

Black-Toothed Beauty:
Teaching Gender and Hegemony in *Heike monogatari*

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Abstract

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あつぱれ、みかたにはかねつける人はいないものを。¹

“Heavens! No one on our side blackens his teeth!”²

The above is the remark of a Minamoto soldier, upon encountering a suspiciously good-looking gentleman on his side of the lines during the battle of Ichi-no-tani. While the gentleman, in fact his enemy, Taira no Tadanori (1144-1184), claims to be *mikata zo* (“one of yours”), his deception is quickly discovered as a result of his refined appearance. At this time in Japanese history, blackened teeth were an expression of beauty reserved for the highest aristocracy, mostly for women, however, “The classical standard of beauty was very similar for men and

¹ SNKZ, Vol. 2 p. 227.

² Tyler, *The Tale of the Heike*, p. 500.

women. The key components were delicate beauty, elegance and sensitivity.”³ To the eyes of a rough and unkempt samurai from the east, the beauty of his enemy is what ensures his defeat.

The story of the war that brought the Heian Period to an end, immortalized in over 50 extant versions of roughly the same narrative, is replete with moral imperatives from start to finish, in particular the most commonly studied Kakuichi-bon 覚一本 version. The theme of karma ensuring the fall of the powerful, for example, is present in almost every version of *Heike monogatari*, in the form of some of the most famous lines of all Japanese literature: “The Jetevana Temple bells ring the passing of all things. Twinned sala trees, white in full flower, declare the great [one]’s certain fall. The arrogant do not long endure, they are like a dream one night in spring.”⁴ Yet while the text makes no secret of its didactic intent in general, the specific social messages it seeks to convey are difficult to disentangle from our own perception of both modern and premodern Japan, as well as our own perceptions of gender.

This thesis will seek to show the ways that the Kakuichi-bon version of *Heike monogatari* takes a specific stance on gender ideology as a way to reinforce its political message, primarily through a case study of *Atsumori no saigo*, the short section which describes the death of Taira no Atsumori (1169?-1184). Several other characters are important to establish isolated aspects of gender ideology: Imai Kanehira, Kiso no Yoshinaka, Saitō Sanemori, Taira no Tadanori, Taira no Rokudai and Emperor Antoku, among others, and these will be discussed as they become relevant. But Atsumori lies on several crucial intersections of politics, class, locality, age and

³ Miller, *Partings at Dawn: An Anthology of Japanese Gay Literature*, p. 36.

⁴ Altered from Tyler, p. 3. 祇園精舎の鐘の声、諸行無常の響きあり。沙羅双樹の花の色、盛者必衰の理を表す。おごれる人久しからず、唯春の夢のごとし。SNKZ, *Yōkyokushū*, Vol. 1, p. 19.

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morality, which make his story an ideal vehicle for the subtly gender-coded message of the Kakuchi-bon. Namely, that this text seeks to draw a strong association between the court – specifically the emperor – the Taira, and femininity. This association comes at a juncture in history when an influx of Confucian ideology was gradually marginalizing women’s status as part of an attempt at broader social control, a movement which would become particularly advantageous to the rise of the samurai. In short, this thesis theorizes that the text seeks to subtly send the imperial family into the realm of the feminine, the powerless, and subsequently the past, as a means to secure samurai authority.

Introduction

The conflict between the Minamoto and Taira clans during the late 12th century has been historically perceived as both a political and cultural war between the old aristocracy and the new shogunal authority, often encapsulated in the term *gekokujō* 下剋上, or “the low subverting the high.”⁵ But in addition to a cultural war between elite aristocracy and capable but low-prestige samurai, as this thesis will argue, the Kakuichi-bon *Heike monogatari* also attempted to represent a conflict between two competing modes of masculinity. With the death of Atsumori, a privileged form of soft, effete masculinity was simultaneously valorized, yet rendered an object of the past. A side effect of placing the feminine in the past and the masculine in the modern, even in such a limited example as this, is the emboldening of masculine hegemonic ideology which automatically conflates the martial or masculine with the future and progress, and therefore an inherent positive, and the feminine or aesthetically elite with the past, the ineffectual, and therefore something to be discarded in the quest for cultural and political hegemony.

The Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci once referred to “hegemony” as, “essentially a position of dominance attained through relative consensus rather than regular force, even if underpinned by force.”⁶ For those familiar with the *Heike*, this concept is likely ringing a bell about the way Minamoto no Yoritomo’s overthrow of the status quo is described: though his leadership is not perfect and has very little legal or ritualistic legitimacy, at least by comparison

⁵ The use is somewhat anachronistic here, as it primarily refers to the various power struggles in the Nanbokuchō period (1336-1392), however the received version of the Kakuichi-bon would have been completed during this period.

⁶ Jewkes et al., “Hegemonic masculinity: combining theory and practice in gender Interventions.” *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, p. S113.

to Taira no Kiyomori's, a reluctant consensus runs through the text to the effect that his rise – like the Taira's fall – was inevitable.

If the Minamoto's overthrow of imperial rule fits the description of "samurai hegemony," with a clear distinction in depictions of masculinity between these two groups, then the role of masculinity in that hegemony is also worth examining.⁷ "Masculine hegemony" was a term R.W. Connell described in the early 1980's, and refers to the way various social power structures are used by the few, powerful men in a society in order to maintain control. It is made up of three overlapping but distinct structures: "(1) the sexual division of labor, which examines economic inequities favoring males; (2) the sexual division of power, which examines inequities and abuses of authority and control in relationships and institutions favoring males; and (3) cathexis, which examines social norms and affective attachments."⁸ To be fair, the second of these structures was a constant throughout the Heian Period. The *Tale of Genji*, for example, is replete with examples of a sexual power imbalance so extreme that Kimura Saeko makes a compelling argument that "rape" as a concept could not have existed, as consent was only relevant to those within exactly the same level of the hierarchy of power, and men and women were consistently separated along this line.⁹ The first of these structures did see a shift from the Heian to the Kamakura period, however, in the loss of significance of court positions,

⁷ Though a hegemonic government does not necessarily entail hegemonic masculinity, nor vice versa, it is harder to find examples of authoritarian leaders who do not employ tactics of masculine hegemony in their "strong man" ideology. Modern examples include Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, premodern ones include the Emperor Commodus of Rome (161-192), who competed as a gladiator in order to emphasize his own physical prowess, despite the vulgar perception of the sport at the time, or the practice of only permitting eunuchs to serve in high government office in premodern China. In particular, one might consider the execution of the false eunuch Lao Ai 嫪毐 (?-238 BCE) by Qin Shi Huang 秦始皇 (259-210 BCE) over his "sexual misdeeds," which apparently included relations with Queen Dowager Zhao 趙姬 (280-228 BCE).

⁸ Wingood, "The Theory of Gender and Power: A Social Structural Theory for Guiding Public Health Interventions." *Emerging Theories in Health Promotion Practice and Research*. p. 313.

⁹ Kimura, " *Genji monogatari* 'to feminizumu.'" 源氏物語とフェミニズム *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō* p. 77.

which women once shared. With those positions gone, the only roles of authority automatically were exclusive to men.

Finally, the most pertinent of these structures to this thesis is the third, affective attachments. As Rajyashree Pandey argues, unlike the highly dualistic contemporary culture of mainland China, gender in Heian literature was largely conceived as performative in nature.

In medieval Japanese texts, *otoko* [男] and *onna* [女] do not entail an understanding of man and woman as stable, unchanging, or essentialist categories. Gender here functions precisely as a kind of script, and it is the specificity of the gendered performance, that is to say, the particularity of the script that is enacted, rather than the sexual attributes and reproductive functions of the body, that gives substance to the categories ‘male’ and ‘female’.¹⁰

Though this period would have privileged the soft masculinity of courtiers, the idea of gender as performance also opens the possibility to gender *hegemony* as performance. It can be accomplished with as little as a lampoon on a popular figure, such as the poems which strewed the walls of inns near the Fuji River after the disastrous defeat of the Taira there, without a single sword having been drawn.¹¹ With this single defeat, a family known for generations for its martial might – especially at sea – became painted as naïve, cowardly and helpless. Affective categories of performance such as this will be the focus of this thesis. But as these structures

¹⁰ Pandey, “Rethinking the Politics of Gender and Agency: An Encounter with the ‘Otherness’ of Medieval Japan.” *Japan Forum*, Vol. 32, p. 465-6.

¹¹ As will be mentioned later, the Taira had been primed by stories of the barbaric “men of the east” (the Minamoto) to such an extent that, when they saw a group of waterbirds taking flight from the river, they assumed it was the white banners of the Minamoto, and mistakenly thought they were already surrounded. After this defeat, poems appeared carved into public places such as, “*Poor, low, one-floor house! / What despair must agitate / the ridgepole warden / since the post he counted on / to prop him up has come down!*” and “*Frothing over rocks / the Fuji River waters / still run less nimbly / than those Taira warriors / running, running for their lives.*” Tyler, p. 292-3. ひらやなる・むねもりいかに・さわぐらん・はしらとたのむ・すけおとして 富士河の・瀬々の岩こす・水よりも・はやくもおつる・伊勢平氏かな SNKZ, Vol. 1, p. 405.

often overlap and feed into one another, the first and second categories of masculine hegemony will also bear some examination.

While the Taira themselves do seem to hold political hegemony at the start of the tale, it is more difficult to argue that their brand of masculinity was hegemonic. The cultural authority which they held, after all, was most prominently based on sensitivity and deep understanding of court culture, rather than one gender's effective control over another. Women in the Heian court had official duties and some roles in the function of the court, though these declined over time.¹² Nor, for that matter, was this privileged, effete androgyny exclusive to men.¹³ Additionally, while violence tended to be associated with the lower classes and the provinces, a theme particularly oft-repeated with regard to the Minamoto, there is no implication that being violent would have made one any *less* masculine, and if anything the opposite. In fact, Jewkes et al. observe a positive correlation between destructive, exaggerated masculinities and the socially marginalized. "Their origins lie in adversity, including in violent experiences in childhood that have enduring psychological impact, manifesting in a lack of empathy and remorse, which enable acts of violence while positioning the male actors as themselves victims (Bourgeois 1996; Fulu et al. 2013; Jewkes et al. 2011, 2013; Mathews, Jewkes,

¹² According to Ijūin Yōko, "When the Japanese female official system was first institutionalized by the ritsuryō code, it still followed a pre-seventh century system under which women as well as men rendered service to the monarch," but by the early ninth century, "[...] female officials ceased to take part in state affairs, and male officials took over their duties." "9-seiki ni okeru jōkan no hen yō to 'kisaki no nyōbo' no shutsugen keiki – Kamitsukeno Shigeko wo sozai to shite." 9世紀日本における女官の変容と「キサキの女房」の出現契機—上毛野滋子を素材として— *Jendaa shigaku*, Vol. 9, p. 51.

¹³ In the Giō chapter of the Heike, for example, the origin of *shirabyōshi* 白拍子 dancers is described as having emerged from a practice of performing while wearing the stereotypical garb of a male court official, "suikan robes, tall, black-lacquered hats, daggers silver-trimmed, hilt and scabbard; and called this dance of theirs 'Manly Grace [otoko-mai 男舞]." Tyler, p. 16.

and Abrahams2011).”¹⁴ Though the soft Taira masculinity was perhaps the ideal, it was not entirely exclusive to men, nor was it not the only acceptable form thereof, therefore it should not properly be called masculine hegemony. Thus, what the Kakuichi-bon achieves in this subtle subversion of the privileged form of masculinity could be considered novel.

At the beginning of the tale, at least in the historical context it describes, there are at least two prominently visible forms of masculinity: the privileged, soft, aristocratic masculinity of characters like Taira no Shigemori, Tadanori and Atsumori, and the valorous but low-prestige masculinity of the warriors of petty aristocracy, slightly anachronistically referred to here as “samurai,” such as Kumagai Naozane and Imai Kanehira. As a rule, the prominent Taira characters in the tale fall into the former category, the Minamoto and their allies into the latter. Few if any Minamoto characters appear for the majority of the first half of the tale, and their roles are often restricted to simply being terrifying wraiths on the battlefield.

By the end of the tale, however, Minamoto no Yoritomo is out for the blood of the Taira, to such an extreme degree that he has his father-in-law, Hōjō Tokimasa (1138-1215), put a bounty on all remaining Taira sons. “The people of the city [Kyoto], who knew their way about, coveted this reward. They cruelly went looking for Heike children and found many. They would present the pretty, pale-skinned son of any nobody, describing him as Captain So-and-so’s boy, or Lieutenant Whatnot’s [...] Tokimasa’s men drowned or buried the babies and smothered or stabbed the older boys to death.”¹⁵ There have been hints throughout the tale, but this is one

¹⁴ Jewkes et al., p. S114.

¹⁵ Tyler, p. 664. 京中の者共、案内は知ッたり、観賞蒙らんとて、尋ねもとむるぞうたてき。かかりければ、いくらも尋ね出したりけり。下藤の子なれども、色白う見めよきをば召し出いて、「是はなんの中将殿

of the clearest separations between the Taira – simply by virtue of their beauty – and all other men. It is specifically their beauty that marks them for death. Moreover, even if it were Yoritomo’s intention to simply be overly thorough in eliminating potential enemies, the end result is that the majority of those killed in this final purge are most likely not even themselves Taira. Whether or not this was a conscious choice, the new hegemony purposefully goes out and kills the beautiful, those who do not fit the image of the new masculine hegemony. These are the values which the Kakuichi-bon subtly seeks to convey: that the inevitable fall of the Taira was at least partly related to their perceived soft masculinity.

I. Background

The recent history before this final conflict – frequently referenced but never outlined in detail in the text – saw much political turmoil throughout the Heian aristocracy: the Hōgen and Heiji rebellions, respectively.¹⁶ The monk Jien 慈円 (1155-1225) apparently said of the former, “On the second month of the first year of Hōgen, a rebellion broke out in the Japanese realm, and from this moment the age of the warrior began.”¹⁷ These two conflicts were also performed by *biwa hōshi*, like the *Heike*, though whether or not they were ancestors of the *Heike* or whether they emerged simultaneously is still debated.¹⁸ Like the *Heike*, “Although they

の若君」、「彼少将殿の君達」と申せば、[...]無下にをさなきをば水に入れ、土にうづみ、少しおとなしきをばおしころし、さしころす。SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 460.

¹⁶ Both named for the eras (*nengō* 年号) in which they took place: Hōgen 保元 (1156-1159) and Heiji 平治 (1159-1160) respectively.

¹⁷ Selinger, “Chapter One: The Genpei Jōsuiki and the Historical Narration of the Genpei War.” *Authorizing the Shogunate: Ritual and Material Symbolism in the Literary Construction of Warrior Order*. p. 1.

¹⁸ However, Oyler suggests that none were likely composed before the Genpei War. (p. 291) Even so, “Although the most influential war tales took form and circulated after the Genpei War, antecedents can be found in late Heian works including *Shōmonki* (Record of Masakado’s Uprising) and *Mutsuwaki* (Record of the Battles in the North).” *Swords, Oaths, and Prophetic Visions*. p. 290.

are presented as – and were through the early modern period considered to be – historical records, they are often episodic and stylistically owe a debt to both *setsuwa* and *monogatari* traditions.”¹⁹ But whether or not their texts/performances were available for reference to the author(s) of the *Heike*, it is fair to assume that the events and actors would already have been a part of the public consciousness. The sheer number and variations among these texts serve to show the popularity of this type of narrative, as well as the experimentation on behalf of its producers.

There are good reasons for the Kakuichi-bon to avoid stressing the details of these two previous conflicts, however, as they contain somewhat conflicting material to its main message. One of them divided the loyalties of the Taira and Minamoto families, thus undermining the family disputes stressed so strongly in the *Heike*. Both also feature the comparatively positively portrayed Go-Shirakawa (within *Heike*) as an instigator and ruthless political schemer. Finally, both portray Taira no Kiyomori as a roughshod but loyal and merciful, as well as militarily brilliant, new entrant into the privy gentry ranks²⁰ of the aristocracy.

The first of these disturbances, Hōgen, was a succession dispute between the reigning emperor, Go-Shirakawa (1127-1192), and retired emperor Sutoku (1119-1164). Siding with Sutoku were Fujiwara no Yorinaga (1120-1156, known in the *Heike* as the “Haughty Left Minister”), Minamoto no Tameyoshi (1096-1156) and Taira no Tadamasa (?-1156). Siding with Go-Shirakawa were Fujiwara no Tadamichi (1097-1164), Minamoto no Yoshitomo (1123-1160)

¹⁹ Oyler, p. 289.

²⁰ “Privy gentlemen” refers to those with high enough rank to have personal audiences with the emperor directly, a very small group, and one that the Taira only joined at the generation of Kiyomori’s father, Taira no Tadamori. This honor is one repeatedly referenced in the *Heike* as being one of which Tadamori was unworthy.

and Taira no Kiyomori (1118-1181) himself. One of the most memorable results of this conflict was the execution of Minamoto no Tameyoshi by Minamoto no Yoshitomo, his own son. Kiyomori also killed his own uncle, Tadamasa, and these executions of family members by family members of the aristocracy – rather than banishments – were a source of some notoriety at the time. But the inclusion of any details of these events might have undermined the powerful family conflict – which almost reaches a cultural level – portrayed throughout the *Kakuichi-bon*.

Despite their starkly different portrayal in the text, both families can claim equally prestigious lineage, tracing their ancestry back to Emperor Seiwa in the case of the Seiwa Minamoto, and Emperor Kammu in the case of the Taira. Both families, in other words, are offshoots of the imperial family, descendants of princes who were removed from the line of succession. Until the age of Taira no Kiyomori's father, Taira no Tadamori (1196-1159),²¹ both families held effectively equal status and prestige within the capital. In other words, neither the family-based conflict, nor the stark divide by status or culture as described in the text, could have been quite as clear-cut as they appear. This makes it even more interesting to view the way the text seems to treat the Minamoto and Taira as almost difference species.

The later conflict, the Heiji Rebellion, did see the Minamoto and Taira divided along family lines, but notably Taira no Kiyomori – so demonic within the *Heike* that he dies from a fever so high it causes water to boil – is merciful and spares the descendants of his enemies. Among them most notably, of course, was Minamoto no Yoritomo, who would brook the Taira

²¹ Who received significant favor from Emperor Toba (1103-1156), including being promoted to the ranks of the privy gentlemen.

no such mercy when one day he found himself in the same position. Elizabeth Oyler also notes, on the subject of Kiyomori's portrayal in the texts of the Hōgen and Heiji rebellions, "the texts thought to be the oldest tend to be less censorious of Kiyomori, while later variants reflect a characterization for him more in keeping with that in the *Heike*, suggesting a trend toward a cohesive narrative across the three tales."²² This increasing cruelty and prominence of Kiyomori in the role of the fall of the Taira suggests conscious effort to invent a singular villain where perhaps one did not exist before. In fact, Saeki Shin'ichi points out that, by comparison to the *yomi-hon* versions, the *katari-bon* versions place far more responsibility and power in the hands of Kiyomori alone.²³ The text also works very hard to avoid direct comparisons between the actions and attitudes of Kiyomori with Yoritomo, as the latter tends to come out unfavorably in objective comparisons.²⁴

Jeffrey Mass outlines two historical interpretations of the Taira rise to power: one in which they were in fact the first to attempt to establish a military government, which failed, and one in which they were relative traditionalists who merely sought to restructure the existing system for their own benefit. Either way, "[The Taira's] prominence is not to be confused with an autonomous presence, but was rather merely a function of a highly successful junior partnership with their traditional patrons, the retired emperors."²⁵ Something that is

²² Oyler, p. 292.

²³ Saeki, "Heike monogatari no ingakan-teki kōsō." 平家物語の因果観的構想 *Dōshisha Bungaku*, Vol. 12. p. 47.

²⁴ Ubukata Takashige points out that, for example, left out of the Kakuichi-bon are tales of both Taira no Kiyomori's and Tadamori's beneficence related to the building of temples at the request of the emperor, which are preserved in the Engyō-bon version. Ubukata, "Heike monogatari no kōsō, shiron: Engyō-bon 'Heike monogatari' tokucho jūin setsuwa wo megutte." 平家物語の構想・試論：延慶本『平家物語』得長寿院説話をめぐって *Nihon bungaku*, Vol. 33, p. 52.

²⁵ Mass, *Yoritomo and the Founding of the First Bakufu: The Origins of Dual Government in Japan*, p. 14. Note that, although the greatest cultural authority lay in the figure of the emperor, the position was highly ceremonial. There

severely downplayed in the *Kakuichi-bon*, but is broadly historically agreed upon, are Minamoto no Yoritomo's motives for the various ruthless decisions he makes in order to establish power throughout the Genpei War. What the Minamoto sought to overthrow was not just the Heike, but, as Momozaki Yūichirō puts it, "the present imperial regime, which the Heike led by the nose into impropriety."²⁶ Though the true thorn in Yoritomo's side was the imperial presence itself, the ideological presence of this august figure was still too powerful to attack directly. A much wiser tactic would be to defer the fault onto a less illustrious target, indeed one's equal, who briefly experienced greater prestige and power from their close association with the throne. But it was that throne itself which was the real target. In other words, the excuse of hunting down the Taira was merely nominal justification for the type of rebellion that had been quite common during this period, and required an air of legitimacy.

This idea, that the real enemy of the Minamoto was imperial rule itself, is extremely de-emphasized by comparison to the overarching theme of the Taira's necessity for total destruction based on the karmic debt incurred by Taira no Kiyomori.²⁷ But Saeki points out a surprisingly obvious incongruity with this narrative:

were rituals to be completed almost every other day of the year, thus leaving not much time for actual governance. Real power lay in a cooperation between retired emperors, like Go-Shirakawa, and aristocratic warrior families, like the Taira.

²⁶ 「平家が不当に牛耳る朝廷の現体制[...]」 Momozaki, "Sōritsu-ki Kamakura bakufu no aidentiti mosaku to reisei, hōsei: kōshiki hōken no setsuzoku to jōchi no shōgun." 創立期鎌倉幕府のアイデンティティ模索と礼制・法制—公式法圏の接続と常置の将軍 Nihonshi kenkyu, Vol. 695. p. 3.

²⁷ As an example of how purposefully the *katari-bon* version does this, two characters that feature prominently in this thesis, both of whom are portrayed extremely positively, were known to have changed sides through the course of the war, but the text never states this outright. In the case of Saitō Sanemori, he knows the rugged east so well partly because he served the Minamoto no Yoshitomo through much of his adult life, only changing sides to the Taira after the Heiji Rebellion. Instead of criticizing him for this, he and several other former "men of the east" complain that changing sides after the war begins would defame them. Kumagai Naozane, meanwhile, is listed in the *Azuma kagami* as being descended from a (very) distant branch of the Taira family (not related to the Kanmu

Within the Buddhist concept of karma which underpins the cycle of samsara, ordinarily, even in the case of agami karma [direct cause and effect in one's current life], this is understood as a personal cause/effect relationship. So, when we see in the Initiates' Book, the 'total elimination of a clan,' which takes on karmic debt based on 'the grandfather's sins [being] visited upon his descendants,' this is something of an anomaly.²⁸

Saeki further points out that the idea of descendants being responsible for the actions of their ancestors does exist within Confucianism, but that this combination of cosmology is very rare within the history of Japanese *setsuwa* tales.²⁹ This suggests the Kakuichi-bon making a particular effort, and even pulling together loosely associated ideologies, in order to support its main argument: that there must have been a cosmic explanation, and therefore no one bears direct responsibility, for the fall of the Taira. As Vyjayanthi Selinger puts it, "This rivalry plot, though historically inaccurate, is potent in narratives because it explains away destabilizing historical events as by-products of long-standing competitive urges."³⁰ Hidden in the background of this argument is the heinous loss of the life of the child emperor Antoku, and subsequently imperial rule itself. The messaging is subtle, but consistent, that part of the fault of the Taira – and by implication the imperial court – lies in their androgyny.

Selinger notes that there was a burgeoning of interest in re-narrating history in the 13th and 14th centuries following Hōgen, Heiji, and the Genpei War itself. "In many of these texts, the twelfth-century past became a foundational moment—an origin imbued with significance—from which subsequent Japanese history could be narrated. The impulse to re-narrate the

Taira), the family name only changing to "Kumagai" in his father's generation (Ozawa, *Shinshaku Azumakagami*, Vol. 2 p. 170). He apparently initially fought alongside the Taira, only changing sides in the midst of the war.

²⁸ 仏教の、輪廻を基底とした因果観は、本来、現報 = 順現業の場合でも、因一果を個人的な問題として認識しており、灌頂巻の「祖父の罪業は子孫にむくふ」に見られるような「一門滅亡」総体を悪果とするような発想とは、やや異質なものである。p. 50.

²⁹ Saeki, p. 50.

³⁰ Selinger, p. 3.

Genpei War in the *Heike* was an integral part of this historiographical enterprise, designed to provide shape to a chaotic past such that it legitimated the present and underwrote a future for shoguns.”³¹ Even though many of the Minamoto characters are portrayed with all their flaws, and are often outshined by the glamor of the Taira, the underlying ideological message of this text was clear to the shoguns at the time. The Taira were indeed glorious, but the narrative is structured to show that this glory in itself is the underlying cause of their destruction. And what prestige meant for the court was indeed at least partly entailed with beauty and androgyny.

II. Authorial Intent

When discussing a text with a political and moral message, the question of authorial intent becomes more important than it would arguably be in the average piece of literature. In this case, whether or not the author were a member of the aristocracy, with a personal stake in the outcome, might change our perception of the events described. Yoshida Kenkō 吉田健好 (1283-1350) famously put forth one Fujiwara no Yukinaga 藤原行長 (active early 13th C.) as the originator of the *Heike*, who supposedly wrote it down and then taught it to a blind *biwa hōshi* named Shōbutsu 生仏 (dates unknown).³² A single, educated author and member of the aristocracy might help explain the profusion of Chinese references, though this would not rule out authorship by educated monks either. Considering the fact that Yukinaga was the son of one of the characters who makes a cameo within the tale³³ – and who evidently kept detailed

³¹ Selinger, p. 2.

³² Tyler, p. xxii.

³³ Fujiwara no Yukitaka 藤原行隆 (1130-1187), who is plucked from obscurity to receive sudden favor from Taira no Kiyomori after the latter secures power over the retired emperor Go-Shirakawa. Presumably Kiyomori was

diaries of the events – the possibility is certainly intriguing. His being a Fujiwara, for example, would put him in neither the Heike nor the Genji camp politically, but rather a rival to both, perhaps explaining the notably sympathetic portrayal of the Taira, at least in the Kakuichi-bon. There is a further tantalizing piece to this theory that the work was originally intended to soothe the spirit of the wronged and defeated retired emperor Sutoku.³⁴ But as there is no further evidence than this,³⁵ the theory will have to remain just that.

The current consensus is that, if there ever was an original “text” authored by a single individual from which all current versions of the *Heike* are now based,³⁶ it has not survived. What we have instead are various compilations and re-workings of broadly the same narrative, each with its own emphasis and style, and at the most basic level divided into text meant to be read aloud, usually at court and during special occasions (*yomi-hon*), and texts meant to be performed dramatically, usually for a commoner audience (*katari-bon*).³⁷ In the case of the Kakuichi-bon, the most widely performed and widely studied version of the latter category, the thoroughly cohesive thematic messaging, in addition to jumps in time and abrupt changes in style, suggest both extensive editing and multiple hands at work. Alison Tokita therefore

seeking to surround himself with loyal advisors who did not have other connections in the capital. The passage concludes ominously, “His prosperity seemed unlikely to last.” Tyler, p. 182.

³⁴ Tyler, p. xxviii.

³⁵ For example, Sutoku himself does not appear as a character in the text itself, but rather only as a few cryptic references. One of them does concern soothing his spirit, however (Tyler, p. 181).

³⁶ Butler outlines a process of the establishment of the Kakuichi-bon by means of at least three older versions of the text, two diaries as well as possible oral accounts. See Butler, “*Heike monogatari* and Warrior Ethic,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* Vol. 29 (1969), p. 94-97. According to Selinger, “Scholars believe the earliest form of the Heike—the so-called ur-Heike— was set down in the thirteenth century. This text, however, has not survived and it is doubtful that it would resemble the extant variants.” Selinger, p. 18. Mizuhara cites certain commonalities across all extant versions as evidence that there was such a text, *Enkei-bon Heike monogatari ronkō*. 延慶本平家物語論考, p. 38. Sansom also notes, “Internal evidence suggests that a basic version was written between 1190 and 1221.” *A History of Japan*, Vol. 1, p. 487.

³⁷ Kami, “Chūsei ni okeru ‘Taiheiki yomi’ ni tsuite.” 中世における「太平記読み」について *Senki bungaku: Hōgen monogatari, Heiji monogatari, Taiheiki, Nihon bungaku kenkyū shiryō sōsho* ed. p. 274.

suggests considering at least the following sources for authorship or editing of the text, “[...] those who produce (or reproduce) the narrative, that is, editors and performers; those who listen to or read it; and those who patronize it or control it for ideological and power purposes.”³⁸ One thing that is certain is that, whether or not they themselves played a part in its construction, those who promulgated the tale were blind monks, the *biwa hōshi*.

The *biwa hōshi* were the ones responsible for the tale becoming one of the first ever expressions of mass media across the majority of Japan. In its episodic and performative nature, the tale is accessible to anyone who can afford an evening’s reciting from these blind lute-players.³⁹ In theory, the only motives of these monks would be to entertain for their livelihood, and to extol the virtues of Buddhism while they were at it. Certainly, the *Heike* has no shortage of either entertainment or Buddhist ideology. In fact, the standard interpretation of the text is that it was intended to soothe the fractious souls of the tragic Taira, so some scholars suggest that monks performing it was a perfectly natural extension of that idea.⁴⁰ Yet in practice, it cannot be ignored that these *biwa hōshi* would have been performing amid the rise of a strict military authoritarian government.

After the time of the creation of the Kakuichi-bon in 1371, the *biwa hōshi* were clearly under the protection (authority) of the Ashikaga shogunate (the Seiwa Genji), and the *Heike* narrative was used as ceremonial music for the shōgun. *Biwa* performers were regularly summoned to the shogunal palace and to other upper-class bushi [warrior/samurai] residences to perform on occasions such as the New Year, installation of a new shōgun and shogunal funerals.⁴¹

³⁸ Tokita, “The Reception of the *Heike Monogatari* and Performed Narrative: The Atsumori Episode of *Heikyoku*, *Zatō Biwa* and *Satsuma Biwa*.” *Japanese Studies*, Vol. 23., p. 60.

³⁹ In fact, performing the work in its entirety over a period of days, the so-called “*ichibu Heike*” 一部平家, is thought to be a later adaptation of the performance. Tokita, p. 68.

⁴⁰ Sunagawa, “*Biwa hōshi*.” 琵琶法師 *Aera Mook: Heike Monogatari ga wakarū*, p. 108.

⁴¹ Tokita, p. 65.

At least by the time of the Kakuichi-bon's popularity, then, these monks would have been beholden to the tide of the rise of the samurai as much as anyone else, particularly during the contentious Nanbokuchō Period (1336-1392). Therefore, it bears considering that they might have felt the real and physical demand to protect themselves and their livelihood by avoiding inflammatory topics or unflattering depictions of historical figures. This is indeed what leads to the standard interpretation that, despite the relatively positive portrayal of most Taira in the text, this is merely an effort to soothe their spirits, and should not be interpreted as reflecting poorly on the Minamoto. The other possibility that this thesis will propose is that, far from reflecting poorly on them, the portrayal of the Minamoto as brutal but efficient and powerful, masculine heroes – despite their lacking taste and sophistication in comparison to the Taira – is in fact a calculated attempt to show a new way forward for hegemonic masculinity.

One thing we know is that the received Kakuichi-bon text was dictated by the *biwa hōshi*, Kakuichi, in 1371. Even this tells us something, however: the version we have now is from nearly one hundred and fifty later than the last historical reference in the text.⁴² In other words, a great deal of time and context for compilers and editors to work on it well after the events described took place. While most versions share the same narrative elements and plot structure, “The major difference between the different emended texts is the inclusion or not of the more apocryphal chapters.”⁴³ A century and a half was also more than enough time for rumors to become legends, so depictions of individual characters – like Atsumori – are the most likely to have been embellished.

⁴² The Jōkyū Rebellion (1221), mentioned in the final pages of Book 12, Song 9, *Rokudai no kirare* (六代被斬, “The Execution of Rokudai”).

⁴³ Tokita, p. 68.

This much time would have had another effect on the text as well: causality is perhaps so strong a theme partly because of the natural tendency to view large events of even the very recent past as inevitable. “Proportionality bias” refers to the phenomenon in which large events seem to require large or even cosmic explanations, thus the worrying tendency across human history to believe conspiracy theories.⁴⁴ Tokita notes, “In the early stage of the evolution of the Heike Monogatari, [...] there was a drawing in of a multitude of regional and ideological elements, which were then blended together with courtly literary traditions, replete with classical Chinese references. This led to the creation of a cohesive cosmic whole [...]”⁴⁵ Thus, for example, there is cognitive dissonance in the text between Kiyomori’s incursion of bad karma through relatively restrained power-gathering becoming the purported explanation for the extermination of his entire blood line, whereas Minamoto no Yoritomo’s decidedly more forceful establishment of himself and his heirs in perpetuity as *Sei’i Taishōgun* 征夷大將軍 (“Commander-in-Chief of the Expeditionary Force Against the Barbarians,” or simply “shogun”) is consistently excused or barely mentioned at all.

Yet one thing that is immediately obvious even from the famous opening of the tale is the way in which this text hits the reader over the head with this theme of inevitability, again and again: *jōsha hissui* 盛者必衰, the powerful must fall. The only problem is that, for the compilers of this epic, they had already fallen. The *kuge* 公家⁴⁶ aristocracy and direct control of

⁴⁴ Douglas et. al’s 2016 study found correlation between belief in conspiracy theories and the “general tendency to attribute agency and intentionality where it is unlikely to exist.” “Someone is Pulling the Strings: Hypersensitive Agency Detection and Belief in Conspiracy Theories,” *Thinking & Reasoning*, 2016. p. 1.

⁴⁵ Tokita, p. 68.

⁴⁶ A very exclusive group of the highest members of the court outside the imperial family itself, all of whom are members of the most prestigious families and who are responsible for day-to-day government processes.

the emperor was already a memory. The Jōkyū Rebellion (1221) would have been more recent history, but if anything its result seemed only to prove the ineffectuality and obsolescence of the court.⁴⁷ Why should it be necessary to ensure that this idea also entered the realm of popular belief and acceptance? The answer that this thesis will propose is one intimately connected to the aversion toward androgynous gender expression. “Hegemonic masculinity has been largely utilized as a social structural concept to explain the legitimization of masculinities through social institutions and social groups (Morrell, Jewkes, and Lindegger2012).”⁴⁸ When applied to larger systems of government, the stricter the regime, the greater the necessity for exerting ideological control, and to that end, to repeatedly and incessantly legitimize its own authority. In particular in the case of the Minamoto, part of establishing their legitimacy involves taking that same legitimacy away from the privileged, androgynous court masculinity.

III. Masculinity in *Heike*

Rajyashree Pandey’s recent work on representing gender in Heian Period literature points to works like *Torikaebaya*, and to *waka* poetry in general, to show how Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity can be applied to these early works as well. “A poet, regardless of his/her biological sex (a category that has no real meaning in this context) can slip seamlessly into the persona of the waiting female or the male who visits. It is through the performative stances adopted by poets that *otoko* and *onna* come into being, and only provisionally so, within the discursive space of *waka* poetry.”⁴⁹ Masculinity, even in the Heian Period, was at

⁴⁷ Emperor Go-Toba (1180-1239) attempted to regain control from the Kamakura shogunate in a coup, supported by imperial loyalist families, an attempt which lasted little more than a single battle. Go-Toba was banished to the islands of Oki, where he would stay until the end of his life.

⁴⁸ Jewkes et al., p. S115.

⁴⁹ Pandey, p. 467.

least partly conceived as a social construct which existed on a spectrum according to how “well” it was performed, holding meaning in contrast to feminine behaviors and other qualities perceived un-masculine. Even within hegemonic masculinity, according to Jewkes et al., “Masculinities are multiple, fluid and dynamic and hegemonic positions are not the only masculinities available in a given society.”⁵⁰ Gender existed for Heian people as a nebulous set of values which would be defined at a cultural level and interpreted at an individual one. Even now, there is no end point for any single category of the many possible expressions of gender, no absolute, even in ideology or fiction, because the boundaries and definitions are always in flux. Thus, there can never be perfect or absolute masculinity or femininity. Discussion is therefore limited to what distinct features of gender expression are “more” or “less” of either gender extreme.

If an average Japanese-educated person⁵¹ were asked about who was the most manly person in the text, one name would likely come to mind: Imai Kanehira describes himself as *nippon ichi no kō no mono* (“the toughest human being in Japan”).⁵² Albeit this is likely little more than typical bluster that would have been required as a performative aspect of military engagement at the time, Imai leaves little room for doubt on the subject. He utters this line just before his spectacular suicide by leaping from his horse with his sword in his mouth, thus impaling himself.⁵³ The term *kō* 剛 (“tough, dauntless, sturdy”) is undoubtedly a gender-coded

⁵⁰ Jewkes et al., p. S113.

⁵¹ The episodes of *Atsumori no saigo*, *Nasu no yoichi* and *Kiso no saigo* from the *Heike* are all taught through either middle school or high school in Japanese public education.

⁵² SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 182.

⁵³ Tyler, p. 466. Notably, while he is the only one to commit suicide this way within the Kakuichi-bon, in the Engyō-bon, a retainer of Seno’o Kaneyasu also does the same. Tyler suggests the removal of this less significant death

one; especially in this context, it amounts to saying, “the manliest man in Japan.” In the example of Imai, his spectacular death is clearly contrasted with his lord’s shameful one at the hands of a stray arrow by a foot soldier. By the standards of the *Heike*, Imai’s would have been considered a very “good” death indeed, and also seems to show the superiority of a vassal to his less manly and less effective commander, a kind of early, quasi-class criticism which would gain traction alongside the rise of the shogunate. This term *kō* also continues to be used throughout the text to refer to warriors, but almost exclusively to the Minamoto and their allies.

Within the ideals espoused in the *Heike* is, perhaps unsurprisingly, a primacy of masculinity as somewhere between the norm and a superior value. This may seem a priori for specialists of the medieval period, but this primacy of masculine values, in particular aesthetics, is a feature not as easily found in earlier Heian literature. While the not insignificant number of female characters in the *Heike* can be easily categorized into no more than a handful of idealized archetypes, whose entire life and consciousness revolve around the men closest to them, the same could not be said of the women described in *Genji monogatari*, *Kagero nikki*, or even arguably *Tosa nikki* to name just a few.⁵⁴ This is not even mentioning the texts which played with gender ideology and expectations such as *Torikaebaya* or *Ariake no wakare*. In

(within the context of the narrative) strengthens the characters of both Imai and Seno’o and is further evidence of the extensive editing at work in the Kakuichi-bon. Tyler, p. xxii.

⁵⁴ This is not to suggest that the Heian Period was inherently “more feminine,” nor feminist, nor were gender norms absent, though there is general agreement among scholars that the Kamakura Period saw a noticeable drop in women’s status. Concerning the hindsight view of the Heian Period as “feminine,” see Tomiko Yoda’s *Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity* (2004) in which she identifies Kamo no Mabuchi as the first *kokugaku* scholar to use gendering the entire Heian Period as an arbitrary metaphor in order to support his own ideology about the superiority of the earlier Nara Period poetry (p. 27-8). In a book concerning Buddhist burial practices, Hank Glassman’s thoroughly researched chapter on the Heian Period describes the increasing evidence of Sinification (and therefore increasing Confucian influence) of family structures in archeological evidence throughout the Heian Period (p. 381-5), which serves as a physical record of Heian women increasingly losing their status.

these works, the society described is still male-dominated, but women are fully developed characters with agency and human flaws, sometimes even subverting traditional roles by living as men. That such a shift should occur – from a vibrant society with multiple gender roles and norms to a fully formed masculine hegemony – seemingly directly following a major upheaval of power structure suggests a possible connection between the two ideologies: *gekokujō* and patriarchy.

The Taira are crucial to this discussion because their masculinity is described differently than the Minamoto's. Where the Minamoto are crude and crass, the Taira are erudite and cultivated. The Minamoto are demons on the battlefield,⁵⁵ while the Taira flee at the sound of waterbirds' wings.⁵⁶ Most importantly, as the eventual losers of the conflict, we are forced to wonder whether – as is commonly argued – the Taira are simply being valorized as a way to sooth their wronged spirits in the Buddhist tradition of thought, or whether perhaps the text also intentionally conflates the Taira with the aristocracy and the kind of soft androgyny court culture represents, as a way to associate them with the former, no longer functioning system of government, the doomed to fail.

Though the text does put forth effort to de-emphasize it, there are hints still present which suggest an earlier, more equivocal view of the difference between the Taira and the Minamoto. During his capture, Taira no Shigehira impresses Minamoto no Yoritomo with his

⁵⁵ As is discussed in the [VIII. Men from the East](#) section, much of the discussion among the Taira prior to their initial clashes with the Minamoto in the north surrounded what they should expect to find when they face the “men from the east.”

⁵⁶ As is discussed in the [VIII. Men from the East](#) section, the Battle of Fujigawa (1180); a particularly shameful, but likely true event which was the source of much frivolity among the local establishments. “Lampoons appeared on every wall.” Tyler, p. 291. It is perhaps for this reason – as well as its ideological leaning – that the text is able to go into so much detail, covering more than five pages.

skills on the *koto*, though Yoritomo had somehow presumed that the Taira “knew nothing but arms.”⁵⁷ Yoritomo’s retainer corrects him, “Over the generations, the Heike have boasted many poets and men of talent. In years past, people have compared them to flowers, and Shigehira in particular to the peony.”⁵⁸ Although the retainer’s advice seems to support the text’s portrayal of the Taira, Yoritomo’s presumption here shows a hint of the underlying reality which the text seeks to conceal. Namely, that the image it gives us of the Taira is almost certainly exaggerated, and their reputation in their own time would not necessarily have been quite so firmly associated with arts and sensitivity as it is here.

Significant to this point is that comparison to femininity is not the only vector by which masculinity in the Kakuichi-bon *Heike* is defined. Masculinity for the male characters also falls along at least four other axes: warfare and enlightenment, high and low culture, locality, and age. Observing how these values interact can help to illustrate what would have been considered acceptable masculine behavior, at least within the text itself. This in turn can suggest how the Heike may be consciously or unconsciously reproducing ideology, which itself may have influenced later literature and later generations of thought about gender ideology, and even exert ripple effects toward social power structures in general.

IV. The Death of Atsumori

Though almost every version of Atsumori’s end has its own unique variation, the narrative generally proceeds in this order: a relatively nameless samurai of the Minamoto side,

⁵⁷ Tyler, p. 546. 「あの平家の人々は、甲冑弓箭の外は他事なしとこそ日来は思ひたれば[…]

⁵⁸ Tyler, p. 547. 「平家はもとより代々の歌人才人達で候なり。先年この人々を花にたとへ候ひしに、此三位中将をば牡丹の花にたとへて候ひしぞかし」 SNKZ, p. 294.

Kumagai Naozane, spots a finely-dressed⁵⁹ warrior escaping to the sea by horse. To prevent his escape, Kumagai beckons him mockingly with a fan, often accompanied by verbal taunts as well. The warrior, Atsumori,⁶⁰ returns and engages in battle with Kumagai. Either in the process of the fight or afterward, Atsumori's helmet is removed. Kumagai is moved by the sight of the youth's beauty and seemingly similar age to his own son. He asks him his name, in some versions receiving it.⁶¹ Despite his sadness and reluctance to kill the young lord, Kumagai does so. In most versions, the discovery of a flute on the body increases Kumagai's desire to abandon the warrior life and take holy orders.⁶² Whether or not it is recorded in each text, we also know that historically Kumagai did eventually become a monk and disciple of Hōnen 法然 (1133-1212), ostensibly in penance for this incident. Even now, his grave sits watchfully placed above that of Atsumori, in Konkaikōmyō-ji temple in Kyoto.

There are several unique things about *Atsumori no saigo* even within the *Heike*. One surprising feature, for example, has to do with the performance. There were several styles of music used by *biwa hōshi* to perform the *Heike*, but the main two styles for performing the most dramatic or moving episodes would be either *fushimono*, melodic pieces for "salvation-oriented, female narratives," and *hiroimono*, for martial pieces.⁶³ *Atsumori no saigo* undoubtedly involves a struggle to the death and takes place in the middle of a battle. However, it is a *fushimono* piece. That his story should be considered either salvation- or female-oriented,

⁵⁹ A well-dressed opponent would indicate both high honors and a presumed high reward for their defeat.

⁶⁰ In one version, the *Genpei tōjōroku* 源平闘諍録, the person described in this incident is Narimori 業盛 (1159?-1184), son of Taira no Norimori 平教盛 (1128-1185) and one of Atsumori's elder cousins, who is also recorded as having perished at Ichi-no-tani.

⁶¹ Such as the Engyō-bon and *Genpei seisuiiki* versions.

⁶² The tale gives the impression that he does so immediately, but he was not recorded as officially doing so until at least six years later (1192) according to the *Azuma kagami*.

⁶³ Tokita, p. 64.

if only in the style of music used to express his story, already succinctly conveys what this thesis is taking so many pages to do, which is simply that Atsumori was no ordinary man.

Concerning depictions of masculinity in this interchange, focus should be placed on the following discreet aspects: the difference in age between Atsumori and Kumagai, the difference in status and class, the emphasis on beauty, the lack of Atsumori's interiority in the narrative and his reasons to fight Kumagai, and the reasons for Kumagai's eventual turn toward enlightenment. Together with examples of related encounters, especially those directly preceding this one, the underlying message about what Atsumori represents in a cosmological sense becomes clear.

V. Masculinity and Age

There are many variations and no exact records, but the best estimate for Atsumori's age is 15-17.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, Kumagai would have been 42 at this time, a proved and veteran warrior. At the start of the battle of Ichi-no-tani, Kumagai's sole concern seems to be making sure he is the first of the Minamoto to break the Taira lines. He competes fiercely with his comrade, Hirayama Sueshige, for that honor, and succeeds, taking "many trophies [heads]"⁶⁵ in the process. Kumagai's son is lightly wounded during this initial assault, at which Kumagai turns even fiercer, effectively scaring the fearsome Etchū no Jirōbyōe into a polite "no, thank you"

⁶⁴ Not only are there no reliable records of Atsumori's birth year, but in the *kazoe* system of the Heian Period, the age during one's entire birth year was considered to be 1, rising in age with each lunar new year. So in theory, someone born on the last day of the twelfth month of 1169 could be considered "two years old" by the following day. His birth year is estimated at 1169 (according to the *Shōgakukan*), which would make him chronologically 15-16 at the battle of Ichi-no-tani, in September of 1184, or 16-17 by the *kazoe* system.

⁶⁵ Tyler, p. 490.

when challenged to fight him.⁶⁶ This interchange, six sections earlier than his encounter with Atsumori, is crucial to establishing Kumagai's state of mind and character, in addition to the gap in experience between he and Atsumori.

Kumagai pinned the head to the ground and, to take it off, tore off the helmet. He beheld a youth in his sixteenth or seventeenth year, his face lightly powdered, his teeth blackened, and about the same age as Kumagai's son, Kojirō. He was very, pretty too.⁶⁷

The above is the crucial moment, only a few lines into *Atsumori no saigo*, when Kumagai realizes the nature of the person he has chosen to kill. Not only that he is young and beautiful, but that he appears close in age to Kumagai's own son. The Kakuichi-bon narrative does stress this last point to some extent, but not nearly as strongly as some other versions. As Inoue Midori notes, instead of simply asking *ikanaru hito nite mashimashi saburō zo* ("Who are you?")⁶⁸ as he does in the Kakuichi-bon, in the Engyō-bon 延慶本 version, Kumagai asks, *tarebito no ko nite watase tamau zo*, and in the Genpei seiuiiki, *tare no onko nite watase tamau zo* (both roughly, "Tell me, whose child are you?").⁶⁹ Furthermore, the Engyō-bon, Nagato-bon and several others of the *yomi-hon* line include an anecdote about a remorseful Kumagai sending back his son's head to Taira no Tsunemori 平經盛 (1124-1185),⁷⁰ which the Kakuichi-bon does not. The *Genpei seisuiki* repeatedly uses words like *osanaki* 幼き ("little") and *wakaki*

⁶⁶ Tyler, p. 489.

⁶⁷ Tyler, p. 504. とっておさへて頸をかかんと甲をおしあふのけてみければ、年十六七ばかりなるが、薄化粧して、かね黒なり。我子の小次郎がよはひ程にて、容顔まことに美麗なり[...] SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 233.

⁶⁸ The phrase is so long because Kumagai is using hedging words (*ikanaru hito* as opposed to *tare* or simply *ta*, as Atsumori then replies back) as well high honorifics toward Atsumori (either *mashimasu* or *saburau* used individually would be polite, though *mashimasu* is itself a high honorific, and Kumagai uses both).

⁶⁹ Inoue, "Genpei seisuiki' no Atsumori no saigo tan no kanōsei." 『源平盛衰記』の敦盛最期譚の可能性 *Nihon Bungaku*, Vol. 66. p. 41.

⁷⁰ Tokita, p. 72.

若き (“young”) to describe Atsumori, and only the *Genpei seisuiki* cites Atsumori being *itowaka nari* 幼若也 (“juvenile”) as the reason he was unhorsed by Kumagai.⁷¹ Inoue in fact suggests that our seeing this particular tale as a tragic, pseudo- father-son love story in the Kakuichi-bon is simply due to the over-emphasis of that same phenomenon throughout the rest of the tale.⁷² However, given the tale’s disdain for Taira no Munemori as he asks after his son in the moments before his death,⁷³ we should not assume that a touching father-son story is necessarily a positive in the context of the morals of the time.

The reasons for the Kakuichi-bon lacking the same emphasis on both Atsumori’s youth and on Kumagai’s father-mentality may simply be that it is believed to be older than the other two versions mentioned here.⁷⁴ But there may also be an ideological explanation: emphasizing Kumagai’s guilt as a father undermines the righteous karmic justice story that the Kakuichi-bon clings to. It complicates his motivations, and applies more personal reasons for them rather than cosmic. Emphasizing Atsumori’s youth – without accompanying mentions of his beauty – changes the image to be more of primarily an inexperienced warrior. Pitiful, yes, but neither feminine nor even remarkable in this single battle, in which page boys and standard bearers left and right by no means find their youth worthy of salvation. While it is indeed his youth and

⁷¹ Inoue, p. 41-2.

⁷² Inoue, p. 40.

⁷³ Munemori’s last words before his death were asking after his son, together with whom he had initially attempted to drown during the battle of Dan-no-Ura, and together with whom he was subsequently captured and imprisoned for several days, as they awaited execution. His son’s last words were likewise asking how his father had died. The warriors present to observe this interchange viciously castigate the pair for their unbecoming attachment to family members in the moments before death.

⁷⁴ This is not certain, however, and indeed, Ubukata notes the similarities in particular passages of Prince Mochihito’s story between the Engyō-bon, Nagato-bon, *Genpei seisuiki* and Shibu-hon, but a discrepancy in the Kakuichi-bon, which suggests it in fact is a later production than the aforementioned (Ubukata, p. 14), but also “scholars posit considerable sharing of material across variant lines, complicating the branch and trunk structure implied in the graphing of textual lineages.” Selinger, p. 19.

beauty which gives Kumagai pause, and adds poignancy to his story, not only is it also insufficient to save him, but indeed it is simply another feature of his nobility which makes his survival impossible.

Within the *Heike*, masculinity has a close relationship with age. There is arguably a peak somewhere between Minamoto no Yoshitsune's early twenties and Taira no Tadanori's early forties, but anyone much older or younger than this range tends to be described with either the tragic ephemerality and beauty of youth, and therefore in more feminine or androgynous terms, or a lack of all of the above, a non-sexual and therefore non-masculine being. When selecting which of his additional grandchildren to usurp the throne from the absent Antoku, Go-Shirakawa is moved that the younger of the two (the future Go-Toba) shows no fear toward approaching him, a near stranger. "'Truly,' he said, 'no little child but one so intimately related could set eyes on an old monk like me and still feel any affection.' [...]"⁷⁵ Though he was only fifty-seven at this time, Go-Shirakawa here reveals a stigma associated with both age and with one who has taken the tonsure, that their ability to attract others, even in a platonic sense, has been diminished. This suggests a contradictory relationship between masculinity and old age, as well as with taking the tonsure.⁷⁶

Similar to both Atsumori and his paternal uncle Tadanori, the truth of the identity of another Taira warrior named Saitō Sanemori, and his tragedy, is not revealed until after his death. A soldier of Kiso Yoshinaka brings him the head of a man he has slain, who, though he

⁷⁵ Tyler, p. 409. 「げにもすぞろならむ者は、かやうの老法師を見て、なにとてあなつかしげには思ふべき。 [...]」 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 101.

⁷⁶ Consider also the case of Saitō Tokiyori 斎藤時頼 (fl. Late Heian Period), who "looked old, emaciated, although not yet even thirty," after renouncing the world over a doomed love affair. (Tyler, p. 547-53)

refused to give his name, wore red brocade and spoke “like a man from the east.”⁷⁷ Yoshinaka immediately thinks of Sanemori, but dismisses the idea, given that the man he knew was already graying when Yoshinaka was a child. Nevertheless, he summons a retainer who knows Sanemori well, who tells him, through his tears, that it is Sanemori, and explains why this head still has black hair.

‘I often heard Sanemori say, ‘If I go to war after passing my sixtieth year, I will dye my beard and hair black, so as to look like a young man. You see, it would be undignified for an old man to seek to best the young in battle, and besides, it would hurt an old warrior so to be ridiculed and despised.’⁷⁸

Much like Go-Shirakawa’s reticence toward expecting affection from his grandchildren, Sanemori expresses fear of being despised for being an old man acting like a young one, i.e., engaging in stereotypically masculine behavior. This is exactly like the case of Atsumori but reversed, with his old age rather than youth making him an inappropriate foe for warriors seeking to increase their own prestige. Sanemori holds no hopes of escaping a war with the “men from the east” with his life, so in order to end his life doing what he is good at, he must affect a more appropriate masculinity of a young man.

Sanemori also refers to himself, like Imai Kanehira, as, “*nippon ichi no kō no mono*”⁷⁹ (“the greatest warrior in Japan”).⁸⁰ With the aged Taira, Sanemori, carrying this line, both

⁷⁷ Though born in Kaga, Sanemori spent much of his younger days serving the Minamoto in Musashi, a region associated at this time with producing particularly fierce warriors. Koremori at one point summons Sanemori to give him advice on the “men from the east,” and the fearful description he gives directly precedes the particularly shameful incident of the Taira forces fleeing at the sound of waterbirds, providing a direct contrast between the two groups. (Tyler, p. 290-2).

⁷⁸ Tyler, p. 370. 「いさかの所でも思ひ出での詞をば、かねてつかひおくべきで候ひける物かな。斎藤別当、兼光にあうて常は物語に仕り候ひし。『六十にあまッていくさの陣へむかはん時は、びんびげを黒い染めて、わかやがうと思ふなり。其故は、若殿原にあらそひてさきをかけんもおとなげなし、又老武者とて人のあなどらんも口惜しかるべし』」 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 45.

⁷⁹ SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 43.

martial prowess and a faded, imperfect masculinity are on his side of the story. This makes his character complex and highly sympathetic, and though he also bears at least two *nō* plays⁸¹ as well as an elementary school song⁸² in his name, his story is neither emphasized in the text nor remembered to the same extent as Atsumori. Though part of the reason for this is no doubt the timing of this story early on in the military conflict between the Minamoto and Taira, and therefore not as dramatically high-pitched as the battles at Ichi-no-tani or Dan-no-ura, I would argue that another reason is the text's purposeful attempt to avoid over-emphasizing Taira characters who are as determinedly masculine as he, even a purely performative masculinity. As we will see in VIII. Men from the East, however, Sanemori's story is relevant in more ways than one to the issue of masculinity of both the Minamoto and Taira.

VI. The Child Emperors

It is important to note that, in particular with regard to Atsumori's story, there are shared associations between youth, femininity, and both the Taira and the figure of the emperor specifically. The reason that this is particularly relevant to a potential relationship between *gekokujō* and hegemonic masculinity is that His August Personage would still have possessed far too much spiritual and cultural authority to attack directly, even on an ideological level, even centuries after these events took place. The brilliance of Yoritomo, after all, was in simply overlaying a new structure of government over the old, not in demolishing it; while

⁸⁰ Tyler, p. 370.

⁸¹ *Sanemori*, a *mugen nō* attributed to Zeami, and *Genzai Sanemori*, a *bangai* play, unattributed.

⁸² The school, ironically located in the city of Kumagai, had the following verse of its school song concerning Sanemori: 年は老ゆとも、しかすがに 弓矢の名をばくたさじと / 白き鬚鬚 (びんひげ) 墨にそめ 若殿原 (ばら) と競ひつつ / 武勇の誉を 末代まで 残しし君の 雄雄しさよ ("Though aged, yes aged but even so, he named his bow [symbol of warrior nature] 'Beloved'; Dying his white hair and beard black, competing with the young warriors; the praise of all valor to him, who forever remained a heroic [manly] lord.")

largely confined to a ritual and figurehead position, the cultural weight of the emperor still remained. The Taira instead serve as his avatars, as their fall anticipates and surrounds his own. The Kakuichi-bon's technique for doing so, I argue, is to create almost poetic associations between the Taira, court culture, and the femininity that culture represents. The themes of youth, beauty, art and femininity are repeated again and again with regard to both the Taira and the Emperor, so that the mind automatically draws a subtle connection between them.

In addition to the events of *Atsumori no saigo*, the association of youth and subsequently femininity with the emperor can also be observed through the curious character of Kiso no Yoshinaka. Kiso is a stereotypical Minamoto samurai from the east in practically every way: a skilled warrior and general, self-important and ambitious, and utterly ignorant of the niceties of court society. As an example of this, his main activities upon entering the deserted city of Kyoto, which the Taira fled ahead of his arrival, are allowing his soldiers to freely pillage there. It is nominally for this reason that Yoritomo later has him pursued and killed.⁸³ His self-importance is so extreme that on one occasion, he muses idly about taking the imperial throne for himself. The reason he hesitates, however, is both amusing and fascinating, “Emperor *would* be good, but then, wearing my hair like a little boy in the end would not suit me after all.”⁸⁴ The text itself almost immediately mocks him: “Just imagine! He had not known

⁸³ However, as George Sansom points out, things had never been peaceful between the two cousins, and Yoritomo had evidently been planning to attack Yoshinaka since at least 1183. The main impetus for Yoshinaka's attacks on the Taira in the north were in fact to keep Yoritomo's attention elsewhere. Sansom, p. 293.

⁸⁴ Tyler, p. 447. 「主上にならうと思へども、童にならむもしかるべからず。[…]

 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 153. Until their capping ceremony at 13 years old (p. 391), young boys in the Heian aristocracy wore their hair long, tied in twin loops on the sides of their head. During the capping ceremony, it would be cut to a length just long enough to be tied up under a court cap. The *Heike* text also makes reference to some aristocrats, at least, having “forelocks” long enough to “bite off” and give as a gift, such as Taira no Shigehira (p. 644).

[...] that an emperor not yet of age wears his hair like the boy he is.”⁸⁵ Partly due to the turmoil stirred up by Kiyomori’s politicking, the emperors during most of Kiso’s lifetime have been children, so he mistakenly assumes that emperors continue to affect childishness even in adulthood.

Though it is true that this small vignette of Kiso’s character is likely meant as merely an example of comical ignorance on his part, it does make several important points about the authors’ assumptions and expectations. One of these is later echoed more than once in the text: that the position of emperor is seen as inherently fragile, youthful and feminine.⁸⁶ Unlike the two retired emperors who feature prominently,⁸⁷ the only adult emperor who appears in the text, Takakura 高倉天皇 (1161-1181) dies at only age 20, and in terms of character is known simply for his kindness, artistic sensitivity, and a tragic love affair, as well as being “very beautiful indeed. He so resembled his late mother Kenshunmon-in.”⁸⁸ These are all features that could be equally well associated with court ladies in general, and especially those that feature prominently in the *Heike*, such as the lady who entertains and falls in love with the captive Shigehira, Senju no Mae. The final emperor mentioned, Go-Toba 後鳥羽天皇 (1180-

⁸⁵ Tyler, p. 447. 主上のいまだ御元服もなき程は、御童形にてわたらせ給ふを知らざりけるこそいたてけれ。SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 153.

⁸⁶ For example, when they are portrayed in Noh, emperors are typically played by child actors, regardless of the age of the character, or even whether or not the emperor is Japanese. So too is Minamoto no Yoshitsune, nowadays remembered romantically as a frail and beautiful youth, tragically betrayed and murdered by his brother. Interestingly, the *Heike* text in fact portrays him as cruel, crass, short-tempered and petty (“You are the biggest fool in Japan!” he snapped, and put his hand on his sword.” Tyler, p. 604), and even “a pale, scrawny fellow with buckteeth,” (Tyler, p. 605) so it would seem history has been kinder to some characters than others.

⁸⁷ Primarily Go-Shirakawa, with a few isolated stories about Retired Emperor Toba, related to Kiyomori’s father’s rise to power.

⁸⁸ Tyler, p. 195. 玉体もいとどうつつくしうぞみえさせおはします。御母義建春門院にいたく似参らッさせ給ひたりければ [...] SNKZ, Vol. 1, p. 270.

1239), is caustically described by the firebrand monk Mongaku as, “a ball-playing brat,”⁸⁹ only interested in amusements rather than actual governance. The text may be particularly negative toward Go-Toba partly because the Jōkyū Rebellion would have been fresh in the minds of both its authors and audience.⁹⁰

But among the child emperors in the text, there are several anecdotes about the key figure of Antoku 安徳天皇 (1178-1185), the tragically doomed political prize of Taira no Kiyomori, which are particularly relevant to the issue of gender. When an imperial child was to be born, there were naturally quite a few ceremonies in need of undertaking to ensure a safe and successful birth. One of them mentioned in the *Heike* is a ceremony to change the sex of the child in the womb from a girl to a boy.⁹¹ Kenreimon'in's pregnancy is not without issues, which the Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa in the text dispels practically single-handedly, even taking credit for both the successful birth and the fact of the child being male. His role in the birth, as well as one other oddity, are later referred to in the text as ill omens.⁹²

The other irregularity occurs some days prior to the birth itself. “[...] when an empress gives birth, the custom is to roll a rice-cooking pot down the roof from the ridgepole: toward the south for a boy and the north for a girl. This time, though, they had rolled it northward,

⁸⁹ Tyler, p. 683. 「毬杖冠者」SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 496.

⁹⁰ Go-Toba was the primary agitator in the war, seeking to wrest control back to the imperial family from the Hōjō family (Kamakura shogunate), failing, and subsequently becoming exiled.

⁹¹ Only a male child would be a guarantee, from Kiyomori's perspective, of securing his equivalent of retired emperor status, by becoming the commoner grandfather of the emperor. The ceremony occurs initially on Tyler p. 131, and the narrative picks up again from p. 143-4.

⁹² Tyler, p. 143.

which caused a puzzled commotion. The pot had to be retrieved and sent rolling down again.”⁹³

The fact that the custom has to be described suggests that such things were not common knowledge to the average audience. This may mean that the anecdote was cherry-picked by the compilers of this text in order to advance their own narrative. But if so, it is worth wondering exactly what purpose this anecdote serves. The main message seems to be to simply seek out justification for the tragedy which later befalls him; the death of an emperor, and a child no less, seems to require more than an average explanation, it surely must have a cosmic one as well. But in choosing this particular anecdote as an ill omen, especially to bring it up chronologically after the boy has been successfully born and thus when it seems less relevant to the progression of the story, suggests a purposeful primacy of masculinity, which in the case of young Antoku at least, was a failure.

These two minor curiosities related to his birth are not the end of Antoku’s relevance to the issue of gender portrayal either. There are few more moving scenes in the entirety of the text than young Antoku’s death. In this scene, too, there is an emphasis on his beauty to such an extent that his youth seems to blend expressions of either gender extreme.

His Majesty, in his eighth year, was thoroughly grown up for his age, and his beauty shone around him. His rich black hair hung down below his waist. [...] Robed in dove-gray, his hair in side loops like any boy’s, his eyes streaming with tears, he pressed his dear little hands together, prostrated himself toward the east, and bid farewell to the Ise Shrine [...]⁹⁴

⁹³ Tyler, p. 144. 后御産の時、御殿の棟より、甕をまろばかす事あり。皇子御誕生には南へおとし、皇女誕生には北へおとすを、是は北へ落としたりければ、「こはいかに」とさわがれて、取りあげて落としなほしたりけれども [...] SNKZ, Vol. 1, p. 200.

⁹⁴ Tyler, p. 610. 山鳩色の御衣にびんびら結はせ給ひて、御涙におぼれ、ちいさうつくしき御手をあはせ、まづ東をふしをがみ、伊勢大神宮に御暇申させ給ひ [...] SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 382.

While there is no question that the loss of young life strikes anyone as inherently more tragic, the text also purposefully emphasizes his beauty, specifically that of his hair. This does mark his youth, but it is an affectation that happens to resemble feminine gender expression, and specifically feminine beauty.⁹⁵ The fact that he is both obedient and in tears should not be disregarded either; minus the single reference to his side loops, this entire passage could be equally applied to any of the court ladies preparing to drown themselves, including his grandmother, Lady Nii.

To be certain the audience receives the intended message, the text further strengthens the relationship between his youth, beauty, and the tragedy of his loss, “Alas! The spring winds of transience in one brief instant swept away the beauty of this lovely blossom; the billows of a heartless fate swallowed up His Majesty.”⁹⁶ This seemingly innocuous echoing of the audiences’ likely emotions also contains a powerful message, however: those responsible for the child emperor’s death, something that should be unthinkable, are not the Minamoto, but “heartless fate” and the “spring winds of transience.” Here again, the Kakuichi-bon absolves the Minamoto of sin, placing the blame entirely on the entropy of the prosperity of the Taira.

This is indeed the primary aim of the Kakuichi-bon. The message its authors seek to convey is not that one individual’s sins are really powerful enough to annihilate an entire lineage, but rather that the Minamoto are not responsible for the loss of imperial governance.

⁹⁵ As can be seen in *Genji monogatari*, for example, rich black color, luxuriance and extreme length are all features highly prized when describing feminine beauty. The emperor laments the cutting Genji’s side loops during his capping ceremony, afraid it will ruin his beauty (Tyler, p. 34), and even the cutting of Fujitsubo’s forelocks when she becomes a nun is lamented by her son, the young Emperor Reizei (Tyler (2003), p. 243).

⁹⁶ Tyler, p. 611. 悲しき哉、無常の春の風、忽ちに花の御すがたをちらし、なさけなきかな、分段のあらき波、玉体を沈め奉る。SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 382-3.

It was simply a result of entropy and “fate”: the powerful must fall. This can all be seen as a subtle loss of faith in the imperial court, and even as one extended excuse for Minamoto no Yoritomo’s power grab. Despite the romantic and admirable depictions of both Antoku and the Taira in general, there is nothing particularly subversive or revolutionary about their sympathetic portrayal. Arguably, being able to feel pity for the Taira, or the young emperor, would not be enough to stir up loyalists toward them, willing to give up the newly obtained military dictatorship to re-instate them. On the contrary, the fact that their beauty, artistic skill and moral quality are all superior is shown again and again to be the precise reason for their downfall. In a culture with a rich history of Buddhist *setsuwa*, after all, it is easier to see ill befalling someone as a natural result of their bad behavior than random chance or the will of any individual.

VII. Masculinity, Religion and Violence

Only later on did Kumagai learn that the youth had been Taira no Atsumori, the son of Taira no Tsunemori, the director of palace upkeep. He had been in his seventeenth year. It was then that Kumagai felt within him the aspiration to enlightenment.⁹⁷

Religion is of course one of the guiding themes of the *Heike*, and despite the prevalence of fighting monks within the cast of characters,⁹⁸ there is a clear distinction between the perceived good of martial prowess versus that of enlightened or peaceful individuals, with the former being associated with masculinity. As can be seen in Kumagai’s turn toward

⁹⁷ Tyler, p. 506. 後に聞けば、修理大経盛の子息に人夫敦盛とて、生年十七にぞなれける。それよりしてこそ熊谷が発心の思はすすみけれ。SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 235-6.

⁹⁸ The majority of the “fighting monks” (an anachronism likely invented from popular culture in the Edo Period) would have been primarily rank-and-file lay devotees, living a monastic lifestyle and protecting the temples for their own security, but not what we would think of as orthodox practitioners of Buddhism.

enlightenment, specifically away from the life of a warrior, as well as in Go-Shirakawa's lack of expectation of affection from his grandchildren after he takes the tonsure, at a basic level religion in the *Heike* has an expectation of being non-violent and non-sexual, therefore non-masculine. It is at this juncture that it is useful to examine arguably the most idealized character in the entire work, Kiyomori's first son, Taira no Shigemori 平重盛 (1138-1179). He is one of the few characters in the piece to receive unequivocal praise from the narrator, is universally admired by the other characters, and indeed only receives criticism from his father, the main villain of the piece. He also both leads by example and vocally espouses Confucian values.⁹⁹ At least as far as the Taira are concerned, he is the ideal aristocrat, the ideal imperial subject, the ideal son, husband and father. The depictions of his masculinity, then, should be treated as more likely to be the most desirable expression thereof.

The contrast between Shigemori and his father is perhaps never clearer than when he arrives at his father's home with the purpose of forestalling an outright military coup against the Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa.

There was his father, amid dozens of Taira nobles dressed in robes of every color and armor to suit each man's taste, [...] Shigemori in his court hat and dress, his expansively patterned trousers swishing and rustling into view, made a most unusual sight. [...] Kiyomori [must have] felt ashamed to speak to him in armor, because he partially closed a sliding door and, behind it, hastily threw over his armor a plain silk cassock. The metal of his breastplate still showed, however. He tugged that part of the garment every which way to hide it.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Such as in his speech tearfully attempting to convince his father not to attack Go-Shirakawa, Tyler p. 92-94.

¹⁰⁰ Altered from Tyler, p. 92. 入道腹巻を着給ふ上は、一門の卿相雲客数十人、おの々色々の直垂に、思ひ々鎧着て [...] 小松殿、烏帽子直衣に大文の指貫そぼとって、ぎやめき入り給へば、事の外にぞ見えられける。 [...] あのすがたに、腹巻を着て向はむ事、おもばゆう恥づかしうや思はれけむ、障子をすこし引きたてて、

This particular conflict shows Shigemori in his best light: so loyal to the imperial family that he is willing to disobey his father, two virtues that – in a healthy society, by Confucian standards anyway – should never be in conflict. Furthermore, while Shigemori walks fearlessly through the ranks of soldiers while dressed in his court robes, Kiyomori – who by this time has taken vows effectively swearing off violence for the remainder of his life – is ashamed to face him while wearing armor. Kiyomori has relinquished all mortal desires, including in this case the violence that signifies masculinity, therefore his clinging to this mortal vice is so shameful that even someone who controls the majority of the country cannot bear to face his own son.

Shigemori, meanwhile, shows no fear to be without protection in the midst of the war-like atmosphere, nor at openly chastising his father, therefore ironically portrays far more bravery than those outfitted for war. This type of contrast, of moral or ideological superiority which ironically leaves one exposed toward risk, is repeated over and over in the *Heike*, and is almost an exclusive property of the Taira. In this way, Shigemori's masculinity is confined by his own context. He is an aristocrat, and more than that, a Taira. Even if his masculinity is idealized, it is not perfect, nor could there be such a thing. By his nature as a Taira – as the text portrays them in any case – his ideal expression of masculinity is still bound by the choices between excelling in the arts and intricacies of court culture, or forsaking that privilege in order to reach toward the rising tide of low-prestige yet hegemonic masculinity. There is no middle road. There is already a conflict of masculinities visible above between Shigemori's soft expression of

素絹の衣を、腹巻の上に、あわて着に着給ひたりけるが、胸板の金物のすこしはづれて見えけるを、かくさうど、頻りに衣の胸を引きちがへ引きちがへぞし給ひける。SNKZ, Vol. 1, p. 134.

power through a lack of fear and unwillingness to take up arms, versus his father's outright aggression, more stereotypically masculine behavior.

No doubt there will be those who question the automatic association between violence and masculinity. As noted by Jewkes et al., "The question about whether the use of violence was inimical to hegemonic masculinity was keenly debated," and "Violent and sexist masculine values and practices may be, but are not necessarily, hegemonic in a given culture (Messerschmidt 2012)."¹⁰¹ This question is entirely appropriate and a particularly relevant point to make regarding the *Heike*; after all, one of the most famous female warriors in all Japanese history, Tomoe Gozen 巴御前 (active late 12th C., possibly fictional), is prominently portrayed as both a concubine and a skilled general serving Kiso no Yoshinaka. The depictions of her resemble most other major warriors in the text, including the hyperbole of being, *ichinin tōzen* 一人当千 ("a fighter to stand alone against a thousand.")¹⁰² The important point about her, though, is that she seems to be the exception that proves the rule. Just as with the male characters, violence is only one aspect of her character, and that alone does not define her as masculine overall.

While another concubine/general, Yamabuki, is mentioned in the text, and both are described as equally beautiful,¹⁰³ the latter's martial prowess is not mentioned at all. Being

¹⁰¹ Jewkes et al., p. S114.

¹⁰² Tyler, p. 463. SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 175. Also used about Seno'o Kaneyasu, among others.

¹⁰³ Tyler, p. 463.

overtly sexualized is also something that only seems to occur to women in the text.¹⁰⁴ Saeki points out that, although male-male love and sexuality was extremely common during this period, there is not a word of overt homosexuality within the *Heike*.¹⁰⁵ Yet both Tomoe and Yamabuki are specifically introduced into the story as *binjo* (“beauties”),¹⁰⁶ somewhat undercutting their role as warriors, in a way no male characters experience. Tomoe’s beauty, and Kiso’s control over her, is also interspersed into descriptions of her martial prowess. “With her lovely white skin and long hair, Tomoe had enchanting looks. An archer of rare strength, a powerful warrior, [...] Kiso clad her in the finest armor, equipped her with a great sword and a mighty bow.”¹⁰⁷ It would seem that her presence represents an inherent friction, for which over-sexualizing her is a way to lessen her role in stereotypically masculine activities.

As a final note on the subject, Kiso’s farewell line to Tomoe leaves little doubt about at least his own opinion on women in war, “Go, woman, go quickly, anywhere, far away. For myself, I shall die in battle or, if wounded, take my own life, and it must not be said that at the

¹⁰⁴ Even Atsumori’s beauty, for example, is diverted from being observed sexually by Kumagai’s own observation of the closeness in age to his son. His beauty is more representative of both his youth and his nature as an aristocrat than of a target for sexual desire.

¹⁰⁵ Saeki, “‘Heike monogatari’ ni okeru nanshoku.” 『平家物語』における男色 *Aoyama Journal of Japanese Literature*, Vol. 47. (2017), p. 92. This in itself is also an important point about the values espoused by the *Heike* authors, especially considering the more or less overt male-male homosexuality that can be observed in *Genji monogatari*, for example (when Genji is frustrated in love and turns to the younger brother of the woman he is pursuing, pulling him into bed and even uttering the words, “You, at least, shall not leave me.” (Tyler (2001), p. 92), which is as explicit as any heterosexual encounter in the text). Notably, according to Jewkes et al., “A core element of the construction of hegemonic masculinity is heterosexuality, and to a greater or lesser extent hegemonic masculinity is constructed as a gender position that is as much ‘not gay’ as it is ‘not female’.” (p. S113) While Saeki makes a convincing argument that there are implications of homosexuality even when not outright stated within *Heike*, the omission also suggests that the authors viewed this as not appropriately masculine behavior. The reason, as I argue with other avenues of masculine gender expression, is that relationships of this nature – which do not serve to protect social order and stability – would be seen as subversive to the samurai government.

¹⁰⁶ SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 175.

¹⁰⁷ Tyler, p. 463. 巴は色しろく髪ながく、容顔まことにすぐれたり。ありがたき強弓精兵、馬の上、かちだち、打ち物もっては鬼にも神にもあほうといふ一人当千の兵者なり。[...] いくさといへば、さねよき鎧着せ、大太刀、強弓もたせて [...] SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 175.

end I had a woman with me.”¹⁰⁸ Despite acknowledging her prowess at war, her femininity makes her presence inappropriate to an honorable death; the implication being that femininity and war are conceptually at odds.

Having now established the contradictory relationship between masculinity and violence on the one hand and enlightenment on the other, it is fruitful to return to the topic of Atsumori and Kumagai. These two begin their conflict without a religious element, but end with the victor’s call to Buddhism. We already learn several important details just from this fact. Firstly, that it is the victor and the Minamoto, Kumagai, who is the more religious of the two; if not necessarily by nature then as a result of this incident. Unlike his uncle Tadanori, Atsumori does not request the chance to pray before his death, but then again neither does he object to it.¹⁰⁹ Notably, though, this is only in the Kakuichi-bon version: as noted by Tyler, the Kakuchi-bon leaves out a lengthy soliloquy by Atsumori, present in the Engyō-bon, about the hardship of being killed.¹¹⁰ Secondly, this religious turn shows that it is only through his victory that Kumagai attains the opportunity to seek enlightenment. The *Heike* is littered with the bodies of Taira who might have had a similar religious turn, if not for the powerful force of cosmic entropy and irrepressible pride which seemingly endlessly drags them into oblivion.¹¹¹ To

¹⁰⁸ Tyler, p. 465. 「おのれは、とう々、女なれば、いづちへもゆけ。我は打死せんと思ふなり。もし人手にかからば自害をせんずれば、木曾殿の最後のいくさに、女を具せられたりけりなんど、いはれん事もしかるべからず」 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 178.

¹⁰⁹ As will be discussed in [X. Masculinity and Death](#), Taira no Munemori is criticized for his distraction of caring for his son before his death, suggesting that delaying the inevitable would be seen as shameful.

¹¹⁰ Tyler, p. xxiii.

¹¹¹ Specifically, for example, Taira no Shigemori, who promises that he will not seek treatment for his illness, and will willingly die if the sins of his family are truly too great for the gods or Buddhas to permit. This, he then does. This tendency is especially notable in the case of Taira no Koremori 平維盛 (1158-1184), who feigns illness to escape the battles of Ichi-no-Tani and Dan-no-Ura, only to retire to the countryside briefly in order to take the

summarize then, while the path toward enlightenment is the less masculine, in the case of the majority of these characters, it is only open to those who are successful. In other words, neither violence nor religion are in conflict with the Minamoto hegemonic masculinity, but moralizing over impractical concerns, and refusing to claw one's way toward survival no matter the indignity, is.

VIII. Men from the East

As seen in the case of Sanemori, there are strong associations between landscape and character within the *Heike*. "The East" sometimes refers specifically to Kamakura, where Yoritomo formed his power base, but it can also refer more generally to the provinces east (or even north) of the capital, which lie outside its prestige and authority, and thus also tend to be treated as the barbaric "other." There are inherent assumptions that are made of the characters based on where they are from, or even where they have spent much of their time, and there is no doubt that being "from the east" is synonymous with both martial prowess and a lack of sophistication. In order to legitimize Minamoto authority, this is yet another trope which *Heike* text must skillfully use to its advantage. Its method for doing so is quite simple: to represent all easterners as extremely stalwart and even devious warriors who are victorious even when their actual strength is lacking, and if there are skilled warriors among the Taira, to provide a locality-based explanation for it.

Up until the start of the Kamakura Period, martial skill and masculinity in literature were arguably at least loosely associated, but not nearly as strongly as they are throughout the *Heike*.

tonsure before drowning himself, together with two retainers. Despite this, he is perhaps the second most positively portrayed character aside from Taira no Shigemori, his father.

As can be seen in *Genji monogatari*, aristocrats in the Heian Period competed with each other using abstracted skill with particular weapons of war, such as a bow, but actual hand-to-hand fighting would have been perceived as a vulgar task relegated to only the lowest and most peripheral aristocrats.¹¹² The first and most obvious example of this prevailing association from the previous age can be seen in the early battles of the *Heike*, between the capital-raised Taira no Koremori and the brutish easterner Kiso no Yoshinaka.

Our introduction to the “men from the east” is given to us by none other than Saitō Sanemori. Koremori begins by asking Sanemori how many of the Genji archers can match his strength. Sanemori replies with a grim smile, “So, my lord. [...] You think I shoot a long arrow?”¹¹³ He describes in vivid detail the difference in strength between their own forces and these “men from the east,” including the fact that, “Should a father or son be killed in battle, they ride straight over the body and fight on.”¹¹⁴ By the standards of hyperbole involved in describing battle forces at this time, his description of the Minamoto actually errs on the sedate side, and concerns itself far more with psychology than with skill, emphasizing the Minamoto’s ruthlessness more so than their actual strength. He concludes by saying, “ ‘You may imagine, my lord, that I speak this way only to alarm you, but not so. [...] For myself, I do not expect to survive this campaign and return to the capital.’ The listening Heike warriors shook with

¹¹² As can be seen in the extreme contrast between Kaoru and an attendant of Ukifune, when he attempts to reward the man for his service by giving him a robe suffused in his elegant scent. The mismatch of Kaoru’s scent with the attendant’s natural (possibly sweaty) one only provokes laughter from others in Ukifune’s household.

¹¹³ Tyler, p. 290. 「さ候へば君は実盛を大矢とおぼしめし候歟。[...]」 SNKZ, Vol. 1, p. 401.

¹¹⁴ Tyler, p. 290. 「親もうたれよ子もうたれよ、死ぬれば乗りこえ乗りこえたたかふ候。[...]」 SNKZ, Vol. 1, p. 402.

fear.”¹¹⁵ This passage establishes several important tropes both about Sanemori and Koremori as individuals and about the difference between the two armies in general. Raised in the east, Sanemori is perceived as both strong and knowledgeable about war by Koremori, who comes across here as desperately naïve, even though both men fight on the same side and both make their residence in the capital. Sanemori’s authoritative voice here conveys a contrast that the reader is meant to take at face value, precisely because his tone is as sedate as it is. There is no reason for him to exaggerate, in fact even his words as they are clearly exert a detrimental effect on the morale of his forces. The surprising realism in this passage lends believability to Sanemori’s broad generalizations about two forces of likely equal strength and experience, which is far more indicative of a clever rhetorical tactic than a factual reality. That said, his conclusions are proven to be correct in this case, as the “battle” of the Fuji River which occurs subsequently is the very incident at which the majority of the Taira army flees before the Minamoto even attacks, frightened by waterbirds taking flight from the river.

Locality is given as the explanation for the martial prowess of two prominent Taira figures: Taira no Tadanori and Taira no Moritoshi 平盛俊 (?-1184). Moritoshi is a similar figure to Sanemori, and in fact was governor of a geographically very near province (Etchū) to the one Sanemori was born in (Echizen).¹¹⁶ Moritoshi is tricked into defeat by his opponent, Inomata

¹¹⁵ Tyler, p. 290. 「かう申せば君を臆せさせ参らせんとて申すには候はず。[…]実盛今度のいくさに命いき、ふたたび都へ参るべしとも覚え候はず」と申しければ、平家の兵共これをきいて、みなふるひわななきあへり。SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 402.

¹¹⁶ To be clear, as these are both of the Hokuriku region, neither of them is actually east of Kyoto. Their being associated with “the east” has more to do with its being a catch-all term for outsiders from the capital than actual geography.

Noritsuna, who, “Although not the stronger of the two, Inomata was brave [*kō* 剛].”¹¹⁷ This use of *kō* here shows perhaps most clearly the way it is used to define the specific variety of masculinity associated with the Minamoto. Even when physically weaker, they have the ruthless determination to claw a victory from defeat; this is the very ideology which supports the rise of the Minamoto throughout the text. Inomata convinces Moritoshi that his kill will not be honorable unless they exchange names first: yet another example of the Taira only being reluctantly coaxed into giving their names. In the process of naming himself, Moritoshi even confesses, “The man you see before you, though born a Heike, has no talents [*fushō* 不肖] and thus came to serve in war [*saburai* 侍].”¹¹⁸ My name is Moritoshi, former governor of Etchū.”¹¹⁹

The term *fushō* refers to someone who simply does not dazzle, it implies a lack of great talent for learning, government administration or the arts. Here, it reveals the expectation that a Taira should be accomplished in these things. Immediately after, it then explains that he was thus demoted to simple service in the countryside as a result of his unsuitability with the glorious life in the capital.

Finally, when a desperate Inomata suggests he could make a deal with Moritoshi to save his life, the enraged Taira responds, “I may not be good for much, [...] but I am a Heike after all.

¹¹⁷ Tyler, p. 499.

¹¹⁸ An early use of the verb *saburo* 侍ふ (“to serve”) being used as a noun for someone who serves as physical protection, rather than engaging in higher pursuits such as government, scholarship or the arts. It does not yet have the modern sense of “samurai” being a profession. Translation mine.

¹¹⁹ 「これはもと平家の一門たりしが、身不肖なるによつて当時は侍になつたる越中前司盛俊といふ者なり。」 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 224.

I have no intention of seeking help from any Genji.”¹²⁰ Moritoshi’s stalwart defense of his family name and honor may seem admirable, but from the Minamoto perspective, is a mere façade of impractical and mostly aesthetic values. The implication by putting these words into the mouth of a Taira is that such pride is bound to precede a fall. Even more interestingly, just as Moritoshi’s patience with him has run out, Inomata applies the same tactic that Kumagai does to Atsumori, using the word *masanō* (“cowardly”).¹²¹ “For shame [*masanaya*]! [...] To take the head of a man who has already surrendered!” This taunt – though clearly merely the desperate cries of a man near death – gives Moritoshi pause, in order for Inomata’s allies to arrive and distract him long enough for Inomata to behead him. Though not significant in the whole of the text, incident shows the stark difference in values between the two sides, excusing Moritoshi’s strength by situating him in the provinces, excusing Inomata’s lack thereof with his superiority of ruthlessness, and concluding that Taira pride is the source of their downfall.

Taira no Tadanori appears at first glance to be an exception to the rule. Both sides lament after his death, “‘Alas,’ they cried, ‘for a gentleman so accomplished both in poetry and war! This great commander will be missed!’”¹²² The specific mention here of his equal skill in the sophisticated arts and war suggests its rarity, which is confirmed in most other notable characters in the text, few if any who are referenced this way.¹²³ Like Moritoshi, though, Tadanori also initially wins his fight. The text is quick to give an explanation: “Having been

¹²⁰ Tyler, p. 500. 「盛俊身こそ不肖なれども、さすが平家の一門なり。源氏たのまうどは思はず。[...]」 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 224.

¹²¹ This will be discussion in more detail in the following section, IX. From Kumagai’s Eyes.

¹²² Tyler, p. 502. 敵もみかたんも是を聞いて、「あないとほし、武芸にも歌道にも達者にておはしつる人を。あつたら大將軍を」 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 229.

¹²³ To my knowledge, only Minamoto no Yoritomo, and only in the *Genpei seisuiki* version.

brought up in Kumano, he was a strong man and very quick. In a flash, he drew his dagger. He stabbed Okabe twice on horseback and once more after he had fallen.”¹²⁴ Again, though not far from Kyoto by comparison and only marginally to the east of it, the text here represents a clear association between locality and physical strength.

In the end, the downfall of all these Taira who manage to show a last breath of martial skill before their deaths, Tadanori, Moritoshi, and Sanemori, even Atsumori himself, can be summarized with one word: pride. Though their deaths are rich in pathos and they exemplify enviable values and even more enviable aesthetics, it is a point which – from the perspective of the *kō* proto-samurai from the east – is easy to criticize. As we have seen, victory at any cost is the superior value to the warriors of the *Heike*. Moral or aesthetic superiority are an impractical distraction. The Taira certainly were strong – if only because some of them did originate from places outside the capital – but that strength did them little good in the face of the forces of the future. Excusing their strength by associating it with the provinces also serves to subtly weaken the image of the court itself, and thus to even further legitimize the Minamoto.

IX. From Kumagai’s Eyes

‘Alas,’ [Kumagai] murmured in bitter grief, ‘the warrior’s calling is harder than any. Had I not been born to a warlike house, never would I have known such sorrow!’¹²⁵

One other unique aspect of Atsumori’s story is its perspective. There is a very good reason that this work is called *Heike monogatari* (“The Tale of the Heike”) and not *Genpei*

¹²⁴ Tyler, p. 501. 熊野そだち大力のはやわぎにておはわしければ、やがて刀をぬき、六野太を馬の上で二刀、おちつく所で一刀、三刀までぞつかれける。SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 227-8.

¹²⁵ Tyler, p. 505. 「あはれ弓矢とる身ほど口惜しかりけるものはなし。武芸の上に生まれずは、何とてかかるうき目をばみるべき。[…]

kassen monogatari (“The Tale of the Genpei War”): even up to the final Initiates’ Book of the Kakuichi-bon, the focus of the story remains on the family of the Taira. The perspective is also consistently with them, the number of times it shifts to the Minamoto a mere handful.¹²⁶ Even when it does, the most memorable of these characters, Minamoto no Yoritomo, Yoshitsune and Yoshinaka, are all portrayed unevenly and with great drama and dynamism, not with a particular focus on their interior thoughts, but rather on their brash actions and the immediate effects of them. The story being in Kumagai’s perspective may have to do with the fact that the *Heike* was likely compiled from many different sources, this one possibly either a monk from Mount Kōya or Kumagai himself,¹²⁷ but the effect it has on the narrative is significant. Without Atsumori’s interiority, he is preserved as little more than a beautiful image which inspires a turn to religion, and thus is no more relatable as a human being than the cherry blossoms which inspire the poet.

A significant portion of the battle of Ichi-no-tani, though, is conveyed to us directly from the eyes of Kumagai Naozane. Part of this is most likely a result of exactly who survived the battle to tell it: we know this experience influenced Kumagai’s decision, and the guilt which apparently made him talkative, to take the tonsure several years later. Yet there are certainly other Minamoto soldiers who survived the battle. None of their interiority is portrayed in such great detail as Kumagai’s. Thus, it is at least possible that placing the tale in Kumagai’s distinct

¹²⁶ This is only true, however, of the *katari-bon* lineage. Yamashita Hiroaki has proposed that there is an “eastern perspective” to the *yomi-hon*, in other words the Minamoto, and a “western (Kyoto)” perspective to the *katari-bon*. Yamashita, *Heike monogatari no seiritsu* 平家物語の成立, p. 162.

¹²⁷ Kimbrough, “Preachers and Playwrights: the Roots of Nō.” *Like Clouds or Mists: Studies and Translations of Nō Plays of the Genpei War*, p. 229 and Mizuhara, p. 360-66.

perspective, for these few moments during this particular battle, was a conscious choice of the author(s).

In discussing the history of scholarship toward *Atsumori's no saigo*, Suzuki Akira points out that relatively little scholarship has sought to determine Atsumori's state of mind;¹²⁸ in other words, most readers find his decision to turn and face his enemy a natural one.¹²⁹ Yet there is evidence in the *Heike* itself that this would not have been his only option, or even a preferred one. From the Taira's initial flight from the capital to escape Yoshinaka, to Tadanori's dismissive "I'm one of you" toward Okada, as Suzuki notes, the text expresses no stigma toward the idea of strategic retreat or duplicity.¹³⁰ Contrary to our romantic image of the samurai of ages past, this period would not yet have been known for *bushidō* ethic; values such as dying nobly for one's lord when all hope of victory was lost. These warriors were by and large pragmatists, who neither shirked petty deception nor running away. Even when the text appears to be glorifying noble deaths, the characters who espouse these values are also quick to abandon them. When rescuing his fatally wounded son, Kajiwara Kagetoki famously tells him, "Die if you must, but never show your back to a foe!"¹³¹ Yet as soon as a chance to retreat arrives, "For a warrior, advance and retreat each has its time. Come, Genda!"¹³² This leaves us with two questions: why would Atsumori, who was already in mid-flight, turn back to face a

¹²⁸ Suzuki, "Masano mo kataki ni ushiro wo misesase tamo mono kana: sajutsu toshite no Kumagai Naozane no kotoba." まさなうも敵にうしろをみせさせ給ふものかな: 詐術としての熊谷直実の言葉 *Rekishi no minzoku: Kanagawa Daigaku Nihon Jōmin Bunka Kenkyūjo ronshū*, p. 52.

¹²⁹ Suzuki, p. 63.

¹³⁰ Suzuki, p. 62.

¹³¹ Tyler, p. 493. 「いかに源太、死ぬるとも敵にうしろを見すな」 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 217.

¹³² Tyler, p. 494. 「弓矢とりはくるもひくも折にこそよれ、いざうれ、源太」 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 217-8.

losing battle, and more importantly, why would the authors leave out his reason for making that decision?

Suzuki postulates that at least one reason for his decision is the specific wording of the taunt Kumagai uses. In the majority,¹³³ though not all versions, the taunt he utters varies surprisingly little: “*Ahare taishōgun to koso mi mairase sōrae. Masanōmo kataki ni ushiro wo misesase tamo mono kana. Kaese tamae.*”¹³⁴ Tyler renders this: “My eyes tell me that you are a man of high rank. For shame, to turn your face from an enemy! Come back! Come back!”¹³⁵ Suzuki found this same *masanashi* (meaning in this context “cowardly”) in only three places in the Engyō-bon¹³⁶ and eight in the Kakuichi-bon.¹³⁷ Each one was used either during a battle scene or about one, each one used exclusively in conversation, and in each case represented both frustration and bluster on the part of the speaker. Citing a strikingly similar example in the dramatic death of Seno’o Kaneyasu 妹尾兼康 (1123-1183) against Imai Kanehira after the fall of Seno’o’s Bitchū fortress, Suzuki determines that the word has a specific effect of drawing such a degree of ire or disgust on the listener as to force them to stop retreating.

This trope of the effectiveness of *masanashi* may have been widely known enough to go without explaining it outright, but the absence of Atsumori’s interiority is still palpable.

Therefore, the question remains why this is so. The Engyō-bon, Nagato-bon 長門本 and *Genpei*

¹³³ Suzuki identifies, in addition to the Kakuichi-bon and Engyō-bon, the Nagato-bon 長門本, *Genpei seisuiki* 源平盛衰記, Kamakura-bon 鎌倉本, Hiramatsu-ke-bon 平松家本, Chūin-bon 中院本 and Jōhō-bon 城方本, all containing approximately the same wording. (p. 53)

¹³⁴ SNKZ, Vol. 2 p. 233.

¹³⁵ Tyler, p. 558.

¹³⁶ Suzuki, p. 55.

¹³⁷ Suzuki, p. 56.

seisuki 源平盛衰記 all include the phrase *ikaga oboshi tamai kemu* (“whatever was in his thoughts...”) before *manukarete totte kaesu* (“once beckoned, he returned”), which they share with the Kakuichi-bon.¹³⁸ This means that the Kakuichi-bon avoids even bringing up the subject of Atsumori’s thoughts. One possible reason for this may be to avoid framing him as a would-be warrior at all, as one can hardly imagine another reason for his ill-advised moment of bravery. As Suzuki points out, he was in the process of escaping when Kumagai called out to him.¹³⁹ This means that we can assume he was neither suicidal nor optimistic about the prospects of his forces. The most likely possibility for his making this decision was perhaps the vice of many youths, a desire to prove oneself. But if Atsumori had such a desire, the portrayal of his character would automatically become more martial and therefore masculine, thus even a vague reference to his thoughts could undermine the femininity of his character.

There a further, cynical interpretation for placing the story in Kumagai’s perspective, which also relates to some aspects of the story which are removed from the Kakuichi-bon: primarily, Kumagai’s reasons for deciding to kill Atsumori, twice. The fact is that Kumagai is willing to kill Atsumori in the same way he is willing to kill anyone at all on the enemy side, for his own fortune and future. The story only functions if he does not know who his enemy is; he might assume that Atsumori is an adult, but there is no guarantee of this. Atsumori was not the only teenager general on the Taira side, something which should have been known especially to Kumagai, who himself is accompanied by his teenage son. Yet the Kakuichi-bon removes all references to the reward Kumagai is expected to receive from Yoritomo for the heads of high-

¹³⁸ Suzuki, p. 59.

¹³⁹ Suzuki, p. 61.

ranking enemies, which is present in other versions,¹⁴⁰ in addition to other more unsavory, realistic elements such as fighting over the heads among the other Minamoto in order to receive these rewards.¹⁴¹ Kumagai makes the initial decision to kill him before he knows anything about Atsumori but his high birth, visible even at a distance in his dress. So at the most basic level, Kumagai is already established as what the Minamoto would call a successful warrior, who can kill at random without hesitation, regardless of who his target is.

Moreover, even after finding out Atsumori's age and beauty, Kumagai still decides to kill him. The way the story is taught in Japanese high schools in the modern era, the most common interpretation of Kumagai's actions seems to be that both Atsumori and Kumagai would rather be killed by someone sympathetic.¹⁴² "He saw Doi and Kajiwara galloping his way with fifty men. Struggling to hold back his tears, he said, 'What I want, you know, is to spare you, but the great host of men on my side will never allow you to get away.'"¹⁴³ Kumagai's comrades are approaching, so he makes the decision that Atsumori would be better off to be killed by him. But, as pointed out by Saeki and Kikuno, in the *yomi-hon* versions, this incident is merely

¹⁴⁰ As Kikuno notes, the Engyō-bon not only has Kumagai saying a line about the rewards promised to those who bring back high-ranking enemy heads – to Atsumori's face, as an excuse for having to kill him – but also about what will happen to Kumagai if the news of his releasing an enemy general gets back to Yoritomo. "The Death of Atsumori Teaching Material Theory: Forgetting the Identity Confirmation and Disregarding the End of Storytelling."

「敦盛最期」教材論：忘却される首実検と無視される語り収め *Kokubungaku kyōiku*, Vol. 65. p. 80.

¹⁴¹ Imai, "Heike monogatari, Engyō-bon to Kakuichi-bon: 'naimen no horisage' wo megutte." 平家物語・延慶本と覚一本：「内面の掘り下げ」をめぐる *Shin Nihon Bungaku*, Vol 38, p. 28.

¹⁴² See Kikuno, p. 79, Inoue, p. 45, Suzuki, p. 52 and Furuta, "'Rashisa' kō: 'Atsumori no saigo,' 'Kiso no saigo' no jissen." 「らしさ」考：「敦盛最期」、「木曾最期」の実践 *Ronsō kokugo kyōikugaku*, Vol. 9, p. 24-5.

¹⁴³ Tyler, p. 505. うしろをきつと見れば土肥、梶原五十騎ばかりでつづいたり。熊谷涙をおさへて申しけるは、「たすけ参らせんとは存じ候へども、御方の軍兵雲霞のごとく候。[…]

another meritorious deed of the Minamoto at Ichi-no-tani.¹⁴⁴ In many ways, according to Kikuno, *Atsumori no saigo* is a failure or parody within the genre of *~ no saigo* (“The Death of ~”). To see a “successful” version of the effectively same story, one need look no further than two sections earlier, to the death of Atsumori’s paternal uncle, Taira no Tadanori.

X. Masculinity and Death

Though martial prowess in the *Heike* may be associated with masculinity, the manner of one’s death is usually treated as a separate matter. The deaths treated positively in the text – meaning that they receive praise by the narrator or characters at the occasion – include those of Imai Kanehira, Taira no Tadanori, Seno’o Kaneyasu, and Saitō Sanemori among others, the vast majority of them on the Taira side. Tragic heroes become a staple of Japanese literature during this period, and for good reason. There is unquestionable emotional magnificence in the necessary but noble sacrifice of one’s life in service of a greater cause. And yet hidden in this glorification of these figures is a subtle message about what they did to earn an untimely end.

Several scholars have already pointed out the inherent similarities between the two stories of *Tadanori no saigo* and *Atsumori no saigo*.¹⁴⁵ There is a vast gap of class represented between Tadanori and Okabe no Rokutaya Tadazumi, his killer, to such an extent that the latter’s name is not consistently recorded across the various versions.¹⁴⁶ Tadanori is also spotted, as the top quote of this thesis indicates, as a noble and a Taira by his blackened teeth. Tadanori’s name is also only revealed after his death, by means of a moving poem attached to

¹⁴⁴ Kikuno, p. 81 and Saeki, p. 48.

¹⁴⁵ Kajiwara, *Kanshō Nihon no koten 11: Heike monogatari*, 鑑賞日本の古典 1 1 – 平家物語 p. 344, Suzuki, p. 57, Kikuno, p. 81.

¹⁴⁶ SNKZ, p. 227, note 8.

his bow, echoing the discovery of Atsumori's flute. As previously mentioned, his death is mourned by both sides, as a rare man skilled in both the ways of poetry and war. Thus concludes the tale of Tadanori.

Unlike Atsumori, however, Tadanori is not meek, nor weak. When Okabe attacks, he accuses angrily, "You wretch! [...] When I told you I was one of yours, you should have let it go at that!"¹⁴⁷ He also initially bests his opponent. But at the moment when he is about to take Okabe's head, Okabe's page boy cuts off Tadanori's dagger arm at the elbow. At this point, Tadanori realizes it is over and he does accept his fate, asking to pray to Amida beforehand,¹⁴⁸ a request which is granted before Okabe takes his head. Okabe, quite rightly, lifts Tadanori's head on the point of his sword and declaims, "I, Okabe Tadazumi, have slain the great Heike commander Tadanori, governor of Satsuma!"¹⁴⁹ This kind of performance was important in order to ensure proper rewards and honors after a battle, and it is one of the many ways in which this entire story is a standard example of meritorious military achievement.

By the standards of this type of story, the killing of Atsumori is in many ways a failure for both Kumagai and Atsumori. Though he does attain the head, the delivery of it to Yoshitsune in return for his rewards is often downplayed or shifted, as in the case of the Kakuichi-bon, to an emotional revelation of Atsumori's name.¹⁵⁰ It is also the unusual nature of Atsumori's story

¹⁴⁷ Tyler, p. 501. 「にっくいやつかな。みかたぞといはばいはせよかし」 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 227.

¹⁴⁸ Beliefs at this time in the newly minted Pure Land Buddhism held that the state of mind, and calling the name of Amida Buddha, directly before death was more important even than sins committed throughout one's life. While similar incidents occur with great frequency, especially toward intentional deaths by drowning, the clearest articulation of this belief in the *Heike* is the execution of Shigehira, Tyler, p. 646-648.

¹⁴⁹ Tyler, p. 502. 「この日来平家の御方にきこえさせ給ひつる薩摩守殿をば、岡部の六野太忠純がうち奉ったるぞや」 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 229.

¹⁵⁰ Kikuno, p. 80.

among similar ones that makes it memorable. There was a very similar encounter between the young Nyūzen Yukishige (of the Minamoto) and Takahashi Nagatsuna (of the Taira) during the battle of Shinohara. But in the case of Nyūzen, the result is the opposite: the veteran Nagatsuna takes pity on him, as Nyūzen is the same age as his own recently departed son, and this moment of pity allows Nyūzen a chance to kill a superior foe. As Kikuno puts it, “It is even possible to imagine voices of criticism raised against the fragile Atsumori. If it had been Nyūzen who faced Kumagai that day, the latter would most certainly have lost his life.”¹⁵¹ The favored virtue for the late Heian and early Kamakura warriors, then, at least as far as the *biwa hōshi* were concerned, was victory itself, not the means of achieving it. It is also notable that, when the positions are reversed – a veteran Taira presented with an inexperienced Minamoto – so is the outcome. This seems yet another attempt by the text to valorize the Taira, showing them as merciful, meek and morally beautiful, and yet to reveal the inherent ineffectiveness of such values against “true” martial strength and masculinity.

XI. Masculinity and Class

‘And who are *you*?’ the other answered.

‘Nobody you can have heard of: Kumagai no Jirō Naozane from the province of Musashi.’

‘Well then nothing about you requires me to give you my name.’¹⁵²

In both the Engyō-bon and *Genpei seisuiki*, Atsumori gives his name to Kumagai when asked. As seen above, in the Kakuichi-bon, he refuses to do so. Despite naming himself when attempting to leave his poems with the great poet Fujiwara no Shunzei 藤原俊成 (1114-1204)

¹⁵¹ Kikuno, p. 79.

¹⁵² Tyler, p. 505. 「汝はたそ。」と問ひ給ふ。「物その者で候はねども、武蔵国住人、熊谷次郎直実」となのり申す。「さてはなんぢにあうてはなのるまじいぞ。[…]

 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 233.

as he flees the capital,¹⁵³ Taira no Tadanori, when asked his name by Okabe Tadazumi, only replies dismissively, “I’m one of yours.” While he has other motivations for doing so, Saitō Sanemori also begs his opponent’s forgiveness that he cannot reveal his name. This reluctance of the Taira to name themselves, specifically in one-to-one combat before their deaths, is a consistent theme which bears some examination here. Ultimately, it is an action of privileged distancing of oneself from those beneath, a kind of sophisticated demurring, the polar opposite of the Minamoto who loudly proclaim their victories in order to secure glory and rewards. It is equally an expression of humility and decorum as it is a stark definition of class.

One illustrative example, also previously mentioned with regard to locality, is that of Taira no Moritoshi. As the battle of Ichi-no-tani turns from bad to worse for the Taira, Moritoshi stays behind, for unknown reasons.¹⁵⁴ Even the way the text introduces him gives him an air of dignity and reluctance. After introducing his opponent, Inomata Noritsuna, as one who, so rumor went, had once “torn a deer’s antlers apart like nothing at all,” the text then contrasts Moritoshi with this, saying: “Moritoshi, for his own part, preferred to confess to the strength of twenty or thirty men but secretly could haul up or launch, all by himself, a ship that required sixty or seventy men to move it.”¹⁵⁵ Though the particular extent of his strength is clearly hyperbole here, the character of humility toward expressing that strength is also equally clear.

¹⁵³ Shunzei spent the latter part of the Genpei War compiling the *Senzaishū*, into which he included one of Tadanori’s poems, supposedly as a result of Tadanori giving Shunzei a collection of his personal bests on this occasion. The *Heike* text speculates that Shunzei thought some of them quite good, was impressed with Tadanori’s character and would have liked to include more, but the Taira were by that time firmly considered enemies of the state (which is to say, Go-Shirakawa and Yoritomo), and so including even one was quite a bold choice. Tadanori’s name is omitted from the head of the poem for the same reason.

¹⁵⁴ The text only speculates that he “felt it was too late for flight,” despite having apparently just seen Taira no Tomomori do exactly that. Tyler, p. 498. 今はおつともかなはじとや思ひけん SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 223.

¹⁵⁵ Tyler, p. 499. 越中前司は二三十人が力わざをするよし一目には見えけれども、内々は六七十人してあげおろす舟を、唯一人しておしあげおしおろす程の大力なり。 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 223.

There is also an intended contrast between Inomata's rather humble maneuver by comparison and Moritoshi's seemingly superhuman one. And yet, what we might find admirable about Moritoshi's humility is likely simply another tactic of the Kakuichi-bon to show the futility of such humble boasting. As we know, neither Moritoshi's superior strength nor his stalwart protection of his family name or values proved much good to him.

While their exact motivations differ, the example of Atsumori gives perhaps the clearest explanation for the Taira reticence for naming themselves. The effect of refusing to give his name, and specifically citing Kumagai's low status as a reason he is not required to do so, simultaneously elevates Atsumori's image and alienates the reader, who is decidedly within Kumagai's perspective at this point. The image we are left with is of a proud, highly educated and beautiful young man, who is passive and dignified toward his own death. Crucially, he is accepting toward his karmic fate, even as he draws a clear line between Kumagai and himself. This small moment is indeed a microcosm of the world view of the Kakuichi-bon: the arrogance of the Taira, albeit deserved for their beauty and talent, is merely an affectation with no practical value. The only way to survive and to achieve enlightenment is to gain mastery of the new skills required of a less stable era. Those are primarily martial skills, but they also include the abandoning of court culture, including the instability of androgyny.

XII. The Flute

He took off the man's *hitatare*, meaning to use it meaning to use it to wrap the head, and found at his waist a brocade bag containing a flute.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Tyler, p. 506. 鎧直垂をとって頸をつつまんとしけるに、錦の袋にいれたある笛をぞ腰にさされたる。SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 235.

Kikuno points out that the Kakuichi-bon in particular seems defensive about the issue of Atsumori's flute.¹⁵⁷ After killing Atsumori and discovering it, Kumagai bitterly laments hearing music at dawn from the Taira side, which no doubt this young man had been a part of, and that of all the "tens of thousands"¹⁵⁸ on the Minamoto side, not one of them would have thought to bring a flute into battle. The key point for most scholars, however, is the following observation by the narrator as a result of all this, in fact the concluding lines of the incident: "It is a touching thought indeed that the giddy charms [*kyōgen kigyo*] of music served to turn a warrior's mind to praise the way traced by the Buddha."¹⁵⁹ This is the line that draws together this incident into the broader narrative of the Kakuichi-bon.

The importance of the previous quote lies heavily in this term: *kyōgen kigyo* 狂言綺語.

Though this may be one of, if not the earliest example of its use within Japanese literature,¹⁶⁰

Saya cites a Tang Dynasty Chinese text, *Báishì wénjí* 白氏文集, as the originator of the term.

In my life until now, I had exclusively made worldly, popular poems [*sezoku no shibun*], taking delight in the sin of toying with meaningless, decorative words [*kyōgen kigyo*]. Turning this activity of writing poetry to good purpose, from now

¹⁵⁷ In some texts, (e.g., the Engyō-bon), it is actually a *hichiriki* 篳篥, rather than a flute, *fue* 笛. Tyler suggests the latter is likely a conceit of the Kakuichi-bon, if for no other reason than the fact that the *hichiriki* is "far less generally appealing" in terms of the sound it produces. (Tyler, p. xxii.)

¹⁵⁸ Historian Isaac Meyer claims that a "large" army of mounted archers (the skilled cavalry and precursor to samurai, as well as the majority of named characters in the *Heike*) would consist of figures in the low thousands at most (Meyer, *History of Japan Podcast*, timestamp 23:55). George Sansom notes, on the figures at Ichi-no-tani, "One contemporary journal says that the Taira numbered 20,000, but this seems highly improbable, since only 3,000 survivors reached Yashima and the number of prisoners taken and men killed was given by the *Azuma Kagami* as about one thousand." Sansom, p. 299. Tyler in fact suggests taking each number of troops mentioned in the *Heike* text as being exaggerated by a factor of ten. Tyler, p. 76, footnote 58.

¹⁵⁹ Tyler, p. 506. 狂言綺語の理といひながら、遂に讃仏乗の因となるこそ哀れなれ。SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 236.

¹⁶⁰ Its entry in the Shōgakukan cites this very line as its *locus classicus*.

on, it is my earnest desire to take every opportunity to use my words to extol Buddhist law, forever.¹⁶¹

Though it is impossible for many reasons to be sure that the originator of the *Heike* read these particular words, the experience of this author (although the term here specifically refers to poetry, not music or other arts) strongly mirrors the Kakuichi-bon representation of Kumagai's turn to Buddhism. Though Kumagai himself bemoans his warrior life that necessitates the killing of the young and beautiful, the text places strong emphasis on the fact that the combination of Atsumori's beauty and his skill with the most moving art forms produces in Kumagai a dearness toward such fragile life, and that this was the reason for his turn to religion.

Yet the need to defend the inclusion of the flute in Atsumori's story is also worth examining. For example, Kikuno suggests that this may be a meta attempt by the *biwa hōshi* themselves to connect with their audience and convey a message about so-called "expedient means."¹⁶² They too, after all, are using frivolous popular entertainment in order to relate larger Buddhist messages, and it is in their best interests to provide ideological support to this practice. From close reading of the text, although the discovery of the flute did precede Kumagai's decision to turn toward enlightenment, it does not seem to be the only cause, or even the main one. Kimbrough notes the difference in emphasis in the *yomi-hon* textual lineage, which includes an anecdote about Kumagai returning Atsumori's head to his father, Tsunemori.

While most *Heike* texts in the recited [*katari-bon*] textual line contain no mention of Kumagai's communication with Tsunemori, they do emphasize the

¹⁶¹ “願 以今生世俗文学業狂言綺語之誤 翻 為当来世世讚仏乘之因転法輪之縁” *Báishì wénjí*, Chapter 17: Xiang Mountain Temple Record of Bai-shi in Luoyang. Xiāng shān sì Bái shì luò zhōng jí jì 香山寺白氏洛中集記. Saya, “‘Heike monogatari’ to fue: kan dai kyu, ‘Atsumori no saigo’ no keisei wo megutte.” 『平家物語』と笛：巻第九「敦盛最期」の形成をめぐって *Mita Kokubun*, Vol. 13, p. 39.

¹⁶² 方便 Kikuno, p. 77.

importance of Atsumori's flute, and in this respect their Atsumori accounts starkly contrasts those in the Nagato-bon, Engyō-bon, and other texts in the readerly [*yomi-hon*] textual line. [...] The flute, we are told, is a symbol of the refinement and gentility of the Taira nobles, and it is Kumagai's discovery of it that contributes to his decision to become a monk.¹⁶³

It seems odd on the surface that the *yomi-hon* line, which is perceived to have a more "eastern" perspective, should neglect this opportunity to insert a symbol of "refinement and gentility" to stereotype the Taira and thus subtly distance themselves from them. It is less surprising that the "western" Kakuichi-bon, perceived to be more friendly to the Taira, should wish to remove any overly sentimental anecdotes about a Minamoto soldier caring for the relatives of those he has slain. However, as can be seen in the quote under VII. Masculinity, Religion and Violence, it is the discovery of Atsumori's name and age that is the key for Kumagai, not necessarily the flute on its own. In fact, the addition of the flute to the Kakuichi-bon fits very well with the image it seeks to create of the Taira. It would not be unimaginable that this aspect of the story was entirely invented, just to increase the poignance and beauty of Atsumori, and in so doing, to relegate him into a tragic figure of the past.

If the inclusion of the flute in the narrative is not to directly aid in a turn to Buddhism, then another, even more calculating reason that may be in play, related to the origin story of the flute.

Now, as to Atsumori's flute, his grandfather, Tadamori, a most accomplished musician, had once received it as a gift from Retired Emperor Toba. He then passed it down his line, and it had come, or so they say, for his talent, to Atsumori. The name of the flute was Saeda ['little branch'].¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Kimbrough, p. 216.

¹⁶⁴ Tyler, p. 506. 件の笛はおほぢ忠盛笛の上手にて、鳥羽院より給はられたりけるとぞきこえし。経盛相伝せられたりしを、敦盛器量たるによつて、もたれたりけるとかや。名をば小枝とぞ申しける。SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 236.

This small set of details is perhaps the most wildly divergent aspect of *Atsumori no saigo* across the versions, beginning with the name of the flute. Saya examined the passage in fifteen different versions, and found, though it was often written 小枝, the readings varied from “saeda” to “koeda” and even “saeta.”¹⁶⁵ The wide variation in names may serve as evidence that the story of the flute was added later, or perhaps only half-remembered from an oral variant that preceded the *Heike* by some time. Arguably, this would be nothing but an interesting bit of trivia, except for the fact that Prince Mochihito 高倉宮 (?-1180), second son of Go-Shirakawa and the doomed prince who was an unwitting catalyst in the events leading up to the Genpei War, also had a flute called, 小枝 “Koeda.”¹⁶⁶

Moreover, though the significance of Atsumori’s flute arrives only after his death and becomes rather conveniently tangled up in a broader religious message, Mochihito’s flute was an important aspect of his character.¹⁶⁷ When his attendant, Nobutsura, discovers the prince has fled the capital without it, he braves danger in order to return it to him, whereupon: “His Highness was overjoyed. ‘If I die,’ he said, ‘I want you to put this flute with me in my coffin.’”¹⁶⁸ Though the texts also diverge on this point, in the Kakuichi-bon, the identify of the beheaded body of Prince Mochihito is also confirmed by the presence of Koeda in his sash. Saya points out that, although for example the *Genpei seisuiki* mentions no flute at all, all other versions agree that Mochihito bears the flute called “Koeda,” something much less consistent in

¹⁶⁵ Saya, p. 36.

¹⁶⁶ Saya, p. 35.

¹⁶⁷ Moreover, Ubukata Takashige argues that there is reason to believe Mochihito’s short rebellion against Kiyomori existed as an autonomous story before being incorporated into the *Heike*. (Ubukata (2002) p. 13)

¹⁶⁸ Tyler, p. 209. 宮なのめならず御感あつて、「われ死なば、此笛を御棺にいれよ」SNKZ, Vol. 1, p. 286.

Atsumori's story.¹⁶⁹ Though the origin story of "Koeda" is not included in the Kakuichi-bon, it does list Prince Mochihito as owning two such flutes, and explains the origin of the other (Semiore, "broken cicada"): "Of old, Emperor Toba sent the emperor of Song China a thousand taels of gold, and got in return, so it appeared, a joint of bamboo right for a flute, bearing along its length a growth just like a living cicada. [the 'cicada' breaks off] That is how the flute got its name."¹⁷⁰ This second flute, Mochihito gives as a gift to the Miroku Buddha at Miidera before his death.

As Saya also notes, the "confusion" which seems to take place among the different versions about who actually had the flute called "Koeda" may well have been intentional.¹⁷¹ Apart from the obvious similarities between their attachments to flutes that bring them to each be found with them on their beheaded bodies, both Atsumori and Mochihito evidently received them in one way or another from Emperor Toba. The significance of this is twofold: firstly, that Emperor Toba could be said to be the ultimate kick-starter of the hubris of, and subsequently the aggressions against, the Taira, by promoting Taira no Tadamori to the status of a privy gentleman, which arguably his birth did not warrant. Secondly, that this draws an even stronger connection between the identity of the Taira, and Taira no Atsumori specifically, and the imperial family.

The text also adds some specific color to Mochihito's flight from the capital which is relevant here. "There is only one way, Your Highness," Nagatsura said. "You will have to dress

¹⁶⁹ Saya, p. 35.

¹⁷⁰ Tyler, p. 226. かの蟬折と申すは、昔鳥羽院の御時、こがねを千両、宋朝の御門へおくらせ給ひたりければ、返報とおぼしくて、いきたり蟬のごとくに、ふしのついたる笛竹を、一よおくらせ給ふ。[...] さてこそ蟬折とはつけられたり。SNKZ, Vol. 1, p. 313.

¹⁷¹ Saya, p. 36.

as a woman.’ ‘Very well.’ The prince let down his hair, and, over layered robes, donned the broad, conical hat of a woman walking abroad.”¹⁷² Whether for escape or for any other reason beyond a cultural norm of entertainment,¹⁷³ no other character in the *Heike* ever adopts an alternative gender presentation. As if it were not enough of a message to simply have the prince doing it himself, the text reiterates this action of his several times and even includes a precedent, “Of old when Tenmu, the Kiyomibara Emperor, was still heir apparent, he came under attack by bandits and, so the story goes, fled into the Yoshino mountains, disguised as a woman. The prince on his present journey did the same.”¹⁷⁴ As evidenced by the fact that “The few gentlewomen were sent off wherever they could go and hide”¹⁷⁵ within the same passage, this temporary feminine affectation of Mochihito’s is not so much like that of Yamato the Brave of the *Kojiki*, who dresses as a woman in order to cleverly trap and kill his foes. It is neither a noble feat nor comedic device, but is a fearful act to prolong his survival, which he adopts without any resistance.

I would not go so far as to suggest that dressing as a woman is significant to Mochihito’s character. That said, his existence does fall in a tricky area for anyone seeking to legitimize Minamoto no Yoritomo. Mochihito is not only a member of the imperial family, but also an agitator who is one of the first to rebel against Kiyomori. Ideologically, this places him

¹⁷² Tyler, p. 208. 「ただ別の様候まじ。女房装束にていでさせ給へ」と申しければ、しかるべしとて御ぐしを乱し、かさねたる御衣に、市女笠をぞ召されける。SNKZ, Vol. 1, p. 285.

¹⁷³ As mentioned previously, early in the text there are feature *shirabyōshi* dancers, for whom adopting several (but not all) male courtier characteristics was a key part of their performance.

¹⁷⁴ Tyler, p. 211. 昔清見原の天皇の、いまだ東宮の御時、賊徒におそはれさせ給ひて、吉野山へいらせ給ひけるにこそ、をとめのすがたをば、からせ給ひけるなれ。いま此君の御有様も、それにはたがはせ給はず。SNKZ, Vol. 1, p. 291.

¹⁷⁵ Tyler, p. 208. 女房達の少々おはしけるを、かしここへたちしのばせて、見苦しき物あらば[...] SNKZ, Vol. 1, p. 285.

simultaneously in both camps, thus creating an equal necessity to endorse his rebellion without endorsing him personally. The Kakuichi-bon describes him thus:

So beautifully did he write and such talent did he display that by rights he should have ascended to the throne, [...] At spring parties beneath the blossoms, he wielded the brush to set down his poems; at moonlit autumn gatherings, he drew lovely music from his flute. Such was the style in which he lived.¹⁷⁶

This may seem entirely complimentary, but there are two unspoken implications. First, in saying he deserved the throne, the narrator is subtly criticizing Go-Shirakawa, who chose his younger brother Takakura due to (or so we are told) jealousy among his wives. Of course, this also reflects quite badly on Takakura himself. And yet, after praising his “scholarly talent” specifically as justification to rule, the text also engages in mild, almost passive-aggressive criticism of how this talented prince spent his time. Not governing, as apparently he should have been doing, but immersed in the arts and appreciation of nature. The type of behavior the text praises is – not coincidentally – the same type of bureaucratic and public skill with which the shogunate would establish its own power. By comparison, Mochihito’s artistic talents are subtly dismissed as merely a “lifestyle.”

It should also be noted that Yoshitsune, who in modern interpretations is often portrayed as a waifish *bishōnen*, in almost exactly the same circumstances when fleeing from Yoritomo, at no point considers the idea of dressing like a woman. Go-Shirakawa faces a similar situation when the Taira are fleeing the capital and they seek to bring him along to protect their own legitimacy, but he also neglects a feminine guise in his escape. This may suggest that such

¹⁷⁶ Tyler, p. 201. 御手跡うつくしうあそばし、御才学すぐれてましましければ、位にもつかせ給ふべきに、[...]花もとの春の遊には、紫毫をふるって手づから御作を書き、月の前の秋の宴には、玉笛をふいて身づから雅音をあやつり給ふ。かくしてあかしくらし給ふほどに、治承四年には、御年卅にぞならせましましける。SNKZ, Vol. 1, p. 278.

forms of subterfuge, at least when used for escape, might be acceptable for the more feminine and elite imperial family, but not for the rough and crude Minamoto, nor for the aged Go-Shirakawa. More intriguingly, the addition of this aspect to Mochihito's story may be one of many numerous, subtle efforts of the authors to ideologically bundle together the imperial family, the Taira and the concept of soft, androgynous appreciation of the arts.

The reason Mochihito's story is particularly relevant to Atsumori, and to gender, is that Atsumori's story is far more likely to be invented, or at least embellished, than Mochihito's is. Mochihito's story occurred chronologically much earlier; in 1180 compared to Atsumori's 1184. The political landscape was entirely different at that time – with Taira ascendancy not being seriously questioned until its concessive military losses in 1183 – and as a broad generalization, it is probably fair to say that less conflict tends to mean better record-keeping. Mochihito was also much higher ranked than Atsumori, his life under constant scrutiny as an imperial prince, and as Ubukata Takashige notes, his story most likely existed independently of the *Heike* before its construction.¹⁷⁷ While Atsumori's *existence* can be confirmed in outside sources, such as the *Azuma kagami*, the details of his story vary so widely that a “true” version may never have existed. The fact that the two stories share a broad structure and echo specific, highly symbolic details suggests at least an unconscious association between the two. Again, this implies some level of conscious or unconscious reproduction of ideology that draws together the Taira and the imperial throne, and seeks to place them in the feminine, artistic and ineffectual past.

XIII. The Doomed Taira Youths

¹⁷⁷ Ubukata (2002), p. 14.

Whoever brings forward a scion of the house of Taira, he shall have the reward that he desires.¹⁷⁸

We have seen that there is a tendency for the authors of this text to associate the imperial court – the emperor himself, more specifically – with youth, and in a subtler way, with femininity. The similarities in depictions between the Taira nobility and the emperors themselves also create tantalizing hints about authorial intent. By the time this “complete” version of the Kakuichi-bon was dictated and committed to text, its promulgators had 186 years between the decisive battle at Dan-no-ura and their present day to contextualize and rationalize the events in a way that was convenient for them. The text itself does not hide the nature of the two competing forms of masculinity, that of the Taira and the Minamoto. On the contrary, it exaggerates them. Yet even while expounding upon the beauty of the Taira, not only does this fact not serve as salvation for them, in fact it seals their fate.

An incident not well known or remembered outside of specialist circles concerns Minamoto no Yoritomo’s final ruthless actions to hunt down every single male with Taira blood in the concluding sections of the text. Addressing a nation ravaged by war, Yoritomo puts a bounty on their heads. Unsurprisingly, as noted in the passage quoted in this thesis’ introduction, his starving populace all too eagerly accepts. By this time in the story, the difference between the Taira and Minamoto has become so extreme that the Taira almost seem to be of another species. Surely a not insignificant number of those caught up in this purge were not Taira at all, but this very fact reveals a subtler purpose of describing these

¹⁷⁸ Tyler, p. 664. p 「平家の子孫といはん一、尋ね出したらむ輩にいては、所望こふによるべし」 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 460.

events in this way: not only were the Taira doomed to fall in spite of their beauty, but rather because of it.

The youths who perished in this purge were killed precisely because of their beauty, whether or not they were Taira. No single male of Taira descent was spared, including the tragic case of Rokudai 平六代 (1173?-1199?), noted in the *Heike* as the final surviving member of the Taira bloodline, until his eventual execution by Yoritomo's heir.¹⁷⁹ The case of Rokudai rings strikingly similar bells to both Atsumori and the child emperor Antoku. Like Atsumori, he is portrayed as far too young for one to be executed, yet like Antoku, he has a bearing which exceeds his years. "This year was only Rokudai's twelfth, though he seemed several years older, such were his looks and dignity."¹⁸⁰ When both the elite general and political mastermind Hōjō Tokimasa and the firebrand monk Mongaku encounter Rokudai, they have the same reaction. Despite admitting to having murdered a great deal of other children of all ages already, Tokimasa says of Rokudai, "He is so attractive that I feel sorry for him, and so far I have done nothing further with him."¹⁸¹ One cannot help but think, here, of Kumagai's hesitation upon seeing Atsumori's "very pretty" face. When Mongaku first sees him, the descriptions grow even more flowering.

The sweep of his hair, his comely figure lent him such true nobility that he hardly seemed of this world. The night before, he must not have slept, and his face, now a little drawn, looked all the more touchingly sweet. [...] Mongaku did not

¹⁷⁹ This is by no means certain. There are no official records of his death, and in fact some records cite a half-brother of his, Taira no Chikazane 平親真 (1178-1225), as surviving him, therefore making Chikazane the last surviving male Taira. A bizarre piece of trivia about Chikazane is that Oda Nobunaga claimed (preposterously) to be descended from him, but the dates of his life and of the ancestor Oda claims are almost a century apart.

¹⁸⁰ Tyler, p. 665. 六代御前今年はわづかに十二にこそなり給へども、よのつねの十四五よりはおとなしく、みめかたち優におはしければ、[...] SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 464.

¹⁸¹ Tyler, p. 668. 「あまりにいとほしくて、いまだともかうもし奉らん」 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 468.

see how anyone could possibly execute this child, whatever threat he might pose in the future.¹⁸²

Rokudai is likely to be the most physically admired figure in the entire text, as every time he is mentioned, descriptions of his beauty undoubtedly follow. But exactly like Atsumori, his beauty provides him only a temporary stay of execution before becoming in fact the justification for it.

Though Mongaku does obtain a pardon for him from Minamoto no Yoritomo himself, which just narrowly saves his life despite the close timing of the planned execution and Yoritomo's temperamental mood, the danger is never absent. "Meanwhile Rokudai reached his fourteenth or fifteenth year, and his beauty shone a brightening light on all around him. [...] Lord Yoritomo found him a constant cause of concern."¹⁸³ When news of Yoritomo's concerns reaches the family, Rokudai's mother has him become a monk immediately, for which he was required to "cut off his lovely hair at the shoulders."¹⁸⁴ Even this only prolongs his life until Yoritomo's death. The text is not clear on the exact date, and therefore it is not clear which heir of Yoritomo's this is referring to,¹⁸⁵ but in any case, "the great lord in Kamakura" becomes aware of Rokudai's presence, even in his continued Buddhist practice, and observes, "Look at

¹⁸² Tyler, p. 668-9. 髪のかかり、すがた、事がら、誠にあてにうつくしく、此世の人とも見え給はず。こよひうちとへて寝給はねとおぼしくて、すこしおもやせ給へるにつけて、いとど心苦しうらくぞおぼえける。[...] たとひすゑの世にいかなるあた敵になるとも、いかがは是を失ひ奉るべきと、かなしうおぼえければ[...] SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 468-9.

¹⁸³ Tyler, p. 678. さる程に六代御前は、やう々十四五にもなり給へば、みめ、かたちいよ々うつくしく、あたりもてりかかやくばかりなり。[...] 鎌倉殿常はおぼつかなげにおぼして [...] SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 485.

¹⁸⁴ Tyler, p. 679. うつくしげなる髪を肩のまはりにはさみおろし [...] SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 486.

¹⁸⁵ Though it does cite Rokudai's year as "his thirtieth."

whose son he is, and whose disciple! [...] No doubt he has shaved his head, but not his heart.”¹⁸⁶ And with no further ado, Rokudai’s execution is finally decided.

Despite the many similarities in the two stories of Atsumori and Rokudai, there is at least one major difference: length. Albeit other stories of the deaths of various Taira loyalists are folded in, Rokudai has a full three sections – the final sections of the entire text but for the Initiates’ Chapters¹⁸⁷ – devoted to his story. Furthermore, he is the son of Koremori, one of the most sympathetic characters, portrayed with the most care and detail apart from Koremori’s own father, Shigemori. He is not only the symbolic carrier of the Taira lineage in that he is stunningly beautiful, but also in that he is peaceful: none of these three men of the Komatsu Taira line¹⁸⁸ wished to be a part of this conflict, and in fact did everything they could to avoid it, yet all three perished within it. Perhaps for this reason in itself, none of them are as well remembered as Atsumori. Even so, the way their story is told suggests particular effort on the part of the authors not only to make them sympathetic, but also to make them pathetic. They are the stereotypical ideal of male beauty and refinement, which makes their masculinity at odds with the new warlike, hegemonic masculinity of Yoritomo and his ilk.

XIV. Conclusion

Whether conscious or not, as we have seen, there are layers of suggestions, both subtle and not-so, which draw implicit connections between Taira masculinity, the emperor, and the inevitable defeat of both. As Ubukata puts it, “And there, in the substratum of the context of

¹⁸⁶ Tyler, p. 684. 「さる人の子なり、さる人の弟子なり。頭をばそつたりとも、心をばよもそらじ」 SNKZ, Vol. 2, p. 496.

¹⁸⁷ Again, only in the *katari-bon*. As noted by Selinger, the *yomi-hon* continues the story in order to praise Yoritomo for his bringing peace to all Japan. p. 20.

¹⁸⁸ Named for Shigemori’s sobriquet, based on his residence at the Rokuhara Komatsudai.

Heike monogatari, one can almost feel, drifting in and out, of the eye of a Heike author, one who can depict in an exceedingly structural manner the fall of the imperial court.”¹⁸⁹ Yoritomo may well have felt threatened simply because he feared an uprising like the one he himself achieved, but the Kakuichi-bon portrayal of his actions lends another interpretation: that the culture, including the androgynous beauty, of his enemies necessitated their destruction. The threat which they provided was, in other words, more than simply one of legitimacy or lineage, although these two things are also difficult to disentangle from the issue of masculinity, it was one of ideology.

For so many centuries until the end of the Heian Period, the court defined social power, and achievements in the arts and in court culture secured legitimacy. Though in truth this system had been gradually breaking down long before the Genpei War began, the world view that we see in the Kakuichi-bon *Heike* is one of simultaneous nostalgia for that secure and peaceful past, as well as a conscious abandonment of it as unsuccessful, even cosmically doomed, in the increasingly martial, modern world of the Kamakura Period. This woebegone court culture happened to privilege a soft masculinity, which was not necessarily martial in nature. To overthrow this power structure entirely, and to avoid a revival of the old system, new legitimacy had to be formed.

There is an implicit association still present in this period, a remnant of the Heian Period, that anything more violent or sweaty than the occasional hunt would be considered an act of vulgarity. If the samurai were to truly take power, a group whose claim to authority rested in their martial prowess, then this association must be challenged. It is possible that the author(s)

¹⁸⁹ Ubukata, p. 47.

of the *Heike* would be conscious of the fact that to challenge such ideology directly would only be perceived as equally vulgar, and would provoke resistance from the classical aesthetic. This is especially true given that, after the shift toward military dictatorship of the Kamakura Period, the remaining aristocracy was forced increasingly to cling to its own legitimacy by becoming even more elitist and conservative, securing a lingering status as bearers of this very classical aesthetic. The way to do this, therefore, would be to subvert the classic without challenging its status; to show in more subtle and symbolic ways its impracticality and unfeasibility for the changing, turbulent times.

Based on the fact that Atsumori is instead named as his cousin Narimori in the *Genpei tōjōroku* version of events, Saya suggests that not only is Atsumori himself not important to the story of his own death, but rather that he exists for this story as a generic Taira who is young, beautiful, extremely aristocratic and cultured, and the killing of whom can bring Kumagai toward religion.¹⁹⁰ This is reflected both in the fact that his piece in the Kakuichi-bon is performed as a *fushimono*, a religious- or feminine-oriented mode, and in the fact that the no version features a *chū-no-mai*, a delicate and exalting dance, normally reserved for female divinities. We do not know how Atsumori's story came to be a part of the *Heike*, but there are suggestions – such as the variations related to his flute – that parts, or the entirety of his story, are invented. By this measure, the more feminine, and the more aristocratic Atsumori appears, the more likely it is that the authors of the Kakuichi-bon wished him to be so, as a representative of the formerly warlike but now toothless, image-obsessed courtiers. Whether

¹⁹⁰ Saya, *Heike monogatari kara jōruri e: Atsumori setsuwa no hen yō*. 平家物語から浄瑠璃へ：敦盛説話の変容 (2002), p. 16-18.

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indeed someone loyal to the Minamoto actually had a hand in the compilation of the Kakuichibon *Heike monogatari*, or whether this subtly stroking the ego of the new ruling power was simply a practical matter for the *biwa hōshi*, the intriguing possibility nevertheless remains that the *Heike* helped usher in a new era of hegemonic masculinity.

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