“Women, Readerly Response, and the Problem of Imitation: *Mumyōzōshi* and the Vexed Beginnings of the *Monogatari* Canon”

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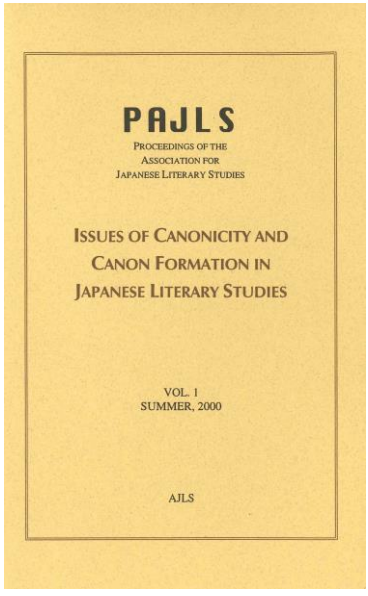


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# WOMEN, READERLY RESPONSE, AND THE PROBLEM OF IMITATION: *MUMYŌZŌSHI* AND THE VEXED BEGINNINGS OF THE *MONOGATARI* CANON

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Ironically, one of the problems with interpreting an interpretive text like *Mumyōzōshi* (The Nameless Book) (ca. 1200) is that it is almost too readily assimilable to current discussions of gender, canonicity, and the politics of literary hermeneutics. It stands out among works of the classical literary tradition for its explicit polemic against the exclusion of female writers from the process of literary canon formation. Equally striking is *Mumyōzōshi*'s explicit championing of fictional tales (*monogatari*) in an age when fictional tales (like women) were regarded with suspicion on moral and religious grounds. The destiny of the mid- and late-Heian tales with which *Mumyōzōshi* concerned itself is now a well-known story. What bears recalling is the still-uncertain direction that tradition faced at the time *Mumyōzōshi* was written. Fujiwara Shunzei's often quoted remark deploring "the composition of poetry without knowledge of the *Tale of Genji*" helped midwife that tale's rebirth as a sourcebook for medieval *waka* and *renga* poets.[1] But the tales themselves, especially *Genji*, were long, unwieldy texts, difficult to come by, and requiring great amounts of skilled labor to reproduce. Their survival and circulation in literary memory through the Middle Ages and into the early Edo period depended in large part on a process of selecting, summarizing, and in effect anthologizing choice passages and poems that in turn became the basis for new works in other genres like *renga*, Nō, and painting. *Mumyōzōshi*, traditionally assumed to be the work of Shunzei's "daughter"

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[1] The remark was made in the context of Shunzei's judgments on *waka* in the *Roppyakuban utaawase* (Poetry Contest in Six Hundred Rounds) (1192). See Hagitani Boku and Taniyama Shigeru, eds., *Utaawase shū*, Nihon koten bungaku taikei 74 (Iwanami shoten, 1965), 442.

(1171- after 1252),[2] stands at the beginning of this process of excision, though its peculiar contributions to the history of classical commentary on *monogatari* have not been systematically assessed, and I will not be attempting that here.[3] This essay represents a preliminary assessment of issues that seem to have vexed the nameless speakers of this nameless book, chief among them one of the troubled intersections between gender and literary recognition: the making and sustaining of a name for oneself as a female writer in thirteenth-century Japan. Rather than tracking the text's elusive influence on the history of *Genji* commentary, this essay tries instead to understand *Mumyōzōshi* as adumbrating a particular moment in the history of female writers and *monogatari*. The impact of *Mumyōzōshi* on later writers will therefore be of less consequence than its relation to the writers and readers, mostly female, who preceded Shunzei's daughter, and with whom she constructed, in *Mumyōzōshi*, a richly textured dialogue of citation and commentary.

*Mumyōzōshi* is a fictional conversation that takes place among fictional women about fictional tales, the characters who people them, and the real women who dominated the writing of them. As a conversation, a "talk"

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[2] Fujiwara Shunzei (1114-1204) was actually the maternal grandfather of the celebrated *waka* poet known as Shunzei's daughter (Shunzei kyō no musume). Her real father was Fujiwara Moriyori, and her mother was Hachijō'in Sanjō, the sister of Shunzei's celebrated poet and classicist son, Fujiwara Teika (1162-1241).

[3] To briefly summarize its trajectory since the thirteenth century, after the early Kamakura period, *Mumyōzōshi* was little read and/or seldom acknowledged by medieval *Genji* commentators, though Ichijō Kaneyoshi quoted from it in his *Kachō yosei* (1472), apparently confusing *Mumyōzōshi* therein with Kamo no Chōmei's similarly titled miscellany, *Mumyōshō* (Nameless Notes) (ca. 1210). It resurfaces during the Edo period among scholars of national learning as interest in the *Tale of Genji* excited greater interest in other Heian tales and memoirs. Meiji and Taishō era literary historians seem to have routinely cited it as an early authority for their disapproval of the imitative quality and "decadence" of *monogatari* from the late Heian period. I am indebted here to Robert Khan, whose essay presented at the 1999 conference represents important historiographical research on the ideological biases underlying Meiji and Taishō assessments of late Heian fiction. See his "The Strange Fate of *Monogatari* after the *Genji*: The Genealogy of the Term 'Giko,' from Style to Subgenre" in this volume.

about tales, it showcases a range of responses to the literary-philosophical debates of its day without pursuing any single one of them to a settled conclusion. A couple of the debates it engages remained live ones in the commentary on the *Tale of Genji* written throughout Japan's middle ages and on into the Edo period. One of these is the ambiguous relationship of fictional tales to questions of religious value and truth.[4] A second issue has to do with the large proportion of *Mumyōzōshi* that is dedicated to establishing a lexicon of emotional affects in order to classify specific passages and characters from the *Genji* and other tales. To put it another way, the speakers in the text single out particularly memorable passages for praise and evaluation and order them into an implicit hierarchy in terms of their emotional effect on the reader. Aside from what this process can tell us about the way specific *monogatari* were understood and appreciated by a particular early medieval audience, it has implications for the conceptualization of canonicity in premodern Japanese tradition. A third issue, also tightly bound up with the problem of gender, reader-response, and canonicity, is that of "imitation" or *mono manebi*, a concept also linked to the explicitly Buddhist concern about the "sinfulness" of *monogatari* already mentioned.

Perhaps predictably, the anxiety *Mumyōzōshi* voices about the lack of recognition for female writers seems to have had little or no impact upon succeeding generations of male commentators on *Genji* and tale literature in general. In effect, the advocacy of female writers and feminine literary lineages so strongly voiced in *Mumyōzōshi* simply failed. The reason for this failure has never been far to seek and is usually found in the dramatic political and social changes of the Kamakura period and beyond. The cultural

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[4] Michele Marra addresses this issue in the introduction to his English translation of the text and argues that on balance, the discussion in *Mumyōzōshi* does not deal in depth with the problem of Buddhist attacks on fictional literature. See "*Mumyōzōshi*: Introduction and Translation," *Monumenta Nipponica* 39.2 (1984):122-23. More recently, Thomas Rohlich finds a greater seriousness of religious purpose in his close reading of *Mumyōzōshi*'s opening passages. See Rohlich, "In Search of Critical Space: The Path to *Monogatari* Criticism in the *Mumyōzōshi*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (June 1997): 179-204. Rather than trying to assess the author's intentions regarding her text's seriousness of religious purpose, I will be calling attention to the equivocal manner in which *Mumyōzōshi* handles one of its overtly religious themes, that is, the problem of "imitation."

capital of the Fujiwara family and its women, and indeed of the Imperial Court itself, dwindled drastically in the face of the political tumult of Japan's Middle Ages. A shift in the gender of tale readers and custodianship has also been noted as one of the secondary effects of the waning influence of bedroom politics at court that had kept Fujiwara women at the cultural forefront during the Heian period. Without denying the importance of these socio-cultural changes, this essay will offer some suggestions about how *Mumyōzōshi*'s own conceptualization of tales, tale readership, and canonicity crystallized the image of the Heian women's tradition as a thing of the past: a still-viable resource whose future, however, was already imperilled and in some ways destined to be lost as a province peculiar to women, for reasons other than the practical diminishment of women's roles in medieval aristocratic culture and society. A brief review of how *Mumyōzōshi* positions itself generically, where and how it signals its relationship to other texts, will help frame our initial discussion of gender and literary recognition.

### *Mumyōzōshi* and Other Talk of Tales

As others have noted, *Mumyōzōshi* strongly foregrounds its intertextual links to the *monogatari* tradition, both the subgenre of historical tales or *kagami* ("mirror") and the frankly fictional variety of tale already by the late twelfth century identified as *tsukuri monogatari* (made-up tales). Interestingly, the only other sustained (and still extant) late Heian meditation on fictional tales aside from *Mumyōzōshi* appears as the final chapter of the historical tale *Ima kagami*, "Tsukuri monogatari no yukue" (The Destiny of Fictional Tales).[5] In terms of content, *Mumyōzōshi* is preoccupied with the analysis of specific *tsukuri monogatari*, but structurally, at least at first glance, it recalls the *kagami* tradition. *Mumyōzōshi* mimics the *Okagami* and *Ima kagami* in its use of the framing device of a superannuated nun as narrator and by developing in its closing section, the "Onna ron" (Essay on Women), a name-by-name focus on individual women writers that is reminiscent of the loose, serial biography format characteristic of *kagami*.[6] On

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[5] See *Ima kagami*, ed. Takehana Isao (Kodansha, 1984) 3, 591-611.

[6] For a more detailed analysis of *Mumyōzōshi*'s structural reprises of the *kagami* tradition, see Higuchi Yoshimaro, "*Mumyōzōshi* no hattan," *Kokugo to kokubungaku* 55 (October 1978), and Marra, 119-23.

the other hand, the text's dialogic, performative mode of representation reminds many readers of the often highly self-reflexive conversations about tales found within mid-Heian works of fiction and memoir. The *Pillow Book* contains several passages in which Empress Teishi and her ladies (or Sei Shōnagon alone), like the fictional ladies in *Mumyōzōshi*, judge the merits and demerits of characters and passages in *Ochikubo*, *Utsuhō*, and other *monogatari*.[7] Some of the mid-Heian *tsukuri monogatari* contain their own embedded commentaries on tales and tale reading, passages in which a narrating voice or a character remarks on the meaning, intention, or the particular power of "the old tales."[8] Lengthier passages, such as the "Amayo no shinasadame" (Judgments of a Rainy Night) in the Hahakigi and the "Monogatari ron" (Discussion of Novels) in the Hotaru chapters of the *Tale of Genji*, provide more sustained examples. In these latter, philosophical issues such as the relation of *monogatari* to truth and falsehood are probed lighthandedly, in the context of casual talk about women or the flirtation between Genji and his foster-daughter Tamakazura.

*Mumyōzōshi* seems to stand at a transitional point between these apparently casual talks about tales embedded within tales, on the one hand, and the interlinear glosses and handbooks produced by medieval poets and readers. Yet the "talk" (*monogatari*) that *Mumyōzōshi* engages in is not simply a rainy-season interlude in some larger fiction, nor yet is it, like the historical mirrors it mimics, simply a series of biographical anecdotes. It is a

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[7] For judgments by Teishi and her ladies on Suzushi and Nakatada, male characters in *Utsuhō monogatari*, see Ivan Morris, trans., *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon* (Penguin, 1967), 95, and *Makura no sōshi*, ed., Watanabe Minoru, Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei 25 (Iwanami shoten, 1991), 96-97. For Sei's comments on *Komano monogatari* and *Ochikubo monogatari*, see Morris, 238, and *Makura no sōshi*, 316-17.

[8] The first chapter of Motoori Norinaga's *Genji monogatari Tama no ogushi* is a tissue of citations of such passages (drawn exclusively from *Genji*) that culminates in Norinaga's line-by-line commentary on the most extended of these self-reflections in the *Genji*, the "Monogatari ron" (Discussion of Novels) from the Hotaru (Fireflies) chapter. See Thomas Harper, "Motoori Norinaga's Criticism of the *Genji monogatari*: A Study of the Background and Critical Content of his *Genji monogatari Tama no Ogushi*," diss., University of Michigan, 1971, appendix I, for a translation of "Monogatari no ōmune."

tale devoted entirely to talk of tales and tale-writers, and as a tale, it is written in the tradition of female-authored *monogatari* (two of the four early textual lines are in fact titled *monogatari*).[9] *Mumyōzōshi*'s evident concern with *waka* drawn from the tales has prompted some to link it to the tradition of *karon* (essays on *waka*) in general, and more specifically to the poetics of Shunzei's circle.[10] Indeed, *Mumyōzōshi* implicitly expands upon Shunzei's claim that anyone who aspires to become a *waka* poet worthy of respect must have a knowledge of the *Tale of Genji*. But, as we shall also see, *Mumyōzōshi*'s interest in *monogatari* goes far beyond the *Genji* and far beyond mining the tales as sources of exemplary *waka*.

At the outset and again vociferously at the end of *Mumyōzōshi*, a concern with naming names and thereby preserving those named from a state of oblivion or namelessness emerges as a prominent theme. It should be recalled that the word "name" (*na*) refers not only to the designation of a particular person but more broadly to that person's "reputation." As though to tease readers into their own, parallel anxiety about lost names and forgotten reputations, the text's concern with naming is counterbalanced by the introduction of its own characters, all of whom remain conspicuously *nameless* speakers: the nun who narrates the frame tale and the group of aristocratic ladies with whom she passes the night in conversation. The frame tale opens as the first-person narrative of an aged nun who is wandering about the Higashiyama district east of the Imperial Palace. She comes to a temple first, at which point she turns west, symbolically the direction of Paradise, but geographically, in this case, a turn back toward the secular heart of old Heian: the Imperial Palace. In the course of these ambivalent peregrinations, she comes upon a run-down villa inhabited by a group of aristocratic ladies who entreat her to "confess" (*zange*) her life story to them and then stay up all night talking. A great deal of name-dropping goes on in these opening lines, positioning the text within a web of specific female patrons and the works, both Buddhist and secular, connected with them. In contrast to the

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[9] A late Edo copy by Oyamada Yosei—thought to be a copy of the oldest extant text (the Kokutōhon, 1335)—is entitled *Kenkyū monogatari*, and one other is *Mumyō monogatari* (the copy in the collection of Fujii Otsu). The *okugaki* in the latter text informs us that the booklet was titled *Mumyō monogatari* sometime between 1344 and 1365. See Tomikura Tokujirō, *Mumyōzōshi hyōkai* (Yūseidō, 1954), 10-13.

[10] See Marra, 124-28.

unreal space of the villa where the conversation will unfold, the temple the nun approaches in the opening passage is the Saishōkō'in, an actual temple commissioned by Empress Kenshūmon'in (consort to Emperor GoShirakawa), containing paintings by Fujiwara Takanobu (1142-1205), an uncle of Shunzei's daughter. The nun's brief recitation of her life story occasions further name-dropping. She explains that she served the mother (Fujiwara Muneko) of Kōkamon'in (consort of Emperor Sutoku, r. 1123-41), and therefore was on hand at court during the reigns of both Sutoku and his successor Konoe (r. 1141-1155). When Kōkamon'in's mother died in 1155, however, instead of taking service with Kōkamon'in (who herself went into retirement at this point), the future nun, too vibrant a spirit for service to a lady in reclusion, stayed on at court and served as lady in waiting from time to time during the reigns of Emperor GoShirakawa (1155-58), Nijō (1158-65), Rokujō (1165-68), and Takakura (1168-80), till age forced her to withdraw just prior to the Genpei Wars. She takes up a life dedicated to veneration of the Lotus Sutra, and it is her chanting of the Lotus (significantly the chapter on *hōben*) that causes the ladies to invite her up onto the veranda, where she soon tires of chanting and drifts off into what she confesses later is a feigned sleep. At this point the younger women take over the conversation.

## Who Comments on What: *Mumyōzōshi* and the "Judgements of a Rainy Night"

The nun's sleepiness marks a shift in the intertextual horizon from allusion to the *kagami* tradition, where the narrator is typically a garrulous cleric with total recall, to "Judgements of a Rainy Night" in the *Tale of Genji*, where Genji, ever unwilling to share his own secrets, pretends to sleep through the greater part of his companions' stories. Although at least one scholar has suggested that the substitution of a worldly figure like the youthful Genji for a nun as interlocutor dignifies the conversation as a serious discussion of the religious merits of fiction,[11] I would suggest the transposition achieves almost the opposite effect—undercutting religious seriousness even as it hints at it. There is a wonderful irony in the figure of a nun who so quickly tires of intoning the sutra that she suggests they take a break, yet

[11] Marra, 121.

who is nonetheless alert enough to stay up all night listening to talk of tales and the women who wrote them (though she, like Genji, craftily hides her wakefulness for fear her comments might turn the talk in other directions).

The conversation develops among multiple female speakers, none of whom, except for the nun, is clearly defined as an individual character. The anonymous women move from a discussion of "those things of this world that are hardest to give up" (*Genji* is the hardest, beating out Amida Buddha and the Lotus Sutra), to individual tales (*Genji* first), to judgments about individual characters within the tales, to a discussion of texts that can be characterized as "real" (makoto ni arikeru mono: poem-tales like *Ise monogatari* and poetry collections or *shū*), to the real women who were responsible for almost all the works under discussion. The thematic variations created by this reworking of the "Judgments of a Rainy Night" from *Genji* do not end with the substitution of otherworldly nun for secular gallant. Consider their implications for *Mumyōzōshi*'s underlying concern with relations between fiction and the real. At the outset of the "Rainy Night" in *Genji*, tales draw skeptical criticism from the guards officer because he sees them as sourcebooks for a feminine tendency to distort and exaggerate women's suffering in affairs of the heart. The talk then turns quickly to stories of actual women (all of whom remain nameless) each of the characters except Genji has known as wives or lovers. As the evening wears away, however, the anecdotes concerning experiences among actual women become more and more fantastic until the men end up as guilty of fictionalizing as the female tale-readers they disparaged at the outset of their conversation.[12] In *Mumyōzōshi*, the conceptual progression arrives at the opposite end of the spectrum: moving from a focus on the aesthetic/emotional impact of fictional characters on fictional readers, to a discussion of the impact of real, named writers, and texts that contain the "real." The conversation proceeds from the fictional to the real, from a preoccupation with fiction and its affects to the talents and paradoxical powerlessness of real writers and their non-fictional lives and achievements, among them the production of fiction.

Before it ends in realistic gossip about women writers who existed in history, the talk in *Mumyōzōshi* diverges from the patterns of "Judgments of a

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[12] See Seidensticker, trans., *The Tale of Genji* (Knopf, 1976), 20-38; and Abe Akio et al., eds., *Genji monogatari*, Nihon koten bungaku zenshū 12 (Shōgakkan, 1970), 129-67.

Rainy Night" in other ways as well. The speakers dwell at great length on the characters and merits of individual fictions. Tales are faulted when they fail to mimic the real (*makoto*) or the original (*moto*) skillfully. The boundaries between fiction and reality, literature and life, are deliberately toyed with, as are the distinctions between imitation as a philosophical/religious issue and imitation as a literary trope. When the *Mumyōzōshi* speakers turn to discussion of real women, they concentrate on qualities other than their desirability as wives or lovers, including their behavior after marriage or in old age. As others have pointed out, this is in pointed contrast to the *Genji* speakers' concern with qualities that make a woman worthy as the object of erotic pursuit and marriage.[13] The women's conversation, and the text, trails off just as one of the speakers notes they have spent the whole night without discussing men. Despite that closing disavowal, the speakers of *Mumyōzōshi* have in fact spent part of the night judging male characters, and when the conversation touched on *waka* and more recent *monogatari*, male writers have not escaped their critical gaze either. So how, one is prompted to ask, do the female speakers of *Mumyōzōshi* perform as critics of male characters and writers?

It seems to me that whatever gender conflict *Mumyōzōshi* voices, the nature of that conflict is not as simply worked out as it immediately appears. It has been suggested, for example, that the *Mumyōzōshi* speakers judge the *Genji* heroes primarily in terms of their treatment of *Genji* heroines.[14] I would argue otherwise. Yūgiri *is* admired for his "seriousness" and faulted for his late fickleness to his wife Kumoinokari, but that change in him is critiqued not as a moral issue, but as an error of versimilitude: Yūgiri's fickleness is *implausible*, given his prior characterization. His actions betray

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[13] See Kuwabara Hiroshi, SNKS 7: 142, and Kikuchi Hitoshi, "*Mumyōzōshi* no joryō sakkahyō," *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* (November 1986): 135-39.

[14] Richard Okada writes, "Almost every critique, revealingly, is framed in terms of how the men treat or respond to the women they encounter. The speakers are especially critical of Genji, who comes off less than grand, certainly not heroic, as a result of the way he treats women, while others like the strait-laced Yūgiri, are generally admired for their steadfastness. The brooding 'Uji' figure Kaoru is praised by one speaker as exemplifying the height of perfection." See his "Fujiwara Shunzei's Daughter," *Japanese Women Writers: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Chieko Mulhern (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 75.

not Kumoinokari, but rather his own name (*na*) as a "serious," or even "staid" person (*mamebito*):

> As though he were not a young man, the staid Captain is so proper as to seem somewhat bloodless, but his discreet ways make him superior to his father Genji. Without giving way to various other proposed matches for himself, he set his heart and waited patiently for Tō no Chūjō 's consent [to take Kumoinokari in marriage]. Rare behavior! I wonder whether even a woman would have handled it so well. But then, at the end of a life spent living with her just as he had desired, he takes up with that trivial Ochiba princess. This overturns his reputation as a staid man and indeed his very character changes. Not at all what you would expect.[15]

Far more striking as a common feature of the negative critiques of male characters is the speakers' concern with their relations with other men. Thus Tō no Chūjō and Prince Hotaru are judged positively because of their integrity in relationships with Genji. In general Genji comes off looking bad largely because of his ill-treatment of other men, not his behavior with women. To put it in other terms, his error is not that he carries out his rivalries through the medium of daughters and foster daughters, but that he competes ruthlessly with his male friends, brothers, and juniors. One speaker recalls that Genji's adoption of and vigorous lobbying for Akikonomu, daughter of the Rokujō lady, ultimately thwarts Tō no Chūjō's efforts to place his own daughter as imperial consort—and this despite Tō no Chūjō's loyalty to Genji even in the face of public disapproval at the time of Genji's exile in Suma. Another is miffed that Genji failed to take Murasaki with him into exile and quick to point out the hypocrisy of his philandering while at Akashi, but these false steps are minor compared to her horror at his deplorable treatment of Kashiwagi, a young man guilty of a sin that replicated

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[15] All translations mine unless otherwise indicated. See also Marra, "*Mumyōzōshi*: Introduction and Translation," *Monumenta Nipponica* 39.4 (1984): 144. My text is the edition by Kuwabara, *Mumyōzōshi*, Shin Nihon koten shūsei 7 (Shintensha, 1976), 37-38, hereafter, SNKS 7. For the reader's convenience, I have cross-referenced longer passages to Marra's complete English translation.

Genji's own youthful adultery with his father's wife Fujitsubo. Genji's handling of Kashiwagi (who is Tō no Chūjō's son) stands in sharp contrast to what the speakers recall of Tō no Chūjō's gentlemanly behavior regarding Genji's son Yūgiri, despite the fact that Yūgiri, like his own father Genji before him, pursues his love interest (in Tō no Chūjō's daughter Kumoinokari) to the point that Yūgiri also thwarts, as did Genji before him, Tō no Chūjō's hopes for placing a daughter as imperial consort.[16]

A second striking feature of the *Mumyōzōshi* critiques of male characters is their probing of the linkage between gender and issues of social rank (*mi*). The linking of masculinity to a preoccupation with class and rank is an issue in both the *Genji* and the *Mumyōzōshi* conversations, but it is handled in different ways. The male speakers in the "Judgments of a Rainy Night" are much concerned with charting the sub-categories of women of the middle ranks. *Mumyōzōshi* picks up on that very preoccupation with rank and marks it explicitly as a masculine weakness, singling out a number of the male characters, notably from *Genji* (especially Kashiwagi and Kōbai), who are flawed by their over-concern with matters of class and rank (a preoccupation that also implicitly lies at the heart of the women's critiques of Genji's rivalry with Tō no Chūjō). The message that men are apt to be dazzled by matters of rank (versus more authentic strengths such as real literary talent) is reinforced by further snide comments when the discussion turns to *waka* anthologies:

> "If only I had the standing of someone like the Lay Priest Shunzei and could compile an anthology!" "Indeed, *Senzaishū* was his creation and it is quite elegant, but perhaps because he deferred to men of rank, it contains many poems that would not be considered particularly good . . . How splendid it would be if one were to compile a collection that did not mix superb poems with those chosen on the basis of a poet's rank or out of deference to his position."[17]

The remark introduces one of at least two somewhat conflicting viewpoints on gender and literary recognition that *Mumyōzōshi* encompasses. Here we

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[16] See Marra, 142-45; and SNKS 7: 35-40.

[17] See Marra, 421; and SNKS 7: 104-5.

have an implicit appeal to overlook or look differently upon the usual distinctions of rank and gender and instead to place a higher value upon the merit of texts themselves, not *because* they are written by women (or male poets of rank), but *in spite of* their origins, feminine or masculine, middle-ranking or higher. One of the perhaps unconscious results of this merit principle is that all the tales mentioned in *Mumyōzōshi*, even *Genji* to some extent, come in for brusque treatment at the hands of these gentle ladies. And yet, as the conversation progresses, one feels there is something else, some other principle than merit, governing the flow of talk and judgment.

## Gender, Talent, and Fantasies of Female Power: the Politics of Literary Recognition

As the passage just quoted suggests, part of the text's polemical energy derives from its antagonism toward the institution of imperially-sponsored *waka* anthologies (*chokusenshū*) or, more precisely, the mixed, politically tainted practices of the men who were chosen as anthologists. *Mumyōzōshi* bristles with remarks that point to immediate conflicts between Shunzei's daughter and a constellation of her famous *waka*- and anthology-producing kinsmen. This literary-biographical dimension of the text is fascinating if somewhat puzzling. If we can date the text to sometime around 1200-1202, and if indeed it was written by Shunzei's daughter, *Mumyōzōshi* was produced at a time when its author's worldly fortunes as a *waka* poet were on the rise, thanks in part to the influence of her grandfather and patron Shunzei and the patronage she received from ex-emperor GoToba. The influence of these men brought her prominence as a contributor to various imperially-commissioned poetry events and collections (especially the *Shinkokinshū*) and allowed her to exert influence in turn as the poetic tutor to Emperor Juntoku.[18] Yet the fact that the presumed author is a well-tended beneficiary of

[18] Meanwhile, the marital fortunes of Shunzei's daughter were plummeting. In 1199, her husband, Minamoto Michitomo, married a woman above her in station, a move intended to shore up his rising political status. For Shunzei's daughter the marriage meant a decline in her own status as wife. As a result, Tomosada, the son she bore Michitomo in 1200, could not expect to become Michitomo's successor. A year later, in 1201, as though in compensation for her marital woes, Shunzei's daughter was commissioned by ex-emperor GoToba as one of thirty poets asked to submit a

Fujiwara and imperial patronage is not so easily deducible from the general tenor of the conversation in *Mumyōzōshi* (at least if we assume that in a patron-dependent relationship, complaints aimed at specific patrons are less acceptable than generalized complaints, such as laments about the fate of women, an old theme in Heian letters.) Shunzei as well as Teika come in for open criticism as compilers of *waka* anthologies and as author of *monogatari*, respectively.[19]

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hundred-poem sequence for inclusion in his *Sengohyakuban utaawase* (Poetry Contest in Fifteen Hundred Rounds). In the following year, GoToba invited her to enter his service and become a member of the poetry group Sendō kadan. Some scholars speculate it was around this time that she was given responsibility for the poetic education of Emperor Juntoku. The invitation to enter GoToba's service was a politico-cultural coup for her grandfather and patron Shunzei. The author's husband Michitomo also benefited from the connection. Teika, the author's prominent uncle, however, was initially hesitant to allow Shunzei's daughter to go to court. Why? Was this a foreshadowing of the apparent rivalries over poetic styles that would trouble relations between uncle and niece in later years? At this point in Teika's career as poetic arbiter, it appears he greatly admired her poetry, including twenty-nine of her *waka* in the *Shinkokinshū*. But the strong showing her *waka* make in the *Shinkokinshū* may simply reflect the influence of Shunzei and GoToba, both of whom had laid the groundwork for the anthology (in part through the poems commissioned for *Sengohyakuban utaawase*). And GoToba in fact quarreled with Teika over the final version of the work. In later years, with Shunzei dead and GoToba out of the picture, Teika slighted Shunzei's daughter by including only eight of her *waka* in the *Shinchokusenshū*. She gets her own say on this later, when she critiques the collection in her *Koshibe zenni shōsoku*, a letter sent to Teika's son Tameie, the compiler of the *Shoku Gosenshū*, in which she compares the *Shinkokinshū* (compiled by Teika—but with much influence from Shunzei and GoToba, 1206), the *Shinchokusenshū* (compiled by Teika, 1235), and the *Shoku Gosenshū* (compiled by Tameie, 1251).

[19] The almost querulous way in which these references to Shunzei and Teika are made raises some questions. Perhaps the finger-pointing should prompt us to consider a later dating of the text, to sometime after Shunzei's death, when Teika's efforts to distance himself from his father's aesthetic principles contributed to the cooling of relations between him and Shunzei's daughter? We might even consider positing a date that would place its composition at some point after Shunzei's

The stridency (strident, at least by late Heian, early Kamakura standards) with which *Mumyōzōshi* speakers complain about the way female poets had been historically overlooked is notable, but what is even more surprising is that these complaints are lodged, not against men in general, but rather against specific men, namely Shunzei and Teika, who should know better than to follow historical precedent in the treatment of talented female poets. Having just insinuated that Shunzei's *Senzaishū*, though fine, was flawed by his inclusion of inferior poems that reflect only the poet's rank, one speaker goes so far as to imply that, should a woman for once be given the chance to compile an imperial *waka* anthology, the results might be superior to those of the past, since women are not so readily swayed by masculine concerns like the court rank of individual poets:

> There is nothing more bitter than being a woman. From olden times there have been many of our number who have cherished the emotions, and studied the way of the arts. The fact that no woman has yet compiled an [imperial] anthology is bitter indeed.[20]

Are the *Mumyōzōshi* speakers also harsher in their evaluations of male-authored tales? My sense is yes—though whether those relatively negative evaluations have to do simply with the gender of the tale writers or more complexly their identity as authoritative (male) figures in the literary circles of Shunzei's daughter's day is hard to determine. What is conspicuously true is that Shunzei's daughter's own male relatives, Teika and Takanobu, are the only writers explicitly named as authors of tales more or less contemporaneous with *Mumyōzōshi*. The text refers to these tales neutrally as "ima no yo no monogatari" (tales of our day) or with a sardonic edge, "muge ni kono koro idekitaru mono" (the [many] pieces that have come out rather too freely these days). All are judged as inferior to *Nezame*, *Sagoromo*, and *Hamamatsu chūnagon monogatari* on aesthetic and/or philosophical grounds, not simply because men wrote them. *Ukinami* is attributed to Takanobu, and

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daughter's death, thus making it a tale "about" her, rather than by her. (It is a curious coincidence that the nun who narrates *Mumyōzōshi* is 83 years old—the age at which Shunzei's daughter died.)

[20] Marra, 421; SNKS 7: 104-5.

*Matsuuranomiya monogatari* (among others of his not named) to Teika by the ladies. Of the latter, one speaker remarks that it is "muge ni makoto naki mono" (utterly lacking in truth/reality). A remark on pre-*Genji* tales, "starting with *Utsubo monogatari*," follows a somewhat different pattern. Although it is not gendered by attribution to a specific author, *Utsubō*, and implicitly other tales of its era, are judged inferior to *Genji* and its immediate successors.[21]

If the relative charms and faults of specific tales are coolly considered and the tales themselves ranked in an order that expresses a hierarchy of exemplars, with *Genji* and other female-authored tales occupying the highest ranks, the judgments on female authors, on the other hand, are made with a great deal of passion and far less of an attempt to rank any one over the others (with perhaps the exception of Murasaki Shikibu). The women are described by means of literary-biographical anecdotes, with a noticeable amount of attention paid to aspects of their lives having nothing to do with their relationships to men. A number of these anecdotes close with references to their old age or even their afterlives, a tendency which reflects anxiety about the imperilled future of their reputations as writers. The past reveals that their talents were overlooked or misjudged and the women themselves allowed to lapse into poverty or oblivion once old age overtook them. Ono no Komachi, of course, is reduced in the end to a skull—though in the *Mumyōzōshi* version of this legend, hers is a particularly powerful skull (see below). Sei Shōnagon ends as a crone wearing rags as headgear. Murasaki Shikibu had been bad-mouthed as a denizen of hell by some, but the ladies counter this bit of slander with the story that she was actually a manifestation of the bodhisattva Kannon.

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[21] For the remarks on Takanobu's and Teika's tales, see Marra, 418, and SNKS 7: 98. The unfavorable reference to *Utsubō monogatari* as one of a number of pre-*Genji* texts is made as an interruption (in the midst of a discussion of *Kakuremino*, a tale roughly contemporaneous with the three named great tales of the immediate post-*Genji* era) and seems intended to support the conclusions of another speaker who has just ventured that there may be some "tales of our own day" that rival or surpass the old tales. The example of a superior tale of recent times the interrupted speaker then goes on to proffer is *Ima Torikaebaya*, a contemporary rewrite of the original *Torikaebaya*, about which more later. See Marra, 411; SNKS 7: 83-84.

Thus, many details in the "Onna ron" section shift the reader's attention away from the text's apparent message that women's writing should be recognized *in spite of* its feminine origins. In its zeal to champion writers who might otherwise slip by anonymously, *Mumyōzōshi* hints at something more radical: the need to recognize women as writers of genius and talent *because* it was they alone who produced the great works of the *monogatari* tradition. What takes the polemic in a less logical direction is the fantasy *Mumyōzōshi* constructs of a peculiar feminine power inherent in women writers. One of the ways the fantasy works itself out can be seen in the conversation's unusual emphasis on female lines of affiliation that have little or no reference to the world of men. Women are discussed mainly in terms of their relations to each other as well as to their work, with links between female patrons and writers brought strongly to the fore. Jōtōmon'in is remembered as the benefactress of Izumi Shikibu, Koshikibu no Naishi, Murasaki Shikibu; Empress Teishi is described in a similar, though more exclusive, relationship with Sei Shōnagon; the mention of Daisai'in Senshi evokes her productive salon of female poets. There are other instances that could be explored, but I will confine myself here to two further examples. Sei Shōnagon's relationship to her patroness Teishi is highlighted, and in a move peculiar to *Mumyōzōshi*, one of the speakers identifies a lesser-known poetess, Higaki onna (tenth century, dates unknown), as the mother of the author of the *Pillow Book*.[22] While mention is also made of Sei's famous poet father Kiyowara Motosuke, it is only to underscore the point that Sei Shōnagon's talents didn't reflect those of her father: "she was by her own admission a poor poet" who was, to her credit, aware of her limitations as a poet and therefore did not try

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[22] Because the *Gosenshū* contains one *waka* by her, scholars assume Higaki onna flourished in the first part of the tenth century. The connection made between her and Kiyowara Motosuke by the *Mumyōzōshi* may perhaps have found some basis in surviving copies of *Higaki onna shū*, a collection of her *waka* which seems to have been compiled in the early decades of the eleventh century. This collection, along with anecdotes in *Yamato monogatari*, *Fukurozōshi*, and *Jikkunshō*, articulate the image of her as an aged woman of refinement fallen on hard times as a result of political disturbances in her day (a story whose pattern thus parallels the legends about Sei's destitution in her later years). For a detailed discussion of the legends surrounding Higaki onna, see Okabe Yoshifumi, "Higaki onna," *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* (November 1986): 62-64.

to push her *waka* into the limelight (as, the speakers have already hinted, many male poets of rank have done in the past).

*Mumyōzōshi* also rewrites one of the well-known legends about Ono no Komachi and Ariwara Narihira in a peculiar way. A more normative version of the legend appears in Kamo no Chōmei's *Mumyōshō*: while wandering in exile, Narihira spends a night in a field, where he hears a voice intoning the first half of the poem that begins "Akikaze no/ fuku tsukete mo/ana me ana . . ." (The autumn wind/ blowing, it pierces / ah the holes that were my eyes). Searching out its source, he encounters only a skull, and in the morning he notices there is windswept grass (*susuki*) growing through its eye sockets, a phenomenon he assumes must have created the illusion of a voice intoning poetry. He learns from locals that the skull is Komachi's, so he completes the poem with two lines that deny her authorship of the words he had heard in the wind the night before: "Ono to wa iwaji/ susuki oikeri" (I am not called Ono/ just *susuki* grass growing).[23] Around a variant of the same poem, *Mumyōzōshi* spins a much sparser tale, whose implications undo the thrust of the *Mumyōshō* anecdote. The poem is quoted in its entirety first, as something that the wind blowing through *susuki* in the midst of desolate plains is said to sound like. Then the tale begins: "A man" (not named by the speaker retelling the tale but presumably recognizable as "the man" of *Ise monogatari*, that is, Narihira), "feeling the sorrow of things," breaks off a stalk of *susuki* and tosses it away. That very night in a dream he hears a voice uttering something other than the poem for which Komachi's skull is famous. Komachi herself appears and tells him how happy his kind deed has made her. She declares that "in exchange for it, I will make you into an exceptional poet" (SNKS 7: 108). The retelling presents Komachi as a kind of muse, a figure of power that overturns the image of her as a dead poet, not to be called "Ono" (Ono to wa iwaji). Here she is a supernatural patronness, conferring poetic genius on a male successor, and thereby originating not

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[23] See Hisamatsu Sen'ichi, ed., *Mumyōshō*, *Karonshū Nōgakuronshū*, ed. Hisamatsu and Nishio Minoru, Nihon koten bungaku taikei 65 (Iwanami shoten, 1961), 96-97. For an English translation see Hilda Katō, "The *Mumyōshō* of Kamo no Chōmei and Its Significance in Japanese Literature," *Monumenta Nipponica* 23 (Autumn-Winter 1968): 422-24.

only a lineage of worthy female writers, but also becoming literary godmother to one of the progenitors of the great (male) *waka* tradition.[24]

## Excision and Authorship, Imitation and the Reader's Response

Aside from its strong, if quixotic, concern with the names or reputations of the under-recognized women who produced the *monogatari* tradition, what is it *Mumyōzōshi* attempts to preserve and recommend to future generations?—not simply texts, but key episodes in specific texts, judiciously excised, along with a lexicon for describing the emotional or affective responses thought to be provoked by the episodes, characters, and poems cited. The process is akin to the one John Guillory describes among early eighteenth-century English poets in the face of a canon of Latin classics that was becoming increasingly inaccessible to the available readership of poetry: "a 'translation' of classical literacy into an anthology of quotable vernacular phrases."[25] A focal point for Shunzei and his "daughter," as indeed for a significant portion of the medieval commentators who came later, was the skillful composition of *waka*: tales, especially the *Tale of Genji*, were to be read and judged as sources of exemplary *waka* compositions. In a more general sense, this mode of excision as commentary (and as means of circulating longer texts) suggests a lot about the conceptualization of the canon and of the writer's relation to the canon in premodern Japan.

Haruo Shirane has described it in terms of an attitude toward the literary canon as a resource rather than an authority.[26] With the *chokusenshū* as perhaps an exception, the canon itself—not to mention individual texts within it—is viewed as permeable rather than closed, while the focus for canonical change (whether expansion, as with the lexicon of *renga* and *haikai*, or contraction–the relative oblivion into which entire works like *Taketori* and *Sagoromo monogatari* fell after the Heian period) centers on these pairings

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[24] The rewritten legend is then itself immediately and comically undercut by a speaker who interjects cluelessly, "wasn't the 'man' who had that dream Michinobu?" Male names, in the essay on women, are conspicuously absent, or else carelessly treated, as here. The speaker may be referring to Fujiwara Michinobu (972-994).

[25] *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), x.

[26] See his "Poetic Essence (*Hon'i*) as Japanese Literary Canon" in this volume.

between specific images or episodes and the affective associations they are asserted to evoke. Certain passages call up these "canonical" associations or affects in a more or less powerful way. By implication, certain sentiments command a higher position in the hierarchy of what is regarded as worthy of imitation. This may shed some light on the long tradition of subordinating a light-hearted writer like Sei Shōnagon to her less flippant peer Murasaki Shikibu. Even as early as *Mumyōzōshi*, "aware naru mono" is accorded more attention and admiration than "imijiki koto" or "okashi." The sentiments typically aroused by the *Pillow Book* rank among the pairings of image/emotional association for *monogatari* that were less desirable to medieval readers.

The *Mumyōzōshi*'s critiques of *Genji* are much concerned with describing and establishing a set of exemplary emotionalized narrative or lyric situations and characters whose actions can be said to incite specific emotional responses in the reader. Other tales are judged in terms of the extent to which they too generate scenes and characters which are emotionally plausible according to the standards set by *Mumyōzōshi*'s selective rendering of key *Genji* chapters, characters, and passages (*fushibushi*). Preferences within this repertoire of emotional responses and character types are implied by the order in which the various types are listed and the number and length of examples cited to illustrate them. The category *aware*, for example, is far ahead of all the others in terms of the amount of commentary it draws. The categories *kokoro yamashiki* (distasteful) and *asamashi* (astonishing) are the last included and draw the fewest number of examples. Implicitly these affects are worthy of commentary and judgment, but they define the limits of this repertoire of reader responses. Thus certain *monogatari* (*Torikaebaya* and *Sagoromo*, for example) are severely faulted for their excesses in precisely these liminal categories.

*Mumyōzōshi*'s concern with denoting limit cases and problems of "excess" and "exaggeration" bring us finally to the concept of imitation. The terms used in *Mumyōzōshi* are *mane*, *manebi* (imitation/mimicry) and *mono manebi* (imitation of things). Aside from the terms' evocation of Buddhist-inspired anxieties about falsehood and fictionality, all three are also related to the verb *manabu*, which encompasses the classical (Chinese) idea of studying a text until one can reproduce it (mimic it) from memory. The philosophical loadedness of the term *manebi* is elegantly disavowed by the deft handling it receives in *Mumyōzōshi*. The speakers' banter about imitation is richly ironic and difficult to pin down as to intent, and this not only

because of the playful, dialogic nature of what the speakers in the text actually say about it, but—just as significantly—what the text itself is *doing* by way of imitation and allusion to other texts. *Mumyōzōshi*'s intertextual profile is unusually complex, its very density calling attention to itself and comprising a crucial part of what it has to say about *mono manebi* as *monogatari* technique. Given its thickly allusive surface and overtly intertextual structuring, we are repeatedly invited to recognize that *Mumyōzōshi* is performing versions of the kind of *mono manebi* it both advocates and critiques in the post-*Genji* tales.

These ironies have often been overlooked or underrated by later readers, to the extent that *Mumyōzōshi* was sometimes cited as a locus classicus for the negative prejudice among Meiji and Taishō scholars regarding the imitativeness of post-*Genji* tales. There is an odor of moral opprobrium which becomes attached to this quality in late Heian fiction by Meiji scholars: imitative equals "unoriginal spiritlessness," "parody," "pastiche," and finally, "degenerate" and "decadent."[27] Certainly the seeds of this moralistic spin are there, ready to hand, in *Mumyōzōshi* itself, though couched in so witty a way that it is hard to read as anything other than clever disingenuousness. The speakers move blithely back and forth between talk of imitation as a technique of intertextual variation (*mono manebi* vs. *moto*, texts that imitate another, original, text) and imitation as mimicry of the real (*mono manebi* vs *makoto*, texts that imitate truth or reality). Even the potentially graver dangers of imitation outside a literary context are scoffed at: when the conversation turns toward discussion of real women, it is framed in terms of one speaker's wish that she might imitate refined women. To this one of the other ladies quips with a laugh: "Isn't imitation a bad thing that drags us into the pit of hell?" (Marra, 422; SNKS 7: 106).

There is little in the text itself to suggest that either the fictional speakers or the historical author of *Mumyōzōshi* regard imitation as inferior or morally corrupt. Nor is there much that might signal a categorical preference for originality over imitativeness. One speaker makes the offhand remark that "imitations (*mono manebi*) are always inferior to originals (*moto*)" (SNKS 7: 84). But the remark is made in a context that undercuts its seriousness. The ladies are comparing *Ima Torikaebaya* to its precursor, *Torikaebaya*, and the upshot is a definite preference for the new version over the old, even

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[27] See Khan.

though the new is an imitation of the old. The deciding point in *Ima Torikaebaya*'s favor seems to be its superior demonstration of decorum. It dispenses with the "exaggerated and awful" (obitatashiku osoroshiki tokoro nado) scenes of the original *Torikaebaya*, that is, the fantastic depiction of the female Middle Counselor giving birth in male drag, and all those "dirty" references to her "monthly illnesses" (tsukigoto no yamai to kitanashi; SNKS 7: 81 and 83-84).

The ladies in *Mumyōzōshi* quibble more seriously over the correct or effective *performance* of *mono manebi*. What they find wrong with many of the post-*Genji* tales is not that they imitate the *Tale of Genji*, but that they do so poorly. Texts are faulted when their use of the resources of the past, both historical and fictional, is ineffective or inappropriate. Two things are disparaged above all: fantastic or indecorous elements (a defense, perhaps, against Buddhist attacks on the fictionality or frivolity of secular literature) and the unskillful use of words *(kotobazukai)*, especially archaic or clumsy diction. Thus Teika's *Matsuuranomiya monogatari* is faulted for its inappropriate use of archaic diction—specifically, *waka* in the style of the *Man'yōshū*. Nor, as we have just seen with *Torikaebaya*, can standards of decorum (gender and class conventions, conventions of taste) be ignored with impunity. Tales are also criticized severely when they include scenes that are improbable by the standards of characterization. We have already noted how Yūgiri, in the *Tale of Genji*, loses favor with his fictional readers because of a psychological inconsistency that is hard to believe. It is not Yūgiri's fickleness per se to which the ladies object, it is his betrayal of his own reputation. His sudden transformation strikes them as a poor imitation of what could be realistically expected of him, given his "name" as a serious, steady man (SNKS 7: 38). Standards of the politically plausible also concern the *Mumyōzōshi* speakers. Thus *Sagoromo monogatari* is criticized for its improbable (because archaic) political fantasy: Sagoromo, a member of the Genji clan, becomes an emperor.

The reason why *Mumyōzōshi* reads such diction, scenes, and inconsistencies as egregiously faulted is readily deducible from the text's very preoccupation with classifying tales in terms of the emotional responses they provoke. The kind of cultural capital that *monogatari* were coming to embody at the end of the Heian period was in large part a set of stock emotional/psychological situations and their corresponding effects on a reader. *Mumyōzōshi* attempts to establish a hierarchy in which tales are judged by their capacity to move the reader. That capacity has to be grounded in plausibility

and the decorum of the text. Texts that do not approximate the plausible or the decorous short-circuit that necessary emotional response which determines its greatness, its canonicity.

What *Mumyōzōshi* does with *monogatari*, then, what it hopes to keep in circulation, what it gathers together in its custodial way to proffer to a future readership for admiration and, implicitly, imitation, is a repertoire of characters, situations, and appropriate responses to them. The fate of individual tales as such is thus of less urgency than that of a certain circuitry of emotional exchange that operates between texts and readers in the *monogatari* tradition. Parts of tales are thus freely excised. What must be transmitted are the paradigmatic passages that incite one or more of the responses canonized by readers of *waka* and tales. One of the long-term results of this preoccupation with readers' responses is that concern with authors (in this case mainly female ones) becomes subordinate to concern with textual issues, particularly the circuitry between reader and text. Given this tendency, and given the new prominence of male readers of Heian tales in the centuries between Shunzei's daughter and the greater dissemination of the classics that began during the Meiji period, the debt to female authors was perhaps easily, even "naturally" minimized.

Obviously, the early Kamakura period project of raising *Genji* to the same level of cultural prestige as formal *waka* was not at all revolutionary and had little to do with proto-feminist concerns for the recognition of women as producers of culture. Shunzei's move was in a profound way reactive and conservative: appropriating and consecrating a body of texts that was becoming increasingly removed from the kinds of prose writing being produced at the time. Shunzei and Teika "scholarized" *waka* by attempting to make the standards for exemplary *waka* contingent upon a thorough knowledge of the history of *waka*—and not only the history of *waka* as canonized by the *chokusenshū* but also the *waka* contextualized within less accessible texts like the *Tale of Genji*. Shunzei's daughter seems to have been trying to move in a somewhat different direction. *Mumyōzōshi* attempts to define and (re)claim as feminine a still-marginal tradition that then seemed on the verge of passing into the hands of differently gendered readers and writers—male writers over whom the text is anxious to (re)assert an image of feminine authority. Although interest in a classical tradition of female-authored masterpieces in prose ultimately resurfaced, like the return of the repressed, among scholarly audiences all over the late

twentieth-century world, this was a lost cause, and *Mumyōzōshi* itself a more or less lost text, throughout most of Japan's medieval period.