Forum for Contemporary Issues
in Language and Literature
No. VI/2025

ISSN: 2391-9426
doi.org/10.34739/fci.2025.06.03

Migration and Gender Norms in Yosano Akiko's Prose Fiction "Keshimochi" (Poppyseed Rice Cake, 1910)

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Abstract

This paper contends that the short story, "Keshimochi" (Poppyseed rice cakes), written by the renowned Meiji period Japanese woman poet Yosana Akiko (1878-1942), is a gender defiant semi-autobiographical tale that reveals the circumstances that drive the main character to migrate within the boundaries of societal constraints. Through the trope of an unidentified female narrator, the story features elements of confession, a theme celebrated in Akiko's poetry, capturing a pivotal moment when Akiko herself, living with her family in Sakai, is invited to join a literary club in Tokyo led by a poet who will later become her husband, Yosano Tekkan (1873-1935). The unique portrayal of various elements of migration, including literary, social, and geographical, highlights the duality of the unnamed female character's adherence to societal norms while seeking opportunities beyond her present situation. In this short story, Akiko masterfully intertwines literary, social, and cultural migration, exploring female aspirations and illuminating societal limitations.

Key words

Modern Japanese Literature, Meiji period (1868-1912), Japanese Women writers, Yosano Akiko, I-novels, prose fiction, "Keshimochi" (Poppyseed Rice Cake)

Introduction: Autobiographical Elements in Akiko's Fiction

"Keshimochi" (Poppyseed Rice Cake, 1910) is a confessional short story by the late nineteenth- early twentieth-century Japanese woman writer Yosano Akiko (1878--1942), which reveals the circumstances under which the main character decides to pursue her dreams through internal geographical migration. Notably, in the Meiji period (1868-1912), Japanese women authors like Akiko found themselves in a marginalized position, where gender norms were controlled within a patriarchal society that saw male authors dominate literature, especially through the new genre of the I-novel. Nevertheless, Akiko transformed the confessional genre, traditionally dominated by male authors, into a female space by employing the "I" narrative and

a semi-autobiographical style. This approach was often disparaged, as women's lives were viewed as domestic, dull, and unworthy of serious literature. Although Akiko's stories depicted women in traditional settings, she created strong female characters, skilfully representing the liminal spaces they could occupy, as she shows how they moved into the male-dominated workforce and later saw the opportunities to search for freedom through internal migration.

"Keshimochi" is placed third-last in Yosano Aki ko's anthology *Kumo no iroiro*[1] and includes verifiable autobiographical elements of Akiko's personal life. In "Keshimochi", the narrator contributes to her parents' business. Although stated as living in Sakai[2], she is depicted as mature and self-assured, having already decided to pursue a literary career and extending her imagination even further in considering a trip to Osaka to present her poetry. The narrative in "Keshimochi" is conversational and centres around a dialogue between an unnamed female protagonist – a sweet shop owner's daughter who assists in the shop during her free time – and two male characters, Kumashichi and Iwasaki, brothers who are helpers at the shop. Akiko focuses the narrative more on the older brother, Kumashichi, whom she depicts as set under the so-called *Yōshi* system, to assume the role of an adopted son-in-law in another family. The conversation explores Kumashichi's reservations, revealing his fears, disapproval, and a sense of helplessness about becoming *yōshi*. He expresses his disdain for his future wife and demonstrates a marked lack of interest in the responsibilities of becoming a family head. Concurrently, while listening without sympathy, the female narrator contemplates a future that liberates her from her prevailing social constraints. This potential for liberation is shown through a letter of invitation requesting the narrator, a budding poet, to contribute to a literary club in Tokyo. The story features elements of confession, mirroring a pivotal moment in Akiko's life that occurred while she was still living with her family in Sakai. The

[1] In this article, the primary reference is to the version edited by Itsumi Kumi, known as "Tekkan Akiko Zenshū", with a total of 32 volumes (excluding supplementary volumes) published by Bensei between 2001 and 2011. Specifically, I refer to Tekkan Akiko Zenshū volume 6 (2002), which I will abbreviate as TAZ. The title of the anthology, as well as three of the story titles, Akarumi e, "Keshimochi", and "Kokyō no natsu", were translated into English by Janine Beichman in the bibliography section in *Embracing the Firebird: Yosano Akiko and the Birth of the Female Voice in Modern Japanese Poetry* (2002).

[2] Janine Beichman's detailed account of Sakai describes it as a city located about fifteen kilometers south of Osaka, in the Kansai region. In the past, Sakai was a key commercial center, and the narrator of "Keshimochi" is believed to live there. By the late 1800s, when Akiko was born, the city had become somewhat detached from Japan's main cultural centers, particularly Osaka and Tokyo, both in terms of geography and culture. Although Sakai once had a prestigious reputation as a thriving international trade hub, it had become mostly a provincial city, characterized by conservative social values and traditional art forms like tea ceremonies, classical dance, and poetry. It maintained a strong merchant spirit, often prioritizing commerce and traditional family values over personal innovation and modern ideas. Given Sakai's relative isolation and conservative nature, the narrator's trips to Osaka and Tokyo take on greater significance, highlighting the differences between life in the provinces and the appeal of urban culture.

narrative ends with the clear impression that the female narrator has decided to accept the invitation from the editor in Tokyo.

Indeed, this invitation to attend a literary event happened to Akiko in real life when an unexpected request was received from Yosano Tekkan, a renowned editor who later became Akiko's husband. Notably, Beichman points to Akiko receiving her first-ever letter from Tekkan in April 1900, when she was around twenty-two years old (2002, 83). The letter mentioned:

> As yet, we have not met, but
> Lady Akiko, whose lovely name I know
> quite well, please send me poems! (Beichman 83).

Beichman further points out that Akiko, after receiving this request from Tekkan, then hesitatingly submitted seven poems, out of which Tekkan selected six, which he published in *Myōjō*[3]. This literary magazine was released monthly from April 1900 through November 1908. Tekkan founded the magazine and established the Tokyo *Shinshisha* (Tokyo Society of New Verses) in 1900. More of Akiko's contributions followed, including some of the poems that were later included in her now-famous collection *Midaregami*, a collection distinctive for the bold expression of female sexuality. With the evident popularity of the New Poetry Society, Akiko's poetry soon gained prominence. Yet, as Beichman further notes, Tekkan found Akiko's poetry even too bold and changed a few words to make it appear less challenging (84). Notably, with Akiko's continuing popularity, Tekkan decided to open more branches of the magazine to be established in Sakai (94).

Significant to this analysis of the short story "Keshimochi", Beichman further states that in July 1900, Tekkan wrote notes to Akiko and another young female poet, Yamakawa Tomiko (1879–1909) (84). He told both women about a visit he intended to make to Osaka, Kobe, and Okayama, regions in western Japan, some 500 km distant from Tokyo. Included in these letters was his proposed invitation for the poets to visit Osaka. Several *bona fide* letters appear to have been used by Akiko to blend them into the prose "Keshimochi". This emerges when the narrator discusses being sent a significant invitation in the form of a letter from an acclaimed editor, Ōkii Sensei, presenting a recreated version of an incident in Akiko's own life. This reinvention technique is discussed later as a way to romanticize and embellish her poetry. Itsumi identifies Ōkii sensei as Tekkan and Yamakawa as the character Yamaoka (2009, 46). Indeed, the narrative in "Keshimochi" ends with the receipt of the letter, leaving the reader curious and able only to anticipate what could happen next. Notably, by the time this short story was published, it was a clear and open secret that Tekkan arrived

[3] The name Myōjō from the planet Venus, commonly known as both the ake no Myōjō (the morning star) and the Yoi no Myōjō (the evening star). For details see Lee p. 3.

in Osaka in August 1900 and met the young Akiko, along with Yamakawa (Itsumi 2002, 46; Lee 1986, 3; Beichman 2002, 86). This quickly formed into a love triangle that, in "Keshimochi", the narrator is only hinting at. In real life, both young poets fell in love with Tekkan, who, in any case, already had a common-law wife. However, by the end of this real-life trip, Yamakawa's parents intervened, and she withdrew from the love triangle, leaving Akiko and Tekkan free to pursue their relationship (Lee 1986, 4) once he could separate from his common-law wife.

In the following analysis of "Keshimochi", I demonstrate how Akiko uses confessional elements from her life in semi-autobiographical fiction to convey a realistic perception of the narrator's search for freedom. These confessional elements are reflected in "Kokyō no natsu" (Summer at home, 1909), which appears early in the anthology, where Akiko also delves into the confessional introspection of characters residing in Sakai, revolving around the narrator's similar longing for a seemingly unattainable world in the bigger city (O¯ta 1994, 63). This desire for freedom motivates the more mature narrator in "Keshimochi" to embark on a physical journey toward fulfilling her dreams by deciding to leave for Osaka. Akiko highlights the path toward freedom as a growing female consciousness, which I will show includes elements of literary, social, and internal geographical migration.

In "Keshimochi", Akiko's approach is to transfer the memories of her youth to the narrator's yearning, which then translates as a yearning for social and geographical migration, warranting a fairer evaluation. Through the stories' confessional elements, Akiko exposes how migration has a gendered burden. Particularly for Japanese women in the Meiji period, the desire to relocate to a place of freedom, including internal geographical migration, is contingent upon societal approval, including that of family and friends. The portrayal of potential geographical migration in "Keshimochi" showcases the duality of the narrator's conformity to societal norms while seeking a departure on a path beyond her current circumstances within restricted patriarchal control. Thus, I show how Akiko defies social norms by exploring female aspirations while shedding light on societal limitations.

Context: Stagnation and Migration Theory

This research centers on Japan's Meiji era, a time when women writers faced limited freedom of expression and often confined themselves to specific genres. In Akiko's case, by the end of the first decade of the 1900s, she primarily wrote poetry, which had been her main genre up to that point. Akiko then discovered prose fiction as a way to depict Japanese women as strong female characters, skilfully representing how they moved out of stagnant female roles into a male-dominated workforce that offered the potential for social movement. Not only this but also reflecting on her life experience, she shows how Japanese women at the time began to see opportunities

for geographical migration, as in the case of the narrator in "Keshimochi" seeking freedom from social constraints in the small town of Sakai and looking towards a more significant personal expression that could be achieved in physically moving to Tokyo. In this research, I show how, in "Keshimochi", Akiko's depiction of complex social and geographical processes reveals a narrative arc of migrational issues depicted within an intersection of class and gender struggles. This is enhanced by the author's autobiographical stance, which in her unique case included a literary migration from poet to prose author.

As noted by Maeda Ai in his book *Text and the City*, the concept of *risshin shussei* – personal advancement through self-improvement – reached considerable popularity, mainly via prominent literature (110). Noteworthy among such profitable works were Yukichi Fukuzawa's *Gakumon no Susume* (An Encouragement of Learning, 1876) and Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859), translated as *Saikoku risshi hen* (Tales of success in Western nations, introduced to Japan in 1970) (110). They all contained the motivational message that people could bring about their success through personal efforts, which energized individuals to develop themselves and contribute to the modernization of Japan. The central theme of "Keshimochi" is female self-empowerment, which is similar to what Copeland in *Lost Leaves*, says Miyake Kaho was also doing in her prose (80).

Several writers, including Futabatei Shimei for *Ukigumo* (The Drifting Cloud, 1887) and Higuchi Ichiyō for "Takekurabe" (Child's Play, 1895–1896) have been analyzed on the use of this theme[4]. Discussing Futabatei's place in modern Japanese literature, Powell (1983), in her book *Writers and Society in Modern Japan*, quotes Itō Sei, who wrote that he was "the first writer really writing about the self and its conflicts with the world" (14). On the idea of *risshin shusse*, Itō states Futabatei had scrutinized the "cult of advancement in life and social success", exploring the problems experienced by people in their private lives during the Meiji period (14). In examining Ichiyō's perception of the Meiji concept of *risshin shusse*, Treat (2018) highlights how she demonstrates the desires and obstacles facing people (81-2). He singles out one of her characters, namely Midori, who personifies the principle of moving upwards in life by rising from peasanthood to a higher socio-economic status (81-2). The emphasis is on her success resulting from her labor, which speaks of a broader societal change from intrinsic value to one of trade and distribution, similar to capital (81-2). As I show, Akiko stands out in her novels' equivocal conclusions, with her characters not acting on decisions made before the story ends. This indeterminate approach brings female consciousness to the fore, mindfulness, and potential endeavor without the compulsion to spell out the actions taken. I also

[4] For more on this theme, also see Van Compernolle, Timothy J. *The Uses of Memory : The Critique of Modernity in the Fiction of Higuchi Ichiyo* ¯ / Timothy J. Van Compernolle. Harvard University Asia Center, 2006.

show how the subtle exploration of *risshin shussei* is achieved through the method of making the characters undertake a psychological journey of self-knowledge and aspiration.

As this research points out, Akiko was immensely successful in poetry yet found it difficult to be accepted in her transition to writing prose fiction. However, I demonstrate the covert ways in which Akiko subversively achieved a remarkable literary migration, moving the confessional genre of I-novel into a female domain by consciously using the first-person "I" narrative and a semi-autobiographical approach. She managed, through self-reflection, using details from her own life story to create a narrator who rose above the stereotype that women's lives were domestic and boring and not worthy of high literature, stagnant in other words. As such, this reveals the circumstances under which the main character decides to pursue her dreams, which would result in an independent physical relocation from her small hometown to the main city, Tokyo.

Profoundly, if we look at the sexist approach of *bundan*[5] towards women, this is only covertly challenged by Akiko's prose. Notably, during the Meiji period, gender roles were very rigid, and women had limited opportunities for self-expression or pursuing their dreams outside of traditional familial roles. This did not, in turn, signify that all males were free, an element of Japanese society that Akiko also reflects on in "Keshimochi." For example, the *Yōshi* system was an example of a traditional practice that reinforced not only the patriarchal structure of society but also the class distinctions. She also mirrors herself in the narrator's statement: "I" was invited to submit poetry to a literary magazine. This invitation symbolizes a rare opportunity for the narrator to step outside societal expectations and express herself creatively.

The Narrator's Search for Freedom and Internal Geographical Migration

Significantly, Akiko uses reports of the editor's letter, rather than the letter itself, to alert the reader to the invitation from Ōkii sensei. In this way, she avoids using the editor's voice, maintaining the independence of the female narrator to mock the social system through which a woman poet would need permission to relocate to Tokyo and subverting that same social order that would require a female poet to seek approval to migrate to an author of prose fiction. For example, in one instance, while making poppyseed rice cakes, Kumashichi is shown asking for help from his brother, Iwasaki. The latter then casually tells the female narrator that he received a phone

[5] Copeland in her book *Women Critiqued* (2000) defines *Bundan* as "the term initially used to describe male writers and critics of the Meiji and early Taishō periods who belonged to an exclusive Tokyo coterie. Eventually it came to refer to a broader establishment of writers and incorporate a greater sense of canonicity. *Bundan* writers, almost exclusively male, were those who sat on editorial and prize committees; who were in positions to advance or mentor the careers of other writers; and who, in their capacity as critics, determined who was or was not a member of the *bundan*" (18).

call from Ōkii sensei (loosely based on Tekkan), asking her to join the poetry event at Hamadera. Iwasaki says, "Ōkii sensei was saying something like (*nantoka*), you should come" (TAZ 6: 388). *Nantoka* translates as "something or other", showing the listener is not taking a serious interest in the conversation. In response, the female narrator questions Iwasaki indifferently, "Why didn't you hear him properly?" (TAZ 6: 388). The unapologetic questioning of the female narrator shows her initial lack of interest in the invitation. In addition, when Kumashichi asks, "What kind of person is Ōkii sensei?" the female narrator mockingly says, "he looks like a monk" (TAZ 6: 389), elaborating that he "is 27–28 years of age" (TAZ 6: 389). This reflects Akiko's teasing attitude towards Tekkan in real life (Beichman 2002, 96).

The opportunity the narrator is given to migrate internally can be seen as opportunistic only because she takes advantage of it. Akiko is careful to express that the narrator's decision to go to Tokyo is not independent but must be blessed by her family. The narrator experiences change through her choices, which then evolves to change those around her. The personal struggles of the narrator (mirrored from the life of Akiko herself) interact and compete with her family. The tension between individual aspirations and acceptance of stagnant social norms, or adaptation to changing ones, is reflected in "Keshimochi" through the shifting dynamics of gender roles within socio-evolutionary and literary changes. This is reflected in the potential for literary, social, and internal geographical migration in Akiko's construction of the female narrator ("I"). In the narrative, Akiko constructs the female narrator's path of freedom as a conscious decision not to break any of the rules, nevertheless still being able to find freedom through change.

As such, Akiko depicts the characters in "Keshimochi" as being influenced by their friends, family, and society, reflecting a process of social change. The story explores the impact of these influences on personal decisions, such as Kumashichi's potential adoption, and highlights the role of others in shaping his life. In the same way, the female narrator is also shown to have received permission to pursue her dreams. While the vulnerability of Kumashichi does not save him from helplessness and sad life, the narrator is shown to have made her way out of this social stagnation. In "Keshimochi", in addition to the phone invitation from Ōkii sensei discussed above, the narrator also receives a formal invitation by postcard, which is read to her by her mother. Beichman (2002) analyzes this scene as the mother granting her permission to accept the invitation without any objections from the narrator's family (49). However, the theme in "Keshimochi" is more of wish-fulfillment, where the narrator is set free to follow her dreams (50), allowing her to migrate internally, that is, in a society that otherwise strictly controls women. As Beichman points out, it is essential to note that the narrator did not receive any of the invitations directly; she always had an intermediary (49–50). This signifies that her decision to follow her dreams was not unilateral, as the family members supported her. Likewise, Akiko

herself did not break any family bonds to become an independent poet. Beichman states, "Akiko unwittingly revealed an important truth about her adolescent years" through this crucial scene in "Keshimochi" of receiving an invitation from Ōkii sensei (2002, 50).

Reflecting on this crucial scene, we also see the importance of this moment when Akiko herself must also have decided to leave home and pursue her dreams. Thus, the revelation that she was not particularly interested in Tekkan is shown in how she receives permission to join the club without asking for permission from her parents. In "Keshimochi", the narrator receives a letter from Ōkii sensei, and in reading the contents to her, this is seen as her mother giving her permission to complete her duties at home and leave for her dreams (Beichman 2002, 50). Furthermore, early in the story, the conversation between Kumashichi and the narrator leads to Kumashichi's comments on Ōkii sensei's age, saying, "he is young" (Akiko 1910, 389). This is also another veiled reference to the real-life Tekkan, who was still considered relatively young, and may signify that Akiko's parents gave their approval to court Tekkan (TAZ 6: 389). In essence, "Keshimochi" delves into the intricate web of societal, familial, and personal influences that impact the characters' life decisions, shedding light on how these forces shape the choices made by Kumashichi and the female narrator. Kumashichi's adoption as *yōshi*[6] highlights how external factors can intensify vulnerability and dissatisfaction, as it forces him into a marriage that grants him wealth and status–benefits he never sought and does not desire. In stark contrast, the female narrator's journey reveals how societal compliance and familial support paved the way for personal freedom, even within restrictive environments. Through her narrative, Akiko intricately weaves the narrator's path to freedom, demonstrating that it is possible to achieve autonomy by negotiating societal rules.

In summary, so far, "Keshimochi" is a confessional short story in which Akiko reveals the circumstances under which she decided to pursue her dreams. Regarding literary migration, the short story uses confession to capture the real-life moment when Akiko was invited to join the literary club and inform the reader that her friends and family supported her decision to join the literary circle. The story also highlights social migration by showing the vulnerability of men under the *yōshi*

[6] The adoption method of a male heir is referred to as the *yōshi* system, which enforces succession in the traditional Japanese family system. Depending upon the circumstances, it consists of different types, such as customary adoption, which infers the adoption of a male child when there is no male heir in the family; adopting a son-in-law, which infers the adoption of a male child who will marry the daughter of the house; adopting two male children, which infers the adoption of two brothers together; terminal adoption, which refers to the adoption taking place only when the original heir dies because of illness; and lastly tentative adoption, which infers the adoption while the original heir is away from home (Takeuchi 2006, 82). Indeed, in "Keshimochi", Akiko highlights the idiosyncrasies of the *yōshi* system, exposing how men were also vulnerable and trapped by the system, not only women.

system, which strengthens the narrator's will to pursue her literary pursuit. Akiko's prose, "Keshimochi" in particular, is seen as an attempt to depict the I-novel of the 1910s. Unlike other women novelists who focus on female characters, Akiko highlights the interiority of the helplessness of both men and women in society. Through this recognition of the vulnerability of Kumashichi in "Keshimochi", who is yearning for a better life, the narrator gains the confidence to pursue her dreams. To follow her dreams, the female character is shown receiving permission to depart from the norms of patriarchal society instead of demanding equal rights. In contrast, men are portrayed as too weak to even think beyond their prescribed social roles and yearn for a solution that society does not provide. Therefore, Akiko's attempt to show the characters' interiority coincides with the yearning associated with I-novels. However, the transfer of this interiority, shown through migration, seems quite original to Akiko's prose.

The Japanese Family System and the Adverse Effects of Social Migration on Men

The adoption method of a male heir is referred to as the *yōshi* system, which enforces succession in the traditional Japanese family system. Depending upon the circumstances, it consists of different types, such as customary adoption, which infers the adoption of a male child when there is no male heir in the family; adopting a son-in-law, which infers the adoption of a male child who will marry the daughter of the house; adopting two male children, which infers the adoption of two brothers together; terminal adoption, which refers to the adoption taking place only when the original heir dies because of illness; and lastly tentative adoption, which infers the adoption while the original heir is away from home (Takeuchi 2006, 82). Indeed, in "Keshimochi", Akiko highlights the idiosyncrasies of the *yōshi* system, exposing how men were also vulnerable and trapped by the system, not only women.

Interestingly, in "Keshimochi", Akiko depicts her female narrator as having little or no emotions or sympathy towards the *yōshi* character, Kumashichi. In certain instances, it is even suggested that Kumashichi might harbor feelings for the narrator (TAZ 6: 384). However, she not only ignores him, but she also believes he is in a better situation than most women. Understanding that the narrator's actions do not necessarily indicate the author's beliefs is crucial. Instead, by showcasing male vulnerability within a patriarchal system, Akiko criticizes the system itself. She uses the female narrator to represent society's viewpoint within that society, not just women's perspectives on men. This portrayal starkly contrasts how Akiko uses the word "men" to represent society in general. By highlighting the vulnerability of men in this situation, Akiko subverts traditional norms, challenging the pre-existing notion that women were unworthy of becoming writers and, in her situation, considered unable to migrate from poetry, where she was successful, to fiction writing, particularly the I-novel genre, where as a woman she was not welcome.

Notably, in "Keshimochi", we see the circumstances under which the adoption is performed in the *yōshi* system from a woman's perspective, the female narrator, who highlights the man's perspective. Akiko uses this literary device to display male emotion in a very vocal way, especially in portraying Kumashichi's characteristics. Akiko shows the female narrator believing the *yōshi* system favors men because they can migrate socially and gain monetarily through it (TAZ 6: 386). This is supported by Sen (2014), as she argues that Akiko saw the *yōshi* system as an elevation of men who did not have any assets (42). In contrast to men, most women would not inherit assets and were considered lower in position than men, even ones who benefitted from *yōshi* (Kobayashi 2007, 368). Clearly, women of this era were limited in their options to migrate compared to men socially. However, they could go into service, marry, become a concubine, or, more rarely, be adopted. Regardless, even if a woman could rise above her existing circumstances, she was, even in her elevated status, socially lesser than the men in her family or relationship.

However, from a yōshi's perspective, Kumashichi's vulnerability of becoming a "spare" is a term coined by Kobayashi (2007) to refer to a male who is utilized as a tool to continue the succession of assets (367). This way, Kumashichi is seen as a spare tool in this short story. For instance, in the conversation between Kumashichi and the narrator, Kumashichi voices his grievances, "I trust you, and so I will listen to what you say. As I always listen to you. I think all living beings should just be alone. Going for adoption or getting a bride is something I hate the most" (TAZ 6: 384). In his distress, he adds, "I always think that a great person will never have children and will die alone" (TAZ 6: 385). This signifies that he is sad that his future is vulnerable and wants to die because he sees himself becoming unfulfilled in society. Gaining monetary freedom seems meaningless to him. Kumashichi's perspective on marriage is shaped by a tragic example he shares of a hairdresser, Ohana, who died shortly after marrying a violent husband. This story informs his negative view of marriage as a system and repeatedly leads him to propose death as a solution to his worries. Akiko interestingly parallels Kumashichi's lamentations on his impending social migration due to his adoption with the feelings of women forced to move to their husbands' families after marriage. This comparison draws attention to the shared sense of dislocation and vulnerability that can affect individuals regardless of gender within societal expectations in Meiji Japan.

On the other hand, the narrator, aware that Kumashichi is getting married to the niece of Otoku, the wife of a former steward in the house of the narrator's sister, asks Kumashichi if he has seen his bride. To this, Kumashichi replies that he saw her side face and noticed her *ears*, which he thinks is the only good part (TAZ 6: 386, emphasis added). When the narrator asks, "What is the good part about ears?", for this Kumashichi replies, "She has plump ears (*fukumimi*), and her skin is fair as well" (TAZ 6: 386). In this context, *fukumimi* is used to express luck or wealth. The narrator

makes fun of this by saying, "This does not sound bad. Someone with plump ears (*fukumimi*) will bring you wealth. You should be adopted by Otoku" (TAZ 6: 386). It is important to note that Kumashichi only noticed the ears of Otoku's unnamed niece when he looked at her from afar. The reference used for Otoku's niece as having luck could mean that from the eyes of Kumashichi, the only part he saw in her was referring to luck, which is true as he will be receiving all her assets once he marries her. It is important to note that even if Kumashichi views Otoku's niece as bringing luck to him, he is not happy. He is still thinking of dying, which shows that the *yōshi* system does not necessarily bring any happiness to men who are used as tools for the succession of the hierarchy (Takeuchi 2006, 81, 84).

As evident in the story, the pain men go through by becoming a *yōshi* highlights their vulnerability, yet when seen through women's eyes, it is seen as an elevation in society. This revelation could be Akiko's criticism of men's opinion on the sufferings of women. However, Sen (2014) argues that Akiko still believed the *yōshi* system favored men (42). Nevertheless, the narrator's views do not influence Akiko's portrayal of Kumashichi. Instead, it is an honest depiction of how men feel when they integrate into this *yōshi* system. Thus, the display of emotions shown through Kumashichi shows the interiority of men's world, which is seen as elevated through women's eyes. To sum up, through "Keshimochi", Akiko portrays male vulnerability and emotional complexity in the *Yōshi* system and serves as a powerful critique of patriarchal norms and societal expectations, offering readers a more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics and the intricacies of human emotion within such systems.

From Edo to Meiji: Migration From Town to City

A general overview of how different literature was aimed at different classes in Japan, particularly between the Meiji period and the preceding Edo period (1603–1868), facilitates a deeper understanding of the social categories of the lives of characters depicted in and "Keshimochi," which in turn reflects on the author's semi-autobiographical intentions and her literary migration from poetry to prose. While Akiko never abandoned poetry, she remained a prose writer long enough to be considered more than a mere tourist in the genre and to produce a complete anthology of short stories. These periods are also reflected in the physical locations the author chooses for the stories' settings. In other words, it is self-evident that modernization and change would be more rapid in big cities than in provincial towns. Significantly, also, in the Edo period, there were four major class divisions: royals (*kuge*), samurai (*bushi*), merchant (*chonin*), and peasant (*hyakushō*), and again, these classes would be represented in different geographical locations. Akiko's family was from the merchant class and lived in provincial Sakai. In another short story of Akiko, "Kokyō no natsu", the narrator longs to go to Kyoto, the home of the emperor

(royal class). Moreover, in the Edo period, different literary genres were aimed at various social classes, that is, in terms of entertainment. Akiko started by writing poetry (*waka*) but made her work into a new-style *tanka* (short poems). Akiko describes Edo-style theatre (*kabuki*) for the merchant class. This was specific merchant-class entertainment, a cultural tradition lingering over from Edo, and families that belonged to the merchant class could enjoy it (Shively 2015, 326). An amalgamation of entertainment styles followed the Edo period, and then, finally, everything changed in Meiji, strongly influenced by Westernization. The culture changed according to the changing period and the emergence of Western exposure. Naturally, these genres and literary categorizations became less distinct by the modernizing Meiji period. However, women writers would be more held back by lingering traditional sensibilities than men, such as the example of Higuchi Ichiyō[7] (Mitsutani 1985, 53).

Moreover, in terms of internal migration, Tokyo's social norms (and thereby also literary norms) evolved faster when compared with smaller provincial towns like Sakai. This is essential to point out, as the semi-autobiographical story "Keshimochi" has central protagonist depicted as having grown up in the small town of Sakai, nevertheless longing to migrate to larger cities. Her desire to migrate is thus shaped by both the cultural constraints of her hometown and the appeal of urban literary life. Part of this new attitude towards migration was the availability of transport. As Jilly Traganou (2004) notes: "Throughout the Edo period, transportation in Japan was confined to foot travel [...] The Tōkaidō railway was established in 1889, at first paralleling and eventually almost eradicating the use of the highway. [...] After the installation of the railway in the Meiji era, the Tōkaidō was presented as a landscape of progress, modernity, and westernization expressing the positive and negative connotations that such notions carried" (Traganou, 1).

It seems pertinent to note that an accident of birth placed the protagonists in "Keshimochi" in the railway period, and there would unlikely have been any invitation from Ōkii sensei/Tekkan to the narrator/Akiko to visit Tokyo had this been even twenty years prior. Notably, on foot, the usual mode of transport, it would have taken Akiko three weeks to walk, six to eight hours a day without rest, from her hometown of Sakai to the big city of Tokyo. Significantly, as we now know that the character of the niece is loosely based on Akiko's autobiographical recollections, it is possible to state that she experienced a period of political migration in her lifetime. Indeed, it would be unreasonable to assume that these Meiji period changes happened

[7] While Ichiyō tackled themes such as poverty and prostitution in her work, she adopted a traditional narrative style, influenced by Murasaki Shikibu, to conform to the expectations of "womanly" literature (Copeland 2000, 46; Tanaka 2000, 77). This strategic approach enabled her to gain acceptance into the male-dominated *bundan*, a privilege not easily afforded to less conventional prose writers like Yosano Akiko.

overnight. Therefore, these facts impact our understanding of "Keshimochi" as an example of Akiko's use of autobiographical elements in her fiction.

Born into a merchant family, Akiko lived in a merchant world in Sakai, near Osaka. Notably, the culture in Osaka, Kyoto, and Tokyo was wholly different and distinguished between different social classes in the Edo period but became more unified during the following Meiji. In general terms, the inclusion of Sakai in the intensely autobiographical story of "Keshimochi" shows how the culture of Edo progressed and shifted to the amalgamation of Meiji culture. Through this, we can learn more about Akiko herself and see how she understood and reflected the emergence of modern Japanese society in the Meiji period. Therefore, this constant sense of movement in "Keshimochi" highlights the political possibilities afforded to women in the Meiji period, although these opportunities were encountered and enjoyed non-linearly. This shows that social progression and migration were sometimes a slow ebb and flow, although the coming of the train to Japan would immediately speed up the access that women like Akiko had to changes that would further their careers, in her case, a literary one.

Conclusion: A Successful Literary Migration of a Poet to an Author

In this article, I show how the unique portrayal of various migration elements, including literary, social, political, economic, and geographical, highlights the duality of the narrator's adherence to societal norms while concomitantly seeking opportunities beyond her present situation. Significantly, "Keshimochi" is a semi-autobiographical account with two main themes. One social theme focuses on how the *Yōshi* system adversely affects men. The other is a gender theme, which highlights a critical turning point in the narrator's life when she receives the surprising invitation to submit her poetry to a literary magazine in Tokyo, which would involve internal geographical migration. I demonstrate that the narrative is an ironic double entendre, as the author is writing a story about a fictional shop worker wanting to be a poet. Yet, the author herself is a poet wanting to be a writer. In other words, the story's author is already a poet attempting to migrate to fiction writing. In this research, I show how Akiko skilfully crafts a story that generates curiosity among the audience. She uses elements of her life reflected in the background to the story of family life and the sweet shop business in Sakai. She also keeps the same romantic theme of her first encounter with Tekkan, the editor and literary critic who later became her husband.

Indeed, by the time Akiko wrote and published "Keshimochi", the theme of her relationship with Tekkan had gained her poetry much popularity (Itsumi 2002, 46). Furthermore, I show in "Keshimochi" that Akiko brings over from her poetry her attitudes towards her future husband, Tekkan, which in her poetry often achieves a tone that is gently mocking (Beichman, 119). There is a similar teasing and poetic

freshness, and she involves her readers in the story on two levels, drawing them into the fictional narrative that nevertheless mirrors aspects of her life story. This may be seen as Akiko's attempt to shift her audience from poetry to fiction, using the same themes, in this instance the first-encounter theme. Thus, I view it as her survival instinct, hoping to migrate from poetry to fiction, specifically novel writing, using similar themes. It is also topical in that male writers used autobiography in the I-novel genre at the same moment in Japanese literary history. Notably, after accepting Tekkan's offer to publish her poetry, which involved internal geographical migration to Tokyo, Akiko became a renowned poet.

On the one hand, "Keshimochi" can be seen as Akiko's attempt to freeze the moment of her youth when Tekkan sought her out to elevate her poetry career, gaining attention for the story. On the other hand, Akiko may have wanted to confess that the liberty granted to the female narrator is not earned but rather given, even without her demanding it, a form of social engineering. In summary, this discussion highlights the interplay between Akiko's life and her writing, emphasizing the significance of her experiences in understanding the depth and nuances of "Keshimochi".

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