

Koizora: a mirroring of *Keitai Shōsetsu* in a
"novel" approach to modern literature

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Introduction:

Keitai shōsetsu (携帯小説) or cellular phone novels, are the newest literary phenomenon in Japan and are opening up new ways to read and understand literature. In 2007, five of the ten bestselling novels in Japan were originally cellular phone novels.¹ This shocking fact has brought media attention and publicity to many aspects of *keitai* culture in Japan. *Keitai shōsetsu* are creating a new understanding of bestselling novels not just by their untraditional physical form, but also in the lower level of literary expertise with which these novels are written or rather, tapped out.

This thesis will explore the role of the cellular phone within the *keitai shōsetsu* literary phenomenon with focus on the development of an “intimate stranger” through *keitai* communication. I will discuss the historical literary archetypes that provide striking similarities to *keitai shōsetsu*. The role of the *keitai* becomes a pervasive presence that provides readers and writers with a way of exchanging personal stories without first forming a traditional friendship bond. I will also explore the parallel role of the cellular phone in the *keitai shōsetsu* *Koizora* (恋空) “*Sky of Love*” of which I have read and translated several portions to complete this study. In order to create a foundation for understanding *Koizora*, I will begin by providing background information regarding the writers of these novels including their social demographics as well as the relationship between the anonymity of the writers and the content of the novels. Using examples from the text of *Koizora* as well as referencing the experiences of *keitai* authors, I will illustrate the similarities between the genre and the work *Koizora*.

¹ Onishi, “Thumbs Race as Japan’s Best Sellers Go Cellular,” 1.

A Description of *Keitai Shōsetsu*:

As mentioned above, *keitai shōsetsu* are novels being written on cellular phones, or *keitai*'s, by individuals in Japan. These novels are tapped out on mobile phones in a form similar to long text messages. In the following thesis, I will provide the groundwork for understanding the *keitai shōsetsu* culture as well as include modern perspectives on the genre before examining the parallels between *keitai shōsetsu* and *Koizora*, the *keitai shōsetsu* I will focus on. In spite of many current literary debates over whether *keitai shōsetsu* is deserving of the categorization as a genre or not, for simplicity's sake, I will refer to *keitai shōsetsu* in general as a genre. I will also use the terms *keitai*, cellular phone, and mobile phone interchangeably. Misa Matsuda discusses in her work entitled "Discourses of Keitai in Japan" why she chooses only to use the term *keitai* as opposed to cellular phone, mobile phone, and even *keitai denwa*. She points out that the term *keitai* refers more to phone technology as it relates to society rather than simply the device itself.² Since I will be discussing *keitai shōsetsu* in terms of the utilization of *keitai* as a device as well as societal implications of the novels, I see no reason to limit the vocabulary of this thesis to *keitai* only.

The Authors of *Keitai Shōsetsu*:

² Matsuda, "Discourses of *Keitai* in Japan," 20.

Keitai shōsetsu in Japan are typically written and read by young adults, most often young women in high school who have much leisure time as they commute to and from school by train. Young, just-married or single women in their twenties also make up a large portion of these cellular phone novelists. This second demographic group spends a lot of time either commuting to day jobs, or, for most married young women, staying at home keeping house.³

One author, Mone, epitomizes the characteristics of these novelists. Mone was a twenty-one-year-old college drop-out in 2006 when she first started writing a cellular phone novel. She had just married a young man who was finishing finance school in Tokyo while Mone chose to live separately and remain with her mother in the country in Japan. Mone was bored having no educational classes or a job to consume her time so one day she got out all of her old diaries and journals and began writing an autobiography in the form of a cellular phone novel. Mone's novel called *Eternal Dream* was published in 2007 and made the list of bestselling novels for Japan the following year.⁴

Although a few of the novels are claimed to be autobiographical, many of them are written by individuals who lead very average lives, but enjoy the creativity of coming up with intricate plots for these novels. One novelist who has had two stories published already is a twenty-seven-year-old mother with two children. She explained to reporter Dana Goodyear from *The New Yorker* that she "thinks up her stories while affixing labels to beauty products at her factory job, and sometimes writes them down on her cell phone while commuting by train to her other job, at a

³ Goodyear, "Letter From Japan: I <3 Novels," 1.

⁴ Ibid.

spa in Osaka.”⁵ Writing these novels as well as reading them is considered an escape from the everyday demands of life. This example of a working-class woman who became a bestselling author emphasizes how barriers to the ranks of the literary world have begun to erode in Japan, all due to the ubiquitous nature of the *keitai*. Further on in this paper I will discuss the autobiographical nature of *keitai shōsetsu* and how it relates to the medium by which these novels are written. In that discussion it should be understood that my analysis will refer only to those cellular phone novels to which an autobiographical claim is held.

Keitai shōsetsu novelists are also found in high schools throughout Japan. Young high school girls have found an outlet for reading and writing fantastic stories of romance and tragedy with cellular phones. Mika, a famous cellular phone novelist and author of *Koizora* allegedly wrote her novel (in which the heroine shares her name) as she was just out of high school.⁶ *Koizora* takes place in a Japanese high school and reveals the struggles of adolescents when they encounter true love. The author claims the story is autobiographical, although many events in the novel leave adult readers incredulous.

Although most of these novels are written by women, the first *keitai shōsetsu* was written by a man with the pen name Yoshi.⁷ This middle-aged Tokyo man was a tutor at a cram school and had an office in Shibuya, an area which, in the nineties, was seen as the “hub of youth culture.”⁸ Yoshi had many opportunities to observe youth interacting with their *keitai* and he got the idea

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁸ Ibid.

for a *keitai shōsetsu* from the increasing popularity and dependence on cellular phones, particularly by young adults.⁹

Keitai shōsetsu are written under pen names and often the author may never be revealed to the public. Due to the autobiographical claim, most of these novelists remain anonymous, choosing one syllable pen names; Mone, Mei, and Mika, are among the more famous *keitai shōsetsu* author pen names. The nature of the content in these novels make anonymity necessary since these young women are often claiming to be revealing dark secrets about their lives in the storylines. A skeptical viewpoint purported by critics of the *keitai shōsetsu* genre makes the assertion that these novelists remain anonymous since then the autobiographical claim cannot be proven false.¹⁰ There is a close connection between the content of the novels and the authors' insistence on anonymity. For example, Mone's story *Eternal Dream* tells of a young teenage girl, Saki (representing Mone in her youth) who is gang raped and left alongside the road. Hijiri, an older boy from school finds her and offers her his coat and the romance begins. Later on in the novel though, Hijiri unexpectedly breaks up with Saki and she discovers that he is, in fact, her half-brother. In the end, Saki and Hijiri realize that their love is stronger than the dictations of social conventions and they live happily ever after.¹¹ Autobiographies of this nature are understandably kept private in order to protect the author and his or her family.

These novelists go to great lengths to hide their identities. Mone has a blog on which her age is stated as eight years old and she has her home listed as "the heart of the mountain."¹² There is no photograph on her blog, just a cartoon caricature. In an interview with Goodyear, Mone said "I would never let my image be seen. If I'm ever photographed, I only show part of my face,

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Marx, "Koizora: Empathy and Anonymous Creation."

¹¹ Goodyear, "Letter From Japan: 1 <3 Novels," 1.

¹² Ibid.

just the profile.”¹³ Only a few close friends and her husband know she is the author of *Eternal Dream*. “I don’t want to bring unwanted attention to my family,” she said. “And it’s not just me—there’s my husband’s family to think of, given the things I’m writing. I don’t want to inconvenience anyone. Revealing anything, whether it is fiction or truth, is embarrassing, don’t you think?”¹⁴ Mone did admit that for the ending of her novel, she realized she “couldn’t put down just exactly what happened.”¹⁵ Her story became more like a typical romance novel as the ending of *Eternal Dream* shows how Mone *wished* her life had turned out rather than the reality of her resulting situation. Unlike the novel where Saki and Hijiri renew their relationship and live happily ever after, Mone and the real Hijiri went their separate ways and she married Yuta, a young man who had feelings for her all along.¹⁶ Although some of these novels may indeed be true, this example from Mone shows that there are parts of the plots and endings that are manipulated to be popular among the readers and to express the private desires of the author.

Content of Keitai Shōsetsu and Koizora:

From the example of *Eternal Dream* it is clear that the content of *keitai shōsetsu* can be compared to romance novels of soap opera proportions. The stories revolve around the lives of young women, typically high-school-aged girls in Japan, who ultimately discover the meaning of true love by means of difficult experiences they must endure. Unlike the typical romance novel, these stories often do not have a traditional happy ending which leaves audiences satisfied and

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

pleased. Instead, *keitai shōsetsu* contain stories that conclude often with a main character dying due to a tragic experience. W. David Marx, writer for *clast* online journal observes, "The stories all seem to revolve around the idea of surviving the death of a loved one."¹⁷ In a sense, *keitai shōsetsu* can be understood as a genre of coming-of-age novels where the main character experiences the struggles of adolescence in a journey to discovering True Love, and then losing that love to death or some other cruel situation.

For this project I read the first chapter of an untranslated *keitai shōsetsu*, *Koizora*. *Koizora* tells the story of a young girl named Mika who falls in love with a perplexing high school youth named Hiroki or Hiro. The two fall in love and enjoy spending time with each other when Hiro's jealous ex-girlfriend Saki, hires a gang to attack and rape Mika. Mika ends up pregnant by Hiro but their desire to marry and raise a family is complicated by the adults in their lives who see abortion as the only option. Hiro and Mika decide to drop out of school and start a family but this decision becomes fruitless as Mika miscarries. Soon after, Hiro breaks up with Mika and disappears from her life almost completely. Mika goes through much emotional trauma during this time but ends up discovering that Hiro has terminal cancer and removed himself from her life in order to spare her the pain of seeing him suffer. They spend the rest of his few days together and then Mika must move on with her life.¹⁸

The novels carry common themes with the subject matter in which they deal. From prostitution, rape, terminal disease, pregnancy, drugs, and suicide, the issues being dealt with in these novels reflect the darker side of teenager struggles. Every cellular phone novel deals with at least a few of these heavy matters, with finding true love ultimately becoming the overarching

¹⁷ Marx, "Koizora: Empathy and Anonymous Creation."

¹⁸ Ibid.

theme. The quest for true love in *keitai shōsetsu* must involve struggles and encounters with the above calamities.

Publishing Keitai Shōsetsu:

Keitai shōsetsu are changing the way and attitude with which literature is published. With traditional books written by recognized authors, there is little feedback from the public about the book until it is actually released, read, and reviewed by magazines and newspapers. Authors write about a certain subject and once the book is published, the public accepts what is given. *Keitai shōsetsu* changes this process with the use of online sites that allow aspiring *keitai shōsetsu* authors to upload their stories in sections or all at once for other authors and readers to view. Currently, *Mahō no Airando* (魔法のアイランド) "Magic Island"¹⁹ is the most popular site for this novel writing and reading in Japan and provides access to more than a million stories to readers for free. The accessibility feature allows writers to see the popularity of their topics and writing style. Readers can comment on the story with plot suggestions, praise, and even relate personal experiences that may be similar to the characters' situations in the story. Cellular phone novels, which are uploaded a chapter or two at a time, have become nearly the equivalent of weekly TV shows. Cellular phone novel uploading websites allow readers to follow their favorite in-progress novels as well as read old ones. Readers can also get the newest chapter sent to their *keitai* as soon as it is uploaded by the author. Cellular phone novel websites also serve as the method of getting a cellular phone novel published in book form. *Koizora*, like most cellular

¹⁹ <http://ip.tosp.co.jp/>

phone novels, was uploaded onto *Mahō no Airando* a chapter at a time. By the time the story reached its conclusion, it had been read by over twenty million people via cellular phone and computer.²⁰ This incredible number of followers spurred publishers to approach the author about getting the story published as a book, a decision that proved profitable when *Koizora* became the number one bestselling novel in 2007.²¹

The interaction between readers and authors, or rather, readers and the story itself, has an interesting effect of causing readers to feel personally invested in a novel. This remarkable phenomenon blurs the line between reader and writer since readers offer advice and feedback and thereby feel an ownership connection with the finished novel. A feeling of participation in the writing of a cellular phone novel could be a factor in the continuing popularity of these novels. Individuals who feel that the author of a novel took his or her advice regarding a plot or conclusion will be more likely to purchase the finished novel since they may see it as containing part of their own experiences. Likewise, individuals can feel as if the novel is telling their own story, which creates a deeper connection to the novel for those participating readers. This interaction is an important aspect of *keitai shōsetsu* which I will further expand upon in the creation of a connection between readers and writer leading to what author Hidenori Tomita calls an "intimate stranger"²² relationship.

The physical book form of these cellular phone novels may seem unnecessary since the stories can simply be downloaded with minimal expense to a reader's cellular phone. However, book forms of these novels are viewed more as collectors' items than as a means of reading the novel itself. Because the novels are readily available on the internet and via cellular phones, the

²⁰ Onishi, "Thumbs Race as Japan's Best Sellers Go Cellular," 2.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Tomita, "*Keitai* and the Intimate Stranger," 184.

published books are made very carefully and use many creative covers in order to give the book a feeling of being more than simply a book made of paper.²³ Mayumi Sato, an editor at Goma Books in Japan, said "It might seem strange that young readers are going out and buying the book after they've already read the story on their mobile. Often it's because they email suggestions and criticisms to the author on the novel website as the story is unfolding, so they feel like they've contributed to the final product, and they want a hardcopy keepsake of it."²⁴

Keitai Shōsetsu Style:

A lot of antagonism exists towards *keitai shōsetsu* by traditional authors and literary critics. As one might expect given the fact that the stories are written on mobile phones, these novels are not notable works of literature and the grammar and writing style leaves a lot to be desired. The novels are marked by the use of slang and informal, short phrases to describe situations. Emoticons such as music notes and even smiley faces set the tone in many of these novels. The prose in cellular phone novels is marked by short sentences, some only three or four words long. Fragments are common and open-ended sentences frequently appear in these novels as they are concluded with "...". This style of ending a sentence leaves more room for the reader to interpret a character's reactions and thoughts. The novels also contain much white space and returns, which can mark the passing of time or represent a main character's indecisiveness or

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Norrie, "In Japan, Cellular Storytelling is All the Rage."

confusion. The language itself contributes to shorter sentences as Japanese needs only a few characters to convey a meaning.

Hardly any descriptive scenes are included in cellular phone novels. This is done purposely to keep readers from feeling a sense of familiarity with the surroundings in the novels. A *New York Times* article explaining cellular phone novels interviewed a *keitai shōsetsu* novelist, Ms. Naito who said "Traditionally, Japanese would depict a scene emotionally, like 'The train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country.'" (This is a direct reference to the famous opening sentence of Yasunari Kawabata's *Snow Country*.) "In cell phone novels, you don't need that. If you limit it to a certain place, readers won't be able to feel a sense of familiarity."²⁵

The style of writing, which limits descriptive phrases, is closely related to the medium in which the novel is written. By its very nature, writing a novel on a cellular phone is conducive to abbreviations, emoticons, and short sentences. The tapping-out of novels on small cellular phones can cause finger cramping and can take a long time to get a lengthy sentence spelled out on a cellular phone. One novelist had to switch to typing her novels on a personal computer as the mobile phone texting caused her to burst a blood vessel in her finger and her fingernail cut into her skin causing bleeding.²⁶ Of course, moving to a personal computer caused formatting problems since *keitai shōsetsu* has a specific style involving the blank space and special emoticons representing sounds and tone of voice. Typing on a computer requires uploading the written chapters to a cellular phone to reformat the novel in *keitai shōsetsu* form before uploading it to the internet. There is debate about whether writing on any other device aside from a cellular phone can still qualify a novel as a *keitai shōsetsu*. One publisher admitted that a

²⁵ Onishi, "Thumbs Race as Japan's Best Sellers Go Cellular," 2.

²⁶ Ibid.

novelist who switched to a computer changed her style, "Since she's switched to a computer, her vocabulary's gotten richer and her sentences have also grown longer."²⁷

A highly criticized aspect of cellular phone novels is the lack of accurate factual information. Because there is little detailed description of either characters or occurrences in the stories, some of the plot is very suspect with regard to reality. Several of the novels contain scenes involving severe illnesses and resulting deaths. These illnesses and deaths often are made to occur in unbelievable ways. In *Koizora*, the author unrealistically depicts a pregnancy as well as the physical effects of malignant lymphoma.²⁸ Typically, traditional novelists will seek professional advice and ensure that any occurrence in a plot is factually accurate. Novels that involve serious illnesses will, for the most part, contain accurate descriptions along with an accurate time line for the illness. *Keitai shōsetsu* is changing readers' expectations of correct information. Readers overlook the inaccuracies in *Koizora*, and still widely believe it to be an autobiographical tale.²⁹

Historical Equivalent of *Keitai Shōsetsu*:

At first glance, it would appear that *keitai shōsetsu* is a revolutionary genre of literature. However, female-authored serialized confessional fiction can be traced back as far as the *Tale of Genji* and the *Kagerō Nikki*. Each of these works contains aspects that resemble the current genre of *keitai shōsetsu*.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Marx, "Koizora: Empathy and Anonymous Creation."

²⁹ Ibid.

Kagerō Nikki is a work from the Heian period describing the life of the author in her quest to be at peace with her philandering husband, Fujiwara no Kaneie.³⁰ This well-known work resembles *keitai shōsetsu* in both the autobiographical nature as well as the hidden identity of the writer. The author of *Kagerō Nikki* is known in the present time only by the title "Mother of Michitsuna."³¹

The *Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu was also written in the Heian period.³² The *Tale of Genji* was written and delivered to readers in chapter installments; closely mirroring what *keitai shōsetsu* has embraced as its own method of delivery.³³ Traces of Japanese women's literature from the first decades of the twentieth century can be found in *keitai shōsetsu* from the development of the female version of the *watakushi shōsetsu* (私小説) "I-fiction".³⁴ In an article entitled "The Origins of the Concept of 'Women's Literature'" the author Joan Ericson indirectly depicts *keitai shōsetsu* in her description of I-fiction by Japanese women authors. Ericson writes:

The dominant trend in Japanese literature in the first decades of the twentieth century was to emphasize the interiority of the author in what came to be known as the I-novel, or I-fiction...In particular, the confessional diaries of women writers in the classical Japanese tradition constituted a wellspring for the pre-eminent genre of modern Japanese letters. It is not surprising, then, given greater opportunities for education and the growth of a sizable female readership...that women should adopt similar confessional forms to express their world. In fact, the most successful modern authors, both male and female, were influenced by this 'feminine' tradition. Women writers were quite candid about themselves, revealing secrets about their lives, loves, and search for survival, in a manner as sensational and indiscreet as that of their male counterparts.³⁵

³⁰ Field, *The Splendor of Longing in the "Tale of Genji,"* 5-10.

³¹ Minoru and Bowring, "Style and Point of View in the *Kagerō Nikki*," 366.

³² Vernon, *Daughters of the Moon*, 5-7.

³³ Shirane, "The *Tale of Genji* and the Dynamics of Cultural Production: Canonization and Popularization," 1-3.

³⁴ Ericson, "The Origins of the Concept of 'Women's Literature,'" 90-91.

³⁵ Ibid.

The works written by women at this time were categorized as *jiden shōsetsu* (自伝小説) “autobiographical fiction”³⁶ rather than *watakushi shōsetsu*, which were connected more with the I-fiction written by men. As a genre, *keitai shōsetsu* mirrors *jiden shōsetsu* particularly regarding the content, which consists of stories about experiences with personal secrets and love. Similar to *keitai shōsetsu*, these I-novels written by women received their own share of criticism from established literary authors. A 1921 issue of a literary journal *Kaizō* described the I-novels as “no more than an extension of a chronicle, lacking in reflection.”³⁷ However, Ericson goes on to point out that in a few short years, these novels became the “pre-eminent measure of literary merit”³⁸ and were considered “pure literature.”³⁹ Banana Yoshimoto, an extremely popular traditional novelist wrote “Youth have their own kind of suffering, and I think that the cellular phone novels became an outlet for their suffering. If the cell phone novels act as some consolation, that is fine.” She went on, “I personally am not interested in them as novels. I feel that it is a waste of time to read them.”⁴⁰ It is not to be expected that *keitai shōsetsu* will become the standard measure of literary merit in the near future, however critics of the genre should perhaps look more closely at *keitai shōsetsu* to discover the value of this raw writing style.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Difficulties Facing Keitai Shōsetsu:

A problem with *keitai shōsetsu* in comparison to traditional novels stems directly from the intangibility of a cellular phone novel prior to being published as a book. Much like the way a Kindle works, a complete *keitai shōsetsu* can be downloaded from the internet for a minimal fee. However, the novels can also be found for free on other sites and reproduced on blogs. This creates a problem for authors as well as publishers of the novels since copyright issues become difficult to resolve. The very nature of the internet tends to blur intellectual property rights so it is no surprise to learn that these cellular phone novels, particularly serialized novels that have not been finished can be too easily stolen and important plot ideas used by other writers and fans of the novels.

Many people are wondering if cellular phone novels can be as popular in the United States as they are in Japan. In the United States though, the Kindle is fulfilling a need by consumers to have several books available without having to physically carry them around. Steve Jobs, the CEO of Apple Inc., said in an interview “It doesn't matter how good or bad the product is [referring to Amazon's Kindle]; the fact is that people don't read anymore.”⁴¹ He went on to say that “Forty percent of the people in the U.S. read one book or less last year.”⁴² After further research, it was discovered that the correct percentage is actually twenty-seven percent, but the concept behind Jobs' statement remains. Perhaps there is no demand in the United States for a novel that can be written and read on a cellular phone since many people do not spend time reading books. On the other hand, the most widely held reason for the increasing popularity of

⁴¹ Elgan, “Read a Good Cell Phone Lately?”

⁴² Ibid.

cellular phone novels in Japan is simply the fact that Japan contains an extensive commuter culture. Columnist and author Mike Elgan writes “so many Japanese people, including students, have long daily commutes in trains too crowded for open books. The size and portability of cellular phones have made them the most important source for all media, including ‘printed’ media.”⁴³ The cellular phone novel in Japan fulfills a need to utilize idle time on trains in a respectful, yet entertaining manner. Currently in the United States though, while there is a commuter culture, it is not nearly as widespread as in Japan. Most individuals in the United States do not spend even remotely the same amount of time commuting as people in Japan.

Another theorized reason for why the spread of cellular phone novels in United States will most likely not occur at such a high rate as in Japan is the audience participation aspect of cellular phone novels. As Elgan puts it “I think cellular phone novels are hot in Japan and not in America because the Japanese have made novels participatory, and we haven't figured out how to do that yet.”⁴⁴ Elgan goes on to point out that pop culture in the United States involves celebrities, bands, and music artists that people see as “part of their world...there’s a constant feedback loop in clothing and hairstyles between band and their fans. They share a vocabulary and a world view.”⁴⁵ In order for cellular phone novels to become part of pop culture in the United States, novels need to be seen by younger people as something in which they can participate. Books are seen as part of media “handed down from on high.”⁴⁶ Young people do not see books as something they could create themselves. On the other hand, we have YouTube, Instant Message, Facebook, and other media which young people feel comfortable using and participating in. Many teenagers and college students enjoy making their own movies and

⁴³ Elgan, “Will Cell Phones Save Books?”

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

uploading them to YouTube for others to view. They see video clips as something they can participate in. Teenagers don't mind downloading movies and songs to their iPods to listen to during travel. According to Elgan, movies and songs are both types of media that young people feel involved in. If books were seen in the same way, perhaps cellular phone novels in the United States wouldn't be such a distant concept after all.⁴⁷ Elgan believes the solution lies in finding a medium that will allow readers who write their own novels to publish them to a large audience, "We need to figure out how to let readers publish their own books in a way that can reach a mass audience -- not just on obscure blogs, but on all media: print, online, audio and, yes, even cellular phones."⁴⁸

In contrast to Elgan's hope that cellular phone novels will find their way to the United States, Jonathan Abel, an assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania who has performed extensive research on cellular phone novels sees the issue quite differently. Abel says that an important aspect of cellular phone novel popularity in Japan is that cellular phones are the primary method by which young people in Japan access the internet. In the United States because there are so many more ways of getting on the web and reading novels (laptops, the Kindle), cellular phone novels may seem unnecessary. Abel believes that a cellular phone novel pop culture "won't happen because technologically, we are beyond that point."⁴⁹ In *The Columbia Spectator*, Gabrielle Sarpy points out that "the appeal of the cellular phone novel is not just about format, but also the autobiographical genre that emerged with it...the increasing

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Sarpy, "Japan Finds Novel Way to Read."

realization of the similarities between America and Japan makes cellular phone novels a good way to explore Japanese culture.”⁵⁰

Koizora:

In an effort to more fully understand the *keitai shōsetsu* phenomenon, I decided to read the first chapter of a cellular phone novel. I hoped to get a feel for the style, emoticon usage, and content of a *keitai shōsetsu*. With this in mind, I wanted to choose a novel that could be considered an acceptable example of the genre as a whole. It was recommended that I examine *Koizora* by Mika. While I realize that *Koizora* is not representative of all cellular phone novels comprehensively, I think it is safe to say that *Koizora* is definitely representative of the *popular* cellular phone novel. The story by Mika had over twenty-five million hits by the time it was concluded as a serialization. *Koizora* was also published as a novel, made into a brief television series, adapted into a film, and now has a manga series based on the tale. My initial goal in reading, analyzing, and translating the first chapter was to discover why *keitai shōsetsu* are so appealing to many and yet others call the content of these novels “short, escapist trash.”⁵¹

The setting for the novel *Koizora* takes place in Japan at a typical high school. The main characters are high school students who struggle with finding and maintaining true love. The novel follows Mika through her journey of finding true love. *Koizora*, like most *keitai shōsetsu*, focuses on moving the plot in the story rather than refining character development, location descriptions, or internal dialogues. The simplicity of *Koizora* is most obvious in the lack of

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Elgan, “Read a Good Cell Phone Lately?”

character development, especially with the main characters. For example, Mika is described in one paragraph in a non-subtle manner less than six lines into the book with little or no segues⁵²:

Tahara Mika:

A freshman who started high school in April.

It is now just three months from the time she entered, and she has found a good group of friends and they got along with each other. Each day they enjoyed each other's company.

Because of Mika's short height and childish face, her biggest worry was that she looked younger than her actual age.

She wasn't especially intelligent and she wasn't particularly cute.

She possessed no special skills. She has no dreams for her future.

As soon as she graduated middle school, she dyed her straight hair a light brown.

Now she is still not accustomed to wearing light makeup.

From the time she was in middle school, Mika has lived a rather ordinary lifestyle.

She had the usual friends.

In her own way, there were people that she fell in love with and dated.

But what all of these relationships had in common was that no matter who she fell in love with, these relationships would end after a short period.

What is true love? Mika doesn't know...the one thing she DOES know is that love quickly ends and never lasts.

Even though Mika thought that she didn't particularly have to fall in love, in the middle of this...she met him.

⁵² All English translations of *Koizora* by Sarah Keckler, 2010.

*Mika's life, which would have ended in this very ordinary way, began to change because of her encounter with him...*⁵³

We learn nothing about where Mika lives and there is no particular geographical setting for this story. Indeed, as is the case with many *keitai shōsetsu* tales, the location is not specific to a certain city in Japan, although it is understood that most *keitai shōsetsu* occur in rural Japan. Like most *keitai shōsetsu*, the main character is a realistic heroine. Her redeeming qualities lie in her ability to remain level-headed in desperate situations. Mika is not the traditional beautiful heroine that is admired for her stunning looks and ability to attract members of the opposite sex, as we would expect to find in a typical romance novel. She is not even another type of heroine found in romance novels who is allowed to be unattractive, but intellectually a genius and thus establish her use from a plot perspective. Mika is simply plain, boring, and perhaps even a bit dull. Why is this attractive? Why do people cry for Mika as they watch the movie or television series and read the novel? There is something about the fact that Mika is so average. Indeed, she is so normal that we can see her in individuals around us, and even in ourselves. Particularly for teenage girls, this type of a heroine can arouse strong camaraderie, since high-school-aged young women stereotypically are working through self-esteem issues and perceive themselves as boring in comparison to pop culture heroines. A heroine like Mika provides a role model who remains calm when her world is falling apart. Mika, although not beautiful like her friend Aya, manages to catch the attention of a handsome leader of a gang as well as the ladies-man of the school, Nozomu, whom Aya wants to date. In a way, this situation of average Mika attracting the desirable young men in the high school is often a desire for teenage girls reading *Koizora*. The character of Mika sends the message that a young woman no longer has to be gorgeous and brilliant to attract young men. Perhaps it is the shy, "normal" girls that boys will like, if only

⁵³ Mika, *Koizora*, 12-13.

because this type of girl is such a welcome change from the shallow personalities of high school peers.

Although *Koizora* is a modern novel set in Japan, it continues to follow certain literary archetypes of Japanese women. Interestingly enough, Mika's character also represents the "submissive" young woman in Japan. Goodyear reports, "The stories themselves often evince a conservative viewpoint: women suffer passively, the victims of their emotions and their physiology; true love prevails."⁵⁴ Satoko Kan, a professor who specializes in contemporary women's literature said "From a feminist perspective, for women and girls to be able to speak about themselves is very important, as a *method*, it leads to the empowerment of girls. But, in terms of content, I find it [cellular phone novels] quite questionable, because it just reinforces norms that are popular in male-dominated cultures."⁵⁵

This passive aspect of Mika's character is evident as she allows herself to be led by her romantic interest, Hiro's, desires, which she convinces herself should be embraced as her own. As an example, in the scene in the novel where Hiro and Mika physically consummate their relationship, Hiro asks Mika if it is alright and she, perceiving that he has whispered that he wants her, succumbs to his desires even though she does not really want to, simply because she is afraid of making Hiro angry or upset at her.⁵⁶ The modern reader feels disappointment that Mika gave in to her boyfriend's physical desires even though she herself did not want to engage in those activities.

In another example, Mika discovers that there is another girlfriend with Hiro and asks Hiro to break up with the other girl. Hiro agrees but then it is discovered later on, after Mika gives

⁵⁴ Goodyear, "Letter From Japan: 1 <3 Novels," 2.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Mika, *Koizora*, 34.

herself to Hiro, that Hiro lied and did not break up with his current girlfriend. Mika suffers for a while with the knowledge that she has given herself away to a liar and cheat. Contrary to modern expectations, Mika does not lash out at Hiro or react in an angry way. Instead she suffers silently, crying to herself all the way home and trying to forget her experience.⁵⁷

An article by Unita Sachidanand compares and contrasts the Heian period literary view of women heroines against certain modern Japanese women authors' writings and how women's roles are perceived in both types of literature. *Koizora*, indeed, *keitai shōsetsu* in general, seems to be a relapse in literary history. Instead of modern works that emphasize the strength of a woman in and out of love, these cellular phone novels bring out the weakness of a woman without a man and the sufferings she endures for the sake of true love. This view of the silent suffering woman can be found in Heian period literature, which was marked by women authors who, according to Sachindanand, wrote "narratives projecting only the sufferings and tragedies of the lives of court women."⁵⁸ Considering both earlier examples of the *Tale of Genji* and *Kagerō Nikki*, this assessment appears accurate. The women protagonists in Heian literature are often marked by their weakness, reliance on those about them, and lives which, "acquired meaning only within the four walls of the house."⁵⁹ This description of the female protagonist mirrors Mika's experiences and personality throughout *Koizora* in many ways. Mika is seen as being acted upon by outside forces including her friends, her *keitai*, and circumstances beyond her control such as her romantic interest's ex-girlfriend. She passively accepts what happens to her as a result of other individuals' actions. Mika is not the pro-active heroine who takes matters

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Sachidanand, "Gender Question in Modern Japanese Literature," 35-36.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

into her own hands and watches out for her own safety. Mika is simply a victim of other people's decisions as well as her interactions with her cellular phone.

The other main character in *Koizora* is the romantic interest and gang leader, Hiro. Hiro is the epitome of contradictions in a high school youth. Hiro is the leader of a gang of students. Hiro's leadership position in this gang makes him an intimidating character, at least initially. Despite Hiro's fierce appearance, the reader soon discovers that he is gentle and kind. He has moments of boyish happiness and in several scenes his almost-childish, innocent smile makes Mika melt every time. Because of his complicated demeanor, I believe Hiro is the most confusing character in *Koizora*. The reader is never aware of the thoughts that move through his head and there is no internal dialogue for him in the text. Similar to Mika, we learn nothing about his family in the first chapter of the book. We are left wondering about his background as well as why he holds this role as a gang leader? Hiro's character is never completely comprehensible to the reader. This aspect of the novel only serves to reinforce the autobiographical nature of the story. True to real life, Mika would have no way of determining Hiro's thoughts. The author of *Koizora* allows the reader to experience the reality of the situation. Hiro changes from gentle to heartless, particularly when it is discovered that he had a girlfriend even while texting, calling, and visiting with Mika. Hiro lies to Mika several times about having a girlfriend and finally tells her he has broken up with his girlfriend, but lies to Mika about this fact as well. He finally tells the truth though, and attempts to make amends for his actions. The first chapter of *Koizora* works through these problems with Hiro's character and ends with Hiro and Mika on the verge of a happy relationship.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Mika, *Koizora*, 41.

Mika and Hiro both have friends who, coincidentally enough, mirror each other. There is Aya, Mika's friend who is crazy about boys and spends her time talking about her crush on the school womanizer, Nozomu. Nozomu is Hiro's friend and is the equivalent of Aya in regards to his shallowness and trivial conversation. One word is commonly used in the text to describe Aya and Nozomu's actions, speech, and personalities. The word is *karui* (軽い) and appears continuously throughout the first chapter of *Koizora* in reference to the shallowness displayed by Aya and Nozomu.

Aya has an important role as a foil to Mika in *Koizora*. She represents the exact opposite type of girl from Mika. Aya's shallow personality and selfishness leads to much trouble for Mika as Mika tries to deal with the consequences of Aya giving out her phone number to Nozomu. Nozomu and Aya both cause difficulties for Mika, but Mika's character is such that she cannot be angry at either of them. When Aya spreads false rumors around the school that Mika is a boyfriend-stealer, Mika is distressed but does not confront Aya. When Aya discovers that Mika is not romantically interested in Nozomu, she rushes to ask Mika to forgive her gossip. Mika cannot help but forgive Aya's selfishness as Aya cheerfully announces that she will help Mika find a boyfriend. Nozomu's frivolous texting only causes Mika mild annoyance as she must cope with the inordinate messages and phone calls she receives from him. However, Mika does not confront Nozomu simply because she is content to ignore his contact in the same way that he ignores her presence at school.⁶¹ Nozomu is simply a foil used to facilitate Mika and Hiro's acquaintance while Aya is a foil used to bring about Mika and Nozomu's association. Nozomu and Aya both act as shallow friends to Mika with information to guide her actions and thoughts. In one scene, Nozomu calls Mika on the phone late at night to inform her that Hiro already has a

⁶¹ Mika, *Koizora*, 18.

girlfriend and that he does not recommend that Mika continue to communicate with Hiro. This knowledge forces Mika to confront Hiro, who admits that he has a girlfriend but lies by telling Mika that he intends to break off the relationship with his girlfriend. Mika is doubtful regarding his honesty and reacts by consulting Aya about what she should say. Aya suggests that Mika tell Hiro that she can no longer be close friends with him unless he breaks up with his current girlfriend.⁶² Mika's actions are brought about by the advice of Nozomu and Aya as they communicate with her.

The Role of the Keitai:

James Katz, an expert on cellular phone technology and usage within cultures, calls the cellular phone a "mini-human."⁶³ After reading the first chapter of *Koizora*, I must agree with Katz's assessment. The cellular phone in *Koizora* acts as an entirely solo character in the story. The mobile phone shapes the story and Mika's life revolves around her interactions with her *keitai*. It seems that Mika's romantic life was brought about by the usage of her cellular phone, but on a deeper level we see the attachment that Mika has with her cellular phone to be much more than that. It becomes evident that Mika's attachment to her cellular phone exemplifies the relationship between real-life readers and their *keitai*, which has caused *keitai shōsetsu* to thrive as a popular genre.

⁶² Ibid., 28.

⁶³ James Katz and Jing Wang, "Cell Phone Culture" (lecture presented at MIT Communications Forum, Cambridge, MA, November 17, 2005).

The pervasive presence of the cellular phone in the first chapter of the novel *Koizora* gives the device a nearly-human role in the life of its owner, as well as the lives of those who use the existence of the cellular phone to connect and relate to the owner of the cellular phone. Mika's *keitai* in *Koizora* acts in a variety of roles throughout the novel, which serves only to reinforce the idea that the mobility and frequency of use of the cellular phone has made it a permanent part of youth culture in Japan to the point of forming and increasing the strength of relationships built upon communication by means of the cellular phone. Mika relies increasingly on the new friendships and acquaintances that she develops through *keitai* communication.

It is important to note the unwritten rules in *Koizora* surrounding usage of the cellular phone not merely regarding where it is used, but also who is allowed to call whom, when texting is acceptable or preferred, and who can give out another friend's cellular phone number. Because of these rules, possession of a cellular phone in *Koizora* facilitates a higher level of decision-making throughout each character's daily life.

In the first chapter of *Koizora*, Mika forms two new "friends" thanks to the cellular phone communication that exists between Mika and the two high school boys she encounters. The cellular phone first makes an appearance in the first chapter of *Koizora* when popular Nozomu, begs Mika and her two girlfriends, Aya and Yuka, to exchange phone numbers with him and become his friend. Mika and Yuka know better than to give a ladies' man like Nozomu their phone numbers, but Aya, the easily-impressed friend eagerly exchanges phone numbers with Nozomu, much to Mika and Yuka's consternation.⁶⁴ In this scene, Nozomu ignores the unspoken rule that a user only exchanges phone numbers with individuals that he or she knows personally. Aya has an equivalent lack of respect for this rule, evident not only by her free exchange of numbers with Nozomu, but also later in the next scene when it is discovered that

⁶⁴ Mika, *Koizora*, 14.

Aya has given Nozomu Mika's phone number without Mika's permission. Aya and Nozomu are both guilty of invading Mika's private space by giving and receiving her number unbeknownst to Mika. Hiro, on the other hand, is an innocent bystander during one of Nozomu's phone harassment sessions and gains Mika's phone number with her permission.

The role of the *keitai* in this initial scene is to reinforce the notion that each individual's *keitai* can be viewed as a portal to accessing another's private life. In an article entitled "*Keitai* and the Intimate Stranger" Hidenori Tomita writes "...the fixed-line telephone number is the same as the address, identified by a series of numbers that represent the physical and social location. In contrast, *keitai* is a telephone of an individual, not tied to a particular location, and its number can be perceived as the individual's number."⁶⁵ By possessing another person's phone number, the possessor now has the ability to contact the person in question at any time. This ability has become more unlimited as individuals have become more attached to their *keitai* and are rarely separated from them. In the introduction to *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian*, Mizuko Ito notes that cellular phone usage by teenagers in Japan has resulted in teens utilizing the cellular phone as a means of connecting with a small, intimate circle of acquaintances. "These intimate circles of contact are...described as 'telecooning', the production of social identities through small, insular social groups."⁶⁶ In *Koizora*, Mika's control over her carefully-selected intimate "telecooon"⁶⁷ of friends who possess her phone number is lost as Aya's indiscriminate, selfish actions put Mika in an awkward situation along with undesired contact from Nozomu.

Analyzing the Mirroring between *Koizora* and *Keitai Shōsetsu*:

⁶⁵Tomita, "*Keitai* and the Intimate Stranger," 199.

⁶⁶ Ito, introduction to *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian*, 10-14.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

I find it interesting that *Koizora* and aspects of the genre of *keitai shōsetsu* mirror each other in many ways, not least of which is the representation of the *keitai*'s role in bringing about communication between the players in both works of literature. The role of the *keitai* in *keitai shōsetsu* is very important in order to understand the parallel role of the cellular phone in the first chapter of *Koizora*. In *Koizora*, the role of the cellular phone is crucial to the plot of the story. Similarly, for *keitai shōsetsu*, the role of the cellular phone is imperative to the accessibility and growth of the genre.

The *keitai* is obviously important to *keitai shōsetsu* as a medium to read and write these cellular phone novels, but it also plays a more subtle role as a form of communication between author and reader. The cellular phone allows readers and writers to become acquainted, not necessarily in a deep friendship, but in a way that is an acknowledgement of the other's presence and experiences. For a *keitai shōsetsu* author, the very nature of writing a novel on one's cellular phone and uploading it for the world to view is an encouragement to readers to respond through comments on the story as well as creating a dialogue about similar experiences and even adding plot and character suggestions. The reader's role in this feedback loop is utilizing the cellular phone to read the novel and then often using the cellular phone to respond to the author with shared experiences and comments. By reading and commenting on a cellular phone novel, a reader signifies to the author that he or she is now part of a special group that follows a particular author's story. While *Koizora* falls into the category of *keitai shōsetsu*, there is an overarching depiction of the relationship between the author and reader of the genre and the two main characters in the novel *Koizora*.

The following portion of this paper will analyze the "intimate stranger" relationship concept and discuss the effects of this relationship on both the characters in *Koizora* and the author and reader in the *keitai shōsetsu* process.

Hidenori Tomita defines the term "intimate stranger" in the following way: "I call people with whom intimate, anonymous contact is made in cyberspace intimate strangers."⁶⁸ Anonymity is defined in a broad range from not knowing another's name to knowing a name but no identity. Tomita goes on to explain how the "intimate stranger" has come to be connected with the *keitai*:

Now...we have the intimate stranger, a person who is anonymous but also intimate, a type of relationship that has been made possible by new media. The unique characteristics of communication with intimate strangers can be understood in comparison to earlier communication patterns. Originally, the telephone was used for conversations with friends or to relay messages. When we talked with people we did not know, it was for business or for making an inquiry to customer service- in short, the purpose was purely instrumental. When tradition telephone communication was positioned on a grid of acquaintance versus stranger and instrumental (serving as a means to an end) versus consummate (existing as the end itself) one quadrant remained empty: the one representing stranger and consummate. This quadrant was filled by the new telephone communication between intimate strangers.⁶⁹

Tomita also goes on to point out that media communication facilitates anonymity and that by repeated "encounters" – conversations- anonymous individuals can engage in friendly dialogue without knowing each other's identities. "In other words, this is a world where intimacy arises from anonymity"⁷⁰ Hidenori Tomita sums up the essence of these relationships in reference to a movie which depicts a romance resulting from an anonymous relationship that occurs via e-mail. Tomita says in regard to the two main characters in the movie, "They were able to communicate

⁶⁸ Tomita, "*Keitai* and the Intimate Stranger," 184.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 190.

honestly with each other only because they did not know much about each other"⁷¹ We can break down the intimate stranger relationship into three factors that comprise the connection. The intimate stranger relationship is marked by anonymous communication, the sharing of personal feelings, and the creation of a connection between individuals.

In *Koizora*, anonymous communication is evident in the beginning stages of the relationship between Mika and Hiro. Hiro and Mika encounter one another on the phone when Nozomu, the shallow, annoying wanna-be-friend of Mika's drunk dials Mika from Hiro's house phone and ends up handing the line with a confused Mika on the other end to Hiro. Mika and Hiro bond over their mutual embarrassment regarding Nozomu's behavior and in the brief conversation, Hiro and Mika exchange phone numbers and grant each other permission to initiate contact again. Hiro and Mika discover that they attend the same school although they have never met in person.⁷² Their on-going conversations, which occur after the initial telephone conversation involving Nozomu, constitute anonymous conversation in their intimate stranger status.

Although Mika and Hiro exchange names and identity-revealing information about themselves, their conversation is still considered anonymous since no face-to-face meeting has ever taken place. Interestingly enough, in *Koizora*, during Mika and Hiro's first conversations, they make no plans to meet each other in person, even though they are both on summer break from school and live in the same general area. It is understood by both Mika and Hiro that they are content with a friendship built solely on anonymous communication.

The content of anonymous communication is important to the development of an intimate stranger relationship. Sharing genuine feelings that would otherwise not be communicated in a

⁷¹ Ibid., 191.

⁷² Mika, *Koizora*, 20-21.

face-to-face anonymous conversation marks an intimate stranger relationship. As Mika and Hiro continue to converse with one another via phone and text messages, they begin to open up their hearts and share honest opinions without reserve. There is a sense that Mika and Hiro are relieved that each one genuinely wants to consult and discuss matters that are of interest to them both. In *Koizora*, Mika and Hiro's conversations are described in the following way:

Sakurai Hiroki...

No, it was Hiro from the day they exchanged phone numbers, and during summer break every day they kept in contact.

Even though she didn't meet Hiro or know what he looked like, because their interests matched and they liked the same kind of music, they were immediately open with each other.

From their exchanges, they understood a few things.

First, even though Mika and Hiro's classes were far apart, they did commute to the same school.

Because Hiro heard a lot from Nozomu about Mika, it seemed like he already knew about her.

When they had free time, the two exchanged communication, and gradually, the relationship deepened.⁷³

A few pages later in the story, Hiro and Mika have already met in person at school but they continue to text and call each other for the majority of their conversations. Mika gradually

⁷³ Ibid.

comes to trust Hiro despite his unconventional appearance and social position, which will be discussed later.

From the beginning, Mika thought she should not trust Hiro, but while they continued to talk, she came to trust him more.

Before she knew it, Mika was opening her heart to Hiro, she consulted with him regarding her troubles and their relationship became closer.

Although Hiro looked frightening, he would listen earnestly and when she asked him for advice, he would respond with strong, reassuring words.⁷⁴

Mika and Hiro create a connection through their anonymous communication which serves to reveal their true feelings about many different subjects. In order to continue the intimate stranger relationship though, their feelings and opinions must be such that a connection is created between the two parties. Mika and Hiro's anonymous conversation would not continue if it was discovered that they disagreed on most issues and were unable to empathize with each other. In the text, we see that Mika and Hiro discover in their conversations, that they agree on many of the subjects they discuss. In the translation above, Mika and Hiro find that they enjoy the same kind of music. The fact that they have mutual acquaintances increases their understanding of each other. Creating a connection by having subjects in common serves to build a foundation for the intimate stranger relationship which Mika and Hiro share.

The development of the intimate stranger within the genre of *keitai shōsetsu* is evident as authors, who are known only by fake names and fake details on their respective blog sites, communicate the outpourings of their hearts to readers. These readers often choose to

⁷⁴ Ibid., 28.

communicate and respond to authors via comments and online messaging with screen names, which are often identity-concealing names.

The anonymous communication that occurs in the writing of these novels is perhaps too obvious. Authors, as mentioned previously, go by pen names and thus anonymously communicate with readers. Readers similarly may anonymously communicate with authors by posting comments and sending e-mails expressing their enjoyment of the novel, sympathy for the characters' experiences, and even suggestions for plot direction. The intimate stranger concept works both ways, from an author sharing personal stories with readers to readers responding to authors telling their own private experiences that resemble the storyline in a *keitai shōsetsu*.

The content of both novels and comments by readers can be considered mutual sharing of deep feelings and experiences. *Keitai shōsetsu* authors fulfill this role of intimate stranger as they reveal private thoughts and experiences to readers through the autobiographical stories they write. In return, readers often share their own private thoughts with authors as reflections on the stories they have read. For example, for the author of the *keitai shōsetsu* *Eternal Dream*, communication with readers began almost immediately after she began writing. Goodyear explains "On Mone's third day of writing, readers started to respond. 'Please post the next one,' and 'I'm interested to see what happens,' she [Mone] remembers them writing. She had been posting about twenty screens a day—roughly ten thousand words—divulging as freely as in her diaries, only this was far more satisfying. 'Everyone is suffering over their loves and trying to figure out their lives, but my particular struggle was something I wanted to let other girls know about,' she says. 'Like, "Hey, girls, I've been through this, you can make it, get up!'" Roland Kelts, author of *Japanamerica* explains that for confessional writers, *keitai shōsetsu* is a safe outlet for self-expression and a "magic cloak" that makes disappearing into the crowd an easy

thing to do. “The cell-phone writers have found a pretty clever strategy, through technology, for being part of the culture—participating in that interdependency—and also having a voice.”⁷⁵

Creating a connection with the intimate stranger through *keitai shōsetsu* fits perfectly with the content of the novels. Sharing private thoughts with another person creates a bond between the two parties. This is evident in *keitai shōsetsu* when anonymous communication between readers and authors becomes verified by the feedback loop that is created. The loop is begun by authors anonymously communicating private experiences to readers. These readers then anonymously communicate to the authors their personal reactions and feelings about the novel. As a result, authors feel a connection to readers as they share similar experiences resulting in an intimate stranger relationship, albeit not romantic. The lively feedback loop in *keitai shōsetsu* is the result of the development of the intimate stranger, which is made possible only through the environment that a *keitai*-heavy society creates. The very nature of *keitai shōsetsu* encourages communication between novelist and reader because of the bond created as a reader invests him or herself personally in the story, which is often read on the reader’s own *keitai*.

The concept of an intimate stranger serves to further embed *keitai shōsetsu* in a reader base that relies on these stories to recall their own sad stories, which relate to the novel they are currently reading. Authors may even change plots based on the connection with a reader. For example, the first cellular phone novelist Yoshi wrote about the area in which he lived, Shibuya, which was seen as the center for *enjo kōsai* (a form of prostitution where school girls trade companionship and/or sex with older men for money to purchase designer accessories and

⁷⁵ Goodyear, “Letter From Japan: I <3 Novels,” 1.

clothing).⁷⁶ Yoshi's novel involved a seventeen-year-old heroine who participates in *enjo kōsai* to pay for an expensive heart operation for her boyfriend. The boyfriend does not receive the money in time and the heroine dies of AIDS that she contracted from a client. Yoshi explained that while writing this novel, he received a message from a young reader telling him that she got AIDS from *enjo kōsai* and that was how he came up with the idea for the heroine's death.

Both *Koizora* and *keitai shōsetsu* reflect the *keitai* relationship between intimate strangers. In a sense, we can say that *Koizora* is the archetypical *keitai shōsetsu* since the development of the relationship between Mika and Hiro in *Koizora* mirrors the author-reader relationship for the *keitai shōsetsu* genre as a whole.

The communication that is brought about by usage of the *keitai* as a medium to read and write novels is also evident in a different aspect as a form of reader suggestions to the author of a novel. Often, as mentioned previously, these *keitai shōsetsu* are uploaded by authors one chapter at a time onto the *keitai shōsetsu* websites. Readers follow these novels much like individuals follow a TV show- making sure to watch the next episode in a series- and in the case of *keitai shōsetsu*, checking the uploading site on a daily basis to read the next chapter in the story. The author of the novel makes the story available to the readers gradually, giving them time to reflect on each chapter and each occurrence in the life of the characters. This method gives readers time to think about what will happen next in the story. The process of reading a novel as a serialization allows readers to become personally invested as they consider plot possibilities and their own similar experiences as well as the outcomes of both. The process gives readers and authors a chance to bond and communicate as readers immediately make plot suggestions to authors by commenting on the website and even sending personal e-mails. Additionally,

⁷⁶ Liddy, "Name Brand Beauties For Sale."

Yoshida, a technology executive explains, "It's a group effort. Your fans support you and encourage you in the process of creating work—they help build the work. Then they buy the book to reaffirm their relationship to it in the first place." Toshiya Arai, the executive director of Starts Publishing Company paid a visit to the novelist Yoshi in 2002 and said that Yoshi printed out a stack of e-mails for him from readers of his *keitai shōsetsu Deep Love*. "Nobody was saying that he was a great writer, or that his grammar was good," Arai says. "And yet his young fans were all writing about how his book had affected their lives and moved them."⁷⁷

A second important concept that relates both *Koizora* and *keitai shōsetsu* is that of passing judgment on an individual based on outward appearance prior to true understanding of character and personality. Particularly in high school settings, the culture is stereotypically conducive to students valuing other students and creating friendships based purely, at least initially, on outward appearances. This aspect of reality can be seen in *Koizora* as well as in the factors that define *keitai shōsetsu*. The concept of an "intimate stranger" as mentioned above can be risky from a psychological perspective as the reality of the situation, i.e. the physical presence of an intimate stranger, can be completely different from the imaginations of the communicators.

As mentioned previously, in the first chapter of *Koizora*, Mika and Hiro's intimate stranger relationship occurred via *keitai* as they chatted and sent e-mails over their short summer vacation. When they come back to school after the break, Hiro loses no time in introducing himself in person to Mika. Although Mika has never seen Hiro, she has gradually come to enjoy talking to him and subconsciously begins to create an identity for Hiro based on the sound of his voice and the kindness he displays in their conversations. She imagines him to be innocent, gentlemanly, and kind. At one point in the story, Aya asks Mika if she is in love with someone. At that

⁷⁷ Goodyear, "Letter From Japan: 1 <3 Novels," 4.

moment Mika imagines a face that she connects with her intimate stranger relationship with Hiro. She admits to herself that she has never actually met Hiro, but Mika feels she can imagine what kind of face he has. When Mika finally meets Hiro, she is shocked to realize that her expectations are incorrect. The following is a brief translation of the scene in *Koizora* where Hiro introduces himself in person to Mika. The scene takes place at school as Mika and her other friend, Yuka, wait for Aya who has run off to flirt with Nozomu.

Left behind, Mika and Yuka waited in a corner of the hall for Aya to return. From out of the group, one individual drew near to where the two girls were waiting.

Dark complexion, light brown hair, thin, well-formed eyebrows, he wore sagging pants and an untucked dress shirt. He was tall...probably around 180 centimeters

On his ears he had countless silver piercings

It was clear he was the leader of the group

The boy, with a penetrating look in his eye, glared as he gradually came to face the girls.

Mika and Yuka looked away, and prepared to run in case of emergency.

He planted himself firmly in front of the two girls. Slowly he opened his mouth

"You're Mika, right? I'm Hiroki."⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Mika, *Koizora*, 23.

Instead of the fresh-faced, innocent young man that Mika imagines Hiro to be, he is the leader of a *yanki* gang and appears intimidating, even frightening. I found, through extensive research, that *yanki* is a type of youth culture unique to rural Japan and depicts a group of young high school students who maintain a certain kind of attire and attitude. According to Patrick Macias, writer and Japanese-pop critic, “The average *yanki* begins life as a disaffected bored youth. Around the age of 14 to 15, they join a gang of others like themselves. During that time, they enjoy taking over parking lots...and riding their bikes to Mt. Fuji to celebrate New Years Eve.”⁷⁹ Macias goes on to explain that *yanki* often dress in an anti-fashion statement by wearing pants that are too big, half-buttoned dress shirts with loosened ties and often accompanied by dyed hair. These *yanki*, although not necessarily dangerous, are seen as delinquent youth who promote the idea of living life to the fullest all while rebelling against authority.

Mika reacts to the unexpected revelation that Hiro is the leader of the *yanki* group by realizing that she must keep her feelings detached from such a bad-boy figure.

Hiro, he was completely different from the person Mika imagined...Her heart must not get attached...

For now, she took her seat and put her head between her hands. Aya, who was sitting next to her, whispered in Mika's ear while avoiding the notice of the teacher.⁸⁰

Mika now has a choice to make: continue her communication with Hiro or cut off any relationship with this potentially objectionable character. Mika's shock at Hiro's appearance

⁷⁹ Macias, “Live Fast, Die Young- Life as a *Yanki*.”

⁸⁰ Mika, *Koizora*, 24.

results in her decision to remain friends with Hiro, but to be aware of his unsavory appearance. After that first meeting, Mika continues her communication with Hiro which, due to his introduction, can no longer be considered an intimate stranger relationship. The fact that Hiro was completely different from the intimate stranger that Mika imagined reveals a common theme within intimate stranger relationships. Hidenori Tomita explains this subject using internet intimate strangers as an example “There is...always a gap between the ‘real me’ and the ‘original me’ as realized through online personas. The incongruity that many people feel when they first meet a *mail-tomo* [an intimate stranger correspondent] in person originates from the discord between the ‘real me’, which they had envisioned from the online persona of the *mail-tomo*, and the physical reality they are facing.”⁸¹ We see that Mika encounters this feeling of strangeness when she discovers the discord between the innocent Hiro that she envisioned and the intimidating gang leader Hiro that was physical reality.

Hidenori Tomita also mentions that this discord between imagination and reality can cause people to reject reality and cling to their mental image of an individual “When the face in cyberspace differs from the face in the real world, we have a tendency to deny the real-world face and to believe in the cyberspace face. We try to maintain the consistency of the image within us, even if it means rejecting reality (‘This is not him/her!’). Meanwhile, we are afraid that the ‘real me’ in cyberspace will be dismissed because of everyday reality (‘original me’) (‘So this is what he/she is really like. How disappointing.’). Such potential disconnects exist in *keitai*, which we always carry around with us.”⁸² Contrary to the propensity to embrace imagination and reject reality, Mika immediately accepts the reality of Hiro’s identity, realizing that despite his fierce looks, their communication was indeed genuine. Mika simply makes up

⁸¹ Tomita, “*Keitai* and the Intimate Stranger,” 199.

⁸² *Ibid.*

her mind not to get too involved or at least, to be very cautious. As Mika continues to communicate with Hiro and spend time with him, she realizes that the kindness and friendship that he showed from the beginning of their intimate stranger relationship, was not faked. Mika is able to lay aside her reservations regarding his appearance and discover that the kind, honest Hiro that she encountered as an intimate stranger, is still reflected in the physically real Hiro. Tomita explains this issue further when he says, “The common themes [of movies exemplifying intimate stranger relationships]...were internet romance and the characters’ realization that some things are more important than people’s social status. They suggest that the ‘real self’ is not the individual defined by social positions and roles of the everyday material world, but is the individual found online who is free of such definitions.”⁸³ Mika realizes that the real Hiro is still the individual with whom she communicated anonymously.

As a novel, *Koizora* seems to be emphasizing to readers the moral that there is often more to a person than what we see on the surface. Mika’s experience of dissonance regarding Hiro serves to remind the reader that what really matters is not the outside appearance of an individual. Comprehension of an individual’s personality should not be solely based on “social positions,”⁸⁴ but rather based on an understanding of an individual’s ability to connect with others on an anonymous level. However, this is not to say that every person contains qualities that reveal a deeper, meaningful character. In fact, the entire first chapter of *Koizora* contains subtle comparisons of the superficial, surface-minded students (Aya and Nozomu) and the characters who desire something more heartfelt (Mika and Hiro). It is interesting to note that solely because Mika and Hiro met as intimate strangers was it possible for them, when they met in real life, to immediately go beyond the level of shallow acquaintances to a deeper understanding of

⁸³ Ibid., 191.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

each other. By creating a relationship through anonymous communication, Mika and Hiro avoid the likelihood of being attracted to each other based purely on physical appearance. The other couple in the first chapter of *Koizora*, Nozomu and Aya, begin a relationship founded almost entirely on Aya's obsession with Nozomu's high school social status as a womanizer and his ability to be "cool". This relationship is understood to be artificial compared to Mika and Hiro's connection. Outsiders like Nozomu and Aya do not understand the depth of Mika and Hiro's relationship which is built on conversational connections rather than physical appearances.

In *keitai shōsetsu*, we see a mirroring of the moral from *Koizora* that there is more to individuals than their outward appearance. As mentioned previously, the autobiographical nature of some *keitai shōsetsu* results in anonymous communication, which is seen as an intimate stranger relationship between author and readers. From a societal perspective, these tales of rape, teenage pregnancy, prostitution, drugs, suicide, etc. represent the shameful aspects of an undisciplined high school lifestyle. In reality, individuals who have been victims to any of the above depravities often face malicious gossip, judgmental attitudes, and in general a lack of sympathy from society. In short, the stories in *keitai shōsetsu* serve as a reminder to society that when we read about such occurrences in novels, we are horrified by the acts and sympathetic to the victim. Yet when we encounter such events that occur to individuals in real life, we may think condemning thoughts and remind ourselves subconsciously of the old maxim "you can't play with fire and not get burnt." These thoughts are the result of viewing the world in a way that rules based on outward appearances without the existence of an emotional or sympathetic connection.

Referring back to the intimate stranger concept, it is as if the authors of *keitai shōsetsu* are advocating an intimate stranger connection as a means of creating a relationship foundation for

people to relate to each other. Rather than revealing the real names and identities of authors, *keitai shōsetsu* promotes a sincere understanding of each individual and their experiences prior to understanding an identity. According to the manager for Yoshi, the first *keitai shōsetsu* author, “Yoshi personally thinks that background information about authors distracts readers when they are reading books.”⁸⁵ The main difference between *Koizora* and *keitai shōsetsu* in this situation is the fact that *keitai shōsetsu* authors never actually reveal their identities, while Hiro, in *Koizora* introduces himself to Mika.

Some authors of *keitai shōsetsu* have experienced the negative opinions regarding their identity and their stories from individuals with whom they do not have an intimate stranger relationship. Dana Goodyear was able to get a meeting with Mone, author of *Eternal Dream*. She describes Mone in the following way, “Mone is short, with brown hair, curled lashes, and wide-set, placid eyes. She has a bow-shaped mouth and wayward canines—the right one sometimes pokes out through her closed lips, giving her the evil-sweet look of a Nara painting. She was reserved at first, picking daintily at the sashimi course. When a simmering dish of *motsunabe*—cow intestine, cabbage, and tofu—arrived, she took a picture of it with her phone, which was ornamented with a strawberry and a Teddy bear.”⁸⁶ Mone’s appearance would be shocking to someone who had no concept of Mone’s identity regarding her experiences as told in *Eternal Dream*, but based their expectations solely on the knowledge that she was a popular novelist whose first novel had sold over two hundred thousand copies and had over three million online hits.

⁸⁵ Goodyear, “Letter From Japan: I <3 Novels,” 4.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

Unfortunately, Mone must still deal with the unsympathetic, even hurtful reactions from individuals who have little connection with either her work or her experiences. Goodyear goes on to report:

As the night progressed, Mone grew more animated. Her literary celebrity had left her feeling bitter...but she was mostly angry at herself. 'I regret almost everything I've ever published,' she said. 'I could have done a lot to cover things up and I didn't. I feel a profound responsibility about that.' The label of writer, she said, is unsuitable both to her and to the genre. 'If I were some super-famous novelist, I would be running around saying, "Hey, I'm a novelist." But I'm not. I'm treated as this lame chick who's written one of those awful cell novels. Do you think I can be proud of that? It really depends on which side the public is going to join. I'm considered a total loser for having done it, and I myself think that, too.' Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes glittered. 'People say these horrible things about cell-phone novels, and I'm not sure they're mistaken. They say we're immature and incapable of writing a literate sentence. But I would say, so what? The fact that we're producing at all is important.'⁸⁷

In view of this attitude towards *keitai shōsetsu* novelists, it seems that readers of the novel, those with an intimate stranger relationship with the author, are often the only true supporters. These readers do not look on the outside appearance and judge, but based on their own experiences accept and appreciate the author. W. David Marx is a writer for the online magazine *clast*, which sees its mission as "breaking down the extremely complex systems of Japanese market culture into easily-discernible parts. At the same time, however, we also hope to break down misconceptions about the market that have buried their way into the conventional wisdom and provide a new perspective based on a multi-disciplinary analytical approach."⁸⁸ Marx wrote an article examining the effect of a combination of anonymity of the author and empathy for the stories on readers of *Koizora*. "Anonymity...is also a key component of this form of confessional literature. Not only does the 'nobodiness' of the author make it seem more 'real'

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Diamond Agency, "About Clast."

and 'personal', anonymity protects seemingly-autobiographical narrative works from the James Frey/*A Million Little Pieces* danger of exposé."⁸⁹ Marx points out that perhaps the anonymous connection is essential to creating a reader base that overlooks the potentially fabricated details in the stories:

Empathy is the key emotional response to a book like *Koizora*. Readers cry because they have emotionally invested in the pain and suffering of this protagonist — feelings no doubt amplified by the assumption that the terrible gang-rape bullying and teenage death actually happened to this pitiful author. Once the narrative becomes 'based on a true story,' revealing the true degree of fictionalization may lead to collective let-down. If Mika were really a forty-year old data-entry clerk who experienced completely unremarkable teenage years, the whole prerequisites at the base of the 'empathy' start to fall apart. It's not fun to cry for the pain of a friend who has lost her mother and then find out the next day that the mom is alive and she was lying the whole time to get you to pay for drinks.⁹⁰

While Marx is skeptical of the actual identities of the authors, he argues that anonymity must remain for *keitai shōsetsu* authors in order for popularity to continue. "The masses of readers are more likely to tolerate terrible writing, melodramatic clichés, and incredulous stories of sex and death on the assumption that they are first-hand accounts. The internet has made the narrative behind the 'success' of a creative work as important as the narrative contained the work itself. Breaking Mika's anonymity in the case of *Koizora* would ruin both."⁹¹

From comparing and contrasting *Koizora* and *keitai shōsetsu*, we can see the representation of the importance of the *keitai* for *keitai shōsetsu* and the plot of *Koizora*. Most importantly however, we see an overarching theme of the role of the cellular phone in facilitating human

⁸⁹ Marx, "Koizora: Empathy and Anonymous Creation."

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

relationships and emotional support. *Koizora*, although outwardly a simplistic, overly-tragic romance novel, has undertones which reflect the growing dependency of young people on their *keitai*. This dependency is what supports the growth of *keitai shōsetsu* (reading *and* writing) as a genre as well as promotes the development of relationships between romantic interests and readers and writers who would otherwise have limited opportunity to become acquainted.

This thesis attempted to describe the new literary phenomenon of *keitai shōsetsu* and subsequently discuss the resemblance between this modern confessional literature and historical examples of Japanese women's literature. In addition, by including personally translated portions of *Koizora*, I hoped to further exemplify the strong connection between *keitai shōsetsu* and *Koizora* through analyzing the intimate stranger in both objects as well as the admonishment that relying solely on outward appearances can hinder the development of a relationship. Mika and Hiro endure many terrible events as the result of their relationship, yet there is never a sense that either character regrets entering the relationship. This no-regrets approach leaves the reader realizing, as Mika finds at the end of the tale, that despite the emotional and physical trauma that arose from her relationship with Hiro, in the midst of it all she discovered true love. This revelation makes every suffering moment worth it for Mika. As modern readers, we expect justice for Mika or at least eternal happiness to compensate for her unenviable experiences. However, *Koizora* emphasizes the concept that the best things in life can only come through trials and that these trials may be worth it simply to experience a few moments of pure happiness.

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