

DRESSED TO CROSS: NARRATIVES OF  
RESISTANCE AND INTEGRATION IN SEI  
SHÔNAGON'S *THE PILLOW BOOK* AND  
YONE NOGUCHI'S *THE AMERICAN  
DIARY OF A JAPANESE GIRL*

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In Japan around the year 1000, Sei Shônagon adds a list to her *Pillow Book* in which she collects “Things that are distressing to see.” Her first item on the list is “Someone wearing a robe with the back seam hitched over to one side, or with the collar falling back to reveal the nape of the neck” (Shônagon 117). This depiction of the gaping body stands as a signifier for Shônagon’s anxieties about maintaining class propriety.

At the beginning of the twentieth-century, Morning Glory, a newly arrived Japanese immigrant to the U.S. and protagonist of Yone Noguchi’s *The American Diary of a Japanese Girl* (1902), secretly dresses in her uncle’s clothes, wishing that she “could only be a gentleman for just one day!” (32). Morning Glory’s desire to switch genders speaks to her perception of womanhood as marked by social powerlessness.

What is at stake in these examples is the persistent cultural motif whereby people escape the imposition of cultured, gendered, or class norms. Though reading back more than a millennium, these stories speak to the power of bodily and sartorial transformations, whether startlingly permanent or temporarily enabling. They question categories of gender, class, and cultural integration and give insight into how early Japanese immigrants to the U.S. used clothing as subversion in a manner similar to century-old practices by Japanese women in need of securing survival. Since, according to E. Jane Burns, clothes “participate in a complex system of fabrications that move constantly between individual bodies and the social sphere, between material objects and various cultural representations of them, creating a relational dynamic” (4), dress constitutes the ideal tool for accomplishing the endeavor of crossing social and cultural boundaries.

Cross-dressing, drag, impersonation, and transvestism are surely well-known concepts. Using Marjory Garber’s understanding of transvestism as creating a “category crisis” which points to “cultural, social, or aesthetic dissonances” (16), I argue that Sei Shônagon and Morning Glory make use of their clothing to disrupt and question the idea of a

stable identity. In doing so, I attempt to extend Garber's influential analysis in relation to the lives of early Japanese immigrants to the United States. All characters discussed in this article successfully employ their apparel to "negotiate . . . among individual desire, perception, and fantasy on the one hand, and cultural demands and conventions on the other" (Burns 4). As Burns makes clear, clothes affect both the personal and the social realm and can thus exert influence in both spheres. Ultimately, I hope that the connections I am drawing will clarify further our understanding of how early Japanese immigrants to the U.S. experimented with markers of identity to create a Japanese *American* subjectivity.

In her *Pillow Book* (*Makura no sôshi*), Sei Shônagon, Empress Sadako's lady-in-waiting between 993-1000, highlights the importance of dress in medieval Japan with painstaking descriptions of her sartorial surroundings. Ivan Morris elaborates that Heian Japan [794-1185] developed a cult of beauty in terms of architecture and décor and the "manufacture and dyeing of textiles had reached a high point of achievement" (171). The arrangement of colors in clothing presented a high standard by which people were judged since it spoke to a person's artistic sensibility. In fact, "good looks tended to take the place over virtue" (Morris 195). Meredith McKinney explains that dress depended enormously on social setting and level of formality and that, while conformity was largely desired, individuality could be expressed via a blend of color, choices of design and fabric, or a combination of all of these elements (Appendix 291).

Instances which Shônagon recounts in *The Pillow Book* speak to this significance of dress in everyday life. She describes how the women-in-waiting attain the attention of possible suitors by showing them nothing more but the colored layers (*kasane*) of their sleeves;<sup>1</sup> Shônagon further explains to her readers how the status of a Counselor is apparent by his layers of visible under-robe and that men above the fourth rank were easily distinguishable because they were the only people to wear black jackets. Considering the darkness of the rooms at court, the vividness and detail with which Shônagon describes dress to her readers is astounding. A certain instance comes to mind when she reports minutely on a courtier's splendid attire: "He wore a gorgeous damask cloak in the cherry-blossom combination, with an immaculate luster to its lining, and his gathered trousers of rich, dark grape colour were woven through with a dazzling pattern of tangled wisteria vine" (Shônagon 70). This passage

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<sup>1</sup> Women's dresses could consist of up to twelve layers. For colors to be adequately admired, "each sleeve was longer as it came closer to the skin" (Morris 204). McKinney, in fact, presents the reader with five pages of sartorial terms in appendix 6 to her edition of the *Pillow Book* (294-298).

convincingly attests to the significant impressions dress made on ladies-in-waiting in their everyday lives.

For Shônagon herself, the dresses she wore gave her entrance to a world into which she was not born. In fact, Shônagon lived at court and enjoyed its pleasures for only seven years before she descended again in status and lived the rest of her life in poverty. According to McKinney, Shônagon was born into what she herself would have called “the periphery of this world” as her father held a rank far from prestigious at court (Introduction x, xii). In her writing, Shônagon essentially does not acknowledge a life before or after her time at court. It appears that her identity is only formed when she comes to court and that she ceases to exist when she is forced to leave. Even her first name changes as Shônagon merely denotes the title of “Junior Counsellor” (McKinney, Introduction xi). I argue that Shônagon holds on to her seemingly precarious status at court by means of the power of dress. Considering that “[c]ulture and civilization were synonymous with court life, and the closer one was to the Emperor the closer one was to its essence” (McKinney, Introduction x), Shônagon engages in what I call “imperial drag,” which allows her to transcend social categories. The wearing and displaying of sophisticated apparel functions as a type of performance by means of which Shônagon consolidates her change in status. Supporting this argument, Edith Sarra points to the predominance of spectacle at court which turns self-display into channels of power and accords the function of costumes to the dresses worn (226). Yet the “threat of poverty and obscurity” was always a possibility for ladies-in-waiting (Fukumori 26), which explains why dress played such a crucial role in their lives.<sup>2</sup>

An episode which I interpret as resembling imperial drag describes the habit of the ladies-in-waiting to keep either the left or right sleeve of their gown longer than the other, depending on which side of the carriage they sit in, for the “delectation of passers-by” (Morris 205). This sartorial technique publicly displays their social cross-dress and ensures the admiration of their status. In order to perpetuate the effectiveness of imperial drag, Shônagon has to point to the crude manners of those outside, compared with the taste and refined conventions of those at court. For her, filthy attire and coarse behavior go together, which explains, I claim, her somewhat dismissive attitude toward beggars, low-ranking aristocrats, and commoners. In her list of “Repulsive Things,” she includes, for example, a “very ordinary woman looking after lots of children” (Shônagon 151). These attitudes reflect Shônagon’s anxieties about the precarious-

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<sup>2</sup> A later text, *Mumyôzôshi* (*An Untitled Book*, Kuwabara, 1976) describes Shônagon after she has left the court as “wearing a lowly robe and a hat of patched cloths” (qtd. in Fukumori 28).

ness of her own status. In contrast to this stands Shônagon's veneration of her empress's attire. Shônagon describes with admiration how Her Majesty's "wonderful, glowing pale plum-pink sleeves filled [her] with deep awe" and make her think that she "never knew someone so marvelous could exist" (169). Clearly, Shônagon equates dress with empowerment, and she herself takes advantage of the accessories of her imperial drag to disrupt further the categories by which she is bound.

Dress makes Shônagon confident, as Linda Chance observes, to "relish[ ] her victories over men and behave[ ] in other ways that did not conform to the officially sanctioned ideal of femininity, which called for submission to strictly defined social roles of service and inferiority vis-à-vis men" (142). Shônagon's imperial drag enables her to question and cross status and gender borders that confine her to a role of passivity and compliance. Shônagon is painstakingly aware of the instability of her hold onto her status at court and fears every instance which threatens the effectiveness of her imperial drag. An episode that portrays the importance of appearance to the reader constitutes the Empress's stay at Narimasa's (a nobleman) residence. Because the gates of Narimasa's estate are too small for the imperial carriages to pass through them, the ladies in waiting have to leave their carriage in order to get into the house. Having assumed that they would not be seen in public, the women, including Shônagon, react outraged, claiming that they were caught off-guard as some of them had not done their hair in a proper manner. In this scene, imperial drag as the safety blanket that protects the ladies-in-waiting from their potential loss of status is taken away from them. Interestingly, this subtly points to a very real decrease in favor at court from which Empress Sadako and her entourage suffered. The Empress would have never had to stay with Narimasa if she had not been losing support at court due to her father's death and a switch in power relations.

The idiosyncrasy of Shônagon's imperial drag also manifests itself in her style of writing. *The Pillow Book* consists of a miscellany of lists, essays, and diary entries which, in Penny Weiss's words, challenge "the reader to see diverse relationships . . . that can lead to a reconsideration of both the individual items and the subject of the category itself" (34). *The Pillow Book* is considered a prime example of the Japanese *zuihitsu* style, which can be translated as "following the brush" (Weiss 28). The term attempts to capture a writing technique by means of which the writer's thoughts follow or move along with the brush. The mind does not dominate or work on its own before the actual process of writing; rather, mind and brush work inseparably together instead of disconnecting writing from thinking and considering writing the result of thoughts. While to some critics this style seems incoherent and unsystematic, I claim that it reflects a type of written cross-dress that enables

Shônagon to disrupt categories, question history, and challenge established cultural visions by intuitively combining elements of daily life that might seem insignificant to some.

Shônagon's literary style establishes that she was looking for new ways of expressing herself in a world where set gender boundaries concerning language and letters confined her to limited ways of writing. McKinney paints the following picture: "Over at the Emperor's court, they were busy reinforcing the male literary tradition by laboriously copying a Chinese classic. What could a woman, who was barred from this tradition, produce that might in some way match that officially sanctioned endeavor?" (Introduction xxv). It becomes clear that Shônagon uses the idiosyncratic style of her *Pillow Book* as a means to undermine limits of composition and self-expression with which her gender and status confront her. As a reaction to her frank observations—Shônagon compares, for example, having affairs in the winter with intimate relationships in the summer—some readers of *The Pillow Book* regard Shônagon's writing as inappropriate, frivolous, or promiscuous. With her candid commentary, Shônagon presents herself as an arbiter of good taste and aesthetics. On her list of "Things That Look Stiflingly Hot," she mentions, for instance, an "extremely fat person with a great deal of hair" (Shônagon 126). This example, again, conjures up fears of social degradation that were constantly an issue for ladies-in-waiting. The style and content of the *Pillow Book*, breaking set boundaries to assert her power, constitute a form of textual cross-dressing designed to support Shônagon's sumptuary transvestism, which preserves her status at court.

I see a similar act of authorial cross-dressing in Yone Noguchi's *The American Diary of a Japanese Girl* (1902).<sup>3</sup> As a male author's imitation of a female voice, *The American Diary* is not only concerned with the thematics of cross-dressing but is itself the product of role-playing and identity-replication. Japanese men at the turn of the century still thought of prose as despicable and reserved for women while they themselves mostly practiced poetry written in Chinese characters. Women wrote in *hiragana*, Japanese characters that were considered vulgar by Japanese men, and mostly used them for love letters (Weiss 32). This might explain why Noguchi wrote only one other novel besides *The American Diary*, which are both overshadowed by the extraordinary amount of poetry he composed and for which he is well-known.<sup>4</sup> After all, poetry was considered the purest literary form in Japan. It is, hence,

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<sup>3</sup> Yonejirô Noguchi (1875-1947) left Japan for San Francisco in 1893 when he was still a student. Upon his arrival, he worked as a domestic servant and journalist before making a living with his poetry. He moved to New York City in 1900 and returned to Japan in 1904 where he became a professor of English at Keio Gijuku.

<sup>4</sup> In 1905, Noguchi publishes *The American Letters of a Japanese Parlor Maid* (Tokyo: Fuzanbo).

rather remarkable that Noguchi chose the diary form for his first novel. In discussing Noguchi's choice, Edward Marx points out that Noguchi, with his outspoken, iconoclastic, and frivolous protagonist, put an "exotic twist on a trendy if somewhat disreputable subgenre," considering that confessional women's diaries were popular in the U.S. at the time of *The American Diary's* publication (138). Marx further establishes *nikki bungaku*, diary literature that developed out of imperial annals in Japan, as a source for Noguchi's writing and mentions that the first diary of importance was written by Ki no Tsurayuki, a male author imitating a woman's voice (143).

Similarities between *The Pillow Book* and *The American Diary* emphasize the connection I see between Japanese women at the Imperial Court and Japanese immigrants to the U.S. as they support that both authors rely on "authorial drag" to achieve authority in a community to which they tried to find access. Both works predominantly build on sections of close observation, with their protagonists slyly commenting on their surrounding environments. *The American Diary* even contains lists that match Shōnagon's characteristic catalogues when Morning Glory, the female protagonist, for example, reports on "Things seen in the street" (Noguchi 36). With regard to Shōnagon, McKinney argues that "women took the diary form and made it a looser, more subjective and psychologically penetrating record of lived experience" (Introduction xxvi). It is the implementation of these changes that I also see in *The American Diary*. I want to propose, then, that Noguchi used the literary form of the fictional diary, a genre of literary exile for Japanese women, in a setting where he himself as a male Asian was excluded—the United States. Noguchi ironically plays with the form of the feminine diary to counter the feminization and silencing he had to endure as a male immigrant from Japan.

While Marx notes that "*The Pillow Book* . . . shares the whimsical quality of *The American Diary*" (143), he fails to mention how the use of the diary form serves as a means of empowerment for Noguchi, which I believe my concept of authorial drag achieves. In discussing early British male authors like Defoe and Richardson, who wrote novels from a woman's perspective, Madeleine Kahn develops the concept of "narrative transvestism," "a theory of the novel as a form which allowed its authors to exploit the instability of gender categories and which is thus inseparable from its own continual reexamination and redefinition of those categories" (6). While in Noguchi's case, too, the "male author plays out, in the metaphorical body of the text, the ambiguous possibilities of identity and gender" (Kahn 6), my project differs from Kahn's in that my emphasis with the concept of authorial drag lies on performance. In contrast to Kahn's early British writers who "gain[ ] access to a culturally defined

female voice and sensibility but run[ ] no risk of being trapped in the devalued female realm” (6), writing from an Asian woman’s perspective is very much an existential project for Noguchi, who had to write himself, as an Asian immigrant outsider to U.S. society, into existence. Being concerned with issues of survival and protest, my concept of authorial drag also sets itself apart from Lorraine Carroll’s “rhetorical drag,” with which she analyzes the replication of a female voice by male writers of captivity narratives. The writers whom Carroll discusses, such as Cotton Mather, and Noguchi share a reliance “on the ironies of gender confusion and contradiction for their cultural and political effects” (3); but the authoritative cultural and political figures in Carroll’s work do not share Noguchi’s need to establish himself as a member of the national community.

In *The American Diary*, Morning Glory comments on the ostracism that Noguchi must have experienced in real life: “I pity my native boys of this city. / ‘Jap! Jap!’ / They are dashed with such exclamations from every corner” (78-79). While those Japanese immigrants who saw themselves as sojourners were less likely to assimilate fully, this trend was common among immigrants in general at that time period. It was not the Japanese’ reluctance to assimilate that was criticized, but their supposed incapability of adapting to American culture. The first Japanese Americans were also regarded as filthy and corrupted people, referring to the loathsome jobs they were working and the poor housing conditions they endured. Thus, the Isseis’ (first generation Japanese immigrants) willingness to work their way up under extremely hard circumstances, a way of living that Caucasian Americans appreciated as a virtue in most other people, was seen as a character flaw in people of Asian descent. Another stereotype that led to anti-Japanese sentiment was the fear of sexual aggressiveness by Japanese men who were believed to desire white women. Complaints like this were often strengthened by spreading unsubstantiated rumors about rising Japanese American fecundity rates (Spickard 58-59). Most of these stereotypes were channeled against Asian men, while Asian women were venerated for their beauty, delicacy, and sexuality. Even though these stereotypes negatively characterized Asian women as a hypersexual monolith, they were seen in a more positive light by American society than Asian men. Very much aware of these differences in social acceptability, Noguchi, I claim, made use of authorial drag to perform himself, with the help of a female voice, onto a higher level of social recognition.

Despite his use of authorial drag and the inauthenticity of voice that accompanies this narrative technique, Noguchi heavily criticizes the American reproduction of Japanese art, which came out of the craze for Japonisme at the beginning of the twentieth-century. Japonisme, a signif-

icant element of the modernist movement, inspired American women, for example, to dress in kimonos and hold Japanese tea parties. Morning Glory ridicules the imitation of Japanese women by American actresses as seen in the popular musical production *The Geisha: A Story of a Tea House* (1896). When her American friend Ada puts on traditional Japanese apparel and tries to walk like a Japanese woman, Morning Glory can only mock “[h]ow ridiculously she stepped” (Noguchi 31). Morning Glory’s indignation about these poor attempts at imitation becomes understandable in light of the fact that, as Amy Sueyoshi claims in her article “Mindful Masquerades” (2005), the Americans’ “embrace of Japanese dress as exotic amusement would only reinforce the ‘alien’ status of Japanese” (69). Japanese womanhood was indeed celebrated as a “‘lost’ femininity in the shadow of the ‘New Woman’” (Sueyoshi 81), and both Japanese men and women were frequently asked by Western acquaintances to put on Japanese clothing for them, which presents a type of reverse cross-dressing that ultimately underlines the immigrants’ status of the “Other.” I see such an instance in *The American Diary* when Morning Glory poses for a photographer whose goal it is to make her appear like an American impersonating a Japanese. Morning Glory reacts with rage against this absurd attempt of imitating an imitation: “The photographer spread before me many pictures of the actress in the part of ‘Geisha.’ / She was absurd. / I cannot comprehend where ‘Mericans get the conception that Jap girls are eternally smiling puppets. / Are we crazy to smile without motive? / What an untidy presence. / She didn’t even fasten the front of her kimono” (Noguchi 40). Her critique against the objectification of Asian women is biting.

Authorial drag is not the only form of cross-dressing present in *The American Diary*. The novel contains sections in which Morning Glory experiments with her newly-acquired identity as Japanese *American* by practicing gender and class cross-dressing. In one instance, she puts on her uncle’s clothes to find out “how [she] would look in a tapering coat” (Noguchi 43). On another occasion, Morning Glory tries on the Irish maid’s dress, convinced that a “white apron on [her] black dress makes [her] so cute” and that she is “just suited to be a chambermaid” (Noguchi 45).<sup>5</sup> These episodes show that for Morning Glory the realms of ethnic, gender, and class identity do not have strict boundaries and that it might indeed be necessary to shape one’s identity based on individual needs to fit into a community. As Laura Franey points out, immigrants to the U.S. frequently adopted or were forced by circumstance to assume roles that differed greatly from their social, economic, cultural, or religious upbringing. Many Japanese men, for example, had to work as domestic

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<sup>5</sup> In *The American Letters of a Japanese Parlor-Maid* (1905), Noguchi tells the story of Morning Glory’s adventures as a domestic worker.



laborers, a task that was traditionally assigned to lower-class women in Japan (Franey xv). The result of this was the Euro-American stereotyping of Japanese immigrants as servants and their feminization. Traise Yamamoto makes it clear that, like Morning Glory, many Asian immigrants “[t]hrough various forms of masking . . . create a space for a self that resists appropriation and subjection” (264). This power of masking, of course, finds a rich cultural background in the tradition of Japanese Noh and Kabuki theater, in which men perform as women and, in preparation for their roles, even live as women in their everyday lives (Kawachi 117).

By means of their performance, these Japanese immigrants, just like Shōnagon, bear out Judith Butler’s argument that if “gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured” (180). For Butler, drag as performance allegorizes ways in which reality is reproduced and contested, and cross-dressing parodies the notion that we are all bound to a certain identity that cannot be changed. Interpreting identity as essentially performative destabilizes it and offers us the opportunity to form our identity depending on our needs. This recalls Garber’s claim that the power of the transvestite shows itself as a “disruptive act of putting into question” (13). Issues of authenticity and (national) representation prove especially prone to such a process of questioning.

Performance and identity in the context of Asian American writing necessitate the discussion of the concept of national identity. I claim that with his use of cross-dressing elements Noguchi specifically puts stereotypes against people of Asian ancestry in the U.S. into question. As Tina Chen in *Double Agency* demonstrates, Asian American identity emerges as “stereotype-in-drag” (71), and I see such self-constitution based on stereotype also in *The American Diary*. Noguchi ironically plays with the hyper-sexualization and docility of Asian immigrants: “I must remain an Oriental girl, like a cherry blossom smiling softly in the Spring moonlight” (36). Few Japanese would have called themselves “Oriental” unless they were indoctrinated in the discourse of Western imperialism, which clearly points to Noguchi’s performative technique of writing. With her expressions, Morning Glory lives Joan Riviere’s claim that “[w]omanliness [can be] assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it” (38). Ultimately, I read this narrative technique as an attempt by Noguchi to cover up his masculine authorial voice as a strategy to gain acceptance from a nation while at the same time criticizing its racist practices.

In his discussion of assimilation processes among immigrants in the United States, Ruben Rumbaut declares that assimilation involves the inventiveness of human agency. Via the different types of cross-dressing which he writes about and engages in himself, Noguchi offers us interesting examples of this necessary inventiveness. According to Rumbaut, assimilation is “also about creative interminglings and extraordinary hybridities and not at all simply surrender on the terms of a dominant core” (953). The fact that the assimilatee is not permanently fixed or static certainly speaks to the flexibility of categories and options of self-transformation that I have discussed above. Priscilla Wald, adds to these characteristics of outsiders in a community by stating that “[t]hrough their literary narratives, they participate[ ] in the imagining of a community and transform[ ] that imagining into a contemplation of the consequences and ambiguities of their own participation” (3).<sup>6</sup> This imagining oneself into a community precisely constitutes the project actualized within Noguchi’s cross-dressing scenes. For Noguchi, transvestism alleviates the “anxiety surrounding the conceptualization of personhood” connected with this process (Wald 4). As Garber points out, “the most extraordinary cultural work done by the transvestite in the context of American ‘race-relations’ is to foreground the impossibility of taxonomy, the fatal limitation of classification *as* segregation, the inevitability of ‘miscegenation’ as misnomer“ (247; emphasis in original).<sup>7</sup> Cross-dressing creates the power to overcome racial, national, and sexual exclusion.

Certainly the most crucial and prominent form of cross-dressing for Morning Glory constitutes ethnic drag, an act of performance trying to fit into a new national community. Sueyoshi elaborates how “Japanese immigrants deliberately donned Western dress in hopes of transforming themselves into ‘Americans’” (67). Morning Glory represents no exception to this practice. Inspired by U.S. magazines, she puts on a corset and Western apparel in Japan to practice her new identity on a dog: “I was glad, it amused me to think the dog regarded me as a foreign girl. . . . My imitation was clever. It succeeded” (Noguchi 10). Sueyoshi explains that while twentieth-century Japanese immigrants were still on Angel Island, they wore *wafuku*, typical Japanese dress; but as soon as they arrived in San Francisco, they would change their hairstyle and dress into *yofuku*, Western clothes, which speaks to the “immigrants’ hopes of gaining acceptance in the United States” (87).<sup>8</sup> Hair also plays an important role in

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<sup>6</sup> In her book, Wald analyzes in detail writings by Frederick Douglass, Herman Melville, Harriet Wilson, W.E.B Du Bois, and Gertrude Stein and how they constitute themselves as Americans. I argue that her discussion also fits Asian American authors like Noguchi.

<sup>7</sup> While Garber specifically refers here to African American transvestites, I believe that her argumentation is valid for all ethnicities.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Japanese immigrants in Hawaii and Latin America kept their traditional dress codes unless work on the plantation demanded different clothing (Sueyoshi 87).

Morning Glory's construction of her Japanese American subjectivity: "In Japan I regarded it as bad luck to own waving hair. / But my tastes cannot remain unaltered in Amerikey. . . . I was exhausted with making my hair curl" (Noguchi 26); the fact that she loses her Japanese hairpins one after another stresses her cultural transformation. Japanese immigrants depended on the reinvention of their ethnic self so that, Sueyoshi claims, "downplaying their ethnicity would prove to be one strategy of survival" (90). Unfortunately, authorities in San Francisco, where most Asian immigrants like Morning Glory first entered the U.S., countered the transformational power inherent in cross-dressing by making it illegal in 1903 (Sueyoshi 75).

Morning Glory, as a representative of early Japanese immigrants, undergoes her acculturation process as an identity crisis that manifests itself in cross-dressing. In looking for a new identity, Morning Glory lives out Garber's claim that cross-dressing "offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of 'female' and 'male,' whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural" (10). I would add to Garber's argument cross-dressing's ability to defy the binaries of citizen/non-citizen and Asian/American. Morning Glory's cross-dressing underlines Garber's thesis that a transvestite in a text that seemingly does not have gender difference or blurred gender as its major theme "indicates a *category crisis elsewhere*, an irresolvable conflict or epistemological crux that destabilizes comfortable binarity, and displaces the resulting discomfort onto a figure that already inhabits, indeed incarnates, the margin" (17; emphasis in original). Morning Glory, as a newly arrived immigrant fighting against stereotypes, constitutes such a subject at the margin. The challenging of identity categories that comes with cross-dressing is necessary for reinventing oneself, which is what Morning Glory sets out to do.

In *Double Agency*, Cheng takes up the issue of identity formation by claiming that Asian Americans challenge "pre-existing categories of identity even as [they] maintain[ ] identity as a powerful way of understanding subjectivity" (16).<sup>9</sup> She argues that Asian American subjectivity depends on impersonation skills on the part of the Asian immigrant. Further, because Asian Americans battle with the stereotype of 'perpetual foreigners,' they are required to impersonate themselves. Chen defines "im-personation" as a "performance by which Asian Americans are constituted and constitute themselves as speaking and acting subjects" and which challenges "static notions of racial authenticity" (xvii, 7). By means of performing their identity, Asian Americans assert the claim to a self that is not based on stereotypes and demand the right to be part of

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<sup>9</sup> Chen makes a reference to passing by African Americans as a similar practice (16).

the national community. Chen gives as an example of acts of im-personation the existence of “paper sons,” Asian men who entered the United States under the pretense that they were the children of an American, which automatically made them American, too. I argue that elements of transvestism can be regarded as im-personation. Much like cross-dressing, acts of im-personation offer options for “resisting the binary logics of loyalty/disloyalty, real/fake, and Asian/American” (Chen xvii). The concept of im-personation, taken out of its US-specific race context, could possibly also be applied to Sei Shônagon. She, too, by means of various forms of cross-dressing, negotiates binaries of true/false, powerful/powerless and performs herself into a new existence which opens up access to a new community for her. Enabled by her acts of cross-dressing, Morning Glory successfully reinvents herself, exclaiming, “I congratulated myself on my new life” (Noguchi 92).

Although transvestism is not necessarily related to homosexuality, a realm that Butler certainly opens up with her move away from the insistence on gender binarity, Morning Glory’s occasional gender cross-dressing also points to the protagonist’s confused perception of her sexual self.<sup>10</sup> According to Magnus Hirschfeld, the German sexologist who coined the term transvestism, “transvestism, particularly among men, [is] different from homosexuality because the focus of the male transvestite [is] on the clothing rather than the sex partner” (Bullough and Bullough 212). Hirschfeld proved that transvestism does not necessitate homosexual feelings and that transvestites can indeed be homosexual, or bisexual, or asexual, but are mostly heterosexual (147-154). For women, it is more “a desire “for the role of the man rather than for the clothing of the man” (Bullough and Bullough 212), which drives their acts of cross-dressing. Hirschfeld’s observations support my thesis that cross-dressing functions as a symptom of the wish to bring about a change in one’s social status and acceptance.

Both *The Pillow Book* and *The American Diary* have so far been widely neglected by American academic discourse; and yet we can acquire an immense amount of knowledge concerning identity formation in U.S. immigrants of Japanese descent from the characters discussed in this article. According to Garber, “*transvestism is a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture*” (17; emphasis in original). I hope to have established how Shônagon in her *Pillow Book* and Noguchi’s *The American Diary* take up this possibility to break out of established categories and to overcome gender, race, and class borders that confine them. For Asian immigrants, cross-dressing as im-personation enables the powerful conception and persistence of an Asian American subjectivity.

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<sup>10</sup> Concerning queer issues in works by Asian American authors, see Russell Leong’s *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience* (1996).

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