Tree Spirits (kodama) and Apparitions (henge): Hagiwara Hiromichi's Analysis of Supernatural Events in Yûgao and the Uji Chapters

Patrick Caddeau

In the last major *Genji* commentary compiled in the Edo period, *Genji monogatari hyôshaku* (1854–61), the poet, author and scholar Hagiwara Hiromichi (1815–63) sums up the similarities surrounding the stories of Yûgao, the frail beauty pursued by Genji in his youth, and Ukifune, the tragic figure who occupies center stage in the final chapters of the tale. By emphasizing the connection readers so often make between the two characters Hiromichi attempts to persuade readers of the relevance of his own interpretive strategy in appreciating the text.[1] He begins by highlighting similar details between Yûgao and Ukifune to illustrate their underlying structural relationship. These details allow him to establish that they are parallel characters when viewed from the perspective of the larger structure of the story. This parallel structure makes the story of Yûgao's demise resonate even more profoundly when it is revisited in the tragic events of the Uji chapters. In the *Genji monogatari hyôshaku* ('general introduction'; 1854), Hiromichi writes:

> Yûgao had no one to rely on. Ukifune, too, was faced with the absence of anything to depend upon. Thus we can consider them to be a pair according to the structural principle of parallel characters [*shôtai*]. Furthermore, the 'certain estate' (nanigashi no in) [where Yûgao is taken by Genji] and the house at Uji [where Ukifune is hidden by Kaoru] are parallel settings.[2] On the one hand Yûgao is caught between two characters: Genji and Tô no chûjô. On the other, Ukifune is caught between two characters: Kaoru and Niou. In terms of the timing, Yûgao is taken by Genji from Gojô on the fifteenth night of the eighth month {which is inauspicious according to the lunar calendar} while Ukifune is

---

1 An earlier draft of this paper was presented at a symposium on *The Tale of Genji* sponsored by Stanford University (25–26 April 2003). I wish to thank my discussant at the symposium, Thomas Harper, for his helpful comments and suggestions.

2 Genji takes Yûgao to the Nanigashi estate (Nanigashi no In) in the "Yûgao" chapter: NKBZS 1: 233; Tyler 64. Kaoru takes Ukifune to Uji in the "Azumaya" chapter: NKBZS 6:86; Tyler 1002.

taken by Kaoru from the house in Sanjô on the evening of thirteenth of the ninth month {also reputed to be an inauspicious day}. In both cases the women are taken by carriage. These similar details provide a clear indication that they are *structural parallels*. One of them is fatally taken by a malevolent spirit [*henge ni torikurosare*], while the other is abducted by a tree spirit [*kotama ni kasume toraretaru*] making them *parallel characters* on this account as well. Employing the same technique {of the brush} with all these details the author indicates that in the case of women who are too retiring there awaits an unpleasant fate.[3]

In mentioning the 'unpleasant fate' of these characters Hiromichi tries to capitalize on the Edo period convention that interpretation strike a note of moral authority to establish its legitimacy. However, his ultimate goal is not to moralize, but rather to persuade readers that the structural aspects of the story reveal the precision with which the text of the tale is composed. Throughout his introduction and commentary on *Genji* he points to the effective use of detail to establish that ambiguous passages in the text should not to be dismissed as the result of oversight on the part of the author, but rather as legitimate elements of the story. He argues that certain ambiguities and omissions in the text are just as important in their function as more obvious structural elements like the parallel construction of the Yûgao and Ukifune stories. In fact, Hiromichi argues that the ambiguity surrounding specific passages and events in the tale are evidence of the author's literary skill at its most sophisticated. Following his summary of the Uji chapters he writes:

The author has made use of the technique of omitting details not because it would be troublesome to have included them, but rather she consciously leaves things out because they are things she felt should be omitted. The text of this *monogatari* is particularly detailed and complete. In common language one might say that it is the kind of style that allows one to scratch in all the places that itch.[4]

---

3 Hagiwara Hiromichi, *Genji monogatari hyôshaku* "sôron" (1854) reprinted in Akiyama Ken, ed. *Hihyôshûsei Genji monogatari*. (1999) 2 : 342.

4 Hagiwara Hiromichi, *Genji monogatari hyôshaku* "sôron" (1854) reprinted in Akiyama Ken, ed. *Hihyôshûsei Genji monogatari*. (1999) 2 : 347.

Hiromichi's pairing of Yûgao and Ukifune relies upon notions familiar to most readers, but his emphasis on the aesthetic value of the text's ambiguity transports *Genji* commentary into new territory. Previous scholars were primarily concerned with such issues as resolving variations among different recensions, advancing philological and moral interpretation, and identifying historical models and poetic allusions. Hiromichi integrates the most advanced theories of his day on all these issues where they facilitate comprehension of the text. However, by drawing upon this familiarity with the composition and interpretation of popular fiction he also brings a keen awareness of literary style to his reading of *Genji*.[5] This emphasis on the sophistication with which *Genji* was written ultimately leads him to consider aspects of the text long overlooked or dismissed by previous scholars. One sentence in the passage translated above is particularly useful in this regard. Of Yûgao and Ukifune he notes:

> One of them is fatally taken by a malevolent spirit, while the other is abducted by a tree spirit making them *parallel characters* on this account as well.

Hiromichi draws our attention to two events never directly described in the text. Both events involve the workings of malevolent and violent forces that defy clear physical description. There are other examples of spirit possession and the supernatural in *Genji*, but the indistinct forces acting upon Yûgao and Ukifune make their cases of spirit possession stand apart from other depictions of the supernatural in the tale-where more clearly identifiable spirits are involved.[6] Precisely because Yûgao and Ukifune are subject to forces operating beyond what is visible or knowable to characters in the tale, readers must put together disparate details from various chapters to gain a clearer understanding of these events. Hiromichi goes on to identify

---

5 After his *Genji* commentary, Hiromichi is best know for his continuation of Takizawa Bakin's *Kaikan kyôki kyôkakuden* (Biographies of Chivalrous Men; 1849) following Bakin's death in 1848. The chapters Hiromichi completed are nearly indistinguishable in style and structure from those written by Bakin himself leading modern scholars to remark on Hiromichi's extraordinary appreciation for subtleties of literary style. See my *Aesthetic Persuasions* (forthcoming) for a more detailed analysis on this point.

6 Most notably, the examples of spirit possession which stand in contrast to those of Yûgao and Ukifune are those of the *ikiryô* involved in Aoi's death and the *shiryô* which tormented Onna san no miya. See Abe Toshiko, "Shukuse to mono no ke" in *Kokubungaku* ((45: 5) 1980: 12).

the possession of Yûgao as one of the five prominent examples of remarkable literary technique employed by the author that often escape the notice of the unsophisticated or unfamiliar reader. He argues that it is a sign of the author's skillful command of the brush that her depiction of Yûgao's death by the possession of a spirit defies comprehension until the Rokujô Haven is introduced later in the text.[7]

If we examine the bulk of premodern *Genji* commentary, few scholars pursue instances of the supernatural at work in the tale. While the ambiguous identity of the malevolent spirit possessing Yûgao receives little treatment, the even more puzzling events surrounding Ukifune's possession are often overlooked, deliberately simplified, or distorted. Tsusumi Yasuo notes in his survey of *Genji* commentary that Yûgao's death receives only a cursory and tentative treatment in most works before the Edo period.[8] This may be due to the fact that depictions of the supernatural and spirit possession were fairly common in literature of the tenth and eleventh centuries.[9] With more than enough thorny textual issues and poetic allusions to track down scholars probably didn't feel compelled to comment on the significance of a scene familiar from other fictional works of the period.

However, as we approach modern *Genji* commentary the analysis of these two scenes does not dramatically increase. In part, this absence of commentary speaks volumes. Scholars writing on *Genji* for most of its thousand year history chose to annotate

---

7 Hagiwara Hiromichi, *Genji monogatari hyôshaku* "sôron" (1854) as it appears in Akiyama Ken, ed. *Hihyôshûsei Genji monogatari.* (1999) 2: 347–48. The other five examples he cites are: 1) The "Kumogakure" chapter is not missing, but omitted by design; 2) The "Yume no Ukihashi" chapter is not incomplete, but is perfect as it is 3) it is not a matter of oversight that characters are not assigned fixed names throughout the text; 4) readers only know that Genji is headed in the direction of Rokujo when introduced to the tragic story of Yûgao. The thread of the Rokujô Haven being implicated in the death of Yûgao is not revealed until several chapters later; 5) readers are at first stunned by the opening of the "Makibashira" chapter in which Tamakazura has been married to Higekuro and the gap that exists between this scene and the end of the previous chapter. It is only after they read further into the chapter that they understand Higekuro's obsession with Tamakazura well enough to understand how he could have made this happen.

8 Tsutsumi Yasuo, "Genji monogatari chûshakushi ni okeru chusei to kinsei" in *Kokugo to kokubungaku* ((67: 1) 1990)15–18.

9 Abe Toshiko, "Shukuse to mono no ke" in *Kokubungaku* ((45: 5) 1980: 11).

aspects of the text that allowed them to show how issues outside the text--ideological, moral, poetic, or historical--were relevant to what could be found in the text. The supernatural does not attract much annotation in most commentaries because its greatest significance is to the fictional world created by the text and the psychological disposition of the characters inhabiting that world. Depictions of the supernatural in a work of fiction are of little relevance to anything outside that text. However, Hiromichi is ultimately concerned with literary technique and its ability to produce effective fictional prose so he finds depictions of the supernatural in *Genji* worthy of his attention. In this regard, Tsutsumi Yasuo argues that Hiromichi's annotation of Yûgao's spirit possession stands out as an important landmark in the transition away from the speculative and ideological concerns of medieval commentary towards the more rational and analytical approach of modern textual analysis. Hiromichi's concern for the broader scope of events in the text applied in conjunction with close textual analysis makes this transition possible.[10]

Hiromichi died in 1863, before he was able to publish a detailed annotation of individual chapters beyond "Hana no En" so most analysis of his scholarship is limited to the comprehensive interpretation of the entire tale found in his introductory remarks to the *Genji monogatari hyoshaku*. The fact that he does not include specific annotation on the Uji chapters should not divert our attention from the importance of his remarks on Ukifune's spirit possession.[11] To place Hiromichi's interpretive stance regarding the supernatural within a more meaningful context we can turn to two annotated editions of *Genji*: the *Kogetsushô* and the *Nihonbungaku zensho Genji*. Kitamura Kigin's *Kogetsushô*, first published in 1673 and reprinted many times during the Edo and Meiji periods, was the most widely circulated edition of *Genji* in early modern Japan. The first fully revised edition of *Genji* to appear in the Meiji period was published in 1890 by Hakubunkan as part of the *Nihonbungaku zensho* series edited by scholars closely associated with the establishment of academic programs devoted to the

10 Tsutsumi Yasuo, "Genji monogatari chûshakushi ni okeru chûsei to kinsei" in *Kokugo to kokubungaku* ((67:1) 1990) 23–24.

11 I am not aware of a previous work addressing Hiromichi's remarks on the spirit possession of Ukifune.

study of 'the nation's literature,' *kokubungaku*, as they liked to call it.[12] The annotation associated with Ukifune's mysterious disappearance as it appears in these two editions provides a useful framework for appreciating the significance of Hiromichi's treatment of the supernatural in the tale.

The Disappearance of Ukifune

The "Ukifune" Chapter closes with Ukifune in tears, the gentlewoman Ukon by her side pressing her to decide between two men. Incapable of imagining herself living with the decision to go to either Kaoru or Niou, Ukifune's thoughts return to the possibility of her own death and the resolution it will bring to so many troubles. Ukifune is unable to eat, unable to decide, and so overwhelmed by the possible consequences of her actions that she is no longer able to communicate with those around her. Earlier references in the chapter to people drowning in the nearby Uji River, tragic love triangles, and Ukifune's despondent demeanor suggest that her gentlewomen and her mother fear something terrible lies ahead. Familiar with her inner thoughts that everyone would be better off if she were dead and that she might as well throw herself in the river, readers expect the worst. These suspicions are confirmed as the next chapter, "Kagerô," opens with the panicked cries of gentlewomen discovering Ukifune is no longer with them. A literal translation of the opening lines reads:

> There, attendants were wildly searching for the missing young woman, but they did not find her. Since it was like the morning after scene from a tale in which a maiden has been abducted [under the cover of darkness] I shall dispense with further details.[13]

The *Kogetsushô* includes the following gloss for this opening line:

> "There (*kashiko niwa*)..." :
> (1 : *Sairyûshô*) Refers to the place where Ukifune threw herself {into the river to

12 Gaye Rowley notes that the editors of this series (Hagino Yoshiyuki, Ochiai Naobumi, and Konakamura Yoshikata) came to be seen as "Japan's first scholars of National Literature (*kokubungakusha*)." *Yosano Akiko and The Tale of Genji*, 60.

13 NKBZ, 6 :191; SNKBT 5 :264; Tyler 1047.

drown}.

(2: *Kachô yôjô*) At the end of the Ukifune chapter we saw the young woman contemplating suicide. Evidently a description of her throwing herself into the river was not thought necessary since no one {in the story} knows what happened.

(3: *Kogetsushô shisetsu*) From this opening line to the words, "dispense with further details" is narration by the author.[14]

At first the *Kogetsushô* style of commentary appears tedious and unnecessarily complicated. Three distinct notes from different commentaries spanning three different centuries fill the available white space at the top of the page to annotate the opening phrase of the chapter.

However, a close reading of the original text reveals how vital each piece of information is to comprehending the peculiar nature of Ukifune's disappearance.

When confronted with the text alone, determining the context for the word 'there' of the opening sentence is probably the first task that comes to the reader's mind. The first annotation supplies the necessary contextualization by citing a commentary compiled in 1528, the *Sairyûshô*: *There* refers to Uji, where we last saw Ukifune at the end of the previous chapter and more specifically, the place where her gentlewomen suspect she must have thrown herself into the Uji River. Her attendants are desperately searching for some sign of her whereabouts, but the only thing they can point to is the last place where they suspect she was: *There*! Sadly, their search is in vain, literally 'it comes to nothing' (*kai nashi*).

The second notation, taken from an even earlier commentary, the *Kachô yôjô* (1472), explains that readers need not expect to learn the specifics of Ukifune's disappearance since characters in the story itself do not know what happened. The poignancy of the opening phrase begins to reverberate more clearly with this comment. Ukifune's gentlewomen are not searching everywhere. The narrator's opening words suggest

14 This quotation taken from Inokuma Natsuki's supplementary comments to a revised version of Kitamura Kigin's *Kogetsushô* (*zôchû kogetsushô*) published in 1890–91 and reprinted with additional revisions in 1927 by Kôbunsha publishers, Osaka.

that they are drawn to a specific place because they have good reason to fear she must have thrown herself into the river. Readers are invited to imagine the frantic cries suggested by the opening line of the chapter: "*there*, she must have jumped from *there*." Tragically, the only people Ukifune can rely on do not even know what has happened to her because *they* were *not there* when she disappeared. The annotation reminds us of the fact that Ukifune is gone and no one witnessed her disappearance. That is *all* we know.

Finally, a comment attributed to Mikata Jôan, the scholar whose lectures inspired the compilation of the *Kogetsushô*, explains that this information is provided from the perspective of the author's narration of the story.[15] The annotation here literally refers to the words of the fictional narrator as 'the author talking' (*sakusha no katari*). Enomoto Masazumi has observed that Hiromichi's definition of the term authorial intrusion (*sôshiji*) in his general introduction to the *Hyôshaku* and his consistent application of the term to his line by line annotation of the first eight chapters of *Genji* provide the first case where we see the term being applied in a way consistent with a modern understanding of the concept of authorial intrusion.[16] Since Hiromichi's line-by-line commentary for the "Kagerô" chapter is not available to us we can only hypothesize that his sophisticated understanding of authorial intrusion afforded him a somewhat more nuanced appreciation of this scene than we find in annotation from the *Kogetsushô*. The author intrudes here to acknowledge that a melodramatic scene such as this is probably familiar to readers from previous tales they have heard. She tells us she knows better than to dwell on a description because there is nothing new to be gained though such repetition.[17] It is equally possible that in drawing attention to the clichéd nature of this scene she is playing with her audience's expectations. In keeping with Hiromichi's theory of textual ambiguity we might also imagine that the author's description is deliberately vague here to produce an even greater effect when she later

---

15 Akiyama Ken, ed. *Genji monogatari handobukku* (1996: 96) entry on *Kogetsushô* explains that annotation attributed to the *Kogetshô shisetsu* within the *Kogetsushô* itself is derived from comments made during lectures on *Genji* by Mitaka Jôan.

16 Enomoto Masazumi, Genji monogatari no soshiji, 151–55.

17 C. f. "... Novelists were the first storytellers to pretend that their stories had never been told before, that they were entirely new and unique, as is each of our own lives..." David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel* (Harvard University Press, 2002: 39).

reveals that the events behind Ukifune's disappearance are far from ordinary.

The above analysis of the opening lines of annotation may seem quite cumbersome when described in translation, but it is worth pointing out that the method for deciphering a text in this way would have been more transparent to a well-educated reader of the Edo period. It reflects the integration of textual exegesis, annotation, and interpretive attribution developed in China for the meticulous analysis of classical texts and modified over the course of centuries in both China and Japan to annotate documents ranging from sacred texts and historical chronicles to vernacular fiction. Within this tradition, exegesis was as highly valued as the original text.[18] A command of relevant commentary was often seen as indistinguishable from the process of appreciating the text itself.

While this style of commentary was highly revered in premodern Japan, it seems to have struck some scholars in the Meiji period as being unnecessarily mired in tradition. The *Nihonbungaku zensho* series promised to bring the classics of Japanese literature to a popular audience in a way never before possible. The editors included the following oblique condemnation of the traditional annotated textual format in their "introductory notes" to the first volume of the series:

> Books of old literature are scarce, difficult to obtain, and even the rare volume that comes to light is full of errors and not easy to understand. The reason we publish this series now is to make these books more easily obtainable, more easily readable, and to demonstrate the excellence of the national literature, which stands head and shoulders above Chinese and Western literature in a class by itself.[19]

The appearance of the *Nihonbungaku zensho* edition of *Genji* did signal an important change. Individual volumes in the series were affordably priced and widely available meaning that *Genji* could now be read in the original, in its entirety, by a popular

---

18 See David Rolston's *How to Read the Chinese Novel* (Princeton University Press, 1990).

19 "Hanrei" in Hagino et al, *Nihon bungaku zensho*, 1:1 as translated by Gaye Rowley in *Yosano Akiko and the Tale of Genji*, 61.

audience for the first time.[20] During the Edo period parody and summary of the original story were widely available though such works as Tanehiko's *Fake Murasaki and Rustic Genji* (1828–42). Parodies of *Genji* were the province of the masses in the Edo period, but the original text largely remained the property of an elite group of readers despite the success of Kitamura Kigin's comprehensive collation of text and commentary in the *Kogetsushô*. The *Nihonbungaku zensho* edition of *Genji* is elegant and accessible thanks in large part to its simplicity. Similar to Kigin's *Kogetsushô* and Hiromichi's *Hyôshaku*, the body of the original text is reproduced along with space at the top of each page for commentary. To facilitate ease of use, the text is clearly punctuated, broken down into paragraphs, and helpful readings for characters are provided by rubi alongside the text. Unlike previous editions of *Genji*, potentially extraneous information has been stripped from the textual commentary. Annotation is so pared down, in fact, that as you progress beyond the introductory chapters in *Genji* much of the space for headnotes is left blank, providing a visually pleasing white space along the top of the page. As a result, the headnotes, written in simple, direct language, are conveniently placed directly above the relevant passage in the original where even the uninitiated reader can easily locate them. In the *Kogetsushô* and *Hyôshaku* textual commentary for one page often runs into the headnote space for the following page until the commentary and text fall so far out of synchronization that full pages devoted to commentary alone often break up the flow of the main text.

The *Nihonbungaku zensho Genji* is, true to its editors' promise, much more streamlined, rationally formatted, and simple to read. The reader is distracted only by what appears to be the most essential commentary. One byproduct of this streamlined presentation is the tendency to simplify complexities of the original to avoid the type of involved annotation associated with traditional commentary. Nowhere is this tendency more striking than in annotation referring to Ukifune's disappearance. The "Kagerô" chapter annotation so radically simplifies details pertinent to the structure of the opening lines that rumors of Ukifune's disappearance, that she must have thrown herself into the Uji River and drowned, undermine the undeiniably ambiguous tone in the description of her disappearance. Notes running along the top of the text frequently refer to Ukifune's drowning in the Uji River as if it were fact, not rumor. For example, the

20 Gaye Rowley, *Yosano Akiko and the Tale of Genji*, 61.

same opening line of "Kagerô" annotated by the *Kogetsushô* is accompanied by the following gloss in the *Nihonbungaku zensho Genji* :

> "attendants were wildly searching for the missing young woman": Because Ukifune threw herself {into the river to drown} at this place her attendants are wildly searching for her.[21]

After working our way through the *Kogetsushô* the *Nihonbungaku zensho* gloss seems refreshing in its concision. However, nearly all traces of nuanced reading offered by the *Kogetsushô* are lost. The sense that there is much we do not, and cannot, know based on this passage is destroyed by providing readers with an overly succinct and apparently omniscient 'interpretation.' The authorial intrusion, indicating that the author is holding back in her description, is not even brought to the reader's attention.

The cumulative effect of this simplified style of commentary begins to emerge even more clearly as the Uji chapters unfold. In the following chapter, "Tenarai," the Prelate of Yokawa is led to a strange form in the woods which we are soon to learn is the body of Ukifune. As the Prelate and his entourage approach, someone asks, "Are you a demon? A god? Are you a fox spirit or a tree spirit?" to which the *Nihonbungaku zensho* provides the gloss that these are the words of the Prelate himself.[22] A disciple of the Prelate wants to learn more about this strange figure, but the imminent arrival of heavy rain forces them to take her to shelter. The *Nihonbungaku zensho* provides a helpful note here reminding readers that:

> "It looked like it was going to rain heavily..." This refers to the downpour the night after Ukifune threw herself into the river to drown (*Ukifune no jusui*) which corresponds to the downpour mentioned in the *Kagerô* chapter {the night following her disappearance}.[23]

---

21 Hagino et al, *Nihon bungaku zensho*, 12: "Kagerô" 1

22 Hagino et al, *Nihon bungaku zensho*, 12: "Tenarai" 5 (NKBZ 6 :272; Tyler 1079).

23 Hagino et al, *Nihon bungaku zensho*, 12: "Tenarai" 5 (NKBZ 6 :272; Tyler 1079). Note that the NKBZS uses nearly identical phrasing to annotate this passage, with the notable exception that "Ukifune's disappearance" (*Ukifune no shissô*) replaces "Ukifune's having thrown herself into the river to drown" (*Ukifune no jusui*).

The gloss above simplifies things by referring to 'Ukifune's having thrown herself into the river to drown.' This then becomes the convention throughout the rest of the chapter. A few pages later we reach the passage where Ukifune begins to regain consciousness and recount the events surrounding her disappearance. As her speech gains strength she describes her confusion as she went outside to where she could hear the sound of the river. She then describes an encounter with a "most beautiful man" who seemed to have taken her in his arms. She relates that he then left her in an unfamiliar place and vanished. Upon realizing that she did not accomplish what she intended to do (drown herself) she begins to cry. The headnotes for this passage provide the following commentary. (The first note on the page comes without any specific reference to a line of the text.):

> The description of Ukifune's intending to drown herself in the river does not extend beyond the scene at the end of the "Ukifune" chapter so it is particularly interesting to see a detailed description of what she was thinking (*Ukifune no omou kokoro*) at this point in the story.[24]

This note is followed by annotation for the line "a most beautiful man approached me...":

> It seems the spirit appearing before her was that of Niou

The last note on the page provides a specific annotation for the line: "I did not accomplish what I intended to do...":

> This refers to her having thrown herself in the river to drown.[25]

The annotation and interpretation in the *Nihonbungaku zensho* edition focuses exclusively on Ukifune's mental state. The editors invite us to marvel at the remarkable

---

24 C. f. Motoori Norinaga's comment which appears in the *Kogetsushô* at this point (KGS, 3: 942). It is almost the same as the note appearing in the NBZ, but Norinaga's language has been modified to more clearly emphasize that what is interesting about the text here is its description of Ukifune's state of mind.

25 Hagino et al, *Nihon bungaku zensho*, 12: "Tenarai" 15 (NKBZ 6:283-84; Tyler 1083-84).

description of Ukifune's mental disposition when she threw herself into the river. The fact that this passage combines Ukifune's description of her mental state with an explanation for how she arrived at this new location is omitted altogether.[26] As we just observed, the editors glossed over the fact that little was know about Ukifune's disappearance at the beginning of the "Kagerô" chapter. As if to cover up for this oversimplification, readers are now told that the text offers fascinating insights into her mental state when she threw herself into the river. There is no effort made to explain that this passage provides an account of Ukifune's spirit possession and an explanation for how her body was mysteriously transported from the Uji River and into the woods.

The *Nihon bungakuzensho* annotation invites readers to conclude that Ukifune threw herself into the Uji River and the heavy rains carried her body downstream to where the Prelate and his entourage discovered her unconscious form. This conflation of rumor and textual ambiguity makes the story seem much less confusing and, ultimately, far more rational than the text suggests. In fact, it has become something of a convention in *Genji* scholarship to refer to "Ukifune's throwing herself into the river to drown" (*Ukifune no jusui*) when writing about the Uji chapters.[27] However, scholarly editions of *Genji* published after World War II, such as NKBZ and SNKT, are careful to refer to Ukifune's "disappearance" or "abduction" (*shissô*).

Civilization, Enlightenment and the Spirit Possession of Ukifune

Hiromichi's interpretation is consonant with modern scholarship on *Genji*, but curiously his work seems to have been overlooked by scholars compiling the *Nihonbungaku zensho* edition of the text in the Meiji period. I offer the following theory as to why Meiji period scholars omitted Hiromichi's work, specifically in terms of the annotation related to Ukifune's disappearance, but also in terms of *Genji* commentary in general. In developing his interpretive theory on *Genji* Hiromichi drew from his experience as a writer of vernacular fiction and translator of popular Chinese fiction into Japanese. His

---

26 The contrast is readily apparent when seen against the notes in the *Kogetsushô* which alternate between reminding readers that certain details are related to Ukifune's 'disappearance' and her mental state when she went to throw herself into the Uji river.

27 Royall and Susan Tyler, "The Possession of Ukifune." in *Asiatica Venetiana* 5 (2000; 177). This article inspired me to reformulate the basic premise for my argument in this paper.

introductory remarks in the *Hyôshaku* clearly reveal his indebtedness to Chinese interpretive theories of literature. In the eyes of Edo period readers in the market for a readable version of *Genji* these qualities may have been seen as an advantage. However, Meiji period scholars promoting the importance of *Genji* had committed themselves to establishing the uniqueness of Japan's literary heritage. Chinese interpretive theory and the supernatural, which Hiromichi emphasized in his reading of *Genji*, were not aspects of the text they wished to elaborate upon under such circumstances. It is in the spirit of asserting national pride and a greater appreciation for Japan's literary heritage that the *Nihonbungaku zensho* series was launched. Because *Genji* was written in classical Japanese, scholars of national literature invested heavily in the notion that the text could somehow convey the worldview of Japanese civilization before it had become tainted by Chinese influence. Hiromichi's application of Chinese interpretive theories to this work of pure Japanese spirit had little to offer scholars with such an agenda in mind.

Paradoxically, those hoping to assert a sense of pride in the Japanese nationstate and national literature (*kokubungaku*) began flirting with notions of Western Civilization and enlightenment (*bunmei kaika*) at this time. Politicians encouraged the citizens of Japan to abandon the culture associated with the Edo period and to embrace what were perceived to be the overwhelmingly superior aspects of Western civilization. In the early years of the Meiji period things associated with premodern Japan were deemed feudalistic, unenlightened, and unappealing. This zeal to disassociate themselves with an inferior past often led to a radical and irrational rejection of things evocative of the material culture and intellectual life in Japan before Meiji. The shotgun marriage of *kokugaku* to *bunmeikaika* which resulted from this flitation provides us with additional insight into the failure of Hiromichi's scholarship to reach a wider audience. His emphasis on supernatural aspects of *Genji* was highly evocative of Edo period popular literature. Such qualities would have been viewed as particularly primitive and irrational in comparison to Western standards of empiricism and rationalism. It was much more appealing to simplify *Genji* commentary and eliminate references to the supernatural than to incorporate Hiromichi's interpretive insights into a new, popular edition of the text. In particular, the reliance on the supernatural as a plot device was closely associated with the most popular writer of the late-Edo period, Takizawa Bakin. Bakin's most successful work, *Hakkenden*, provides a compelling

example of the central role played by the supernatural in popular fiction of the period. Writers and literary critics of the Meiji period were eager to distance themselves from what they perceived as the irrational and Chinese oriented literary style perfected by Bakin and applied to *Genji* by Hiromichi.[28]

Conclusion

The explanation above relies upon the implied rejection of Hiromichi's interpretive insights due to the absence of his theories in the *Nihonbungaku zensho Genji*. However, by way of a conclusion I would like to provide an additional anecdote to illustrate this point in more concrete terms. In 1890, the same year that the *Nihonbungaku zensho Genji* came out, the critic and scholar Yoda Gakkai (1830–1909) entered into a fascinating debate with the first translator of *Genji* into English, Suematsu Kenchô, concerning the merits of Hiromichi's *Genji monogatari hyôshaku*.

Gakkai chose to promote Hiromichi's *Hyôshaku* at a meeting of the literary society in Tokyo because of the compelling interpretive insights he believed it could provide readers of *Genji* and students of literature in general. In a rebuttal to Gakkai's remarks, Kenchô condemned the *Hyôshaku*. He found Hiromichi's emphasis on the aesthetic value of ambiguity to be completely misplaced. In particular he argued that Hiromichi's interpretive strategy robbed *Genji* of its sense of mystery and beauty. After returning home from the debate with Kenchô, Gakkai recorded the following remarks in his diary:

> Following my talk on the *Genji monogatari hyôshaku* Kenchô remarked: "*Genji* is well written, but whether such complicated principles are present or not is beside the point. Rather, what is important is that it is written in an engaging manner. For later generations to interpret the text in this way produces precisely the opposite effect, destroying its sense of mystery."... Kenchô and I were not in agreement. Concerning the ambiguous passages in *Genji*, he argued that the text did not strictly conform to any compositional principles. He related that when he translated *Genji* into English and showed it to foreigners they often found this

28 Tsubouchi Shoyo's treatise, "The Essence of the Novel" (Shosetsu shinzui; 1885–86) is probably the best know and most influential examples.

aspect of the text to be vexing. "Each chapter in *Genji* has its own particular aura of mystery, but it is not a continuous narrative from beginning to end. It is not necessary to delve into such things as chronological discrepancies [within the text]." He said one should take pleasure in the delicate nuances to be found in each volume and the work as a whole without theorizing about this and that. There were some points I wanted to make in response, but in the end I turned to Kenchô and said that because I had not spent enough time reading the work in its entirety I would leave my comments at that. [29]

Unfortunately, Gakkai's defeated attitude at the end of this debate seems to have been shared by other influential scholars familiar with the interpretive insights offered by Hiromichi. After World War II the child produced by the shotgun marriage of *kokugaku* to *bunmei kaika* grew up and left home, leaving its troubled parents to go their separate ways. It is only after this separation was complete that we again see scholars willing to take Hiromichi's work on *Genji* seriously again.

—Amherst College—

29 Gakkai nichiroku kenkyûkai, *Gakkai nichiroku*, (1992; 8:114)