Women’s Lives
in Premodern Japanese Literature

Professor Lori Meeks
EALC 427, Spring 2009, Tuesdays 2:00-4:50 pm
Doheny Memorial Library 110C (East Asian Library Seminar Room)

Objectives and Approach

This course will explore the lives of women in premodern Japan. Our approach will combine the interests of social history, literary studies, and gender theory. The course is concerned with both the particular and the general. In terms of the particular, it will offer the opportunity to study Japanese culture, and especially the history of premodern Japan, in some detail. But you will also be encouraged to think about the “big picture,” to consider how classical works from premodern Japan speak to certain human truths that transcend time, space, and culture.

Our readings will invite you to consider how women living in a time and culture vastly different from our own observed and experienced common human tendencies and predicaments. We will read both first-person narratives written by women and third-person works written about women. In these primary accounts we see how women described themselves and their relationships with others, how they observed and were observed by men, and how they learned and played the “game” of gender.

Although our texts will consist primarily of classical works in translation, we will supplement these primary sources with a limited number of theoretical and scholarly studies. These secondary works will treat topics such as women’s property and legal rights, sex work, and changes in marriage and family practice.

Requirements and Grades

This course also aims to help students further cultivate research and presentation skills. There will be no exams, but you will be expected to write regularly, and to undertake independent research throughout the semester. An introduction to the East Asian Library will be offered early in the semester. You are also encouraged to meet with me early in the term to discuss research interests and methods.

Grades will be determined as follows:

- Class preparation and performance: 5%
- Weekly Reflection Papers (2 pp./wk.): 20%
Class Presentations (2) 20%
First Paper (5-7pp., due Mar. 10) 20%
Annotated Bibliography for Final Paper (due April 14) 10%
Final Paper (due May 7) 25%

In your **weekly reflection papers** (2 pp.) you should reflect on one or two themes from the week’s reading assignment in some depth. These papers are due in class each week.

Everyone will be asked to sign up for **two in-class presentations**. For each presentation you will choose a topic in consultation with the professor, research that topic, and then present on your research in class. Presentations should not exceed 15 minutes. You may use Power-Point or other presentation software if you like, but you are not required to do so. (If you need to photo copy handouts and contact me in advance, I can make them in the department.) Some research topics you may want to consider: marriage patterns in Heian Japan; clothing and personal adornment; incense-making and perfumery; court music; Buddhist thought and practice; child-rearing practices; disease and medicine; taboos, geomancy, and Daoist thought; social class; interaction with China and the continent; government structure and land governance; travel and pilgrimage; the development of kana writing; and the reception of niki literature in modern Japan. During the weeks of your own in-class presentations you will not be expected to submit reflection papers.

You will also be asked to write **two papers**, one short paper (5-7 pp.), and one term paper (15-20 pp.) You will also be asked to compile an **annotated bibliography** in preparation for the final paper. All paper topics should be chosen in consultation with the professor.

**Textbooks**

(2) As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams [Sarashina nikki]: Recollections of a Woman in Eleventh-Century Japan, Ivan Morris, trans.
(3) The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon [Makura no sōshi], Meredith McKinney, trans.
(4) Gossamer Years: The Diary of a Noblewoman of Heian Japan [Kagerō nikki], Edward Seidensticker, trans.
(6) Letters of the Nun Eshinni: Images of Pure Land Buddhism in Medieval Japan, James Dobbins
(7) Selling Songs and Smiles: The Sex Trade in Heian and Kamakura Japan, Janet R. Goodwin
In addition to these textbooks, a number of additional readings (documents in translation, book chapters, and articles) will be made available through the ARES Online Reserves system.

**Faculty Contact Information**

Lori Meeks

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**Policy Statements**

**Statement for Students with Disabilities**
Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

**Statement on Academic Integrity**
USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/.
**Schedule**

Jan. 13  
**First Day of Class**  
Introduction to the Course: Sources and Methodology

Jan. 20  
**Thinking About Gender and Early Japanese Writing**  

Jan. 27  
**Kagerō Nikki**  
- *The Gossamer Years: A Diary by a Noblewoman in Heian Japan*, Book One (through p. 69)

Feb. 3  
**Kagerō Nikki and the “Game” of Gender**  
- *The Gossamer Years: A Diary by a Noblewoman in Heian Japan*, Books Two and Three (through end of book)  

Feb. 10  
**The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon**  
- Introduction  
- Sections 1-121 (through p. 127)

Feb. 17  
**The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon**  
- Sections 122-end (through p. 256)

Feb. 24  
**Murasaki Shikibu Nikki**  
- *The Diary of Lady Murasaki* (read entire work)

Mar. 3  
**Sarashina Nikki**  
- *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams* (read entire work)

Mar. 10  
**Love and Family Life in Popular Tale Literature**  
- Excerpts from *Konjaku monogatarishū* and *Shasekishū* (ARES)  
(First Paper Due)
Mar. 17  Spring Break: No Class

Mar. 24  Medieval Lives: Buddhist Nuns
• James Dobbins, Letters of the Nun Eshinni

Mar. 31  Medieval Lives: Ladies-in-Waiting
• The Confessions of Lady Nijo (Towazugatari): Introduction, Books One and Two (through p. 120)

April 7  Medieval Lives: Ladies-in-Waiting/Female Pilgrims
• The Confessions of Lady Nijo (Towazugatari): Introduction, Books One and Two (through p. 264)

April 14  Medieval Lives: Courtesans
• Janet Goodwin, Selling Songs and Smiles (selections)
  (Annotated Bibliography Due)

April 21  Medieval Lives: Late Medieval Stories about Nuns and Female Pilgrims
• Excerpts from Margaret Childs, Rethinking Sorrow: Revelatory Tales from Medieval Japan (ARES)
• Selected translations from Keller Kimbrough, Preachers, Poets, Women, and the Way: Izumi Shikibu and the Buddhist Literature of Medieval Japan

April 28  Medieval Lives: Female Storytellers
• Selections from Ikumi Kaminishi, Explaining Pictures: Buddhist Propaganda and Buddhist Storytelling in Japan (ARES)
• Barbara Ruch, "Medieval Jongleurs and the Making of a National Literature" (ARES)

Reflections on the Course
(Final papers due Thursday, May 7, 2009).