

Bad Poems on Purpose, in Diaries That Aren't Diaries: Communicating Discontent at the Japanese Court

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15:30–17:00

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Abstract: For those who in part used skill at poetry as a means to success within the social economies of Japanese courtly societies during the late-Heian and Kamakura periods, the idea of a poorly-made or ill-advised composition becoming known to others was, generally speaking, anathema. Poetry-themed anecdotal stories, or *setsuwa*, include many a cautionary tale recounting the humiliation and ridicule that was the reward for those whose bad poems came to light. It is curious to find, therefore, within Japan's literary history a significant number of examples of highly-skilled and profoundly knowledgeable poets creating and circulating poems that they themselves knew to be inappropriate, unsuitable, or obviously flawed.

In this presentation I will propose that one key to understanding the motivations behind the composition of such poems, and to comprehending their function within courtly webs of social communication, is the nature of the texts which served in a large number of cases as the carriers for such poems: vernacular diaries, or *kana nikki*. Once it becomes clear that this genre of text functioned in ways very different from the diaries of today, then its true role as a means for the targeted dissemination of information can be recognized, and reasons why a good poet might use one to transmit a seemingly ill-advised poem begin to come into focus.

I will also examine how the fundamental conservatism of Japanese court poetics during the late-Heian and Kamakura periods added weight to the act of intentionally slighting a verse, transforming it into a powerful tool for accomplishing the purpose for which it was most often employed: the voicing of discontent.

Preregistration for those coming from outside the KU community is greatly appreciated.

Regardless of whether you preregister, if you are coming from off campus, please register as a guest at the Information counter near the entrance before coming up to the room.

ご来場の方： 神奈川大学関係者は事前登録不要です。学外の方は前日までに QR コードにて事前登録をお願いします。当日は 1F の Information カウンターで Guest 登録を済ましてから、部屋までお越しください。

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Ratcliff, Preregistration