

The Kagero Diary: A Woman's Autobiographical Text from Tenth-century... Study Guide

The Kagero Diary: A Woman's Autobiographical Text from Tenth-century... by Edward Seidensticker

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Plot Summary

"The Kagero Diary," is the autobiographical recordings of a Japanese woman from the tenth century. The book is translated by Sonja Arntzen from the original diary by the unknown woman. The diary represents the Heian period (794-1185) of classical Japanese literature. The author, identified only as Michitsuna's Mother (Michitsuna being the author's son), is recognized as a talented and artistic writer and poet. The woman writes about her life, with the greatest focus on her dysfunctional marriage to a man named Fujiwara Kaneie. Throughout the first two sections of the book, the misery that her disappointing marriage has caused her is the focal point of her entries and is poignantly obvious to those who read her words some one thousand years later.

The entries begin when the older Fujiwara first shows interest in the nineteen-year-old woman. She tells her father that he is not suitable for her but despite her reservations, the man is determined to win her over. During this courting period, many poems and messages are exchanged between the two. Finally, he wins her over—or at least wins her father over—and they marry. Just nine months later, she gives birth to a son, Michitsuna. Although the woman is ready to accept her life and make the most of it, Fujiwara does not take his marriage vows seriously.

Soon after they marry, Fujiwara begins taking up with his first wife, spending many hours and days at her residence. He has a child with his first wife who tries her best to win Fujiwara back. Surprisingly, the woman feels empathy for the first wife and sends her several messages, expressing her belief that Fujiwara is abusing both of them. Although Fujiwara never officially returns to the first wife, he continues the relationship for years and has another child with the woman. Fujiwara later takes up with a promiscuous woman named Omi and has a child with another woman with whom he has only a casual affair. The child, a daughter, is ironically adopted by the woman and Fujiwara later at the prompting of the woman.

Throughout the majority of the book, the woman expresses her uncertainty and pain in being married to a man who blatantly flaunts his affairs with other women and visits her only at his whim. Almost as painful as the adultery is the fretting and worry she experiences when and if he comes to visit her. The woman is a good mother and despite her obsession with her wayward husband, Michitsuna's welfare is always of paramount importance to her. She delivers a not so thinly veiled threat to her husband that if he does not take proper care of their son should she die first that she will avenge him from the grave. Her caring nature is underscored in her desire to adopt the young girl who is the illegitimate child of her roving husband.

In the final section of the book, the woman finally finds peace in her heart. Although Fujiwara never changes and becomes the husband she dreamed of as a young woman, she has come to accept him and focuses her attention on her children, her spiritual life and her community.



Book One: Pages 55 through 94

Book One: Pages 55 through 94 Summary and Analysis

Michitsuna's Mother, (MM), the author of the diary, reflects on a disappointing relationship with her husband, Fujiwara Kaneie. MM is from middle-ranking aristocracy while Fujiwara is from a wealthier branch of the same family. Fujiwara begins courting the nineteen-year-old MM by sending her lyrical poetry by messenger and by boldly confronting her father about his intentions. MM tells her father the man is not suitable for her but that does not seem to matter. MM reluctantly begins responding to his messages and he replies quickly, abundantly and with great affection. MM remains remote and distant in her replies. The exchange of correspondence continues for months, with Fujiwara constantly pressuring MM for her affection.

When Fujiwara tries to visit MM but she is away in the mountains, he accuses her of hiding from him. Fujiwara begins to visit more often, which MM regards as "cheating" her. As MM reflects on the past, she compares these early impressions to her current life with Fujiwara who does eventually become her husband. She expresses how sad she is and how just the sight of him makes her burst into tears. Even though he pledges his love to her, she grows to distrust.

Nine months after their courtship begins, MM's father has to leave on a prolonged trip. MM hates to see her father go. She is upset that her father leaves an encouraging note for Fujiwara, asking him to take care of his daughter. Fujiwara takes the message to heart and marries MM. Nine months later, MM gives birth to a son, Michitsuna. Fujiwara is away for many weeks after the baby is born. MM discovers a letter among his belongings that obviously is written to another woman. When confronted, Fujiwara claims he is testing MM's feelings. MM has her husband followed and learns that he is staying with another woman. Fujiwara spends many days and nights away and openly carries on his affair. MM is in despair, not knowing what to do.

MM learns that Fujiwara has been staying with his first wife, Tokihime, with whom he has a son. MM writes to Tokihime expressing a sympathy for the woman and acknowledging that both women are being neglected by Fujiwara. MM continues to fret, wondering if her marriage is over. With his infrequent visits, she remains in a state of uncertainty. The few times he stops by, Fujiwara is in a bad temper and abruptly leaves. He eventually tapers off visits even more. She is sad when she hears him walk by on his way to court. It is hard for her to sleep alone.

MM's husband flaunts his affair with his first wife, appearing with her in public. He has Tokihime with him in his carriage when he rides by MM's residence. The affair is the subject of gossip all over town. Even MM's servants are making comments about her husband's blatant behavior. The ultimate disgrace falls upon MM when she learns that



Tokihime has another baby. He has the unspeakable nerve to ask MM to sew new clothes for his household, which MM refuses to do.

Some months later, Fujiwara sends a message to MM, expressing his wish to visit her. She allows him to visit and although both are uncomfortable, he stays the night. A few days later after a typhoon hits the area, Fujiwara stops by to make sure she is safe. Since Fujiwara is staying for longer periods of time, MM begins to reason that Tokihime has lost favor with her husband. However, her worries soon return when his absences increase. MM has begun to hate the other woman and hopes that she will suffer as much as she has. MM's child, now two, imitated his father's often heard words, "See you later." When confronted, he acts innocent. She writes him a long verse, trying to explain her misery, even saying she would rather be dead than live with such sadness and uncertainty. She tells him her misery has driven her to consider going into the religious life.



Book One: Pages 95 through 136

Book One: Pages 95 through 136 Summary and Analysis

Fujiwara responds to MM's open and sincere letter. He expresses his love for MM but offers no apologies for his behavior. He reminds MM that her father asked him to take care of her which, he insists, he has done. He reminds her of times when she refused to see him, times when he banged on her door with no response. Fujiwara dismisses his relationship with his first wife as casual. He suggests to MM that if she is so unhappy with him, perhaps she should find another husband. He tries to pull on her heartstrings by reminding her of their memories together and of the son they share.

They exchange more letters, tinged with the excitement of a rekindled love. MM is heartened to learn that the other woman is trying everything she can to win Fujiwara back—which tells MM that the woman is not seeing him often or that the relationship might be over. Fujiwara is promoted to a new position in the ministry that he is not fully satisfied with. Perhaps this dissatisfaction causes him to come to see MM less frequently. His Highness, the Prince who is in charge of the ministry, writes to Fujiwara trying to encourage him about his new assignment.

As the rains pour in the winter months, MM and Fujiwara move into her empty father's house which is adjacent to the Prince's residence. The Prince sends messages that seemed to ridicule the problems that the couple is having. The Prince insists that he has never had unhappy affairs. When Fujiwara visits Tokihime, the Prince sends MM a message professing his adoration for her but sadness that they can never have a relationship. MM does not respond to the letter but shows it to Fujiwara when he returns. Fujiwara does not seem upset and chooses to ignore the obvious advance that the Prince is making toward his wife. The Prince writes later that he hopes there is no misunderstanding about his message to MM.

Months go by in which MM and Fujiwara are getting along. Fujiwara is allowed to return to the court at the ministry, a position which is much more satisfying to him. The Prince is absent from his home and it is assumed he is visiting a wife or lover. When he returns, he sends a message that he would like to accompany Fujiwara and MM to celebrate the Obon Ceremony. MM tells Fujiwara of her sadness and her uncertain future since, after ten years of marriage, they have only one child. Further sadness befalls MM's life when her mother succumbs to a long illness. MM is so distraught over her mother's passing that she becomes very ill. Her household servants are very worried about her health and well-being. MM's father reminds her that she still has one parent and encourages her to nourish herself back to good health. Fujiwara is upset over MM's state, but cannot touch her. The defilement of touching her would prohibit him from returning to court.



Although he cannot participate in the funeral and memorial for MM's mother, Fujiwara makes the arrangements and continues to pay for all future memorial services. Feeling sorry for his wife, Fujiwara begins visiting her more often in an effort to lift her spirits. During the year of mourning for her mother, MM lives with her aunt and brother. After the year passes, MM and her relatives purify their clothing in a special ceremony. After her mother's passing, MM relies heavily upon her sister. Unfortunately, her sister has to return home after the mourning period. Just when she is spinning into another depression over her sister's departure, MM receives a message from Fujiwara asking her to return. When she reunites with him, he scolds her that her constant crying spells will bring bad luck onto the household.

Fujiwara becomes very ill—so ill that he thinks he will soon die. He decides to stay at another residence so MM will not witness his declining health. MM becomes very depressed over her husband's health. He tells her that should he die she can remarry but should wait at least a year to allow the period of mourning to pass. She is bereft when he is taken away in a carriage. MM is so worried about him that she writes him multiple times each day. He is too weak to write back himself so has an assistant write the replies for him. Miraculously after ten days, Fujiwara feels much better and seems to recover completely. He begins responding to MM's letters himself.

MM visits Fujiwara who is still recovering. He has fasted, not eating any meat or fish, but wants to break his fast now that MM is with him. They have a nice visit and MM does not depart until the next morning. After she returns home, he writes her that they have left things unsettled and that he will soon visit. Even though he is still ill, after another few days he stops by to see her. Fujiwara returns to full health and resumes his regular visiting pattern. They attend the Gosechi Festival together where they play backgammon. Fujiwara arranges for a box adjacent to the Prince's. They have a splendid time at the festival.

The marriage continues past ten years with MM always feeling that her marriage is not like most others. With a limited staff and her father traveling most of the time, MM feels alone and abandoned. Many things in her household are in disrepair. Although MM broods about her state, Fujiwara claims to be too busy with work to help her. After an argument one day, Fujiwara leaves the residence for five days. MM again is beside herself in worry and sends him a letter. He reappears but the two, as usual, feel very uncomfortable with one another.



Book One: Page 137 through 168

Book One: Page 137 through 168 Summary and Analysis

As a way to vent her worries, MM makes pilgrimages to several shrines where she makes two prayer offerings of poems. MM is somewhat concerned that too much of her poetry consists of complaints and that her prayers will not be answered but will be ignored. MM strings up ten goose eggs and sends the garland as a present to the young prince. He dies a short while later and is succeeded by the East Prince. Fujiwara is promoted to head chamberlain and despite the mourning for the dead prince, Fujiwara receives many congratulations. MM feels pride in his position but still dissatisfaction with her marriage. With yet another promotion, Fujiwara moves MM to a residence closer to the court so he can see her more often. Lady Joganden comes to stay in an apartment in the same building. She is to tend to the needs of the East Prince. MM develops a friendship with Lady Joganden and they exchange poems and messages quite frequently.

MM decides to make a pilgrimage to Hase. At the small village of Uji, MM enjoys the sparkling water and forest. MM does not want to be noticed on this trip so she takes very few attendants with her. She loves watching the small fishing boats swaying to and fro in the calm water. As the carriage travels on, MM and her party cross the Izumi River and stop for the night at the Hashi Temple. The next day, they stay at another temple and the day after that at a market town called Tsubaichi. To her surprise, a courier appears with a message from Fujiwara who is worried about her. He wants to know when she will be back so he can meet her. MM returns a message telling her husband that she will be going deeper into the mountains and is uncertain of her return date.

MM is disappointed by the terrain they encounter, which is faded and lacking in flowering plants. MM is unable to fall asleep in the temple, being kept awake by a blind man who is pouring forth his troubles. She is so saddened by his words that her eyes fill with tears. On her return trip, a guardsman has been sent by Fujiwara to learn her location. The party breaks their fast by eating meat and fish—carp and bass. In a somewhat festive mood as they return from the pilgrimage, the attendants decorate the carriage with leaves and flowers. The carriage is towed across the river on a barge. When she returns, Fujiwara insists that she make preparations for the Purification Ceremony that is to take place. The next month, getting ready for the Enthronement Rites take a lot of her time. Her life is not what she had expected or wanted. Everything seems fleeting and unreal.



Book Two: Page 169 through 218

Book Two: Page 169 through 218 Summary and Analysis

The new year dawns. MM's household has never observed the superstition of not speaking inauspiciously on New Year's Day. Perhaps, she thinks, that is why things have not worked out that well for them. She quietly crawls out of her bed and advises her attendants to observe the rule of silence to begin the new day and new year. The household is happy and laughing. Her sister begins singing a funny song. Her son is joining in the fun as well. She sends a note to her husband who is getting ready to leave the house. Fujiwara responds with a comment about two fifth months in the new year in order to satisfy the lunar calendar.

The very next day, MM has an unpleasant incident involving the attendants. Her husband has sympathy for her and seems to side with her. She fears that living too close to him has caused unnecessary tension. In order to rectify the situation, he plans to move MM to another residence. The plan seems to have worked as there is much more harmony between them and the tension is eased within the household. He comes to visit every other day.

A month later, Fujiwara plans to host an archery contest on the grounds. There is much activity and excitement surrounding the plans—many men come and practice their archery skills. However, there is an incident that causes the plans to be canceled. By the end of the month, the minister of the left is banished and there is quite a uproar. The minister himself fears for his own fate and runs away and hides. When he is found, he learns the horrific news that he will be banished. The minister sees no further for himself in the ministry and becomes a monk—he is exiled although he is forced to accept duties in Kyushu. The whole incident is personally very disturbing for MM and that is why she records it in her diary.

Soon after, Fujiwara leaves to begin a prolonged fast. MM is not aware of his leaving probably because she is so caught up in her own sadness. She receives a letter from her husband telling her that he feels very depressed in the location he has chosen for his fast. MM comes down with a debilitating illness. Though it is serious, MM tries to bear up and not reveal that she is clinging to life. She cannot keep her attendants from healing rituals—such as burning poppy seeds—but they have no effect. Fujiwara stops by the front door but is unable to enter because of MM's illness. He seems to care very much about her health. There is evidence that he is still seeing his first wife on occasion. Fujiwara is building a new residence that he promises to show MM as soon as it is completed. She wonders if she will live that long and if she does survive, will he really bring her there because after all she does not know what is truly in his heart.

Out of concern for her welfare, Fujiwara sends monks to see MM in hopes that they can help bring her back to good health. MM, fearing that she is dying, writes to Fujiwara



warning him to not mistreat their son for if he does, she will punish him from beyond the grave. MM keeps the letter in a box with a note that it be opened after the period of mourning for her ends. After months of sickness, MM finally begins to feel better and starts to recover. She hears that the governor general's wife has become a nun. Feeling anguish for her friend, she writes a poem that contains all her feelings and thoughts about life and love. Around this time, MM decides to go on another pilgrimage, this time to Mitake. On this retreat, she plans to take their son along. MM is asked to write poems for a formal showing. Out of shyness, MM at first refuses but eventually agrees to submit her works after repeated requests. She writes poems about cranes, fish, fishing boats, horses, a celebration and the beach. Her works are to be accompanied by sketches contributed by an artist. Summer and fall turn into winter, a deep snow reminds MM how cold Fujiwara is. He is moving into his lavish new residence and she is staying where she is. She reminds herself that she has to learn from bitter experience.

MM's son practices for an archery contest to be held in the spring. The contest will be followed by a dance which her son also practices for. She is very proud of her son who seems to be skilled at both dance and archery. Fujiwara attends the event and is proud of his son's abilities. MM is joyful that Fujiwara takes part in the celebration. MM's son is the star of the show and helps his archery team win with his outstanding shooting abilities. MM glows in the aftermath of her son's victories—feeling overjoyed for many days following the event.

Fujiwara becomes ill again and does not visit often. MM waits and worries most nights, hoping he will come. News arrives that the grand minister of Ono Palace has passed away—there is a great to do over this occurrence. Fujiwara sends MM a message to have his mourning clothes prepared. She writes back that those attendants who make such clothing are away. He seems to be offended but she is in deep melancholy, noting that he has not come by for over a month. To ease her mind, MM makes a pilgrimage to Karasaki. MM is overcome with emotion, enchanted with the beauty of nature. The trip is enjoyable, culminating in a purification ceremony.

Upon her return from the purification ceremony, MM is still in deep depression over her husband's behavior. She writes him a letter and has her Michitsuna deliver it; however, her husband does not respond. However, suddenly one day he appears at her door. He explains that he has stayed away because he is in mourning and scolds her for sulking about his absences. His attitude upsets MM who falls into an even deeper depression. She prefers to die but the thought of Michitsuna keeps her going. She even broaches the subject of her own suicide with her son who threatens to become a monk if she kills herself.

MM hears a rumor that Fujiwara may be infatuated with an over-sexed serving lady named Omi. In her great sadness, MM takes a small entourage with her on another pilgrimage, this time to the Ishiyama Temple. After her return home, it is time for the Grand Sumo Tournament. MM has a costume made for her Michitsuna who wants to attend. Michitsuna goes to his father's residence before attending the event but his father all but ignores him. Michitsuna is saddened by his father's treatment of him. A short while later, Fujiwara appears and demands that all doors be locked for the day of



ritual seclusion. He ridicules MM for being startled by his behavior. Fujiwara scolds MM—it is not he who has had a change of heart but it is her who ruined the relationship by seeing everything in a bad light.

Fujiwara is promoted to major captain and in this lofty position is able to give Michitsuna an official court rank. Happy for her son, MM fears that her relationship with her husband has run its course. On the day of the Enthronement Rites, Fujiwara discusses with MM what clothes their son should wear. MM's mood is elevated as the conversation reminds her of good times they shared.



Book Two: Pages 219 to 271

Book Two: Pages 219 to 271 Summary and Analysis

But Fujiwara's absences continue. The pouring rain reminds MM of the time when neither wind nor rain would have kept him from her. The new year comes and goes with no sign of Fujiwara. MM once again hears the rumor that he is involved with Omi. On the rare occasions that he visits, he blames her "sad countenance" for his staying away. MM begins a fast and prays to Buddha for enlightenment. The days are long for MM, wondering about her husband and waiting to hear from him. She feels humiliation over her attendants' knowledge that he has all but abandoned her. When Fujiwara learns that MM is going on another retreat, he sends a message asking her to abandon her plans because he has something to discuss with her. MM ignores his request and departs on her planned trip. To her great surprise, Fujiwara arrives at the monastery where MM has traveled and demands that she return with him. Although she does not return immediately, she sends him a letter explaining that she is under ritual seclusion. She tries to strike a reconciliatory tone.

MM stays on her retreat, accompanied by her son. MM feels guilty seeing Michitsuna struggle with the vegetarian diet that she has pledged to maintain. She discusses becoming a nun with her son who is totally opposed to such fate for his mother. Fujiwara sends an entourage to encourage MM to return home. She is in a quandary about what to do—if she stays, will it mark the end of her marriage; if she returns will she feel humiliation? No matter who tries to persuade her to return—including her father—she will not return. Even though her son is miserable staying with her, she refuses to budge. Fujiwara finally accepts her decision but tells her he will accompany her home whenever she decides to return. An aunt and a cousin come to visit MM—bringing her food and gifts—but nothing will make MM leave her seclusion. The captain of the guards visits and offers to escort her home. She declines his offer but adds that she will soon be returning home.

Finally, MM's father demands that she return home. At home, she is greeted with Fujiwara who belittles her concern for plants and flowers over the welfare of her son and concern for his feelings. MM is in a daze when she first returns home, still unsure of her relationship. Fujiwara returns very quickly to his old ways—promising to come by and then, without explanation, failing to appear. When Fujiwara hears of MM's plan to make a pilgrimage to Hase Temple with her father, he displays wild behavior—throwing her incense lamp and rosary about. He seems to calm down after venting his rage and becomes pleasant and stays the day.

The pilgrimage to Hase Temple with her father reminds MM of a pilgrimage she made by herself when she was in the depth of depression over her husband's behavior. MM stays at her father's residence when they return home. Fujiwara is anxious to see MM and, in a letter, reminds her that the sumo tournament is coming up. Still, his visits

remain sporadic and infrequent. No taste for life remains within MM—growing old in the world seems meaningless to her.



Book Three: Pages 272 through 328

Book Three: Pages 272 through 328 Summary and Analysis

In the year of Tenroku (972), at last MM's heart is at peace. Although there is much activity—the Coming of Age Ceremony and the Presentation of the White Horses Ceremony—MM is disinterested. There are interactions between MM and Fujiwara but they are uneventful and not especially joyful to MM. Fujiwara is promoted to senior counselor. Michitsuna seems to be pleased and Fujiwara is insulted that MM does not send him congratulations. He tells her that his "happiness seems to be for nothing." (279) Fujiwara sends a message sometime later asking why he has not heard from her. She responds that with his new position, she realizes that he will have even less time for her. She no longer frets, however; she is at peace about their relationship.

MM's main focus turns to her son, Michitsuna. She has several dreams which are interpreted to mean that he will have a successful future. MM has always wanted more children and begins to think about adopting a girl from a good family. Someone suggests the daughter born to the daughter of the late Genji counselor Kanetada with whom Fujiwara had an affair. MM learns that the woman is considering becoming a nun, which compels her to write a letter to her requesting that she be given custody of her daughter. The girl is very attractive and elegant but small for her age. Fujiwara meets her and finds her charming. MM reveals that the girl is his daughter. Fujiwara is astonished and becomes emotional over the lost years with the girl. Thereafter, Fujiwara always asks about the welfare of the "little one." MM begins teaching the girl calligraphy and composition.

While MM is away participating in the Yahata festival, a fire breaks out in MM's neighborhood. She and her attendants rush back as quickly as possible. She is relieved that Michitsuna has taken control of the situation and saved their house and made sure that his sister was taken to safety. Fujiwara also hears about the fire and rushes over to make sure everyone is safe. During another festival, Michitsuna is attracted to a woman in a fine carriage and does his best to follow her home. He loses her in the crowd but is able to find her location and get a message to her that she pretends not to understand.

After months of not hearing from Fujiwara, MM receives a message from him that he has been very ill. Although at peace with his absence, she replies to his message that she felt awkward sending him messages other than those delivered by their son. Fujiwara confronts MM about her passivity. He asks her why she never asked about him and why she never invited him over. Why did she not tell him she hated him? Her response is that since he has all the answers, it is not necessary for her to reply. MM has predicted that she will die that fall. Michitsuna tries to contact his father at his first wife's residence to tell him about MM's poor health. He is unable to locate his father. MM lives through the ninth month—the prediction of her death is thus proven to be erroneous.



The archery contest takes place again in the spring and once again Michitsuna is one of the best archers, impressing those gathered as well as his parents. On the way to a festival, Fujiwara's carriage passes by MM's carriage. He puts a fan up to his face as he passes by. Later confronted with his "shyness," Fujiwara explains that he is just hiding his aged face. Michitsuna continues to court the woman in the carriage; however, in one letter she shows her hurt and anger toward him when she accuses him of courting another woman. Fujiwara's visits begin to dwindle in frequency.

MM is not able to adequately take care of her residence so her father insists that she move into one of his residences. She tries to reach Fujiwara to tell him of her planned move but he is unavailable so she moves without telling him. When Fujiwara realizes she has moved, he is upset with her for not telling him. She replies that since her new location is inconvenient, she does not expect him to visit. He replies that he does indeed find its location inconvenient. She does not hear from him for a long while.



Book Three: Pages 329 through 379

Book Three: Pages 329 through 379 Summary and Analysis

Although his visits have become infrequent and tinged with bitterness on his part, Fujiwara never fails to send his clothing to MM for repair and replacement. Another new year has come and gone with all the regular festivities. An associate of MM suggests that she join a group on another pilgrimage. Although MM has a positive attitude when she begins the pilgrimage, she does not like the large number of people who participate, some of whom she determines are of lower class than she. Just a few days after she returns, MM embarks on yet another pilgrimage to the Kamo Shrine. The trip takes place in the heart of winter, with wind and snow blowing. MM catches a bad cold and languishes in bed upon her return.

Michitsuna and his man servants celebrate the New Year, drinking and carousing. Although MM is happy that her son is sharing good times with other young men, the celebration makes MM feel desolate about her own life. She throws up a brick wall when an associate of Michitsuna's asks about the young girl, MM's adopted daughter, who lives in his house. MM journeys on another retreat deep in the mountains. The terrain is so dense, that hardly a bird can be heard. Once she returns, practice for another archery tournament has begun. The director who asked about MM's daughter approaches her, asking if Michitsuna has told her of his interest in the girl. He boldly asks MM if the girl has feelings like a woman yet. The man says he will send her a letter of proposal for her daughter. MM is shocked—her daughter is not ready for such attentions.

The letter arrives in which the man tells of his constant thoughts of the girl and that he would like to visit her. MM does not answer in a timely matter, which upsets the director. MM wants to get Fujiwara's feelings on the matter before she responds. Once Fujiwara is available, he tells MM to answer tactfully and that it is not a good idea for him to visit such a young girl. MM responds without agreeing to a visit from the man. The man, however, does not give up and continues to write letters to MM about the girl. MM does not answer all the letters. Finally, one day the man, who is quite handsome, appears at her door. MM tells her servants to tell the man she is not there.

MM is embarrassed by her maids who are peeking through the shutters at the handsome man when the wind catches the shutters and exposes their voyeurism. A few days later, MM sends the director a note of apology that she was away when he visited. He sends word back that he would like to visit again. MM does not invite him but he comes unannounced one evening on the pretense that he needs to talk with Michitsuna. When he speaks with MM, he apologizes for being so bold the last time they spoke. He begins to reiterate his feelings for the girl. MM tells him firmly that the girl is too young to enter into a relationship with him. He is unsatisfied with her response and remains in the



house very late into the evening. He tells MM that it will be necessary for him to return to her house on occasion to speak with Michitsuna.

The man is bold and keeps returning to the house—pressing MM for the chance to be with the girl and eventually commit to a marriage. She gives him the same response each time—the girl is too young for such a relationship. The director continues to pressure Michitsuna and even claims that Fujiwara has agreed to an immediate union between the two. Fujiwara, when contacted by MM, says that the man must wait until later in the year. The man is insistent, almost demanding that MM allow him to see the girl. MM and the director have quite a confrontation. He literally begs to see the girl but MM is steadfast. The man claims to be heartbroken and asks for some mercy from MM, whom he finds very cold. The day after their confrontation, she sends a conciliatory letter to which he responds with his sincere apologies for his behavior.

The director comes again and hints that he might be driven to suicide over the girl. Finally, the director agrees to the wedding taking place at the end of the year. However, he still presses MM to see the girl and to pressure Fujiwara to change the date of the wedding to the fourth month instead of the eighth month. MM tells him to talk directly to Fujiwara himself. The director stays away from MM but begins to pressure Michitsuna, telling him how much he cares for his sister. He expresses the hope that he will not die before their wedding date. The director is so desperate to marry the girl that he proposes cutting out the middle of the calendar and pasting it together. MM finds the notion charming and feels a little warmer towards the man. MM grows more sympathetic to the director, sensing his sincerity and genuine misery over the girl.

Finally, the eighth month comes but there is a terrible outbreak of small pox in the region that reaches their neighborhood. Unfortunately, Michitsuna has become infected. The wedding between the director and the girl does not take place. Although communication has broken down with Fujiwara, MM knows she has to let him know about his son's illness. Finally, after a month, Michitsuna recovers from the illness. The small pox epidemic rages on, taking the lives of many residents of the region. Although he does not visit, there are infrequent messages from Fujiwara inquiring about his son's health. The first day that Michitsuna is well enough to leave the residence, his carriage has an accident with the carriage of the woman he has been pursuing. She is rude to him and emphasizes that she has no interest in him. Fujiwara offers to come to the residence to help Michitsuna prepare for a festival but is not certain that MM will allow him to enter the residence. MM is crushed by his words and she quickly sends her son off to his father's residence. MM was very proud of Michitsuna's participation in the festival. Michitsuna meets a young woman with whom he begins to exchange messages. Sadly, the young woman loses interest in Michitsuna and eventually commits to marry someone else. The incident leaves Michitsuna sad and in pain.



Characters

Michitsuna's Mother

Michitsuna's mother is the author of the autobiographical work entitled, "The Kagero Diary." The woman is never identified beyond this description, other than the fact that she was a Japanese woman who lived over a 1,000 years ago. From her words and poetic expressions, it is apparent that the woman was a cultured and educated person with undeniable talents and abilities. The woman writes of her experiences from her marriage at a young age in approximately 949 through 974, which represent her later years when she finally finds peace in her heart and acceptance of a disappointing life.

The woman marries an older man named Fujiwara Kaneie who has relentlessly pursued her. Her instincts turn out to be right when at the age of nineteen she tells her father that Fujiwara is not suitable for her. Despite her reservations, Fujiwara is able to convince the woman and her father that he is the right man for her. She gives birth to her son, Michitsuna, just nine months after her marriage. Shortly after the child's birth, Fujiwara begins seeing his first wife with whom he has a child. Although he never officially leaves the woman, Fujiwara continues his wayward ways throughout the duration of their marriage having multiple affairs with other women.

The woman goes through the pain and humiliation of a man who blatantly flaunts his adulterous ways in front of friends, neighbors and servants. She never knows when to count on the man. As the years go by, her husband's absences increase. She is unable to care for her residence by herself and is forced to move to a smaller place. The woman is a good mother who always puts her son's welfare before her own. Later, in a magnanimous deed, she adopts one of her husband's illegitimate children because she has always wanted more children.

The woman expresses herself in her poetry and through her prose. She is able to find some relief from her unending misery by the many spiritual retreats she takes to remote regions of the region where she can pray and feel close to nature. Finally, the woman finds peace in her heart not from a changed husband but rather by acceptance of a disappointing life. By freeing herself from worry about her failed relationship and the false hope that it could one day change, the woman focuses on the richer aspects of her life—her children, spiritual life, artistry and community.

Fujiwara Kaneie

Fujiwara Kaneie is the husband of the woman who writes "The Kagero Diary." He is some years older than the nineteen-year-old woman whom he selects to be his next wife. The woman has good instincts and knows that Fujiwara is not a good match for her. However, he persists and eventually convinces her father that his daughter would do well to marry him. Not long after they marry, Fujiwara takes up with his first wife,



Tokihime, with whom he has a child. The woman becomes very distressed at the frequent absences of her husband and his philandering ways but he never changes.

Fujiwara works for the court for many years where he receives regular promotions. By virtue of his lofty position in the court, he becomes an important and influential man within his community. He has many attendants and servants and is greeted with the respectful title of "his lordship." Fujiwara is cruel to the woman, knowing that his behavior is eating her up inside. Despite her anguish, he never apologizes or discusses their personal relationship with her. The closest he comes to discussing their dysfunctional relationship is to blame her, saying he stays away from her because she has a sullen look on her face or she only sees the darkness in things.

In addition to the son, Michitsuna, he has with the woman, Fujiwara has an older child with his first wife and then later, after his marriage to the woman, has a younger child with her. He also has several illegitimate children, one of whom he and the woman adopt at her urging.

Michitsuna

Michitsuna is the only son of MM, the author of the diary, and Fujiwara. He is very close to his mother and very respectful of his father.

MM's Adopted Daughter

With a grown son and a very unstable relationship with her husband, MM decides to adopt a twelve-year-old girl to focus her attentions on. The girl is described as beautiful and elegant, though very small for her age.

MM's Father

MM's father travels a great deal. He has many residences and when MM's residence becomes too much for her to handle, her father insists that she move into one of his homes. He also demands that MM return home from a prolonged retreat in the mountains.

Tokihime

Tokihime is Fujiwara's first wife with whom he has a child. Even after marrying MM, Fujiwara continues to see Tokihime. The relationship leads to another baby being born to the couple.



Yoshimochi

Yoshimochi is the dance master who performs the "Butterfly" dance following the archery contest and leads the contest participants, including Michitsuna, in a celebratory dance.

Ishiyama Monastery Monk

MM becomes friendly with a monk at the Ishiyama Monastery where she makes pilgrimages on several occasions. Knowing that she is having marital problems, he contacts her now and then to see how she is feeling.

Omi

Omi is a promiscuous woman with whom Fujiwara is allegedly infatuated. Rumors swirl for years that he is having an affair with her.

The Director

The director is a handsome young man who is taken with MM's adopted daughter. He continues to pressure MM to allow him to see the girl and to agree to a date when they can be married.



Objects/Places

Fujiwara's New Residence

Fujiwara builds a lavish new residence. He promises to bring MM over when it is completed but just as she feared, she is not welcome there.

Fujiwara's Usual Place

When Fujiwara visits the residence of his first wife, MM's attendants refers to the house as Fujiwara's "usual place."

The Court Ministry

Fujiwara holds positions at the court during his entire working career. He receives many promotions during his tenure at the court, reaching the high level of major captain.

Misasagi

Misasagi is the place of burial for the young prince who dies while Fujiwara works in the ministry. After the 49th day after the passing of the prince, the assistant commander of the guards abandons his wife and becomes a monk at Mt. Heie. MM knows his wife, who later steals away and becomes a nun. MM feels very sad over the turn of events.

Ishiyama

Ishiyama is one of the many locations to which MM travels for purification. Ishiyama is the site of a large monastery.

Shiga Mountains

A daughter Fujiwara fathers in a casual affair lives with her mother near the Shiga Mountains. Eventually, MM decides to adopt the girl because she wants more than one child.

Momozono Villa

The Momozono villa is the residence of the governor general's wife after her other home burns to the ground. She eventually abandons this residence when she becomes a nun.

Kamo

Kamo is the location of a pilgrimage that MM makes with her newly adopted 12-year-old daughter who is fathered by Fujiwara.

Nakagawa at Hirohata

When MM is unable to adequately care for her large residence, her father insists that she move to one of his residences. The one they select is located near Nakagawa at Hirohata in the mountains.

Reizei Palace

The archery contests that take place every spring in the region where MM lives are held on the grounds of the Reizei Palace. Michitsuna always competes in these events.



Themes

Emotional Abuse

The author of the diary, known simply as Michitsuna's mother, is married to a man, Fujiwara, who flagrantly disregards her. Although his adulterous behavior is an acceptable part of the society of tenth century Japan, Fujiwara treats her with contempt and seems to relish hurting her. In the society in which they live, it apparently is common for husband and wife to have separate residences even though they ostensibly enjoy a happy union. The times in the diary in which the woman describes her agony waiting for her husband to come, after he promises to visit and then does not appear, are too numerous to mention.

Although she is the victim of emotional abuse and downright cruelty, Fujiwara places the blame for his absences squarely on the woman's shoulders—intimating that her sullen look and attitude are what keep him away when in actuality it is all the other women he is seeing. He tells her at other times that her negativity makes him want to stay away. Even though she knows that she is not to blame, she remains silent to keep the peace in hopes that their relationship can one day be repaired.

On one occasion, after a long absence, his carriage passes hers in the street. When he comes close, he places a fan over his face so he will not have to interact with her. Since the woman, out of propriety, has no one she can vent her painful feelings to, she turns to recording them in a diary. Of course she has no thought or awareness that over a thousand years later, millions of people will be reading about the abuse she suffers; at long last she is finally able to share her anguish with other people.

Japanese Rituals and Spirituality

The tenth century Japanese woman, known only as Michitsuna's mother, suffers in a dysfunctional relationship with her husband. One of her only sources of peace and solace are the many retreats and pilgrimages she makes to the mountains and to monasteries where she can pray, clear her head and feel at one with nature. Going on these journeys are not only spiritually satisfying, they provide a needed break from her failed marriage and emotionally abusive relationship.

The woman and her attendants make many pilgrimages, including those to the Ishiyama Monastery, the Temple at Hase, Mitake, Karasaki and the Kamo Shrine to name a few. When the woman makes these pilgrimages to the shrines, she will often have prepared poems which she offers as prayers to Buddha.

Several times, the woman records that she has been ill with just a minor condition like a head cold. If her husband comes by at that time, he has to stay at the doorway, unable to enter her room and in some cases the house because to do so would cause him to be defiled and unable to attend the court where he holds an important position. There



are other times when she is fasting or participating in a special ritual and the direction of her residence does not allow him to visit her. The people in the community often go through purification rituals which cleanse their souls of sins.

Misogyny

The book, "The Kagero Diary," contains the autobiographical writings of an unnamed Japanese woman who lives during the tenth century. The society, as it exists when this woman records her intimate feelings and reactions to the life that has been thrust upon her, is a misogynistic one. When she was a sheltered nineteen-year-old, an older man—Fujiwara Kaneie—begins to court her. The girl is not drawn to the man and instinctively feels he is not a good match for her. She tells her father her feelings but they are ignored. He chooses to favor Fujiwara, who convinces him that he is indeed the right man for his daughter.

Almost as soon as they are married, Fujiwara begins his philandering ways, resuming a relationship with his first wife and then moving on to other women, ultimately having several illegitimate children along the way. Although the woman is miserable with her relationship, as attested to by the words and poetry in her diary, there are no entries in which she describes that she openly voices her pain and anguish to anyone. In the misogynist society in which she lives, the behavior of her husband is customary. Also customary is the fact that women who are treated in such an off-hand and disrespectful manner do not complain nor discuss the behavior of their husbands with anyone. Even though this woman lives over one thousand years ago, the hurt and humiliation that she has to endure from the actions of her husband evoke the understanding and empathy of the modern reader.



Style

Perspective

"The Kagero Diary," contains the autobiographical accounts of a Japanese woman who lives over a thousand years ago. The book is written in first person narrative in which the author records the anguish and pain she experiences from living in a dysfunctional, unsatisfying marriage. The book covers a period that spans the time of her marriage as a young woman to the latter years of her life. The woman, who is only identified by the title of Michitsuna's mother, is a prolific writer and poet. Many of her poems are made part of her diary. The woman is recognized during her lifetime for her writing abilities.

Relying on her artistry, the woman is able to convey the deep feelings—pain, concern, uncertainty—that she experiences while living a life of disappointment. As a young woman, she is anxious to have a husband and her own family. However, she writes in the diary that when Fujiwara begins pursuing her she knows he is not right for her. Her instincts do not let her down, however, her father does as he determines that the older Fujiwara is a good match for his daughter.

Her words tell of the abandonment and desolation she feels when time after time her husband lets her down—both through his blatant adultery and his prolonged absences while he is obviously pursuing other women. No one but this woman can tell her story and tell it with such intelligence and emotion so that, even one thousand years later, the reader can truly feel for her.

Tone

The author of the "The Kagero Diary" is a Japanese woman who lives in the tenth century. During her lifetime, she is recognized as a talented writer and poet. It is obvious from her writing and the artistry displayed in her poetry that the woman is an upper-class, cultured woman. She often mentions the important positions her husband holds within the court and the many servants she has—which both point to her status within the community. Although the woman, who is never identified other than by the title of Michitsuna's mother, is relaying personal information about her dysfunctional marriage and the pain and stress she experiences as a result of it, she displays little or no bitterness or acrimony about her situation that, unfortunately, is never resolved.

The woman's works—both the prose and poetry contained in the diary—are identified as belonging to the classical Japanese literature of the Heian period (794-1185). Since the diary entries are potentially humiliating to the woman if read by others, it is quite probable that she does not fathom the possibility that they will be read by literally millions of people. With the thought that she is writing in a format that will be kept private, the woman seems to have recorded the honest thoughts and reactions to her experiences and the events that take place around her.



Even when she writes about her husband's infidelity and frequent absences and the resultant pain caused by his behavior, she shows no disrespect for him and records no plans or plots of revenge. Her emotional words indicate a woman who is a gentle, caring person who unfortunately lives a disappointing life. Finally, in the end, although there is no real resolution and her husband never changes, she finds comfort in accepting her life and focusing on other richer aspects of her life—her children, spiritual life and community.

Structure

"The Kagero Diary" is divided into three main sections called "Books." The books are basically separated according to years. Book One covers the author's married life during the years 954 to 968. Although the translations are based on estimates about the exact years covered, there is evidence that the writer does not begin her formal diary entries until sometime in 971, indicating that she either records events from memory or from other notes that she took at the time the events she occur.

Book Two covers the three years between 969 and 971. Again, some of the author's entries are from memory or from other notes since there is evidence that she did not begin keeping a formal diary until the year 971. Due to the detail contained in the entries, the author undoubtedly relies on notes in making her recordings—although as a writer she does have rhetorical skills and thus would have been capable of enhancing actual events. Book Two basically covers the worst years of her life and marriage—a marriage which has almost totally deteriorated. Book Two contains a larger portion of prose than Book One, which contains much more poetry.

Book Three covers the period after the author seems to have accepted the reality that her marriage will never become what she thought it would. Although she still mentions her unstable relationship with her husband, in Book Three it is obvious that she is at peace and does not fret and worry about it any longer. Most of Book Three is devoted to episodes about her children and events that take place in the community.

There is a long introduction that precedes the main dairy and extensive notes throughout the book. The book also contains a number of illustrations. Following Book Three there is a section that contains the poetry of the author. An index of major topics makes up the final section of the book.



Quotes

"For this ultimately disappointing affair, there was, of course, the exchange of love letters; from about the time that he became 'a tall tree among oak trees,' it seems that he made his intentions known." (Book One, p. 57)

"It got very strange; he carried on quite openly as though there was nothing amiss when one might have expected him to try and hide the affair a little and make excuses about having to work at court and such. He became more and more inconsiderate; there was no end to it." (Book One, p. 71)

"Despite my having consorted with this most fortunate man for months and years, I am still without a lot of children, and thus, my position is uncertain and these worries are the only things of which I have a surplus." (Book One, p. 113)

"On New Year's Eve, I thought I would try the custom of 'chasing away misfortune,' so while it was still light, I set my attendants to shouting and banging things, and while I was thus amused, the new day and new year dawned." (Book One, p. 147)

"Even when you frown at him in jest, it seems to make him so miserable; I beg you, as long as his offense is not great, please don't show him your displeasure. Even when I am gone, if someone treats my child unkindly, I shall feel the pain of it." (Book Two, p. 177)

"When I think of the old days, it must not have been love, but just his basic lustful nature that brought him to me, not letting wind or rain stop him; now when I think about it, since there was never a time when I felt really secure, my expectations have been exaggerated—ah—to think he wouldn't let wind or rain get in his way, that's no longer something I can expect, and so I spend the day gazing out, sunk in brooding thoughts." (Book Two, p. 219)

"I have become a person of no happiness. Thinking how miserable it was that over the years my heart has never known any peace and now it has come to this awful turn in our marriage, please let me quickly perfect my practice and achieve enlightenment." (Book Two, p. 227)