Medieval Jongleurs and the
Making of a National Literature

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TOWARD THE RECONSTRUCTION OF A
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Barriers of Tradition
During the last half century, since Muromachi fiction first attracted some small stirring of interest in the academic world, a number of barriers have inadvertently been erected that greatly hinder our understanding of literary developments from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. In general these barriers have easily withstood subsequent attack because they are composed of elements well known to resist the force of logic and evidence: tradition and predilection. Perhaps the most pernicious barriers are, first, an elitism with regard to what is worthy of literary study; second, the inordinate dependence of literary scholars on concepts borrowed from political history; and, third, a traditional scholarly vocabulary consisting of terminology that only inadequately applies to the literary phenomena observable during the Muromachi period. Specifically this means there is, first, a tendency to make light of, or even to ignore, medieval literature produced outside the purview of the imperial or the shogunal courts and thus a reluctance to see literary value during the Muromachi period anywhere but in nō drama or classical poetry. There is, second, a surprising willingness to partition literature into political periods, or rather a disinclination to concede that literary history may flow at a pace and in conformations unrelated to the occurrence of wars or the rise and fall of governments. As a result, literary history books are littered with such all-but-meaningless terms as “Muromachi period literature” or “gekokujo literature” (the literary products of sociopolitical upheaval) which we are

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forced for the time being to employ for want of well thought out and agreed upon alternatives. It is clear that the time has come to give Japan’s many rich and varied periods of literary output names that reflect the unique characteristics of the genre, the literary movements, or the writers, and not the politics of the age. Third, there is almost no mutually agreed upon scholarly vocabulary (outside of the fields of no and classical poetry) whereby we can discuss the development of new forms of medieval literature except for such widely and inadvisably used terms as otozōshi (companion stories) and Nara e hon (Nara picture books), anachronistic appellations whose origins remain unclear and whose use is disconcertingly inconsistent among scholars. Clearly neither is a suitable vehicle for the advancement of theoretical studies of medieval fiction.

The barriers of inappropriate period and genre terminology are outside the main concerns of the present essay, but the problem of elitism must be disposed of before we can start to build our theoretical framework. Elitism is difficult to counter because it is apparent that Japanese literature itself began with the patronage and participation of the elite and by the tenth to twelfth centuries had been honed to an aesthetic perfection inconceivable outside leisurely wealthy circles. As a result, the standards and preoccupations of the classical court tales or monogatari and various forms of classical poetry have exerted, among connoisseurs, an influence so overpowering that these standards have become for many scholars, even today, a measure for all other periods and genre. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the Ashikaga shogunal court continued to patronize aristocratic literary arts, and it encouraged the application of courtly aesthetics to new arts, such as no performances, which under other circumstances might not have felt the reach of formality.

Interpretations of Japanese literary history based on such elitist standards have nurtured several common predispositions, observable among both Japanese and Western scholars, that must be laid to rest before we can make progress in understanding the unique nature of medieval literature. The first of these views is that the Muromachi period is a dark age for nonpoetic literature. Although the classical Heian monogatari definitely met its end during this period, there is no evidence whatever to support a “dark age” thesis, irrespective of the gloom one may be tempted to find from time to time in the political, economic, or military history of the age. In the past two or three decades a sufficient number of medieval texts has been uncovered to prove the fertility of these centuries.

The second notion is that the medieval period is really essentially a transitional period for fiction that in some enigmatic fashion links the Heian monogatari and the Edo period ukiyo zōshi of Ihara Saikaku (1642–1693).

It should be obvious that four hundred years is far too long a period to be accurately described as transitional. Even the two hundred and fifty years or so of the Muromachi period represent too long a stretch of time and too wide a variety of unique literary developments to belong to a “transitional” category. To use such a term because the before and after of the so-called transition is well understood (i.e., Heian and Edo literature), while the product of the intervening Kamakura and Muromachi periods is still insufficiently studied, is to do an injustice to scholarship and to discourage research.

A third view, and the one most frequently repeated, is the contention that medieval fiction is the degenerative end of the Heian monogatari tradition, or worse, a vulgarized imitation by the masses of what used to be a high art. Coupled with this view is the related notion that during the Muromachi period there first emerged a “shomin-ization,” i.e., a popularization (vulgarianization) of Japanese literature. Whether this is considered a degeneration of aristocratic literature or the bursting through of a common people’s literary energy, almost all writers customarily associate popularization with a lowering of quality. That there were no new rivals to the Genji monogatari is indisputable, and as far as aristocratic monogatari are concerned there was a rapid drop in both quantity and quality. But this was due less to the “popularization” of this genre than to the altered state of aristocracy itself and to a decline in its interest in the monogatari genre. If by popularization we mean the rendering of literature intelligible to everyone from top to bottom of the population, then that phenomenon did occur. Nevertheless, as we shall see, such popular literature was not an outgrowth of the fading Heian monogatari tradition; it was a new type of literary art fashioned by medieval religio-secular jongleurs.

The “quality” of this literature must be measured differently from that of the Heian monogatari. One cannot speak of the first literary products of a newly emerging corporate culture as degenerated anything. That the writers or tellers of new forms of literature chose the picture-scroll format or a medieval version of the classical language does not mean they were laboring to imitate Heian traditions; such choices were natural as the only readily available options. But surface similarities to earlier models should not lead us to expect to find the old aesthetics as well. Nor should it blind us to those things which were truly revolutionary about the new literature. Clearly the three persistent views outlined above are actually different expressions for one and the same elitist view of Muromachi literature. Once we remove the aristocratic monogatari from the fulcrum of the argument, therefore, all three hypotheses of a dark, vulgarized, transitional age of
The Concept of Shomin-ization and the Machishū

The reverse of elitism can also be found in studies about medieval literature; it manifests itself in a propensity to see literary developments in the light of upwardly mobile common people. The literature of the period, therefore, if not referred to as gekokujō literature, is sometimes described as literature of the common people (shomin-teki bungaku). The concept of the shomin-ization of Japanese literature, however, also has its drawbacks. Such terminology does more, perhaps, to obscure than to clarify the actual observable processes of literary change. Shomin-ization implies a shift in class. In the context of literature this means a shift either in the class of the creators of literature, in that of the audience, or in both. Changes did indeed occur: there was a widening of the circle of people involved in one way or another in literary arts, and the most energetic contribution to the new forms of literature came largely, but by no means exclusively, from people outside the court or the houses of the military elite. But we emphasize shifts in social class at our peril. There is nothing unusual in a swelling of the numbers and types of participants in a nation’s literary production as the written language slowly penetrates to all levels of society. Every nation has experienced the identical phenomenon. It is not the simple and natural widening of the circle of literates alone that changes literary history. The newly literate learn from the previously elite and model their skills on the examples provided by their mentors. New learners are not the iconoclasts of literary tradition; they are, by and large, its fascinated and devoted followers. In some societies where written literature is looked upon mainly as a practical means to political or economic advancement, literacy takes on special and sometimes fearful dimensions. In Japan, nonpoetic writing in the native language, however, was never viewed primarily or even secondarily in this light. The growing literacy of the people at large, therefore, is not the major factor in the revolutionary changes that occurred in Japanese literature. In the case of renga, for example, where practitioners could be found from court to street corner, it was not the newly literate stable boy nor the prostitute who shook the poetic world with verbal experiments in poetic scurrility or lewdness, but priests with sound literary educations.

Related to the question of social class is the widely discussed hypothesis of Hayashiya Tatusuburō, according to which Muromachi culture as a whole is the product of a newly formed group, the machishū. Consisting of the politically enfeebled aristocrats, the newly powerful bushi, and the craftsmen, manufacturers, merchants, and others in commercial activities in Kyoto, the machishū were the city dwellers at whose hands an essentially urbanized set of cultural values and way of life were created. Although this stimulating thesis has created important breakthroughs in our view of medieval history, in the context of medieval fiction it is somewhat less satisfactory. The problem is that it is difficult to find any hard evidence to support the existence of machishū as major literary producers of fiction. The only known author of medieval fiction is one samurai-turned-priest, who may or may not have been a machishū. In other cases where we can make fairly sound guesses as to authorship we find, for example, an overwhelming number of instances of noncity origin: priests of Nikkō (Gemmu monogatari), Koya hiji (Sanmin hōshi), sekkyōshi of Kashima (Bunshō no sōshi), etc. Other medieval works such as the Heike monogatari and the Soga monogatari, as we shall discuss below, were the products of wandering religio-secular performers, who by their very nature are the antithesis of city dwellers. There are certain works set in Kyoto which depict the successful rise in life of plebian heroes. Fictional works of this kind are frequently alleged to be the product of the energetic and upwardly aspiring towns men because they are considered to reflect the resourcefulness of this social group (Monogusa Tarō, Fukutomi gōshi, Issun bōshi). Yet even these works do not, on close examination, support the thesis of machishū authorship. These heroes do not succeed because of their resourcefulness as machishū: Issun bōshi was a mōshigo (child born as a result of prayer) of Sumiyoshi shrine and Monogusa Tarō was a mōshigo of Zenkōji as well as the abandoned child of an aristocrat. For such as these, success was inevitable, predetermined by fate. The intent of the Fukutomi story is not to urge people to exploit their humble talents to gain success, but rather to warn against envying the talents of others and to recommend that one be satisfied with his own place in life. Even in that curious genre irui monogatari that centers on animals, birds, or other irui (nonhumans), almost all the upwardly mobile irui marriages (i.e., an animal marries into...

1. See Professor Hayashiya’s essay in this volume as well as his basic studies on the subject, Chōsei bunka no kichi (Tokyo, 1955) and Machishū (Tokyo, 1964). For discussion of his theory by other scholars, see Hayashiya Tatusuburō, ed., Kyōto no reki (Tokyo, 1967–), 3 (1968): 545 ff., 569 ff.; 4 (1969): 95 ff.
a human family) end in failure, in the taking of the tonsure, and in salvation. In short, the main agent in medieval fiction is fate, not ambition; the essential core of Muromachi literature is restoration of the proper world order, not gekokujo. There is much evidence that the machishū made intent audiences and supported the theater and book commerce that converged on Kyoto; as recipients of the literary arts, the machishū were certainly active as viewers, patrons, and buyers. It is still questionable, however, whether the evidence will support the machishū as the major creators of medieval fiction; the present essay will suggest different candidates for this role.

**Characteristics of Medieval Literary Arts**

Before discussing the specific originators of Muromachi literature, it is of great importance that we be aware of the fundamental difference between Japanese literary arts whose quality depends upon the development of an aesthetic theory and those literary arts whose basic strength lies not in conforming to theoretical aesthetic codes but upon capturing an audience and delivering an emotional impact. The first type (waka, renga, and in its later development nō), whose history was built upon a growing body of theoretical and critical works (karon, renkaron, nōgakuron, for example), was reinforced by collections of practitioners' works (wakashū, rengashū, yōkyoku) that were felt to conform well to stated aesthetic principles. The quality of such literary arts is judged less by the intensity of emotional response elicited in an audience than by how fully the product represents a mastery by the practitioner of the aesthetic principles involved. Typical in the practice of such literary arts is the importance of a judge who is also a practitioner of the highest skill.

The second type of literature (Heikyoku, etoki, sekkyō bushi, Kowaka bukyoku, kijūruri, kōryū, and later bunraku and kabuki) is represented by arts that have no history of aesthetic codes, no body of criticism upon which practitioners based their activities. Their primary aim was to draw the listener deeply into an orally delivered narrative and to cause, above all, an emotional response (nostalgia, tears, laughter, pride, joy, astonishment, gratitude, religious conversion) in an audience. Such literary arts were transmitted from practitioner to practitioner mainly through repertory texts and were taught by oral mimesis alone. Perfection was sought in the verbal, aural, and in some cases visual techniques which elicit emotion, not in recondite wording employed to demonstrate erudition nor in the mastery of poetics that ensure the creation of an aesthetic atmosphere. In poetry and nō, only the best practitioners were expected to appreciate fully the best products. In Heikyoku, etoki, sekkyō, and jūruri, it was crucial that

the majority of one's audience, no matter how disparate, be reached and moved, despite ignorance of the artistic principles or techniques employed by the performers. For simplicity's sake, although the terms are not fully adequate, I will call these two types of literature practitioner-oriented canonical literature and audience-oriented repertory literature.

Several literary art forms lie someplace between these two major and distinct types of Japanese literature. Although I mentioned nō as an example of practitioner-oriented canonical literature, such a definition is somewhat anachronistic. Save for the intervening hand of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408) it is highly likely that nō would have remained an audience-oriented repertory literature where it originated and where its companion kyōgen remained until the seventeenth century, despite a certain aesthetic self-consciousness stimulated by its close association with nō. Probably it was due to the influence of renkaron, to which he was exposed after his association with Yoshimitsu, that Zeami (1363–1443) wrote his nōgakuron, and this act thrust nō into a kind of hashigakari (bridge) position linking the world of pure oral mimesis with that of canonical aesthetics. In contrast to waka and renga, nō had always been performed by one group for another group. No matter what the original intent of den'gaku and san'gaku nō performances might have been, however, the objectives shifted considerably after the fourteenth century. An intent to move the majority of a disparate audience of nonpractitioners gave way to an intent to meet the aesthetic standards of a highly informed audience which included many amateur practitioners of the vocal, instrumental, or choreographic aspects of the art. Such changes isolated nō even more from its point of origin and propelled it further into the literary world of the practitioner-oriented canonical arts.

The classic monogatari, too, lies between these two basic types of literature, but for different reasons. Like poetry and poetic diaries with which it had a close association, the monogatari had always been written with little consciousness of an audience apart from the small numbers that constituted the literary salons of the court. In short, the readers and writers were for all practical purposes the same people; they wrote for each other and not for a general audience. In subsequent periods the enthusiasm generated by the Genji monogatari sprang largely from the poetic and aesthetic interests of poets and antiquarians—not, as far as our evidence goes, from the interest of aspiring fiction writers or from any audience demand.

Most of the literary arts that emerged during the middle ages belong clearly to the category of audience-oriented repertory literature. These arts were not canonical but repertory arts, and they were not based on aes-
Vocal Literature

There was one other characteristic that was fundamental to medieval Japanese literature: all of the many new forms of literature that blossomed during the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries involved the art of voice projection or the intoning of a prose/poetry text—a literature I shall call “vocal literature” (onrei bungaku). Some practitioners added to their cantillations various sounds, rhythms, or musical settings produced by means of vocal cries, the beat of a fan on the palm, or by drum, bell, biwa, or sasara. To certain types of vocal literature body movement or even choreography were added, while others used such props as picture scrolls and books, clay dolls or puppets, religious artifacts such as gobei, or costumes and masks. But no matter what the literary art form was, be it denkaku or sanagu mō, kyōgen, etoki, Heikyoku, enkyoku, Kowaka bukyoku, ko-jōran, sekkyō, or any of the many other vocal literary arts that sprang out of medieval soil—all were arts of intoned and embellished literature, and all such literature was a unique product of the age. Of equal significance is the fact that none could have existed without texts, whether read from, declaimed from memory, or improvised upon according to predetermi
ned techniques.

I would like here to clarify the singular role played in Japan by literature involving voice projection and to define more precisely the term onrei bungaku. Japanese “vocal literature” is quite a different thing from what we normally speak of as “oral literature” (kōshō bungaku or sometimes dense bungaku). I choose the word “vocal” as opposed to “oral” in order to eliminate the inapplicable and misleading nuances that the term “oral literature” carries. Oral literature is a product of and flourishes in a world of illiteracy. It is most often employed in reference to word arts in societies that have no written language or it is applied to stages in a society’s literary history prior to the introduction of script. If used in the context of a modern nation, it is associated with folklore, with the fireside storyteller whose fairy tales flourish in some remote corner of society where few have as yet learned to read or write fluently or where such skills play a minimal role. Thus oral literature usually implies illiteracy on the part of the producer of a story, on the part of the audience, or both. Oral literature did and does exist in Japan.

Japan’s vocal literature, however, shares few characteristics with the illiterate world of oral literature. From the beginning of its history, vocal literature has had firm ties to the written language; indeed it was usually based upon written texts: sutras, chronicles, sermons, and many other types of writing. Further, it was more often than not recorded into daishon or libretto texts. Illiteracy, among either practitioners of vocal literature or audiences, is a peripheral factor. Some practitioners were highly literate, as were preachers such as the shōdōshi of the Agui school, or actor-playwrights such as Zeami. Some, blind from birth, obviously had no knowledge of or use for writing, but we know in the case of the blind lute-playing priests—the biwa kōshi, for instance—that many worked in an environment where the colleagues on whom they depended were both sighted and literate. Others, such as the great master of Heikyoku, Akashino Kakuichi (d. 1371), became blind in adulthood after having achieved a high level of literacy as a priest. There were of course other performers of vocal literature who are depicted in contemporary picture scrolls as little more than blind beggars, and that in itself would seem to assure their illiteracy. But records support our assumption that at least some performances by such men and women were based on the same general repertory as that of others in their calling who were more literate and prosperous. Thus, even illiterates had close ties to written texts.

The audience of vocal literature should not be thought of in terms of illiterates either. The records make it clear that audiences represented the full range of literary accomplishment, or lack of it, from scholar-aristocrat to literate beggar. At any of the command performances in the mansions of the wealthy elite we assume a literate audience. A street-corner performance of the same repertory would be more likely to attract an audience in which literacy was rare. At way stations on pilgrimages, at temples, and on numerous other occasions the audience for a performance of vocal literature, as we can see depicted in contemporary emaki, might include representatives from several such social levels. It cannot be denied that wandering priests and nuns, whose aim was the conversion of as broad a base of the Japanese people as possible, created or adapted vocal literature on a level easily understood by everyone. But literacy or illiteracy was not a concern. If their narratives avoided demonstrations of erudition, it was

2. It is a particular feature of Japanese literature that a highly developed written tradition and a highly developed vocal literary tradition existed simultaneously until the seventeenth century; furthermore, many types of vocal literature from this period remain alive today. Kenneth Butler, “The Heike monogatari and Theories of Oral Epic Literature,” Seske Daigaku Bulletin of the Faculty of Letters 2 (1966): 37–54, provides an excellent analysis of the relation between written and oral traditions in the Heike monogatari; Butler uses the term oral literature but is actually describing what is defined here as vocal literature.
where it could not be appreciated by the ear. If they placed a minimal emphasis on aesthetic subtleties, it was because their touchstone was not a literary canon but the human heart; the appeal was direct and emotional and transcended social class.

The Literary Revolutions of Media and Content
A profusion of diverse performers, both religious and secular, were active between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries and contributed to these developments. Two specific types, however, played major roles in the formation of Japan’s first national literature and in determining both the format and content of the vocal, reading, and dramatic literature of subsequent centuries. Both of these two types were performers of vocal literature and yet they were fundamentally different from each other. The first were the etoki or “picture explainers,” men and women who used paintings and illustrated texts as visual props and whose narrative performances played a crucial role in introducing the emaki and chon to all levels of society (see figures 1–5). The second general type were the biwa hōshi and goze groups, blind men and women whose vocal arts created a universally loved repertory of stories inspired by the Gempei wars that holds a prominent position in Japan’s literary history (see figures 6–7).

Together, these two types of medieval jongleurs did more than probably any other groups to build what can be called Japan’s first body of truly national literature and to spread it throughout the country. We will examine in some detail what is known of the first, the “picture explainer” group—men and women known respectively as etoki hōshi (picture-explaining priests) and Kumano bikuni (nuns of Kumano).

In order to understand the roles played by these medieval jongleurs it is important to keep in mind the basic literary revolutions of which they were both product and participant. In broad terms there were two. The first, which I have discussed elsewhere in more detail, is the twelfth-century revolution. Here we witness a radical and massive shift of focus from salon literature for reading aloud and for private reading to a new “media” literature where narratives become so closely allied to the emaki through the practice of etoki that the visual illustration of literature and its oral delivery came to equal if not surpass in importance the text itself. Painting, story, chanter, and even the sounding of musical instruments (often pure sound rather than music) combined to create a total audio-visual experience rare, if not unique, in the premodern history of world literature. The process can quite supportably be termed the cinemization of Japanese literature, and the product, “media literature.” (I use the word media much as we use it today for the television and cinema arts.) Inherent in this shift was a clear separation between author-performer and audience. Literacy or the lack of it was not an issue. This was not a class revolution but a conceptual revolution, one that affected attitudes toward narrative literature from the top to the bottom of society. This distinct and dramatic shift to literature as media can clearly be attributed to the activities of talented, enterprising, and often devout religio-secular jongleurs, etoki of various sorts who, with no intent whatsoever to revolutionize literature, brought about a major change in the course of Japanese literary history. Without a recognition of what was started by the twelfth-century revolution we will fail to see, for example, that the art of Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724) was a natural and inevitable culmination of this medieval media literature. His art was based on the ingenious combination of puppet, samisen, and joruri chanter, and in this regard he achieved what no man had successfully done before. But this combination of the visual aid, the audio accompaniment, and the chanter/narrator was already by his day deeply rooted in Japanese society and represented the mainstream of nonpoetic, non-Chinese literature in Japanese literary history. Chikamatsu’s puppet, samisen, and joruri chanter are predated by four or five hundred years; their predecessors were the Kamakura-period picture scroll, the biwa, and the pre-joruri chanting style of the twelfth-century shōdō priests of the Agui school, battle singers, etoki, and other practitioners of media literature who have yet to be fully researched.

Whereas the twelfth-century literary revolution was a conceptual one affecting medium, the second major revolution of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries radically altered content and produced Japan’s first “national literature.” Although this second revolution took place in at least two stages, the agents involved were again medieval jongleurs. No longer court-oriented, the new narratives were conceived on battlefields and sacred mountains, in shrines and temples, and reflected, as had the media revolution, the energy born out of the wedding of newly risen Amidist sects and native Shinto cults. During the first stage the subject of love that had dominated court literature was replaced by the suffering and salvation of military heroes and deities as well as themes that reveal the anxieties and concerns of the new and turbulent age. The highly developed aesthetic vocabulary of the court gave way to modes of expression that reflected the techniques of religio-secular chanters and responded to the requirements of viewer-listeners. By the fourteenth century the creative surge of new military and religious narratives had come to an end. A new stage of secularization was in motion, however, that was to produce a body of literature known and loved by people in all walks of life: Japan’s first national literature.

A National Literature
By “national literature” I do not, of course, mean the whole body of literature produced by a nation nor even the certain unique and highly developed literary arts by which a nation wishes to be known abroad (for Japan, nô, for example, or haiku). On the contrary, I refer to a combination of themes, heroes and heroines, predicaments, ethical dilemmas, resolutions, and emotional attitudes which are, as a composite, unique to a given nation but which at the same time are not the product or property of a particular literary coterie at any one level of society. A national literature is a certain core of literary works the content of which is well known and held dear by the majority of people across all class and professional lines, a literature that is a reflection of a national outlook. Such literature never
shocks or revolutionizes; it is constituted of favorite themes that recur again and again and of which the people never tire. It gives comfort because, as a composite, it fits the national character. For this very reason it may be the least exportable of literary products, the least appreciated or understood beyond national borders. This national literature may, indeed must, cross genre lines. It is substance rather than form. *Heike monogatari, Gikaki, and Soga monogatari*, for example, and the medieval *engi-honji* narratives that circulated with or interacted with them, are products of this fourteenth-century revolution. They are “national literature” because they contain all the treasured themes and sentiments that Japanese at all levels of society wanted to hear recounted again and again. Their subject matter permeated major literary genre from *nō* and medieval fiction to *kowaka* and *joruri*, to *kabuki*, *ukiyo-zōshi*, *yomihon*, and even to *Meiji* novels and modern cinema and television. How forcefully they have spoken, even to the late twentieth century, we can observe, for example, in some of the masterpieces of Mishima Yukio.

A national literature cannot develop if a society is isolated into geographical pockets or fragmented by stringent class lines. Neither of these was the case, however, in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Japan. But it is not enough to say, as many have, that Muromachi literature was created when the aristocratic *kuge-bushi* culture of Kyoto was transported to provincial centers and when local cultures were carried to the city to be refined and polished and to vie for attention. The creation of a national literature involves more than just a stirring of the pot. The ingredients of Japan’s national literature were a cataclysmic event, a religious response, and the artistic utilization of both by medieval jongleurs. The themes, the heroes, the predicaments that gripped the imagination of everyone during this period, that permeated every literary genre, that created new ones, and that proved to have a retentive power that has lasted centuries sprang specifically and primarily from the cataclysmic events of the Gempei wars and from the magico-religious world of the deities with whom the warring factions were associated. The Gempei catastrophe struck home on all levels of society and for centuries subsequent wars and disasters were measured by it and subsumed under it; religious proselytizers established links between these events and the healing powers of local deities; religious-secular narrators then bore the product from one corner of Japan to another. No body of literature had, until then, been so universally embraced. For the first time Japan in the Muromachi period came to share one body of heroes and heroines, one sense of pathos, a consciousness as to what constitutes tragedy, a more or less unified attitude toward such problems as suffering, resignation, self-sacrifice, the transience of the individual yet the immutability of the social order. Even a national ethic, a national sentiment, was formed that was without question the product of
the religio-secular missionary-jongleur of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. During these two centuries they had built a body of myth that loomed larger than the central mythology of the Kojiki and Nihongi ever had or would, and whose heroes and heroines replaced at center stage most of the almost legendary celebrities of the Heian period as well. Japan's medieval jongleurs created a new literature, a panorama of life attitudes in repertory, that not only determined the nature of much of Edo period literature but which remains alive today as national lore.

THE MAKERS OF A NATIONAL LITERATURE

Etoki
It has been suggested that a revolution took place in the twelfth century when the mainstream of narrative literature shifted to an audio-visual media. It may well be asked what is all this about a "revolution," since the Japanese have always had a great deal of illustrated literature from at least the mid-Heian period. We must be careful, however, in discussing the audio-visual revolution to distinguish between the reading aloud of illuminated texts and a performing of the emaki. In the former, illustrations are only supplements to the literature; the paintings and the literature they illustrate, though related, may be appreciated independently. In the latter, literature and pictures were integral parts of a total experience, and they cannot be considered separately without the danger of misunderstanding their value and function. Their relationship is analogous to picture and text in the context of film or television: neither can exist alone meaningfully.

The performance of emaki emerged during the twelfth century in major shrines and temples through an activity known as etoki, or "picture explanations," performed by etoki hōshi or "picture explaining priests," who were sometimes also called simply etoki, "picture explainers." Engi emaki (illustrated histories of shrines and temples and of the origins of the deities worshiped there) and kōshūden emaki (illustrated biographical works depicting events in the lives of important priests and founders of sects) were displayed in temples on certain occasions and an etoki hōshi would give an etoki performance by providing a narrative for the viewers. The practice of etoki must have had a long history in Japan. Since the etoki of wall

4. As just one example, Atsumi Kaoru, in her Heike monogatari no kiwai deki kenkyū (Tokyo, 1962), has demonstrated clearly the evolution of ethical attitudes through an analysis of various texts of the Heike monogatari. Kenneth Butler has also endorsed this view in "The Heike monogatari and the Japanese Warrior Ethic," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 29 (1969): 93–108.

5. Ruch, "Religious Picture Scroll."

paintings and scrolls was a Buddhist activity known in China, it seems probable that priests imported the practice to Japan along with many other religious customs sometime after the introduction of Buddhism. The illustrations used in China were of three types: murals, horizontal scrolls, and hanging scrolls (usually several to one set). In Japan, the earliest known examples were murals: the so-called Shōtoku Taishi eden, which portrayed events in the life of Shōtoku Taishi (573–631) and which decorated the inner walls of the Hōryūji in Nara and the Shitennoji in present-day Osaka, temples of which Shōtoku Taishi was the founder-patron. The earliest documentation of an actual etoki performance of the Shōtoku Taishi eden, however, is not until the twelfth century when Fujiwara Yorinaga (1120–1156) mentions several such occasions in his diary, Taiki. Yorinaga appears to have requested etoki every time he went to worship at Shitennoji, so perhaps this was the customary practice for aristocrats at the time. He mentions that after offering prayers before a portrait of Shōtoku Taishi he went to the picture hall and had etoki of Shōtoku Taishi eden performed for him.

It is difficult to determine what the men were like who first performed etoki in the temples. There is no documentary evidence from Yorinaga’s day to establish the social status or rank of these priests. In later years this category of temple personnel came to be referred to as etoki hōshi, the term hōshi (priest) normally being an appellation for people on a very low level in society who performed religious and semireligious ceremonies for shrines and temples. People in such a category were also known as sanjōman (residents of the sanjō) because the institution with which they were associated permitted them to live in a part of its tax-free property known as sanjō in exchange for their services, which included the performance not only of ceremonial tasks but of such menial chores as cleaning and gardening. The performance of the etoki of treasured engi and eden murals or scrolls for aristocratic patrons who came to worship at temples was certainly not a menial task. It is reasonable to postulate that aristocratic patrons who requested special performances received them from priests of appropriately elevated rank. In general, however, such highly specialized performing arts seemed to be the province of people from the bottom level of society who were associated with temples but not fully involved in religious pursuits. This phenomenon, found in many medieval performing arts, has not as yet been adequately explained.

Research concerning etoki has been hampered by the fact that there were at least two distinct types of performers who bore the appellation etoki, but no attempt has been made to treat them separately. One is the temple etoki hōshi. We actually know almost nothing about him personally except that he performed engi and eden emaki in the temples and received a fee. There are no pictures of him, and so we do not know what he looked like, but many examples of the visual props he used remain. The other etoki, however, is an entirely different type of man. Medieval paintings are extant that show him at work as a secular artist by the roadside and in the marketplace. We know precisely what he looked like, but we have no known examples of the pictures he used. The secular etoki is depicted in Sanjōhishin shokumin uta awase, a Muromachi emaki dating from sometime in the Bummei period (1469–1487). This etoki (figure 1) is clearly not a priest but is dressed as a low-ranking samurai. On the lid of the open traveling case in front of him rests a large folded painting with loops by which it can be hung in front of an audience by the roadside or wherever he is called to perform. In action, he would accompany himself on the biwa while delivering his narration; stopping now and then, he would point with a pheasant feather on a stick to the pertinent scenes hanging before him.

Unfortunately, in the several extant versions of this crucial picture of the secular etoki his paintings remain folded and we do not know their subject matter. The poet-priest Ikkyū (1394–1481) inadvertently helps us to know at least one item in the lay etoki’s repertory. In his Jikaisō, Ikkyū tells us that one day a fellow disciple, Yosō, brought in a portrait of their master and, unrolling it, urged him to look at the words he had prevailed upon the master himself to inscribe. In a bitting comment Ikkyū writes that Yosō at that moment looked just like an etoki who interrupts his playing on the biwa to point with his feather and say: “That is Hatakeyama Rokurō. These are Jirō and Gorō of the Soga clan.” Ikkyū had obviously seen an

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7. As early as the Tang period in China, priests served as popular lecturers and storytellers in Chinese temples, and the texts for these lectures or stories are called pien wen (Japanese, hen bun). To date there is no evidence that Japanese texts are translations of pien wen, but the practice of using illustrated texts for oral performances had been observed by Japanese priests in China (Zenin saw such a performance in Ch'ang-an, for instance) and the possibility of direct influence is great. The most important research on pien wen in English is in Eugene Eoyang, “Word of Mouth: Oral Storytelling in the Pien Wen” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1971). See also the following studies: Umezu Jirō, “Hen to henbun,” Kokka, no. 760 (1955): 191 ff.; Okami Masso, “Ekki to emaki-ezōshi,” in Nikkō emakimono zenshū (Tokyo, 1960), 6: 39–49; Akīyama Terukazu, Heian jidai seizōka no kenkyū (Tokyo, 1964); Konishi Jin’ichi, “Shidō bungaku,” in Minzoku bunka bunko, 5, Chūsei bungo to minzoku, ed. Wakamori Tae, pp. 103–108; and Kawaguchi Hisao, “Tonkotō henbun no seikaku to Nikkō bungaku: Ekki no sekai,” Nikkō bunka 12, no. 10 (1963): 27–41.


9. Taiki, items under Kyūtan 2 (1146)/9/24, 1147/9/14, 1148/9/14, 1148/9/17, and 1148/9/21. For the original text, see Taiki, ed. Takato Chûzō (Tokyo, 1898), pp. 158 ff.

10. The pheasant feather pointer was no doubt used to protect the delicate pigments of the painting.

etoki performance of episodes from the Gempei wars. Further, the nature of his remarks makes it clear he assumes everyone had seen such a performance and would therefore immediately recognize the etoki’s mannerism he has mockingly pointed out.

Figure 2 shows a lay etoki playing his biwa in the marketplace in Itten shinin eden (1299). This etoki looks just like his colleague in the Sangūmban shokanin uta awase, though he dates from two hundred years earlier. We are struck by the fact, however, that he is not performing etoki (no paintings are hung or spread, no traveling box is nearby), but clearly he is in the act of playing his biwa. We are left to speculate: is this an etoki caught at a moment of relaxation strumming randomly on his biwa, or does he represent the lay etoki profession before it had adopted visual props and before it came to use the name etoki?

It has been maintained that some temple etoki hōshi were blind and that their “picture explanations” were actually a vocalization of memorized material. This is a highly controversial point, and there is confusion as to whether etoki were blind or not. One source of confusion may be that sometime between 1318 and 1330 a resident of the Toji sanjo, referred to as the lay priest Fujitsugu, made a successful application to become an etoki hōshi, prompting a flurry of protest from blind groups. This incident has been interpreted to mean that etoki hōshi had always been blind and therefore represented the threat a sighted man posed to their exclusive right to the etoki profession. But it is not at all certain who the protesting blind groups were, nor is it precisely clear why they were protesting. It seems just as logical to assume that the controversy centered not on a sighted person becoming an etoki but on a sighted person applying to be an etoki with the intent of accompanying his performances on a biwa, the instrument used as a means of livelihood by blind people for many centuries. There is no evidence that etoki of eden or engi had ever been accompanied by a biwa. Yorinaga’s frequent notations about etoki performances in the twelfth century never mention the biwa or other musical accompaniment. Neither does he mention blindness. Further, an analysis of engi emaki such as Kegon engi, later used as visual props for etoki performances in temples, does not support a thesis of blind etoki hōshi. Indeed, all the evidence points to etoki who memorized or extemporized on their narrations but who read the snatches of conversation written on the pictures of the scrolls as they reached out to point to scenes.

At some point in history, then, either a temple etoki hōshi had to take up the biwa or a secular sighted person competent on the biwa had to conceive of the notion of adding the visual dimension of emaki to his art. The latter alternative seems more likely, since there developed no subsequent tradition of engi etoki to the accompaniment of the biwa, although there did emerge a tradition of secular, sighted, biwa-playing etoki. Possibly it was the lay priest Fujitsugu himself who took that first creative step. In any case it was shortly thereafter, during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, that etoki as lay professionals were seen and heard everywhere. They were frequently hired for an afternoon or evening’s enjoyment of vocal literature together with artists of Heikyoku or nō and puppet performers.

In addition to the temple etoki performer of religious murals and scrolls and the secular etoki performer by the roadside or at the mansions of the wealthy, there was a third type, the “salesman of the faith.” In the face of financial crises in the temples and as a result of a rising pitch of evangelical fervor, particularly among the Amidist sects, these etoki hōshi traveled the countryside with their kakejiku (illustrative hanging scrolls) and emaki to proselytize and to raise funds for their home institutions. We do not have evidence to call the missionary etoki hōshi a transition between the other two types of etoki; probably by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries all three types of etoki were at work simultaneously. Without question, however, it was the missionary type and the lay performer who played a crucial role in popularizing the emaki and in helping to establish on all levels of society a body of narratives known and loved by all.

Kumano Bakuri
Kumano bakuri, or the nuns of Kumano, were the female counterpart of etoki hōshi. Very little is known of their origins, but it may be assumed that these nuns, like most professionals with religious names, started their activities at a religious center. As their name suggests, they were probably associated with the three sacred mountains of Kumano, one of the most important centers of popular religion in the middle ages. In spite of the geographical isolation and the difficulty of the roads, Kumano attracted pilgrims in all walks of life, from the emperor on down; a popular saying at the time likened the swarms to “ants on pilgrimage to Kumano” (ari no Kumano matri). Lyrics of popular songs (enkyoku) recounted travels


along the roads to the sacred site, and Tendai shōtō priests from the Agui center in Kyoto included in their proselytizing texts their version of the origins of the divinities at Kumano. Much of this popularity was unquestionably due to the active missionary campaigns which the three shrines of Kumano had conducted at least as far back as the middle Heian period. Agents from these shrines toured the whole country seeking donations, and Kumano bikuni were no doubt among them.

Few records exist concerning these bikuni until after they began their decline, first as entertainers and later as prostitutes. The nuns were apparently known by several names: Kumano bikuni was the most common, but they were also referred to as uta bikuni (singing nuns), etoki bikuni (picture explaining nuns), and kanjin bikuni (money raising nuns), reflecting various aspects of their art or function. From the few pictorial representations of these nuns that exist, although probably none dates earlier than the seventeenth century, we gather a fairly good notion not only of the early religious etoki they performed but also of their later secular activities (figures 3, 4, and 5). Possibly the different Kumano bikuni portrayed are indicative of stages through which the profession passed, from religious to secular; nevertheless, at least from the fifteenth century on, all three types of nun depicted are apparently carrying out their respective activities simultaneously, all under the same broad professional appellation of Kumano bikuni.

Closest to the image of what the original Kumano bikuni were probably like is the one shown in figure 3. Here a woman in nun’s robes with shaven head covered by the usual nun’s zukin sits by the roadside performing etoki along a pilgrimage route where many travelers are sure to pass. She hangs on a little stand a kakejiku depicting a mandala-like depiction of heavens and hells to which she points with a staff as she delivers her narration. The paintings that Kumano bikuni used as visual props were known as Kumano e, jigoku gokuraku e, or rokudai e. Such paintings existed in hanging form (figure 3) or horizontal emaki form as well as in illustrated book form.

Another special feature of Kumano bikuni is that these women proselytizers could gain access to the secluded female members of exclusive households with an ease no male missionary enjoyed. Depicted in figure 4 is a nun visiting a private home and delivering an etoki narrative using a horizontal hand scroll. Her audio-visual performance is an apparent success since it has moved one young lady of the household to tears. No written text is visible in either figure 3 or figure 4, so we must assume that the nun’s narratives were either memorized or composed more or less anew at each performance according to principles of extemporizing on a basic theme. Records exist, however, which indicate that at least some of the nuns under certain circumstances read from written texts. Several mid-fifteenth-century notations, for example, describe mendicant nuns engaged in reading aloud from the Genji monogatari on request.

Kumano bikuni played an important role in the insertion of love themes into episodes about the Gempai wars. The Kumano bikuni shown in figure 5 is a nun in name only, a young woman with stylish hairdo carrying her scrolls or texts smartly in a small box under one arm, a completely secular figure. The close relation between love (even prostitution) and proselytizing is an intriguing subject. For the courtesan who had become a nun and was wandering the country evangelizing, there was only a short step between telling of the sufferings of heroes who had been saved or apotheosized (hongi) and telling of the personal suffering that had led to her own salvation. Indeed, the concept of confession (zange) permeates medieval fiction, and confessions of the agonies of love that hinder salvation (iro zange), if not based on experience, necessitated the invention of stories about the love relationships of famous heroes. Kumano bikuni, as they created and performed episodes of the Soga monogatari, changed heroes who were basically hostile to women into men capable of love. They transformed the Azuma kagami’s Tora, the lover of Soga Jūrō, into a woman like themselves who, at Jūrō’s death, traveled the pilgrimage routes not only to Zenkōji but to Kumano, Tennōji, Kokawa, Yoshino, and Iwaya and whose confessions brought about the salvation of everyone connected with the Soga family. It is easy to imagine the step from iro zange used to convert a listener to iro zange used to arouse prurient interest.

The Kumano nuns sometimes appear in Muramachi literature used as minor characters. In Fusa, Bijin kurabe, and Akiyama monogatari, for example, there are references to Kumano nuns as protectors of stepchildren, an extension of the belief that the Kumano deities took special care of such children. It is possible to imagine that these stories originated in the repertory of the Kumano bikuni themselves, or at least were encouraged and

18. From about the time of the Heike defeat in the late twelfth century, paintings of the tortures of hell or of travels through hell became popular. See, for example, Jigoku zōshi, in Nihon emakimonon gendai, 6 (1960), or Kiyomoto tenjin engi, in ibid., 8 (1965).
20. There was actually a group of nuns called Tora gozen who told the Soga monogatari. Tsukasa Susumu believes this group was closely related to the Kumano bikuni; Monogatari no tenb, in Minzoku minzōto (Tokyo, 1970), 52: 133-155.
conveyed by them. But it is important to realize that in the popular imagination the Kumano nuns, like many other wandering religious agents in the middle ages, were thought of as extensions of the powers of the deities they represented. The nuns became the hands, feet, and voice of Kumano gongan.

Both Kumano faith and life’s normal sufferings were introduced into narratives about Gempai heroes and their families by the Kumano nuns. Their greatest contribution by far to the history of Japanese literature, however, can be seen in the role they played in making the picture scroll, and especially books, a familiar item in the lives of the common people. More than any other factor prior to the commercialization of printing in the Edo period, the proselytizing of the Kumano bikini put books into the hands of Japanese on all levels of society everywhere in the land. Numerous Muromachi-period texts conclude with passages that indicate the stories had been written down and then distributed (i.e., sold, exchanged for a donation, or given away) as part of missionary activity.

The Muromachi story *Kumano no honji* is clearly a product of such efforts by Kumano nuns: its original source is uncertain—a libretto text perhaps or a transcription of an item of vocal literature in their repertory or possibly a written story read aloud and then left with the listener—but it concludes:

If you read this story once, it means you have made a pilgrimage to Kumano once. If you read it twice, you will have gone twice. If you read it five times, it is the same as if you had gone to Kumano so many times. You should read it many times. If you put a copy of this story in your home, then the Kumano deities will enter your house and protect it. You should read this honji to those who cannot read and have them listen to it, so that by hearing it they will be guided both in this world and the next, and will not go to hell.

Another example comes from *Kumachin no sōshi*:

For people who hear this story, to say nothing of those who read it, it will be the same as if they had made thirty-three images of Kannon and worshiped them.

Although passages of this sort have frequently been cited as examples of 21. Matsumoto, pp. 109, 111n.
22. There has always been a close connection between wandering religious agents and wandering peddlers. It was in many ways difficult to distinguish between the religious and the commercial aspects of such pilgrim/pedder/performer activity or to determine which of their roles carried the greatest weight with the practitioners themselves. For more on the subject, see Oshima Tatèhiko, *Oshi zōshi to mindan bunrei*, in *Minzoku mingi sōshi*, 12 (Tokyo, 1971): 112.

the religious or didactic nature of Muromachi period literature, a crucial point seems to have been missed. The little books distributed by Kumano nuns, and probably other religious agents as well, must have been *ōnamaori* or “talismans,” to protect or bring benefits to the owner. Such books should not be viewed in the same context as the works read aloud for pleasure in Heian court society. Nor should these works be judged as literature for private reading such as was made possible on a large scale by the rise of the publishing industry in the seventeenth century. The concluding passage of *Monogusa Tarō* exhorts the owner of this short honji-type story to read the book aloud and let others listen to it at least once a day! Even the most brilliant of short classics could not survive that sort of treatment if the aim was aesthetic enjoyment or even simple narrative interest. The magic in reading these stories lay elsewhere.

Although a number of Muromachi narratives have been recorded in magnificent emaki and ehon, scholars have often wondered, and no one has satisfactorily determined, why so many Muromachi narratives are preserved in an ehon form in which the paintings are so primitive, so quickly done, so childish, in a way, and yet clearly not put together by a child. Usually this particular type among Muromachi period ehon are dismissed as a gekokuṣō phenomenon. They are discussed as if they typify what happens when the semiliterate masses put fumbling hands to an aristocratic art. If, however, we accept the clear fact that the texts of some stories are, more than anything else, talismans or omamori, I wonder why we cannot view this fact in the context of the category of ehon just described and explore what seems an obvious hypothesis: that shrines and temples and other religious agents brought out ehon on a mass-produced scale as omamori and that the people from top to bottom of society took these omamori books home, much as to this day ojuda and omamori of various sorts are purchased as talismans to protect oneself and one’s home.

We know that copies of some medieval stories were almost necessities in the home on certain occasions. Probably in the earliest stages of its evolution *Banshō no sōshi* concerned itself with the benefits of Kashima myōjin and the potency of this deity in answering prayers of childless couples who wanted children. But as jongleurs spread the story around the country, the effectiveness of the book itself as a talisman overshadowed the specific features of its narrative, and *Banshō no sōshi* became a book that was read aloud by every family at New Year’s time as part of the old custom of *yamahajime* (The First reading of the New Year). Evidence of the belief in dera in Kyoto, where Kannon is the central deity, was considered to be under the protection of Kumano gongan. It is therefore natural for Kumano bikini to encourage faith in Kannon.
benefits or rewards and in sympathetically induced success, such books were kept in the house and read aloud.

On this foundation, a direct line of subsequent secular development can be postulated where the production of these books is no longer exclusively in the hands of religious institutions or agents. There is only a thin line of commercial consciousness that separates religious artifact from souvenir. It is known that some medieval stories in ehon form were sold by commercial shops whose inventories included paper products of various sorts (shikishi, tanazukii, papier-mâché dolls, and fans, as well as picture books and scrolls). Among the seals of producers impressed in ehon and emaki can be found those of fan and doll shops of this sort, some of which in later generations emerged as commercial booksellers and publishers.25 Already, therefore, a rudimentary form of publisher-bookseller existed during the Muromachi period, forerunners of the industry that was to play such an important role during the Edo period.26

The small tracts of Kumano bikuni brought about an important, almost revolutionary, change in Japanese literary history during the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Probably not for our twentieth-century reasons, but out of other needs and preferences, books had become a familiar part of Japanese life. Whether devout religious figures with shaven heads and somber robes sing the nembutsu, performing etoki on paintings of hell, and gathering donations for Kumano; whether missionary educators reading aloud from monogatari or performing religious etoki for the ladies of the house; whether stylish secular performers of etoki and singers of ballads; or whether loose companions on the road who had abandoned all pretenses to either religion or literature, Kumano bikuni were familiar and frequent travelers along the main roads of Muromachi Japan. Their repertories, oral and written, religious and secular, traveled the country with them and helped to contribute to a "national literature" known to everyone high and low who heard them perform.

Literature as Magic

In the passage of time from the Kamakura through the Muromachi periods, most magico-religious performers lost their official religious functions and became performers who used their art to earn a living. Some

25. For details on the seals, see Okami, “Machihiti no bungaku,” pp. 372-373.
26. There are several hypotheses as to who painted and calligraphed the anonymous Muromachi period emaki and ehon. These hypotheses range from painters of court and shogunal edo to professional temple painters, independent ebiyoshi, ebi working among the machihiti of Kyoto, and on down to amateur ladies and even children. It is important to note that there is no evidence that either etoki hōshi or Kumano bikuni, the carriers of emaki and ehon, were ever the makers (i.e., calligraphers or painters) of these items.

formed guilds, as did the etoki, biwa hōshi, goze, etc., while a great miscellany of others worked independently. One can call this a secularization or a commercialization of religious or semireligious functions; the secularization process, however, had less to do with a shift in religious attitudes than with economics. Secularization was accelerated, if not actually initiated, by the great financial difficulties in which shrines and temples found themselves at different periods throughout the middle ages. We should not imagine that secularization of all religious arts occurred at once. Men and women proselytizers and performers were cut loose from the financial support of their shrines and temples at different times and for different reasons.

Whatever the case, by the end of the Muromachi period most religious proselytizers had been deprived of their official religious functions. Many, however, never lost their magico-religious aura in the eyes of the populace. The image of the Kumano bikuni as the miko (priestesses) of Kumano myōjin was never far from people's minds; even when their function had become little more than entertainment, the very presence of a Kumano bikuni was believed to bring good fortune to a house where she visited. Goze too were so closely associated in their origins and in their stories with aruki miko and local deities that they seemed to be bearers not only of vocal literature but of a magico-religious power as well.27

A conviction behind almost all Japanese vocal arts before their secularization, and one that adhered to a surprising degree even afterward, was a belief that the souls of deities or ancestors descended through the media of the symbolic prods used in the oral recitation (fan, stick, branch of Sakaki tree, gohei, bow, clay doll). Clearly the Kumano bikuni saw the little books that they urged on the people as having such magico-religious quality. Thus this literature, even when secular in content, cannot easily be separated from the magico-religious qualities that imbued the environment in which it developed. The magic quality of voice projection goes back at least to the intoning of Shinto ritual prayers (norito) and to the reciters of history (kataribe), with roots in prehistory. It is well known that vocal literature of many types was believed to have magical qualities in performance during the middle ages as well. Instances are recorded of ar-
tists performing no and dokugin renga before dieties to get them to heal illness. There can be no doubt that performances of Heikyoku and Soga monogatarî too were believed to have, besides the ability to move the listener, the power to preserve the honor of the great clans, perpetuate their genealogies, reveal the personalities of their leaders, expiate their inner agonies, comfort the tormented spirits of the dead whose last moments were being recounted, comfort those who were left behind, and aid in the salvation of all who heard. Surely the deities and the spirits of Buddhist patriarchs were present when the kôsôden and engi emaki that constituted the great temple treasures were unrolled and etoki was performed. Both biwa hôshi and goze were believed to be blind due to the sins of a former life, and they were convinced that their sight would be restored, if not in this world then in the next, by the religious power of their activities. Jôruri, with its close ties to Yakushi nyorai (the Healing Buddha), also had deep magical roots.28

This was an age when people believed in the wandering of onryô (vengeful ghosts) and a period when those who had suffered and traveled (deities, remnants of fallen clans, tomoseisha, pilgrims, and outcasts) were viewed as having gained special powers. The performers of vocal literature were firmly in this tradition. Vocal literature, which constitutes the bulk of Muromachi fiction, cannot therefore be viewed in purely literary terms either as an aesthetic exercise or as simple entertainment. Such an interpretation will only obscure our research and lead to erroneous and anachronistic conceptions of the meaning of medieval literature. Muromachi vocal literature was more than entertainment or diversion; it was a magico-religious and psychotherapeutic ceremony for artist and audience. In addition to its qualities as entertainment, it calmed destructive demons, cured the sick, protected the home, asserted one’s ties to clan and land, confirmed the compassion of the deities, saved one’s soul, and affected one’s karma.

With the success of commercial activities in the medieval period, another magical quality of literature emerged: the use of literature to achieve material wealth. This is not to be confused with literature that gives practical instruction on how to become a millionaire. Consistent with the age in which it emerged, it was based not on logic or practicality but on sympathetic magic, on a belief in good luck symbols and the power of felicitous words. Kamunom gyoki tells us that there was not a house in the

capital that did not honor Daikokuten and Ebisu, the lucky gods of wealth.29 The view of wealth as a result of luck or fate, together with the shîgen view of literature, must have greatly reinforced the concept of small books as omamori, as we originally observed in reference to the books of the Kumanô bikuni.

Conclusion

The missionary efforts and ultimate secularization of both etoki and Kumanô bikuni thus exerted two important effects on the development of Japanese literature. First, they built a body of vocal literature, a repertory of heroes and themes that permeated all genre and became Japan’s first national literature. This literature was performed for people on all levels of society and served basic needs that were shared by all classes equally: the desire to know about the conflicts and troubles that were afflicting the world, and the need to learn how to come to grips with or how to escape from the fear and depression such calamities brought. Second, as more and more of their stories were transcribed and circulated, books became a familiar part of Japanese life. Thus, long before the Edo period began, commercial production of handmade books had already started and the history of books was established on its future course. By the time Ihara Saikaku decided to seek his livelihood as a professional fiction writer, both format and general concepts of content were predetermined. He initiated no alteration in the former; on the contrary he actually participated in illustrating his own works. As for content, his Kôshoku ichidai onna, to give just one example, is a direct descendant of the iro zange of the Kumanô bikuni.

Other wandering proselytizers and jongleurs played crucial roles in the making of the national literature: Jishô hijiri at Mt. Koya; the shôgi sekkyô priests of the Agui school associated with Mt. Hiei; the biwa hôshi, blind dramatic narrators who played the biwa and who were responsible for the final form of such great works of vocal literature as the Heke monogatari, Hîgen monogatari, Haji monogatari, and Tôkyûki (figure 6); and the goze, blind tsuzumi-playing women chanters whose repertory included narratives related to Kumanô and Hakone deities and whose performances contributed to the final form of the Soga monogatari (figure 7). All of these men and women were major contributors to the mainstream of medieval fiction, and the details of their individual roles in the development of the

28. Legendary origins trace the first jôruri to a monogatari composed in the manner of Heikyoku by a blind chanter in the mid-fifteenth century out of gratitude to Yakushi Nyorai for the restoration of his sight. For a discussion of the doubtful nature of this legend, see C. J. Dunn, Early Japanese Puppet Drama (London, 1966), pp. 11–12.

29. Sakurai Yoshirô, Chuân Nihonjin no shi to kyôgen (Tokyo, 1970), p. 317. Ebisu, Bishamon, and Daikokuten (all representatives of the magic of wealth) appear in kyôgen plays; not only professionals but merchants as well performed dances known as Daikoku mai; ibid., p. 318.
specific stories that constitute Japan’s national literature deserve full and separate treatment.

The stories that are the heritage of their traditions are not only long episodic works—the Heike monogatari, the Soga monogatari, and repertory literature such as Konwaku bukkyoku and sekkyû jôruri—but many short independent works as well, works known variously as chûsei shôsetsu, Muramachi idai monogatari, Muramachi idai tampen shôsetsu, otsuki zôshi. All share the basic anonymity that is the almost inevitable characteristic of works produced by, or at least carried by, itinerant jongleurs. These works have come down to us in many forms: handwritten copies from written texts, transcriptions from performances, emaki, ehon, and seventeenth-century printed books. Irrespective of written format, however, it is safe to say that more serious attention given to all these works as daihon or tanêhon rather than as yamihon will inevitably shed much needed light in an area where research has not produced any fundamental advancements for some time. Many puzzling aspects of Muromachi fiction can be easily resolved once we accept some (though of course not all) of these works as transcriptions of performances or daihon, whether or not such daihon were later treated as omamori or yamihon.31

If, over the past several decades, scholars of medieval Japanese literature have been shackled to a narrow, anachronistic view of the medieval literary world, it has not been for want of liberating evidence; the shackles have been largely self-imposed. An elitism with regard to what genre are worthy of study; a fascination with the role of social class in literary creativity; an imposition on literary history of concepts, terms, and chronologies borrowed from political history; a disinterest in the enormous emotional and imaginative impact of audience-oriented repertory literature on Japanese society as a whole; a blindness to the centrality of vocal literature in Japan; and an unwillingness to relinquish ill-devised and antiquated scholarly vocabulary—these are the self-imposed shackles, technical, conceptual, and factual, that have led us to such fallacies as the

31. The practice of viewing variant texts of the same story as copies of hypothetical lost written texts in a reading tradition is a widespread but dubious practice and has so far led to no important breakthroughs in the field of Muromachi fiction. If variant texts, where wording is identical in parts and radically different elsewhere, can be seen as transcriptions of different oral performances of the same work, considerable advances can be made in reconstructing the principles behind the formulaic arts of dramatic recitation practiced by medieval jongleurs. Such principles have been established for Yugoslavian and Chinese oral composition and can be usefully applied to Japanese medieval texts. See Alfred B. Lord, The Singer of Tales (New York, 1968), and Eoyang, “Word of Mouth,” cited above.