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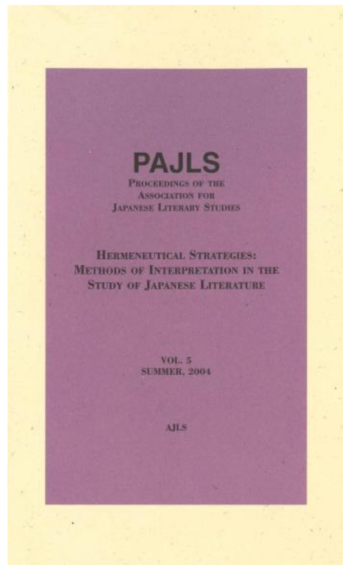

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ACCESSORIZING THE TEXT: THE ROLE OF COMMENTARY IN THE CREATION OF READERS

Linda H. Chance

Academics, constantly peering into areas that we think have not been viewed in quite the best way, are all too familiar with the saying "You can't see the forest for the trees." If the example under consideration is a work of premodern Japanese literature and the early modern commentary it inspired, the terms of the analogy might align in a similar style for many of us. You would imagine, perhaps, a thicket of *shō*s and *chū*s, (selected commentaries and annotations),[1] underbrush wrought by second-rate literati, strangling a broad wood. In the face of this our task is not hard to find. Hack away the growth and expose the very floor of the forest to the light; rehabilitate the tallest timbers—such is the call to contemporary scholars. Or such was the call before we began doing conferences on hermeneutics. I have always rather preferred to just thin the scrub, which I think does an adequate job of enriching the great pillars, and is of intrinsic interest even when it does not perform that function terribly well. I have not looked to the littlest trees in hopes of seeing the forest, in other words, and so the view has not disappointed me. In the past my methodology has been to treat the planters of the brush and their plans for the commentarial landscape, without too much thought about the visitors to the woods (with the exception of myself, naturally).[2] One of my questions in this paper is whether and by what means we might be able to reconstruct the genesis of those visitors, by asking how the horticultualists

[1] *Shō* refers to a passage or passages selected out for either copying or annotation; it is frequently the last element in early modern commentary titles. See Nihon daijiten kankōkai, ed., *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, vol. 10 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1972), p. 443. Kawase Kazuma defines *chū* as a passage that explains and interprets a text. *Nihon shoshigaku yōgo jiten* (Tokyo: Yūshōdō, 1982), p. 190. *Shō* does not merit an entry in his dictionary, although he explains it as "selections of examples" on page 136.

[2] See "*Zuihitsu* and Gender:*Tsurezuregusa* and *The Pillow Book,*" in *Inventing the Classics: Modernity, National Identity, and Japanese Literature*, Haruo Shirane and Tomi Suzuki, eds. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 120-47. Commentary made me a more avid reader of the text and taught me to seek a larger meaning, even as I sometimes struggled against the specifics of certain approaches, but it was those approaches I sought to outline. The question of the reader remained implicit.

(writers of commentary, that is) fashioned their copses to entice readers into the forest for a visit to the depths of the oasis.

In framing the issue around readers, the text ultimately remains the center of the investigation, and the present method does little to address Michael F. Marra's plaint that "interpretation has been systematically subordinated to texts, by being viewed as the 'skillful means' needed to make texts meaningful, and as something that can be discarded as soon as the interpreter feels that the text's meaning has been presented".[3] There are two ways, however, in which the present approach hopes to differ from the usual treatment of commentaries. For one, it is not focused on tracing a lineage of commentaries as the residue or evidence of a process of canonization. For another, it does not assume that the role of commentary is principally to assist in the extraction of meaning—whether the overall import or the meanings of individual words—from text; that is, to be an accessory in the sense of an ornament. Rather it assumes that the idea of meaning itself was something that commentators strove to impress upon would-be readers, to enhance, and to build appreciation for. In other words, on this ground, at least, commentary does matter as much as the text, because it is commentary that attempts to set the terms of reading and reception. And not even just that. Commentary, as Komine Kazuaki argues in an article in *Chūsei no chi to gaku* (Medieval knowledge and learning), *is* reading (or rereading), basic to any effort to understand or appreciate a text. While it cannot be separated from the text or escape the limits of its own time, commentary is not a passive appendage.[4] Reading actualizes the text: it is the very activity for which and by which the text exists. To the extent that commentary is an instance of reading, and one that is overt in its character and purpose, it is no longer just a tool, but becomes a persuasive statement. This discussion will be limited to commentaries of the late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries in order to control the temptation to survey examples rather than processes and contexts. And with your indulgence, it will treat foundational commentaries on a single text, the fourteenth century *Tsurezuregusa* of Kenkō.

To imply that commentary had to teach the need for meaning seems absurd on one level, since in order to facilitate reading the texts of the past, explication of the meaning of words (at least) is an obvious requirement. Commentary, in providing such access, cannot be accused of necessarily having an ideology beyond its own utility. Much commentary is in fact

[3] "Introduction" to *Japanese Hermeneutics: Current Debates on Aesthetics and Interpretation*, Michael F. Marra, ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), p. 3.
[4] "Chūsei no chūshaku o yomu—Yomi no meiro," in *Chūsei no chi to gaku*, Mitani Kuniaki and Komine Kazuaki eds. (Tokyo: Shinwasha, 1997), p. 14.

mere glossing of individual lexical items, nothing more than a convenient dictionary of sorts. And yet as we all know, commentary can provide something beyond just equivalents and definitions. Anyone who has looked at Edo period *chūshaku* has seen works that through sustained engagement with a discourse on the overall purpose of the text, elaborate prefaces, and burgeoning forematter become critiques that transcend a narrowly instrumental program. Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), for example, is one whose commentaries are treatises in their own right.[5] Such commentators foster or assume in readers the desire for something in addition to a lexicon.[6]

Another reason it might strike you as absurd to maintain that commentators sought to create an enhanced attitude toward meaning in readers is that we know the reading of a text is about the search for ever more clarity of meaning. And yet, in the spirit of truly questioning our methodology, we have to admit that this is not always so. Some commentators create in their readers the desire for something totally other than a lexicon. Susan Blakely Klein, in her wonderful *Allegories of Desire: Esoteric Literary Commentaries of Medieval Japan*, has shown us a commentary tradition that is not directed at establishing meaning of the sort that we are used to, as she describes, "'rational' (approximating modern secular humanism) and address[ing] such issues as philology, the pragmatics of composition, and proper aesthetic appreciation." The esoteric commentaries she examines "instantiate religious and literary modes of interpretation completely different from our own."[7] Thus when we look at commentary we have to first ask whether we are in fact looking at a familiar orientation toward meaning or not, rather than assuming that all interpretation is directed at the same ends. Commentary is a language, and like other languages, it is not transparent. The more transparent it seems to us, the more careful we probably need to be. Early modern commentary that proliferated around *Tsurezuregusa* focused on exoteric, pragmatic information and increasing access to such information. Yet there was considerable resistance. After traditionalists responded negatively to the circulation of knowledge on the text, newly created

[5] Motoori's *Genji monogatari tama no ogushi* (1799), with its attention to *mono no aware*, is a case in point.
[6] Which is not to deny that lexicons can have larger significance as well. Definitions can certainly be more than instrumental, and in fact the idea of a "mere glossary" is a bit problematic. The writer of a dictionary is after all interested in getting and setting things right. Propagation of the text requires spreading knowledge of the words and grammar.
[7] Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series, 55 (Harvard-Yenching Institute: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), p. 6.

secret teachings appeared, the "Three Important Matters" and the "Seven Oral Secrets" that tried to go back to the style of direct transmission of guarded trivia in the tradition of the *kokin denju.*[8] This shows us that the orientation toward clear meaning was if not new, then at least newly emphasized in these developing commentary styles. It further suggests that to the extent meaning did in fact signify clarity, it was considered dangerous (even if only to the financial prospects of those who possessed and could profit from the obscure secrets).

Tsurezuregusa of Kenkō was emerging from relative obscurity during the Keichō era of 1596 to 1615. Up until that time, it had been read most avidly by such priest-poets as Shōtetsu and Shinkei, who found much to praise in its views on impermanence. Commentary as such that might have existed before 1600 does not survive, but we hear of the resonance that the work had for Buddhists of the Tendai sect from the writing of the early sixteenth century monk Sonkai.[9] In the late sixteenth century, however, we learn that the nobility that had occasionally left evidence of having borrowed the book for reading were indeed taken with it, enough that Nakano'in Michikatsu (1556-1610) taught the text to his disciples. One of those disciples, the poet Matsunaga Teitoku (1571-1653), then gave public lectures that took the text beyond aristocratic circles, laying the groundwork for the first printed commentary, which would appear in 1604. That commentary, the *Tsurezuregusa Jumyō'in shō*, was evidently designed for owners of manuscript editions, hence it did not include a text of *Tsurezuregusa* itself.[10] In many ways it represented a transition from the old world in which one listened to lectures in order to orally supplement a manuscript in one's possession to the soon-to-be-bustling world of printed

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[8] While scholars frequently compare these secrets to the private transmission of esoteric knowledge about the *Kokinshū*, there are any number of such protocols in various arts and religious fields in Japan, not just poetics. Susan Klein explores these and their genesis in socio-economic conditions in *Allegories*, pp. 145-50. Interestingly, the expanded Taishō era version of a Meiji edition of *Mondanshō* includes a text of the "Three Important Matters," noting that the custom of receiving a document (*kirigami*) to attest to one's knowledge of these secrets "seems strange from the perspective of our post-Meiji era, when all study has been liberated." The texts are supposed to be the *kirigami* owned by Kitamura Kigin (1624-1705) himself and passed down in the family. Suzuki Kokyō, comp., *Kaitei zōho Tsurezuregusa mondanshō* (Tokyo: Aoyamadō Shobō, 1926), pp. 14-15.

[9] His *Gyōja yōjinshū* (1508) is the source. Komatsu Misao, "*Tsurezuregusa* chūshakushi," in *Tsurezuregusa kōza*, vol.3: *Tsurezuregusa to sono kanshō II*, Yūseidō Henshūbu, ed. (Tokyo: Yūseidō, 1974), p. 51.

[10] See the *kokatsujibon* (old typeset) edition of 1604 held by the Naikaku bunko in the National Diet Library collection.

editions, many of which came with commentary interlineated. There was evidently an interactive relationship between the spread of public lecturing and increasing publication related to *Tsurezuregusa*. Because there were more copies of the text in circulation, there were more lectures and more reproductions of lecture notes (i.e. commentaries were produced for texts); because there were commentaries in circulation, there was more desire for the texts themselves (texts were produced for commentaries). This is a rational explanation for the kinds of publications we see. But I would like to argue that the growth of printing and the increase of lecturing were not just trends that happened to feed one another in the commercial marketplace, but were parallel processes springing from the same roots. That is to say, the imprinting of texts and comments about them onto paper by means of woodblocks was equivalent to the imprinting of text and comments on receptive listeners' ears. The public was eager to have both the original text and the supplemental commentaries impressed upon it, both in written and spoken forms. From the public's point of view, this eagerness had a variety of sources, personal social improvement among them, but from commentators' perspectives, treasuring the past, highlighting the text's role in a larger tradition, and provoking a spiritual response were important.[11]

Printed commentaries begin with *Jumyō'in shō* by the physician Hata Sōha (1550-1607) and continue with *Tsurezuregusa Nozuchi* of Hayashi Razan (1583-1657), which dates to 1621 but was printed in 1667. These, as well as *Nagusamigusa*, compiled in 1652 and supposedly based on talks by Matsunaga Teitoku from fifty years before, and *Tsurezuregusa Mondanshō* of the poet and classicist Kitamura Kigin (1624-1705), also dating to 1667, are intertextually related and establish a presentation style that is still not uncommon today.[12] All four open with biographical notes on the author, featuring genealogical charts. *Jumyō'in shō* then explains the general meaning or *taii* of Kenkō's search for the Way. (Which Hata incidentally gives as a combination of the three ways of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.) This expression *taii* comes from the Buddhist exegetical tradition, as seen for example through a usage in the sixteenth fascicle of *Eiga monogatari* (*A Tale of Flowering Fortunes*), where a

[11] It is well know that *Tsurezuregusa* provoked a more secular response through parody, which could also bear reexamination in the light of creation of readers.

[12] Most editions of *Tsurezuregusa*, from the annotation that runs to thousands of pages to the schoolchild's crib, have cut pieces of text, notes that convey various levels of sheer information, and frequent mini-essays on the significance of passages. These seem to assume that new readers must be created with appeals to the value of the work for understanding not only the medieval past, but our contemporary struggle to live a good life.

lecturer gives the general meaning of a sutra before going on to a *kaishaku* (interpretation) of the specifics.[13] The taii of the text both in the whole and in parts is a constant concern of commentators. Razan frequently mentions the *taii* or *hon'i* (essential meaning) of a section; *Nagusamigusa* gives the *taii* of each and every section; and *Mondanshō*, which cites the pith of the earlier commentaries, also works within this frame.[14] Several commentaries will announce this as their main interest, as in the *Tsurezuregusa kokon taii* (The greater meaning of *Tsurezuregusa* ancient and modern) of 1658 by Ōwada Kigyū. I have written in the past about how this identification of a main meaning or textual essence resulted in a struggle over the central ideology of the text, with some commentators choosing Confucianism, some Buddhism, and some Taoism, then mobilizing colorful arguments for their partisan selection, and surely this is a sign that such writers were attempting to delimit the readers of *Tsurezuregusa*.[15] Suffice it to say that the emphasis on greater meaning tells us more about the explicators than about the text under analysis, which I would argue could be elevated to the status of classic precisely because it is open to a variety of interpretations, and again that the "greater meaning" approach teaches as much about the audience they envisioned for the text as it teaches about their own takes on it. The audience was supposed to be looking for overall significance, often defined in terms of the Way, and they were encouraged to treat the lyric, the lexical, and the material as supports for this mission.[16] Reading, which the untutored would have surely experienced as a chore, involving the acquisition of linguistic, referential, and practical knowledge of the world of 200 years prior, was directed toward substance. The trend toward parodic commentaries that showed up in public performances, such as Shidōken's (d.1766) comic "lecturing" on one of the secret traditions in the grounds of

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[13] Matsumura Hiroji, *Eiga monogatari zenchūshaku*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1974), p. 200.

[14] *Nagusamigusa* originates, reportedly, in Teitoku's jotting down of the *taii* of each section on scraps of paper. Saitō Kiyoe, Kishigami Shinji, and Tomikura Tokujirō, *Makura no sōshi, Tsurezuregusa*, Kokugo kokubungaku kenkyūshi taisei (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1960), p. 272.

[15] See *Formless in Form: Kenkō, Tsurezuregusa, and the Rhetoric of Japanese Fragmentary Prose* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), chapter three.

[16] We might interpret the rage for recluses of this time period, and an emphasis on Kenkō as recluse, in a similar fashion, for although recluse tales highlight Kenkō's poetic image, they presuppose a concern with finding the Way. *Fusō in'itsuden* (Biographies of Japanese recluses, 1664) is the premier example.

Asakusa temple in Edo, may indicate just how earnest purveyors of meaning were (earnest enough to provoke an opposite reaction, that is).[17]

The physical layouts of commentary texts reflect the effort needed to read the classics. Pages evolved into an ever more complex visual field as publishers played with the graphic capabilities of the block printing technique. *Jumyō'in shō* uses a bold *kanji* and *katakana* layout for its minimal notes. *Nagusamigusa* distinguishes between the main text on the one hand and the glosses and *taii* on the other by shrinking the size of the latter and containing them at the top of the page. Asaga Sansei's *Tsurezuregusa shoshō taisei* (Great compendium of various writings on *Tsurezuregusa,* 1688) in the collection at Yale University features an elaborately subdivided page: the top third is reserved for notes in *kanbun* with *kaeriten* punctuation, individual items set off with headings in boxes and prominent circles within the entry to mark its various parts. The bottom two thirds of the page features large single lines of text followed by explications in *kana* that are set off by various dots, squares, and triangles. Section numbers appear in reverse ground (white characters against a black background box). And of course, after the lexical notes the author has placed explanations of the overall significance of each section, working intertextually. The note on the preface, for example, considers "why this section is known as the preface" (*kono issetsu wo jo to iu ron*), echoing a point that Hata Sōha had made.[18] Komine Kazuaki has written that "The premise of commentary is the absolute authority of the classic (*koten*). Commentary cannot be separated from the consciousness of the classic or the ideology of classicism."[19] It bears noting as well, though, that as we enter the early modern era, the reproducible—or may I say transplantable—authority of the commentary tradition itself is an important part of the consciousness of proper treatment of the classic.

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[17] Komatsu Misao, "*Tsurezuregusa* chūshakushi," p. 53.

[18] I will note in passing that it is possible (though no doubt simplistic) to observe a gender difference in commentarial practice, even on the level of physical layout. Consider the *Makura no sōshi* of Sei Shōnagon. The so-called *Pillow Book* is mentioned several times in *Tsurezuregusa,* always in tones of praise. But a commentator such as Okanishi Ichū (1639-1711), author of *Tsurezuregusa jikige* of 1686, is suddenly more interested in graphics than in *taii* when he comes to annotate this female-authored text, devoting pages to illustrations of room decorations and the like. *Makura no sōshi bōchū,* in Muromatsu Iwao, gen.ed., *Kokubunchūshaku zensho,* (Tokyo: Kokugakuin daigaku shuppanbu, 1908), pp. 7-20. Kitamura Kigin's *Makura no sōshi shunshoshō* (1674) takes the text seriously, as does Katō Bansai in his commentary, but there is a trend toward dwelling on ornament rather than meaning in other commentaries.

[19] "Yomi no meiro," p. 15.

Commentaries are accessories to the text—they provide access, "contributing in an additional and hence subordinate degree"[20]—but they are by no means something that we can leave out of an account of how texts have come to be transmitted, and even what they mean to readers.

Finally, let me note one instructive failure from my foray into the subject of commentary as creator of readers. I was hoping to also find, through a study of comments on passages in *Tsurezuregusa* that show scenes of reading, a theory or practice of reading as a physical endeavor (here I was enthused by Peter Kornicki's fascinating discussion of what evidence we have of early readers at work).[21] But alas, the attention of comments on *Tsurezuregusa*'s section 13, for example, in which Kenkō praises spending time with favorite books under the lamplight, was directed to the particular titles, not the posture of the reader. *Nagusamigusa*, for one, notes that the choices are good for one who preferred reclusion and constituted a treasure for scholars. Such a reaction suggests again that meaning was of more interest than the actual task of reading.

What I have tried to do here is to take a brief and intensive look at commentary and its possible role in critical practice. Any such look prompts the question whether this "underbrush" is worthy of attention. Some defenses are easy enough to tender—much as we need to look at the process of canonization to understand how we came to read and teach the texts we do, we need to be aware of how those texts have been construed and transmitted. Certainly if it possible to learn something about the text's audience over time from snooping around in commentary, that alone would justify the effort for sociologists of literature and perhaps others. But it is hard to avoid recognizing some element of nostalgia as well. Critics often invoke nostalgia these days, generally to castigate those under its sway, but I cannot help thinking that there is in attention to interpretation some nostalgic appreciation for a time when texts gained readers rather than consumers, and had meaning instead of atmosphere. Now of course that comment is facetious, but wouldn't we love to be able

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[20] J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition (New York: Clarendon, 1989), vol. 1, p. 74.

[21] As in, for example, how Fujiwara no Yorinaga read the *Book of Changes* on 1143.12.8: "First I placed the book on my desk; after bowing to it twice I began reading. I washed my hands and rinsed my mouth out, and put on my *eboshi* hat and my *nōshi* apparel before reading. This is how it will be in the future too, for this book is particularly worthy of respect." *The Book in Japan: A Cultural History from the Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1998), p. 255.

to propagate and publish our own forests of textual supplements, and to freely acquire dueling editions of our favorite texts with notes? Recalling a time when people could is only somewhat comforting, but we will take what we can get.