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Allegories for Fiction in A Stylish Woman Who Brought Disaster and Life of a Sensuous Woman

Ihara Saikaku (井原西鶴) is at times characterized by the elusiveness of his own voice as an author, given the variety of genres, subjects, agendas he juggles between, not only across his oeuvre but even within individual works. While it may be difficult to grasp the voice or ideologies of Saikaku himself, however, an analysis focusing on the stories themselves, their internal parts, and the various ways they are represented or constructed may reveal a certain understanding or awareness underlying his writing. Elements of the short story A Stylish Woman Who Brought Disaster, contained within Life of a Sensuous Woman, provide an interesting opportunity for such analysis. By beginning from the general features of the larger story of Life of a Sensuous Woman, and then attempting to identify various associations and allegories within the chapter's components such as the 'jealousy meeting,' several aspects of the story can be reframed to see how they invite discussions of the forms and functions of fictional narratives in the particular historical or social contexts depicted in the work.

Life of a Sensuous Woman, or *Kōshoku ichidai onna* (好色一代女), is one of Saikaku's works in the *ukiyo-zōshi* (浮世草子, 'books of the floating world') genre of vernacular fiction pioneered by Saikaku himself, and within that part of the subgenre of *kōshoku-mono* (好色物, 'books on love'). A collection of short stories that together construct a unified, continuous account of the protagonist's life, it takes the form of an old woman's retelling of her life story, divided into a total of twenty-four chapters narrated in the first-person as a reliving of her own experiences. The overarching narrative across each anecdotal story focuses primarily on the

woman's adventures in love and sexual desire and the lessons she learns through the various relationships she experiences or witnesses.

However, at times, and especially near the latter half, it shows traces of Buddhist sentiment as a confessional story, or *zange* (懺悔), of her sins and regrets and as a reminder for the impermanence of the world, with her falling into positions of lower and lower societal standing and material wealth as she grows older. Particularly interesting is the various occupations and situations that the protagonist finds herself in throughout the work, which serve as a demonstration of the wide range of possible roles that a woman could have played during the time. Stories such as The Mistress of a Domain Lord, in which the narrator humorously describes in detail the streamlined and commercialized processes, social mechanisms, and economic incentives that allow the protagonist to fabricate an identity fit for becoming a daimyo's mistress, also implicitly depict that this social mobility is predicated to a significant degree on the developments toward an increasingly commercialized economy and society, as the protagonist sells her body, labor, and knowledge in a multitude of forms throughout her life to get by.

It is within this larger work that the short story A Stylish Woman Who Brought Disaster, or *Wazawai no kankatsu onna* (妖孳寛濶女), takes place, in the second chapter of the third volume. The narrator, working under a daimyo's wife who resides in Edo, accompanies her visit to a secondary residence. There, the protagonist encounters the opening of a 'jealousy meeting,' where the women are asked to confess to their feelings and acts of jealousy, using a strangely well-crafted doll which they proceed to inflict verbal and physical abuse upon. After several confessions that fail to satisfy the daimyo's wife, the protagonist enacts the plight of a lord's wife neglected in lieu of a mistress. This greatly pleases the daimyo's wife, who admits she is in just

such a position and that the doll was made in the image of her husband's mistress. At its end, the story takes a brief turn to the supernatural as the doll seemingly comes to life to attack the daimyo's wife, and when details of the incident find their way to the daimyo, the wife is shunned by her husband and the mistress is dismissed for fear of curses, with the ending implicitly suggesting that the protagonist is the one who 'brought disaster' to the household.

On its surface, the story components and structure of A Stylish Woman Who Brought Disaster are illustrative of many of those that persist through the larger work as a whole. The premise of the chapter begins like most of the others, placing the protagonist in a different occupation and setting than the last. And there is a general progression that can be identified as the protagonist moves through different segments of society. A cursory look at the first three volumes shows that the woman starts early on by reaching the high-ranking position of a daimyo's mistress. She then moves (downward) through courtesan ranks in the pleasure quarters, and subsequently takes on a number of different roles and occupations outside of it, interacting with merchants, priests, or other types of commoners. She then enters a warrior household as a waiting woman. Taking advantage of an anecdotal format of storytelling reminiscent of other stories labeled as *setsuwa* (説話), these individual chapters can also largely be read as self-contained short stories, each one having its own story from beginning to end. Inversely, the details between stories are not necessarily explained, nor does Saikaku seem to pursue a sense of realism in the mechanisms the protagonist uses to actually move between these different roles and sections of society.

The fact that the shift in roles itself seems to be prioritized over the coherence of transitions between chapters suggests that part of the intended appeal of Life of a Sensuous Woman may have been in the variety of environments and experiences it deals with. For

example, in the ending of the previous chapter, the first chapter of the third volume titled *Chōnin koshimoto* (町人腰元), the narrator recounts herself going insane after a failed attempt to seduce her merchant employer and curse his wife to separate them. Such an ending does not lend itself well to a logical progression to the next chapter, where the setting abruptly shifts to the woman working in Edo for the warrior household of a daimyo, and nor is the transition between them explicitly explained. To highlight a more egregious example, in the third chapter of the third volume, the protagonist works as a nun, taking vows and cutting her hair, but in the following fourth chapter, she again works for a warrior household, but this time as a hairdresser that is ironically envied for her hair. Although at the end of A Stylish Woman Who Brought Disaster, the woman remarks she “returned to Kyoto feeling so disappointed with the world I thought I might become a nun” (出家にもなる程のおもひして、又、上方に帰る), providing some foreshadowing that connects the stories of the second and third chapters, the remaining details are entirely left out (Shirane 2002, 105; Shōgakukan 1996, 473). This touch of absurdity may, though, have been the point.

In other words, this may be because although Life of a Sensuous Woman takes the format of a larger, unified narrative, more than any concern over a logical continuity across stories it is the variety to be found in the situations it depicts that is its bigger priority. And this could make sense if one tries to answer the question of Saikaku’s ‘intended’ audience with the work, taking into account the historical context of 17<sup>th</sup> century Japan, particularly the evolution of audiences and authors’ relationships with them. With developments such as advancements in printing technology, the emergence of a publishing industry, and rising literacy rates, writing also gained another dimension as a commercial practice. Authors, and especially those of popular vernacular fiction such as Saikaku, were thus writing for wider audiences than before that they weren’t

intimately familiar with. This could have been a motivation for this focus on change and variety between chapters, as doing so could lead to a wider appeal, either through the representation itself attracting readers or conversely targeting those wanting a glimpse into the private stories and details of the daily lives of those in different positions. The latter may have been especially relevant considering that society was supposed to be strictly divided by class in the eyes of the state-sponsored ideology of Confucianism.

This awareness of a heterogenous audience may also have a part in explaining the apparent lack of any consistent ideology it advocates for or attempts to impart to its audience. A work within the *ukiyo-zōshi* genre, Life of A Sensuous Woman primarily focuses on the topics of love, sexual pleasure, and the inconstancy of the contemporary world, from a perspective that from the onset leans more toward the values of the urban commoners or townspeople (*chōnin* 町人) rather than those of the warrior class. Moreover, it arguably undermines the image of latter by depicting the reality of the scandals happening in their households, like the feelings between the mistress and main wife of the daimyo in the story of A Stylish Woman Who Brought Disaster. But Saikaku appears to consciously include elements from both of these conflicting ideologies, whether that be in the narrative loosely following the format of the Buddhist *zange* that negatively judges the actions of the protagonist or other characters, or in the fact that it at times explicitly reinforces hierarchies and relationships as prescribed by Confucianism. The chapter of A Stylish Woman Who Brought Disaster, like several others, ends with a line summarizing a lesson learned from its contents: “jealousy is something you must never, never give in to . . . [w]omen should be very careful to resist it” (さらさらせまじき物は憎気, これ女のたしなむべきひとつなり) (Shirane 2002, 105; Shōgakukan 1996, 473). A possible, albeit admittedly uninspired explanation may again be found in the historical context for literature. That is, it may

have been a response to the presence and threat of censorship by the government, which throughout the Edo period saw the pleasure quarters and the values associated with it as an issue, although this is naturally not made explicitly clear anywhere. Alternatively, the ambiguity of didactic purpose and interweaving of various cultural and textual influences, alongside its range of subject material may have also acted to broaden its accessibility and appeal to larger audiences. For audiences in or adjacent to the warrior class, for example, these incorporations of Confucian rhetoric could either add an element of plausible deniability or serve to an extent to curb moral inhibitions or qualms.

Beyond such surface-level details, however, a closer reading and analysis of A Stylish Woman Who Brought Disaster, provides further elaboration on the possible appeal of fictional works and the mechanics of fictional narratives themselves. The literary techniques used in its opening passages, for instance, can be interpreted as bringing both the protagonist and reader into a certain type of fictional space whose qualities could be especially attractive in the context of a stratified society. The chapter begins by describing a scene of serving women playing kickball, which is mentioned to “[have] long been a sport for aristocratic men and warriors” (蹴鞠のあそびは男の態なりしに) (Shirane 2002, 100; Shōgakukan 1996, 466). In doing so, it recalls classical poetic imagery with its inclusion of language like “azaleas [that] were beginning to bloom, turning all the small fields and hills a bright crimson,” the original text pivoting the word for “bright crimson” (*kurenai* 紅) to also modify the “long divided skirts” (*hakama* 袴) that “nearby . . . some waiting women [were] wearing” (広庭、きり島の躑躅咲き初めて、野も山も紅の袴を召したる女藤あまた) (Shirane 2002, 100; Shōgakukan 1996, 466). Witnessing this, the narrator herself admits that “I was amazed that women were doing this. It was the first time I’d seen anything like it” (女の身ながら女のめづらしく、かかる事どもはじめて詠め

し), stressing the unfamiliarity and novelty (using *mezurashiku* めづらしく) of what she sees the women doing, “despite [also] being a woman” (*onna no mi nagara* 女の身ながら) (Shirane 2002, 100; Shōgakukan 1996, 466). Other chapters similarly open with such poetic imagery, but here there is an additional dimension in the portrayal of the protagonist entering into the strange, an impression which persists throughout.

In a manner characteristic of *haibun*, Saikaku produces unconventional associations and contrasts between the present and a classical past. What results is the formation of a fictional space, charged with an uncertain temporality and partially removed from hierarchies of class and gender, where despite the people in the space being in positions heavily restricted by various societal rules and expectations (as women in a warrior household), they are free to deviate from them. That isn't to say that such distinctions are eliminated completely; after further references to the historical figures of Prince Shōtoku and Yang Guifei and their influences on the pastimes of nobility, the woman concludes that these deviations from gendered traditions are possible precisely due to the position of a daimyo's wife: “the wife of a domain lord is free to do whatever she wants. How magnificent she was!” (国の守の奥がたこそ、自由に花麗なれ) (Shirane 2002, 101; Shōgakukan 1996, 467). Here as well, Saikaku does not commit to either wholly undermining or reinforcing contemporary hierarchies, but it may also suggest the actual inability for stories to completely escape their influences, or perhaps in the specific case of Life of a Sensuous Woman, it is practically unavoidable as its overarching narrative directly deals with both vertical and horizontal movement in such a hierarchal society.

What is perhaps the most intriguing element of the chapter, though, and answers the question of what is actually done within this formed ‘fictional space,’ is the ‘jealousy meeting,’ or *rinkikō* (愒気構), which the rest of the chapter revolves around. Embedded with several

different allusions and associations to various types of narratives and the mediums in which they appear, it can be seen as both a sort of microcosm of the larger work of Life of a Sensuous Woman as well as an allegory for fictional narratives and stories in general.

Like the larger work itself, the jealousy meeting is framed as containing elements of the Buddhist *zange*, both in its content and its physical arrangement. In the opening of the meeting, the head waiting woman Yoshioka tells the group to “speak about anything at all . . . Don’t hold anything back. Confess something you yourself did” (何によらず身のうへの事を懺悔して), explicitly using the word *zange* (懺悔) to describe the act of sharing moments they harbored or acted upon ‘sinful’ emotions such as jealousy, hatred, and resentment (Shirane 2002, 102; Shōgakukan 1996, 467). The communal setting of the meeting is also highlighted, as serving women of all ranks participate: “. . . soon even the cooks and bath maids appeared and sat without the slightest hesitation in a circle around the lord’s wife. There must have been thirty-four or thirty-five women in all” (御末女・渡し女にいたるまで憚りなく、三十四五人車座に見えわたりし) (Shirane 2002, 102; Shōgakukan 1996, 467). This ‘flattening’ of the hierarchal structures between members, alongside the image of the women ‘sitting in a circle’ (*kurumaza* 車座), could together with Buddhist sentiments also recall the practice of *renga* (連歌, ‘linked verse’) meetings or other forms of communal literature, also historically significant in their ability to bring together those from different backgrounds and ranks.

In so characterizing the jealousy meeting, however, it also speaks to the multiple, at times contradictory, allures of public confession and by extension the Buddhist confessional narrative. In one view, confessing in the form of public storytelling allows one to declare one’s sins and devotion to Buddhist salvation thereafter, and implicitly serves as a call to others to join in or learn from one’s own mistakes. In other words, it has both a self-serving and didactic purpose. At



the same time, it can also serve as a form of pure entertainment, just as the overarching narrative of Life of a Sensuous Woman allows an audience to vicariously experience the vicissitudes of the woman's life full of indulging desire while also taking the form of a confession. And indeed, it is this latter kind of appeal that appears to come out the strongest in the jealousy meeting. The meeting is, after all, held foremost to satisfy the wishes of the daimyo's wife, acting as the audience. Its opening announcement does not only ask for 'confessions' but specifically for those that relate to her latent emotions and desires: "[confess] how you blocked another woman's love for a man and hated her. How you were jealous of a man going to see another woman and spoke badly of him. Or the pleasure you felt when a man and woman broke up. Stories like these will bring great joy to our mistress" (女を遮って悪み、男を妬ましく誇りて、恋の無首尾を御悦喜) (Shirane 2002, 102; Shōgakukan 1996, 467-8).

The concept and practice of jealousy meetings were not an original idea of Saikaku's, which were apparently commonly held in 17<sup>th</sup> century Japan especially by women in the upper ranks of society (Shirane 2002, 101). The doll that appears in A Stylish Woman Who Brought Disaster, on the other hand, seems to be an entirely novel addition, and its inclusion produces several other associations, specifically to the use of dolls in rituals and forms of theatre. The use of dolls in religious rituals, for example as substitutes to transfer sins or impurities to (in this context sometimes referred to as *hitogata* 人形), would fit well with the possible Buddhist connotations previously mentioned. The jealousy meeting also contains strong connections to the practice of curses, aided by the lingering fact that the protagonist herself attempts something similar in the chapter directly prior. At the chapter's end, she expresses an understanding that "the lord's wife, out of jealousy, [was] trying to kill her with curses" (奥さま御心入れひとつにて、憎気構にてのろひころしける), or taking the text more literally, trying to curse and kill

her “through the jealousy meeting” (*rinkikō ni te* 愒気構にて) itself (Shirane 2002, 105; Shōgakukan 1996, 473).

The description of the doll and how it is actually used in the jealousy meeting suggests other forms of narratives. The doll is introduced as “a life-size doll that looked exactly like a real woman. The artisan who made it must have been a master. It had a graceful figure and a face more beautiful than any blossom in full bloom. I myself am a woman, but I was entranced and couldn’t stop gazing at it” (形を生き移しなる女人形取出されけるに、いづれの工が作りなせる、姿の婀娜も、面影美花を欺き、見しうちに、女さへこれに奪はれける) (Shirane 2002, 102; Shōgakukan 1996, 468). The dolls’ stressed resemblance to the real thing, and its treatment as a substitute for such within the several confessions that follow, puts in mind the several theatre arts that utilized dolls, and particularly that of *jōruri* puppet plays, which focused on the puppets’ detail and delicate ability to mimic human emotion, and especially so considering Saikaku’s own experience as a *jōruri* playwright.

Regardless of whether it’s through connections to ritual traditions or theatre, though, the jealousy meeting can be read as speaking to the same function or appeal of narratives in literature and fiction. In the context of the jealousy meeting, it allows individuals able to process and fulfill certain desires or the emotional needs that they wouldn’t otherwise be able to, either due to social or material restraints, and to do so within the controlled environment of a fictional space removed from any of the consequences they would face would they attempt to do the same in the real world. This dimension of the jealousy meeting is, like the scene that opens the chapter, underscored by the setting it occurs in and the people participating in it. It is all women, and although they come from a range of various ranks and occupations, they are all within the confines of a warrior household, both literally and figuratively.

A closer reading of the confessions themselves with these associations in mind bolsters this interpretation. Despite the Buddhist connections evoked by the format of confessional narrative of anecdotes, there is little to no explicit element of repentance or guilt. Instead, the confessions primarily act as a form of public storytelling or therapy for the audience, through either a reliving or simulation of the experience for the speaker. The first of the chapter's four confessions is performed by the character Iwahashi, who after telling of when she tailed her husband going to meet and sleep with another woman, reenacts her biting of that woman with the doll. Interestingly, the narrator describes "the way she did it" as "ma[king] me feel that right there in front of me, with my own eyes, I was seeing exactly what had happened that night long ago. I was terrified" (かの姿人形にしがみ付けるは、その時を今のやうにおもはれ、恐ろしさかぎりなかりき), highlighting the scene's immersive quality and ability to evoke the emotional response of fear instead of any of its confessional or didactic contents (Shirane 2002, 103; Shōgakukan 1996, 469).

Each following confession takes the same format, in the telling of a story followed by the affliction of abuse toward the doll. The doll is, in the eyes of those confessing, transformed into the physical or verbal outlet of their negative emotions. This transformation can be seen in the different perceptions between the women of the jealousy meeting and the narrator, specifically in how the doll is referred to differently between dialogue and narration. After the second story, which talks of the speaker's niece becoming humiliated and then pushed to exhaustion by her husband's sexual frivolity and vigor, she says, "I'd like to make him do it again and again right now with this doll here. Until he falls over dead!" (そのつよ蔵めをこの女に掛けて、間なくころさせたし), and the narrator then describes how "she hit the doll and knocked it over, and then she screamed at it for some time" (かの人形をつきころばし、姦しく立騒ぎてやむ事な

し) (Shirane 2002, 103; Shōgakukan 1996, 470). Although not completely captured within the translation, the confession refers to the doll as *onna* (女, ‘woman’), while the narrator uses *ningyō* (人形, ‘doll’).

The same distinction is seen after the third story, where the speaker says, “Hey, beautiful doll . . . Yes, you’re so very, very smart, aren’t you. You even know how to make another woman’s husband stay overnight at your house!” (こんな姿の女めが、気を通し過ぎて、男の夜どまりするをもかまはぬ物ぢゃ), followed by the narration of “Then she began to disfigure the innocent doll” (科もなきかの人形をいためける) (Shirane 2002, 104; Shōgakukan 1996, 471). Here, the contrast is even further emphasized, as the modifier of “innocent,” or *toga mo naki* (科もなき, lit. ‘without fault’) is used, suggesting that it is not only the doll’s external physical appearance but also its internal moral character and quality that is being altered. (Shirane 2002, 104; Shōgakukan 1996, 471). This serves to accentuate the disconnect between reality as observed by the narrator and that which is being reconstructed by each narrative within the imaginary space of the jealousy meeting.

The protagonist’s gaze as the narrator adds another layer with her role as an outside audience and can be interpreted as an allusion to other ways of enjoying fictional narratives like the confession. While those that ‘confess’ can be seen as reliving or simulating certain experiences to directly achieve a sort of catharsis through their actions, the narrator is a step removed from this process, but is arguably extracting another form of emotional fulfillment, through judgments and comparisons of the characters, either with herself or others. Each of the speakers is noticeably described negatively in some fashion by the narrator. Iwahashi, for instance, is said to have “had a face so classically unattractive it invited disaster” (妖孽まねく顔

形、さりとは醜かりし), which also provides as foil to the beautified features of the doll (Shirane 2002, 102; Shōgakukan 1996, 468). Their stories, moreover, while providing themselves with a form of emotional release, are fundamentally ones of misfortune. Still, if not through the process of self-insertion, one can gain a sense of superiority as the narrator does here, either through favorably comparing oneself to a story's characters, or through engaging empathetically by extending sympathy or pity to them. The same would apply to the overarching narrative of Life of a Sensuous Woman, which is in one view also a story of decline and regret.

Another possible reading is that the narrator is inserting herself into the place of the doll that she notably elevates, considering that the stories of the women and their recasting of the doll are reminiscent of the protagonist's own past actions. The first casts the doll as a woman who stole a husband, as an object of resentment; the second, as a woman full of sexual desires, to inflict the same pain to the man who exhausted a niece through his; and the third, to a woman who has relations while serving a single mistress, again as an object of envy and resentment. The protagonist has, at various moments in the chapters so far, already found herself in these positions, either implicitly with her experiences in the pleasure quarter, or explicitly with her attempts to seduce men away from their wives (such as in the chapter directly preceding this one, *Chōnin koshimoto*). In other words, she can already be seen disrupting the relationships of other women and would have likely gathered sentiments of envy or resentment from some of them. In that sense, the confessions in this chapter provide another perspective for the story, as the 'other side' or 'victims' of the protagonist's actions.

Perhaps ironically then, it is the narrator's awareness of these other perspectives that allows her to connect at the end of the chapter to the daimyo's wife, who remains unsatisfied even after this series of confessions. Instead of constructing a narrative that satisfies her own

desires, she is aware of the daimyo's wife as the audience (and employer) that is watching her, and so her in a performance 'recasts' herself as the daimyo's wife and the doll as the mistress occupying her husband's attention. The narrator specifically says "I . . . acted as if I truly hated the doll from the bottom of my heart . . . what I'd said turned out to be what the lord's wife herself had been thinking." (骨髓通してうらみし有様、御前さまの不断おぼしめし入りの直中へ持つてまゐれば) (Shirane 2002; Shōgakukan 1996, 471). The use of language such as *arisama* (有様), in creating an 'appearance' of extreme resentment, and *motte maireba* (持つてまゐれば), literally 'bringing' the scene she performs toward or into the wife's complex surrounding her husband's mistress, suggest the deliberate and calculated quality of her actions. Extending an allegorical reading, the woman finally takes on the role of an author perhaps like Saikaku, identifying and writing for an audience. Doing so secures her success in providing what the daimyo wife desires but cannot directly request.

Reading this section in relation to previous chapters, particularly the third chapter of the first volume The Mistress of a Domain Lord or *Kokushu no enshō* (国主の艶妾), also leads to some interesting discoveries. As the title suggests, during this chapter the woman briefly experiences being in the position of a daimyo's mistress. Notably, near the end of the chapter, after being disappointed by the daimyo's lack of attention and virility, she makes the following observation:

Daimyo lords usually spend most of their time in the front rooms of their mansions overseeing domain business, and without knowing it, they become attracted to the young pages with long hair who are constantly waiting on them.

The love a lord feels for a page is deeper than anything he feels for a woman. His

wife is definitely in second place. In my opinion, this is because a lord's wife isn't allowed to show her jealousy the way commoner women do. (Shirane 2002, 91)

惣じて大名は面むきの御勤めしげく、朝夕ちかうめしつかはれし前髪に、  
いつとなく御ふびんかかり、女には格別の哀れふかく、御本妻の御事外に  
なりける。これをおもふに、下々のごとく、りんきといふ事もなきゆゑぞ  
かし。(Shōgakukan 1996, 414)

The passage predominantly focuses on the figure of the “young page” (*maegami* 前髪), with the main contrast being between the lord's relationship with a male youth and a woman such as his wife. But the original text also includes what can be read as a reference to relationships with mistresses or other women outside of marriage in the embedded phrase *onna ni wa kakubetsu no aware fukaku* (女には格別の哀れふかく), a literal translation being ‘having a separate (or special) affection for women,’ these “women” (*onna* 女) being implicitly distinct from the “[main] wife” (*go-honsai* 御本妻) (Shōgakukan 1996, 414). The passage can thus also be interpreted as singling out the main wife as being in the most difficult position of all—not just in ‘second place,’ but in last.

Likewise significant is the final sentence, referring to the expression of “jealousy,” or *rinki* (りんき). The ‘jealousy meeting’ (*rinkikō* 愷気構) reveals itself as the indirect way the daimyo's wife processes these latent emotions and explains her participation in it as solely an audience. She expresses a similar sentiment in A Stylish Woman Who Brought Disaster, as she laments how “It's very sad being a woman—complaining does no good at all. But I did have this doll made to look like her [the daimyo's mistress]. At least I can cause pain to it” (女の身のかな

しさは、申して甲斐なき恨み、せめては、それめが形を作らせて、このごとくさいなむ) (Shirane 2002, 104; Shōgakukan 1996, 471). Altogether, a joint reading of these two chapters instills a dimension of sympathy directed from the protagonist to the wife, possibly explaining why she was able to construct such an effective ‘confession’ for the daimyo’s wife in the jealousy meeting. As an allegory for fictional narratives, it further speaks to their role particularly for those in constrained societal positions. For those that are unable to even voice their regrets, all they can do is emulate or project them onto others and satisfy such latent desires through indirect means like literature or theatre.

The analysis hitherto makes possible a reinterpretation of the doll’s role, as well as that of the supernatural occurrence near the end that clashes with the otherwise relatively realistic perspective maintained by Saikaku for its majority. If the chapter is one that intends to make the reader aware of the multiple parties involved and their respective perspectives, then the moment the doll comes to life can also be fit into this framework. After all, even after the daimyo’s wife finally achieves her catharsis from the jealousy meeting, there are still those who have not yet had a chance to truly participate, either as speakers or the audience: that is, the doll itself, which has been essentially a prop and victim to abuse in the name of the narrative, and the mistress that it is made in the image of and partially represents. That the doll, after seemingly becoming sentient, “[grabs] the front of the lord’s wife’s outer robe and wouldn’t let go” (御前さまの上かへをつまに取りつきし) reverses between them the roles they held up until that point, as it is finally granted its own form of agency (Shirane 2002, 104; Shōgakukan 1996, 471-2). If it’s to be read as a representation of the mistress, then it may also function as a reminder to the reader that the relationship between the daimyo’s mistress and wife may have not been as one-dimensional or a one-way exchange of emotions as portrayed for most of the chapter.



Of significance is also the story's progression after this event, as it is not any lingering otherworldly influence, but the indirect emotional and social consequences of the supernatural occurrence that are given narrative focus. The narrator tells of how "the waiting women thought she must be possessed by the doll's soul" (「人形の一念にもあるやらん」と、いづれも推量して), and how even after the doll is burned and buried, "the rumor spread beyond the mansion walls, and the lord's wife became the object of widespread ridicule" (これを伝へて世の嘲哂とはなりぬ), which eventually results in her relationship with her husband deteriorating (Shirane 2002, 104; Shōgakukan 1996, 472). The details of the incident itself are left unexplained. Instead, it is how the event is understood and judged by the surrounding parties, and the way this develops into speculation and rumors, that it comes to exert influence on the real world. Regardless of whether the audience believes the doll really came to life or not, there are indeed very real consequences for the daimyo's wife and household. When read in such a manner, the abrupt insertion of the supernatural almost functions as a break or transition between the fictional and real, and as an assertion of the narrative's ability to have influence on reality through its sway over emotions and behavior. And although not deeply explored by Saikaku in this chapter, the rumors themselves are arguably stories or narratives in their own right.

These scenes, alongside the singular and brief appearance of the daimyo's mistress, reveal the inherent oversights in the narratives that have been presented to the reader so far. At the chapter's end, the narrator sees the daimyo's mistress in person during her duties as a messenger, and comments that "when the woman appeared and sat nervously on her knees before the lord, I saw she was far more graceful and beautiful than the doll had been. I was a bit proud of my own looks, you know, and we both were women, but I was so overwhelmed I could hardly bear to look at her" (この女、嬋娟にして、跪づける風情、最前の姿人形のおよぶべき事

にはあらず。それがしもすこしは自慢をせしに、女を女の見るさへ眩くなりぬ) (Shirane 2002, 105; Shōgakukan 1996, 472-3). In what can be seen as one last subversion, the doll, whose beauty and physical resemblance had been so emphasized until then, is ultimately exposed as not being able to stand up to the thing it is supposed to imitate and represent. The reader is not allowed any sort of look into the internal world of the mistress, and neither is anything beyond a brief and abstract physical description given to form a concrete impression of her character. A deeper reading might suggest that the audience is being simultaneously left with a reminder of the limits of narratives in their ability to fully capture reality and all its relevant subjectivities.

Through forming what feels like a complex web of layered and interconnected fictional narratives found throughout the larger work of Life of a Sensuous Woman, the stories of each chapter, the subjective realities of each individual character, and the smaller scale narratives they create or otherwise engage with, Saikaku either directly or implicitly asks and answers questions about the spaces that these narratives exist within, the numerous ways these spaces and stories are utilized or interacted with, and how they relate to more abstract concepts such as the relationship between fiction and reality. An attempt to navigate through just some of these through an allegorical analysis as done here unveils possible avenues for which to not only better understand certain views of fiction and literature, but can incidentally also lead to discovering new dimensions of the story, its characters, and the deeper relationships between its moving parts, all of which likely contributing to a greater appreciation for the work as a whole.

While the singular chapter of A Stylish Woman Who Brought Disaster was chosen for the opportunity of analysis centered around the portrayal of the ‘jealousy meeting,’ it should still be kept in mind that this analysis was limited to a very small portion of larger work.

However, the same or similar analysis can likely be repeated or adapted and applied to other

instances where Saikaku depicts fiction or narratives. The recurring appearances of theatre like kabuki or related imagery in his works, for example, comes up to mind as possible places for further analysis. While Saikaku's own voice or stance about broad moral or value judgments may remain largely hidden within his works, inquiries like these can at least provide small glimpses into what he may have been aware of while writing.

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