

A study of laughter in the *Tale of the Hollow Tree*

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The 10th century marks a significant change in the field of Japanese literature with the elevation of a new genre: the *monogatari* (“vernacular prose composition”). This genre, which emerged in the closed circle of the Heian court, was composed by and for the court aristocracy. It gradually evolved during the 10th century and reached its zenith in the early 11th century with the *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*).

Over the centuries, this aristocratic literature centered on daily life, love affairs and court intrigues, was considered as a reflect an ideal society about a time when the imperial court was at its peak. The aesthetic concepts of *mono no aware* (pathos of things) and *miyabi* (aesthetics of the capital) used to characterize this literature undoubtedly contributed to a form of idealization of the world represented in these stories. However, court literature, understood as literature of amorous refinement and worldly elegance, is also a place of laughter.

Through the analysis of the Tale of the Hollow tree (*Utsuho monogatari*), composed in the late 10th century and considered as the Japan's oldest full-length narrative, I explore the relationship between the laughter and the emergence of the *monogatari* genre. This study will, we hope, renew the approach to their works and recognize their playful and comic dimension, which critics have so far tended to minimize or even ignore.

I analyzed the laughter in the *Tale of the Hollow tree* through three mains axes: “laughter and violence”, “laughter and critical spirit”, “laughter and the logic of narrative discourse”. As part of this research, I drew on the theories of polyphony and ambivalent laughter defined by the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin. This is the first in-depth exploration of the development of literature and the role of laughter in the Heian period from the perspective that laughter is more than mere entertainment: it is a fundamental element in literature. Laughter, especially its dual value, is considered as a means of combining a multitude of characters, voices, and tones.

The chapter 1 and 2 explore the relationship between laughter and violence in the festival time and space. Prior research has shown that the episode of Kanzuke no miya in the *Tale of the hollow tree* is a representative episode of the carnivalesque dimension of the Tale. The scene in which Kanzuke no miya tries to kidnap princess Atemiya is characteristic of the festive world which is full of confusion, frenzy, music and laughter. However, this carnival situation is not limited to the *Tale of the Hollow tree* but can also be found in *The Tale of the Sunken Room* (*Ochikubo monogatari*). I consider the cohesion of a priori incompatible tones is a typical example of the opening of the discourse

at the heterogeneity in the narrative literature of Heian period.

Chapter 3 examines the polyphony of discourse through the ambivalence of the character of Miharu Takamoto, one of « the three eccentrics ». This character portrayed as an able administrator which will rise to ministerial rank is also defined as a miser. I stated that the Miharu Takamoto's ambivalence is not limited to the characterization of characters, but extends to the level of critical discourse. This character, who is both ridiculed and mocked by his peers for his avarice, is also the bearer of a critique of the lifestyle of court society. The comic character because of his particular position in the Tale has been seen as a way to introduce a plurality of discourses and consciousnesses, that oppose to the dominant ideology of the narrative.

The chapter 4 explores the role that laughter plays in the strategy of narrative discourse through the episode of Fujiwara no Suefusa. Suefusa, a student of Kangakuin, is persecuted by the other students because of his poverty. The mocking laughter which is the main way of abuse towards Suefusa become the expression of the unfairness of the system of Kangakuin. Thus, the laughter against Suefusa was seen as a strategy of the author to denounce the deviance of Kangakuin's system at this time, an academic facility for noble established by Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu.

This study shows that laughter is a creative element in kana writing, promoting the expression of diverse characters in society and contributing to the opening up of discourse. The stories depict a variety of characters that go beyond the ideals of elegance and color preference, and these characters shape the world of the story from their own unique perspectives. Laughter is a creative element in the development of kana writing, contributing to the expression of diverse characters and the opening up of social discourse. *Tale of the Hollow tree* is said to have contributed to the development and deepening of Heian period narrative literature through its diversity of characters, voices, and languages.