



Figures of Resistance

Language, Poetry,

and Narrating

in *The Tale of Genji*

and Other

Mid-Heian Texts

H. Richard Okada

Figures of Resistance

Post-Contemporary Interventions

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H. Richard Okada

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*To my mother and
the memory of my father,
Sueo Okada*

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Contents

Preface vii

Introduction 1

I

Tales of the Bamboo Cutter

- 1 Languages of Narrating and Bamboo-Cutter
Pretexts 27
- 2 A “Pivotal” Narrative: *The Tale of the
Bamboo Cutter* 53

II

Waka “Poetics” and Tales of “Ise”

- 3 Constructing a Capital “Poetics”:
Kokin wakashū 85
- 4 An Early Figure of Resistance: Lady Ise 112
- 5 Sexual/Textual Politics and *The Tale
of Ise* 131

III

Tales of “Genji”

- 6 Situating the “Feminine Hand” 159
- 7 Narrating the Private: “Kiritsubo” 183
- 8 Feminine Representation and Critique:
“Hahakigi” 197
- 9 A Figure of Narrating: Tamakazura 214

Contents

10	Aesthetics, Politics, and Genealogy	232
11	Substitutions and Incidental Narrating: “Wakamurasaki”	250
12	The Akashi Intertexts	266
	Epilogue: Endings, Tellings, and Retellings	287
	Appendix: Chapters in <i>The Tale of Genji</i>	293
	Notes	295
	Bibliography	367
	Index	377

Preface

In February 1987 I presented a paper at Duke University that was an earlier version of Chapter 9 of the present study. After a discussant offered generous and insightful comments, the moderator opened the floor to questions. In attendance was Fredric Jameson, widely acknowledged to be the foremost Marxist critic in the United States today. Toward the end of the session, Jameson asked a question that prodded me into rethinking my perspectives on the *Genji* tale and the other Heian texts on which I had been working. He remarked that although what we—one other speaker had delivered a paper on Chinese literature—were clearly suggesting was a sexual politics, we had not addressed it directly, and he asked how we would respond to the issue. The question was directed at the other speaker, but another member of the audience asked me how it applied to the *Genji* tale. As I recall, I stumbled around the question at the time but later began to realize just how pertinent the issue was to practically everything important about the tale and Heian discourse. I therefore set out to reconfigure a major portion of my earlier analyses of the texts and added sections and chapters that explicitly addressed the issue. In the process of rewriting, I began to look more closely at the highly educated and talented Heian women who became the major transmitters and producers of a culture that has not only endured for centuries but has become synonymous with much that is now considered the very essence of the Japanese nation. I also incorporated more of what we know or can surmise about other enabling conditions or contexts of utterance (especially the crucial question of genealogy).

The result is a series of readings of three Heian *monogatari*—*Taketori*, *Ise*, and *Genji*—readings situated by examinations of other relevant Heian texts, discourses, and various other intertextual circumstances. The three *monogatari* have been canonized in the Japanese tradition and are also accorded prominent places in Western scholarship. As I discuss the issue of reading in the Introduction, I will use the term “close reading” to refer not to the attempt to discover the “true meaning,” in any sense of the term, of a text, but

rather to a process that can question the possibility of any and all overall meanings. Some readers may not find the thematic closure they expect, but I hope that such readers will follow the analytical strands that run throughout the book. I am concerned with how linguistic, narratological, historical, and sociopolitical discourses, which are my multitiered or polylogic points of focus, can be placed into dynamic relations with each other, with the larger “worldly” situations out of which they emerged, and with present-day postures of analysis, including my own.

In the process of tracing the discourses, I often take sustained issue with aspects of traditional scholarship. Let me state at the outset that I do not intend in any way to negate or belittle scholarship to which, obviously, I am greatly indebted. My aim is rather to call for genuine debate as we continually reexamine our attitudes toward Japan. I do not believe that we are or should be engaged in a contest for the absolute “truth” of a particular methodology but would urge that we always examine the implications of what we do in terms of the situations in which we find ourselves constructed as speaking, writing, teaching, and thinking (gendered) subjects.

This book could not have been written without the help of a great number of people. I wish to thank, first of all, Masao Miyoshi, without whose support, guidance, and criticisms over the years, projects like this study would have been impossible. He continues to provide a powerful example of the critical spirit and energy with which to teach and do research. I am indebted to Edward Fowler, who gave the manuscript a close, critical reading in its incarnation as a dissertation and who has always been an exceptionally sound and cogent critic. I am also grateful to James Fujii for giving me useful and incisive comments on an earlier draft and at a moment’s notice.

My Princeton colleagues have been another indispensable source of support. Earl Miner has for many years kindly and freely dispensed much needed encouragement as well as invaluable advice on many matters. He together with my other colleagues, especially Martin Collcutt, Yoshiaki Shimizu, Marius Jansen, and Willard Peterson, have made Princeton a most stimulating and congenial place to work. Outside of Princeton, I have received encouragement and assistance in important ways from Richard Bowring, Janet Walker, Mark Morris, Harry Harootunian, Naoki Sakai, Minae Mizumura, Chieko Mulhern, Brett de Bary, Sumie Jones, Tetsuo Najita, Norma

Field, William Sibley, Sandra Buckley, Susan Matisoff, Anthony Chambers, and Amanda Stinchecum.

I must also mention the scholars in Japan who have given unstintingly of their time and knowledge. The generosity, learning, and energy of Mitani Kuniaki, one of the founders of the Monogatari kenkyūkai (Monoken), are second to none, and I have profited tremendously from our discussions over the years. I have also learned much from discussions with other Monoken members, especially Fujii Sadakazu and Takahashi Tōru, and from the sessions of the group (surely unique among scholarly circles anywhere) that I have had the privilege of attending. I am grateful to Matsuda Shigeho for introducing me to the world of *Genji* studies when he came to Berkeley as a visiting scholar and to Hino Tatsuo for overseeing a lengthy period of study at Kyoto University. I thank Katō Kumiko for her gracious hospitality during visits to Nagoya and the Reizei family in Kyoto for allowing me to participate in a series of their monthly poetry gatherings, which gave me firsthand experience with a traditional way of disseminating poetic techniques. Finally, Katō Tachimitsu was a source of comradeship and lively conversations during a year-and-a-half stay in Sagano.

I also thank Charlene Kiyuna and the McGowan family for their unwavering loyalty. Perhaps my deepest gratitude is to my wife, Tara, who has been a constant intellectual and emotional companion, for proofreading drafts of the manuscript, and for showing great patience and understanding during the stage of rewriting.

A note on the translations of poetry and method of romanization. I have chosen not to follow the accepted practice of translating waka into a strict formal arrangement consisting of a series of four or five stacked, horizontal lines. Because written waka assume various calligraphic forms from one to three or more vertical lines and each of the 5/7/5/7/7 syllabic clusters forms an important unit of each poem, I have used a variable system of three or four horizontal lines with syllabic clusters in the Japanese represented by clearly separated English phrases. By doing so I wish to call attention to the sense of “linearity” that Mark Morris has carefully pointed out and also to highlight when necessary syllabic clusters that “float” syntactically, a configuration that enables the semantic (and incantatory) thrust of the waka cluster to operate in a multidirectional manner. The translations of poetry and other passages found in the study are my own

Preface

unless otherwise noted. In translating I have punctuated freely in order to create a structure that runs against the grain of modern styles and invokes earlier periods of English usage. Romanized versions of the Japanese terms and phrases taken from the texts are based on equivalences of *kana* orthography as found in modern printed editions or in a reputable classical language dictionary (*kogo jiten*) such as the excellent one edited by Ōno Susumu and published by Iwanami shoten. When referring to words or terms in current use today, I have used a standard modern romanization system (I would thus write *iusoku*, for example, when citing a Heian text and *yūsoku* when referring to its modern use).

Introduction

A book is not an isolated entity: it is a narration, an axis of innumerable narrations. One literature differs from another, either before it or after it, not so much because of the text as for the manner in which it is read.

Jorge Luis Borges, *Other Inquisitions: 1937–1952*

Indeed I would go so far as saying that it is the critic's job to provide resistances to theory, to open it up toward historical reality, toward society, toward human needs and interests, to point up those concrete instances drawn from everyday reality that lie outside or just beyond the interpretive area necessarily designated in advance and thereafter circumscribed by every theory.

Edward Said, "Traveling Theory"

The initial problem is one of perspective.

Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*

What are *monogatari* and how should we be talking about them? The question, with which I began an earlier version of this study,¹ arose because the term *monogatari* named texts that seemed hopelessly disparate: (1) collections of poems² with "stories" about them (e.g., *Heichū monogatari* and *Ise monogatari*), (2) "prose" works (e.g., *Taketori monogatari* and *Ochikubo monogatari*), (3) texts (e.g., *Ise monogatari* and *Yamato monogatari*) that resembled in part others seemingly of a different "generic" category (e.g., *Kokin wakashū*), and (4) a single text that merged or was a mosaic of passages from differing discursive realms (e.g., *Taketori*, *Murasaki Shikibu nikki*, and *Utsuho monogatari*).³ The continued importance of the term for twentieth-century readers is evident in the place it holds in the nonfictional writings of one of the greatest modern Japanese writers, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886–1965), who during the course of his long and productive career undertook perhaps the most ambitious and sustained experiment with the possibilities of narrating, and also from the attention given the term

monogatari in one of the more remarkable books on modern Japanese literature in the last decade, *Nihon kindai bungaku no kigen*.⁴ It remains unclear, however, what the term ultimately signifies.

My earlier study explored what it would mean to read *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*) and other Heian period (794–1185)⁵ *monogatari* texts if we began with the assumption that the language in which they were composed, recited, written down, and received was of serious theoretical concern and worthy of sustained inquiry.⁶ In other words, what happens if we view language not merely as an incidental (albeit—with Heian *hiragana* language—a most difficult) obstacle that once hurdled can be abandoned in pursuit of transcendent matters, but as forming, beginning to end, the ineluctable subject of any reading even as it is constituted as subject by that reading? How does the fact that the texts were written in a particular, non-Western linguistic medium relate to or alter existing readings of them, and can contemporary discussions of language, meaning, and form offer any assistance? Such a perspective, I argued, would facilitate the examination of the problems that arise whenever Japanese (both Heian and later) “literary” texts are being discussed.

In setting out to resolve my initial puzzlement, I decided early on that one text, even if it were *Genji monogatari*, would not be sufficient to treat the subject adequately. The Heian texts appeared during a particular period of Japanese history when modern Western categories of discourse (e.g., lyric, diary, prose fiction, literature, history) did not perforce apply. To demand that *monogatari* texts conform to categories and strategies well known to us today, including the isolation of “masterpieces,” and then to proceed with analyses as if those categories were self-evident and in need of no further questioning would be to participate in a form of appropriation (even colonization). One step toward an answer to the question “What are *monogatari*?” was to focus initially on aspects of Heian texts that tend not to be articulated in integrative or “polylogic” (as opposed to dialogic) ways: modal-aspectual markers, “tenselessness” of the language, open-ended textual movements, narrators and narrating perspectives (or moments), lack of clear distinction between “first-” and “third-person” narration, quantity of variant texts, and significance of poetic and other citations (in the commonly used “weak” sense of “intertextuality”) in which all texts and authors participate.

In the present rereading of the earlier study, I have tried to make coextensive with often extended demonstrations of linguistically

oriented narratological readings, which I feel are still necessary at our point in time, another sense of open-endedness: the larger socio-politico-historical intertexts (in the strong sense of the term).⁷ I have, accordingly, taken a large hint from contemporary discussions of writing and viewed *monogatari* not as “autonomous” or even as primarily “literary” works as is commonly done, but rather as texts, writings, discourses, or signifying practices.⁸ Assuming that notions of narratology and narrative must move beyond formalist or structuralist oriented readings to embrace broader discursive situations and questions of culture, power, and gender, I have sought to rewrite the texts in terms of various intertexts with the aim of discarding the usual essentialist notions connoted by the term “literature” and of examining the texts as scriptive spaces that, rather than “naturally” belonging to universal “generic” categories, can be seen as inscribing particular (historicocultural) discursive (including oral) environments that appropriated, contested, and rewrote other types of existing discourses.

I am not suggesting a wholesale abandonment of issues traditionally associated with the discipline of “literature.” Association with and participation in that discipline is an obvious and unavoidably restrictive factor of my own discourse. Even while confirming the impossibility of total abandonment, I want to point toward a way of reading and rewriting whereby the canonical terms and bases of the discussion of what we in the West normally (or normatively) consider the “literary” can be displaced through different modes of inquiry and constructions of “new objects of knowledge.”⁹ Such “rewrites,” then, would enable negotiation of the problematic in a manner that pays attention not only to the totalizing tendencies (thematic, structural, historicist) on which reading strategies have often insisted and that texts and their makers may seem to invite and authorize, but also to the sociopolitical positions of putative authors along with the discursive thresholds, rifts, elisions, and inconsistencies in the texts. In short, I wish to emphasize a strategy that not so much demonstrates how the texts “reflect” the sociopolitical structures of their and their readers’ times but attends to the ways in which they construct, appropriate, contest, deny, or assist in altering those structures. I thereby displace my initial question—“What are Heian *monogatari*?”—with the following: How did Heian writers respond to the needs and desires of their specific historical and genealogical situations? How can we articulate the often complex responses found in

monogatari to other writing already in circulation as well as to other (including our own) "worldly" situations? And how can we do so in a manner that problematizes and keeps contingent readerly temporality and position and, finally, remains mindful of the question of writing subject and enunciative audience?¹⁰

"Reading" Texts Not of Our Time or Place

Much has been made lately of reading strategies and performances. Rather than espousing particular "reader-response" perspectives with their essentializations of the reader, I pose this question: How does a text arising out of particular historical circumstances, its writer both liberated and constrained by particular sociopolitical and cultural forces, posit its reader (and we must remember that such readers are "gendered" readers) so that she or he is able to "make sense of" or "rationalize" it? The readerly position might be that of a character, a narrator (or "narrating," i.e., the position that emerges when the narrator "speaks" to the reader or audience, who is either an implicit presence or an explicitly addressed interlocutor),¹¹ the discernible "theme" or assumed "intention," or even the setting in which the story is assumed to have occurred. Many writers have argued convincingly that the act of reading itself constitutes a process of "construction," not simply one of "consumption"; readers do not so much retrieve what is already "in" the text as "re-produce" the text (and its meanings) through interpretive strategies. From such a perspective on the problem of positionality (seen in terms of class, gender, race or ethnicity, and other factors), when we actually engage a text in reading it, we do not simply "receive" meanings (as an antenna receives radio signals) or "discover" truths but to an important and complex degree "construct" those meanings and "truths." And we do so not from any free-floating, neutral point in space and time but from the points of provisional identification the text allows in terms of a reader's historicocultural identities and configurations. The traditional belief in a neutral reading or writing position has been shown to be based on a masculinist (unmarked), Western bourgeois myth, as I shall discuss below.

The particular (though often assumed to be universal) positions of readerly construction, moreover, become moments at which the question of "ideology" enters. From positions always already con-

structed at particular sociocultural coordinates, the reader “reads,” that is, “re-creates,” the text and in doing so is apt to merge positions—the ones attributable to the text and the ones offered by the reader’s cultural perspective—that may very well be incommensurable and only result from an act of interpretive violence.¹² As Gramsci, Althusser, and others have pointed out, the fact that subjects are constructed within an ideological sphere should not imply any sense of coercion or force but rather collusion; ideology “works” precisely because its mechanisms are erased and the subject takes positions freely and even eagerly.¹³ For example, when it comes to reading within a Western cultural sphere texts produced by Heian period women and men who wrote in the presumably “private” native Japanese mode (*hiragana*), in conscious contrast to the officially dominant, “public” Chinese and quasi-Chinese mode (*kambun*), it would seem on the one hand the height of arrogance to assume a congruity of reader-text positions when the controlling perspective is in fact securely situated in a Western male reader’s stance (whether actually adopted by male or female) and, on the other, the most naive form of historicism to assume that you can put yourself in the position of a Heian reader and understand the texts as the Japanese of the time understood them. Modern scholar-readers alternate between the two poles, desirous of the latter but left, wittingly or not, with the former.

Let me repeat that I am not advocating yet another version of a “reader-response” approach with either interpretive communities (*à la* Fish) or interpretive horizons (*à la* Jauss or Iser),¹⁴ but rather interrogating the relation of constructed “subject positions” to “narrative” (or “narrativity”) as problematized by an increasing number of recent writers. Dominant perspectives of reading and interpreting (or noninterpreting) texts in our lifetime—New Critical, structuralist, semiotic, reader-response, Marxist, psychoanalytical—have failed, as their critics have shown, to attend rigorously to aspects of the geopolitical, sociocultural, historical, and sexual forces at work in the production and reception of texts and subjects. Although those perspectives encompass a rich and varied interdisciplinary range, they all fall prey in one way or another to criticisms that question the appropriateness of assuming at crucial moments the operational efficacy of universal or essentialized elements whether couched in terms of humanistic value, form, signification, readerly interpretation, Class, History, or subconscious text (subtext). Their failure to note the displacements that occur when they do not inflect their own

analytical stances and procedures for gender, race or ethnicity, class, historicity, contingency, or institutional setting is also vulnerable to attack.¹⁵ Recent scholarship written in the discourse of feminism, poststructuralism, and postcoloniality, in its interrogation of the problems of the body, gender, race, and representation, has been teaching us that modern Western subject positions are deeply inscribed by patriarchal or imperialist-colonialist ideologies. My purpose, accordingly, is twofold: to question, at times implicitly, previous readings of Heian period texts performed in the context of the institutionalized discipline of Japanese literature, or “Japanology,” which has sanctioned and maintained practices fully complicit with both patriarchal and colonialist discourse, and to reread and rewrite Heian period texts in order to trace the contours of resistance they present to the employment of Western canonical terms of appropriation (novel, lyric, hero/heroine, [fully rounded] character, plot, first/third-person narration, and so on) deployed in unquestioned and only ironically unmasked strategies of reading.

To assist in interrogating one aspect of the important issue of positionality, let us examine the assumptions underwriting the familiar method of “close reading” we are taught in schools (here I mean American high schools, colleges, and universities), a method that remains the primary pedagogical tool in American institutions of higher learning. The program of close reading, with its roots in I. A. Richards’s *Practical Criticism*—the title itself another term by which the procedure is known—was greatly enhanced by the wave of the New Criticism that swept over North America in the 1940s and 1950s. It is, moreover, a procedure that most adherents would claim to be politically neutral, through which undergraduate college students in particular can display their “native intelligence” as they confront texts “directly.” One critic, John Barrell, has recently critiqued the method, albeit within a British context:

It is never possible to speak or write except in discourse; and because all discourses embody an account of reality, they all produce a position from which that account is assembled. Whenever we speak or write we are adopting, whether we know it or not, a specific discourse, one that we feel is more or less appropriate to the topic we are addressing and the situation in which our utterance is being made. All our utterances are therefore political utterances, in the widest sense of being attempts to claim for ourselves particular *positions in language*, which represent us as the subject of knowledge, and represent the world as we, and as those whose interests we assume we share, claim to see it.¹⁶

Barrell argues for the indivisibility of position, discourse, and politics. An essay written by even the most avowedly apolitical undergraduate student, in other words, since it must be written from a particular cultural "position," demarcated by strictures established in a particular institutional setting, participates in the discourse of that culture and is therefore thoroughly "political."

Barrell's compact and incisive analysis of the problems of close reading, carried out from a position of cultural materialism, touches on such important matters as representation and reference, form and content, the assumption of the value of "full humanity," the valorizing of universals, the resolution of ambiguity through an imposition of the notion of balance, and the neutralization of masculine-subject and middle-class positions of dominance. When the work of close reading is examined, its judgments turn out to be governed by what Barrell calls the ideal of the "fully human," which is "a notion in which the idea of the 'fully literary' is metaphysically and morally grounded. To be fully human is to take on a universal identity, and a permanent one which has not changed throughout the whole of history."¹⁷ Close readers, moreover, firmly believe that their critical method "makes the intrinsic qualities of a text entirely visible, and that, by virtue of this method, they are able to discover exactly what it means to be fully human; they have found a method of distinguishing the essential from the merely contingent" (p. 4). Such a notion of competence has meant that any reader, regardless of gender, race or ethnicity, or class can assume the position of close reader insofar as he or she effaces all that is contingent about his or her own sociopolitical and cultural positions and recognizes that "their political affiliations, and more generally their shifting political situations as defined in particular by class and gender, are somehow contingent to their identity as readers" (p. 4). In order to become certified critics, readers are encouraged to shrug off "certain aspects of . . . [their] complex identities" in order to read a text "*properly*" (Barrell's emphasis), even when the act of endorsing "that kind of position may actually be oppressive." By so doing, the argument goes, they can "become more human and so better human beings" (p. 9).

The "fully human" position, which turns out to be a fully "masculine" one, has always been the neutral, unmarked position and derives, Barrell asserts, from the fact that ideology writes men as generally more "balanced" than women: "If women speak with an uncontrolled 'shrillness' of tone . . . this is the sign of a failure to transcend their femininity—but no male writer ever lost control of his

text through a failure to transcend his masculinity" (p. 6). Not only is the judgment that seeks a "balance" between the execution of the text (form) and the ultimate truths to which it must point (content) intimately tied to the dominant masculine reading position, the notion of balance, "a middle point between and above all merely partial and particular situations, bears a close resemblance to a certain ideal construction of the situation of the middle class" (p. 5). Barrell's discourse, then, appears to address the problematics of gender and class.

In response to the traditionalist, institutionalized stance, Barrell notes: "recent critics have denied that there are any qualities that we can identify in human beings that are universal, unchanging, and that constitute a deep ground of identity among all of us. The qualities that human beings express are entirely *culturally constructed*, and furthermore they are *constructed within language* (p. 8; emphasis added).¹⁸ I agree with the implicit claim that we can no longer afford to leave our readings uninflected by historicity and contingency, or leave foundationalist or essentialist moves unquestioned, as also argued by feminist critics,¹⁹ or leave unaddressed the fact that the texts we read as well as our own reading strategies are always (already) situated in specific historical and ideological moments.²⁰ But what alternatives does Barrell offer? First of all he denies "that there is any one position, from which all 'literary' texts can be read, which is more or less proper or competent than another" (p. 9). After disclaiming any slide into critical anarchy (a relativist "what this means for me" situation), he maintains that we must "identify the available positions from which an effective challenge can be made, which means to read from those generic positions which practical criticism seems to deny: the positions of an oppressed class, an oppressed gender, an oppressed race." And he suggests finally that "it is necessary to identify which of those positions it is appropriate to adopt in relation to each individual text we read" (pp. 9–10).

Although I am generally convinced by Barrell's critique, I take issue with the method suggested above: that you can simply choose from among different positions the one "appropriate" to the text at hand. The act of choosing, of course, presupposes an act of judgment, which presupposes a "place of" judgment. If we are merely choosing among pluralities, the very announcement of that stance of selection has already situated the critic outside the various possible maneuvers.²¹ What, for example, is the "generic" position of "an

oppressed class, an oppressed gender, an oppressed race," and how are we to adopt it? The terms themselves figure a catachresis that Barrell's formulation keeps concealed. Although Barrell makes the laudatory move of refusing any "exemplary" status for his own readings, he cannot avoid a basically monologic position that groups some readings in opposition to others: "I have tried to do this [criticize an oppressive reading practice] by trying to show that the poems I discuss can be read, and read closely, from some other position than that prescribed to the reader by the discourse of practical criticism" (p. 16). You need look no further than several recent projects to find demonstrations that "oppositional" readings do not of themselves solve problems of representation and narrativity, and dependency on a floating, "Archimedean" stance cannot place the terms of debate elsewhere from that given by the dominant system. Writers like Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Harry Harootunian, Teresa Ebert, Toril Moi, Tania Modleski, Teresa de Lauretis, R. Radhakrishnan, and Renato Rosaldo have been showing us that the taking of positions is more than a question of armchair choice making, which means an eventual return to business as usual.²²

Translation and Commentary

In the light of the above I now turn briefly to the situation of Japanese literature studies. Two activities, both related to the program of "close reading" criticized by Barrell, most clearly characterize the history of that area of study in the West. Situated in terms of a methodology, they represent a combination of positivist philology and New Criticism. The former approach encouraged a pseudohistoricist linking of the texts of study to their cultural milieu, whereas the latter fortuitously (or ironically) countenanced the avoidance of wide-angle perspectives (transcultural and intertextual) in order to keep one's interpretative sights trained on the "verbal icon" at hand. While the critics allowed the philologists to devote attention to one text at a time, the philologists could slough off warnings of committing "intentional" or "biographical" fallacies secure in the knowledge that they were engaged in "scientific" endeavor. Having begun their careers as translators, many among the critics found in philology the "discipline" needed to write "commentary" and in

New Criticism the “method” needed to help execute the addendum, usually called the “introduction,” to a translation that required the supplying of “background” or “critical” remarks. The actual activity of scholars in the field, however, at times only vaguely resembled the two methodologies. “Philology” too often became yet another act of “translation,” not the adaptation of any complex method of philology or text criticism but rather the more mundane (and arbitrary) search for “appropriate” English equivalents to Japanese words. And far from any consistent and rigorous employment of New Critical reading procedures, criticism has meant either summary of Japanese scholarship in terms of historical “background” information and detailed points of descriptive interpretation or an unquestioned (and most often unstated) reliance on the writer’s own political and cultural norms for broader interpretive maneuvers.

Theoretical issues themselves have rarely been foregrounded as critical non-self-awareness has kept the analyst in blind obedience to the mandates of her or his cultural (or political) unconscious regardless of how the dictates of that unconscious might be relevant (or irrelevant) to the “object” of study. Indeed a belief in the efficacy of translation virtually seduced practitioners into assuming that cultural others could be objectively interpreted through seamless analogies on every level, from the linguistic to the literary and sociohistorical. Such assumptions, I would insist, are wrong on all counts. The work of linguistic translation involves exclusionary moves similar to those performed at the level of “descriptive” commentary. As I shall be pointing out along the way, in their quest for target-language fluency and readability, translators and critics have often suppressed as marginal precisely those aspects of the native text where its specificity can (and must) be read. In an important discussion of translation, Walter Benjamin touches on the problem using a quotation from Rudolf Panwitz: “The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. Particularly when translating from a language very remote from his own he must go back to the primal elements of language itself and penetrate to the point where work, image, and tone converge. He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language.”²³ When the prerogatives of the target language are emphasized, they diminish the “spirit of the foreign works.”²⁴ At the level of commentary, as I shall discuss further below, such moves most often take the familiar

form of “thematic” readings similarly destined to suppress difference and diminish the “spirit of the foreign works” as they appeal to and manipulate abstractions (metaphors) of “content” and ignore forces of signification that undermine those abstractions. I am in no way imputing sinister motives to highly talented and invaluable scholar-translators. My point is that contemporary discussions of language and representation are addressing the question of how any and all totalizing maneuvers involve exclusions (as well as the erasure of that act) at the very moment of their establishment. Who is doing what to/for whom, the question of the subject of and constituency for enunciation, and his or her position and empowerment, then, become absolutely critical.

Why, it might be asked, impugn a procedure—thematic criticism—that, despite dismantling attempts from different fronts in recent years, still persists (even thrives) in all sectors of the academy? First and foremost, because an overriding emphasis on thematic criticism presents in many ways the greatest impediment to extricating Japan studies from an “Orientalist” discourse that is, I hope, unacceptable to all scholars and writers insofar as it certifies an interpretative colonization of the other at the expense of specificity and moments of resistance. As Rodolphe Gasché has put it in a recent study that includes a compelling critique of thematics in the context of literary criticism’s differences from the Derridean deconstruction of Western philosophy: “[Theme is] an originary—that is, constituted—unity or substance. As such . . . theme exercises a *totalizing* function with regard to all the signifiers of a literary work. The theme secures the work’s unitary meaning, its inner continuity. It is in the logic of thematism to be monistic, monological: therefore, the totalization to be achieved by a theme can succeed only if there is no other competing theme.”²⁵ Monological “totalization” deprives a work of its specificity and difference, leaving, for Gasché (quoting Heidegger), “only this or that dull sense of unambiguous meaning.” “What is wrong with literary criticism,” he continues, “to refer to Heidegger once again, is that it experiences too little in the neighborhood of the work and that it expresses its already diminished experience too crudely and too literally” (p. 267). Thematic readings, in other words, often either overlook formal and syntactical aspects of texts or deal with them through yet other self-generating thematist moves. The difficulty faced by literary criticism, including its inability to preserve the uniqueness of texts, appears most often as commentary: “As

commentary, certainly the discourse of criticism presupposes the works' uniqueness. But as commentary it can only turn that work into an example of a universal truth" (p. 268). Here I prefer to politicize Gasché by recalling Barrell's observation that such universal truths become so only from patriarchally governed, middle-class positions. For the translator-commentators of Japanese literature, the problem becomes not only the turning of objects of study into examples of universal (Western) truths but also the tendency to devalue immediately those works whenever the latter fail to measure up to unquestioned, hidden standards.

The beginnings of a solution (and there can be no simple one) lie not in trying to eliminate "themes" altogether, an impossibility given the necessarily representational (and essentializing) force of linguistic and interpretative activity itself (as my readings will also show) and the institutional requisites of modern scholarly discourse. Rather, to quote Gasché once again, the path lies "through reflecting on the originary unity in which is embedded the differences that organize the literary and critical discourses. . . . Whereas a poetization of the critical discourse would lead to a mutual overcoming of both in a higher, fuller synthetic unity, and would thus yield to the most elementary telos of philosophical thinking, a reflection on the originary unity in which literature and criticism are embedded maintains their difference and respective uniqueness, while at the same time accounting for this difference" (pp. 268–269). By "originary unity" Gasché refers to those difficult "phenomenologically unthematizable unities . . . that organize and limit the conceptual differences that make up the critical discourse" (p. 269).²⁶ I would continue to politicize Gasché (and, by extension, Derrida) and add, albeit at a different register, that whether or not we are out to deconstruct the texts we read, we must continually put into question the institutionalized tools of criticism and genealogize their establishment, for those tools often serve to effect precisely those "unthematizable unities" at the very moment when we believe we are accounting for the most important, overarching (universal) levels of the text.²⁷

Without venturing further into the issues, which defy summarization, I suggest only that we attend to matters delineated consistently over the past couple of decades in the work of scholars writing from poststructuralist, feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern positions. We must maneuver within various perspectives of critique, position

ourselves (or accept our positioning) “elsewhere” to the dominant discourses and ideologies, and beware of reifying any particular position or of unwittingly keeping undeconstructed the crucial notion of “position” (“subject,” “narrator,” and “author” are a few manifestations) itself. If we work from deconstructive perspectives, for example, we must be mindful of sympathetic critiques (like the one by Gasché cited above, and those by Spivak)²⁸ as well as the forceful criticisms put forth by writers like Said and Terry Eagleton and interrogate the relevance of the debates to the construction of a critical procedure that will allow us to negotiate new spaces of difference mindful of positionality (especially our own). Unless we do so, we face the prospect of reinscribing the very thematic and cultural dominance we are laboring to disappropriate.

Taketori, Ise, and Genji

The present study takes as its main objects three Heian texts: *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* (*Taketori monogatari*), the *Tale of Ise* (*Ise monogatari*), and *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*). Each of the three parts of the book focuses on a different text. I have chosen the texts for the following reasons: (1) they are often regarded by Japanese scholars as representing the most important *monogatari* texts of the time;²⁹ (2) the *Taketori* text is cited by the *Genji* narrator as the “parent of *monogatari*,” and aspects of the bamboo-cutter story form major pretexts for such important figures as the Akashi Lady, Tamakazura, and Ukifune; (3) the *Ise* text becomes a prime intertextual component (together with *Kokinshū*, also discussed) of poems, situations, and broader narrative linkages, and Narihira stands as a possible inspiration for *Genji*; (4) many of the historical figures cited or suggested in the texts were victims of exclusionary Fujiwara policies or were close associates of figures who were driven (often exiled) from power; (5) there is a special connection between the texts and members of the Ki family, especially Ki no Tsurayuki, the important ancestor of *hiragana* writing; and (6) since the *Genji* text, to my mind, has not been situated sufficiently in broader discursive networks by Western scholars, it has tended to be overemphasized as an autonomous, practically sui generis, creation. What is crucial for the *Genji* text is its attempt, in privileging *monogatari* over Chinese discourse, to legitimize *hiragana* writing in a manner that repeats the *Kokinshū* legitimization of *waka*

over Chinese poems (and the *Tosa nikki* legitimization of *hiragana* over *kambun* diaries).

I find in the three texts a position of “resistance,” a term that I employ as a multivalent emblem for many of the issues with which I deal throughout the present study. In one urgent sense of the term, the Heian texts themselves have almost always presented resistances to their appropriation by both Japanese and non-Japanese readers; the issue becomes even more timely now in the context of cross-cultural readings, interdisciplinary questionings, and postmodern, poststructuralist problematics. In another obvious sense the texts represent or situate figures who openly resist,³⁰ who assume (or are made to assume) positions of resistance, or who participate in resisting configurations that govern their narrative constructions. And finally, I use the term to gesture toward the question of the resistance of language itself to its own readings, interpretations, theorizations, and totalizations as articulated by contemporary writers.³¹

In addition to the above three texts, I have included in Part I discussions of early discourse and an examination of two narrative suffixes and several pretexts for the bamboo-cutter tale to help situate the *Taketori* signifying practice. In Part II, I have included a discussion of the canonical poetry collection *Kokinshū* that legitimizes waka discourse as appropriate for “public” occasions and sets the parameters of sociolinguistic endeavor in the mid-Heian period. The *Kokinshū* discussion, presenting the case of an imperially ordered collection with clearly designated compilers, complements the discussions of the two private, anonymously compiled collections. The opening section of the private poetry collection of Lady Ise, a forerunner of such celebrated women-in-waiting as Murasaki Shikibu, Izumi Shikibu, and Sei Shōnagon, shows another way that waka find placement into “contexts.” It will thus help situate another “private” collection, the *Ise* tale, which Lady Ise is even thought to have compiled and which is radically resistant to readerly appropriation.³² I shall examine rhetoricopolitical movements of the texts and connect the linguistic and structural ploys found there to questions of genealogy, “fact” and “fiction,” and the Fujiwara hegemony.

Part III comprises readings of the daunting *Genji* texts, readings, it must be stated at the outset, that are in no way meant to be “comprehensive” but that interrogate what seem to me some of the important issues raised by the texts. I pay particular attention to the following: a specific feminine authorship and the “marginal” status of *hiragana*

writing; the official ranks and genealogies from which such learned salon women as Murasaki Shikibu emerged; the possible relations between narratological representations and gender and rank; the tropological maneuvers and moments that follow from earlier texts and practices and that invert or otherwise complicate distinctions between “fact” (or “history”) and “fiction”; and the employment of *monogatari* to trace (and to critique aspects of) the “under or obverse side” (*ura*) of “life” as well as the more complex and difficult-to-negotiate underside of interpretive or reading strategies themselves. I do not seek, then, to highlight, as others have done, such familiar interpretive categories as “plot,” “character,” or “lyrical moments” as sufficient in themselves to control *Genji* readings, but rather wish to place those and other common terms continually into question. Part I situates *Taketori monogatari* in a larger field of bamboo-cutter pretexts. Part II discusses aspects of “poetic” discourse to amplify moments that are crucial to the *Taketori* narrative and to the socio-political issues it raises. Finally, the first two parts provide pretexts for reading the *Genji* tale.³³ Since we know very little about the historical circumstances of their production, I have read the texts in terms of linguistic, narrative, tropological, and other poetic configurations for the discursive positions they mark and adopt and for their potential contributions to the study of discourse and narrativity (and storytelling). I have elected to omit discussion of *Sagoromo monogatari*, a post-*Genji* text (not yet translated into English) that I included in the dissertation, and to incorporate it into a future study of late-Heian narratives.

Heian Hiragana Language

In an informative study of the types of possible phrasal combinations in Heian texts, Yamaguchi Nakami lists two broad categories of combination: phrases simply juxtaposed, one following another, and phrases conjoined by syntactic markers. The latter category embraces three different elements: (1) concessive markers, like *sikaredo* (that being the case, however); (2) pronominal (deictic) markers, like *sore* (that); and (3) repetitions of a word, a topical marker, for example, taken from the previous line.³⁴ The first general type, interestingly enough, occurs most frequently; the “repetitive” type within the second category the least. Moreover, the first type occurs most often

in longer narratives, such as *Genji*, *Ochikubo monogatari*, *Yoru no Nezame*, *Hamamatsu chūnagon*, and *Sagoromo*. Yamaguchi cites an example from the “Aoi” chapter of *Genji*:

gisiki nado, tune no kamuwaza naredo, ikamesiu nonosiru; maturi no Fodo, kagiriaru oFoyakegoto ni soFu koto oFoku, midokoro koyonasi [The ceremonies, though they are ones usually held for deities, are carried out with great solemnity; during the (Kamo) festival itself, there are many marvelous additions to the official celebrations that offer sights of an unparalleled nature.]³⁵

Texts in which we might expect to see an overt conjoining of phrases turn out on the whole to comprise units only implicitly linked to each other. Yamaguchi concludes that such phrasal patterns are characteristic of texts written primarily in the native *hiragana* mode, whereas texts written in a Chinese (*kambun kundoku*) style employ more connectives. The so-called poem-tale (*uta monogatari*) represented by the *Ise* tale and *Tales of Yamato* (*Yamato monogatari*) falls somewhere between the two.

In texts where phrases are juxtaposed, where the syntax replays a process of “listing,” the cognitive burden falls on the reader, or “audience,” since “the audience must ponder the relations between sentences and supply those relations as he or she follows along.”³⁶ The *Genji* narrating constructs extremely lengthy passages that comprise a series of shorter phrases. As the text moves on, narrative focus, grammatical subject, and other referents shift freely within those extended phrases, and it is up to the reader-audience to keep track of the narrating by continually filling in the gaps. Syntactic connectives or anaphoric references are unnecessary, Yamaguchi surmises, because the narrating tends to exhaust one discursive topic before moving on to the next, and the (topical) context prevents the listener from becoming confused (p. 27).³⁷ *Uta monogatari*, which are thought to have originated in an oral tradition, tend rather to be constituted by shorter phrases linked through a greater use of connectives. Yamaguchi calls such texts “explanatory” (pp. 28–29). As I shall note, however, all *monogatari* texts when tied to oral situations of communal reception are constitutive of an “explanatory” register that does not depend on the presence or absence of sentential conjunctions. In any case, as Yamaguchi’s essay suggests, a pattern analogous to one encountered at the narrative level—juxtaposition of narrating moments—can be observed at the syntactic level as well.

Let us remember that equivalent English terms by which we can refer to Heian linguistic segments are not easily found. The notion of “sentence,” which might be substituted for “phrase” in the above, for example, is extremely problematic for Heian discourse. As it used to be taught in schools in the United States, an English sentence is characterized as a unit—subject-verb-object (SVO)—representing a “complete thought.”³⁸ In English, which tends to valorize abstract, conceptual discourse governed by clearly demarcated subjects, such “thoughts” grow logically to form transcendent, governing “ideas,” a process that highlights the metaphysical impulse of the language and its speakers. Heian Japanese, on the contrary, with its common (S)(O)V pattern, where the burden often falls on the verbal component, tends to elide the “subject” (see below), and rather than “object,” we find amplification of a “topic.” Discourse thereby always remains “open” and in a particular sense “concrete”³⁹ with not so much (logical) “thoughts completed” as associative remarks and enunciative contexts in which one participates. “Thoughts” become discursive or textualized moments that respond to a momentarily established topic. The reader-listener realizes or completes them only to have them yield to a succeeding moment that displaces them with another movement similarly constructed. No one group of successive moments necessarily follows “logically” from prior ones.

Robert Brower and Earl Miner note another distinctive feature of the Heian language: its large number of modal and aspectual markers. In their words,

Few modern languages have such a range of possible inflections for adjectives, few are capable of such subtle verbal distinctions. Japanese verbs of the classical language employed by the Court period do not have our seven so-called tenses, but as many as seven morphemes expressing various kinds of *aspect* combined with as many as fourteen morphemes expressing *mood*. The result of the highly complex system of inflections is a particularly fine adjustment of tone (ultimately beyond the reach of translation) and an instrument especially well suited to exploring states of feeling, mind, and being. The functions of Japanese verbs are indicated by such inflections in agglutinative terminations.⁴⁰

The morphemes referred to are the auxiliary verbal suffixes (*jodōshi*) affixed to verbal stems. The variety of modal markers—which include *mu*, *ramu*, *kemu*, *besi*, *meri*, *zi*, *masi*, *mazi*, and *nari* (in one of its significations), their meanings ranging from “must,” “should,”

“will,” and “seems,” to “have heard” and including a few negative counterparts—attests to the “particularly fine adjustment of tone” found by Brower and Miner. Such morphemes also mark the continual emphasis placed on an implied speaker or enunciative position and on the (modal) attitude that speaker or position adopts toward the discourse.⁴¹ The presence of such a powerful modality, however, does not mean that the discourse is “subjective.”⁴² At the narrative level, then, we find another analogue to a linguistic feature: namely, that a text or narrating moment always suggests a source (hearsay or perception, for example) from which it ostensibly derives, producing a kind of global indirect discourse or narrating.⁴³ The modal-aspectual markers include ones that signify a type of completed action or state (*tu* and *nu*), those that indicate incomplete action and resultant state (*tari* and *ri*), and two that I take to be (self-legitimizing, or “doubly grounded”) “narrative modal-aspectuals” (*ki* and *keri*).⁴⁴

Together with the peculiarities of the syntactic and modal-aspect situation, we must address what is at once the most obvious and the most overlooked (or taken for granted) facet of the Heian language in narrating terms: the language is, by and large, unmarked for tense. The “nonpast,” “tenseless” propensity produces an enunciating perspective that gives the illusion that the events being recounted are happening at the very moment of the telling.⁴⁵ It does not, accordingly, subscribe to the familiar Western discursive pretense of taking the reader back to a past in order to “represent” events. For Heian narrating, every moment of telling becomes in a sense a “new” and contingent telling, and the events become (always) new “events.”⁴⁶ The present study seeks to explore and delineate the implications of such a “tenseless” linguistic system for narrative discourse. Although their stance is not clear from the above, I infer from the remarks by Brower and Miner that the question of tense for Heian Japanese is at least to be held in abeyance, and although I agree with that view, I also believe that we ought to be considering the broader ramifications of thinking primarily in terms of aspect and mood (though in ways different from Genette and Todorov) rather than of tense.⁴⁷

Another feature of the Heian language is its “lack” of syntactic subjects (already mentioned), a condition in which the burden of the narrating falls on adjectivals and verbals chosen in accordance with the governing “topic.” As Watanabe Minoru states, the phenomenon may only mean that such subjects are not explicitly part of the

discourse, since all the reader need do is supply them. The issue, however, is not whether they are implicit or explicit, although Watanabe does remind us of those instances where no "subject" can be found,⁴⁸ but rather obfuscation of the distinction between the speaker *of* the text and the speaker *in* the text, between first and third person narration. The syntactic erasure, analogous to the generic (and eroticized) markers *wotoko* (man) and *wonna* (woman) found at poetic moments throughout *monogatari* texts, invites the reader-audience to identify with the discursive perspective and maintain a participatory relation to it.⁴⁹ The feature is virtually impossible to translate into a language like English, which insists that proper subjects for each utterance be clearly designated, thus preserving a readerly distance even as it allows psychological identification. Rather than well-defined syntactic subjects, the Heian language relies on an ongoing institution of topical markers to create what I refer to as "narrating moments." A "topic" (the name of a character, a season or month of the year, or a celebratory occasion such as birth, death, or promotion, for example) rules every utterance, and each member or element of a narrating situation uses the currency provided by it to participate in the discursive exchange. The participants do not so much appropriate the topic for an individually interpreted remark or thought as complement it with a gesture toward both the topic and an interlocutor.

Finally, the Heian language positions the subjects of an utterance by an often complicated network of honorific language. By strategic usage of appropriate honorifics, humilifics, or unmarked words and morphemes (prominent in the language to this day) for a speaker's own actions as well as those of his or her listener, socially determined hierarchical relations of great complexity can be designated among the members of a verbal exchange (including a third person referred to by the speaker or listener). The situation becomes even more complicated when the narrator herself or himself participates in the honorific verbal scheme. For example, take a situation in which narrator (N) tells about a character (A) speaking to a second character (B) about a third character (C). N may use an honorific word or suffix for A (to show that A is of higher status than N); similarly, A may use a humilific suffix for herself and an honorific one for B (to show that B's status is higher than A's) and then perhaps a neutral suffix for C (which would mean that A and C are equal in status). Mapping the use of honorific language (the class of honorifics used by the narrator

to refer to the Kiritsubo Consort, for example) has led scholars if not to the actual identity of one of the *Genji* narrators, at least to the level of her rank or social class. Although the discovery is by no means definitive, the rank and class noted provide further proof that women related to the “middle ranks” of Heian society form the most important constituency for the *Genji* tale, a constituency that I discuss in Part III.

Reading and Textual Variants

As is well known in scholarly circles, a title like *Genji monogatari* or *Ise monogatari* actually stands as a metonym for its many variant texts. Scholars have spent an enormous amount of energy during most of this century locating, examining, and collating the vast number of textual specimens and providing commentaries for those exemplars judged closest to a Heian “original.”⁵⁰ Although many felt they were on the track of an “original” text, what we read today are nothing but hypothetical valorizations of a particular exemplar. In the case of *Genji*, for example, that exemplar belongs to the so-called Blue-Cover Texts (*Abyōshi-bon*), one of three identifiable textual lineages—the others being the Kawachi Texts (*Kawachi-bon*) and the miscellaneous texts known as the “separate texts” (*beppon*). The Blue-Cover Texts derive from the collating work of the celebrated early Kamakura period (1192–1333) scholar-poet Fujiwara no Teika (or Sadaie, 1162–1241); the Kawachi Texts, from the work of Teika’s contemporary Minamoto no Mitsuyuki (1163–1244) and Mitsuyuki’s son Chikayuki.⁵¹

Modern institutionalization of the Teika texts arbitrarily solves the textual problem by erasing the questions surrounding the rise of variants, questions which even suggest the Fujiwara-Minamoto relations underlying much of the *Genji* narrating itself. The scholars consulted different available texts (the Kawachi collators seem to have consulted a greater variety with the aim of producing a standard family version. As readers have noted, the Teika texts tend toward a simplified phrasal structure and an altered *kana* orthography based on Teika’s own system, whereas the Kawachi texts display a more “explanatory” style. Teika refashioned the text into *cleaner* (though not necessarily *clearer*) patterns; Mitsuyuki and Chikayuki opted for the insertion of commentary or preserved in the texts they consulted

those passages that facilitated comprehension. The Kawachi texts, indeed, are criticized for their tendency toward lengthy, run-on phrases in the midst of which the reader can easily lose track of the narrative thread.

It is tempting to ignore modern practices and favor the Kawachi texts, especially since the apparently added on explanatory passages accord well, as we shall see, with the manner in which *monogatari* are believed to have been presented and received. Those who prefer the Teika texts argue that since Teika wrote more tentatively (i.e., more carefully) about his findings than did the Kawachi group, his conclusions must be more faithful to the “original” text and, accordingly, command more respect. Such a position, however, ignores the words of Teika himself, who did not believe it was possible to produce a completely verifiable version: “impossible to erase all doubts [as to the veracity of the text].”⁵² The Kawachi collators arouse scholarly suspicion because they claim to have reconstructed a text about which all doubt has been eliminated and are criticized for having been too arbitrary.⁵³ It being impossible, of course, to assess the arbitrariness of any particular reading, the only measuring stick, lacking an Ur-text (original text), can be another text such as Teika’s, which would be subject to similar criticisms.

The two scholarly traditions, in fact, seem to have been motivated by more urgent and private matters than the standards of objectivity assigned by modern readers. They wanted to establish “verified household texts” (*ie no shōhon*), a desire that problematizes the very relation between textual prestige and interpretive power. Suffice it here to note that although both texts attracted important groups of adherents and followers, the Teika texts eventually overwhelmed the Kawachi texts from about the mid-Muromachi period (1338–1573), largely because of the work of the great *Genji* scholar Sanjōnishi Sanetaka (1455–1537).⁵⁴

For the *Ise* text, the version used today is another Teika exemplar, alleged to derive from manuscripts that the scholar himself copied for his granddaughter in the second year of Tempuku (1234). It begins with the “coming-of-age” section and includes a total of one hundred and twenty-five sections. Here too there exist other versions that seriously challenge the supremacy of the Teika texts, most notably the texts thought to have begun with a section (*dan* 69) telling of an Ise Virgin. A complete exemplar is no longer extant but it is mentioned in the colophons of other texts, and parts of it are appended to existing

texts.⁵⁵ Sometimes referred to as the “Text of the Court-Appointed Hunter” (*Kari no tsukai-bon*), it is also known as *Koshikibu no naishi-bon* for the alleged copyist, Koshikibu no Naishi (daughter of Izumi Shikibu), of one of the variants. The latter receives mention by a monk-scholar of the Rokujō family, Kenshō (1130–1210), who many believe collated a version of the “Hunter text,” which he values as highly as the Tempuku texts. This textual “other” is thought to have begun with *dan* 69 and ended with *dan* 11 of the Teika texts, to have contained at least twenty-one poems not in the Tempuku texts, and to have been organized quite differently from the latter.⁵⁶ The “final” poem in the Hunter text, moreover, speaks of an eternally repeatable encounter inscribed in the movement of the moon, a fitting end to a text that, as we shall see, refuses closure and replays instead a pattern of continual return.⁵⁷ In sum, the *Ise monogatari* reader faces a bewildering textual array consisting of three lines of Teika texts, four lines of “old texts” (*kohon*), three lines of “expanded texts,” “Texts of the Lacquered Chamber” (*Nurigome-bon*, also known as “abridged texts,” *ryaku-bon*), “texts written in Chinese characters” (*mana-bon*), and the miscellaneous “separate texts” (*beppon*). After thorough study, scholars now agree on two aspects of the *Ise* text: its initial versions were much shorter than the text we read today, and it expanded as a result of accretions by later author-compiler-arranger-editors.⁵⁸

As the above demonstrates, textual problems alone would justify a reexamination of approaches to Heian texts. Aside from the question of the correctness of modern textual procedures, we must not forget what is all too apparent yet almost always brushed aside as marginal to Heian discourse: the extant Heian texts are constitutive of a contingency that arises as much out of the manner in which they were appropriated as out of any vagaries of historical circumstance (such as loss by fire and other calamities or errors by copyists). In other words, textual discrepancies are not necessarily incongruous with the spirit of participatory textual production, and we should take seriously the fact that the term *monogatari* does not denote final, self-identical editions. As the Senshi anecdote with which I begin the discussion of the *Genji* tale suggests, it was possible for copies in different calligraphic hands⁵⁹ to appear almost as soon as the initial writer or writers had completed a section of a tale, and the high artistic value that was placed on calligraphic skill meant that persons of all ranks and backgrounds routinely practiced “penmanship” by copying out

poems and narratives following accepted stylistic models. During the course of such practice, or at its readings and recitations, a text could easily undergo alteration by any of the components that make up the reader-calligrapher-reciter-audience network.⁶⁰ When dealing with the products of such a culture, we must remember that the act of “reading” was a far cry from the passive and individual act it has become today; it was a communally oriented, integrative process that not only required linguistic and poethicohistorical competence but also summoned calligraphic, vocal, and even painterly talent and freely allowed a degree of rewriting, or re-creation.⁶¹

Tales of the Bamboo Cutter

[*Taketori monogatari*] was a work truly appropriate for commemorating the moment when the city [Heian] was divorcing itself from agricultural villages, and seeking its own free space.

Saigō Nobutsuna, “*Taketori monogatari no bungakushiteki ichi*”

This era [the Engi era, 901–922] must be called the age of the pivot-word, and also the age of the rise of the associative-word.

Onoe Saishō, “*Kokinshū no shūji*”

Individual languages, their roles and their actual historical meaning are fully disclosed only within the totality of an era’s heteroglossia.

Mikhail Bakhtin, “*Discourse in the Novel*”



Languages of Narrating and Bamboo-Cutter Pretexts

For the ancient Japanese, writing could not have been the familiar process it must have seemed to the ancient Chinese or seems to us today when, despite certain obstacles (e.g., writer's block), putting pen to paper or transferring letters from keyboard to computer screen is as intuitive and self-evident as eating or sleeping. As Raymond Williams has noted, "In modern industrial societies writing has been naturalized. It is then easy to assume that the process itself is straightforward, once the basic skills have been mastered in childhood. There is then only the question of what to write *about*."¹

In contrast to the Chinese mainland where a writing system mated to the phonological demands of a native, basically though not categorically monosyllabic language (i.e., one graph = one sound = referent-idea) developed over centuries, the Japanese, content without written language, found themselves confronting a civilization that began to impose itself not through military aggression but through the medium of written texts. Early attempts to adapt Chinese writing to the Japanese verbal ground must have presented seemingly insurmountable problems given the dissimilarity of the two languages. A writing system suited to the largely monosyllabic Chinese language would a priori be eminently unsuited to the agglutinative and inflecting, polysyllabic Japanese language. As contact between Japan and China (often via Korea and Korean immigrants) increased during the early centuries A.D., texts and other inscription-bearing objects (bronzes, mirrors, coins, and seals) began flowing into the islands. Scarcity of sources inhibits accurate reconstruction of the rise of scriptive activity, but judging from extant sources, Chinese writing seems to have entered Japan as early as the first century A.D.² It was not, however, until the fourth or fifth century that Japanese began to write using Chinese graphs and, for the most part, the Chinese language—for the most part.³ The early specimens offer evidence that the Japanese at the very earliest stages were already disengaging phonetic from semantic values as they used Chinese graphs to transcribe native sounds, especially mor-

phemes that constituted personal names and toponyms.⁴ Sometimes referred to as “Japanized (*wa-ka*) Chinese style (*kambun*),” the early practice probably did not extend much beyond transcription of personal and place names. When the first full-blown text as we know it appeared in 712, soon after the capital was moved to Heijō (Nara) in 710 (the Nara period dates from 710–84), the Japanese had been experimenting with writing for several centuries.⁵

Chinese Writing and Japanese Discourse

Assuming its discursive space in diverse ways, the difficult-to-label *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters) text immediately raises issues relevant to Japanese attitudes toward writing and the Chinese language. First of all, in contrast to the later *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan), *Kojiki* clearly purports to be a written transcription (selected and edited by Ō no Yasumaro at the command of Empress Gemmei) of an orally delivered (by Hieda no Are) discourse: “On the eighteenth day of the Ninth Month of the fourth year of Wadō a command was given to Yasumaro: ‘You are to select, record, and present to the throne the old materials recited by Heida no Are’” (p. 23).⁶ Are was a young man renowned for his prodigious memory and vocal prowess:⁷ “One look and he could recite it aloud; one hearing and it was imprinted in his mind” (p. 22). He had earlier been commanded by Emperor Temmu to recite (“read aloud”) selected old texts that recorded imperial genealogies and legendary and historical incidents so that a written transcription could be made for posterity. Empress Gemmei revived the project when it was halted with the emperor’s death. Here we see an inextricable connection between writing and orality: on the one hand, the written does not, indeed cannot, come into existence without the oral—the oral authorizes the written; on the other hand, the written becomes a “permanent” document that proves the legitimacy of that which authorized it.

A point of controversy is the meaning of “read aloud” (*yominaraFu*). Some interpret it as signifying that Are somehow clarified the “meaning” of the texts as he recited them aloud. Others argue that, given his performative talents and the common practice of reciting Buddhist sutras, the phrase really meant that Are was commanded to recite the texts *in a particular manner*, using certain patterns of intonation, and that it was a particular oral rhythm (there

must have existed other, competing ones) that Emperor Temmu wanted to valorize.⁸ To fix the previous discourses into a specific, orally deliverable mode was tantamount to seizing the essence of the texts. The one who performed the act or had it performed became the legitimate possessor and king of all discourses, that is to say, through a topographic metonymy, king of the country.⁹ Cognition of the world, channeled through phonic modulations, might have stopped well short of semantic closure, but political power, as it often does, effected another closure. For the Japanese, as we shall see, written discourse does not easily exist separately as a self-contained entity, but is always positioned vis-à-vis a multitude of “intertexts,” whether linguistic stimulus (often, though not necessarily, oral), historical “model,” genealogical imperative, narrator, and/or reader-listener. If we agree with the above argument that the text was meant to be intoned, we can conclude that for *Kojiki*, the written—at the same time that it accomplished the all-important goal of preserving a specific mode deemed proper to earlier discourses—was ultimately dependent on the oral and that the written text existed only in a contingent state that had to be vocally realized each time.¹⁰

How did Yasumaro transcribe Are’s recitation? Although written with Chinese characters, the *Kojiki* style, whether in phonological or syntactical terms, is not Chinese, which the *Nihon shoki* more closely approximates. By the time of *Kojiki*, proper names and toponyms are not the only items resistant to direct rendering by the Chinese written language; longer discursive stretches, commentary and reading notes, and song-poems are also transcribed in the “Japanized” style mentioned above.¹¹ Generally called *man’yōgana*,¹² the selected graphs were part of a systematic process of using Chinese characters for phonological value through which the Japanese accommodated Chinese pictoideographs to the specifications of their own language. Take, for example, the opening line of *Kojiki*:

天地初發之時 高天原成神名 天之御中主神 (訓高下天云阿麻)

[When heaven and earth first appeared, the name of the god who went out on the High Plain of Heaven is Ame no Minakanushi.]¹³

After the line a gloss (called *kunchū* and found throughout the text) is inserted, instructing the reader to “pronounce the graph *ten* [heaven], which comes after the graph *kō* [high], as *ama*; learn from

this as you read on" (p. 26). The sounds /a/ and /ma/ are represented by the two graphs 阿 and 麻

Especially resistant to rendering with Chinese graphs, which tend to specify "meaning," were song-poems, since the incantatory qualities in the actual sounds needed to be preserved.¹⁴ Here is one poem (of 112 in *Kojiki*) considered the ancestor of the thirty-one-syllable *tanka* form:¹⁵

夜久毛多都 伊豆毛夜幣賀岐 都麻基微字爾

夜幣賀岐都久流 曾能夜幣賀岐袁

yakumo tatu, idumo yaFegaki, tumagomi ni, yaFegaki tukuru, sono
yaFegaki wo (NKBT, 89)

[the eight-layered clouds rise, in Izumo, land of the eight-layered
clouds, to match the layers of my fence, built to confine my newly
beloved; what a fine eight-layered fence]

Each graph, whose meaning is largely irrelevant, represents a single syllable.

As the Japanese continued to experiment with writing, they generated a variety of other phonemic-semantic-graphic combinations. Morphemes such as *tu*, *mi*, *ni*, *ru*, and *wo* in the above song-poem, what today are called "particles" (*joshi*) and verbal suffixes (*jodōshi*), were not represented when the Japanese wrote in a Chinese style. When the Japanese occasionally paid attention to the semantic values of the graphs, the result reads like a "shorthand" notation for transliterating into a Japanese syntactic form a Chinese-like word order. *Man'yōshū* 2845 is an example:

忘哉 語 意遣 猶戀

Only vaguely intelligible to a Chinese reader, the poem requires the following Japanese phonetic realization:

wasuru ya to, monogatari site, kokoro yari, sugusedo sugizu, naFo
koFinikeri

[to forget about you, I talk about various things and try to clear my
thoughts of you; but, try as I might, I find I end up longing for you
even more]

The single graph 語 is given the expanded Japanese rendering *monogatari site*, while the segment 雖過不過 displays the up-and-