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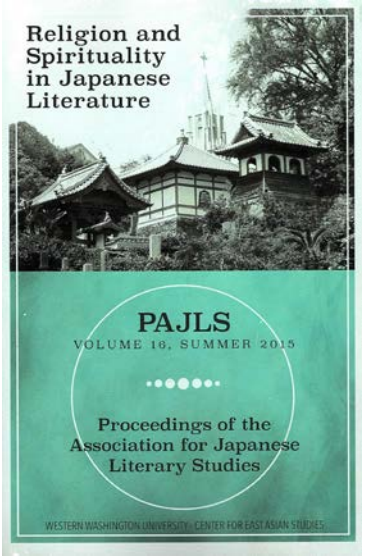

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Kamikakushi 神隠し: *An Artist's Salvation?*

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During the 1970s and early 1980s, the learned and ladylike author Nakazato Tsuneko 中里恒子 (1909-1987) wrote a variety of fiction and essayistic fiction works that involved the slightly musty topic of *kamikakushi* (supernatural abduction). The tidal wave of interest in this phenomenon that was set in motion by the publication of Yanagita Kunio's 柳田國男 *Tōno monogatari* 遠野物語 (The Legends of Tōno, 1910) had long since subsided. The international media craze sparked by Miyazaki Hayao's 宮崎駿 animated film *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* 千と千尋の神隠し (re-titled *Spirited Away*, 2001) was still decades in the future. Despite the flood of fresh creative and scholarly interpretations of *kamikakushi* that the film has stimulated, a pensive story by Nakazato entitled "Oborozōshi" 朧草子 (A Misty Script, 1976) remains compelling and extraordinary in many respects. In this essay I focus on the story's premise that popular belief in supernatural interventions persists and can be manipulated to facilitate success in highly competitive professional fields, especially in the realm of the arts. The story treats *kamikakushi* as an essential element in a complex system of substitutions, sacrifices, compromises, and cover-ups in which the process of career development is thoroughly enmeshed.

The narrative concerns a Kyoto family that has been coping with the mysterious disappearance of one of its members. Jirō, the middle child of the Kita family, was a gentle dreamer who had scorned material values and longed for a simple life. The family suspects that the young man might be living deep in the Kumano Mountains, under an assumed name, in bondage to a sinister woodsman. The story foregrounds the issue of how a discourse that enables belief in supernatural creatures and events is created and maintained, in society and in the world of this tale. Above all, "Oborozōshi" attests to the vital role of "storytelling"—in its oral, written, pictorial, performance, and other forms—in preserving an atmosphere in which belief in the supernatural can continue to exist and the *kamikakushi* mechanism in particular can continue to operate. Nakazato brilliantly deploys a range of narrative techniques to ensure that despite or because of the profusion of clues sprinkled though her text—some

that may serve merely to distract or to provoke unwarranted assumptions—the reader will never assemble the countless puzzle pieces into a coherent picture. This brief essay is a patchwork of excerpts from a longer essay in which I attempt to elucidate a range of strategies that Nakazato has utilized to craft an immensely intricate and haunting "Oborozōshi."[1]

The Kita family consists of parents and three children. The father is a retired company executive and the mother is recently deceased. The elder son, Ichirō, is a successful surgeon; Jirō was a low-level company employee when he went missing years earlier on a (*matsutake*) mushroom-gathering excursion; the daughter, Asa, is a dancer in the classical Japanese style. Asa enlists a friend to assist in the search for Jirō; this is the story's unnamed, first-person narrator, who seems to be some kind of researcher-writer. The story opens with a description of the narrator's visit to Dōjōji, a temple of special significance for Asa and apparently for the narrator. Asa has asked the narrator to join a married couple who are friends of Ichirō's on a hike along the Kumano Pilgrimage Route. The husband is a professor of pharmacology, and his wife is a *waka* scholar whose family deals in timber. A mountain caretaker in the family's employ, Mr. Irokawa, will provide some guidance. Asa asks the narrator to garner information from Mr. Irokawa about the lifestyles of fugitives who are living in the Kumano Mountains. Asa explains that since Jirō's disgraceful disappearance, her family has refrained from contact with Ichirō and his associates; they worry that any reminder of Jirō might cast a pall over Ichirō's charmed life.

In the course of their trek, the narrator is treated to some local lore concerning the medieval warrior Oguri Hangan 小栗判官, who supposedly was poisoned, resurrected from the dead, and his health restored by the hot springs at Yunomine. She is surprised to hear from an innkeeper there that Oguri had spent his later years as a painter-recluse and that his grave is at a temple in her hometown. She also learns from Mr. Irokawa about a man who had fled his home, changed his name to Morita, lost his eyesight in the course of his journey through the wilderness, and had been given medical assistance and work as a woodcutter by Irokawa. Might this be Jirō?

[1] "Oborozōshi" is the final story in a collection by the same title of five linked short stories. See Nakazato Tsuneko, "Oborozōshi." An overview of Nakazato's life and literature is provided in an attractive multimedia booklet by Uno Chiyo 宇野千代 and others.

Near the end of the story, Mr. Kita arranges a meeting with Irokawa at a hot-springs resort in Kumano that Kita frequents. While he is waiting for Irokawa, his thoughts are conveyed by an omniscient narrator; the reader gains insights into Jirō's and Kita's personalities that prompt her to reassess the entire situation. When Jirō had confided his dreams of making a living as a painter, Kita had exhorted him to persevere in his corporate career, as Kita had. Then we learn that Kita had loved literature as a youth; he had been especially impressed by a French novel that described a married woman who had abandoned her family to run off with a lover. Kita's repressed romantic passions and his literary inclinations are revealed. Could his own frustration have provoked him to try to squelch his son's anti-establishment tendencies?

When the two men meet, it immediately becomes clear that Irokawa has no intention of introducing his visitor to Morita. He discourages Kita's efforts to ascertain Morita's identity or to locate Jirō. Sometimes people enter a different world; it is prudent and merciful not to pursue them. The idea of *kamikakushi* is articulated explicitly, for the first time in the story, by Irokawa. After the men part, Kita sees Irokawa and a man using a white cane walking together along the riverbank. As the pair fades from sight, Kita has an attack of dizziness. Perhaps he is "spirited away" or is taken captive here. Perhaps he has been poisoned at dinner. The story does not reveal whether he ever returns home.

In the final scene, the narrator is reflecting on the message in a postcard from Asa, whose status in the dance world is evidently improving:

> "These days our troupe is performing *Maple Leaves*. Even after the curtain falls, the crimson leaves continue to scatter."
>
> According to certain Kumano legends and records, in his later years Oguri Hangan had cast aside the official attire of his distinguished family and gone to live in a decrepit hut on the grounds of a temple. There he'd devoted himself to painting cranes. Asa had once confided to me her dream of someday donning male garb to perform the role of Oguri Hangan. She wanted to portray the events of his life as he'd reminisced about them in his hovel; she would trace back to the days of his youth, when he'd lived in splendor as the son of a proud, warrior family.
>
> She hadn't yet come up with a way of expressing through dance the mind of a person who'd renounced the world. But she'd begun to think that even when a person's change of heart appears suddenly, it's the manifestation of a slow, invisible process, like a flame flaring up from buried embers.
>
> Memories came back to me too—of the charmingly inept drawings in the picture scroll showing highlights from Oguri Hangan's life. Someday, on a stage in a suitable setting, Nishino Asa would probably perform those very scenes; no doubt her dance would eloquently suggest how a person whose heart has gradually changed withdraws to a silent place, like waves returning to a distant shore. At that time, I imagined, Mr. Kita, together with the white cane

> he'd seen that evening, would be absorbed into Asa's dance, like the clear peal of a small bell as it fades into silence (389).

In describing Jirō's disappearance and possibly related incidents, Nakazato incorporates many buzz words and ideas from *kamikakushi* literature and lore: mushroom-gathering; persimmon tree; *tengu*天狗 (mountain goblin) traits; becoming confused and being carried away; returning home befuddled; and so forth. These are sprinkled throughout "Oborozōshi" in order to maintain awareness of the possibility of supernatural occurrences and to situate the chronicle of contemporary events within the canon of *kamikakushi* legends. Her written sources evidently included *Tōno Monogatari*, Yanagita's essay "Yama no jinsei"山の人生 (Life in the Mountains, 1925), and the account given to the Edo-period scholar Hirata Atsutane平田篤胤 by the boy Torakichi寅吉.[2] There are also echoes of tales from relatively obscure collections, suggesting that Nakazato had become well-versed in this subject in the course of integrating it into several of her literary works.

Jirō's disappearance while on a mushroom-gathering excursion in the local mountains in autumn matches the classic profile of *kamikakushi* in terms of season, location, and activity, as well as the victim's disposition. A married woman from Uji also disappeared in the local mountains on the same day as Jirō. The experience of this woman, one of Jirō's many doubles in the story, must be considered simultaneously, because unlike Jirō, she returned home. Dazed and distraught, she could not clearly recall what had happened to her; deranged by her trauma, she was soon divorced by her husband. Many canonical *kamikakushi* tales feature somewhat odd individuals who disappear while out gathering mushrooms, bamboo, firewood, chestnuts, or the like in a wilderness. Jirō has obviously been fashioned in accordance with the archetype of the individual most susceptible to abduction. The confusion and sometimes permanent mental impairment of those who return from an abduction experience are also standard features of these tales.

Hirata's Torakichi is spirited away by a man selling magic pills to a mountainous Other World inhabited by *tengu*-like beings. While living in the mountains with his captor-mentors, Torakichi is initiated into a range of occult

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[2] Several scholarly works have broadened my understanding of *kamikakushi*, *tengu*, Torakichi's adventures, and related topics. Foremost among these is Komatsu Kazuhiko 小松和彦, *Kamikakushi to Nihonjin*. Professor Komatsu's anthology on the theme of *kamikakushi* is an excellent companion volume; it includes ethnological writings such as "Yama no jinsei" as well as works of fiction. Komatsu Kazuhiko, ed. *Kamikakushitan*.

knowledge and practices, including how to synthesize and use various magical potions. The pharmacologist in "Oborozōshi," who regularly goes on plant- and herb-gathering expeditions in the wilderness, prompts the reader to consider such legendary precedents and wonder if drugs, herbs, mushrooms, or other hallucinogenic substances played a part in Morita's (and/ or Jirō's) "journey" and process of transformation—for better or worse. Perhaps a combination of consciousness-expanding and cognitively-disabling substances was involved. Or perhaps Jirō is off madly painting on another mountain, his artistic talents having been enhanced by a miraculous elixir, while Morita, another of Jirō's doubles, has been rendered meek and zombie-like by a toxic concoction. Is the pharmacologist Irokawa's factotum, or vice versa? The pharmacologist and possibly Ichirō the surgeon may be actively participating in Irokawa's enterprise by applying their respective medical expertise to altering the minds and bodies of those who have been drawn into Irokawa's orbit.[3]

Other aspects of the account of "Jirō's mysterious disappearance" that align it with *kamikakushi* tale literature and thereby foster the reader's receptivity to the possibility of supernatural forces at work in contemporary life concern the conspicuously stylized qualities of the tale and its emphasis on the storytelling process. "Once upon a time there were two brothers, Ichirō (#1) and Jirō (#2). The elder was fortunate and successful in every way; the younger was floundering and discontent. So the younger seems to have been ripe for a fantastic, spiritual adventure." In good postmodern fashion, Nakazato makes the reader aware of her authorial presence and her creative philosophy and process: of how she is dissolving hierarchies such as traditional and modern, non-rational and scientific, and of how she is converting collected raw material into a narrative whose content and structure resemble those of a folk tale. But the boundaries between the world of the framed tale and that of its fabricators in the frame story are ill-defined. Thus the text of "Oborozōshi" as a whole forces its reader to suspend disbelief with regard to the contradictory, illogical, and inexplicable as s/he would when reading a traditional tale based on an orally transmitted legend with many variants.

[3] Besides relying on premodern Asian sources, Nakazato may have also been weaving contemporary western literary and cultural trends into her tale. Records of mind-altering experiments using the mushroom-derived drug psilocybin had been disseminated worldwide by the early 1970s, thanks partly to the popularity of writings by Timothy Leary and Carlos Castaneda.

Just as the effectiveness of "Oborozōshi" depends on keeping the possibility of the supernatural viable, so too, a balance must be maintained to prevent supernatural elements from dominating and thus allowing the story to slip into the fairy-tale mode. To preserve the possibility that Jirō's disappearance has a rational explanation, the author creates a cloud of suspicion around most of the story's characters, beginning with Jirō himself. His portrayal as a nonconformist makes it easy to imagine him seizing a chance to embark on a different life.

Several of Jirō's possible romantic liaisons are mentioned in Asa's account. The reader (along with some of the story's characters) is inclined to wonder if Jirō eloped during the company excursion. On the other hand, Jirō may have been running away from an imminent marriage. If so, a spurned woman may have initiated a revenge scheme against him. The Dōjōji legend reverberates throughout the story; so each time a woman who may have been disappointed by Jirō is introduced, the reader rushes to judge her as a latter-day Kiyohime. (This woman's unreciprocated lust for a mountain ascetic incites her to pursue him to Dōjōji Temple. Along the way, her fury transforms her into a serpent; when she coils around the temple bell, her fiery passions immolate the monk, who is hiding beneath the bell.)

Mr. Irokawa is the story's most attractive and most dubious character. A large, loquacious man with a slightly foreign look, he reminds the narrator of the Greek-Irish fabulist Lafcadio Hearn and the reader of some kind of nature goblin or satyr. In Irokawa's presence, people become mesmerized and lose their common sense. The narrator, Asa, and Mr. Kita are all similarly "entranced" during their encounters with Irokawa. The reader quickly realizes that this denizen of the sacred peaks possesses many typical traits of a *tengu,* the hawk-man hybrid of Japanese folklore. He dwells deep in the thickly-forested, remote mountains. His large physique, his rather diabolical aura, his hypnotic deceptiveness, his love of trees and young men, his self-avowed childlessness, his predatory acquisition of companions, whom he jealousy guards—all help round out the picture. The attribute that is conspicuously absent from Irokawa's description is his avian equipment; have his wings been clipped, or is he keeping them under wraps?[4]

[4] In Japanese folklore there are various mountain-dwelling beings with supernatural powers; labelling terminology and definitions depend on region and other factors and are not precise or constant. *Yama-otoko*, *yamabito*, *yamakami*, *ōbito*, and even *ijin* (foreigner) are terms that may mean *tengu*, and in any case, these creatures share many

The sexual innuendos that pervade the story become more noticeable when Irokawa describes to Mr. Kita his work in the mountains with trees; he compares them to young men—his surrogate sons. The pride and pleasure of raising them to adulthood, the sadness of cutting them down for sale, the renewed hope and satisfaction inspired by seeing the new crop of trees replacing the old. The motifs of blindness, loss, and androgyny that are inscribed into the story are all consistent with its phallic imagery and also with related ideas of male grandeur and its curtailment. During the men's visit, the reader, along with Mr. Kita, becomes increasingly confused by Irokawa's contradictory statements and behavior. Is Irokawa operating some kind of sex business, or is he just a simple, lecherous *tengu* on the lookout for playmates? Is the lodge, an ordinary inn by day, transformed by night into a site of orgiastic feasting and frolicking—a fabled, *tengu* mountain sanctuary? Perhaps it is always a paradisal refuge, for those who have the eyes to see, including Morita! The reader is becoming convinced that Irokawa possesses some kind of magical powers and that this entire domain is an enchanted forest. He can't help wondering if Irokawa and his chain-saw wielding underlings are reveling in a *tengu* palace, operating a slave trade, managing a private club for sadomasochists—or all of the above! But even if Irokawa is running some kind of racket, that does not preclude the possibility of his being a supernatural entity.

The I-narrator, while pitiful, may well be the culprit, and hence her no-name status. She presents herself as a person with a poor memory, and one who is less knowledgeable and accomplished than Asa. She is fascinated by the legend of Kiyohime's impetuous pursuit of the monk Anchin and her insane revenge when he betrays her expectations. It is equally imaginable that the narrator, like Kiyohime, was rejected by a man or that she had a close encounter with an alien. Or she might be possessed by the vengeful ghost of an outraged woman, like the *ranbyōshi* dancer in the Dōjōji legend; this would account for her recurring flashbacks to events described in the legend, and for her empathy with Kiyohime. She could have had a tryst—possibly even with Jirō—that she's been drugged to forget.

The narrator is evidently a single woman, and she seems to spend much of her time traveling around Japan, gathering information about regional customs and lore, interviewing and recording the stories of local people. Whether she engages in these activities as a hobby or a paid occupation is never

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characteristics. Nakazato takes advantage of the fuzzy boundaries among these categories in characterizing Irokawa and thereby compounds his elusiveness.

clarified. The Kita family might be supporting her in exchange for various services that she has rendered and others that she continues to provide. If the Kita family and their Kumano network had ensnared the narrator in their *kamikakushi* scheme, this would help explain why they continue to use her as a pawn and a camouflage.

As the story progresses, we are given further indications of the narrator's dim-wittedness, which takes the form not only of limited intelligence, but also a preference for popular rather than elite forms of culture. Her conversations with the *waka* scholar during their excursion throws these distinctions into sharp relief; it establishes the two women as another pair of antagonistic doubles, and it contributes to the binary dynamic between center and periphery, premodern and modern mentalities and behaviors that informs the story.

Textual elements that call to mind many different Japanese creative compositions of various genres, classical and popular, are woven into "Oborozōshi." Some (such as *waka*, or the Ishidōmaru legend) are passing references, but others are developed and integrated as motifs that are essential to the fabric and meaning of the story. By weaving famous old tales through the hearsay and opinions of Jirō's family members and acquaintances, the storyteller Nakazato, along with her artist-counterparts in the text, create a great polyphonic discourse around Jirō's disappearance. Rendering the unknown (or suppressed) saga permeable to an array of possible analogues, they increase its malleability and enhance its cultural resonance. They thereby enable its formulators and transmitters to treat it with unrestricted freedom, infusing it with details that easily dissolve into a pool of cultural myths.

Folk legends are foregrounded in "Oborozōshi," for several rather obvious reasons. They have many variants, which is especially helpful in obscuring Jirō's fate. They have prominent supernatural components, which support the possibility of supernatural causes for his disappearance. They have mass appeal. Aligning Jirō with the peripheral or even abject of modern culture valorizes premodern cultural forms and views.[5] Beneath the umbrella of the *kamikakushi* tale are two specific famous folk legends that are effectively used in "Oborozōshi" as paradigms for contextualizing Jirō's situation. These are the

[5] Baba Akiko 馬場あき子 interprets Jirō as an emblem of Japanese anti-modernity; he sets out in search of the hidden paradise and spiritual homeland that the Kumano region represents. Her essay is to my knowledge the only extended discussion of *Oborozōshi* that exists.

Dōjōji legend and the legend of Oguri Hangan. The two are skillfully counterpointed throughout "Oborozōshi" as alternative but not necessarily conflicting precedents for Jirō's saga. Both legends have prominent revenge elements and supernatural aspects. Both revolve around a woman's passionate attachment to a man and her unrelenting pursuit of him. In Dōjōji, Kiyohime's love turns to hate and she drives her man to an excruciating death. In Oguri Hangan, his wife's determination to transport Oguri to the healing waters of Yunomine ensures his survival. Both legends offer the I-narrator and the reader possible ways of understanding Jirō's disappearance and subsequent life, but closure is indefinitely deferred. Still, they serve as lenses that can be superimposed on the larger framework of *kamikakushi* to bring Jirō's story into sharper focus.

The central episode of "Oborozōshi" is the narrator's visit, upon returning from Kumano, to the gravesite and memorial shrine of Oguri Hangan, located on the grounds of Yugyō-ji, in Fujisawa. The shabby, elderly caretaker at the neglected little shrine confirms the innkeeper's tale but qualifies it slightly: Oguri had painted only carp and cranes. Where he had done so becomes increasingly unclear. The narrator buys a scroll of monochrome prints (*hanga*) depicting highlights from O. Hangan's life. She finds the work endearingly quaint; its amateurish, black-ink drawings seem better suited to its subject than any garish, multicolored paintings could be. But she is bewildered by the dilapidated condition of the memorial. Furthermore, the crone's remark on the painter's narrow artistic focus not only exacerbates narrator's and readers' doubts about this version of the legend, but uneasiness about the meaning of this additional limitation on Oguri's life. They cannot help but consider, illogically enough, what this might imply about Jirō's character and his fate. (Conversely, if Jirō is not a martyr-hero or romantic outcast but merely a rogue, then the meaning of Oguri's reclusion must also be questioned. After all, the men may be leading parallel lives.) Even if Jirō had found a measure of serenity in some inaccessible neck of the Kumano woods, and even if Jirō is not Morita, his circumstances might be far from idyllic.

"Oborozōshi"'s extensive, nearly excessive, use of simulacra (doubles and multiples) in the form of characters, places, objects, words, and situations that reflect or coincide with each other, partially or completely, is another strategy for creating confusion. This mirroring, splitting, or multiplication of phenomena takes many forms and serves different narrative purposes. Sometimes a fantastic element is involved in the production of simulacra, as

when a historical or legendary figure steps out of the past to blend with a living character in the text. This is a standard technique in postmodern fantasy texts, which use simulacra to challenge the concept of individuality; they also confuse the sequence of events in a narrative to subvert linear conceptions of time and suggest the possibilities of time reversals, time travel, parallel universes, reincarnation, and so forth.

Perhaps more pertinently, the Other World of Japanese legend exists outside of historical time. The obfuscation of the chronology of events in "Oborozōshi" contributes to the general aura of uncertainty about what occurred; it situates an indeterminate portion of the story in a Japanese Other World; and it creates an atmosphere congenial to supernatural happenings. It encourages readers to entertain the possibility that certain characters are ghosts, or that they are possessed by the restless spirits of long-deceased characters. The integration of the Dōjōji legend into this and other stories in *Oborozōshi* promotes this possibility; so does the repetition of other narrative and rhetorical elements that occurs intertextually across the collection.

The structural aspect of the text whose manipulation for the purpose of maximizing indeterminacy may be the most sophisticated is that of narrative perspective. An initial reading of the story is likely to yield the impression that two main narrative voices are inscribed into the text, and that each of these encompasses an indefinite number of other voices. There is a (nameless) I-narrator, who directly communicates her own "stories" (thoughts, opinions and experiences) to the reader, and in addition, receives and transmits to the reader the stories of others. The latter contain stories within stories whose sources cannot be traced and/ or whose accuracy cannot be verified. (Moreover, these may be supplemented by the I-narrator's embellishments.) There is also an anonymous, omniscient narrator who provides information that could not by rational means be accessible to the I-narrator as a character in the text-as-fiction. This information includes the mental processes of others and events that occur when the I-narrator is not present and about which she is not reported to have been apprised. It also includes information conveyed to her by her informants that they evidently could not have known. Both narrators seem to overlap to some degree with the story's author, Nakazato Tsuneko.

The I-narrator lets us know that she is a friend of Uno Chiyo's; that she was born and raised in Fujisawa; that she keeps animal companions in her home. All of this information is well-publicized biographical data about Nakazato, the famous author. The I-narrator in the text also seems to be a writer, but we are

made to doubt her competence and even her sanity. The real-life Nakazato was still writing first-rate literary works long after this story collection appeared; why would she construct her fiction-essay persona as a simpleton other than to exemplify the textual premise of the instability and multiplicity of the self? The anonymity of the I-narrator, along with the fuzziness of her mental condition and of her occupational and marital status might signal a resemblance to the Uji woman. Alternatively, it could indicate the author Nakazato's anxiety about whether her literary corpus would endure or evanesce after her death.

The omniscient narrator is also easily equated with the author Nakazato who, unlike the "I" character, knows everyone's thoughts and actions, for obvious reasons. The reader can view the I-narrator and the omniscient narrator as another set of doubles—dual projections of the author's consciousness; the voices of this complementary pair seem to alternate, one providing information that the other cannot. There are yet other forms of fragmentation that further complicate the treatment of narrative perspective. Sometimes the narrating voice cannot be distinguished as either of the above. A more comprehensive model may better describe the text's point of view. There is another narrative level in the text, delineated by an implicit narrator who mediates between author and the above two narrators, both of which are clearly present in the text even if not always distinguishable from each other. It is this implicit narrator that selects and processes the "stories" that the other two narrators relay to the reader. This model is especially attractive because it offers the possibility of an infinite regression—nesting eggs composed of countless implicit narrators within narrators—that mimics the legend formation-and-transmission process. Moreover, the reflective passages in the text—on reclusion and evanescence, for example—typify in tone and content the personal essays for which Nakazato is renowned; but these may actually be the musings of the I-narrator as fiction character, and in no way express the views of the author, at least in the context of this work of fiction.

Conversely, Kita's lengthy interior monologue may quite faithfully represent the author's views and feelings, for which Kita serves as vessel and transmitter. The omniscient narrator in the text may be a (disguised) male voice, and may, like the I-narrator, be a character in the text that is a writer. Might the primary author-character in the text, contrary to what is implied, be Kita rather than the female I-narrator? It is even conceivable that the I-narrator is a fiction persona devised by Kita in order to write this story, *his* story. (Shades of Nabokov!) Providing further support for this hypothesis is a remark that Asa

makes on her father's skillful handwriting. The compliment introduces an episode in which several stunning revelations occur; these all but prove that Asa completely misled the I-narrator about the Kita family situation. Mr. Kita lives separately in Ichirō's household, where he engages in sutra transcription (and by implication, other forms of writing); Mr. Kita retired early, seemingly due to a heart ailment; Asa uninhibitedly visits Ichirō's home; Ichirō's wife actively helps maintain the Kita family's façade of innocence. The convergence of these new pieces of information near the end of the story strongly influences the reader's interpretation of the I-narrator's reflections on Asa's dream of donning the formal attire of Oguri Hangan's paternal forebears to perform their tribal tale; she will simultaneously wrest away the role of scribe and storyteller from her father.

The I-narrator's namelessness is a factor that undermines the credibility of her reports. But it also increases the possibility that her character is a ghost, and as such that she has powers of perception that enable her to access the information whose sources are unclear and that seems to be provided by an omniscient narrator. If we read "Oborozōshi" as a kind of magical-realist text, we may be inclined to interpret the I-narrator's illogical thinking and naiveté in more positive terms, and apart from the questions of whether she has had a *kamikakushi* experience or if she is a ghost. Her apparent cognitive impairment might indicate an inherently frayed consciousness that enables her to apprehend phenomena that are imperceptible to normal individuals—whether the impressions that emanate from a neighbor's home, an acquaintance's mind, an "other world" of fugitives in the Kumano Mountains, or some unearthly spirit realm.

A main objective of "Oborozōshi" is to expose the mechanics of storytelling, as it proceeds from oral to written forms to other media, and thereby elucidate the legend formation-transmission process. Of equal importance, because she was a writer and was intrigued by the dynamics of artistic development, Nakazato evidently wished to expose possible links among *kamikakushi*, the artistic personality, and the artist in society—to identify the conditions under which talent can flourish. For ordinary people, the purpose and effect of converting the painful experience of a loved one's disappearance into a *kamikakushi* narrative is to obtain emotional comfort and psychological closure. But for the individuals on whom Nakazato is focusing, artistic considerations take precedence above all else. Once they have secured the practical circumstances conducive to artistic production, their objective in fashioning a

kamikakushi narrative—from lies, inconsistencies, gaps, creative embellishments, recognizable borrowings from literature and legends, and a modicum of truth—is to generate a blizzard of unverifiable whimsy around the events and their participants, a story that will endure at least for a generation or two as an urban legend, if nothing else. Their fable might even eventually be worthy of inclusion in the canon of immortal Japanese *kamikakushi* literature. The written script—whose formulation is being "performed" in this very story—might even someday be seized for conversion into another medium.

It is not until Mr. Kita's innermost thoughts are divulged at length that the reader wonders if his literary ambitions may have been the chief cause of Jirō's exile. But immediately following this episode is the disclosure of Asa's desire to "assume a male role" and interpret Oguri Hangan's life. The juxtaposition of these two scenes suggests that Asa's motivation for "performing" Oguri Hangan is not only to simultaneously express Jirō's feelings and life story through her imaginative reconstruction and fusion of the two men's lives. She also may wish to "become" her father, as an artist and in other ways.[6]

If "Oborozōshi" is a "survivor's tale," whose is it, and in what sense is it so? The process of creating and performing a dance will enable Asa to shape and express her family narrative to her liking; to release herself from her attachments to Jirō, her father, and perhaps others; and to assimilate their emotions and "stories" into herself and thereby enrich her imaginative life. However, if any of the Kitas, including Asa, had conspired in a scheme that led to Jirō's ruin, then the theme of deterioration might apply to those individuals. Asa's appropriation of the male role may signify not her empowerment purchased at the price of Jirō's (and possibly her father's) enslavement; her dance might be a meditation on karmic retribution or an elegy on a family in decline.

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[6] At least four of the stories in *Oborozōshi* concern themselves with a daughter's complex attachment to a father or other male authority figure that belongs to some artistic circle. The connoisseur-heroine of "Yamahime" for example, adores her painter-father, yet feels compelled to control his legacy and thereby to usurp and obliterate him. In the culminating scene (of "Oborozōshi" and *Oborozōshi*), the dancer's self-emancipation from patriarchal confines takes center stage. The female-artist's will to "master" male predecessors was a personal impulse and literary theme that evidently continued to agitate and energize Nakazato. The posthumously published fragment of a novel that she had begun writing dovetails provocatively with the climax of "Oborozōshi." The novel's female writer-narrator states at the outset that her intention to probe the heart of a world-weary Narihira springs from her impulse to make the revered author "dance a male dance." See Nakazato Tsuneko,"Ikō: Otokomai Ariwara no Narihira," 269.

The I-narrator recalls Asa saying that what she wished to express through her dance was Oguri Hangan's gradual "change of heart." This phrase is vital; it is used several times earlier in the story by the narrator when she is contemplating the reasons for Jirō's disappearance and for his susceptibility to enchantment. She also uses it in relation to her own gradual process of resignation to parting from a lover. So in this concluding scene, where it explicitly refers to Oguri Hangan, we understand that it also refers to Jirō (and, if more remotely, to Kiyohime's passion for Anchin). And because the previous scene ends with Mr. Kita's resolution to cease his search for Jirō, we realize that he too has recognized that he has had a "change of heart." Moreover, Asa had told the narrator when she had disclosed her wish to "dance Oguri's life" that she had begun to understand the meaning of "change of heart" in a different way from before; this indicates that by that time, Asa too had recognized within her some emotional change. The narrator implies that Asa's affection for her father, and perhaps for Jirō, has begun to cool, although the basis for her conjecture is not revealed.

The story concludes with the image of Asa's memories of Kita and Jirō waning away, like the sound of a bell, as they are absorbed into Asa's dance. The motifs of loss and evanescence that have run throughout the story are most poignantly expressed here; the sound of the big booming bell of Dōjōji that the story's opening scene calls to mind has been reduced at the end to a tinkling that is ebbing away. Recall the famous picture scroll depicting the gender reversal that occurs at the end of the Dōjōji legend. Kiyohime appears as a gigantic, enraged serpent and the monk as a tiny, charred skeleton that emerges from beneath the bell.[7] Who or what has possessed Asa to dance? Nakazato may have rewritten the Dōjōji legend, displacing its image of the woman maddened by romantic betrayal onto the power-hungry, androgynous artist. The storyteller as hissing snake that suffocates, then burns to a crisp, those with alternative voices and visions may account for Jirō's expulsion to an "other world," the I-narrator's brain damage, and finally, Kita's and Jirō's "assimilation" by Asa.

The bell is also of crucial importance in *kamikakushi* lore; it is the favored medium for contacting abducting deities in an Other World and entreating them to return an abductee. The big bong's reduction to a faint peal at the end of "Oborozōshi" might signify the Kita family's decreasing hopes for Jirō's and Mr. Kita's return and for learning the whole truth about their disappearances. The story's final lines include beautifully aligned images: the

[7] See Osaka Shiritsu Bijutsukan, ed., *Inori no michi*, 97.

person who has had some change of heart withdrawing into silence, and the sound of a bell fading away. The images are accompanied by the implication that the "unspeakable" truth of *kamikakushi* is better suited to some wordless medium than to verbal transmission. Perhaps in rhythm with Asa's dance, Jirō is painting his own version of his narrative in some blissful Other World.

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