UNIVERSITY of HAWAI'I MĀNOA
EAST ASIAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
Center for Japanese Studies
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EALL TALK SERIES

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Stealing the Deity's Wife: Poetry, Scandal, and the Rite of Utagaki

Bonnie McClure
University of California, Berkeley

THURSDAY, February 5, 11:00 AM -12:00 PM
Center For Korean Studies (CKS), Auditorium

Some of Japanese court literature's most beloved heroes, including the semi-fictionalized Ariwara no Narihira of the *Tales of Ise* and the fictional Hikaru Genji of the *Tale of Genji,* are known for their scandalous love affairs with imperial consorts and shrine priestesses. This talk traces the history of such tales of scandal back to Nara-period myths that reference *utagaki*, an orgiastic festival of song and courtship observed in early Japan. At the *utagaki*, which both celebrated fertility and renewal and encouraged the release of society's usual sexual taboos, men were expected to court the wives of others. This talk analyzes how early myths and legends draw on *utagaki*-related motifs and proposes the concept of an "*utagaki*-type hero." This hero is both a daring wife-stealer and a skilled poet, as well as a political underdog when he appears in the mythology of Japan's imperial line. Such a man, if we consider how his actions allude to *utagaki*'s ritual character, can be seen as an archetypal hero of fertility, and even as a figure whose scandalous actions do not truly undermine social order but rather paradoxically reinforce it. Furthermore, the poetic skill and flair that form an essential part of this hero's image can be traced to the central role of courtship song exchanges at the *utagaki*, and to the lasting association they establish between taboo-breaking scandal and bold acts of song.

Bonnie McClure is a PhD candidate in premodern Japanese literature at the University of California, Berkeley. Her current work on Nara-period myth and poetry focuses on archetypes of tragically-ending narrative, examining what the narrative tensions in these tales reveal about core concerns of early Japanese myth and ritual, and how they birth an ideal of poetry as a mediator of ritual and political conflicts. Her dissertation research has been supported by Fulbright-Hays and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. More broadly, she is interested in issues of premodern Japanese poetry and poetics from the Nara through Edo periods, and has also published in both English and Japanese on medieval Japanese travel poetry and classical linked verse.

Talk is open to the public. A light lunch will be served in EALL (Moore Hall 3rd F) following the talk.

For more information, please contact SeaHee Choi (seahee@hawaii.edu) and Matthew Burdelski (mburdels@hawaii.edu); For disability access, please contact the EALL office at 956-8940 or eall@hawaii.edu