

**Self-Reflections of Extended Vernacular Prose
Narrative: Discussions of Fact and Fiction
in *Don Quixote*, *The Story of the Stone*,
and *the Tale of Genji***

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SUMMARY

Here I extend to a reading of two Non-Western narratives (the Chinese *Story of the Stone* and Japanese *Tale of Genji*) and one European narrative (*Don Quixote*) Blumenberg's analysis of the modern (Renaissance) concept of "reality"--reality becomes redefined as "actualization of a context in itself," an infinite, dynamic, future-oriented process which is grounded in human intersubjectivity--and correlative description of the modern novel, which now must reflect upon its own possibility and so "represents nothing but itself." In all three works we find a new focus on "fictionality" and on the autonomy and free possibilities of human creativity; the question of the corresponding roles of fact and fiction becomes a central narrative as well as epistemological issue in all three literary traditions, as does the problematic of the ever-increasing gap between individual and collective (intersubjective) experience.

KEY WORDS

narrative
context
intersubjectivity
creativity

reality
actualization
fictionality
autonomy



I

In his seminal article "the Concept of Reality and the Possibility of the Novel," Hans Blumenberg contends that the modern European novel could come into being only during the Renaissance when a new concept of reality as context¹ together with a new concept of truth emerged and engendered a fundamental change in the conception and ascribed functions of fictionality. Whereas in premodern conceptualizations reality has to be guaranteed by authorities external to man (Plato's ideal world, the medieval concept of God), in the modern concept reality was construed as "The actualization of a context in itself."² The modern concept of reality, according to Hans Blumenberg,

takes reality as the result of an actualization, a progression which can never reach a total, final consistency, as it always looks forward to a future that might contain elements which could shatter previous consistency and so render previous "realities" unreal. (...) Reality as self-constituting context is a borderline concept of the ideal totality of all selves-it is a confirmative value for the experience and interpretation of the world that take place in intersubjectivity. Obviously this concept of reality has a sort of "epic" structure, relating to the totality of a world that can never be completed or grasped in its entirety-a world

that can be only partially experienced and can never exclude different contexts of experience which in themselves constitute different *worlds*.³

Reality is thus understood as an infinite, dynamic, future-oriented process which originates in, and can be sustained only by, human agency. The consequences that follow from this new concept of reality for art, and literature in particular, are substantial: Since reality is defined as "actualization of a context in itself," it is no longer understood as a given, but is now for the first time conceptualized as a mere subjective construct which is open to intersubjective scrutiny and subject to constant revision, subjective partiality, structural open-endedness, and fictional exploration; simulation and anticipation of future realities advance consequently to become constitutive elements of the novel form and establish the novel's claim "not merely to represent *objects* of the world, or even to imitate *the* world, but to actualize *a* world."⁴ Though the novel "represents nothing but itself" and "removes the boundaries between being and meaning, matter and symbol, object and sign" and destroys "the correspondences that had been integral to our whole tradition of truth concepts,"⁵ it still "involves continuing dependence on the tradition it negates," and can thus sustain itself only by taking "itself as its own subject matter: by demonstrating the impossibility of the novel, a novel becomes possible."⁶ The novel therefore cannot but reflect upon its own possibility (thus the importance and prominence of work-immanent self-reflexions in the novel).⁷ Finally, since art is liberated from its representational foundation, truth, too, is no longer to be seen "somewhere in the relation between the representational work of art and Nature; it now lies between the subjective mind perceiving the work and the product which is viewed as a possible piece of reality created by the artist."⁸ Like reality, truth "becomes only valid through an agreement among subjects that are

capable of understanding one another-i.e., through intersubjectivity and its various possible perspectives."⁹

In what follows I shall show in an analysis of the prevailing notions and ascribed functions of fiction/fictionality in European, Chinese, and Japanese prose narrative that the analytical framework established by Hans Blumenberg not only illuminates constitutive elements of the Western tradition of extended vernacular prose narrative (and its representative form, the novel) but also proves to be heuristically fruitful and comparatively valid for the analysis of non-Western traditions of extended vernacular prose narrative like the Chinese or Japanese. *Don Quixote*, *The Story of the Stone* (*Shitou ji* 石頭記), and *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji Monogatari* 源氏物語)--each of these works is commonly regarded as having made outstanding contributions to the prose narrative of its respective literary tradition--have been chosen because they belong to the earliest examples of their respective literary traditions in which the *novel/xiaoshuo* (小說)/*monogatari* (物語) has "taken as its theme its own possibility."¹⁰

II

In *Don Quixote* the work-immanent self-reflections on the novel are most succinctly presented in the authorial *Prologue* (DQ *Prologue*: 9-14) 11 and in dialogues in the main body of the text between the Canon and the Priest (DQ 47:373-5; 48:375-9) and Don Quixote (DQ 49:383-7; 50:387-9).¹¹ In the *Prologue* section the author mocks at his contemporaries' practice of validating their literary creations by inferring classical authorities; he, for his part, asserts his autonomy from all canonical authors and claims to "have nothing to quote in the margin or to note at the end, still less do I know what authors to follow" (DQ *Prologue*: 10). In accordance with his critical attitude toward established *Weltanschauungen*, which for him despite their claim to unquestioned authority

are ultimately mere arbitrary constructs, he "exempts and frees" the reader "from every consideration and obligation" (DQ *Prologue*: 9) concerning his deliberately subjective, discontinuous, and heterogenous fabrication and tries to unconceal in his readers' latent resistance to authority (and undoubtedly also his own) a hidden creative potential. Subjectivity, discontinuity, and heterogeneity as well as a certain detachment of the author from his creation--"though I pass for the father, I am the stepfather of Don Quixote" (DQ *Prologue*:9)¹³--in turn become "essential parts of an artistic design, a stylistic will, a poetic truth."¹⁴

In the dialogues between the Canon, the Priest, and Don Quixote the author stages his and his time's *problématique* which, *nota bene*, to a degree is still ours: how to develop a literature in which subjective and collective experience can be brought to a genuine uncompromised convergence. Each character in the dialogues represents a different group of people with their specific interests in fiction/fictionality: the priest represents the clerical as well as worldly authorities who condemn fiction/fictionality for its latent threat to moral and political order, Don Quixote represents the "ignorant public" which by its lack of moral and intellectual judgment and by its need for compensation for its social discrimination, is easily seduced "to believe and accept as truth all the foolishness they [fictional works] contain," (DQ 49:383) the Canon finally-as the most thoughtful and forward-looking authority represents the progressive, Enlightenment-like scholar for whom not fiction or fictionality as such is problematic, but the uses people had made of it. He stresses the "opportunity [fictional works] afforded to a gifted intellect for displaying itself" and propounds that "if [the writing of fictional works] is done with charm of style and ingenious invention, aiming at the truth as much as possible, he will assuredly weave a web of bright and varied threads that, when finished, will display such perfection and beauty that it will

attain the worthiest object any writing can seek, which as I said before, is to give instruction and pleasure combined." (DQ 48:375) Couched in a critique of the narrative flaws and illusive qualities of the fantastique tale, the Canon propagates an ideal of literature in which fiction/fictionality/the fictive is used to bridge the gap between mutually exclusive cognitive levels and reading attitudes (as well as to collapse the boundaries between the established literary kinds)¹⁵ which used to separate the sexes, classes, and national communities and to make them converge in a literature which can be shared by all.¹⁶ Fictionality, thus, becomes an agent of change both in the socio-political and literary-aesthetic realm inducing, accelerating, and reflecting these processes all at the same time.

III

The Story of the Stone (*shitou ji*, generally better known under its title *The Dream of the Red Chamber* [*Honglou meng* 紅樓夢], ca. 1760, first printed edition 1791) was fashioned in a time when a constructivist concept of reality began to replace the Neo-Confucian notion of the world as a fixed, pre-stabilized entity.¹⁷ *The Story of the Stone* takes this newly gained freedom of world-constructing as its theme—not celebrating it but exposing the (unexpected) abysses, “the absence of absolute standards,”¹⁸ it creates for human communication.

The first five chapters of *The Story of the Stone* can be regarded as the most intricate work, immanent self-reflection of traditional Chinese extended vernacular prose narrative (*xiaoshuo*).¹⁹ This has, on the one side, to be accounted for by the continuous impact which the large and diverse traditional criticism of the genre had exerted on its production since its emergence in the late sixteenth century.²⁰ But the novel's intent, namely to defend and justify the use of fiction/fictional-

ity, shows also, on the other side, that the use of fictionality/the fictive was still considered to be suspect and had to be defended.²¹ However, the extended prologue section in *The Story of the Stone*, ironically enough, while defending the use of fiction/fictionality, not only "forces the reader to confront its own fictionality through the enactment of a fantastic-mythic realm" but also calls "the ground rules or defining conditions of significance themselves,"²² among them the relationship between fact and fiction, into question. In this, *The Story of the Stone* "is probably more burdened with the representation of reality-illusion, truth-falsehood (chen chia 真假) dialectics and the idea of emptiness (k'ung 空) than any other in the Chinese *hsiao-shuo* tradition" and the seriousness with which the question of the status of stories as fictional configuration is raised and acted out "is infused with an existential urgency that makes the reader feel that the play with reality-illusion dialectics is crucial to the final configuration of meaning."²³

The prologue section is not a continuous narrative but "is made up of a series of discontinuous moments,"²⁴ every such moment adds to the impression of a fundamental difficulty of literary communication and accentuates in the abortiveness of its search for a redeeming (transcendent) origin²⁵ the *problématique* of communicability in general. With traditional authorities losing their self-evident truth, old modes of communication like the historiographical-the most important of all modes of communication for its previously unquestioned ideological dominance and overwhelming influence on the narrative tradition-have become "untrue" and anachronistic (though not yet obsolete because the new mode of communication still depends on it as it negates the old ones).²⁶ They have ceased to be a viable means of expression under the conditions of fragmented subjectivity: "Pages full of *idle* (or better, *absurd*: *huangtang* 荒唐) words/Penned with hot and bitter tears;/All men call the author fool;/None his *secret message*

hears." (ST 1:51. Emphasis mine.) Since world-understanding and constructing are subjective and therefore partial, intersubjective understanding and truth are possible only in rare moments of "coincidence of intention and unity in communication"²⁷--an idea that is at once confirmed and questioned in the purported history of the story's transmission in the prologue. It is in the "careful second reading" by the text's arche-reader, the Daoist Vanitas,²⁸ and by subsequent readings of others, including the author, that this moment is attained; but its attainment is not guaranteed, indeed it is unlikely, a fact the text's *personae*, its diverse narrative "authorities,"²⁹ obliquely point to.

IV

Like *Don Quixote* and *The Story of the Stone*, *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*, ca.1005/6 or 1015),³⁰ too, was composed at a time when the concept of reality had just changed. It is in texts of the eighth and ninth centuries that, according to William LaFleur, "not just a new era but an entirely new epoch" can be grasped: "There is in these texts a sense of amazement that a whole new mode of understanding reality had been set forth and a whole new mode of discourse begun. These new concepts served as the principal substance of discussions and debates for many centuries afterward."³¹ It was under these new conditions that Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部 (973-1014),³² the author of *The Tale of Genji*, though possibly not fully aware of this epistemic shift and its implications for her literary production, wrote what came to be appreciated in the Kamakura period as the unsurpassed masterpiece of the Japanese literary tradition.³³

In *The Tale of Genji* the work-immanent self-reflection of the *monogatari* form³⁴ is presented in the confrontation between Genji and his protégée Tamakazura in chapter 25, *Hotarū* 螢 (*Fireflies*).³⁵ Tamakazura, introduced at the outset of

the chapter as "facing a new crisis" and "wondering what to do next" (TG 25:430),³⁶ is depicted later in the chapter as losing herself in pictorial stories hoping to get consolation for her uneasy situation and searching in these stories for confirmation of her stance toward Genji. Genji upon seeing her reading "fictitious stories" ridicules the credulity of women--their inability or unwillingness to distinguish between factual and fictional accounts. He obviously reiterates here the charge against the monogatari form of telling "falsehoods" (or factual untruth: *soragoto* 空言)³⁷ current during the tenth century.³⁸ As he goes on in his thoughts on the *monogatari*, though, Genji has to admit that "these old romances," if read as what they are, namely fictions, can "relieve our boredom," can "move" us,³⁹ and make us think of our past and become sensitive to our present.⁴⁰ (TG 25:437) (He even approves of his daughter's reading monogatari, if only after careful scrutiny by his hand [TG 25:439].) And he even goes as far as to compare the *monogatari* with *The Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihongi* 日本紀) and somewhat hyperbolically states that highly esteemed historical accounts like *The Chronicles of Japan* "are mere fragments of the whole truth" and that it is the *monogatari* that "have set down and preserved happenings from the age of the gods to our own" and "that fill in the details."⁴¹ (TG 25:437) While he praises the *monogatari* in comparison to historical accounts for its upholding historical continuity and true-to-life concreteness, he praises the genre in comparison to Buddhist stories or expedients (*ho ben* 法本) for its equally broad appeal to a wide audience and its function of "pointing obliquely at the truth." (TG 25:438)⁴² Genji further asserts that there can be no unfailling description of how exactly something occurred to someone and implies that even, if this were possible, it would not be worth either knowing or telling; for the only things worth telling are things by which we are moved and maybe even changed, "things that happen in this life which one never tires of seeing and hearing

about, things which one cannot bear not to tell of and must pass on for all generations." (TG 25:437) Genji maintains that it is the storyteller's, and finally our, responsibility to hold on not so much to the external facts but to the commitment to make moral choices in relating events (to name the good good, and the bad bad), to share one's own experiences and insights with others and thereby to "set down and preserve) in one's own age what for future generations is worth being known and handed down.⁴³

V

In the foregoing discussion of the self-reflections of extended vernacular prose narrative in three different literary traditions--the European (*novel*), Chinese (*xiaoshuo*), and Japanese (*monogatari*)--I hope to have shown that the frame of analysis suggested by Hans Blumenberg is also applicable to non-Western narrative traditions and makes us aware of how much in fact the three literary traditions--their considerable differences notwithstanding⁴⁴--share with each other:

All three works discussed in this essay are products of ages of changing attitudes toward the prevalent concept of reality and truth held in the respective cultures. Previously transcendently legitimized static (finite) concepts of reality are challenged and finally replaced by individualized and dynamized (infinite) constructivist concepts of reality. Truth is seen to be located not so much in an "outward reality" as in man's imagination. Since truth is not self-evident and it can be pointed at only obliquely, it is regarded as hidden in the trivial,⁴⁵ the marginal, the unexpected,⁴⁶ or the unprecedented.

Concomitant to the re-evaluation of reality and truth concepts, the question of the corresponding roles of fact and fiction becomes a central narrative as well as epistemological issue in all three literary traditions. The new notion of the fictive opens new perspectives on human vis-à-vis natural

creativity and leads to a stipulation of the autonomy of human creativity.

This stipulated autonomy of human creativity shows itself in the authors' attempts to create a totality--or, at least, to create the *illusion* of a totality--in the literary work (hence the scope of the three selected texts). All three authors make their newly gained freedom manifest in that they playfully transform conventions, create a new, individualized (vernacular) language, infuse their texts to a lesser or greater degree with a critique of the existing social and natural world and "give expression to ideals that could not be satisfied or fulfilled"⁴⁷ in their authors' day (critical and anticipatory content of fictionality).

Despite the tendency to free human creativity (or imagination) from previous models which restricted it to (historical) factuality and corresponding narrative techniques and themes, the use of the fictive is not uncontested in all three literary traditions and has to be defended against massive charges launched by worldly and clerical authorities blaming the fictionality of literary works and its effect on the reader for the breakdown of political order and public morality as well as the decay of the traditional standards of literary excellence. (It is the eminently important socio-political context against which the three work-immanent self-reflections of extended vernacular prose narrative have to be analyzed and evaluated.)

Paradoxically enough, however, fictionality is experienced not only as liberation of human creativity (or imagination); very quickly in the most advanced examples of the respective traditions the use of the fictional leads to the question of the mutual exclusion of knowledge and experience and of the narratability of experience in the first place and engenders the typical latterday *problématique* of the seemingly ever-increasing gap between the spheres of individual and collective experience.

Notes

¹ Hans Blumenberg, "The Concept of Reality and the Possibility of the Novel," *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism. A Collection of Essays*. Ed. Richard E. Amacher and Victor Lange (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979) 42.

² *Ibid.*, 32.

³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ On this subject matter, see Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-conscious Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) and Lucien Dällenbach, *Le récit spéculaire* (Paris: PUF, 1977).

⁸ Blumenberg, 41.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹¹ DQ=Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote. The Ormsbu Translation, Revised. Backgrounds and Sources. Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1981). The first number refers to chapter numbers, the second to page numbers.

¹² For a most enlightening interpretation of these dialogues, see Fritz Wahrenburg, *Funktionswandel des Romans und ästhetische Norm: Die Entwicklung seiner Theorie in Deutschland bis zur Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Shuttgart: J. B. Metzler 1976) 39-46. For a more general assessment of Cervantes' literary theory, see E. C. Riley, *Don Quixote* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986) 62-72, and Alban K. Forcione, *Cervantes, Aristotle, and the "Persiles"* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970).

¹³ This sense of detachment is in addition intensified by Cervantes' device of introducing three basic narrators. See Felix Martinez-Bonati, *Don Quixote and the Poetics of the Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992) 221.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, XX.

¹⁵ CF. DQ 48: 375: "For the unrestricted range of these books enables the author to show his powers, epic, lyric, tragic, or comic, and all the moods the sweet and winning arts of poetry and oratory are capable of, for the epic may be written in prose just as well as in verse."

¹⁶ Fictionality mediates between "the instructive and the pleasurable" (*prodesse et delectare*) and is therefore appealing to a much wider audience than any one of the two alone possibly could appeal to. CF. also DQ, 374: "[Fiction] is all the better the more it looks like truth, and gives the more pleasure the more probability and possibility there is about it. *Plot in fiction should be suited to the understanding of the reader* and be constructed in such a way that by solving impossible situations, explaining how great deeds are accomplished, smoothing over difficulties, keeping the mind in suspense, they may surprise, interest, divert, and entertain, so that wonder and delight joined may keep pace one with the other." (Emphasis mine)

¹⁷ I am thinking here of the contributions to a new foundation of the concept of reality by Dai Zhen 戴震 (1723-77) and other major intellectual figures of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology. Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) XX, 1-85, and Ch'en Chung-ying (tr.), *Tai Chen's Inquiry Into Goodness* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1971).

¹⁸ Li Wai-yee, "Rhetoric of Fantasy and Irony: Studies in Liao-chai chih-yi-and Hung-lou meng" (Ph. D. Diss. Princeton, 1988) 179.

¹⁹ For a detailed analysis of the first chapter, see Li Wai-yee, 144-202, and Lucien Miller, *Masks of Fiction in the Dream of the Red Chamber. Myth, Mimesis, and Persona* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1975) 17-86. For Cao Xueqin's idea (or better, ideas) of fiction, see Miller, 181-253.

²⁰ For a collection of a specific kind of this tradition, the *dufa* 讀法 ("instructions how to read"), see David Rolston ed. *How to Read the Chinese Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990).

²¹ See the catalogue of ascribed functions provided by the stone, in

Cao Xueqin, *The Story of the Stone* (=ST). Trans. David Hawkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, vol. 1) 50: "Surely my 'number of females', whom I spent half a lifetime studying with my own eyes and ears, are preferable to this kind of stuff ['boudoir romances']? I do not claim that they are better people than the ones who appear in books before my time, I am only saying that the contemplation of their actions and motives may prove a more effective antidote to boredom and melancholy. [...] My only wish is that men in the world below may sometimes pick up this tale when they are recovering from sleep or drunkenness, or when they wish escape from business worries or a fit of the dumps, and in doing so find not only mental refreshment but even perhaps, if they will heed its lesson and abandon their vain and frivolous pursuits, some small arrest in the deterioration of their vital force."

²² Li Wai-ye, 145-6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 144f. This seems to me to come close to what Hans Blumenberg describes as "reality based on the experience of resistance": "Here illusion is understood as the desires entertained by the self: unreality as the threat to and seduction of the self through the projection of its own wishes; the consequent antithesis is *reality as that which cannot be mastered by the self, i.e.*, which resists it not merely as an experience of contact with inert mass, but also most radically in the logical form of the paradox." (Blumenberg, 34. Emphasis mine) Cf. also ST 1: 55: "Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true;/Real becomes not-real where the unreal's real."

²⁴ Li Wai-ye, 153.

²⁵ For a list of expressions for "origin" in the first five chapters of *The Story of the Stone*, see Li Wai-ye, 164.

²⁶ See ST 1: 49: "Brother Stone, according to what you yourself seem to imply in these verses, this story of yours contains matter of sufficient interest to merit publication [...] But as far as I can see (a) it has no discoverable dynastic period, and (b) it contains no examples of moral grandeur among its characters--no statesmanship, no social message of any kind. [...]'- 'Come, your reverence,' said the stone [...] 'must you be so obtuse? All the romances ever

written have an artificial period setting--Han or Tang--for the most part. In refusing to make use of that stale old convention and telling my *Story of the Stone* exactly as it occurred, it seems to me that, far from *depriving* it of anything, I have given it a freshness these other books do not have."

²⁷ Li Wai-ye, 180.

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 174: "As the Taoist experiences conversion in the process of understanding, he turns the book into his own story by inscribing himself."

²⁹ Cf. Miller, 181-253.

³⁰ For these dates, see Richard Bowring, *Murasaki Shikibu. The Tale of Genji* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991). For a succinct critical history of the text of *The Tale of Genji*, see Shirane Haruo, *The Bridge of Dreams. A Poetics of The Tale of Genji*' (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1987) 223-6.

³¹ William R. LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts of Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) xii. Cf. also his comments on the dominant philosophical tradition and the concept of reality: "By thinking of this epoch in terms of its canon, we can describe Japan's medieval period as that span of time during which the literate people of the country held the classics of Buddhism to be the ultimate norm; that is, the canon for integrating, interpreting, and judging a much wider range of books and experiences they are also accepted as valuable and, to a lesser degree, authoritative. [...] Perhaps it would be most accurate to say that Buddhists of this period were interested in flattening or relativizing our habitual distinction between what we identify as the *reality* of the world we experience when awake and the *illusion* of all the events that take place in our dreams. [...] The Buddhists made it their business to point out that it is not a matter of a black-or-white difference between waking consciousness and dream consciousness but rather of both of them being *on a continuum* of consciousnesses." (William LaFleur, 11; 4-5)

³² For the basic biographical data of Murasaki Shikibu, see Shirane Haruo, 215-23 (the dates given for Murasaki Shikibu are his), and

Mary Ellen Waithe, "Murasaki Shikibu," Mary Ellen Waithe ed., *A History of Women Philosophers. Vol. II: Medieval, Renaissance and Enlightenment Women Philosophers, A.D. 500-1600* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989) 7-10

³³ It must be admitted, though, that *The Tale of Genji* during this period "was appreciated not as prose fiction per se but for its *waka* and poetic passages" (Shirane Haruo, xui). And in Murasaki Shikibu's time, too, "prose narrative was taken seriously, not in the form of vernacular fiction, but in the shape of biographies, histories, religious tracts, or philosophical essays, which were normally written in *kambun* and which, in keeping with the Confucian tradition, served practical or didactic purposes. Vernacular prose fiction, by contrast, was considered a frivolous pastime suitable only to women and children who could not read Chinese, the official language of government and religion." (Shirane Haruo, xvi) Cf. also Thomas Harper's chapters "Japanese Views of Fiction Prior to the *Genji Monogatari*" and "Murasaki's Contemporaries and Their Views of the *Genji Monogatari*" in his dissertation *Motoori Norinaga's Criticism of the Genji Monogatari* (Ph. D. diss. University of Michigan, 1971) 15-28. That Murasaki was weary of these prejudices against the *monogatari* form and fiction as such shown in the discussion between Genji and Tamakazura in chapter 25 of *The Tale of Genji* as well as her creative transformation of *monogatari* conventions by which she sought to elevate the *monogatari* form to a serious vehicle of knowledge (see Shirane Haruo, xviii-xix). For the reception history of *The Tale of Genji* up to Motoori Norinaga (1930-1801), see Harper, 41-78.

³⁴ For a generical description of the *monogatari* form, especially its appropriation by women (and for women, although not exclusively), see Shirane, 84-7, and Richard Okada, *Figures of Resistance* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) 1-4, 159-63.

³⁵ For most various discussions of chapter 25, see Abe Akio, "Murasaki Shikibu's View of the Nature of Monogatari," *Acta Asiatica* 11 (1966) 1-10; Makoto Ueda, "Lady Murasaki on the art of the Novel: Truth and Falsehood in Fiction," *Literary and Art*

Theories in Japan (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1967) 25-36; Thoms Harper, 37-40; Edwin A. Cranston, "Murasaki's 'Art of Fiction'," *Japan Quarterly* 18 (1971) 207-13; Earl Miner, *Comparative Poetics. An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990) 136-140; and Okada, 214-231.

³⁶ Her situation stays in stark contrast to Genji's and his ladies': "Genji was famous and life was secure and peaceful. His ladies had in their several ways made their own lives and were happy. There was an exception, Tamakazura, [...]." (Murasaki Shikibu. *The Tale of Genji*. (=TG) Trans. Edward G. Seidenstricker [New York: Knopf, 1991] 430). Tamakazura's situation was made even harder by the fact that she had had virtually nobody to entrust herself to ("There were few really highborn women in their household." [TG 25: 431]).

³⁷ For an analysis of this term and its correlative term, *itsrwari* (偽り verbal untruth) in *The Tale of Genji*, see Abe, 4-7.

³⁸ Ueda, 27. Cf. also Harper, 26-8.

³⁹ For illuminating insights on the affective-expressive theory of literature predominant in the Japanese literary tradition, see Miner, 9.

⁴⁰ Cf. Murasaki's looking at an illustration of a young girl in *The Tale of Kumano* who "made her think of her own younger self." (TG 25: 438)

⁴¹ This should not be misunderstood as a disqualification of histories, but as a qualification of their truth claim, see Abe, 10: "We know that Murasaki Shikibu herself never had the intention of placing 'monogatari' above history. What she is contending is that 'monogatari' had its own method different from that of history, namely to narrate human life through fiction in its broadest sense."

⁴² For a deconstructivist reading of this passage, see Okada, 227: "The comparison of *monogatari* to Buddhist parables, in particular, should alert us to the possibility of reading a globally applicable discursive reversal and alterity: words are not, can never be, what they seem, including of course the 'words' of Genji's speech. Is it not a case of narrating events 'exactly as they occurred' (*ari no*

mama) [...]; rather, what a writer selects out of affective impact that is self-validating must also always be given a differential reading. We face here an exemplary instance of an allegory of a reading process, an indication that *monogatari* and especially the *Genji* text, which is always the self-valorized text as distinguished from earlier tales, is not 'groundless, empty talk' (*soragoto*) but must be read in a manner that pays attention to the underside (the intertextuality of grounded and ungrounded acts) of its own reading, writing, and reciting." Based on this interpretation, Richard Okada then provides a convincing reading of the often neglected exchange of poems between Genji and Tamakazura that follows the main part of the discussion. He sees in it a⁴³ "play on the paradoxical potential of fictive illusion" (Okada, 227) and sees himself confirmed in that "the interplay between the 'figural' and the 'literal' is constitutive of fiction itself in its constant and contradictory (or mutually undermining) interplay" (Okada, 229).

⁴³ This is not to mean an objectifying, "realistic" depiction of past events but rather one's own understanding of, and relationship to, this past. Cf. Shirane, xix: "Even as the *Genji* maintains a consistent and psychologically realistic tone, it deviates in significant ways from Heian social and political practice [...] and gives expression to ideals that could not be satisfied or fulfilled in Murasaki Shikibu's day. This type of narrative, as the Marxist critic Fredric Jameson has noted, is not simply the substitution of some more ideal realm for ordinary reality (as in the idyll or the pastoral); it is rather a process of transforming contemporary circumstances and implicitly criticizing them." Cf. the unexpected convergence of this position with Walter Benjamin's in his extraordinary essay *Der Erzähler. Betrachtungen zum Werk Nikolai Lesskows* in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1972) 385-410.

⁴⁴ E.g. the considerable differences between the European Judaeo-Christian versus the Chinese Confucian and Japanese Buddhist intellectual traditions; the different audiences (social status, intellectual capacity etc.) the respective works were addressed to.

⁴⁵ Cf. TG 25: 431, "frivolity and idleness," ST 1: 51: "idle words, secret message," and the discussion in Okada, 220.

⁴⁶ Cf. Blumenberg, 33n6: "Surprise becomes something to be expected."

⁴⁷ Shirane, xix.

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