

Life as Art

Or, the Aesthetic Temptations of Eleventh-
Century Japan: *Pillow Book*, 52-125
(October 16, 2003)

The good life

- Crito and Socrates: where they disagree
- Where Crito is unable to answer Socrates
- The good life is a life spent dealing justly with others and improving one's soul, even at the expense of one's personal life
- The reward structure of *The Sims*

Lightness and density

- Density of literary reference, of personal implication
- But this play of internal reference doesn't seem to be about anything serious
- Why are “Depressing Things,” “Hateful Things” that way?

Experiments with value

- Section 149: “There are times when the world so exasperates me that I feel I cannot go on living in it for another moment and I want to disappear for good. But then, if I happen to obtain some nice white paper, Michinoku paper, or white decorated paper, I decide I can put up with things as they are a little longer.”

Desire

- ... And disappointment (sec. 13)
- ... And loss
- ... And frustration (sec. 14)

Beyond good and evil?

- What would be a life lived for the sake of beauty?
- As opposed to....?

“Should be”

- Aesthetic standards applied to daily life
 - “A carriage passes by with a nasty, creaking noise... [When this happens,] I dislike not only the noise but also the owner of the carriage” (sec. 14)
- The arbiter of elegance?
 - “as in a novel”
 - Sections 52 (Tadanobu’s visit), 86 (the square cakes)
- Romances and novels
 - Genre confusions in the *Pillow Book*: sections 177, 179, 180, 181, 182— descriptions or fictions?

Canons of beauty and value

- What are the ideals of this text?
- Meticulousness of the descriptions: beauty is infinitely specifiable
- Lingering over details: details make all the difference
- Openness and closedness of definitions
- Beauty in relation to what other values?

Conversation as strategy game



Section 89

The emergence of individuality

- Sei Shōnagon as unusual woman
- The exception and the rule
- Being seen; being recognized; being loved
- Our role