

**The Power of Fiction:
The Nameless Book and the Birth of Literary Criticism in Japan**

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Abstract

The Nameless Book (*Mumyōzōshi*, ca. 1200) is frequently cited as the first work of prose criticism in the Japanese literary tradition, in part due to its author's sensitive treatment of several vernacular tales (*monogatari*) composed between the early tenth and late twelfth centuries. The author is generally assumed to be the poet known as Shunzei's Daughter (ca. 1171–1252), and the text can be seen as part of a larger movement on the part of her father's Mikohidari House to promote *monogatari* fiction as essential to poetic training at court. This paper explores possible models the author may have considered in constructing this work, the first of its kind. An analysis of the text's rhetorical strategies reveals several of its implied objectives, including the promotion of literary women, and the elevation of vernacular fiction itself to the same critical level as the more-esteemed genre of traditional *waka* poetry.

Keywords: literature, criticism, *monogatari*, tales, fiction, Japan, waka, poetry

In the classical era in Japan, specifically during the Heian (794–1185) and Kamakura (1185–1333) periods, the composition of poetry was a skill expected of every nobleman and noblewoman at court. Indeed, superior poetry was a mark of the enlightened aristocrat, and was even seen as an indicator of social and political worth. Not long after Murasaki Shikibu completed her famous novel *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*) in around the year 1010, the ongoing competition between various schools of poetic composition took on a new twist: the *monogatari* genre, that is to say narrative fiction itself, became a point of contention. Up until the late 1100s, *monogatari* fiction was generally frowned upon as a source or model for serious poetry. As these schools competed over what constituted the essentials of poetic training, the more conservative Rokujō School and the more progressive Mikohidari School became the main players in the dispute over who had access to and authority over certain proprietary realms of knowledge. In a complex series of exchanges, which included poetry contests (*uta-awase*), edited compilations (*kashū*, *chokusenshū*), poetic treatises (*karon*), and personal letters to important imperial patrons, the highly respected scholar and leader of the Mikohidari School, Fujiwara no Shunzei (1114–1204) successfully argued that knowledge of *monogatari* was essential for composing any kind of formal poetry. At the same time, through a related, but no less complex, series of activities, Shunzei and his descendants also cornered the market on *monogatari* expertise, by collating and editing *The Tale of Genji* and other important works of narrative fiction, by securing authoritative manuscripts and commentaries, and by promoting these texts as part of the foundational education required for competent poetry.

Given this context, it is unsurprising that the work hailed as “the first work of Japanese literary criticism” appeared at roughly this time.¹ *The Nameless Book* (*Mumyōzōshi*) was composed around the year 1200, most likely by the poet known as Shunzei’s Daughter (ca. 1171–1252), and actual granddaughter of Shunzei, who was then adopted.² *The Nameless Book*, which runs to about 110 pages in modern printed editions, is the earliest text of any significant length that evaluates, analyzes, describes, and interprets a range of works in the genre of vernacular fiction. As an early work of criticism, it is also noteworthy because its

¹ See, for instance, Suzuki Hiromichi’s entry for *Mumyōzōshi* in *Nihon koten bungaku daijiten*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1984), p. 678. In *The Bridge of Dreams: A Poetics of ‘The Tale of Genji’* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), Haruo Shirane identifies it as “the first significant critical essay on the *monogatari*” (1987, p. xvi). The ensuing discussion of the historical background and structure of *The Nameless Book* is indebted to the commentary in Suzuki Hiromichi’s *Kōchū Mumyōzōshi* (Tokyo: Kasama Shoin, 1970), as well as the commentaries in two other standard edited editions of the work: the version edited by Kuboki Testuo in *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* (1999), and the version edited by Kuwabara Hiroshi in *Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei* (1976). I have also consulted Michele Marra’s three-part “*Mumyōzōshi*: Introduction and Translation” in *Monumenta Nipponica* 34 (1984) and Thomas Rohlich’s “In Search of Critical Space: The Path to *Monogatari* Criticism in the *Mumyōzōshi*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 57 (1997), which constitute the only extended treatments in English of *The Nameless Book*.

² The rather indistinctive title by which this text is best known (there are a few alternate titles among the extant manuscripts of the text) was perhaps prompted by the fact that certain contemporary historical figures are mentioned in the text. Some scholars have surmised that the author did not want the argument for the elevation of *monogatari* to be associated with any other work or any particular literary or poetic house. Keeping the work “nameless” and the author, as well as the narrator within the text, anonymous may have conferred a more-general applicability to the arguments within *The Nameless Book*. See, for instance, Ogiwara Sakae, “Shunzeikyō no musume kenkyū: *Mumyōzōshi* sakusha no tachiba kara,” *Komazawa kokubun* 17 (1980): 143–154, and Tabuchi Kumiko, “*Mumyōzōshi* no sakusha zō,” *Kokugo to kokubungaku* 89: 5 (2012): 73–86.

assessment of these *monogatari* has withstood the test of time. Furthermore, because it discusses several works of narrative fiction that are no longer extant, it also serves as an essential resource for research into so-called lost and fragmented tales (*san'itsu monogatari*)—works such as *The Magic Cloak* (*Kakuremino*), *Waves upon the Crags* (*Iwa utsu nami*), *A Temporary Shelter* (*Tsuyu no yadori*), *First Snow* (*Hatsuyuki*), and *Tribute Horses* (*Koma mukae*). In total, *The Nameless Book* offers at least a brief evaluation of twenty-five tales, including all the most famous works of fiction we know of from the Heian era, providing an important window into the reading culture of the period.

The author employs specific rhetorical strategies to elevate vernacular tales as a genre: she argues their relevance to the central practice of poetic composition, their suitability as a mode of criticism, their historical worth, and their power to effect change in the real world. Furthermore, the intricately structured discussions within *The Nameless Book* contribute to a move towards the serious study of fiction, and are an important step in the canonization of *The Tale of Genji* and other works of fiction from the classical period.

This paper explores the models that Shunzei's Daughter may have looked to for both the content and structure of *The Nameless Book*. Drawing inspiration from a wide range of sources, she borrows the outer framework of certain historical tales (*rekishi monogatari*) such as *The Great Mirror* (*Ōkagami*, ca. 1118–1123), and employs critical terms found in earlier poetic treatises. The author's implementation of arguments and descriptions from works ranging from Sei Shōnagon's (ca. 966–ca. 1025) court collectanea *The Pillow Book* (*Makura no sōshi*, ca. 1002) to Taira no Yasuyori's (ca. 1146–ca. 1220) vernacular compendium of Buddhist tales *The Collection of Treasures* (*Hōbutsushū*, ca. 1179), to *The Tale of Genji* itself, shows she was a careful reader of fiction and non-fiction alike. This paper reconsiders the objectives of *The Nameless Book*, and argues that it is not only a pioneering work of literary criticism, but embodies a *raison d'être* for the *monogatari* genre itself.

The Nameless Book begins with a first-person narrator who, the reader soon discovers, is an elderly nun wandering through the eastern hills of the old capital, the Higashiyama region of modern-day Kyoto. The woman happens upon the temple Saishōkōin, and meets up with other women at a dilapidated dwelling on the premises. The narrator begins to recite from the *Lotus Sutra*, but is soon interrupted by the other women there who gradually draw out the narrator's life story. The old nun was formerly a lady-in-waiting at court, and has taken her Buddhist vows late in life. She then becomes a listener in the background as one of the other women begins a discussion with the question, "What is the most difficult thing to give up in this world?"³ Responses range from "the moon," to "letters," to "the Buddha," before the talk turns to Murasaki Shikibu and her famous tale. The three or four anonymous women continue to discuss about a dozen of the chapters thematically, and then go on to appraise several characters within the tale, both male and female.

The characters from the tale are often judged according to the poems they compose. Similarly, the women of *The Nameless Book* evaluate several other Heian-period *monogatari*, not so much on plot or character development but on the quality of the poetry included in each tale. After discussing such major works as *The Tale of Sagoromo* (*Sagoromo monogatari*, ca. 1060), *The Hamamatsu Counselor* (*Mitsu no Hamamatsu* or *Hamamatsu Chūnagon*

³ "Well now, what is the most difficult thing to give up in this world? Let each of us give her opinion on this," someone suggested. 「さてもさても、何事かこの世にとりて第一に捨てがたきふしある。おのおの、心におぼされむことのたまへ」と言ふ人あるに。Marra (1984), p. 133; Kuboki (1999), p. 181.

monogatari, ca. 1060), and *The Changelings* (*Torikaebaya*, ca. 1070), the conversation turns to more minor works of the period, many of which are no longer extant.⁴ Praise for *Tales of Ise* (*Ise monogatari*, early tenth century) and *Tales of Yamato* (*Yamato monogatari*, ca. 951), primarily because they are based on true events, forms the transition to a discussion of poetry and poetic collections.⁵ The interlocutors in *The Nameless Book* lament the fact that no woman has ever been afforded the task of compiling an imperially recognized anthology, despite the abundance of great female poets throughout history. What ensues is a review of the great women poets from the past, including Ono no Komachi (ca. 825–ca. 900), Izumi Shikibu (ca. 976–ca. 1033), Murasaki Shikibu, and her patron, Empress Shōshi (988–1074). *The Nameless Book* ends rather abruptly when a brief proposal to discuss the great men in history is cut off by one of the women, who notes that other works have already covered that particular topic.

Much has been made of the framework of the text. The elderly narrator introduced at the beginning has taken Buddhist vows, but was previously an eyewitness at court—a figure that can be readily associated with the narrators in *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes* (*Eiga monogatari*, ca. 1030 and later) and *The Great Mirror* (*Ōkagami*, 1118–1123). That these historical narratives written in *kana* and in vernacular Japanese are mentioned by name more than once is an internal clue that points to the fact that these were likely models for *Shunzei's Daughter*. In fact, in the very last sentence of *The Nameless Book*, the two texts are mentioned by name: ““On this topic it would surely be better to consult *Yotsugi* and *Ōkagami*. What more could we add to these chronicles?” a lady answered, continuing the conversation....”⁶

Commentary on *monogatari* tale fiction that predates *The Nameless Book* is quite limited. A handful of examples can be found in diaries, letters, and in other *monogatari*. There are several works of poetic criticism, a genre later known as *karon*, that appear earlier, but there is nothing that approaches *The Nameless Book* in terms of its extended discussions of vernacular tales, their authors, and the poems and characters therein. This work is truly the first of its kind. Aside from the narrative framework of historical tales, what other models might *Shunzei's Daughter* have looked to for inspiration?

The Collection of Treasures (*Hōbutsushū*, 1179), with its conversational tenor and episodic format, also seems to have served as a model. The links to this collection of Buddhist stories compiled by Taira no Yasuyori become clear when one considers the religious tone of

⁴ For more on these mid-eleventh-century tales, see, respectively, David P. Dutcher, *Sagoromo*, Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Harvard University, 2006); Thomas Rohlich, *A Tale of Eleventh-Century Japan: Hamamatsu Chūnagon Monogatari*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); and Rosette F. Willig, trans., *The Changelings: A Classical Japanese Court Tale* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983).

⁵ A translation and study of the former can be found in Helen Craig McCullough, *Tales of Ise: Lyrical Episodes from Tenth-Century Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968). See also Joshua S. Mostow and Royall Tyler, trans., *The Ise Stories: Ise monogatari* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010). For the latter tale, see Mildred M. Tahara, *Tales of Yamato: A Tenth-Century Poem-Tale* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1980).

⁶ Marra (1984), p. 434. 「『世継』 『大鏡』などを御覽ぜよかし。それに過ぎたることは、何事かは申すべき」と言いながら。Kuboki (1999), p. 285. *Yotsugi* is an alternate title for *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes*, and specifically refers to the fictional narrator of that text. For more on the possible relationship of these works to *The Nameless Book*, see Takahashi Tōru, “*Mumyōzōshi* to *rekishi monogatari*,” *Kokubun ronsō* 34 (March 2004): 40–48.

the opening passages of *The Nameless Book*, and the fact that it appears to defend the criticisms of Murasaki Shikibu that are included in that text. *The Nameless Book* opens with the following lines:

When I consider that I have spent three and eighty years in idleness, I am deeply saddened. It was my good fortune to be born by chance as a human being, and when I realized how sad it would be to die without leaving behind any trace in this sorrowful world, I shaved my head and dyed my clothes. But only my body has barely entered into the Way, and my heart has not undergone any change at all.⁷

In *The Collection of Treasures*, the author of *The Tale of Genji* is consigned to suffering in hell because of all the misleading “fabrications” (*soragoto*) woven into her tale.⁸ As Thomas Rohlich has pointed out, the religious setting laid out at the beginning of *The Nameless Book* provides the “critical space” necessary to begin the discussion of *monogatari*, and addressing the condemnation of Murasaki Shikibu, as specified in *The Collection of Treasures*, provides the segue.⁹ A few quotes from *The Nameless Book* serve as examples.

‘Didn’t Murasaki Shikibu recite the *Lotus Sutra*?’ The first lady answered, ‘Well, it’s rather sad that she has to put up with such criticism.’¹⁰

Someone replied, ‘But Murasaki was in fact a very religious person. She was anxious about the next life and spent morning and evening in continuous religious services. She doesn’t seem to have been a person engrossed in the things of this world.’¹¹

‘I can’t help being surprised when I think about the appearance of *Genji Monogatari*. However much I think about it, its origin is surely not of this world. Didn’t it spring from the fervent worship of the Buddha?’¹²

⁷ Marra (1984), p. 173. 八十あまり三年の春秋、いたづらにて過ぎぬることを思へば、いと悲しく、たまたま人と生まれたる思ひ出でに、後の世形見にすばかりのことなくてやみなむ悲しさに、髪を剃り、衣を染めて、わづかに姿ばかりは道に入りぬれど、心はただそのかたみに変はることなし。Kuboki (1999), p. 129. See also Nakamura Aya, “*Mumyōzōshi* bōtōbu no kōsō,” *Saitama Gakuen Daigaku kiyō* 5 (Dec. 2005): 15–29.

⁸ Rohlich (1997), pp. 186–187, outlines this argument. See Koizumi Hiroshi, et al., eds., *Hōbutsushū, Kankyo no tomo, Hirasan kojū reitaku*, Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei 40 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993). See also Marra (1984), p. 123, and Shirane (1987), p. xvi, and p. 227, n. 9. The female narrator’s opening lament about growing old also has a parallel in *The Collection of Treasures*. See Terry Kawashima, *Writing Margins: The Textual Construction of Gender in Heian and Kamakura Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), p. 116.

⁹ Again, see Rohlich (1997), especially pp. 197–202.

¹⁰ Marra (1984), p. 137. 「紫式部が、法華經を読みたてまつらざりけるにや」と言ふなれば、「いさや。それにつけても、いと口惜しくこそあれ。」Kuboki (1999), p. 187.

¹¹ Marra (1984), p. 137. また、「さるは、いみじく道心あり、後の世の恐れを思ひて、朝夕行ひをのみしつつ、なべての良には心もとまらぬさまなりけるひとにや、とこそ見えためれ」など言ひはじめて。Kuboki (1999), p. 188.

As Michele Marra has noted, whereas in *The Collection of Treasures*, Buddhism is ultimately the answer to the query, “What is the most difficult thing to give up in this world?” in *The Nameless Book*, *monogatari* fiction is accorded that distinction.¹³

Once the discussion of *Genji* and other tales begins, Shunzei’s Daughter incorporates critical terms that appear to be borrowed from certain *karon*, or poetic treatises. Her use of, for instance, the term *sugata* (form/structure) and the *kokoro-kotoba* (meaning-word) dichotomy clearly indicate that the author was familiar with works such as Fujiwara no Kintō’s (966–1041) *Newly Selected Essences* (*Shinsen zuinō*, ca. 1012) and Shunzei’s own *Treatise on Poetic Styles Past and Present* (*Korai fūteishō*, 1197).¹⁴ An older contemporary of Shunzei’s Daughter, Kamo no Chōmei (ca. 1155-1216), wrote a treatise titled *Nameless Notes* (*Mumyōshō*) in around 1211. Even though this similarly titled work likely postdates *The Nameless Book*, Chōmei’s treatise in some ways represents a culmination of the studies of poetry from which Shunzei’s Daughter may have drawn.¹⁵ These poetic treatises often offer model compositions, based on a set of circumstances, and then judge the quality of those responses. In *The Nameless Book*, a total of 97 poems, mostly but not all from *monogatari*, are quoted in full, generally as positive models, and several more poems are partially quoted or otherwise clearly referenced. The appraisal of several of the tales begins with a simple judgment of whether the poems are good or bad, suggesting that the quality of the poetry was an overriding consideration when judging the success of any particular tale. Furthermore, the sensitivity of characters within a tale is exemplified through representative poems. Poetic composition and modeling is clearly a major concern of this text. Even so, I would hesitate to call *The Nameless Book* a poetic primer or handbook, because it does much more than present and discuss poetry. So what is the purpose of this hybrid text that has elements of historical narratives, stories of religious awakening, and poetic treatises?

Both the structure and content suggest that *The Nameless Book*, as a whole, is fundamentally a highly crafted defense of fiction, argued along the lines of Murasaki Shikibu’s own so-called “Defense of Fiction” in the “Fireflies” chapter of *The Tale of Genji*. To summarize that argument, *monogatari* are of value to the extent that they are true to life, if not true to fact. In other words, works of fiction can draw attention to significant details about our existence in the real world. As *Genji* says in his conversation with Tamakazura, histories “give only part of the story. It is tales that contain the truly rewarding particulars!” He continues, “Not that tales accurately describe any particular person; rather, the telling begins when all those things the teller longs to have pass on to future generations—whatever is it about the way people live their lives, for better or worse, that is a sight to see or a wonder to

¹² Marra (1984), p. 137. 「さて、この『源氏』作り出でたることこそ、思へど思へど、この世一つならずめづらかにおぼほゆれ。まことに、仏に申し請ひたりける験にやとこそおぼゆれ。 Kuboki (1999), p. 188.

¹³ Marra (1984), p. 123.

¹⁴ These terms as used in *karon* are nicely summarized in Nicholas J. Teele, “Rules for Poetic Elegance: Fujiwara no Kintō’s *Shinsen Zuinō* & *Waka Kuhon*,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 31 (1976): 145–164.

¹⁵ See Hilda Kato, “The *Mumyōshō* of Kamo no Chōmei and Its Significance in Japanese Literature,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 23: 3–4 (1968): 321–430. Marra (1984, p. 124) mentions Chōmei’s *Nameless Notes* and states, “The influence of such treatises on *Mumyōzōshi* is apparent throughout the work. We see it first of all in the author’s critical approach to prose through its poetry.”

hear—overflow the teller’s heart.”¹⁶ Later during the same discussion, Genji puts forward the idea that events that happen in fictional tales are not “removed from life as we know it,” but rather “happen to people in real life too.” This argument within *The Tale of Genji* invokes the familiar *hōben* “expedient devices” section of *The Lotus Sutra*. Very briefly, *hōben* encompasses the idea that, even though words are necessarily an inaccurate representation of truth, some stories, such as sutra parables, can be useful as “expedient devices” to lead readers or listeners to religious awakening. Using Genji as a mouthpiece, Murasaki Shikibu likens fictional tales to “expedient devices” that can help uncover the truth of our experiences.¹⁷

It is precisely this notion of “expedient devices” that links the “Defense of Fiction” in *The Tale of Genji* to the beginning of *The Nameless Book*. The elderly nun who serves as the initial narrator takes refuge at a thatched lodging on the grounds of a temple in the eastern hills of the former capital, and sits down to read aloud from *The Lotus Sutra*: “I started to recite in a low voice the verses addressed to the monks in the chapter ‘Expedient Devices’ in the final part of Book One.”¹⁸ By foregrounding the concept of “expedient devices” at the beginning of the narrative, Shunzei’s Daughter clears the way towards a serious discussion of tale literature. A number of women gather to listen to the narrator, and they then engage her in conversation, especially after hearing that she was previously in service at court. Various topics come up, and the narrator then notes, “Three or four ladies sitting close to me continued talking quietly. ‘Well now, what is the most difficult thing to give up in this world? Let each of us give her opinion on this,’ someone suggested.”¹⁹ Suzuki Hiromichi and Mori Masahito have pointed out how many of the descriptions in the first several responses to this question, and even the thatched-hut setting of the discussion, rely on *Genji*, *The Pillow Book*, *The Izumi Shikibu Collection* (*Izumi Shikibu shū*, mid-eleventh century), and other well-known Heian-era texts.²⁰ The praise for how wonderful letters are, for instance, is directly indebted to *The Pillow Book*—and *The Nameless Book* author in no way tries to cover her tracks:

Another lady remarked, “If I were to have to think of something almost too marvelous to exist in this world, then I would think of letters. Since the subject often comes up in *Makura no Sōshi*, it is hardly original to say how letters appeal to the heart.... Even if somebody is living far away and you haven’t seen

¹⁶ Royall Tyler, trans., *The Tale of Genji* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002), p. 461.

¹⁷ The uneasy relationship between the literary arts and Buddhist beliefs during the Heian period has been outlined elsewhere. See D. E. Mills, “Murasaki Shikibu: Saint or Sinner?” in *The Bulletin of the Japan Society of London* 90 (1980), pp. 4–14 and *passim*.

¹⁸ Marra (1984), p. 132. 一の巻の末つ方、方便品比丘偈などよりやうやう忍びてうちあげなどすれば。Kuboki (1999), p. 179.

¹⁹ Marra (1984), p. 133. 三四人はなほみつつ、物語をしめじめとうちしつつ、「さてもさても、何事かこの世にとりて第一に捨てがたきふしある。おのおの、心におぼされむことのたまへ」と言ふ人あるに。Kuboki (1999), pp. 180–181.

²⁰ For several examples, see Suzuki Hiromichi, “Mumyōzōshi jobun zakkō: Hiwadabuki yashiki no jujutsu ni kanshite,” *Sonoda Gakuen Joshi Daigaku ronbunshū* 1 (1967): 13–20, and Mori Masato, “Mumyōzōshi no kōzō,” *Kokugo to kokubungaku* 55: 10 (1978): 29–42.

him for many years, you get the feeling that you're standing right in front of him when you just get a glimpse of one of his letters."²¹

By referencing classic works of literature from the past as she covers recognized poetic and literary topics such as “tears” and “the moon,” Shunzei’s Daughter claims her place as part of that tradition, and establishes herself as a careful reader of those texts.

Eventually, *monogatari* fiction is proposed as “the most difficult thing to give up in this world.” The women fondly recall scenes from various chapters of *The Tale of Genji*, and then move on to discuss characteristics of leading women in the tale. One of the women mentions Tamakazura as belonging to the category of “Pleasant Women” (*konomoshiki onna*). The same speaker offers the following opinion of Tamakazura: “She was self-confident and clever, and I think that what she said about Genji, ‘In this world we cannot see such an unparental heart,’ doesn’t fit her character at all.”²² That is to say, Tamakazura is usually so pliable that her behavior in this instance is striking. The poem by Tamakazura that is cited here is the one she addresses to Genji in the middle of the so-called “Defense of Fiction” part of the “Fireflies” chapter. The context here is that Genji is pointing to various *monogatari* romances from the past as precedents to start up an affair with his adopted daughter, and Tamakazura parries with her poem that scolds him for his rather unparental expressions of desire. This is the key moment in *The Tale of Genji* text where Murasaki Shikibu puts forward an extended discussion of the usefulness of tales. Much more than idle entertainment, they provide valuable vicarious experience and teach their readers life lessons. Shunzei’s Daughter no doubt had this “Defense” in mind as she constructed her own discussion of tale fiction. Just as Murasaki emphasizes that tales can be true to life and therefore useful, the women in *The Nameless Book* also show a predilection towards works that can be applicable to real-life circumstances.

In *The Nameless Book*, it is clear that truth and realism are prized. The fantastic and the old-fashioned are shunned, partly because they do not reflect true experience, but also for a more utilitarian reason: because they cannot be applied to the practical composition of poetry at court. Antiquated tales with unlikely scenarios did not provide the kinds of model compositions that *The Nameless Book* discussants seem to be seeking. As mentioned previously, the quality of any particular tale is often contingent on the poetry, and the quality of the poetry is often measured by the usefulness of the examples. The unmistakable emphasis on poetry and the act of composition in the women’s discussion of their favorite tales, along

²¹ Marra (1984), p. 134. また、「この世に、いかでかかることありけむと、めでたくおぼゆることは、文こそはべれな。『枕草子』に返す返す申してはべるめれば、こと新しく申すに及ばねど、なほいとめでたきものなり。遙かなる世界にかき離れて、幾年あひ見ぬひとなれど、文といふものだに見つれば、ただ今さし向かひた心地して...。」 Kuboki (1999), pp. 182–183. For more comparisons, see Abe Motoko, “*Mumyōzōshi shōkō: Makura no sōshi no eikyō ni tsuite*,” *Shōkei Daigaku kenkyū kiyō* 27 (2004): 17–25. Abe cites a similar passage from the Nōin-bon version of *The Pillow Book*. One of her points is that many of the specific turns of phrase come from the Nōin-bon rather than other manuscript lineages. The particular passage on “letters,” for instance, does not appear in the major English translations of the text (Ivan Morris’s, *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), and Meredith McKinney’s, *The Pillow Book* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006)), both of which are based on other manuscript versions of the text.

²² Marra (1984), p. 141. 「...あまりに誇りかに、さかさかしくて、『この世にかかる親の心は』など言へるぞ、あの人のおさまにはふさはしからずおぼゆる。」 Kuboki (1999), p. 195.

with the focus on true-to-life scenarios, funnel into a central proposition of *The Nameless Book*: that women should be afforded the opportunity to compile an official anthology of poetry.

All of the first eight imperial collections of Japanese poetry were compiled by exclusively male editors, usually working alone, but sometimes as part of a committee of as many as six, along with their male imperial patrons. A second impetus for composing *The Nameless Book*, in addition to elevating vernacular fiction as a worthy literary genre, may have been to suggest that women should be allowed to participate in the anthologizing process. *The Nameless Book* dovetails these two motivations by providing a compelling pedigree of feminine poetic prowess to pair with the fact that almost all of the most important tales of the time were written by women—the first and foremost example, of course, being *The Tale of Genji*.

The second *monogatari* taken into consideration is *The Tale of Sagoromo* (*Sagoromo monogatari*, ca. 1080), composed by a lady-in-waiting known as Senji. Much as the women in *The Nameless Book* admire *The Tale of Sagoromo*, which is praised as second only to *Genji* among Heian tales, they find fault with its fantastic ending. In the tale, the hero Sagoromo rises to become emperor, and his father is given the honorary title of the Horikawa Retired Emperor, a fact that the women find absurd. Other works, such as *The Tale of the Hollow Tree* (*Utsuho monogatari*, tenth century) and *The Tale of Matsura* (*Matsura no miya monogatari*, late twelfth century) are similarly criticized for being “fantastic” or “devoid of realism.”²³ One of the women goes so far as to say about *Sagoromo*, “I feel that this is the work of someone without a grain of common sense and I feel utterly disappointed. His father, the Minister, also became a Retired Emperor, and is called the Retired Emperor Horikawa, no less! A novel is surely absurd if it isn’t realistic.”²⁴

By contrast, there exist a handful of texts that, for lack of a better term, were known throughout most of their history as “non-fictional *monogatari*,” a genre distinct from both traditional tales (*tsukuri monogatari*) and historical fiction (*rekishi monogatari*). The women in *The Nameless Book* show that they are keenly aware of the difference between a piece of fanciful fiction and a narrative that was “based on a true story,” as it were. In the following quote, one of the women suggests that *Tales of Ise* (*Ise monogatari*, tenth century) and *Tales of Yamato* (*Yamato monogatari*, tenth century) are categorically different from the other works they have been talking about because they describe things that really happened:

A certain lady in the group raised her voice and declared, “When I think about these novels, I feel that they are nothing but fabrications, full of falsehoods. So let’s talk about literary works that report things that

²³ Marra (1984), p. 418. 「むげにまことなきものどもにはべるなるべし。」 Kuboki (1999), p. 257. The comment is applied to the *The Tale of Matsura*, a story purportedly by Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241), uncle to the author of *The Nameless Book*.

²⁴ Marra (1984), p. 295. 「大臣さへ院になりて、堀川院と申すかとよな。物語といふもの、いづれもまことしからずと言ふなるに、これは殊の外なることどもにこそあんめれ。」 Kuboki 1999, p. 234.

really happened. I've heard it said that *Ise Monogatari* and *Yamato Monogatari* both describe actual events, and so they must be marvelous works."²⁵

The woman observes that it is precisely because these tales describe things that really happened that "they must be marvelous works." Furthermore, and this is a key transition in *The Nameless Book*, they are marvelous because they have good poems that are included in imperial anthologies. Continuing the discussion of these two "true" tales, she offers, "If you want to know whether the poems in these tales are good or bad, then you have only to look at *Kokinshū*, and you'll find that all the good poems in these two tales have been included in the anthology."²⁶

There is a definite connection here between *monogatari* that are based on true events, the poetry composed upon those occasions, and the real-life collection of what is probably the single-most-influential poetry anthology in the Japanese literary tradition. As the first imperial anthology of Japanese poetry, *Kokinshū* (*The Collection of Ancient and Modern Times*, ca. 905) established the standards for court poetry for centuries after its compilation. In *The Nameless Book*, the argument that women should be given an official commission to compile an anthology builds from this point onward. Shunzei's Daughter proceeds through several sections that serve to express a desire for permanence, convey a wish to bequeath works to posterity, and articulate an aspiration to have one's name remembered in future generations. One woman straightforwardly remarks, "Why don't I possess the talent to write a work that would last into posterity?" and laments that passing away without having one's name "recorded for future generations is really sad."²⁷

All of this lays the groundwork for a central proposition of the text, as stated by one of the conversing women: "If only I were given the chance to be like the Lay Priest of the Third Rank and to assemble an anthology!"²⁸ Here, "Lay Priest" refers to the author's adoptive father Fujiwara no Shunzei, and the compilation is the seventh imperial anthology, *Senzaishū* (*Collection of a Thousand Eras*, ca. 1187). Another one of the women complains,

²⁵ Marra (1984), p. 418. 例の若き声にて、「思へば、皆これは、されば偽り、そら事なり。まことにありけることをのたまへかし。『伊勢物語』『大和物語』などは、げにあることと聞きはべるは返す返すいみじくこそはべれ。」 Kuboki (1999), p. 258.

²⁶ Marra (1984), p. 418. 「そのうちの歌のよし悪しなどは、『古今集』などを御覧ぜよ。これによきとおぼしき歌は入りはべるべし。」 Kuboki (1999), p. 258.

²⁷ Marra (1984), p. 422. 「さらば、などか、世の末にとどまるばかりの一ふし、書きとどむるほどの身にてはべらざりけむ...世の末までも書きとどめられぬ身にてやみなむは、いみじく口惜しかるべきわざなりかし。」 Kuboki (1999), pp. 263–264.

²⁸ Marra (1984), p. 421. 「あはれ、折につけて、三位入道のやうなる身にて、集を撰びはべらばや。」 Kuboki (1999), p. 262.

“There is nothing more deplorable than the fate of being a woman. From olden times there have been many of us who have loved emotions and studied the arts, but no woman has ever been chosen to compile a collection of poetry. This is really a great shame.”²⁹

The act of compilation is, of course, not an end in itself. It is a part of a process of presenting models, defining aesthetics, and influencing the practical composition of future poetry. *The Nameless Book* even suggests as much: one of the women notes that because anthologies contain poems on topics (*dai*), “they are very useful when you are suddenly called upon to write a poem quickly.”³⁰ It is perhaps ironic that the anonymous women in this text known as *The Nameless Book*, a generically humble title, seem to have a preoccupation with making a name for themselves.

To conclude the discussion of the framework of *The Nameless Book*, one other model must be mentioned, the so-called “Rainy Night Discussion” [*amayo no shinasadame*] from the “Broom Tree” chapter of *The Tale of Genji*. When one reads these two texts side by side, the parallels are quite specific and unmistakable. Both *Genji* and the old nun in *The Nameless Book* become listeners in a group discussion about character traits of women and men. The following passage from *The Nameless Book* is clearly patterned on the “Rainy Night Discussion” from *the Tale of Genji*:

One of the ladies asked, “Among the men, who is the most wonderful?”

A lady answered, “It would be hopeless to try to establish now whether Minister Genji’s behavior was good or bad. There is no need even to bring the matter up. Still, there are many places in the novel where we may wonder whether it would have been better for Genji to have acted otherwise.

The Palace Minister was close to Genji from his youth and never parted from him. He began the Rainy Night Discussion by reciting the poem,

‘Though we left / The Palace / Together,

The moon of the sixteenth night / Does not show me where you are going.’”³¹

Referred to here as “*amayo no on-monogatari*” or “A Tale on a Rainy Night,” the *Genji* scene is both modeled and referenced in this segment of *The Nameless Book*, a section known as the “appraisal of men” (*dansei-ron*). A comparison of the contexts, however, reveals a significant role-reversal. In *Genji*, a group of young men discuss the types and characteristics of women, whereas in *The Nameless Book*, the ensuing discussion has a group of older women

²⁹ Marra (1984), p. 421. 「いでや、いみじけれども、女ばかり口惜しきものなし。昔より色を好み、道を習ふ輩多かれども、女の、いまだ集など撰ぶことなきこそ、いと口惜しけれ。」 Kuboki (1999), p. 263.

³⁰ Marra (1984), p. 421. それを見ても題の歌はいとよく心得ぬべし。 Kuboki (1999), p. 262.

³¹ Marra (1984), pp. 142–143. また、例の人、「男の中には誰々かはべる」と言へば、「源氏の大臣の御事は、よし悪しなど定めむも、いとこと新しくかたはらいたきことなれば、申すに及ばねども、さらでもとおぼゆるふしぶし多くぞはべる。まづ、大内山の大臣。若くよりかたみに隔てなくて慣れ睦び思ひ交はして、雨夜の御物語をはじめ、もろともに大内山を出でつれど行く方見せぬいさよひの月。 Kuboki (1999), p. 198.

discussing the types and characteristics of men. I shall unfortunately have to relegate to another venue the several other aspects of this text that characterize it as a powerful work of feminist criticism.

Like the “Defense of Fiction” from the “Fireflies” chapter of *The Tale of Genji*, the “Rainy Night Discussion” from the “Broom Tree” chapter also looms large in the imagination of the author of *The Nameless Book*. As mentioned at the outset, *The Nameless Book* is, on a fundamental level, not just a pioneering work of criticism, but also a defense of fiction in its own right. To take the argument a step further, one could even categorize *The Nameless Book* itself as a *monogatari*. While acknowledging the other models noted above, one notes the narrative framework is closest to the fictional world of a romance or tale. Scholars such as Hoshiyama Ken have identified *The Nameless Book* as part of a category of narratives known as “site-specific storytelling” (*ba no monogatari*).³² These typically begin with a gathering of like-minded individuals that are willing to discuss a particular topic at hand. The “Rainy Night Discussion” in *Genji* that Shunzei’s Daughter clearly took as a model also falls into this category, and that discussion itself has been referred to as “A Tale on a Rainy Night” in *The Nameless Book* and elsewhere.³³

Thus allow me to conclude by suggesting that *The Nameless Book* is a meta-*monogatari*, a tale about tales, and as such is advocating the potential of these fictional romances. It is proposing that *monogatari* are an entirely appropriate genre for offering literary criticism—for appraising and assigning value to poems, to character traits, and to other *monogatari*. It argues a defense of fiction, but also *embodies* a defense of fiction by exemplifying the fact that *monogatari* can serve as a vehicle for literary analysis. It takes Murasaki Shikibu’s argument, that fiction can be useful, to a new level of discourse by showing not only that tales are worthy of focused criticism, but also that they can be the vehicle of that focused criticism. Much as Murasaki asserts that fiction offers insights that can have an effect on real life, Shunzei’s Daughter makes the rather ingenious move to use this same framework to suggest change, to argue for an anthology collected by women, and to offer compelling reasons for this proposal as well.

Returning to the notion of *The Nameless Book* as a *monogatari*, and the power of fiction to effect change in the real world, it is perhaps not a surprise that two of the oldest extant manuscripts of *The Nameless Book* actually refer to it as a *monogatari*. The Shōkōkan Library manuscript is titled *Kenkyū monogatari* (after the era name during which it was produced), and the Tenri Library manuscript is titled *Mumyō monogatari*, or *The Nameless Tale*. The work should be considered a success as a *monogatari*, as a piece of criticism, and as a proposal for change. The fact that eventually, an anthology known as *Fūyōshū* (*Collection of Wind-Blown Leaves*, ca. 1271) is compiled by a team of women under the direction of the Empress Dowager Ōmiya-in, and that *Genji* and other tales do indeed become the focus of serious study from the twelfth century onward, I think speaks, on several levels, to the power of fiction.

³² Hoshiyama Ken, “‘Ba no monogatari’ no keifu ni okeru *Mumyōzōshi*: Kikite rōni no keireki oyobi nenrei ni chakumoku shite,” *Nihon bungaku* 56: 6 (June 2007): 13–22.

³³ For more on the parallels to the “Rainy Night Discussion” from *Genji*, see Mori Masato, “*Mumyōzōshi* no kōzō,” *Kokugo to kokubungaku* 55: 10 (1978): 29–42.

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