air and begs in her politest language for some food from the Buddhist altar.[9] Sei is somewhat irritated by her appearance but gives her food, prompting the old nun to begin chatting away in an overly familiar fashion with her and the other court women. For their own amusement, they all take this opportunity to prod her on, encouraging her to sing bawdy songs, including one that goes, "Who shall share my bed tonight? / Hitachi no Suke — he's my man! His skin is soft to touch." From this point onward, the woman is given the sobriquet "Hitachi no Suke" or "Assistant Governor of Hitachi Province." The court women laugh disgustedly at her. The Empress, having heard this, chides the court women for having the

old woman act in such a ridiculous fashion, and she gives them a robe to pass along to her, a gift that prompts the old woman to imitate the aristocratic tradition of performing a dance of thanks. The court women's disgust for her behavior becomes all the stronger. On subsequent days, "Hitachi no Suke" returns and behaves in a ridiculously familiar manner that causes much amusement among the ladies. The derision of the ladies stems not so much from the fact that the old nun is destitute but rather from the fact that she does not behave in a way that is appropriate for her position in life. Her dancing, songs, and speech all reveal her lower status, but she is presumptuous enough to assume that by engaging in these performances, she elevates herself in the eyes of the court ladies, and her subsequent behavior reflects this assumption. However, because she cannot perform in a way that is authentically aristocratic, all she does is reinforce her status as a commoner.

In a subsequent passage, when another beggar with a physical handicap appears, it becomes clear that the ladies' revulsion to "Hitachi no Suke" is grounded in the nun's behavior, not her actual class. The handicapped nun seems extremely reticent, and the ladies feel pity (*aware*) for her. When the Empress gives her a robe too, the woman prostrates herself before them. Sei writes, "She prostrated herself [like "Hitachi no Suke"], but there was nothing unpleasant about her (*saredo yoshi*)" (Adapted).

"Hitachi no Suke" feels jealous that the court ladies are treating someone else so well, and does not return for some time. When at last she does reappear, she utters a *waka* poem of complaint in which she expresses her envy that that another woman had been treated so well. This poem seems to meet all of the standards of *waka* poetry — it has the requisite number of syllables (there is *ji-amari*, but well within the limits of *waka* conventions), a pillow word (*watatsu no umi* modifying *ama*), and a pivot word with multiple meanings (*ama* meaning both "nun" and "sea diver") — but it only evokes more contemptuous laughter from the women.[10] This is no doubt because "Hitachi no Suke" had presumed to transgress the boundaries separating the classes and assume that she had earned the ladies' friendship. As suggested above, this anecdote suggests that it is not commoners in and of themselves who are despicable to Sei but behavior that she sees as presumptuous and unbefitting one's actual class. Clearly, in her mind, one cannot easily traverse the barriers of class simply by acting in a manner associated with a higher position.

Fukumori comments that the use of figures such as "Hitachi no Suke" who inhabit the socioeconomic periphery of *The Pillow Book* enables Sei to evoke laughter and amusement while deflecting attention from the difficult political situation surrounding Empress Teishi and her salon. Fukumori reminds us that in 995, the father of Empress Teishi, Chancellor Fujiwara no Michitaka, had died, leaving Teishi without political backing. Meanwhile, Fujiwara no

Michinaga, the brother of Michitaka, used the opportunity to come to power and give his daughter, Shōshi, who was also married to the Emperor, the backing required to push her into political prominence. Written after this political shift, *The Pillow Book* celebrates the court of the Empress Teishi and should be read as a re-visioning of her vanished glory days. Indeed, it can be taken as a politically motivated paean to the days when Teishi exercised influence. By inviting liminal figures such as "Hitachi no Suke" onto the stage of her work, "Sei Shōnagon sets up a dynamic in which the members of Teishi's salon collectively ridicule and alienate outsiders, thereby reinstating a feeling of harmony within their own small community" (Fukumori 1997a: 27). This laughter allows the historically knowledgeable reader vicariously to hold the tragic circumstances at bay and imagine the aestheticized world of Empress Teishi's salon. Such figures, Fukumori remarks, play a role similar to those in the Bakhtinian notion of carnival.

Certainly one function of the Bakhtinian carnival is to provide "liberation from the threatening psychological forces through their ability to provoke laughter and merriment" (*ibid.*) At the same time, the carnival also presents "a boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations opposed [to] the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture," and thus represents a site where aesthetic ideals and the class structure that supports them are brought into question (Bakhtin 1968: 4). What should be clear in this example, however, is that when the presumptuous behavior and lower class aesthetics of "Hitachi no Suke" come into contact with those of the court world, they are contained by the laughter of the court women like Sei. The old nun's attempts to manipulate aristocratic aesthetics to her own benefit proves unsuccessful, and the laughter of the ladies serves only to reinforce class divisions and diffuse any potential challenge to the rigid standards of Heian aristocratic culture that might be implicit in the encounter.

Conversely, just as Sei finds attempts on the part of commoners to adopt aristocratic culture distasteful, she also finds it undesirable for people of rank to behave in ways that appear to be beneath their own class. Such behavior can only be unseemly. In NKBT 28 "*Nikuki mono*" (M 27 "Hateful Things"), Sei comments that she hates to see men stretch out the wrinkles on their hands when warming them over braziers. She says,

> One might suppose that such behavior was restricted to people of little [social] value (*kainaki mono*); but I have observed it in people of some social standing (*sukoshi yoroshiki mono*), including a Senior Secretary of the Fifth Rank in the Ministry of Ceremony and a former Governor of Suruga (Adapted).

Similarly, NKBT 57 "*Wakaku yoroshiki otoko no*" (M 53 "It Is Hateful When a Well-Bred Young Man") states,

> It is hateful when a well-bred young man who is visiting a woman of lower rank (*gesu-onna*) calls out her name in such a way as to make everyone realize that he is on familiar terms with her. However well he may know her name, he should slur it slightly as though he had forgotten it.

Clearly, fraternization between social classes is only tolerable as long as it is masked by the pretense of social and personal distance. In Sei's eyes, behaving in a way that associates oneself with a different socioeconomic class, be it either superior or inferior, is hateful (*nikushi*) and might invite ridicule.

One way for the aristocracy to maintain its aloofness from the common people is to dismiss outright even favorable comments from the lower classes. NKBT 311 "*Yoroshiki otoko o gesu-onna nado no homete*" describes the attitudes of the upper classes when their social subordinates attempt to praise them.

> If a servant girl (*gesu-onna*) says about a man of breeding (*yoroshiki otoko*), "What a delightful gentleman he is!" one immediately looks down on him, whereas if she insulted the person in question it would have the opposite effect. Praise from a servant (*gesu*) can also damage a woman's reputation. Besides, people of that class always manage to express themselves badly when they are trying to say something nice (M 290 "If a Servant Girl," Adapted).

Again, the problem seems to be partly one of cross-class behavior. Clearly, in Sei's view, servants do not have the social standing nor the aesthetic perceptivity to produce meaningful opinions about their superiors, and any attempt to do so is made all the more egregious by their lack of verbal perspicuity. Since servants do not have social or aesthetic authority, Sei assumes their opinions, when they presume to offer them, are fatally flawed, and a kind word from a servant becomes a liability more than anything else. The dismissive attitude on the part of the aristocracy represents a distancing technique that prevents personal intimacy from forming between the classes.

In addition to the passages discussed above, there are four others that mention the common people in lights that might be seen as negative, and two of these are especially deserving of comment since commentators have remarked on them as embodying a particularly virulent dislike for the common folk.[11] The first is NKBT *ippon* 28 "*Hase ni mōdete tsubone ni itarishi ni*" (M 309 "It is Very Annoying") in which Sei describes her annoyance at encountering a group of common people on a pilgrimage to Hase Temple, located in what is now Nara Prefecture. The term she uses to describe them is the adjective *ayashiki*, meaning

vulgar or common, plus the noun *gerō-domo*, meaning low-class serving people. She describes these people as pulling their sleeves down and sitting upon them in a fashion that imitates the aristocrats. When she enters the temple,

> I found a throng of priests in white clothing and a group of people that reminded me of bagworms. They were standing up, prostrating themselves, and so on. There was scarcely an inch between us. This made me indeed feel terrible, and I really felt like pushing them all over sideways. (Adapted.)

The displeasure directed toward the common people is even stronger in the Nōinbon version (NKBZ 308), which leaves out the priests and simply describes the humble pilgrims and their garb.

> I found a group of people that reminded me of bagworms, and they were wearing common (*ayashiki*) clothing that struck me as very horrid. They were standing, prostrating themselves, and so on, and I really felt like pushing them all over sideways. (Adapted.)

Sei's malicious image of bagworms (*minomushi*), a caterpillar-like insect that constructs brownish cocoons out of scraps of leaves, captures an impression of both the dirty, patchwork clothes of the commoners and the pilgrims' wriggling movements as they prostrate themselves. In both texts, the passage ends with a lament about the difficulty of such situations, and Sei comments with apparent envy that people of especially high rank are fortunate enough to have servants to clear commoners away.

The most obvious reason for Sei's snide negativity might be that her hopes for a quiet, contemplative pilgrimage were dashed when the she found noisy throngs of people already at the temple. Even so, why did Sei choose to include this passage? Why was the experience important enough to write about? Sei's mood seems to have turned sour not so much because of the simple presence of the commoners but because they were unwilling to bow to her as their social superior and evacuate space for her. Other passages have revealed how distressing Sei finds behavior that does not conform to what she expects, and in fact, one might count this among the recurring motifs of *The Pillow Book*.

The other negative portrayal in NKBT 314 "*Sōzu no onmenoto no mama nado*" (M 292 "One Day I Was in the Apartment") begins by stating that one day, Sei and several other court ladies were in the Empress's room when they heard a man approach. In an absurdly polite style, this man, apparently a member of the lower classes, tells the women that his house had burned in a fire that started from the Imperial Stables, and he had lost everything. For days, he says he has existed only by "squeezing my buttocks into people's houses," a term that

Ivan Morris interprets as reflecting his crude nature (1967: II 372). This story provokes laughter from the unsympathetic women, and Sei writes for him a poem full of puns, which the apparently illiterate man could not hope to understand. Mistaking the poem for a list of things that she will give him, the man asks how much she has offered. One of the ladies tells him to read it himself, but he returns that he is half-blind. The lady tells him to go elsewhere and have it read, and then she assures him that he has nothing to worry about. As the ladies leave, they all laugh among themselves as they imagine how upset he will be when he learns the contents of the paper. Later, when they tell the Empress about it, she asks with a smile the rhetorical question, "How can you all be so mad?"

Donald Keene comments on this passage with resignation, "One has to accept the fact that for members of the court at this time the illiterate mass of Japanese did not belong to the same species as themselves" (1993: 424-25). Japanese critics too have found the degradation of the illiterate, common man particularly appalling. Yunomoto Yūyuki states that though this passage is ostensibly included to tell the tale behind a particular poem, there is no way around the fact that it also makes fun of an illiterate man; this anecdote reveals that commoners and courtiers inhabit entirely different dimensions of the same world (Yūseidō 1975: III 267).

No doubt for modern readers the cleverness of the poem Sei writes does little to compensate for the meanness of her practical joke, but this appears to be at least one reason that she included this story in *The Pillow Book*. It is also possible that Sei may be purposely showing herself in a negative light to make Empress Teishi look good. Even though Teishi does smile, she does not fail to give the ladies a light reprimanding. (It is ultimately unclear whether her smile was one of amusement at the ladies' incorrigibility or if it was a sign of imperial indulgence.) Although Teishi's comment is unlikely to placate modern readers, an imperial reprimand would probably not be taken lightly by its Heian-period addressee. The words of admonishment suggest that she does not fully approve of the behavior of Sei and her cohorts. Remember too that in the passage in which the court ladies are making fun of the old beggar woman "Hitachi no Suke," the Empress found the ladies' cruel playfulness displeasing and tried to put an end to it with a gift. In both places, Sei shows the Empress Teishi as possessing a superior morality and benevolence, and thus this passage is in keeping with the project of writing a particularly positive history of Teishi and her salon.

Granted, there are a number of places within *The Pillow Book* in which Sei mentions the common people in contexts that modern scholars have interpreted as derogatory or reflecting a general dislike for commoners, and some of these portrayals are far from flattering, but the examples above suggest that these allegedly negative portrayals spring less from simple elitism than from other

motivations, such as feelings of distaste for mismatches between behavior and actual socioeconomic class or a desire to show the Empress Teishi in a positive light.

(2) "Neutral" Images

There are about four places in the text in which Sei mentions the common, working people in contexts that are neutral or even betray a tinge of curiosity. NKBT 6 "*Onaji koto naredo mo kikimimi kotonaru mono*" is a list of "things that are the same but that sound different to the listening ear." After noting that priests use different language from those in the secular world and that men and women speak differently, Sei comments, "There are always extra syllables in the speech of common people (*gesu*)" (M 6 "Different Ways of Speaking," Adapted). No doubt given the separation between classes, there was a good deal of difference in the speech of various segments of society, but the text does not express an overt preference for any of these rhetorical styles.

Nōinbon variants of the text contain a passage in which the narrator gives a detailed account of a handful of carpenters eating a meal. (It is absent in the Sankanbon variants of the work.) NKBZ 313 ("*Takumi no mono kuu koso*") begins, "The way in which carpenters eat is really odd" (M 313 "The Way in Which Carpenters Eat"). The adjective *ayashi* used to describe their gustatory habits can generally mean either (1) "strange" or "different," thus making a statement relatively free of value judgment based on class, or (2) "crude," "unpleasant," or "low-class," thus linking socioeconomic class with an aesthetic judgment. If in fact Sei used this word with the latter meaning in mind, then the condemnation does not come across as terribly strong. Rather, the entire passage is written with a tone bordering on fascinated wonder. She methodically observes how the carpenters squatted, then consumed their soup, side dishes, and rice in sequence. From the fact that three or four men ate their meal in this fashion, she concludes that this must be the custom of carpenters in general. The passage concludes, "I should not call it a very charming one" ("*Ana, motaina no koto to mo ya*"). The term *motaina* denotes something outrageous as seen from the vantage point of courtly values. At the time, it was common for members of the upper classes to eat various courses together, enjoying the way that the flavors of the dishes blended with each other. The lowly custom of taking all courses quickly and in succession must have seemed unusual or even rude to high-ranking onlookers. This paper includes this passage under the subcategory of "neutral" images because the author's obvious interest in the subject seems somewhat at odds with the dismissal of the behavior as strange and lacking in aristocratic propriety. Here as with other spots to be examined below, the author expresses curiosity in a phenomenon associated with the common people only to make a

comment toward the end that puts distance between her and the object of scrutiny. In the comment that this way of eating must be typical of carpenters, she implies that she knows little about the ways of working-class people, and her final comment suggests that she prefers aristocratic decorum.

Two of the other neutral portrayals are in sections in which Sei, ever the aesthete, describes what she sees as the ideal conditions for certain types of people. In NKBT 55 "*Ushikai wa*," Sei writes, "An ox-herder should be big; his hair should have a slightly reddish tint, and his face should be ruddy. He should also look resourceful." (M 34 "The Driver of an Ox-Carriage," Adapted). According to Tsumoto Nobuhiro, *ushikai* refers to a young ox-herder (unlike in Ivan Morris's translation, which has him a graying ox-cart driver), and Sei has selected physical attributes that she thought would suit a young male laborer admirably (Yūseidō 1975: II 221-22). His hair should have started to turn from black to red in the sun, reflecting his diligence, and he should have the appearance of resourcefulness, since such a trait is useful in his daily work.

In NKBT 234 "*Mijikakute arinubeki mono*," Sei writes, "The hair of a woman of the lower classes (*gesu-onna*) should be neat and short" (M 206 "Things That Should Be Short"). Commentator Morimoto Shigeru notes that long hair gets in the way of physical work, and long hair is associated with the upper and middle classes, providing two reasons why lower-class women who work should keep their hair cut (Yūseidō 1975: III 184). Both the comments on common women and the appearance of ox-herders contribute to the reader's sense that the world of Sei Shōnagon, namely the Empress Teishi's salon, was a place of extreme aesthetic awareness and distinction. The insistence that things should be just so is entirely in keeping with the project of promoting a laudatory representation of Teishi's age and of a salon at its aesthetic zenith.

(3) "Positive" Images

When Sei describes the common people in a light that has been interpreted as negative, she tends to focus on unbecoming behaviors, specifically those that she judges incommensurate with actual socioeconomic rank and class. However, with the exception of the passage about the gustatory habits of carpenters discussed above, Sei describes the common people in a generally positive, even appreciative fashion as long as she feels that they are being themselves and acting in ways that she sees as appropriate for their class.

One of the most striking examples can be found in the essay-like NKBT 144 "*Shōgachi tōka yoi no hodo*" (M 137 "On the Tenth Day of the First Month"). Sei describes the following scene, which she appears to have encountered along a roadside.

> On the tenth day of the First Month there were thick clouds in the sky but the sun shone through brightly. In a rough, uncultivated field behind the house of a lower-class person (*esemono*) grew a young peach tree. Little branches sprouted thickly all over it; I noticed that the leaves were green on one side while on the other they were dark and glossy as if colored with a deep red dye.
>
> A slender youth, with beautiful hair and wearing a torn hunting costume, had climbed the tree. At the foot stood a little boy; he had on short clogs, and over a plum-red under-robe he wore a white hunting costume tucked up so that it bulged at the waist. "Come on!" he called to the youth in the tree. "Cut me a nice branch."
>
> Just then a group of three or four girls arrived. They too had pretty hair, and though their skirts were faded, they wore nice jackets. "Please cut us some branches," they shouted to the lad. "Choose some that we can make into nice hare-wands. Master sent us for them."
>
> When the youth in the tree started to throw down branches, the children ran for them helter-skelter, each taking her share and crying, "Lots for me! Lots for me!" It was a delightful scene (*okashikere*).
>
> Then a man in a dirty trouser-skirt came running along and said that he too wanted some branches. The boy asked him to wait for a moment, whereupon the man began shaking the tree. The boy was terrified and clung on like a monkey, which I found most amusing (*okashi*). One is likely to come across similar scenes when the plum trees start bearing fruit (Adapted).

Sei takes obvious delight in this scene of children playing and acting in a natural, unpretentious fashion, as if unaware of being observed. Twice she uses the adjective *okashi*, meaning "pleasing," "appealing," or "interesting" to describe her aesthetic reaction to the scene before her. As Fukumori has noted, this term is an extremely important one in *The Pillow Book*, appearing more often than *aware*, the aesthetic term frequently employed in Heian diaries to mean a deep, sympathetic emotional resonance. *Okashi*, by contrast, implies a "momentary and fleeting attraction which is based more on wit than emotional stirrings," and it is this same term that Sei uses whenever she wishes to describe the pleasing aesthetic heights of Empress Teishi and her salon (1997a: 15-16).

In a reading of this passage, Fukumori notes that it is filled with a combination of both courtly and non-courtly elements (1997b: 79). Certainly, the unkempt field and the common dwelling indicate that the scene takes place outside the removes of court culture; however, the children are described as wearing a combination of tattered and nice clothing, and the girls have lovely hair, which in Heian literature generally suggests beauty and frequently even an erotic appeal. Fukumori uses this passage to point out that when Sei deploys the prefix *ese-*, she

does not describe things of little or no interest. Quite the contrary, Sei describes people and things that, though frequently associated with relatively low or common social status, at times manifest qualities worthy of the attention of even the most aesthetically discriminating court ladies. Fukumori perceptively remarks that "courtly and non-courtly aspects exist in the *ese*," and the coexistence of these contradictory elements invites us to reevaluate the assumption that Sei had nothing but contempt for the lower classes (*ibid.*: 83). In this scene, though the lower-class people she describes obviously do not have a social standing anywhere near that of the courtiers, these commoners provide a scene worthy of the attention of even the Empress herself.

Many scholars have noticed within Sei's lists the importance of classification, particularly in the list-like passages which catalogue certain items, place names, and even types of experiences that produce certain poetic effects. This has led to speculation that *The Pillow Book* started as a handbook of words for use within poetry but evolved into the present work when Sei began expanding on the terms in these lists, creating increasingly free improvisations. Indeed, the reader frequently finds list-like passages evolving into essays or journalistic passages where it seems the author could not resist the urge to relate extra thoughts or even an entire story related to an item in the list. The classification of the work's passages into three types, namely lists, essays, and diary-like entries, is only approximate.

There are, however, certain clear patterns that structure at least parts of the work. The list-like passages come in two types, one with titles containing the word "...*mono*" ("things that...") and one with titles containing the contrastive particle *wa* ("as for" such-and-such). Mark Morris, in his extensive study of these list-like passages, notices that the two types occupy approximately the same percentage of the work as a whole, suggesting a carefully organized mind at work. Morris also points out that the grammatical logic structuring these two types of passages is exactly opposite (1980: 9-12). The *mono*-type passages are full of items that can be used as subjects before the words in the title; for example, if the title of a passage is Z-*mono* (things describable as Z), the listed items — Y1, Y2, Y3 — are ready to be inserted before the modifying clause in the title to make sentences meaning Y1 is Z, Y2 is Z, and so on. The *wa*-type passages, however, contain a subject in the title and list items that are grammatically prepared to serve as the subject's predicate. For instance, a *wa*-type passage with the title X *wa* and with predicates Y1 and Y2, is ready to be reconstituted into sentences meaning X is Y1, X is Y2, and so forth. In short, the *mono* passages give grammatical subjects for an already given predicate whereas the *wa*-type passages provide predicates for an already given subject. Morris notes that Sei seemed to take special pleasure in putting remarkably different items together in these two types of lists so that the reader will take pleasure in the witty mind that put such disparate things together under a single category.

Mitamura Masako takes this argument a step farther by examining the types of differences between items in the list-like passages and arguing that parts of Sei's work may be seen essentially as a study in the signifying process. Like Morris, she argues that a major principle underlying *The Pillow Book* is a project of classification, but Sei is also interested in what causes differences between the various items that she has classified. For instance, Mitamura notes that in the *mono*-type passages, Sei lists various items that adhere to a single set of circumstances as if she is examining the variables that create apparent differences within the category (1995: 252-72). As one example, Mitamura looks at NKBT 6 "*Onaji koto naredo mo kikimimi kotonaru mono*," discussed above. The following represents the entire text of the short passage.

> A priest's language.
> The speech of men and of women.
> There are always extra syllables in the speech of common people.

In this short list, Sei seems to be aware of three factors which cause apparent differences in speech, even if the people are saying more or less the same thing: secular versus religious distinctions, gender, and class. All three are variables that cause an apparent discrepancy (*sakeme* or "fissure" in Mitamura's terms) between content of speech and the actual manifestation of that speech. To extend Mitamura's argument, when Sei evokes the lower class in such contexts, she is not doing so out of an attempt to define the relative value of any of these groups but rather as part of a larger intellectual exercise that examines "slippages" (*zure*) between content and outward appearance. For this reason, one can only classify this instance of the description of the common people to be "neutral," as it has been above.

Mitamura suggests that throughout *The Pillow Book*, Sei uses varying logic to pursue her project of classification and examination of differences. Another common but related logical pattern is the one manifested in the *wa*-type lists. Sei takes a general category of things, such as "non-flowering trees" in one excerpt examined above, and she lists various, specific things that fall under this category, for example "hemp palm." Finally, she will often make a comment about how the object's name or appearance differs from its actual situation, such as noting that hemp palms have a Chinese air, but are often found in the unattractive yards of the poor. In this way, she examines apparent incongruities between signifier and signified.

One finds a second example of this in NKBT 41 "*Tori wa*" (M 43 "Birds"), which also mentions the common people. Sei comments that the splendid *uguisu*, known for its wondrous song, never makes appearances in the palace grounds, though "outside the Palace, in the paltry plum tree of some commoner's

(*ayashiki mono no*) house, one hears the *uguisu* warbling joyfully."[12] The common people, however, use a strange signifier to indicate this bird.

> In the summer and autumn the *uguisu*'s voice grows hoarse. Now the common people (*yō mo aranu mono*) change its name to "insect eater" or something of the kind, which strikes me as both unpleasant and unseemly. I should not mind if it were an ordinary bird like the sparrow; but this is the magnificent *uguisu*, whose song in the spring has moved writers to praise that season in both poetry and prose.

NKBT commentators Ikeda Kikan and Kishigami Shinji gloss *yō mo aranu mono* as people without status or cultivation.[13] *Yō*, though written in *kana*, apparently comes from the character 用 meaning "use" or "necessity," and therefore, *yō mo aranu mono* might be more literally rendered "people who aren't even useful." It is clear from context, however, that it is not the aristocrats, who have praised the *uguisu* since time immemorial, that change the bird's name; rather, it is the common people, who think of the bird in a practical way and not as an object deserving attention. As a result, there emerges an apparent incongruity between signifier and signified or, to use Mitamura's term, *zure*. Interestingly, as in several places before, we find that the difference between the classes is manifested through outward behavior, here the performative act of speech. Just as the nobles exhibit their knowledge of the *uguisu* in literary history by appreciating the bird, the common people exhibit their lack of literary knowledge or cultivation by selecting a name that reduces the much celebrated bird to a mere mosquito trap.

Finally in one of the richest but least thoroughly pursued strains of her argument, Mitamura notes that Sei applies this logic even outside of the confines of the list-like passages, examining apparent incongruities or *zure* between the ways people and things are perceived, the language used to talk about them, and the situations in which these people and things actually appear. The section on "negative" images above noted that Sei also frequently describes and makes light of aristocrats who behave in ways unbefitting their own social class. These might be considered examples of *zure* in that they all manifest an apparent incongruity between one's actual situation and one's image as established through behavior. Sei's interest in such incongruities may serve as a partial explanation for why she comments on the common people with greater frequency than other Heian *kana* diaries. To many of her contemporaries who wrote diaries, the common people appear to have been a subject of little interest, but as the description of the children playing by the peach tree suggests, Sei at times found them quite interesting and pleasant, thus manifesting the *okashi* aesthetic that Heian writers held in such regard. Specifically, she evinces curiosity about exactly how people not ordi-

narily associated with these aesthetic effects manage to manifest them. In pursuit of the answer, she describes in detail the scenes in which she has felt these effects, as well as the clothes, appearance, and behavior of the participants.

Indeed, a number of Sei's stories mentioning the common people might be read as studies in how people come to be perceived as they are. Behaviors that project or "perform" aesthetic discrimination and perception frequently take center stage in her essay-like *études*. For instance, the entire story of "Hitachi no Suke" could be read as a study in how that woman came to be perceived as a beggar scarcely worth the attention of the attention of the court ladies. Even though "Hitachi no Suke" could perform certain acts associated with the aristocratic class, such as composing *waka* poetry, Sei seems interested in understanding what elements in her performance led her to be regarded as she was. For this reason, Sei describes (with an effect that may have been comic to contemporary readers) the old woman's errors when she attempts to perform the behavior of a class other than her own. Also, Sei describes in detail the differences between the behavior of "Hitachi no Suke" and the other nun who did succeed in eliciting the sympathy of the other court ladies, almost as if Sei were using the other nun as a control against which to locate the variables within the performance of "Hitachi no Suke" that produced such an unpleasant effect.

Three scenes in *The Pillow Book* describe watching the common people with interest as they engage in labor. Interestingly, in all three scenes, the text treats the work as an aesthetic sight in and of itself, but in each case the degree of identification with the workers and the pleasure derived from the scene are qualitatively different. What remains constant, however, is the text's careful insertion of rhetorical devices that mark the class of the narrator as different from that of the people being watched. Nowhere is this more dynamic clearer than in NKBT 99 "*Gogachi no ōnsōji no hodo*" (M 95 "It was during the Abstinence of the Fifth Month"), which describes several court ladies on an outing to hear the singing of the *hototogisu* and write poems about the experience. Along the way to Kamo, their destination, the retinue stops at the home of Lord Akinobu, the uncle of one of the ladies. While there, the host arranges for the women to see "some of the local activities."

> "When one visits a new place," said our host, "one should see the local activities." He sent for a quantity of what I took to be rice plants (*ine to iu mono*), and also summoned a number of young low-ranking people (*gesu-domo*), who did not appear unrefined (*kitanage naranu*), and some girls from the neighboring houses. About half a dozen threshed the rice, while two others used a revolving thing that I had never seen before. As they worked, they sang such a strange song that we all laughed/smiled (*warau*) and completely

forgot about writing our *hototogisu* poems. (Adapted)

Here, a careful distance is maintained between the high-ranking people who watch and the servants who perform the work. (Here *gesu-domo* appears to refer specifically to servants, given the ease with which Akinobu summons their help.) The entire scene, of course, is staged as a tourist spectacle and thus represents only an artificial simulation of work that puts the use-value of the servants on display to satisfy the scopophilic desires of the guests. Right from the initial set-up, there is an inherent distinction between the workers as viewed object and court ladies as viewing subject. There is a possibility that the ladies will experience an aesthetic appreciation for the workers or even an identificatory bond with them, feeling things that they imagine the workers to be feeling or even a desire to try the work themselves. In fact, the narrator's statement that the servants appeared not to be terribly coarse represents a step in this direction.

The possibility of an identificatory bond, however, is neutralized by language that consistently places distance between the workers and their onlookers. The narrator uses the words "what I took to be rice plants," coyly acting as if she did not know exactly what she was seeing. Ivan Morris comments that this affectation seems almost overly deliberate (1967: II 87).[14] Indeed, considering that the grain from those same plants formed the main staple of the Japanese diet at that time and that the author must have seen such plants countless times on her pilgrimages into the countryside, she must have known what they were. One can only see this statement as representing a feigned, performed ignorance that specifically marks the narrator as belonging to a socioeconomic class that does not engage in agricultural labor. Likewise, the narrator's emphasis that she had never seen the revolving tool the workers were using draws a line between her and the working classes.

In the end, the use of the word *warau*, meaning either "to laugh" or "to smile" leaves it unclear as to the exact nature of the ladies' reaction to the song. Ivan Morris's translation of *warau* as "burst out laughing" suggests that the ladies were laughing either out of surprise at the strangeness of the song or out of amused disgust at something so vulgar, but it is also possible that the ladies were smiling or laughing out of interest tinged with curiosity, having found the song of the workers pleasing. Neither prospect is impossible, but in view of the remarkable frequency with which the adjective *okashi* ("pleasing") appears in *The Pillow Book*, the conspicuous absence of the word here might support Morris's interpretation. If this is the case, then regardless of how we interpret the laughter, be it out of surprise, derision, or even shock, we should see it yet another action that draws a class line between the court ladies and servants. If the ladies are smiling because they are enjoying the unusual song or feeling something akin to *okashisa*, then the word *warau* cannot be seen as helping to draw a performative line

between classes. Either possibility is equally plausible.

NKBT 227 "*Hachigachi tsugomori*" (M 242 "Towards the End of the Eighth Month") gives a less ambiguous example of an aesthetic reaction to a scene in which the narrator watches the masses work. Again, however, one finds the narrator using remarkably similar techniques to maintain distance between the classes. Below is the full text of this passage.

> Towards the end of the Eighth Month I was on my way to the temple at Uzumasa when I saw a crowd of people (*hito*) working in the fields. The men were busily reaping the ears of rice. True indeed were the poet's words when he wrote, "They were pulling out the sprouts. Now already autumn's stolen up." Yes, it was only the other day that I had seen them planting the fields as I set out on a pilgrimage for Kamo, and it was already time for the harvest. This thought filled me with a feeling of *aware*.
>
> On this occasion all the workers were men. Bending down, they seized the base of the red plants by their green roots, and cut off the ears with something. They seemed to work with such ease that it really looked as if something I would like to try! Why did they do it that way? The way they laid out all the ears in a row was pleasing (*okashi*).
>
> The appearance of the huts [inhabited by these peasants] and so on.
>
> (Adapted, final ellipsis in the original)

In witnessing the scene of labor, the text uses only the word *hito*, meaning "person" to describe the workers, even though their skilled familiarity with agricultural work suggests that they were from that portion of the peasantry that habitually worked in the rice fields. By not semantically marking them as peasants and thus dividing herself from them, the text opens up a possible channel of identification with them.

In other conspicuous ways, the narrator does mark herself as different from the workers. The text carefully notes that the author does not know what sort of tool the men use to sever the ripened rice from the stalk. The Nōinbon variant in NKBZ 249 differs from the Sankanbon variant translated above, stating the men used "a knife or something" (*katana ka nani ni ka aramu*), but here too, one finds a specific ignorance about the precise nature of the cutting instrument put to use. This may be because she maintained enough physical distance from the workers that she truly could not see the tools they were using. Another possibility is that in writing the text, she simply chose to feign ignorance about the workers' tools in order to highlight the fact that she was involved only as a spectator. In either case, the result is the same; the text emphasizes that she is not overly familiar with the conventions of farm work, and it opens a gap between viewing subject and viewed object.

The meaning of the final line is ambiguous. The NKBT Sankanbon version ends with an elliptical expression "*Io no sama nado*" ("The appearance of the huts and so on"), which does not indicate what exactly the author thought about these humble dwellings. Coming right after the word *okashi*, context would seem to dictate that she found the huts pleasing as well, but the Nōinbon version ends with the somewhat vague "*Iho no sama kotonari*," meaning "The appearance of the huts differed" (NKBZ 249). This could be interpreted as meaning that the huts, unlike the rows of recently reaped rice, were not aesthetically pleasing, or as Ivan Morris rendered it, "The huts inhabited by these peasants looked most peculiar," thus differing from what would have been most familiar to aristocrats like the author.

Most importantly, the allusion to the anonymous poem from the *Kokinshū* represents a display of the sort of poetic knowledge possessed only by the upper crust. This poem forms the literary precedent for the author's feelings of *aware*, which was one of the sentiments held in high regard by the upper class, and thus justifies the feelings of admiration and, to an extent, identification with the men reaping the fields. The specific interest in juxtapositions of color, here the red and green of the plants, echoes that of other Heian writing, in which color was of utmost importance in determining aesthetic effect. Here, the author finds the sight of the ears of rice laid out in rows delightful, describing the effect with the word *okashi*. Thus within only a few lines, the author testifies to experiencing both of the aesthetics that Heian culture found so dear: *aware* and *okashisa*. Though the common people are the subject matter, Sei achieves a distinctly courtly and elegant effect in her description.

As the poem from the *Kokinshū* suggests, the common people harvesting had been for some time considered an appropriate topic for aristocratic literature. Other passages express appreciation of things that might seem shocking to contemporary readers. The description of passing carts in the hot months is one such instance. NKBT 224 "*Imijū atsuki koro*" (M 201 "During the Hot Months") reads,

> During the hot months, of course it gives a cool feeling when a gentleman's carriage passes by, but it also gives a cool feeling when just one or two plain people (*tada no hito*, i.e. people without rank) pass by in a carriage with the rear blinds slightly raised. One feels all the more so when the sound of a *biwa* or flute comes from inside, and one feels sorry when it disappears in the distance. At such times, one catches a whiff of the oxen's leather cruppers, and even though it is a strange, unfamiliar smell, as mad as I may seem, I find something rather pleasing (*okashiki*) about it (Adapted).

Throughout this excerpt, the author finds interest in not only the sort of things

her contemporaries are likely to enjoy but also in things that might be considered beneath her social class. It is not just the carriage of a gentleman that gives a fresh, cool feeling — that goes without saying — but also the carriages belonging to the lower classes as well.[15] Likewise, the author states that she finds the smell of the ox's crupper (the strap of leather that passes an animal's rump) to have a pleasant smell. In an era in which caring for beasts was considered the responsibility of servants, this statement is so astonishing for a person of rank that the author feels the need to include a disclaimer ("I know it seems crazy, but…": *okashiki koso mono guruhoshikere*). Mark Morris has noted in his discussion of the famous opening of *The Pillow Book*, NKBT 1 "*Haru wa akebono*" (M1 "In Spring It Is the Dawn"), that Sei takes a canonical topic, the seasons, in canonical order, arranged chronologically beginning with spring, but then "turns about and all but betrays the traditional poetic" in order to let her own creativity flow (1980: 41). The result is essay-like prose that meanders in directions of its own choosing rather than a form of writing more subject to the rules of convention like *waka* poetry. In the discussion of ox cruppers, Sei makes an even more radical departure from the language and established topics of poetry, but the result is again an idiosyncratic, witty, and perhaps even shocking bit of prose that presses the boundaries of the poetic, challenging the aristocratic reader to find an experience of interest in the banal.[16]

Returning to the last of the three scenes of labor described in *The Pillow Book*, one finds that it manifests a technique like that seen before — admiring the work of commoners while simultaneously distancing oneself from their activities — but in neither case does the text specifically invoke the aesthetics of *aware* or *okashisa*. NKBT 306 "*Hi no ito uraraka naru ni*" (M 285 "Times When One Should Be on One's Guard") describes an excursion by boat cut short by a thunderstorm. After Sei describes her fear, she writes,

> When one thinks of it, sailors are the bravest people in the world. Even in reasonably shallow water their vessels are far too flimsy to be safe. Yet they do not hesitate to embark on a sea of any depth — perhaps even a thousand fathoms — entrusting their lives to a boat that the water comes up almost to the edge. The common people (*gesu-domo*) who man the boat run up and down, never giving a thought to the danger; and, though it looks as if the slightest rocking would capsize it, one sees them banging down into the hold half a dozen great pine logs two or three feet in circumference. Amazing!

Later in the same passage, the narrator expresses admiration for the bravery of female divers who have to plunge into the watery depths for their livelihood. With obvious horror, Sei notes that simply watching them disappear into the depths and resurface panting is enough to make one imagine the seawater pour-

ing off one's own skin. Clearly, she does not want to trade places with the divers. Interestingly, her text does not contain any terms that specifically mark the workers as lacking status in the court hierarchy, a linguistic move that opens up room for the narrator and readers to identify momentarily with them and admire the skill of their work. Nonetheless, soon after mentioning the sailors, the text remarks, "When all is said and done, I feel indeed that people of rank (*yoki hito* as contrasted to the common people) should not go in boats. Traveling by land is frightening enough, but then at least one has the firm ground under one's feet and that is a great comfort" (Adapted). Even though Sei describes having fun rowing a boat and even though she admires the skill of sailors, she is careful to state that *yoki hito* do not belong upon the water.

CONCLUSION

As the above discussion of "positive" images of the common people suggests, on several occasions the text deploys images of the common people with complicated results. At times, the text manages to find a degree of vicarious enjoyment in watching the behavior of the common people, now and again expressing admiration and finding moments of *okashisa* and *aware*. It is commonly assumed that Sei's aesthetic ideology, which rigidly divides experience into that which is aesthetically pleasing and that which is not pleasing, overlaps neatly with a worldview that divides society into the courtly and the vulgar. Sei, however, effectively resists the notion that one can create a polarized relationship that pits the courtly and aesthetic versus the common and unappealing. She attempts to show that aesthetic boundaries do not necessarily overlap with social boundaries, and as her discussion of young children, ox cruppers, or harvesting peasants reveals, one can take special pleasure in vulgar things associated with the lower classes — provided, anyway, that one does so from a distance.

Though Sei does act as an aesthetic renegade, she never acts as a renegade in the social sphere. The text contains elaborate embedded defenses that reassure the reader that whenever she appreciates something associated with the common people, she still retains her own status in the upper crust. Even though she may aesthetically appreciate certain things associated with the common people, the text always carefully positions the lower classes as social Others, distinctly separate from people like her. It does so primarily through semantic choices, conspicuous deployment of the type of accomplishments associated with the higher classes (poetry, for example), self-conscious exposure of holes in her knowledge associated with the lower classes (not knowing or feigning not to know whether something is a rice plant for sure or what tools the rice-cutters were using), and caveats that express reservations about things that the text portrays. At all points

where the lower classes are discussed in a positive light — as well as many in which they are discussed in a negative light — Sei is careful to stress the differences between classes, focusing especially on the differences between behaviors and patterns of knowledge that establish and maintain these differences. These passages must be seen as exhibitions in their own right, elaborate linguistic and aesthetic displays that clearly associate Sei herself with the aesthetically discriminating world of the Empress Teishi's salon. The text, at countless points, is "performing class," marking the author as unmistakably belonging to the highest echelons of society. This, in turn, can only reflect positively upon Teishi and her attendants and contribute to the carefully crafted illusion that the heyday of Empress Teishi's salon, to which Sei Shōnagon belonged, represented the aesthetic zenith of the court.

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Most references to the Japanese text of *Makura no sōshi* will be to the Ikeda and Kishigami edition (1958), which is in the *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* and is based on a Sankanbon version of the text, but there will also be references to the Matsuo and Nagai (1974) edition, which is in the *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* and is based on a Nōinbon version of the text. Because there are multiple versions and reprintings of these texts, quotations will referenced

in parenthesis with the *passage* number given for the Japanese text (NKBT= Ikeda and Kishigami [1958] and NKBZ=Matsuo and Nagai [1974]) and the English translation (M=Morris [1967]). Morris's translation is largely based on a Nōinbon version of the text, but since Morris also refers to the Sankanbon version, the passage numbers in Morris do not correspond neatly with either the NKBT or the NKBZ versions of the text.

1. The characters for Teishi's name, 定子, can also be read Sadako.
2. The passages in NKBT containing the word *gesu* are numbers 6, 25, 45, 57, 87, 96, 98, 99, 122, 159, 222, 234, 237, 259, 267, 278, 306, 310, and 311. I have consulted Sakakibara *et al.* (1967) for the frequencies of various words in *The Pillow Book*. This compendium is based on a Sankanbon version of the text, and so the frequencies of the words may differ slightly depending on the particular variant of the text in question.
3. Ikeda Kikan and Kishigami Shinji, the annotators to NKBT, suggest that the term *gesu* here should be interpreted here as meaning "servants," but the less specific meaning of common people in general seems equally, if not more, likely given the contrast within the passage.
4. The passages in NKBT containing various conjugations of *waroshi* used to invoke socioeconomic class are 8, 40, 48, and 186. Most of the others are commenting on a disagreeable situation, the bad character of a courtier, and so on. See for instance the use of *waroshi* at the end of NKBT 1 "*Haru wa akebono*" (M 1 "In Spring It Is the Dawn"). There, the text reads, "As noon approaches and the cold wears off, no one bothers to keep the braziers alight, and soon nothing remains but piles of white ashes; this is inferior (*waroshi*)" (Adapted).
5. The passages in NKBT containing *ese-* are numbers 23, 24, 109, 120, 122, 125, 144, 156, 159, 263, 305, and 307; however, not all of these uses have to do with socioeconomic class.
6. All but the third item, "The Ladies in Charge of the Emperor's Keys..." also appear in the Nōinbon-based NKBZ. The translation of the third line is from Fukumori (1997b). The Nōinbon contains several more items, some of which are mentioned below.
7. In NKBZ, Matsuo Satoshi and Nagai Kazuo gloss this use of *esemono* as "*jitsuryoku no nai hito*," a person without real power. In NKBT, Ikeda Kikan and Kishigami Shinji gloss this use of esemono as "*tsumaranu hito*," a person of little consequence.
8. Another possible explanation for the inclusion of moonlight on the commoner's roof in her list of unbefitting things is that the house simply did not measure up to the standards of cleanliness or luxury that Sei felt were appropriate for such a magnificent sight, but Sei does not choose language that draws attention to the squalor of the house. If she were objecting to squalor specifically, she may have chosen a word such as *kitanaki* (dirty), or *ayashiki* (vulgar, crude).
9. After describing her dirty clothes, Morris's translation says, "She really looked like a

monkey," but there is some dispute about the meaning of the original Japanese "*saru sama nite iu narikeri*." NKBT annotators Ikeda Kikan and Kishigami say that the Japanese *saru sama*, written all in hiragana, could mean "like a monkey" (猿様), "in this way" (さる様), or "in a way that was funny" (猿楽う様).

10. If indeed this poem was indeed written by the old beggar, then this would suggest that the woman had a degree of learning since she could perform the production of poetry with remarkable aptitude. It is not impossible that Sei wrote the poem herself from the point of the view of the old woman since the poem is constructed around the sorts of double entendres and cleverness that she was known for. If so, the story of "Hitachi no Suke" may well have been included in *The Pillow Book* partly because Sei did not want to let the opportunity to include one of her good poems pass.
11. The passages that I will not examine are NKBT 222 and 237. In both, the word *gesu* is used, but in neither case does the person seem to be of very low socioeconomic class. In the former passage, the *gesu* are servants who appear to be part of the retinue of the High Priestess of Kamo, and in the latter, they are rustic people who still have enough money and status to have their own carriages and servants.
12. The NKBZ Nōinbon version of this passage is considerably different from the NKBT Sankanbon version. For "commoner's house," NKBZ 48 gives *ayashi no ie*.
13. This sentence is missing from the Nōinbon-based NKBZ 48.
14. The words "*to iu mono* " appear elsewhere in *The Pillow Book*. In these situations, it is used in reference to something that the narrator recognizes but that is not terribly familiar or that she assumes may not be familiar to readers. For instance, see NKBT 120 "*Shōgachi ni tera ni komoritaru wa*," NKBT 133 "*Tō-no-ben no onmoto yori*" or NKBT 161 "*Kodono no onbuku no koro*."
15. Nagai Kazuko suggests that the cool feeling arises as a result of imagining trading places Markwith the person in the carriage and feeling the air stirred by the carriage's movement wafting over oneself. It is unclear to what extent the author consciously imagines herself assuming the place of a commoner, but if she indeed does, then this may be seen as another instance of an aristocrat identifying with a person of lower rank — granted it seems it is only to escape the terrible heat! (Yūseidō 1975: III 177).
16. Mark Morris wryly comments, "It is always fun to have someone with real style put into words the naughty things you will now be flattering yourself to have been thinking all along" (1980:47) Sei apparently wanted to provide her Heian contemporaries with this bit of amusement, using her slick brush to say what no one else dared say about leather harnesses for oxen.

要 旨

庶民への眼差し、階級意識のパフォーマンス

ジェフリー・アングルス

『枕草子』の研究に於いては、清少納言が庶民に対して、大変冷笑的な意識を持っていたとよく書かれている。本稿は『枕草子』に於ける庶民の描写を分析することにより、『枕草子』の階級意識がより複雑であることを強調する。本稿では先ず、平民を指す語彙、特に名詞の「げす」、形容詞の「わろき」と接頭語の「えせ」の使い方を検討し、次にその言葉が利用された描写自体を分析する。確かに、いわゆる「侮蔑的」な描写がないわけではないが、庶民への興味をしめす点もあるところから、清少納言が平民に対して、冷笑的な態度しか示さなかったとする定説を訂正すべきと考える。そのような描写も、語り手と庶民との間に、距離を置いておく働きがある。侮蔑的な描写と侮蔑的ではない描写を取り入れる事自体が凝ったパフォーマンスであり、そのパフォーマンスの目的が語り手の上級の立場と美学的な鋭敏さを物語るものと論じる。