

Izayoi nikki The History of a Disputed Heritage in the Kamakura Period (1185-1333)

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Abstract This paper aims to cast fresh new light upon *Izayoi nikki* (The Diary of the Sixteenth Night Moon, c. 1280), the most representative work of Nun Abutsu. After considering why it has long been undervalued by Japanese scholars, this study takes a close look at the long and complicated legal dispute described in the diary. In this legal dispute, Nun Abutsu played a central role as loyal mother and widowed nun in struggling to ensure a future for her children, the natural descendants of a famous dynasty of poets. To fully understand the strength of the reasons behind her actions, it would seem to be of fundamental importance to read *Izayoi nikki* from a different perspective, taking into account not only the personal story of the author but also the socio-historical framework of the Kamakura period, focusing in particular on inheritance practices and the kinds of responsibilities women were expected to bear in relation to the family.

Keywords Nun Abutsu. *Izayoi Nikki*. Marriage and women's rights. Medieval Japan. Mikohidari poetry. Fujiwara no Tameie.

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The greatest revolution in a country is one that changes women and their way of life. Revolution cannot be achieved without women. Women may be physically weaker, but morally they have a force a hundred forces greater.
(Fallaci 1961, 40)

1 Reading the Work of a Controversial Author

The *Izayoi nikki* 十六夜日記 (The Diary of the Sixteenth Night Moon, c. 1280) proves to have an intrinsic composite structure that prevents us from classifying it within one specific genre. Literary critics tend to define it as a *kikō* 紀行, a ‘travel diary’, including it in anthologies that contain largely similar works, but due to the presence of more introspective passages, it could rightly be considered to belong to the so-called *joryū nikki bungaku* 女流日記文学, or diaries written by women from the Heian period (794-1185) onwards.

The division of the text into four distinct parts persuasively confirms its versatility, showing the confluence of various genres, to which each of its sections seems to correspond. The introduction, focusing on the personal experience of the protagonist, who freely expresses her distress in the face of adverse fate, brings to mind other examples of writing that open up the inner world of women. In particular, comparison with *Kagerō nikki* 蜻蛉日記 (The Kagerō Diary, c. 974) does not appear unduly audacious as, like the mother of Fujiwara no Michitsuna (935-95), Nun Abutsu (1225?-1283?) too, once far away from the court environment, focuses her attention on an acrimonious family experience she wishes to share with other women of her time. It may safely be said that these two heroines, living in distant ages, share a feeling of marginalization, where writing appears to take on an almost therapeutic role in an attempt to overcome a trauma to which they react according to their very different temperaments: the fragile and passive protagonist of *Kagerō nikki* contrasts with the strength and determination of Nun Abutsu who, through the pages of *Izayoi nikki*, impresses the reader as an unprecedented model of wife and mother.

The particular emotional tension that distinguishes the first part of the work, where the reader is informed of the circumstances that lead the author/protagonist to undertake the journey to Kamakura after a moving farewell from her closest relatives and friends, seems to fade away, or at least to return only intermittently, in the other three

* This contribution is the first result of the three months of study that the Author spent in Japan in the autumn of 2018 as guest researcher at the National Institute of Japanese Literature in Tokyo, to whom we must express our heartfelt thanks.



Figure 1 Portrait of Nun Abutsu, 14th century. Colour on silk, 83.2×51.0 cm. Artist unknown, Private Collection, Hyōgo, Japan. Source: Miya 1979

sections of the work. The second part is already in a very different style from the first and, being a detailed account of the journey from Kyoto to Kamakura, is halfway between a travel diary (*kikō*) and a guide to famous places (*meisho* 名所); the writing style changes again in the third part, whose narrative structure is based on exchanges of poetic missives (*zōtōka* 贈答歌) with relatives and acquaintances left behind in the capital; in the fourth part, the prose sections are eliminated altogether to leave room for a long *chōka* 長歌, followed by a short *hanka* 反歌 that serves to restate in no uncertain terms the reasons for the trip to Kamakura.¹

In Japan, and consequently also abroad, the heterogeneous and fragmentary structure of *Izayoi nikki* has long affected its reception, leading some scholars to underestimate its literary value.² As if this were not enough, the controversial personality of Nun Abutsu and the numerous points of contact between the content of *Izayoi nikki* and her real-life experience, while attracting the interest of many, have further influenced judgment of the work's intrinsic value, subordinating it to an evaluation of the author's conduct as either positive or negative.³ While some scholars denigrate or even completely ignore a text written by a person whom they consider evil, shrewd, and careerist (Mezaki 1989), quite a few critics have reassessed it, seeing it as an account of the life of a faithful spouse and loving mother prepared to make whatever sacrifice necessary (Iwasa 1993). The second interpretation, which seems to have had particular fortune in Japan, perhaps because it coincides with the traditional model of the ideal woman, soon transformed the protagonist of the *Izayoi nikki* into an immortal symbol of the motherly love constantly presented in high school literary manuals. The suspicion that the work may have been cunningly exploited, considered useful in forging young minds, cannot be excluded *a priori*. Actually, it seems to lend itself naturally to this kind of purpose, since the true story in this text is mixed in with the carefully thought-out narration whose aim it is to make the reader passively accept a model of exemplary womanhood constructed to a specific end by the writer.

While critics have long limited themselves to reading *Izayoi nikki* as a reflection of one of the two antithetical images of Nun Abutsu handed down over the centuries, more recent studies (Wren 1997;

1 There are different types of manuscripts of *Izayoi nikki*. Some of them include the final *chōka*, while others omit it. In this essay I follow the *Izayoi nikki* edited by Iwasa Miyoko (Iwasa 1994) based on the combination of two manuscripts (the *Kujōkebon* and the *Matsuhirabon*), which includes the final poem.

2 Regarding the low literary value attributed to the work, see for example Kazamaki 1929 and Reischauer 1947.

3 For a detailed examination of the reception of *Izayoi nikki* see Hagiwara 1990 and Laffin 2005.

Tabuchi 2009; Laffin 2013) have tried to show that interpreting this work only on the basis of a positive or negative opinion on the author could in fact be rather reductive or even misleading. It might prove much more interesting to examine it carefully within the sociohistorical context in which it was produced to understand why Nun Abutsu felt the need to write it and why she decided to present herself as a devoted wife and mother sincerely concerned with the fate of her children. Starting from this vein of critical studies that consider the *Izayoi nikki* as a literary document with an interesting cross-section of its time, we will try to analyze the story of the disputed inheritance described in this work in order to reconstruct the role of women within the family and society in the Kamakura period through this complicated legal controversy. At a time of great change, when women's rights would gradually erode, Nun Abutsu's decision to fight so doggedly to obtain such an important legacy appears to acquire a special meaning, becoming a stubborn act of feminist resistance against an unjust and oppressive system, one in which we can recognize a multiplicity of women from every age and every part of the world, all engaged in the same struggle.

2 A Long and Complicated Dispute

The young people of today cannot even imagine that the title of that book, which is said to have been found hidden in a wall a long time ago, also concerns them. Therefore, despite the fact that my poor husband repeatedly left unequivocal evidence of his will, the father's recommendations have been ignored by his son. As if this were not enough, I then realized that I was the only insignificant person unworthy of the consideration of a just sovereign who should never abandon any of his subjects and that I did not even deserve the compassion of his faithful ministers who keep track of everything that happens in this world. Nevertheless, I am still unable to resign myself, and I suffer greatly on account of worries from which there is no respite. (Iwasa 1994, 268)⁴

The book alluded to by Nun Abutsu at the beginning of *Izayoi nikki* is the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (The Classic of Filial Piety),⁵ which condemns

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the Author.

⁵ A very short Chinese work containing the dialogues between Confucius and his disciple Zengzi engaged in a discussion on filial piety, one of the fundamental virtues of human conduct. This, the best-known text attributed to Confucius or his disciple, includes 9 chapters divided into 18 sections. It is thought to have been written in the middle of the third century BC.

Tameuji (1222-86), Fujiwara no Tameie's (1198-1275) son to another woman,⁶ for not respecting the new terms of his father's will. In 1273, the latter, retracting what he had previously said, assigned one of his properties, the Hosokawa estate, together with a series of documents belonging to the family, to another son, Tamesuke (1263-1328), whom he had to Nun Abutsu at an advanced age, citing Tameuji's reprehensible behaviour as a reason.⁷

Reference to the "book found in the wall", a text considered sacred and inviolable, at the beginning of the work is not accidental, as it has the precise function of making Tameuji's behaviour appear blasphemous, since he does not observe its teachings and immediately establishes a clear moral demarcation line between the writer and her antagonist. This effective premise is probably also intended to draw attention to the solid culture of Nun Abutsu who, with her knowledge of Chinese classics, cancels the traditional differences between men and women, not only from the intellectual point of view but also from the legal one, announcing her intention to address the legal issue on an equal footing (Wren 1997, 189-90). As evidence of how important Confucian thought and respect due to parents during the military government had become, the *Goseibai shikimoku* 御成敗式目, the code of fifty-two articles drafted in 1232, later revised and supplemented on numerous occasions throughout the Kamakura period, clarifies that in the event that children (not only males but females too) failed to show respect for their parents, the latter could at any time retract the contents of a will already drafted (Kasamatsu 1972, 19, article 18). Disinheriting relatives seems to have been widespread practice at the time, and this allowed wills to be revised several times, which suggests that sons and daughters reached a degree of tranquillity and stability after the death of both parents (Tonomura 1990, 607).

Consequently, if Nun Abutsu could manage to prove that Tameie had designated her son Tamesuke as his only legitimate heir because of Tameuji's reprehensible conduct, he would have a good chance of inheriting the Hosokawa estate and, with it, numerous important literary documents.

Shortly after Tameie's death in 1275, Tameuji and his stepmother, Nun Abutsu, who was determined to defend the rights of her son Tamesuke, began to fight for the inheritance of the Hosokawa estate

⁶ The daughter of Utsunomiya no Yoritsuna (1172-1259), a well-known general and renowned poet who, according to *Meigetsuki* (Diary of the Full Moon, 1226), was the recipient of the *Ogura hyakunin isshu* anthology (A Composition for One Hundred Poets, c. 1237) that Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241) produced at the request of his son, Fujiwara no Tameie, so that his father-in-law could use the poems from the collection to embellish the paper on the sliding doors of his summer residence on the slopes of Mount Ogura.

⁷ The full text of this letter is contained in a collection of documents belonging to the Reizei family. See Zaidan hōjin reizeiike shiguretei bunko 1993, 3-5.

in the province of Harima (today's Hyōgo prefecture). The dispute, which lasted almost forty years, continued even after the death of Tameuji and Nun Abutsu, coming to an end only in 1313 when the parties involved were now Tameuji's son Tameyo and Tamesuke himself. The inordinate length of time required to reach the final verdict was apparently due to a series of inevitable complications arising from a case judged by two different *fora* (one civil, i.e. the court, and the other military) following two distinct legal systems that treated inheritance issues in different ways: the courtier law set greater restrictions on revising wills and only tended to recognize the validity of the original one, while the *Goseibai shikimoku* prescribed that in case of multiple wills, the latest will was given priority (Fukuda 1962, 35-6).

At the heart of this dispute was a claim to the Hosokawa estate, and more specifically the need to establish who had the right to administer it, or who should perform, according to the provisions of the military government, the functions of *jitō* 地頭. It is known that in medieval Japan most of the land had become private property (*shōen* 荘園) exempt from taxation and protected from interference by public officials. The land did not usually belong to a single owner but was allocated through a layered system of rights called *shiki* 職. Small landowners had the power to grant their property to a central aristocratic or religious institution that could, in turn, grant them tax exemption for their portion of the property. The original owners had to offer their work in exchange for the protection received by these institutions, which were recognized as legitimate owners (*ryōke* 領家). They could also apply to remain on their portion of land as guardians (*azukari-dokoro* 預所) in lieu of the new owner.

The system, dating back to the eighth century, was later revised in 1185 by Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147-99), who appointed the mainly military *jitō* as property administrators entrusted with ensuring protection and collecting taxes in exchange for a portion of the proceeds from produce. Although the power of the nobles had diminished considerably after the Gempei war (1180-85) and the Jōkyū riots in 1221, aristocrats continued to be considered – at least in social terms – superior to warriors. Precisely for this reason, in the ninth month of 1221, Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241), the father of Fujiwara no Tameie, obtained the *jitō* rights to the Hosokawa estate, of which he already owned the property rights. By accepting the appointment as *jitō*, Teika, who had lost the protection of GoToba (1180-1239), officially became a vassal of the *shōgun* 將軍, securing a significant economic return (Atkins 2006, 500-1).

As mentioned above, the Hosokawa estate inherited from Teika by Tameie's son should have gone – in accordance with a will amended by Tameie himself – to Tamesuke, his son born to Nun Abutsu in 1263, but Tameuji, to whom the estate had been entrusted by his father in 1256, opposed the new decision. Given that the civil court, unlike

the military court, tended not to recognize amendments to wills, it could not be said *a priori* that it was illegal for Tameuji to claim ownership. At the time, namely immediately after Tameie's death in 1275, the right to administer (*jitōshiki* 地頭職) the Hosokawa residence was subject to the jurisdiction of the military government, while the right to ownership (*ryōke*) was considered subject to the jurisdiction of the civil court. In 1286, through a ruling of abdicant Emperor Kameyama (1249-1305), the court granted the right of ownership to Tameuji, who was later authorized to administer it by the military court. As the Hosokawa estate was located in the western provinces, it was standard practice to submit the question of inheritance to the court of Rokuhara. However, should the decision of this court be considered unacceptable, it was possible to appeal to the court of Kamakura, given that the Rokuhara court could not issue the final verdict. Having rejected the Rokuhara court's ruling on the right to administer the residence, Tamesuke decided to appear before the Kamakura court. Tameie had foreseen the difficulties he would have to face in order to obtain the property in a letter of 1273 addressed to Nun Abutsu, where he wrote: "If a dispute should arise, you must turn with this document to both the civil and military courts" (Zaidan hōjin reizeike shiguretei bunko 1993, 5). Following her husband's instructions, in 1279 Nun Abutsu went in person to Kamakura in order to claim the rights of her son Tamesuke. There, she waited in vain for the final verdict, which did not come until after her death. Posterity would view this as proof of her exemplary maternal love, but it would perhaps be more appropriate to consider it a natural consequence of the important role that widows played in questions of inheritance at the time (Tabuchi 2009, 169-70).



Figure 2 Abutsu's grave at Eishōji in Kamakura (photo by the Author)



Figure 3 Fujiwara no Tamesuke's grave at Jōkōmyōji in Kamakura (photo by the Author)

3 A Widow's Role

Many documents dating back to the civil and military diarchy at the beginning of the Kamakura era recount endless disputes over inheritance involving women, especially widows, who refused to be passive victims and were increasingly aware of their important role in their husband's family even after his death (Faure 2003, 174-5).

とどめおく
古き枕の
塵をだに
我が立ち去らば
誰か払はむ⁸
(Iwasa 1994, 270)

When I am gone
who will take away
the dust
that has built up
on the old pillow?

This poem, that Nun Abutsu recited shortly before leaving for Kamakura, expresses her responsibilities as wife and mother very effectively. If the pillow represents the intimacy between Abutsu and Tameie, who once slept together, the dust accumulated does not simply indicate the end of their intense relationship. It also suggests Abutsu's imminent and prolonged absence from the capital and the impossibility of finding someone to act as lady of the house. The dust-covered pillow evokes an image of an abandoned house, irreparably fallen into ruin, also evoked in the long final *chōka* where, in even more dramatic tones, it emphasizes the negative consequences that might befall a family due to the absence of a female presence representing both protection and cohesive strength.

行く方も知らぬ
中空の
風にまかする
故郷は
軒端も荒れて
ささがこの
いかさまにかは

⁸ *Todomeoku | furuki makura no | chiri o dani | wa ga tachisaraba | tare ka harawamu.*

なりぬらん⁹

(Iwasa 1994, 301)

In the uncertainty of the future,
 my old house
 is abandoned to the elements,
 with rotting beams
 and covered in spider webs
 I wonder what it is like!

Her displeasure over separation from the house is great, but at the same time inevitable because it stems from a just cause: ensuring a future for her son Tamesuke, but first and foremost that of defending her rights as wife and mother. Nun Abutsu's story, that of a rigorous custodian of the family order, is inevitably intertwined with that of other protagonists of the Kamakura period, when the transformation of marriage customs led to the gradual erosion of women's property rights, which had previously afforded them considerable financial independence from their husbands.

As numerous scholars have shown,¹⁰ women in the Heian period were entitled to inherit lands, homes, and other family assets. This custom continued unchanged among peasants, aristocrats, and warriors in the Kamakura period, albeit with different class-dependent characteristics (Tabata 1987, 58-60; Wakita, Gay 1984, 93-5). In the early days of the Kamakura period, daughters could partake of the division of family property in exactly the same way as sons. Parents would often favour one of the daughters in particular and would designate her as 'first daughter' (*chakujo* 嫡女), entitled to the greater share of the property. The inheritance rights of females were not normally compromised by marriage, which in no way threatened their ties with their family of origin. The family inheritance was independent of marital status, and the husband was not entitled to obtain the wife's property, which, in the event of her death, was usually passed on to the children. Women could also hope to obtain an inheritance not only from their family of origin, but also from their husbands, who might entrust them with part of their property as a mark of gratitude, especially for having given birth to children (Tonomura 1990, 597-9). An example of this situation is the letter sent by Tameie to Nun Abutsu in 1268:

I have reserved lifetime rights for you as caretaker and deputy administrator of the Koazaka estate in the province of Ise. After your

⁹ *Yukue mo shiranu | nakazora no | kaze ni makasuru | furusato wa | nokiba mo arete | sasagani no | ikasama ni ka wa | narinuran.*

¹⁰ In this regard, see McCullough 1967; Fukutō 1980; Mass 1983.

death you may dispose of it as you see fit. I entrust these to you as a sign of gratitude for giving me three children and for supporting me thus far. (Zaidan hōjin reizeike shiguretei bunko 1993, 3)

While there is no doubt that women could inherit until at least the middle of the Kamakura period, it is unfortunately also true that, reading the documents, it is often difficult to precisely reconstruct family relationships and the criteria for handing down property. Greater knowledge of the system of succession, marital customs, and other related issues could give a better understanding of hereditary issues and their importance in defining the social position of women. Since the medieval system of kinship is by its very nature somewhat elusive, the necessary reference sources are lacking. There was no registration – such as that required in the seventh and eighth centuries – of birth, deaths, marriages, or divorces, nor do the laws in force make explicit reference to family relationships, which one may only try to painstakingly reconstruct by relying on last wills and testaments.

Marriage was not a matter of legal interest, and there were no rules governing the establishment of kinship. Marriages that can be defined as ‘marital’ were in fact the result of a relationship that had become naturally stable over time and therefore recognized by society without recourse to civil authority and, apparently, even without a formal contractual agreement between the parties involved. Separations too were not normally formalized, and no provision regulated possible second marriages. The vagueness of nuptial customs characteristic of Kamakura period is evident in the *Goseibai shikimoku* measures, issued regarding widows’ rights, much revised over time, testifying to the blatant indecision of the authorities concerning the attribution of a husband’s legacy in the event of a true or presumed second marriage (Tonomura 1990, 600-2). The original 1232 provision reads:

if a widow has received a property from her husband, she should renounce all other things and devote herself solely to praying for his future life. Should she soon forget about chastity and remarry, her husband’s legacy ought to be passed on to their children. If there are no children, another solution must be found. (Kasamatsu 1972, 22, fn. 24)

Subsequently, the military government was obliged to clarify more precisely the conditions under which the 1232 measure was to be applied:

if news of the second marriage of a widow who administers the property or follows sundry family matters becomes public knowledge, the previous provision [that of 1232] is valid. If, on the other hand, the second marriage is kept secret, even if rumours about it circulate, the rule is not applied. (Kasamatsu 1972, 60, fn. 121)

A further change, again on this issue, came in 1286, apparently because of the ambiguities arising from previous clauses:

regarding the secrecy of marriage, until now, in cases when new marriages were only the subject of rumour, the established law was not applicable due to lack of evidence. For this reason, widows, even if married, have kept their marriages secret. From now on, however, due punishment will be meted out even in the event of mere rumour of an alleged new marriage, despite the widow not actually being involved in the management of her new husband's property or the sundry family matters. (Kasamatsu 1972, 63, article 597)

It is assumed that there was a clear distinction between *tsuma* 妻 (wife) and *mekake* 妾 (concubine), as evidenced by the testamentary documents and court decisions usually referring to the beneficiaries of a husband's property as *tsuma*, suggesting that these women had a privileged role in the eyes of the man who had chosen them. Wives inherited their husbands' property and as such were responsible for managing this and other family matters. The *Goseibai shikimoku* clearly defends the rights of married women, but at the same time draws attention to the duties of widows towards the families they formed with their deceased husbands. For this reason, the expression "forgetting chastity" in the 1232 measure should not be interpreted as a criticism of morally reprehensible conduct but rather as a warning to avoid a second marriage, which would risk the dispersal of family property (Nomura 2017, 174-5). The provisions of the *Goseibai shikimoku*, unlike the legal requirements of previous eras, indicate a tendency to consider property not as possessions that may be personally disposed of at will but as a common good belonging to the entire family, who recognized the husband and his father before him as important points of reference (Fujie 1994, 72-3). For these reasons, after several revisions, it was decided to intervene not only if a widow officially remarried but also when there were only rumours concerning such an occurrence. This type of measure was necessary to prevent the widow's involvement in the management of her new husband's property and other family matters, the possible transfer of her deceased husband's property to her next husband, and finally the addition of the children of her previous marriage in a family other than her original one.

The *ie* 家 - the co-residential nuclear family - that came into being from the late eleventh century onwards, differs from the *uji* 氏,¹¹ that

¹¹ The *uji* (clan) was an endogamous group whose members shared the same name and deities. The members had a common descent and were ruled by an *uji* chief who was considered a direct descendant of the deity (*ujigami* 氏神) worshipped by the members. The *uji* was not only a political, social, and economic unit. It had also a religious significance and formed the basic, decentralized ruling structure in the fifth and seventh centuries.

have characterized previous eras, not so much on account of its patriarchal system but because it would place the married couple in prime position (Fukutō 1991). The family, previously made up of a man engaging in occasional relationships with a number of women, would gradually become a more stable nucleus comprising a husband with a wife who enjoyed a legally recognized position of privilege compared with all the other concubines (Wakita 1995, 23-5). The widow referred to as *goke* 後家 was usually given the power to control and manage family matters and was granted the right to inherit property at least until the Nanbokuchō era (1336-92), when recruiting soldiers who were to be rewarded with the concession of land ownership became a priority issue for the government, which gradually deprived women of the right to own property, thus weakening their position within the family (Kurushima 2004, 232).

Assuming that the *ie* was a family unit built around the couple who formed it, it became the norm to entrust the woman with the management of the family and to recognize the widow's right to exercise her power over the *ie* (Wakita 1992; Iinuma 1990; Kurushima 2004). After her husband's death, she would naturally become a sort of substitute figure, often gaining considerable authority and prestige: she would resolutely defend her spouse's dying wishes, but she could also try to modify them as she wished. Many legal documents describe cases of fearsome widows who, exploiting the power granted to them, especially with regard to hereditary matters, revoked and redirected the allocation of a property that their husband had assigned to a particular child to another one, often on the ground of reprehensible conduct of the former as a cause (Tonomura 1990, 606). It was also not uncommon for widows to transfer their property before a second marriage in order to avoid losing their right to manage it. In the light of this kind of outrageous behaviour, in 1239 the military government laid down that the widow could manage her husband's property as long as the second marriage remained secret, but she had no right to transfer it unless she was seriously ill (Kasamatsu 1972, 59, article 98).

With the threat of the Mongolian invasions (1274 and 1281) and the consequent increase in limitations on women's inheritance rights due to the need to curry favour with men serving in the military, many widows were forced to take vows as a sign of loyalty and tangible proof of their choice not to remarry if they were to secure their husband's property (Meeks 2010a, 49). As a matter of fact, it seems that this practice had been prevalent for some time, as evidenced by a legal document from 1239 which records that a widow was sued in court by one of the deceased husband's daughters because she had not transferred her father's inheritance despite remarrying. The widow won the case because she presented the terms of her husband's will where she was named as heir, swearing (clothed in monastic hab-

it) that she had never remarried. The woman's marital status was again challenged five years later by the same daughter, this time represented by her son before the court. In order to clarify the situation once and for all, the military government dedicated much time to investigating the widow's conduct, but having failed to find any reliable evidence of the alleged marriage, concluded that these were false charges and allowed the woman to retain the property she had received (Mass 1979, 270-6).

From the twelfth century onwards, widows would play a vital role because they formed a link between the head of the family and his successor. The widow's rights included bringing up children, maintaining the family property, dividing it up, and being directly involved in any disputes over inheritance.¹² It is surely no coincidence that the promise Nun Abutsu makes to her dying husband, related at the opening of the *Izayoi nikki*, draws attention precisely to the specific tasks entrusted to widows.

Many people have compiled collections of verse, but few have had the honour of receiving the order [to do so] twice from different emperors. Fate willed that I should have the good fortune to actually meet one of these people and to have three children in my care together with many old texts on poetry. Unfortunately, however, and for no reason, the Hosokawa property my husband left me, with the solemn promise that its income would be used to promote the poetic art, suitably educate his children, and offer prayers for his future life [...], ended up in the hands of someone else. (Iwasa 1994, 269)

Nun Abutsu had to get the Hosokawa estate back at all costs: its revenues were vital to promote the art of poetry and educate the children, and her decision to remain faithful to her vows was not only due to her desire to dedicate solemn prayers in suffrage for her deceased husband in the next life, but most probably also to making her position in the struggle for inheritance more credible. In this regard, it is interesting to note that while it was common for widows to go before the court of the military government to claim rights to a property in the Kamakura period, with the gradual transformation of the position of women in society, from the Nanbokuchō period this would no longer tend to happen. The *Izayoi nikki*, drafted in the interval between the two Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281, which led to the inevitable breakdown of the economic, social, and political balance of Japan, is therefore a text of paramount importance for understanding the concerns, in an era of transition, of a widow who

¹² On the rights and role of a widowed woman see Gomi 1982; Iinuma 1990; Fukutō 1991.

in this case had the primary duty of safeguarding the cultural heritage of a family of illustrious poets.

4 A Bay of Salty Algae to Protect

In the introductory part of the *Izayoi nikki*, just before leaving for Kamakura, Nun Abutsu hands over to her son Tamesuke a collection of poems belonging to her husband, to which she adds these verses bearing a very precise message:

和歌の浦に
かきとどめたる
藻塩草
これを昔の
かたみとは見よ¹³
(Iwasa 1994, 270)

You have to take care
of these salty algae
collected together
on the beach of Wakanoura
as a precious reminder of the past.

The poem focuses on the term *moshiogusa* 藻塩草, i.e. the algae burned to make salt found in *Wakanoura* 和歌の浦, ‘the bay of poetry’, located in the province of Kii, corresponding to today’s Wakayama prefecture and the southern part of the province of Mie. The bay symbolically indicates the family, custodian of the poetic art, while the algae represent the rich poetic production of Fujiwara no Tameie and his ancestors, entrusted here to his son as an important legacy.

It has been observed that the algae image, conventionally associated with poetry, recurs with some regularity in various parts of the *Izayoi nikki*, appearing for the last time within the long closing *chōka* in the expression “wakanoura ji no moshiogusa”, or ‘the algae along the beach of Wakanoura’ (Wren 1997, 193). This is clearly a rhetorical device that aims to persuade the reader of an important objective probably shared by many aristocratic intellectuals of the time: to preserve the transmission of an art at all costs, in this case the art of composing verse that had made the Mikohidari family famous (Tabuchi 2005, 5).

The name Mikohidari had ancient roots. It came from the residence where the founder of the family, Fujiwara no Nagaie (1005-64), the sixth son of Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1027), known as the Ma-

¹³ *Waka no ura ni | kakitodometaru | moshiogusa | kore o mukashi no | katami to wa miyo.*

for Chancellor of Mikohidari because he lived on the property where Prince Kaneakira (914-87) resided. He was the son of the Emperor Daigo (885-930), temporarily downgraded to the status of subject and appointed Minister of the Left (*miko* 御子 means 'Prince', while *hidari* 左 means 'left').

The reputation of the Mikohidari family began to grow thanks to Fujiwara no Toshitada (1071-1123), son of Fujiwara no Tadaie (1033-91) and grandson of Nagaie, whose poems were included in the fifth and sixth imperial poetry anthologies (*chokusenwakashū* 勅撰和歌集). However, it was Toshitada's son, Fujiwara no Shunzei (1114-1204), who consolidated the family's prestige as the most important line of poets and poetry critics, forming the original nucleus of the family's collection of manuscripts with his personal copies of anthologies of poems, treatises, and other documents. Shunzei was responsible for the reappraisal of *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語 (The Tale of Genji, early eleventh century) as an important reference point for poetic composition, which had to show a knowledge of the courtly culture of previous eras in order to be deemed of any value. The importance that members of the Mikohidari family attributed to Murasaki's masterpiece is also evident in *Mumyo-zōshi* 無名草子 (An Untitled Book, early twelfth century), the first critical text on court narrative attributed to Shunzei kyō no musume (1171?-1252?), Shunzei's niece, who, surely by no coincidence, praises the work of Murasaki Shikibu as an unparalleled masterpiece.

A worthy heir to Shunzei, his son Fujiwara no Teika would go down in history as the most influential poet in the history of classical poetry, as well as an indefatigable copyist of numerous poetic anthologies and literary works, including *Genji monogatari* and diaries written by ladies in waiting. He was also the author of some important collections of poems of reference for poetic composition and critical treatises of enormous value. His son, Fujiwara no Tameie, despite not having his father's talent, and despite having shown few signs of responsibility in his youth, would live up to his ancestors in time, being appointed to compile two anthologies of imperial poetry,¹⁴ an honour reserved for the few and deserving of the highest esteem in both the Heian and Kamakura periods, because it officially sanctioned a poet's talent and his function as a chosen supporter of the culture promoted by the Emperor. Composing, reading, and quoting poetry was an activity to which many courtiers devoted themselves, both privately and publicly, demonstrating their cultural superiority at a time when they were losing political power in favour of the military class. Poetry competitions, during which participants challenged each other

¹⁴ For information on the principle members of the Mikohidari family, see for example Atkins 2006 and Iwasa 2018.

in composing poems on preestablished themes judged by an arbiter, underlined the importance of preestablished rules, and adhering to them was a sign of great culture and refinement. After the mid-eleventh century, several poetry 'families' or 'schools' (*ie*) were established. This allowed the development of a system of teaching poetry based on the relationship between teacher and disciples, allowing composition techniques, necessary to excel in these poetic circles, to be handed down, even secretly (Tollini 2017). The Mikohidari family was considered the most illustrious for the quality of its poetic output. This primacy, a source of great pride, explains the legal battle carried out by Nun Abutsu who, as a widow, felt the duty to protect and hand down the art of the family to whom she belonged.

As reported with such precision in the diary, on the sixteenth day of the tenth month (the text's eponymous date), she undertook a tiring journey along the Tōkaidō to reach Kamakura, seat of the military court, accompanied by one of her five sons, known as "Ajari no kimi" (Holy Master). At that time, the journey, if made on foot, took around fifteen days, while seven days might be sufficient on horseback. Since Nun Abutsu was a fairly old woman, it is thought she would have travelled in a sedan chair or on horseback, so the report of fifteen days' travelling might not actually be true. In any case, it may be assumed that it would have been a very demanding physical trial for her, as a commentary on the first day of the diary suggests, with a specific mention of tiredness from the journey (Tabuchi 2009, 176-7):

It was the night of the sixteenth day. Exhausted, I lay down to sleep. (Iwasa 1994, 274)

Little by little, however, with the passing of the days, almost as if she were awakening from a long emotional torpor caused by the pain of her husband's loss, she began to savour the pleasures of the journey, to take an interest in the landscape, local customs, the names of places, and their origins: she was struck by the meanings of hitherto unheard-of place names and dazzled by the mysterious charm of unknown lands. Instinctively, she translates her feelings into verse and does so constantly throughout the journey, so much so that the prose often appears only as a brief introduction to the circumstances that inspire her poetic compositions.

In an attempt to demonstrate her knowledge of the poetic practices of the Mikohidari school and to have her son come across as Tameie's rightful heir, especially in the section describing the journey, Nun Abutsu includes various poems that apply her husband's stylistic techniques. For example, when she crosses the Ōsaka barrier (Ōsaka no seki), she writes these verses:

定めなき
命は知らぬ
旅なれど
又逢坂と
頼めてぞ行く¹⁵
(Iwasa 1994, 273)

I know not what awaits me
on this journey,
as uncertain as my life.
I depart, hoping to return
to the hill of meeting.

It has been pointed out (Laffin 2013, 155) that these verses allude to a composition of Tameie's in 1223, found in the *Tameie shū* 為家集 (Collection of Tameie, c. 1270), in which he refers to the place-name "Ōsaka" as a place to trust in for a safe return and reunion with loved ones left in the capital.

あふさかは
行くも帰るも
別れ路の
人たのめなる
名のみふりつつ¹⁶
(Yasui 1962, 150)

The hill of meeting
is the road to separation
for those who come and those who go.
In its name alone
have people trusted over the centuries.

Although Ōsaka or Ōsaka no seki (literally 'the barrier of meeting') was the starting point for trips from the capital to the eastern provinces, the fact that the very name of this place was considered auspicious and could somehow guarantee a trouble-free return to the capital refers to a particular interpretation, apparently specific to the Mikohidari school, which is not found in previous poetic writings (Nagasaki 1987, 81-3).

During the journey, Nun Abutsu often dwells on the reasons she was forced to leave for Kamakura and her responsibilities as wife and mother. For example, upon crossing the Fuji River she writes:

¹⁵ *Sadamenaki* | *inochi wa shiranu* | *tabi nare do* | *mata Ōsaka to* | *tanomete zo iku.*

¹⁶ *Ōsaka wa* | *yuku mo kaeru mo* | *wakareji no* | *hitodanome naru* | *na nomi furitsutsu.*

On the eighteenth day when we crossed the Fuji River at the barrier of the province of Mino, I recalled this poem:

我が子ども
君に仕へん
ためならば
渡らましやは
関の藤川¹⁷
(Iwasa 1994, 275)

In order that my children
might serve
their sovereign,
would I be likely to cross
the Fuji river barrier?

She uses these lines to recall that her displacement is due to a very important cause: to show fidelity to her husband's desires by supporting his offspring. Her choice of the Fuji River is also no accident, as it was precisely in the vicinity of this river that Fujiwara no Teika had produced the *Fujikawa hyakushu* collection (A Sequence of One Hundred Poems on the Fuji River, 1224) lamenting his lack of promotion at the court. Later, his son Tameie wrote several poems in the same place when he met Nun Abutsu (around 1253), making a journey similar to the one she would undertake after his death. It is therefore unsurprising to note that in various places the poems recited by the author of the *Izayoi nikki* echo the words of her deceased husband, with whom she seems to have a moving poetic dialogue along her journey.

The poem she recites on the first day of the trip to the province of Omi lays the foundations for a sequential re-evocation in verse of the various stages of the itinerary previously followed by Tameie:

うち時雨れ
故郷思ふ
袖ぬれて
行く先遠き
野路の篠原¹⁸
(Iwasa 1994, 274)

Far is the destination
from Noji no shinohara,
where the rain

¹⁷ *Waga kodomo | kimi ni tsukaemu | tame naraba | wataramashi ya wa | seki no fujikawa.*

¹⁸ *Uchishigure | furusato omou | sode nurete | yuku saki tōki | noji no shinohara.*

bathes sleeves
already drenched with homesickness.

This poem is particularly reminiscent of the verses composed by her husband in the same place:

いかことよ
野路のしの原
しばしだに
ゆけど程ふる
旅の長じを¹⁹
(Yasui 1962, 146)

What is the reason
that the road
from Noji no shinohara
seems even longer to travel
so soon after departure?

It is interesting to note that, unlike other poems connected with this *utamakura* 歌枕, normally full of dew, hail, and wind, both compositions lament the “far destination”, or the road “ever longer to travel” shortly after a painful separation from loved ones (Tabuchi 2009, 181).

In *Izayoi nikki*, the claim to *Tameie's legacy* is not only supported by the vivid memory of his poetic compositions but also by the poetic style of Nun Abutsu, who often adopts the *honkadori* 本歌取 technique of allusive variation, a rhetorical technique that consists in taking up some verses from an older poetic composition and inserting them in a new sequence of verses and in a different context from the original. As is well known, in *Yoru no tsuru* 夜の鶴 (The Night Crane, late thirteenth century), a treatise on Tameie's poetic theories, Nun Abutsu draws attention to the importance of this technique by writing: “How they take something from ancient poems distinguishes talented poets from less gifted ones” (Morimoto 1979, 191). Teika himself had spoken of it in detail several times in various writings, and Nun Abutsu is keen to demonstrate that she knows how to put into practice the teachings received from her husband by presenting herself to the reader as his most worthy disciple.

When, for example, she arrives in Samegai (literally ‘the same well’), a place located in today's Shiga prefecture, she recites:

結ぶ手に
濁る心を

19 *Ikani to yo | noji no shinohara | shibashi dani | yukedo hodo furu | tabi no nagaji o.*

すすぎなば
うき世の夢や
醒が井の水²⁰
(Iwasa 1994, 275)

If I were to lave
my tainted soul
with the water of Samegai,
gathered in my hands,
would it awaken me from the dream of this painful world?

These verses seem to take up, albeit in a different context, a famous poem by Ki no Tsurayuki included in the *Kokinwakashū* 古今和歌集 (Collection of Japanese Poem of Ancient and Modern Times, c. 905):

むすぶ手の
雫に濁る
山の井の
飽かでも人に
別れぬるかな²¹
(Ozawa 1971, 189)

Again desirous of drinking
the water of the pure mountain spring
now clouded by the perspiration
of my hands as they gather it
unwillingly, I take my leave from you.

In Nun Abutsu's verses, the original poem by a man forced unwillingly to take leave of his beloved, likened to a mountain spring whose purity is violated by the hands of the man who greedily draws water, bears a completely different meaning, becoming the heartfelt plea of a believer who hopes to reach longed-for salvation through the rite of purification.

Through these and other verses, the spatial movement of Nun Abutsu, who visits many famous poetic places (*utamakura*) appears, in the eyes of the reader, as a journey back in time, full of literary evocations that emphasize the dominant role of poetry, the common thread of a narrative through which, time and again, it takes on different functions: it is an important legacy to be defended against impostors and at the same time a rare talent that justifies the position of the writer; it is a precious gift offered to the gods in moments

²⁰ *Musubu te ni | nigoru kokoro o | susuginaba | uki yo no yume ya | samegai no mizu.*

²¹ *Musubu te no | shizuku ni nigoru | yama no i no | akademo hito ni | wakarenuru kana.*

of sorrow, but also an effective means of expression to convey feelings and emotions to relatives and friends. In the end, it appears as an irreplaceable means of persuasion in the final part, where all the author's words are hinged in a long *chōka* constructed as a solid harangue pronounced in support of an innocent victim.

5 Loyal Wife and Loving Mother... Or Merely a Wily Social Climber?

If, as it would appear, the legal action brought by Nun Abutsu stems from the solemn promises she made to her husband, namely “to promote poetic art, to educate her children, and to pray for his future life”, it can certainly be said that it is not only understandable but also exemplary, because it is wholly consonant with the duties of a widow in the society of the time. Nevertheless, the conduct of the author of the *Izayoi nikki* has not always been judged positively, due - inevitably - to denigration by her stepchildren involved in the struggle for inheritance,²² which inevitably conditioned the reception of the work. Attempts were made to replace the image of faithful wife and exemplary mother with that of a shrew, described as a greedy manipulator, influencing her elderly husband in the last years of his life and forcing him to change his will to the advantage of her son Tamesuke after deliberately tarnishing Tameuji in the eyes of his father on account of his reprehensible conduct (Seno 1997, 27-8; Genshō waka kuden kenkyūkai 2004, 303-7). In an attempt to overcome this stark dichotomy, some scholars (Fukuda 1969; Nagasaki 1990) seem to have chosen a third way allowing a more lenient verdict in her regard, namely to define her as a *chūsei onna* 中世女, or a woman typical of the Middle Ages who, unlike those of the Heian period, who accepted without resistance their own destiny, was strong, wilful, and enterprising, just like other heroines of literary works of the day. This new type of woman can be considered a natural consequence of the consolidation of the *ie*, that is, of a family nucleus centred on the couple and the children they produced, where the wife took care of the offspring and housework, giving orders to the servants and employees who worked for the family business and acting in every way as the head of the family in his absence.

Nun Abutsu showed that she was aware of the responsibilities her role as wife and mother entailed. Her choice to go to Kamakura to claim property rights, as many legal documents show, is no isolated incident for that time. Furthermore, the fact that it becomes the theme of a literary work probably indicates that the author wants to

²² See in this regard Genshō waka kuden kenkyūkai 2004, 303-9.

recount her personal experience so that other women who have family problems similar to her own can identify with it.

Actually, we do not know what really happened, and there is no way to discover whether Nun Abutsu manipulated her elderly husband to the detriment of his other children or not. However, we do know that she met Tameie shortly after 1250 upon being introduced by Abbess Jizen of the Hokkeji Temple in Nara,²³ where she was staying, to the daughter of Fujiwara no Tameie, Gosagain no Dainagon no Suke (1233-63), as a reliable expert on the *Genji monogatari* and qualified to work as copyist and personal assistant to her father (Genshō waka kuden kenkyūkai 2004, 300). Thanks to this fortunate circumstance, she embarked upon a romantic relationship with Tameie, then a leading figure in the Mikohidari family. Over time, this relationship apparently became so meaningful that Tameie would leave his previous wife, the daughter of Utsunomiya no Yoritsuna (1172-1259), to live with Abutsu on a permanent basis. There is no conclusive evidence of a marriage between the two, but some scholars (Tabuchi 2009, 81-2; Laffin 2013, 115; Wallace 1988, 392; Craig McCullough 1990, 289) consider the separation of Tameie from his previous wife and their consequent cohabitation as concrete evidence that he chose Nun Abutsu as his new wife. As a scholar of the *Genji monogatari* and a well-established poetess whose career Tameie himself had followed very closely and promoted,²⁴ she felt that her children could rightly be considered her husband's heirs. The numerous and precious poems she left us, and her treatise on the legacy of the poetic art, *Yoru no tsuru*, seem to confirm her position as a disciple already perfectly suited to the role of guardian of a very important heritage (Esteban 2015). It cannot therefore be excluded that Tameie may have seen her as the most suitable person to ensure the continuity of his celebrated family, and the *Izayoi nikki* could have been written precisely to show the world the privileged position this woman had been able to conquer in the heart of the man she loved through her extraordinary culture.

It is widely known that after the death of Fujiwara no Tameie, the family was divided into three distinct branches: the Nijō, the Kyōgoku, and the Reizei, entrusted to his sons Tameuji, Tamenori (1265-1328), and Tamesuke respectively. The family's literary documents, contested in the disputes over succession described in *Izayoi nikki*, thirty years after the death of Nun Abutsu in 1313, when the case finally ended with a judgment recognizing Tameie's last will,

²³ On the Hokkeji temple and the intellectual activity promoted by Abbess Jizen and other nuns related to the court environment, see Meeks 2010b, 58-90.

²⁴ The active participation of Nun Abutsu in the cultural gatherings organized in Tameie's Ogura residence, where selected passages of the *Genji monogatari* and other classics were read, is well documented in the diary of Asukai no Masaari (Mizukawa 1985).

were entrusted to Tamesuke, founder of the Reizei branch and the only school of poetry to survive to this day. His descendants have conserved precious literary documents with extraordinary care and dedication, protecting them from the threat of destruction by war and fire for over seven hundred years. Only in 1981, after centuries during which the family's collection continued to be totally unknown, was the *Reizeike Shiguretei Bunko* (The Reizei Family Shiguretei Library) founded in Japan as a public benefit foundation, thanks to which the family made available a varied selection of documents for the first time. These featured in exhibitions and publications created for the purpose of sharing this precious heritage with the family's countrymen (Brower 1981, 455). To this today, manuscripts are constantly being studied and selected in Japan, and when new documents belonging to the Reizei family are made public, the media promptly bring them to the attention of all, as they are considered newsworthy at national level (Tabuchi 2005, 14-15). Although opinions on the conduct of Nun Abutsu may differ, it is legitimate to think that if this enterprising and determined woman had not existed, the Reizei School of Poetry would probably never have been founded, and many precious manuscripts representing tangible evidence of her deep devotion to the memory of Fujiwara no Tameie would not have come down to us through generations (Iwasa 2018, 48).

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