

## Regenerating Narratives: *The Confessions of Lady Nijō* as a Story for Women's Salvation

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*The Confessions of Lady Nijō* (Towazugatari, completed in 1313) was written by a court lady referred to as Nijō, who served the Retired Emperor GoFukakusa. The work covers the 35 years from 1271 to 1306, opening when Nijō is 14 years old and coming to an abrupt halt when she is 49. According to her diary, Nijō was born in 1258, but nothing is known about her life after the age of 49. *The Confessions of Lady Nijō* (hereafter referred to as *Confessions*) can be divided into two parts. The first part narrates Nijō's life at court and the second part deals with her travels as a nun. Because these two parts have no organic connection, many studies have focused on linking the two. This paper takes up the second part of *Confessions* and considers the meaning of Nijō's travel. In particular, I will examine how Nijō's narrative constitutes a performance. First, I briefly introduce how scholars have linked the two parts of the work. I begin by outlining the debate over Nijō's sexuality, then show how this debate has colored interpretations of the second half of the work, with nunhood and sexuality seen as being fundamentally incompatible. In closing, I suggest that one reason Nijō recorded her travels was to show the possibility of women's salvation outside dominant medieval Buddhist principles.

Nijō is often referred to by modern commentators as an “*onna Saigyō*,” or “female Saigyō,” a conceit that she highlights within her own diary. In the closing section of *Confessions*, Nijō identifies her travel as being of the same nature as Saigyō's. She explains the meaning of her travels as follows.

When I attempted to live in lonely seclusion, I felt dissatisfied and set out on pilgrimages modeled after those of Saigyō, whom I have always admired and wanted to emulate. That all my dreams might not prove empty, I have been writing this useless account—though I doubt it will long survive me.<sup>1</sup> (264)

*Mi no arisama o hitori omoi itaru mo akazu oboe haberu ue shugyō no kokorozashi mo saigyō ga shugyō no shiki urayamashiku oboete koso omoitachi shikaba sono omoi o munashiku nasaji bakarini kayō no itazura goto o tsuzuke oki haberu koso nochi no katami to made wa oboe haberanu.<sup>2</sup>*

Scholars have likened Nijō to Saigyō as an aristocrat who abandoned court life and renounced the world. As a result, the travel section is seen as a spiritual journey necessitated by the sexual desire indulged in the first part of the work. Counter arguments have cautioned against this tendency to view Nijō as a female Saigyō. Rather than a conscious choice, Nijō's travel may have been one of the few options she had after being marginalized at court and exiled. This view of Nijō sees her as being less religiously pious than Saigyō because she did not choose her path.

Nijō can also be seen as keeping one foot in the realm of the secular by not fully renouncing the world. Some scholars see the production of *Confessions* as an effort to overcome her attachment to the world.<sup>3</sup> Despite allegedly breaking ties to her life at court and from the world, Nijō describes reuniting with GoFukakusa during her travels in Book Four. Her route also oscillates between the capital and the provinces. GoFukakusa, Nijō's memories, and her feelings for him are recurring themes within her travels in Books Four and Five of *Confessions*. Nijō's route, her attachment to GoFukakusa, and her writing of *Confessions* all support the idea that she never fully renounced her life at court and show that we cannot entirely separate her travels from her service at court.

In order to determine the significance of Nijō's travels and her motivations, we must also understand what precedes her extended journey. What factors influenced Nijō's decisions to take the tonsure and travel? To answer this we must look to the first part of the work, which depicts her life at court. One key issue, which has never been resolved, is Nijō's status at court. Much scholarly debate surrounds whether Nijō should be considered a formal wife, or *seisai*, or whether she was merely a concubine, or *meshūdo*. Within the polygamous marital system of the court, a high-ranking man could have a principal wife, who was superior in rank, and other wives of lower rank, who were also officially recognized. A *meshūdo*, or concubine, was excluded from this hierarchy and her children were not considered legitimate heirs. Evidence in *Confessions* can be found to support both interpretations: the view that Nijō served as GoFukakusa's wife, and the view that she was a concubine. I would like to briefly examine the first part of the work, which depicts Nijō's life at court, and consider how this section has been approached by scholars.

The contemporary scholar and *Confessions* annotator Misumi Yōichi asserts that Nijō was regarded as a formal wife. He bases this assertion on Nijō's swift return to court after the death of her father. Misumi writes that the official period of mourning was normally one year, yet Nijō returns to the palace only fifty days after her father's death.<sup>4</sup> According to Misumi, this shortened period of leave shows that whether officially

sanctioned or not, Nijō was viewed by others as a formal wife of GoFukakusa and permitted to act as such at court.

Kawazoe Fusae, a scholar of classical Japanese literature and gender, points out that *Confessions* narrates the birth of Nijō's son as though it took place around the same time Empress Higashi-Nijō bore a daughter. Historically, Nijō's son was born one year after the birth of Higashi-Nijō's daughter. Kawazoe suggests that these two events are made parallel in the diary to emphasize that Nijō contributed a son to the imperial line, whereas Higashi-Nijō disappointed expectations by bearing a daughter.<sup>5</sup> However, Nijō's son died in infancy and her dream of becoming the mother of a crown prince was never realized.

What can we surmise of Nijō's position based on her marriage to GoFukakusa? The scholar Shimegi Miyako notes that *Confessions* begins with Nijō's father Masatada arranging for her first sexual encounter with GoFukakusa, which indicates that he views the relationship to be an official marriage. Shimegi asserts that GoFukakusa takes Nijō to the court as his mistress, in spite of formal arrangements that had been made for her as a wife.<sup>6</sup> According to this view, GoFukakusa refused to accept Nijō as a wife and instead adopted her as a *meshūdo*, or concubine. Similarly, Kawazoe also reads Nijō's father Masatada as having anticipated a formal marriage for his daughter, but that GoFukakusa steals Nijō away against his will.

Nijō's father clearly hoped for political gain through his daughter's relationship to GoFukakusa, but in the first part of the work Nijō gradually loses opportunities to improve her position and is forced to relinquish any power she holds at court. To the reader she appears quite capable and ambitious, yet her failure to produce any heirs for GoFukakusa marginalizes her within the child-bearing system at the center of the imperial court. Since she does not bear any children who can be raised into positions of political significance, Nijō gradually loses the chance to be regarded as GoFukakusa's official wife.

Some scholars hold the alternate view that Nijō was never an official wife, but only an attendant who had an affair with her master. According to this interpretation, she should be understood as a *meshūdo*, or concubine, throughout her relationship to GoFukakusa. Despite any sexual relations a concubine might have with the master she served, a *meshūdo* was permanently excluded from the hierarchy of wives. Within the polygamous system of sexuality of the Kamakura period, a legitimate wife, or *seisai*, was expected to share her husband's love with his attendants or those serving her. To avoid political problems, attendants who had sexual relations with their master were referred to as "*meshūdo*" to mark them as sexually nonproductive. Thus, *meshūdo* were prohibited from being wives and did not produce legitimate heirs. *Meshūdo* were well-suited to the position of a wet nurse (*menoto*) who would provide breast milk to the legitimate child of a legitimate wife.

Actually, Nijō records her own pregnancies five times in her diary. Her first son with GoFukakusa died while still an infant, and the next child, a daughter with Yuki no

Akebono (thought to be Saionji Sanekane, 1249-1322), was adopted and grew up as the legitimate child of Akebono and his legitimate wife. The conditions surrounding the third child are very vague. Nijō was pregnant when she ran away from the court, but several years are left out of her diary and the birth of the child is not mentioned. Her fourth and fifth sons are by Ariake no Tsuki, a conundrum within *Confessions*, because GoFukakusa appears to have sanctioned Nijō bearing sons with Ariake. Aware of Ariake's love for Nijō, GoFukakusa supported him by providing opportunities for sexual encounters with Nijō. According to rumors in the diary, their first son likely died. Their second son was born after the death of Ariake, and Nijō describes caring for the infant herself. After Nijō is summoned to return to court, nothing more about this son is recorded. The narrative does not focus on the children's lives, perhaps because Nijō's children never brought her political prestige. In this sense, her sexuality is similar to that of a *meshūdo*.

In examining how Nijō was summoned by GoFukakusa, he often appears to refer to her using expressions that represent the role of a *meshūdo*; such as inviting her "to massage his legs" (*on'ashi mairu*). This is seen in multiple instances, such as those listed below.

His Majesty had retired, and I was massaging his back. (117)  
*Ontonogomorite aruni, onkoshi uchimairasete saburauni* (112)

His Majesty retired and asked me to massage his legs. (122)  
*On'ashi nado mairite, ontanogomori tsutsu* (116)

While their Majesties were preparing to retire together, GoFukakusa asked me to massage his legs. I did not like the idea, but there was no other lady to whom I could pass down the order. (141)  
*"On'ashi ni maire" nado uketamawarumo, mutsukashikeredomo, tare ni yuzurubeshi tomo oboeneba* (134)

A *meshūdo* was often summoned to her master's night bed to massage his body, which could lead to a sexual relationship. The system of *meshūdo* and *menoto* intersect in that both the mother of the legitimate child and the wet nurse had to become pregnant around the same time for the *menoto* to nurse the infant. Nijō's mother Sukedai acted as wet nurse for GoFukakusa and she was also a foster sibling, or *menoto-go*, to GoFukakusa. Foster siblings were often far closer to each other than to their birth siblings because they grew up together, whereas each birth sibling would be raised by a separate wet nurse. Sukedai was able to become GoFukakusa's nurse because her father was a male nurse (*menoto*),<sup>7</sup> an important position of power for men in the medieval court. Nijō was likely an appropriate *meshūdo* in that she could take over her mother's position within a house well-known for acting as *menoto*.

During the medieval period, the position of *menoto* gradually shifted. A male nurse could be selected as a godfather, a powerful position also called *menoto*, such as

Menoto Nakatsuna. The political power of the male nurse derived from the privileged status of the original female wet nurse, who was on close terms with the powerful child cum master. The new male *menoto* was established as a position of political support (*ushiromi*) for the master, while the position of female wet nurse continued to function as both a political role and one of simply providing breast milk and raising the child. Over time, the political role of the female wet nurse became secondary and even her primary role as caregiver commanded less prestige. There were, however, some women who continued to occupy positions of political influence through the role of wet nurse.

The new role of male *menoto* can be seen in *Confessions*. In Book Two, during the women's kickball performance, men are selected to support the women as *menoto*. All of the attendant ladies seem reluctant about participating in this event because they have been forced to dress as men and stand in the garden.

Each of the ladies was assigned a man to assist with her preparations: Nobles were assigned to the upper-class ladies, courtiers to the upper middle class, and senior imperial guards to the middle class....Saionji Sanekane was appointed my assistant. (93)

*Sarubeshi to mina hitobito mōshi sadamete menmen ni jōrō niwa kugyō kojōrō niwa tenjōbito chūrō niwa jōhokumen menoto ni tsukite idashi tatsu....Saionji no Dainagon menoto ni tsuku. (90)*

We see another case at the end of Book Two, when the Regent Kanehira comes to Nijō's bedside and asks her to think of him as her male nurse (*menoto*).

The intruder then said, "Won't you let an eccentric old man have his way? You might think it unusual, but actually there are many precedents for a man like me becoming the benefactor of a young woman." All this was said to me practically from His Majesty's pillow. I did not reply, for words could not possible have expressed my mortification. (119-20)

*Kakaru oi no higami wa, oboshi yurushiten'ya. Ikanizo miyuru koto mo, onmenoto ni narihaberuran furuki tameshi mo ōku nado, onmakura nite mōsaruru, iwankata naku, kanashi tomo orokanaran'ya. (114)*

If Nijō had indeed been a *meshūdo*, she would have customarily acted as wet nurse to GoFukakusa's child, in which case it was likely that the political influence imbued by this role would have prevented her expulsion from the court.

As indicated in the section of *The Pillow Book* (Makura no sōshi, ca.1000) called "Among the People Who Show You," being appointed an imperial wet nurse was an important position that could lead to being reborn as a heavenly being (*tennin*).

Among the people who show you what it must be like to be reborn as a heavenly being, there's the gentlewoman in ordinary service who becomes an imperial wet-nurse. She no longer wears the usual Chinese jacket, or for that matter a formal train; she sleeps beside Her Majesty, and is at home in the imperial bedchamber; she calls on the other ladies to send messages down to her own rooms, or deliver letters for her—in fact there's no end to the list of special privileges she enjoys.<sup>8</sup>

*Mi o kaete tennin nado wa kayō ya aran to miyuru mono wa tada no nyōbō nite saburau hito no onmenoto ni naritaru. Karaginu mo kizu mo o danimo yōiwaba kinu sama nite omae ni soifushi michō no uchi o idokoro ni shite nyōbō domo o yobitsukai tsubone ni mono o iiyari fumi o toritsugase nado shite aru sama iitsukusu beku mo arazu.*<sup>9</sup>

Here, the so-called heavenly being is of course a metaphor for the female attendant who has access to the Emperor's bedroom and has all her needs fulfilled by other serving women. The phrase “to be reborn as a heavenly being” indicates the degree of power that the position of wet nurse to the Emperor carried at court.

The literary scholar Sofue Yuriko has suggested that because Nijō's mother acted as wet nurse to GoFukakusa, the daughter's failure at court means that she essentially lost her position of foster sister or *menoto-go*. As a result, her family also lost their former influence at court.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, her precarious position at court meant that Nijō was never able to move up in the ranks to occupy a position of prestige or be named wet nurse to an imperial offspring. In this sense, her failure to become a wet nurse is both a reflection and cause of the decreasing political influence of her family.

Nijō's status and that of her family is important in terms of interpreting her sexuality as either productive or nonproductive within the power structure of GoFukakusa's court. Sexuality has been a recurring theme in interpretations of *Confessions*, but the prevailing approach has been to read the work as representing the decadence of a court in decline. Scholars have assumed that if Nijō was GoFukakusa's wife, then his collusion in her affairs with other men shows him to be sexually perverted. Although not always overtly stated, this is often how the work has been read. But if Nijō was in fact a concubine, then being sexually accessible to several men was not scandalous, but perhaps even standard for a woman of her status.

It is important to remember that GoFukakusa's desire to keep Nijō near him was based on his love for her mother, who was his nurse. At the beginning of their relationship, Nijō is desired by GoFukakusa as a substitute for his *menoto*. In Freudian terms, his desire for his wet nurse originates out of pleasure found in the oral stage. Within the sexual economy of the court, desire for a wet nurse was not forbidden by the father (unlike desire for the mother within the Oedipus complex), and thus GoFukakusa could maintain his desire and satiate this in the form of a sexual relationship with his wet nurse. Within this anti-Oedipal system, incest was not a primary taboo. Since GoFukakusa

consummates his desire for his wet nurse, who later becomes Nijō's mother, it is not unreasonable to ponder if Nijō might be the product of their union, rather than the daughter of Masatada. This possibility confirms that the incest taboo was not primary to the structure of sexual relations at the medieval court. The following statement by GoFukakusa affirms that his relationship with Nijō's mother leads to his desire for Nijō and inevitably to the potential of an incestuous affair with his own daughter.

“I was the first to love you,” he continued, “and through the years, no matter what has happened, my devotion to you has not wavered. Yet somehow matters have not turned out as I expected them to, and unfortunately, I have great difficulty expressing my love. I first learned of love from your mother, that late Sokedai, and I was secretly very fond of her, but I was still an adolescent timid in the ways of the world. So while I let the days slip by, Fuyutada and Masatada stole her away, leaving me ignobly to seek unguarded moments with her. I was anxious about you even before you were born, and after you came into my care I eagerly looked forward to the time when you would be mine.” (124)

*Hito yori saki ni misomete amata no toshi o suginureba nanigoto ni tsukete mo naozarinarazu oboyuredomo nani to yaran waga kokoro nimo kanawanu koto nomi nite kokoro no iro no mienu koso ito kuchioshikere waga niimakura wa ko-Sukedai ni shimo narai tarishikaba tonikakuni hitoshirezu oboeshi o imada iukainaki hodo no kokochi shite yorozu yononaka tsutsumashikute akekureshi hodoni Fuyutada Masatada nado ni nushizukarete hima o koso hitowaroku ukagaishika hara no naka ni arishi ori mo kokoromotonaku itsuka itsuka to te no uchi narishiyori sabakuritsukete arishi. (118)*

GoFukakusa's relationship with Nijō was based on his private desire, and was not, from his perspective, concerned with political gain.

The perversion of the Kamakura court has been a common thread in scholarship concerning Nijō's sexuality. The question boils down to whether Nijō's sexuality was “productive” within the power structure that constituted the court. Nijō's sexuality was exchanged as an object between men and even used as a gift, similar to the awarding of clothes. As a concubine, all of her services would have been nonproductive within the court's sexual economy and thus located outside the nexus of power politics. The first part of the work shows how Nijō gradually loses opportunities for advancement and is forced to relinquish any power she holds at court.

Let us move on to address the second part of the work. Most scholars either fail to mention Nijō's sexuality in the second part of the work, after she has taken the tonsure, or desexualize her activities. But Nijō's sexuality is a theme that runs throughout the entire work. It should therefore be seen as a thread of continuity in a work that has usually been divided into two separate parts. If we see Nijō's sexuality as extending into

the second part of *Confessions*, how does this affect our interpretation of sexuality and nunhood?

The significance of travel has traditionally been interpreted as degradation and exile, or as the role played by the loser of court power games. The literary scholar Itō Kunio, for instance, points out that Nijō did not always maintain an air of composed religiosity after renouncing the world and that her writing of *Confessions* may have been to overcome her deep grudge at being socially marginalized and ousted from the court. In the second part Nijō does not appear to renounce the world entirely, and even meets GoFukakusa during her travels. Physically and emotionally, she can be seen as alternating between the center (i.e., the court) and the provinces. Even after leaving the court, she continues to write about GoFukakusa.

Most interpretations of the travel section, including those of Itō and Mitamura, are based on the notion that people who renounce the world are completely asexual or should be viewed as desexualized. However, Nijō's father's last words suggest that while she needs to control her sexual desire in the secular world, after renouncing the world, she need no longer fear the shame of sullyng the reputation of her family. In the first part of the work, Nijō's father advises her to renounce the secular world and protect the reputation of her family. He tells her, "It would be shameful indeed if you remained in society only to blacken the name of our great family. It is only after retiring from society that you can do as you will without causing suffering."<sup>11</sup> The potential for shaming Nijō's family is directly related to lechery or amorousness in the secular world. It is possible to interpret Nijō's father's advice as only applying to amorousness in the secular world, and not her life after tonsure. In this case, Nijō's nunhood can be seen as compatible with her sexuality.

During her travels, Nijō meets GoFukakusa at the Iwashimizu Hachiman Shrine. While she must have understood GoFukakusa was at the Shrine, she writes as though it were a chance meeting. The careful staging of this reunion belies Nijō's emphasis on its unexpectedness. When GoFukakusa invites her inside, Nijō feels like she is returning to her past. They spend the night together. The scene is described as follows.

We stayed up the entire night, until all too soon the sky began to brighten. "I must complete the religious retreat I have begun," he said. "We can have a more leisurely meeting another time." Before leaving he took off the three small-sleeved gowns he was wearing next to his skin and presented them to me. "Don't let anyone know of these keepsakes, yet keep them with you always." At that I forgot completely the past, the future, and the darkness of worlds yet to come. My heart filled with an inexpressible agony as the dawn brightened inexorably. His Majesty murmured goodbye, and I gazed fondly after him as he retired to an inner room. His presence lingered in the fragrance of his scent still clinging to my black robes. The gowns he had given me were so conspicuous they would certainly attract attention. I would have to wear them under my own dark robes, awkward though that was. (208)

*Nenu ni akeyuku mijikayo wa hodonaku akeyuku sora ni nareba, "Onkomori no hodo wa kanarazu komorite mata mo kokoro shizukani," nado uketamawarite tachitamau tote onhada ni mesaretaru onkosode o mitsu nugase owashimashite, "Hito shirenu katami zo. Mi o hanatsunayo," tote tamawaseshi kokoro no uchi wa koshikata yukusue no koto mo konyo no yami mo yorozu omoi wasurete kanashisa mo awaresa mo nanito moushiyaru kata naki ni hashitanaku akenureba, "Sarabayo," tote hiki tatase owashimashinuru onnagori wa onato natsukashiku nioi chikaki hodo no on'utsuriga mo sumizome no tamoto ni todomarinuru kokochi shite hitome ayashiku medatashikereba onkatami no onkosode o sumizome no koromo no shita ni kasanuru mo bin naku kanashiki monokara. (195-96)*

Scholars have questioned whether Nijō and GoFukakusa actually had sexual intercourse on this night. The scholar of medieval diaries Matsumoto Yasushi claims they did not and points out that GoFukakusa asks her to meet him after his retreat. According to Matsumoto, the fact that GoFukakusa is on retreat and that he requests another meeting suggests that any sexual ties have been postponed.<sup>12</sup> He thus characterizes the meeting as romantic, but not sexual, despite the bestowal of the robes. The literary scholar and narratologist Mitamura Masako assumes GoFukakusa gave Nijō the gowns because he felt pity at seeing her nun's vestments.<sup>13</sup> As Nijō writes, "His presence lingered in the fragrance of his scent still clinging to my black robes. The gowns he had given me were so conspicuous they would certainly attract attention. I would have to wear them under my own dark robes, awkward though that was" (208). Scholars have read this encounter with GoFukakusa as nonsexual only because Nijō is a nun. Similar passages in the first part of the work, when Nijō is not yet tonsured, are accepted as sexual encounters.

For example, the first part of *Confessions* describes Nijō's relationship with Ariake no Tsuki, a priest at Ninnaji Temple. Ariake dies immersed in passionate love and sexual desire for Nijō. The problem of sexuality and religiosity recurs throughout the narrative, yet scholars have tended to avoid examining this continuum within the work. The continuity can clearly be seen in the Iwashimizu scene. Nijō's relationship with Ariake functions as a meta-narrative in the section in which she encounters GoFukakusa at Iwashimizu Hachiman Shrine. When Nijō hears of Ariake's death, she says, "Life is more fleeting than a dream within a dream" (149) (*Hakanaku nari nan to kikishi wa yume ni yume miru yori mo nao nadorare subete nani to iu beki kata mo naki zo ware nagara tsumi fukaki*) (143). Nijō later alludes to this "dream within a dream" (*Yume ni yume miru kokochi shite*) (196) in the Iwashimizu section. After meeting with GoFukakusa, she writes, "It seemed a dream within a dream as I departed with his image futilely contained in the tears on my sleeves" (208) (*Munashiku nokoru on'omokage o sode no namida ni nokoshite tachi haberu mo yume ni yume miru kokochi shite*) (196).

Similarly, GoFukakusa's gift of robes echoes Ariake's exchange of under robes. When Nijō leaves Ariake, he "forcibly...seized the small-sleeved gown I wore next to

my body, giving me his in return as a memento of our love.”<sup>14</sup> Ariake dies wearing Nijō’s gown and his page later tells Nijō of how the priest died:

The boy told me how Ariake had folded up the small-sleeved gown he had taken from me on our first night together and had placed it on his meditation mat. He continued, “On the night of the twenty-fourth he put it on next to his skin and told me he wanted to be cremated in it.” (150)

*Kano kanashisa nokoru to arishi yoru kikae tamaishi kosode o komaka ni tatami tamaite itsumo nenju no yuka ni okaretarikeru o nijūyokka no yūbe ni narite hada ni kiru tote tsui no keburī nimo kaku nagara nase to ōseraretsuru zo iwankata naku kanashiku haberu. Mairaseyo tote saburaishi.* (144)

Mitamura Masako has pointed out that gifts of clothes in *Confessions* are actually pledges of economic support given in exchange for sexual intercourse. Ariake sent Nijō money with a poem as a memento for her after his death.<sup>15</sup>

GoFukakusa’s gift of gowns can also be understood as compensation for sexual relations. Whether they actually engaged in sexual intercourse or not, the narrative describes the meeting like a lover’s tryst. There is nothing to suggest Nijō did not have sexual relations during her travels. In *Confessions*, Nijō’s encounter with GoFukakusa and the depictions of sexuality after tonsure demonstrate that nunhood and sexual activity are not incompatible. Nijō even admits that others are eager to gossip about her sexual relations while “mixing with common men” at various lodgings: “There is no dearth of people who enjoy starting rumors, whether in the capital or in the countryside” (223). Clearly this is what GoFukakusa fears when he accuses her of not fulfilling her ascetic practices.

I hope that we can meet again on another moonlit night in this lifetime, but you persist in placing your hopes for our meeting only after the far distant dawn of salvation. What kind of vows are you cherishing? A man is more or less free to travel eastward or even to China, but there are so many hindrances for a traveling woman that I understand it to be impossible. Who have you pledged yourself to as a companion in your renunciation of this world? I still cannot believe it is possible for you to travel alone. (221)

*Satemo kono yo nagara no hodo kayō no tsukikage wa onozukara no tayori niwa kanarazu to omou ni haruka ni ryōge no akatsuki to tanomuru wa ikanaru kokoro no uchi no chikai zo. Mata Azuma, Morokoshi made tazune yuku mo otoko wa tsune no narai nari. Onna wa sawari ōkute sayō no shugyō wa kanawazu to koso kike. Ikanaru mono ni chigiri o musubite uki yo o itou tomo to shikeru zo.* (207-8)

GoFukakusa uses Buddhist logic in pointing out the asymmetry of men and women. Support for his view can be found in doctrinal texts such as *The Lotus Sutra* (Hokkekyō). A well-known section of the “Devadatta” chapter, or Chapter Twelve of *The Lotus Sutra*, describes the ability of the dragon girl to achieve Buddhahood, and is thus regarded as an important indication of the possibility for women’s salvation. But this same section also states that women never attain Buddhahood in their female form because they possess five inherent obstacles. The dragon girl has to be transformed into a man for her to achieve Buddhahood.

There is nothing to suggest that Nijō abandoned her practice, and she seems to have chosen her own approach to religious asceticism. When Nijō makes a brief visit to Hokkeji Temple, a famous nunnery, she writes:

The next morning, on a visit to Hōke Temple, I went to the cloister, where I met the nun Jakuenbō, daughter of Lord Fuyutada. She talked to me about the relentless cycle of life and death, causing me to consider remaining in the cloister for a while. But realizing that it was not in my nature to quietly devote myself to scholarly pursuits, and aware of the unending confusion that still dwelled in my heart, I decided to leave (204).

*Akenureba Hokkeji e tazune yukitaru ni Fuyutada no otodo no musume Jakuenbō to mōshite ichi no muro to iu tokoro ni sumaruru ni aite shōji mujō no nasake naki kotowari nado mōshite shibashi kayō no tera nimo sumainubekika to omoedomo kokoro nodoka ni gakumon nado shite arinubeki mi no omoi tomo warenagara oboeneba tada itsutonaki kokoro no yami ni sasoware idete. (191-92)*

Nijō does not remain at Hokkeji Temple to practice because she knows she is not suited by nature to “scholarly pursuits.” What kind of religious practice then does she espouse as leading to salvation? Instead of basing her practice at a nunnery, Nijō travels through various provinces. Through her travels, Nijō proposes an alternate path for women’s salvation.

When Nijō visits Itsukushima Shrine, she stops at the small island of Taika. There she finds “women who...fled from lives in prostitution.”<sup>16</sup> For a couple of days, Nijō remains with these women who now practice Buddhism rather than the art of love. Nijō includes other encounters with prostitutes in *Confessions* and shows sympathy toward them. She appears to empathize with their sexuality as well as their conversion to religious practice. Nijō encounters various narratives of women’s salvation while traveling through the countryside as well. At Taima Temple (Taimadera), she is told the story of the Taima Mandala and Princess Chūjō (Chūjōhime). *Confessions* records the legend in considerable detail (205).

In contrast, when Nijō writes about religious rites and prayers, she repeatedly refers to her impure state and lack of dedication. For example, at Ise Shrine, she considers

making a *nusa* offering (a ceremonial offering of a branch of the *sakaki* tree hung with strips of white hempen paper), but writes, “I wondered how that kind of purification could cleanse the taint buried deep within my heart.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, while watching a festival at Itsukushima, she recites a Buddhist vow and prays for salvation, but at the same time, thinks, “how wonderful it would be if I were pure at heart.”<sup>18</sup> Nijō implies that her impure heart prevents her prayers from being fulfilled. Her wanderings appear to be a result of this belief. If traditional religious approaches to practice cannot help Nijō, then what deeds can she perform that will lead to salvation? Nijō’s recording of oral stories hints at one alternative.

The scholar of medieval literature Shimura Kunihiro writes that the stories in *Confessions* are drawn not only from literary documents but oral sources as well.<sup>19</sup> During her travels, Nijō records many stories about women’s salvation. She alludes to various oral narratives related to sites that she visits, including many stories that are no longer found in written records. These “invisible” narratives often run counter to dominant doctrinal texts on women’s salvation. As such, they offer an alternative approach to women’s salvation. This can be seen, for example, in Nijō’s description of her pilgrimage to Zenkōji Temple. Close analysis of this section reveals that Nijō did not actually travel to Zenkōji Temple.<sup>20</sup> Why then did she choose to include this section in her diary? Nijō writes that she wanted to visit the temple because “it was noted for its famous image of Amida Buddha.”<sup>21</sup> Since the statue was famous, the story (or *engi*) behind it that describes Empress Kōgyoku (594-661) falling into hell and being saved must also have been well known. The narrative also describes a servant girl giving alms and later being welcomed into the Tosotsu-ten or Tusita heaven (the heavenly realm of Bodhisattva Maitreya or Miroku).

The “Ascension to Tusita Heaven” (Tosotsu ten ōjō) was imagined at court circles in medieval Japan as a scene of women’s salvation. For example, a court story called *The Princess in Search of Herself* (Wagami ni tadoru himegimi, ca.1271) depicts the Empress on the throne going to Tusita heaven after her death where she holds a poetry celebration. Women’s imagining of the ascension to Tusita heaven led to the creation of new stylistic renderings of the Tusita heaven, such as pictorial depictions of Fugen and the Ten Raksasa Daughters (Fugen-jū-rasetsu-nyo).<sup>22</sup> Nijō’s desire to include a pilgrimage to Zenkōji in her diary may be linked to stories of women’s salvation such as these. Though *Confessions* does not describe the specific tales that appear in various *engi*, they were well known to women of the time.

These narratives of women’s salvation provide a contrast to GoFukakusa’s description of the hindrances faced by women, which he draws from canonical Buddhist texts. Nijō’s travel is a form of religious practice, but also an act of seeking and collecting narratives that show salvation as something she and other women can attain. She collects these stories and weaves them into the traditional genre of a travel diary, by citing various place names and their associations. Famous sites such as Mino, Mount

Fuji, and Yatsunashi appear in other diaries by women as canonical place names (*meisho*) in the tradition of travel writing. Like *Confessions*, the earlier, female-authored *Sarashina Diary* (Sarashina nikki, ca.1059), for instance, also describes the route the author travels and the unique narratives associated with each place. Nijō borrows from this tradition of travel writing and recording of oral narratives. By cobbling together various narratives related to women and by citing examples of female salvation, Nijō provides an alternative landscape for women to travel on the path to salvation. The view of female salvation provided in *Confessions* contrasts with the dominant narrative found within Buddhist doctrinal texts.

The compelling scene in which Nijō runs after GoFukakusa's coffin barefoot can be read as another citation of a religious narrative.

I left the palace and went out onto Kyōgoku Street to follow after the procession. All day long I had been inside, and when the carriage had arrived for the casket I was in such a state of confusion that I could not remember where I had left my shoes. Now I found myself running behind the carriage barefoot. At the corner of Kyōgoku Street and Fifth Avenue, where the procession turned west, the carriage brushed against the side of a bamboo tree growing along the avenue, and a screen was knocked loose....I kept thinking I should stop, but at the same time I was unwilling to go home. As I drove myself on, my bare feet ached so that with each step I fell further behind the procession. (243-44)

*Yagate Kyōgoku omote yori idete mikuruma no shiri ni mairu ni higurashi goshō ni saburaisuru ga, "Koto narinu," tote mikuruma no yorishi ni awatete hakitarishi mono mo izukata e ka yकिनुरान hadashi nite hashiri oritaru mama nite mairishi hodo ni Gojō Kyōgoku o nishi e yarimawasu ni ōji ni tatetaru take ni mikuruma o yarikakete, "Mikuruma no sudare katagata ochinu beshi," tote mikuruma zoi noborite naoshi mairasuru hodo....Koko yori ya tomaru koko yori ya tomaru to omoe domo tachikaeru beki kokochi mo seneba shidai ni mairu hodo ni mono wa hakazu ashi wa itakute yawarazutsu yuku hodo ni mina hito niwa oi okurenu. (229)*

Why was Nijō running barefoot? Shimura Kunihiro proposes that this scene was created by Nijō as an allusion to Saigyō's primary collection of poems, *The Mountain Home Collection* (Sankashū, ca.1180).<sup>23</sup> In *The Mountain Home Collection*, there are three sequential farewell poems for GoToba that appear with long headnotes.

On the night of the funeral of Emperor Toba, Saigyō, who had come down from Mt. Koya to attend it, met among the attendants Tokudaiji Saneyoshi, who had accompanied the late emperor when he went to see the construction work of the Anrakuji Temple incognito. They talked together. This song was written then.

Tonight  
I am convinced how tied I was  
by unknown fate  
unto the emperor now gone.

On the occasion when the remains were being carried to the mausoleum.  
How sad  
this journey of tonight  
from here below  
unto the other world!

After the burial those who attended the funeral returned home, but he stayed until  
dawn when the recitation of the sutras began.  
Sad, but I stay to pray  
now for his soul's repose  
I being  
in the holy orders.<sup>24</sup>

*Ichi in kakure sase owashimashite yagate no gosho e watashi mairasekeru yoru  
Kōya yori ideaita mairaitarikeru ito kanashikarikeri. Kono nochi owashimasu  
beki tokoro goranji hajimekeru sono kami no ontomo ni Udaijin Saneyoshi,  
Dainagon to moushikeru saburawarekeri. Shinobase owashimasu koto nite mata  
hito saburawazarikeri. Sono on-tomo ni saburaikeru koto no omoi iderarete  
orishimo koyoi ni mairaitaru mukashi ima no koto omoitsuzukerarete yomikeru,*

Koyoi koso omoi shirarure asakaranu kimi ni chigiri no aru mi  
narikeri

*Osame mairasekeru tokoro e watashi mairasekeru ni,  
Michi kawaru miyuki kanashiki koyoi kana kagiri no tabi to miru  
ni tsuketemo*

*Osame mairasete nochi ontomo ni saburawarekeru hitobito tatoen kata naku  
kanashinagara kagiri aru koto nareba kaerarenikeri. Hajimetaru koto arite akuru  
made saburaite yomeru,*

Towabaya to omoi yoradezo nagekamashi mukashinagara no waga  
mi nariseba<sup>25</sup>

However, unlike Saigyō, who accidentally encounters Emperor Toba's funeral and thus feels a strong connection to his old master, Nijō is not able to reach GoFukakusa's casket. Moreover, this episode from Saigyō's life does not explain why Nijō runs barefoot. If this is indeed a fictional scene that Nijō created, as Shimura suggests, then why does she include the image of her bare feet?

This embellishment can be read as a reference to the image of the first nun in Buddhist history, Mahapajapati. Mahapajapati asked Buddha to make her a nun, but the Buddha refused, saying women were not considered capable of taking up the holy life.

However, Mahapajapati did not abandon her desire and instead cut her own hair, wore a nun's robe, followed the Buddha, and asked repeatedly for his instruction. Her feet became dirty and her body covered in dust and grime. She cried with exhaustion. Finally, through the help of Ananda, Mahapajapati becomes a nun.<sup>26</sup> Ananda persuaded the Buddha to make Mahapajapati a nun by reminding him that she had raised him after his mother died. Mahapajapati was his wet nurse, or *menoto*. In this Buddhist story, being a nun is permissible not because of the holy act of motherhood, but by the merit accrued in having acted as a wet nurse.<sup>27</sup> Whether or not Nijō's barefoot imagery can be directly linked to the narrative of Mahapajapati, we should not forget that the original depiction of nuns was linked to that of a wet nurse.

To conclude, viewed from the perspective of the tradition of oral literature, *Confessions* is not so much a narrative of confession for Nijō's salvation alone, but rather a narrative for the salvation of all women. It is significant that some of Nijō's visits never actually took place, which means that sections of Nijō's travels must therefore be read as fiction. This suggests that rather than accurately recording her "pilgrimage," Nijō was more concerned with creating a "narrative." The dialogue between Nijō and GoFukakusa shows a clear contrast in strategies for women's salvation, and because orthodox Buddhist texts such as *The Lotus Sutra* ruled out the possibility of female salvation, Nijō proposed alternative narratives. Buddhist doctrinal texts can be seen as central to the hierarchical structure of religious and court life. In contrast, Nijō's travel narrative is situated on the peripheries of the Buddhist canon, court-centered literary culture, and the cultural geography of Kamakura Japan. Her travel writing can be seen as part of the process by which central court literature came into contact with other oral sermonic stories and was regenerated to include women's salvation.

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## Notes

Editor's Note: Elsewhere in this volume of the *Review* the title "Towazugatari" has been translated as "The Unrequested Tale." Here it is translated as "Confessions of Lady Nijō" in keeping with Karen Brazell's translation, from which all citations in this essay are taken.

1. Karen Brazell, *The Confessions of Lady Nijō* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973). Hereafter, all citations are taken from this

translation of the text.

2. Misumi Yōichi, ed., *Towazugatari*, in *Shin Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikai* (New Compendium of Japanese Classical Literature), vol. 50 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1994), 249. Hereafter, all Japanese citations of *Confessions* will be drawn from this text.

3. Itō Kunio, "Towazugatari no shudai to shudai ni amaru mono" (The Main Theme and Beyond the Main Theme of *The Confessions of Lady Nijō*), in

*Genji monogatari no uchi to soto* (Internal and External Aspects of *The Tale of Genji*) (Tokyo: Kazama Shobō, 1987).

4. Misumi Yōichi, "Towazugatari ni okeru kōsō to shippitsu ito" (The Idea and Aim of Writing *The Confessions of Lady Nijō*), in *Towazugatari chūsei nikki no sekai* (*The Confessions of Lady Nijō: The World of Medieval Diaries*), vol. 5 of *Joryū nikki bungaku kōza* (Lectures on Women's Diary Literature) (Tokyo: Benseisha, 1990), 63.

5. Kawazoe Fusae, "Joryū nikki ni okeru chichioyazō: *Towazugatari* o chūshin ni" (The Image of the Father in Women's Diaries: Focusing on *The Confessions of Lady Nijō*), vol. 1 of *Joryū nikki bungaku kōza* (Tokyo: Benseisha, 1991), 284.
6. Shimegi Miyako, "*Towazugatari* no kyokō to sono imi: sofū Koga Daijō Daijin ga ko o megutte" (Fictions and Their Meaning in *The Confessions of Lady Nijō*: Concerning the Phrase "The Child of the Minister of State"), *Joshi seigakuin tanki daigaku kiyō* (The Journal of Seigakuin Women's Junior College), vol. 16 (1984): 57.
7. Male and female nurses were two separate positions. The male nurse acted as a guardian in a role similar to that of a godfather and thus benefited from his political ties to the child. Both male and female positions could be privileges that were predominantly controlled by one family, as was the case with Nijō's mother. Her position can therefore be understood as political, rather than simply biological (or limited to the act of providing breast milk) in scope.
8. Meredith McKinney, *The Pillow Book* (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 201.
9. Matsuo Satoshi and Nagai Kazuko, ed., *Makura no sōshi* (The Pillow Book), *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* (Newly Edited Compendium of Classical Japanese Literature) (Tokyo: Shōgakusan, 1997), 367.
10. Sofue Yuriko, "Masatada musume to Nijō: menoto-go toshite no konseki" (From the Daughter of Masatada to Nijō: Traces of Nijō's Status as a Foster Sister), *Kokubun mejiro* (Meiji University Journal of Japanese Literature), vol. 40 (2001): 85-95.
11. Brazell, *Confessions*, 25. "*Kami o tsukete kōshoku no ie ni na o nokoshi nado sen koto wa kaesu gaesu ukaru beshi. Tada yo o sutete nochi wa ikanaru waza mo kurushikaranu koto nari.*" Misumi, *Towazugatari*, 26.
12. Matsumoto Yasushi, *Chūsei kyūtei jōsei no nikki* (Diaries of Medieval Court Women) (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1986), 175-76.
13. Mitamura Masako, "*Towazugatari* no zōyo to kōkan" (Donation and Exchange in *The Confessions of Lady Nijō*), in *Shin monogatari kenkyū 1: Monogatari to media* (New Narrative Studies: Narrative and Media) (Tokyo: Yūseidō, 1993), 311-12.
14. Brazell, *Confessions*, 81. "*Hada kitaru kosode ni waga onhada naru onkosode o shiite, "Katami ni." Tote kikae tamai tsutsu oki wakare nuru.*" Misumi, *Towazugatari*, 78-79.
15. The box also contained money, as can be seen in the following translation by this author, not contained in the Brazell translation. "Inside this box were many wrapped gold pieces" (*Kano hako no naka wa tsutsumitaru kane o hitohata ireraretari keru nari*) (144).
16. Brazell, *Confessions*, 228. "*Yūjo no yo o nogarete iori narabete sumaitaru tokoro nari.*" Misumi, *Towazugatari*, 213.
17. Brazell, *Confessions*, 212. "*Nusa o sashite izuru nimo kokoro no uchi no nigori fukasa wa kakaru harae ni mo kiyoku wa ikaga to asamashi.*" Misumi, *Towazugatari*, 199.
18. Brazell, *Confessions*, 230. "*Nigori naki kokoro no uchi naraba ikani to warenagara modokashikuzo oboyuru.*" Misumi, *Towazugatari*, 215.
19. Shimura Kunihiko, *Setsuwa bungaku no kōsō to denshō* (The Concept and Transmission of Oral Literature) (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1982), 311.
20. Oguchi Rinji, "Nijō no Zenkōji sankei ni tsuite" (Regarding Nijō's Pilgrimage to Zenkōji Temple), *Komazawa Kokubun* (The Komazawa University Journal of Japanese Literature), vol. 3 (1964): 47-50.
21. Ibid., 197.
22. Kimura Saeko, "Jotei no umareru toki; *Wagami ni tadoru himegimi* ni okeru ōjō o meguru kōsōryoku (When a Ruling Empress Is Born: The Imagery of Rebirth in Heaven in *The Princess in Search of Herself*), *Gengo jōhō kagaku* (Language and Information Sciences), vol. 2 (2004): 67-80.
23. Shimura Kunihiko, "*Towazugatari* no tabi to jinsei" (Travel and Life in *The Confessions of Lady Nijō*), in vol. 5 of *Joryū nikki bungaku kōza* (Tokyo: Benseisha, 1990), 149-50.
24. H. H. Honda, trans., *The Sanka Shū: The Mountain Hermitage* (Tokyo: Hokuseidō Press, 1971), 137-38.
25. Gotō Shigeo, ed., *Sankashū* (The Collection of the Mountain Hermitage), *Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei* (Shinchō Collection of Classical Japanese Literature) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1982), 215-17.
26. "*Chūagon kyō vol. 28 Gōtamī kyō vol. 10, 2*" (Majjhima-nikaaya Vol. 28, Gotami Sutra, Vol. 1.10, 2), in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō vol. 1 Agon bu, jō* (The Taishō Tripitaka Vol. 1, Agama) (Tokyo: Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō Kankō kai, 1924), 605.
27. Ibid. Mahapajapati Gotami fostered the Buddha by adopting and raising him after the Buddha's mother died.