



**Sugawara no Takasue no Musume.** *The Sarashina Diary: A Woman's Life in Eleventh-Century Japan.* Translated, with an introduction, by Sonja Arntzen and Ito Moriyuki. Translations from the Asian Classics Series. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. Illustrations, maps. 322 pp. \$39.99, e-book, ISBN 978-0-231-53745-2.

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**Commissioned by** Douglas Slaymaker (University of Kentucky)

You may be of two minds about the Penguin Classics edition of the *Sarashina Diary* (*Sarashina nikki/niki* or *Sarashina no nikki/niki*, c. 1060) written by Sugawara no Takasue no Musume (1008-?). This English translation, by Ivan Morris, of a woman's text from the late Heian period (784-1185) masquerades under the concocted title *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams* (1971). On the one hand, seeing its narrow binding on the shelf can provoke a feeling of mystery and delight, as though one has discovered a tiny jewel. You might well choose it for a class, relieved at how little it costs (\$16.00) and trumpeting to your time-conscious students how much they will get from how few pages of assigned reading. Yet such a frail volume almost seems to say "here is a quite minor work of the Japanese canon, hardly worth pausing over."<sup>[1]</sup> Is this Penguin Classic a small wonder, a delicious bargain, or the perfect companion to others of Morris's highly readable oeuvre, his translation of *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon* (1967) and his account of the context germane to high Heian literature, *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan* (1964)?<sup>[2]</sup> Or is Morris's version of the *Sarashina nikki* a slight to one of the earliest and most fascinating lyric writers the world has known? Did Morris brush

away the title of the original for his translation (not to mention reduce some poems to two glancing lines) as easily as he swipes at parts of Heian religion by labeling them superstitions in *The World of the Shining Prince* volume?<sup>[3]</sup> Love it or leave it?—a conundrum for makers of syllabi and advocates of the complex riches in early Japanese literature.

As of July 2014 your dilemma has changed, because at last Sonja Arntzen, one of our most conscientious translators, has given us a new and weighty version of this beautiful and useful short classic. Working with the *Sarashina nikki* specialist Itō Moriyuki, and extending the techniques she honed in her earlier translation of the *Kagerō nikki* (*The Kagerō Diary: A Woman's Autobiographical Text from Tenth-Century Japan* [1997]), Arntzen and her coauthor fill in the gaps of interpretation and annotation that Morris left open. Now your question is not whether you should recommend the *Sarashina nikki* (apprehensive that people will think the whole enterprise of Japanese literature featherweight), but which rendition you will prefer. Will you continue to champion the small but smooth Morris, or push the bright newcomer whose packaging seems commensurate with the contents, which are nothing less than a

touching account of a distinctive individual woman's subjectivity and love of fiction? With a little luck, both Penguin and Columbia University Press will stay their courses of keeping translations in print over the long term, and the dilemma will resolve itself at different times in different ways appropriate to local needs.[4] Even so, the question of which translation is more ideal in the absence of other practical factors remains. Not to deprive you of the comparison, offered below, nor to short circuit your decision, but Arntzen and Itō's is the treatment that the *Sarashina* diarist deserves.

Case in point—a lovely poem from the author's second pilgrimage to Hatsuse reads: “*yukuhe naki / tabi no sora ni mo / okurenu ha / miyako nite mishi / ariake no tsuki* (In the sky / of this aimless journey, / a companion who / has not failed to keep up with us / the dawn moon we saw in the capital)” (pp. 194-195). This effort was selected for the imperial anthology *Shoku gosenshū* of 1235; Morris voiced the complaint that it was “peculiarly intractable to translation.”[5] Yet this unassuming rendition seems to work well, particularly in the context of the translators' exposition throughout of the role the journey and companions played in the life of the woman who wrote it. For many other reasons, the lover of Heian letters—or of Japanese history, of women's writing from any place or time, of dreams—will find this book exciting. The title page promises a standard format, “translated with an introduction,” which hardly hints at the groaning larder within: an eighty-five-page study, four maps and twelve photos of sites mentioned, three Edo woodblock illustrations, facing notes, bibliography, index, and two charts of the author's relations. One cannot easily imagine any of the translators' desires that the publisher failed to fulfill. The result is a book that can stand proudly next to the *Tale of Genji*, a major piece of fiction that gains so much by being considered along with this message from Takasue's daughter, one of its early, enthusiastic readers.

Arntzen and Itō concentrate on presenting the author as a reader, taking that as the first of four features that distinguish the *Sarashina Diary* from other Heian literary memoirs. Introductory material, beginning with the first subsection “Text and Author,” brings the newcomer into the complete world of Heian vernacular writing and its historiography. Arntzen and Itō never forget to give (as my students would say) “relatable” reasons to spend time with this text, such as that the author retains a sense of childish wonder into old age. The measure of the years they spent thinking comes out in such passages as their discussion of the reasons the author became known only as the daughter (Musume) of Sugawara no Takasue. We do not know her given name, but neither is she anonymous, Arntzen and Itō state (p. 9). Here and elsewhere they stipulate the significance of what the author left out as much as what she included. This links to their argument that the text is structured by a “dynamic tension” (p. 23) between the overt narration of how her love of literature deluded the author in her youth and a covert focus on that same literature as a consolation for loss (of her older sister, her nurse, her husband, and even of the rough east country from which she traveled up to the capital in her youth). Establishing two categories—narrative passages that carry the first message of the author's awakening to the spiritual damage wrought by her obsession with tales and lyric passages that undercut her surface didacticism—they caution us that poetry and prose function in both types, but not equally. They aim to complicate the text, but not in an unduly complicated way.

Anyone—most especially the general reader encountering Japanese literature for the first time—can follow even as Arntzen and Itō explore the key role of Buddhism and dreams in the text (their second distinguishing characteristic), which they couch in both religious and psychological terms (“Dreams and Religious Consciousness,” chapter 3). They walk us through six introductory chapters carefully, slipping in the opinions of sec-

ondary scholarship as necessary. Their chief interlocutor seems to be the skeptic who would call Takasue no Musume a naïve or careless writer. Instead they show us an author who has created two personae: the woman attached to words and the self-scolding moralist. The trajectory, they argue, is not from the mire of the first to the triumph of the second, from infantile fantasy to wisdom, but through their interrelations to a life of multiple experiences and dimensions (“A Child’s Viewpoint and Layers of Narration,” chapter 4). Noting that the author recounted her dream of being told to read the *Lotus Sutra*, and her failure to heed the warning, in the context of an absorbed reading of tales, they suggest that she reached a level of awareness, to wit: her very reading of other women’s intertexts taught her that the profane grants access to Buddhist truth (“Text and Intertext: The *Sarashina Diary* and the *Tale of Genji*,” chapter 5). In a final analytical chapter, “A Life Composed in Counterpoint,” they enumerate the structures (light and dark; the ending that juxtaposes self-concern with renunciation) that cause them to read the text as a series of point-counterpoints (their fourth characteristic), ending in “a final oscillation before the unity of silence” (p. 88). It is a profound defense of an ending that is sometimes criticized for not tendering a “proper” resolution.

From time to time, a single word will somewhat cloud the waters of clarity that otherwise move the critical study along, as when, for example, Arntzen notes that they “occasionally opted for readings from the original manuscript” (p. xiii). Of course, Fujiwara no Teika’s (1162-1261) handcopied edition is not the original manuscript of the diary, which is lost; one hopes that nonspecialists will not get the wrong idea. Overall, however, the book corrects so many of the myths and mistakes in the English record that the occasional semi-slip does not matter. Thanks to research since the 1970s and the collaborators’ respect for the text, many details come through in the new translation. Morris was unaware, for example, of

the pun on raft (Ikada) that describes a rainy night stop on the opening journey (the third feature of the diary), since he read it Ikata (or Iketa) (p. 113n6). I will not list the lapses in Morris’s translation. Suffice it to say that you need Arntzen and Itō to know for sure when a reference is to the author’s birth mother rather than stepmother, and to get the cultural world complete and correct.

My first glimpse of the cover of the new *Sarashina Diary* provided a mild shock nonetheless. The image is from the *Azumaya* chapter of the *Tale of Genji* scrolls—nothing to do with the *Sarashina nikki*! was my reflex response. But on second thought, it has everything to do with the *Sarashina* diarist. It illustrates one of the main themes of the text—the love of reading tales—via the tale that the author most wanted to read. The cover does raise, however, a curious comparison to the Morris translation. Morris’s title, *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams*, similarly invokes the *Tale of Genji*, specifically the title of the final chapter, “*Yume no ukihashi*,” “floating bridge of dreams.”[6] As it turns out, Columbia University Press uses the same image that graced the original Dial Press edition of the Morris translation.[7] There is no reference in the diary to this image of a “bridge of dreams,” and no case of an earlier copyist associating the text with this phrase. One of the main contentions/assertions of the new translation is that Morris sorely erred in inventing this odd label. Itō takes Morris to task in his afterword, accusing the Englishman of a “dismissive attitude” toward a title that Itō is convinced reflects the literary project of the *Sarashina* author (p. 211). Elsewhere they note that there was no reason to discount the title as the original author’s (p. 83); apparently they can think only of bad faith as an explanation for Morris taking this great liberty. It has always seemed a weird title to me as well, and not an improvement on the traditional *Sarashina nikki* (even if one believes that neither *nikki* nor “diary” are fair descriptions of

the genre), and I was glad to have that term out of sight.

Still, I am somewhat surprised the translators could find no rationale for Morris's choice to ignore the "Sarashina" title. In 1971, when the Morris translation appeared, it was common for editions of *Sarashina nikki*, including the venerable *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (Compendium of classical Japanese literature) edition that he consulted, to state plainly that it was not known whether this was the original title.[8] Earl Miner's *Japanese Poetic Diaries* drew attention to the notion that few Heian period literary works could be linked definitively to a single "original" title, using the example of the *Ise monogatari*, also known as *Zaigo chūjō nikki*, among many others.[9] Current reference entries on *Sarashina nikki* dutifully point out that the title cannot be documented in an early manuscript, even while arguing that it should be accepted as original because it works so well.[10] Over forty years ago, is it so surprising that Morris soaked up the notion that the title was or could be the invention of a later copyist? Not that I wish to belabor this point, since after all the new translators are not at pains to criticize the older version on any other grounds, as well they might have.

One of those grounds is unarguably his handling of poetry. Morris is a free spirit, often choosing two lines or four, but not averse to electing three or five, to render the 5-7-5-7-7 syllable *waka* that do so much of the work throughout this text. One can argue that for Japanese readers it is the aural quality of the verse that marks the distinction from prose passages, but for a reader of an English translation, what more reliable key is there than consistent lineation to announce the shift. Five lines say something special is going on, and that something takes the same shape every time it happens, to aid our recognition. Arntzen tells us that she resisted thinking of her translation practice as governed by rules; her first chief principle of not being bound by overwrought

strictures, such as contriving thirty-one syllables in the English, just makes good common sense. Her second principle explains why her renditions are so attractive: by not violating the order of the images in the poems, she produces versions that give the non-Japanese reader access to the unfolding of the original poems. Consider this poem, part of an exchange weighing the seasons, spring against fall: "asa midori / hana mo hitotsu ni / kasumitsutsu / oboro ni miyuru / haru no yo no tsuki (Lucent green— / misting over, becoming one / with the blossoms too; / dimly it may be seen, / the moon on a night in spring)" (p. 174). The author proffers it during an encounter with a man who reminds her of the fictional Genji, a passage much celebrated because Teika was able to identify him as Minamoto no Sukemichi. Morris shreds any sense of buildup with his first lines "The hazy Springtime moon— / That is the one I love," and fixes the interpretation as "When light green sky and fragrant blooms / Are all alike enwrapped in mist." [11] Arntzen gives us an open interpretation in which we must decide what is characterized as "lucent green" (not to mention a long note on the innovation of this wording, about which Itō has written, p. 175).

Gratitude is due Columbia University Press for the care in editing this volume. My heart stopped when I saw a first typo already on the second page (in the preface, "We met at just such conference"), but I found no more until page 196 (*kokorobosasa* for *kokorobososa*), and detected only one error, Shoryaku for Chōryaku (p. 169n249), which is truly remarkable. Although the layout style with notes on the facing page is well established, having been used to good effect in Richard Bowring's *Murasaki Shikibu: Her Diary and Poetic Memoirs* (1982) and Arntzen's own *Kagerō Diary*, it must give the publisher pause. How very good of them to keep the tradition alive.

There is much in the notes that will have you cheering, if you are inclined to think of Japanese women writers as more than dull repeaters of po-

etic commonplaces. Of special interest is the characterization of “the two sisters beginning to write a tale themselves” in a well-crafted exchange of poems (p. 123). Heian women’s investment in literary activities was more than emotional. It cannot escape the reader that the author controlled a vast amount of knowledge that she deployed with great rhetorical skill. The notes also point out that wives worked in the production of clothing; attention to robes is not merely a sign of their fashion sense. That said, the translators evidently have not escaped the mindset that takes vernacular writing as literature and writing in Chinese style with Sinographs (*kanbun*) as something else, since Arntzen remarks on the first page, “During this period, women writers had the domain of prose writing almost to themselves.” This is a claim one can only make by considering the rather sizeable output of men’s prose in *kanbun* to be in a domain of its (considerably less valuable) own.

It is a tactical choice to argue the significance of the *Sarashina nikki* along established lines that partition women’s writing in this way. The study directs notice to the symphonic character of the narrative, intently showing us how the parts of the text assemble themselves into an aesthetic whole of masterly timbre. Arntzen and Itō delight in the author’s appreciation for poetry and fiction, elaborating how she used intertexts to scaffold the journeys that she took through both time and space. It is plain that they consider this an accomplished and important work, not a random, casual, or even regret-filled memoir. In other words, they take Takasue no Musume seriously at every turn of the page. But you will not find here the kind of bold feminist stamp that Edith Sarra gives the diarist, whom she calls a textual autoeroticist and rhetorician who made use of the strategies available for feminine intervention in discourse about women of the Heian upper class.[12] There is no doubt, however, that Itō and Arntzen believe Takasue no Musume to be a deliberate writer, and not a sideshow or footnote to any portion of the Heian literary legacy. Discussing Takasue’s daugh-

ter in an entry for *The Princeton Companion to Classical Japanese Literature* three decades ago, a team of literary historians opined that “in the future she is certain to receive increasing attention.”[13] It is well that their prediction has played out in the form of this in-depth study and translation that is both heartfelt and fastidious.

#### Notes

[1]. Please excuse this appeal to physical formats, which may seem especially beside the point to a young generation of scholars that gets its reviews online.

[2]. Penguin Classics has a new translation. Sei Shōnagon, *The Pillow Book*, trans. by Meredith McKinney (New York: Penguin, 2006).

[3]. Premodernists may feel obliged to have a strong opinion pro or con regarding *The World of the Shining Prince*, which is a pathbreaking classic to some and an outmoded essay deserving of a slumber undisturbed by revival to others. Barbara Ruch’s introduction to the new edition features a ringing defense. See Barbara Ruch, introduction to *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan*, by Ivan Morris (New York: Kodansha International, 1994), ix-xx. See Richard H. Okada for a discussion of how Morris aestheticizes and masculinizes Heian literature as part of the Cold War era project to create a new, friendly, and peaceful Japan. Richard H. Okada, “Displacements of Conquest, or Exile, *The Tale of Genji*, and Post-Cold War Learning,” in *Reading The Tale of Genji: Its Picture-Scrolls, Texts and Romance*, ed. Richard Stanley-Baker, Murakami Fuminobu, and Jeremy Tambling (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2009), 65-66.

[4]. It is not necessary, as it was in 1971, to give the preexisting translation “a decent burial,” such as Edwin Cranston arranged for the 1932 Annie Shepley Omori and Kochi Doi version that Morris so utterly and thankfully replaced. Edward Cranston, “Review Article: A Bridge of Dreams,”

*Monumenta Nipponica* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1972): 442.

[5]. Ivan Morris, trans., *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams: Recollections of a Woman in Eleventh-Century Japan* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), 142n187. Morris repeats a nonexistent “This moon” in his attempt to wrangle this poem (p. 99).

[6]. Also, perhaps not coincidentally, it corresponds to Arthur Waley’s title for the sixth installment of his popular translation of *The Tale of Genji*, Arthur Waley, *The Bridge of Dreams, Being the Second Volume of “The Lady of the Boat” and the Final Part of “The Tale of Genji”* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1933).

[7]. Cranston, “Review Article: A Bridge of Dreams,” 438. Covers are variable things; the Penguin Classics edition I own sports a scene from “Shōtoku Taishi e-den,” chosen no doubt for its image of a period-appropriate bridge. Prince Shōtoku was admittedly rumored to be a pious Buddhist, but his illustrated biography is otherwise not relevant to *Sarashina nikki*.

[8]. Nishishita Kyōichi was the *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* annotator who said it is *fumei* (not known) in *Tosa nikki*, *Kagerō nikki*, *Izumi Shikibu nikki*, *Sarashina nikki*, *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1958), 20:463.

[9]. Earl Miner, *Japanese Poetic Diaries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 15.

[10]. See, for example, Ōsone Shōsuke, et al., ed., *Nihon koten bungaku daijiten* (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1998), 524.

[11]. Morris, trans. Penguin edition, p. 84.

[12]. Edith Sarra, *Fictions of Femininity: Literary Interventions of Gender in Japanese Court Women’s Memoirs* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 4, 8, 132, and 139.

[13]. Earl Miner, Hiroko Odagiri, and Robert E. Morrell, *The Princeton Companion to Classical*

*Japanese Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 39.

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