

NORMA FIELD

The Splendor of
Longing in the
Tale of the Genji

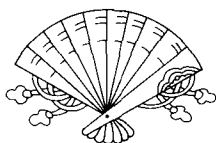


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The Splendor of
Longing in the
Tale of Genji



Norma Field



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PRINCETON
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For Rodger

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Preface

IN PREPARING this book I have consulted a number of Japanese editions of the *Genji Monogatari* chiefly, the Iwanami *Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei* version, Shinchōsha's *Nihon Koten Bungaku Shūsei*, the *Kogetsushō*, Tamagami Takuya's *Genji Monogatari Hyōshaku*, and as the basic text, the Shōgakkan *Nihon Koten Bungaku Zenshū* edition. All the passages quoted from the *Genji* are my own translations (as are passages from other works unless indicated otherwise). Each is identified in the body of the text with its location in the Shōgakkan text followed by its location in the Seidensticker and Waley translations. Thus (3 206, S 405, W 461) means volume 3, page 206 in Shōgakkan, page 405 in the 1976 Seidensticker translation, and page 461 in the 1960 Modern Library Waley edition.

I imagine a number of uses for these correlations. First, the reader may wish to situate a particular passage in context. Second, the great differences in the three translations may provoke interest in their own right. I must caution the reader, however, that the particular element for which I am quoting a passage will often not appear in the Seidensticker or Waley versions. This is especially the case with character names or titles. I have, nevertheless, indicated the location of the passage in Seidensticker and Waley. This is also true when the omissions are more extensive. Only when a given incident or exchange is entirely missing do I mark its general location in brackets. This happens from time to time with the Waley translation. The celebrated omissions from Waley are of course a portion of the "Fireflies" chapter and the entire "Bell Cricket" chapter. A considerable section is also missing at the beginning of the second "New Herbs" chapter. Together with the writing of sequels or parodies, translation represents the most active form of reading. All translators have their own conception of the whole that governs the handling of the parts. I hope the reader will keep this in mind when reviewing my juxtapositions. Nevertheless, I cannot overestimate the extent to which I am indebted to both the Seidensticker and the Waley translations.

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I have made certain decisions for the sake of consistency in helping the English-speaking reader to follow the text in either the Waley or the Seidensticker translation. I have used the Seidensticker chapter titles and listed Waley and Japanese equivalents in an appendix. I have also generally used the Seidensticker character names and given equivalents in the list of "Principal Characters." The reader may wish to supplement with the genealogical charts offered in the Waley translation as well as in Ivan Morris's *The World of the Shining Prince*. Better yet, the reader might follow in the venerable tradition of *Genji* scholarship and produce his or her own charts with the help of the descriptions in the list of "Principal Characters." Genealogies are one of the most valuable representations of the tale, it is best to have both charts that are specific to the context at hand and those that reveal more far-flung relationships.

This study began as a dissertation at Princeton University, and by now the list of those whom I would like to thank is considerable indeed. Work began during a two-year stay (1980-1982) in Tokyo, Japan, supported by Fulbright-Hays and Social Science Research Council grants. I wish to record my gratitude to the institutions that made possible this rich and happy period. My work in Japan was aided by the kindness of more people than I could possibly name. Nevertheless, I wish to thank Professors Akiyama Ken, Nakanishi Susumu, and Suzuki Hideo for their assistance in getting me started and their continued cordiality. To all the members of the Monogatari Kenkyūkai, my heartfelt thanks for sensible instruction, spirited exchange, and inexhaustible conviviality. Fujii Sadakazu, Takahashi Tōru, Kawazoe Fusae, and Kobayashi Masaaki have been generous with ideas and materials. To the indefatigably provocative Mitani Kuniaki my intellectual debt continues to be unbounded.

My years at Princeton were sustained by the warm encouragement of teachers and friends. My thanks to Andrew Plaks, Richard Bowring, and Ian Levy for diligently reading and commenting on my work, and to Earl Miner for his apparently unquenchable enthusiasm and willingness to prod, without which the project might never have been undertaken let alone completed. Lewis Cook of Cornell University gave generously of

Preface

his powers of critical scrutiny. He may quarrel with much that remains but I am grateful for his efforts.

At the University of Chicago I found a wonderful community of friends and colleagues. My thanks go to students who have listened to and argued with me and, in particular, to my colleagues Harry Harootunian, Tetsuo Najita, and Bill Sibley whose enlivening exchange and encouragement have inspired new thought and energy. Karen Brazell and Thomas Rimer as readers for the Press offered a number of valuable suggestions. Cathie Brettschneider edited the manuscript with perspicacity and resolution. My thanks also for the friendship of Linn Freiwald and Maria Laghi, representatives of that fabled and exacting creature, the common reader. Finally, I wish for words with which to thank my patient family, both immediate and extended. I dedicate this book as a token of esteem and gratitude to my husband Rodger.

March 13, 1986

Principal Characters

THE FOLLOWING is a list of the principal characters referred to in the text. A variety of names are used in the *Tale of Genji* for any given character (the more significant the character, the more forms of reference). I have generally followed the designations in the Seidensticker translation and indicate the Waley and Japanese appellations in parentheses. For the latter I have generally used the principal listings in the genealogical charts at the end of each volume of the Shōgakkan edition. Where I have deviated from Seidensticker, I have so indicated with an * and listed the Seidensticker name first in parentheses. There are of course some variations in the Seidensticker and Waley translations as well. I have ignored slight variations of form and use "same" to indicate that the source uses the same name as the one listed immediately before it.

Akashū Empress / Akashū Princess (Crown Princess / Akashū Princess, Akashū no Chūgū) Genji's daughter by the Akashū Lady and therefore half sister of Yūgiri and, unknown to the world, the Reizei Emperor as well. Consort of the last emperor in the tale, a son of Suzaku. Mother of the First Princess and Niou among others.

Akashū Lady (Lady of Akashū, Akashū no Kimi) Daughter of the Akashū Priest and mother of the Akashū Princess by Genji.

Akashū Priest* (the old man, the ex- or old Governor, Akashū no Nyūdō) Former governor of Harima Province and father of the Akashū Lady. He is a cousin to the Kiritsubo Lady, Genji's mother.

Akikonomu (Lady Akikonomu, Akikonomu Chūgū) Daughter of the Rokujō Lady and a crown prince, dead before the beginning of the tale. Consort of the Reizei Emperor. Has no issue.

Aoi (Princess Aoi, Aoi no Ue) Daughter of a Minister of the Left and Princess Ōmiya, sister of Tō no Chūjō. Genji's first official wife and mother of Yūgiri.

Principal Characters

Asagao, Princess* (Asagao, Princess Asagao, Asagao no Himegimi) Daughter of a brother of the Kintsubo Emperor and therefore first cousin to Genji

Bennokimi (same, Ben) Daughter of Kashiwagi's wet nurse, in attendance on the Uji princesses

Eighth Prince (Hachi no Miya, same) Son of Kintsubo Emperor, half brother of Genji Father of the Uji princesses and Ukifune

First Princess (same, Onna Ichu no Miya) Daughter of Akashi Empress and the last emperor in the tale Sister of Niou Kaoru, although married to her half sister the Second Princess, is ardently drawn to her

Fujitsubo (Lady Fujitsubo, Fujitsubo Chūgū) Daughter of a "previous emperor" and consort of the Kintsubo Emperor Secretly bears Reizei Emperor by Genji

Genji (Prince Genji, Genji) Eponymous hero Son of the Kintsubo Emperor and the Kintsubo Lady Father of Yūgiri, the Akashi Empress, and, unknown to the world, the Reizei Emperor Officially married first to Aoi and later to the Third Princess

Hana Chiru Sato* (Lady of the Orange Blossoms, Lady from the Village of Falling Flowers, Hana Chiru Sato) One of Genji's minor ladies, but installed in the Rokujōin Entrusted with the care of young people, including Tamakazura, Yūgiri, and his daughter Rokunokimi

Higekuro (Prince Higekuro, Higekuro Taishō) Married first to Murasaki's stepsister and later to Tamakazura

Higekuro's Wife (Lady Makibashira, Higekuro no Kita no Kata) Daughter of Prince Hyōbu, Murasaki's stepsister Replaced by Tamakazura as Higekuro's principal wife

Hotaru, Prince (Prince Sochi, Hotaru no Miya) Genji's half brother and later husband of Higekuro's daughter Makibashira by his first wife

Principal Characters

Hyōbu, Prince (Prince Hyōbukyō; Hyōbukyō no Miya and later Shikibukyō no Miya). Brother of Fujitsubo and father of Murasaki and Higekuro's first wife.

Kaoru (same). Son of the Third Princess by Kashiwagi. Thought by the world to be Genji's son. As Genji's son, he becomes half brother to the Akashi Empress and therefore uncle to his close companion Prince Niou; as the Third Princess's son, he is Niou's cousin.

Kashiwagi (same). Son of Tō no Chūjō and half brother to Tamakazura. Married to Ochiba no Miya but loves the Third Princess and fathers Kaoru by her. Yūgiri's close companion.

Kiritsubo Emperor* (the Emperor; same; Kiritsuboin). Father of Genji. Brother of Princess Ōmiya (Tō no Chūjō's mother), Prince Hanazono (Princess Asagao's father), and the late crown prince who was the Lady Rokujō's husband.

Kiritsubo Lady* (a lady; same; Kiritsubo Kōi). Beloved of the Kiritsubo Emperor and mother of Genji. Daughter of a major counsellor who was a brother of the Akashi Priest.

Kokiden (same; Kokiden Nyōgo). Daughter of a Minister of the Right and sister of Oborozukiyo. Principal rival of the Kiritsubo Lady and Fujitsubo for the Kiritsubo Emperor's affections. Bears him the Suzaku Emperor.

Koremitsu (same). Genji's trusted attendant and companion on escapades, as with Yūgao.

Kumoinokari (Kumoi; Kumoi no Kari). Daughter of Tō no Chūjō. Wife of Genji's son Yūgiri.

Makibashira (the little girl; Makibashira). Daughter of Higekuro and his first wife. Wife of Prince Hotaru, Genji's half brother.

Minister of the Left (same; Sadaijin). Several characters hold this title. The principal one is husband of Princess Ōmiya and father of Genji's wife Aoi and his close companion Tō no Chūjō.

Principal Characters

Minister of the Right (same, Udaïjin) Several characters hold this title, of whom the principal one is father of Kokiden and Oborozukiyo and grandfather of the Suzaku Emperor

Murasaki (same, Murasaki no Ue) Daughter of Prince Hyōbu by a minor lady, niece of Fujitsubo and beloved of Genji

Nakanokimi (Kozeri, Naka no Kimi) Second daughter of the Eighth Prince and sister of Ōigimi and half sister of Ukifune Established by Prince Niou in the Nijōin, the estate loved by Murasaki and originally belonging to the family of Genji's mother, the Kiritsubo Lady

Niou, Prince (same, Niou no Miya) Son of the Akashi Empress and the last emperor in the tale Close companion and rival of Kaoru, his cousin and uncle (see Kaoru, above) Makes Rokunokimi, one of Yūgiri's daughters, his official wife and keeps Nakanokimi at the Nijōin Pursues her half sister Ukifune

Oborozukiyo (Princess Oborozukiyo, Oborozukiyo no Kimi) Daughter of a Minister of the Right and sister to Kokiden Beloved by the Suzaku Emperor but is herself drawn to Genji

Ochiba no Miya* (Second Princess, 1, Princess Ochiba, Ochiba no Miya) Daughter of the Suzaku Emperor and wife of Kashiwagi, who is fatally drawn to her half sister the Third Princess Pursued by Kashiwagi's friend Yūgiri after his death

Ōigimi (Agemaki, Ōigimi) Eldest daughter of the Eighth Prince and sister of Nakanokimi, half sister of Ukifune Loved by Kaoru

Ōmi, Lady of (Lady from Ōmi, Ōmi no Kimi) Daughter of Tō no Chūjō by a lesser woman Brought out from the provinces with hopes of providing competition to Tamakazura, then thought to be Genji's daughter

Ōmiya, Princess (same, Ōmiya) Sister of the Kiritsubo Emperor and wife of a Minister of the Left Mother of Tō no Chūjō and Aoi

Principal Characters

- Reizei Emperor (Ryozen, Reizeiin) Son of Fujitsubo and Genji, but thought by the world to be the Kintsubo Emperor's son Akikonomu is his consort He abdicates without issue, though a daughter is incongruously mentioned in "The Bamboo River"
- Rokujō Lady (Lady Rokujo, Rokujō no Miyasudokoro) Daughter of a minister and widow of a crown prince, to whom she has borne Akikonomu Once pursued by Genji Possesses several of his ladies
- Rokunokimi (same) Daughter of Yūgiri and official wife of Niou
- Second Princess (same, Onna Ni no Miya) Daughter of the last emperor in the tale but not by the Akashi Empress Wife of Kaoru, who is however drawn to her half sister the First Princess
- Suetsumuhana* (the Safflower Lady, Princess Suyetsumuhana, Suetsumuhana) Daughter of a dead Prince of Hitachi, befriended by Genji
- Suzaku Emperor (Suzaku, Suzakuin) Son of the Kintsubo Emperor by Kokiden and half brother of Genji Father of the emperor regnant at the end, whose consort is the Akashi Empress
- Tamakazura (same) Long-lost daughter of Yūgao and Tō no Chūjō and Kashiwagi's half sister When discovered, Genji tries to claim her as his own daughter Becomes Hige-kuro's wife
- Third Princess (Princess Nyosan, Onna San no Miya) Daughter of the Suzaku Emperor and sister of the last emperor in the tale Married to Genji but has a son, Kaoru, by Kashiwagi
- Tō no Chūjō (same) Son of Princess Ōmiya and a Minister of the Left, brother of Aoi Genji's companion and rival Father of Kashiwagi, Tamakazura, and the Ōmi Lady among many other children

Principal Characters

Ukifune (same) Unrecognized daughter of the Eighth Prince by an attendant, related to the Prince's wife Half sister of Ōigimi and Nakanokimi Sought by both Kaoru and Niou

Ukifune's Mother (same, Chūjō no Kimi) Attendant of the Eighth Prince, bears him Ukifune Both are unwelcome in his house, and she subsequently marries the Governor of Hitachi

Utsusemi* (Lady of the Locust Shell, Utsusemi, same) Wife of a provincial governor, pursued by the young Genji and later installed in a pavilion neighboring the Rokujōin

Yokawa, Bishop of (Sozu, Yokawa no Sōzu) Priest who becomes entangled in the lives of Ukifune and Kaoru

Yūgao* (Lady of the Evening Faces, Yugao, same) An undistinguished lady loved by both Genji and Tō no Chūjō, who fathers her daughter Tamakazura

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Introduction

OUR CENTURY WANES, and the distance between us and the creation of Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji* will soon measure one thousand years. One thousand years' differences of culture or language fade before the sheer expanse of time. Yet such an expanse, like many-digit numbers, strikes most of us as meaningless. We are apt to be politely awed, as when shown a fossiled horn coral or told the number of light years between ourselves and the North Star, but for most of us the surprised reverence passes quickly. I do not know if most contemporary readers of the *Tale of Genji* in the West are struck by overwhelming differences (ranging from the provocative to the insurmountable) or by astounding similarities between their own lives and perceptions and those described in the novel. These reactions, of course, cannot be strictly exclusive, nor is it possible to conceive of some sort of ideal mean between them. It is difficult to possess in sufficient abundance the tact and imagination invariably required by distance and difference. The first task is to recognize them, which already involves the paradoxical operation of distinguishing that which one does not know. I shall begin this process by sketching the range of readings performed on the *Genji* over the centuries.

First, a word of caution. By now, in the Japanese literary tradition, the *Genji*'s place at the head of the canon is secure. It is so thoroughly implicated in a variety of arts that it is, simply put, taken for granted. It has provided inspiration as well as subject matter not only for subsequent prose fiction but also for poetry, drama, and the visual arts. It continues to be reproduced to this day—in multivolume editions, on cassette tape, and in comic book form.

One might say the book was a bestseller in its own time, but that is a ludicrous anachronism given the paucity of paper and of literate human beings. In her diary Murasaki Shikibu complains of unrevised drafts being stolen from her room in the course of her duties as an attendant to Empress Shōshi.¹ Perhaps

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the better comparison would be to a popular serial, for the author's first audiences doubtless read the work in such pieces as they could get their hands on over the years of its composition. Somewhat more than half a century later, a young girl returning to the capital upon the expiration of her father's term as provincial vice-governor yearned so desperately for a copy of the *Genji* that she even made it the focus of her pilgrimage prayers. These were eventually answered, and the lucky adolescent, heedless of dream warnings to turn to scriptural study, abandoned herself to the pleasures of reading fiction. Like so many fiction readers she ardently hoped, in spite of her unpromising looks, to receive one day the attentions bestowed on the *Genji* heroines Yūgao and Ukifune. (That these two met spectacularly unhappy fates seems not to have given her pause, although her choices are naive, we must acknowledge the powerful stimulus the *Genji*, like so many good novels from different ages and cultures, afforded the reader's desire to "become a heroine.") Not until her thirties did she express serious regret over her choice of fiction over devotion. She recorded these matters in a sort of journal known as the *Sarashina Diary*. She is herself thought to have written several works of fiction. Remembered as Takasue's Daughter, she was the niece of a woman known as Michitsuna's Mother, whose diary is one of the oldest extant pieces of Japanese prose.²

The earliest recorded instances of scholarly attention to the *Genji* date from the late twelfth century. Much of the attention came from poets, the most celebrated of their age, who devoted impressive portions of their lives to copying and annotating texts. Their criticism often took the form of interlinear commentary. Enormous effort was expended in the production of chronologies and genealogies as guides to, or rather instances of, correct interpretation. According to the relentless trend of the medieval arts, these poets and their readings of the *Genji* formed themselves into rival factions such that points of pronunciation and allusions from historical, Chinese, or Buddhist sources became part of secret teachings transmitted within families. Today scholars recognize three large groups of texts, the Aobyōshi (the basis for most current annotated editions), the Kawachi, and "others."

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Texts lacking a certain number of characteristics of the first two groups end up in the third

It should not, of course, surprise us that there are numerous variants in texts of a work written nearly ten centuries ago, especially a work that was being circulated in draft form even as it was being written. There is no hope of ever possessing the "final" form of the novel as Murasaki Shikibu "originally" wrote it. Given these complications, as well as the scope of the work itself, it is understandable that critical endeavor over the centuries has tended toward the production of dictionaries, digests, and compilations of annotations (with traditions developing within categories, e.g., digests for poets, digests for painters). Perhaps the most important of the compilations is the *Kogetsushō* of 1673 by Kitamura Kigin, who was among other things a composer of verses in both the classical thirty-one-syllable *waka* form and the newer seventeen-syllable *haikai* form. The *Kogetsushō*, which has been periodically expanded and is still widely used, juxtaposes various critical notes, often vehemently opposed, as headnotes to a text of the *Genji*.³ It affords wonderful access to the views of one's fellow readers over the centuries, and it was the text used by the redoubtable Arthur Waley for his translation.

Now we need to step back to Takasue's Daughter in order to pursue other themes in the history of readings of the *Genji*. There was something prophetic about her intoxicated fiction reading punctuated by dreams warning that her time would be better spent in the pursuit of holy truth. As if paying heed to these hints, there developed a tradition from the late twelfth century that Murasaki Shikibu was suffering in hell for the perpetration of lies and other vicious practices in her novel. Many prayers were offered for her soul. Praying for her salvation became a motif later pursued in the Noh as well as in other forms of theater. Almost contemporaneously, there circulated the view that the Bodhisattva of Mercy (Kannon) had taken the form of a woman, namely Murasaki Shikibu, to write this tale as an aid to salvation.

There were two ways that moralists of Confucian as well as Buddhist persuasion could recuperate the *Genji*—either as a cautionary tale or as an allegory. If Confucian scholars were favor-

ably disposed, they propagated the view that the *Genji* could serve as a textbook for teaching desirable relationships between men and women, or between lord and servant, or as an example of the importance of the cultivation of the arts, or, as the warrior class became dominant through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as a guide to etiquette. The elasticity of the work is attested to in subsequent centuries when it gained favor as a didactic book for young women. At the same time that various parodies were being written in newly popular fictional genres, there were such versions as one in which Genji fritters away his time in brothels so as to induce his father to shift his affections to a younger brother and make him heir.

Whereas the poet-readers, with their interest in minute motifs, inevitably contributed to a cannibalization of the work, the Buddhist and Confucian moralists, unpromising as they seem, had a salutary effect in directing attention to the work as a whole through their preoccupation with particular themes. Paradoxically, too, they contained the seeds of liberation from the literal-minded interpretation of truth: allegorical interpretations are of course based on presumptions of figuration, and didacticism did not require that a narrative be virtuous in itself in order to be useful.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the emergence of a nativist strain of scholars opposed to foreign, specifically Confucian, interpretations of what they perceived as their distinctive cultural legacy. Among this group was one of the most significant readers the *Genji* has ever produced: Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801). Norinaga appealed to the prestige of Japanese poetry and claimed its affective powers for the *Genji* in an effort to free it from didactic readings. In addition to his philological expertise, Norinaga contributed to—we might also say imposed upon—the novel the possibility of an aesthetically unified reading such as had not existed since its beginnings. For modern readers, Norinaga's imprint remains ineradicable.

From the late nineteenth century on, the *Genji* has been dissected and reconstructed with a rich and bewildering variety of tools. It became the standard subject of experimentation for disciplines newly imported from the West. It was the site where

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such creatures as the modern subject were discovered. The *Genji* became, in a sense, a principal medium through which foreign intellectual perspectives were domesticated. Initially, the example of German philological studies was particularly prominent. The demands of positivism made themselves heard early and loudly. The emerging disciplines of sociology, psychology, and folklore, and the influence of Freudian and Marxist conceptions, all touched the study of the *Genji* sooner or later and with resounding vigor after the second World War. Today, given the accelerated pace of cultural commerce, a critical practice developed in Europe or America is absorbed into *Genji* studies within a year or two. It is worth observing that just as the legitimacy of Buddhist and Confucian interpretations was vigorously challenged by Norinaga, so murmurs and sometimes louder objections have been raised at the application of Western approaches to a national masterpiece—as if the *Genji* in the twentieth century could, any more than the culture of which it is a part, be cleansed of its history.

The modern history of the Japanese encounter with the West produced several consequences for the *Tale of Genji* that deserve mention. One is suggested in the observations of philologist and literary scholar Haga Yaichi (1867-1927) in a work published in 1898:

To tell the truth, it is disheartening to be forced to cherish as our national literary masterpiece a work depicting such a decadent society. It certainly is disagreeable to think that it is being read in schools as a textbook.⁴

Upon the new sensibilities of many writers, the *Genji* registered as a musty and hopelessly unsophisticated embarrassment. What changed it all was the appearance of Arthur Waley's magnificent translation in six volumes from 1925-1933. Of course, it gave a moral boost to have the work recognized abroad (Waley's translation spawned a number of European-language translations) and it made one look at it anew, but of equal if not greater importance was the fact that in Waley the work could be read through in something resembling a reasonable amount of time—something no longer possible for most Japanese readers in

the twentieth century One of the surprising converts was the Naturalist writer Masamune Hakuchō (1879-1962), who purchased the translation in London and read it on the voyage home The Waley translation provoked a flurry of comparisons with various European writers, the more plausible among them being Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust, given Waley's Bloomsbury ties and above all the style he adopted for his translation Such comparisons, and more particularly the translation of Proust into Japanese, stimulated new interest among Japanese writers such as Horii Tatsuo (1904-1953) who had previously been indifferent to if not contemptuous of the remote creation of their countrywoman ⁵

One of the more intriguing instances in the *Genji*'s international history is the French novelist Marguerite Yourcenar's parodic treatment of Genji's death, "Le Dernier Amour du Prince Genghi" in *Nouvelles Orientales* As far as is known, Murasaki Shikibu never described Genji's death in her novel, even though an appropriate chapter title has existed since at least the end of the twelfth century In her story Yourcenar has an aging "Genghi le Resplendissant," eyesight failing, reencounter without recognizing the docile and neglected "la dame-du-village-des-Fleurs-qui-tombent" (Hana Chiru Sato) Although the lady unnerves Genji by telling him that since his vows he has already been quite forgotten in the capital, she lavishes him with attention, and he takes keen pleasure in her company After a nostalgic litany of his past loves, he says to her, "If only I had known you earlier in life! But it is right that one piece of fruit be preserved for late autumn" The lady is tortured by his omission of her name and pleads, does he not remember a certain "dame-du-village-des-Fleurs-qui-tombent"? But Genji is already dead ⁶

As it happens, Yourcenar was following in a tradition eight or more centuries old among *Genji* readers, that of filling in perceived gaps in the work Most of these attempts have not survived, and those that have are themselves incomplete Of the three main examples, one takes up the Uji story and unites Ukifune with her mother, another begins with Genji's last years and boldly takes us through the progeny of Kaoru and Niou, the

third, by none other than Motoori Norinaga, tells of the early days of Genji's love for the Rokujō Lady ⁷

Of course it is hardly a simple sense of deficiency that prompted these readers to produce their own narratives. Rather, one concludes that the *Genji* is a work with the property of inducing, on the one hand, such forms of reading as represented by the production of poems, plays, and scroll paintings and, on the other, various games such as the pairing of heroines to determine which ones behaved better on given occasions. These constitute a continuum rather than an opposition, the *Genji* provokes its readers into such engagements, both lighthearted and intent, and tantalizes them with its ellipses and shifting configurations. So in this century three Japanese writers of stature have translated the tale in its entirety into various versions of modern Japanese. They are the poet Yosano Akiko (1878-1942) and the novelists Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886-1965) and Enchi Fumiko (1905—). Akiko, one of the most successful practitioners of the traditional thirty-one-syllable verse form in the modern age, produced an astonishingly crisp *Genji*, published from 1912 to 1914, with a revised edition appearing in 1938-1939. Tanizaki's, by contrast, is richly stylized. His first version was published between 1936 and 1938, and two revised versions appeared after the war—interesting not only as a reflection of the stylistic evolution of a consummate artist but also as a record of what was and was not felt to be reproducible from an acknowledged national masterpiece under the conditions of prewar censorship. Enchi Fumiko's version of 1972-1973 includes a depiction of Genji's death. For all these artists, given the sheer length of the novel, the decision to translate it represents a powerful commitment, and though we can only guess at its significance for each of them, the labor surely had an effect on their own writing. Thus, the *Genji* continues to participate in the generation of Japanese letters ⁸

The reader may be wondering why such translations were conceived, let alone necessary. Earlier, in reference to the importance in Japan of Waley's English translation, I hinted at the difficulty of Murasaki Shikibu's variety of Heian Japanese. Most

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Japanese today would be severely taxed to decipher even a few passages of Shikibu's text. They will invariably be familiar with certain selections favored by entrance examination compilers who reproduce them in mutilated form in a battery of cram books. This partially accounts for the need for modern translations, but it hardly exhausts the reasons for their proliferation or for the countless reading groups and lecture series usually directed at housewives who have gained some leisure time. The demand for the vicarious experience of heroinehood never disappears. There continues to be, in other words, a lively interest in this eleventh-century novel, and of course it is not confined to women. My dentist listens to a cassette recording of a modern-language version along with selections of Western classical music while he attends to his patients.

I fear that by now I may have overfilled the ground between Murasaki Shikibu's *Genji* and ourselves. Indeed, the plethora of aids interposing themselves between us and the work (without even mentioning our own helpful or blinding predilections) may drive us to seek refuge in a solipsistic protestant reading. It is not that indulgence in this particular fiction is altogether unhealthy. In fact, it is crucial to resupplying us as readers with a fresh vitality, but a different kind of care and patience are also wanted. The late John Gardner, recounting his literary vita in an essay called "Cartoons," had this to say about his encounter with medieval literature following his immersion in the New Criticism:

The usual New Critical method, which is to stare and stare at the work until it becomes clear, was useless on this material, because again and again you found yourself staring at something that felt like a symbol or an allusion, or felt like maybe it ought to be some kind of joke but you couldn't see the humor. To figure out the poem you had to figure out the world it came from—read the books the poets knew, try to understand aesthetic principles abandoned and forgotten centuries ago. One had no choice but to become a sort of scholar.

The novelist Gardner found his efforts rewarded in this fashion:

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I found in medieval culture and art exactly what I needed as an instrument for looking at my own time and place. I of course never became for a moment a medieval Christian believer, but medieval ideas and attitudes gave me a means of triangulating, a place to stand.⁹

Now the book that follows upon this introduction is in part a record of my own efforts to "become a sort of scholar" about the *Tale of Genji*. Not being, alas, a novelist like Gardner, I cannot put the results to the same end, but a "means of triangulating, a place to stand" are precious possessions for any life. I should add, as a sort of caveat, that I have spent the better part of the last five years trying to read and understand the *Tale of Genji*—a great extravagance on the one hand, and on the other too niggardly even for a novice, as the reader may surmise from my lightning-quick account of the history of *Genji* scholarship. Perhaps it goes without saying, though I think it can never be sufficiently acknowledged, that I have benefited incalculably from Japanese scholarship, both from the abundance of its knowledge and from its increasingly supple use of theory of varying provenance. (This is not, of course, to deny in any way the enormous stimulus provided by contemporary studies of letters in the West, rather, such distinctions become increasingly tenuous, especially from the Japanese point of view.)

In any case, I hope to share some of what I have gained, but I shall not dwell on that here since it is part of the flesh and blood of my text. Instead, let me offer a few words on a subject that I rarely take up explicitly, something that might be called the life and times of the author of the *Genji*.¹⁰ Another name for that interval in Japanese history between the late eighth and the late twelfth centuries, most commonly known as the Heian period, is the Fujiwara period. Strictly speaking, the latter is a somewhat narrower designation, referring to the three centuries following 894, when the Japanese decided to terminate embassies to T'ang China (a medium that had served for two centuries to bring in the artifacts of the dominant civilization literally by the boatload). The Fujiwara period is a term of chronological classification especially favored by art historians. It highlights, in

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other words, that aspect of the Heian period that has widely been taken to be most characteristic—cultural splendor on a scale never to be reproduced and, intimately tied with this, the emergence of a sense of native identity¹¹ Fujiwara is the name of the family of which the “northern branch” had consolidated power in its hands by the time the *Genji* was written. The northern branch was consistently successful in applying the principal strategy for political supremacy, which, succinctly put, consisted of ensuring that one of its daughters bear the next crown prince. At its smoothest, the system operated so that when the latter was still of a tender age, the emperor would be persuaded to abdicate, whereupon the grandfather of the new emperor would reign as regent.

Heian grandeur was supported by Fujiwara (i.e., private) wealth. There had been a time when attempts were made to put into practice the public, bureaucratic, Sinified version of state government. The Taika Reform of 645 had decreed state ownership and public distribution of rice land. The Heian period witnessed the rapid dissolution of this system: it was an age for large provincial estates held by absentee landowners. Land and emperor were privately controlled. Some of the medieval commentaries proposed an interpretation influential to this day—that the *Genji* was set during the reigns of Emperor Daigo (897-930) and his son Emperor Murakami (946-967), two idealized rulers who took an anachronistically active role in government. This reading has Murasaki Shikibu (so often thought to have written an apolitical novel) favoring imperial rule as an ideal over the politicized Fujiwara regency. I cannot imagine that she would have found so simple an opposition interesting. Her hero has the surname Genji (literally, he of the Gen, or Minamoto, clan). As a means of controlling the succession and presumably easing the strain on the public coffers, princes of the blood who stood outside the direct line of succession were given a surname (the other possibility was Heishi, or Taira) and made to join the ranks of the nonroyal upper aristocracy. Since the emperor had no surname, to be so endowed signaled that the bearer could not become emperor. Thus, the title *Tale of Genji* means a story about one who is barred from the supreme position in the land.¹² Gen-

ji's ambiguous political identity contrasts both with that of the uninspiring emperors in the tale and with that of his refreshingly grasping Fujiwara foil, Tō no Chūjō

Murasaki Shikibu was employed by the most powerful Fujiwara of all, Michinaga (966-1027), who was grandfather of not one but two emperors and close kin to four others. What were the terms of her employ? She was to add brilliance to the salon of Michinaga's daughter Shōshi, who, entered in the court of Emperor Ichijō (r. 986-1011) at the age of eleven, must have been a rather green competitor to Teishi, her senior by approximately one decade. Teishi's circle included Sei Shōnagon, the author of the other great Heian prose work, a collection of essays known as her *Pillow Book*.¹³ Culture as embodied in the lady-in-waiting was a prized instrument of Heian politics. Shikibu came from a family of scholars and provincial governors, as did Sei Shōnagon. The early Heian poet Ise, the mid-Heian poet Ise no Tayū, the diarist Michitsuna's Mother and her niece Takasue's Daughter, the poet Izumi Shikibu, the poet and presumed compiler of the *Tale of Flowering Fortunes*, Akazome Emon, were all daughters and wives of provincial governors. Situated at the subtly humiliating fringes of the lower aristocracy, often entering court service, these women, whose dates of birth and death are unrecorded, were responsible for the flowering of Heian literature.¹⁴ Being women, they wrote in Japanese and turned it into a supple medium suited for a variety of ends that men, hitherto confined to Chinese, were less apt to explore.

It is not that these women were altogether unacquainted with Chinese. Certainly, Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shōnagon (though Shikibu sniffs at her rival's command of Chinese writing in her diary) were quite competent. One of the most memorable vignettes we have from Shikibu's life concerns her father's bitter disappointment over having a clever daughter who could make her way through the Confucian classics though his son had no such facility.¹⁵

The contemporary literary scholar Saigō Nobutsuna has suggested that the difference in quality of mind apparent in the writings of Murasaki Shikibu and Michitsuna's Mother has to do with the former's bilingualism.¹⁶ I suppose what is meant by this

is that acquaintance with another language and tradition afforded Shikibu a "means of triangulating, a place to stand." Bilingualism offered her access to a variety of genres: the *Tale of Genji* shows that its author had at her disposal the world as it was shaped by Buddhist and Confucian teachings, histories, fantastic tales, poetry, and diaries, both in Chinese and Japanese. From the lofty heights of the twentieth century we tend to take the multiplicity of genres for granted or, worse yet, to view them developmentally, according to the relentless march from the primitive to the sophisticated. A genre, first of all, represents a point of view, which is not an object available for the asking but a system of values to be cultivated and claimed.

If mere access to differing world views sufficed, there would be more novelists now as well as in the Heian period. I think the significance of bilingualism lies in metaphor: what distinguishes Murasaki Shikibu is her capacity to perceive one genre as a metaphor for another. It is a characteristic common to novelists, perhaps possessed on a grander scale by those who write encyclopedic novels, but what is important is the shared principle. Let me put it another way: the novel is the most supple instrument of thought ever devised. This also means that it is a fine tool for apprehending reality, however that reality is construed. What accounts for these extraordinary capabilities?

In the past I have relied on a reasoning that runs something as follows: fiction's distinguishing attribute is fictionality. Fictionality might be defined as "lacking in truthfulness," for which in turn a ready synonym is "falsehood." This series of associations makes possible the negative social assessment of the novel as well as the positive aesthetic one. The latter position, strongly put, asserts that the novel can do what it does because it floats free of truth. Because "truth" often overlaps with "reality," a more defiant assertion comes to hold that the novel has nothing to do with reality, indeed serves to wean us of such puerile notions.

Our own preoccupation with the linguistic constitution of reality is not merely heady but so compelling in its presumptions as to render it difficult to construe the world otherwise. Within that preoccupation, however, we must avoid plotting too hasty a

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trajectory from fiction to falsehood. Our linguistic, that is to say, our textual apprehension of the world does not direct us to equate fictionality with lack of truth. If the metonymic force of association thrusts us in that direction, we must hesitate before the equation itself. Above all, we must be alert to the political implications of the equation of fiction to falsehood—avoid, at the very least, the error of assuming it to be natural. It is, of course, of enormous consequence that the novel was early denied, and came to eschew, the legitimacy and authority essential to the existence of other genres and other disciplines, those that stand in the name of science, for example, or of religious faith. Although legitimacy and authority confer upon their holders precisely the power to determine truths, the novel's renunciation of these attributes is not identical to its being untruthful.¹⁷ If we fail to keep this clearly in mind, we shall misapprehend the novel's capacity to discover uniquely tactful—that is to say, discreet, singular—connections between things. And we shall have deprived ourselves of this most exquisite instrument of thought.

A novel is lost if its reader refuses to think novelistically. This means in part that at a certain point every reader—and this point will be different for each reader and each reading—must gain some distance from inherited points of view (principles of theory, tools of the trade such as information on historical allusion, rules of etiquette, fashions in incense concoction) simply in order to make room for other perceptions. I realize that I am skirting perilously close to all the pitfalls of the intrinsic-extrinsic distinction dear to the old New Critics. Let me be more specific. In reading the *Genji*, I am continually struck by minute points of resonance, by extraordinarily complicated and unfamiliar configurations. In fact, a great deal of my book is an appeal to other readers of the *Genji* to *notice*, for example, a form of address, or the presence of a certain musical instrument. Now obviously, the points that I notice are determined by my other experiences in reading literature, by readings in other disciplines, by warnings from others about what one ought to notice in the *Genji* or other literary works, by what I have chanced to observe about tone of voice or gesture in domestic quarrels or supermarket lines, by how alert I am when reading a particular passage (for

one must never underestimate the potency of the banal)—and by all the factors that have produced these circumstances. But to do my part as a reader in keeping the *Genji* alive beyond its thousandth year, I must always attempt to see in it something that I had not already known. This is the paradoxical responsibility of the reader: to replenish the strangeness of the novel by making connections with the familiar.

What is required is a dialectic between being “a sort of scholar” and a devoted reader of novels. Take, for example, the pervasive aestheticism of the Heian period. Much has been made of the refinement of Heian sensibilities—the excruciating devotion to details of color, scent, hand, or season. Now this can be interpreted in a number of ways, mostly overlapping, some contradictory. I will turn to this subject again at the conclusion of the book, but for now I would like to caution the reader to be attentive to these aesthetic matters as languages that are deployed throughout the tale. Certainly, from our own point of view, some of these interests seem precious at best and perniciously frivolous at worst. To put it another way, it has been repeatedly pointed out that the *Genji* works as a psychological novel; this is a view I subscribe to myself. Yet many readers, especially when they have been told this in advance, experience a certain disappointment and feel the characters are shallow and impenetrable when compared with those of the great European novels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In part, I think this has to do with our equation of psychological depth with use of psychological language. Unless characters talk about themselves, either in dialogue or soliloquy, we think we do not really know them. There are of course *Genji* characters who behave in quite a familiar way in this respect, especially from the “New Herbs” chapter on, but others do not. We risk losing the latter unless we learn to follow the other languages—of dress, of calligraphy, of floral and musical preference, of incense concoction. This implies, of course, expenditure of effort to learn about these matters. We must be cautious, however, so as not to force the novel to conform to such expertise as we may have gained but rather to use it to help us apprehend that incense concoction, for instance, is one language among others within the novel. Usually

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we need to travel out of the novel to gain this sort of information, but having done so, we must return. I hope above all that this study will encourage new readers and old to turn and return to the *Tale of Genji*.

MY BOOK is organized around the heroines of the tale. They are points of convergence for the many languages constituting the work. The points themselves are not fixed but are constantly modified by each other—from which follows, necessarily, the continual transformation of whatever we perceive to be the totality of configurations. The eponymous hero, far from being the controlling center of the work, is as much constituted by his heroines as they are by him. Yet, for reasons to be seen, he is curiously absent by comparison to his ladies.

The discussion begins early in the hero's youth, at the point of entry of the first heroine, Fujitsubo, who replaces Genji's dead mother as his father's favorite.

Chapter 1



Three Heroines and the Making of the Hero

DICHOTOMIES AND SUBSTITUTION: FUJITSUBO

MOST OF THE CHARACTERS of the *Tale of Genji* are known to its readers by suggestive sobriquets such as “Evening Face” (Yūgao), “Village of the Falling Flowers” (Hana Chiru Sato), or “Evening Mist” (Yūgiri), which are culled from key poems associated with the characters within the text. Many of these names also serve as evocative chapter titles. It is not known to what extent the author or her earlier readers were responsible for these acts of naming, but convention now assigns the preponderance to the latter. The common designation of the characters within the novel is a version of official rank or place of residence, the particular choice being strategic to emphasis of tone or information.¹ In certain situations, however, the characters are starkly identified as “the man” or “the woman,” or, with honorific suffix, “the gentleman” or “the lady.” The situations are erotic, and these words signal that a climactic moment may be at hand. Of all the women pursued by the hero Genji, there are two who are never referred to in this fashion: they are Fujitsubo and Princess Asagao, the hero’s stepmother and cousin, respectively.² The first is the object of Genji’s lifelong attachment; the second, his staunchest resister. For reasons that are either not provided or have become invisible over the centuries, Princess

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Asagao never permits herself a moment when the narrator could justifiably dub her a "woman." It is otherwise with Fujitsubo. During the one episode in which she incontrovertibly yields to the reckless young Genji, she is steadily referred to as "Her Highness" (1305, S 98, W 95). Fujitsubo is never divested of her majesty.

The circumstances of this heroine's entry into the work are promisingly complex. She replaces the Kintsubo Lady, Genji's poor dead mother, who, though but the daughter of a late major counsellor, had dominated the Emperor's affections and was consequently hounded to death by the jealous members of his household. It had been a mistake, reflects the Lady's grief-stricken mother, to have permitted her to enter court service in accordance with her late husband's immoderate ambitions. Some years later, the Emperor, who had remained inconsolable, hears of a young lady bearing a remarkable resemblance to Genji's mother. This is Fujitsubo, daughter of a figure known only as "the former Emperor." Her mother, mindful of her predecessor's fate, is reluctant to expose her daughter to such trials even though her higher station might shield her to some degree. Like so many mothers of literary heroines, however, this one dies at a critical point in her daughter's life. Sixteen-year-old Fujitsubo has no choice but to accede to her brother Prince Hyōbu's view that unprotected though she was, she would be better off at court than elsewhere.³

Fujitsubo is an instant success. Her uncanny resemblance to the dead lady wins the Emperor's undivided affection, which fortunately she can receive without fear of reprisal because of her own high birth. The problem, of course, is that she also attracts her stepson Genji, but five years her junior. The Kintsubo Emperor, the most genial of cuckolds, personally attests to the new wife's resemblance to his young son's late mother and encourages their friendship. Of course, there are limits to their intimacy once Genji is initiated and married, he is no longer permitted within Fujitsubo's curtains of state. Henceforth, their thoughts are conveyed in the notes of her koto and his flute.⁴

For some time Fujitsubo makes but fleeting appearances, and then only in Genji's thoughts, as he listens to his fellow young

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men discuss the ideal woman, or overhears gossip about his carryings-on ("The Broom Tree"), or sits through a terrifying night with the corpse of a lover ("Evening Faces") It is not until the fifth chapter ("Lavender") that Fujitsubo speaks in person, on the occasion of an unexpected and, as will be seen, fateful meeting with Genji. Sometime thereafter, the narrator, in a moment of unusual freedom with intimate detail, observes that Fujitsubo's ladies have been troubled when attending her at her bath. This leads ineluctably to the day when Fujitsubo is compelled to witness the Emperor's joy over the birth of a son he had not fathered and over this new son's resemblance to an older favorite, Genji. With the Emperor's passing in the tenth chapter ("The Sacred Tree"), Fujitsubo is exposed to the vindictive passion of another lady of the court, Kokiden, the principal victim of the dead Emperor's devotion first to Genji's mother and then to herself. Not that Kokiden has been entirely robbed of her due, for the Kiritsubo Emperor, in one of his more prudent moments, had demoted Genji to commoner status and designated as heir Suzaku, his son by Kokiden. Now it is Kokiden's season, for she is the daughter of the supremely powerful Minister of the Right as well as mother of the new Suzaku Emperor. There is still a thorn in her side, however, for the late Emperor, in recompense for having demoted his favorite son Genji, had decreed his supposed son by Fujitsubo (Reizei) crown prince at the time of Suzaku's ascension, moreover, he had promoted Fujitsubo to the status of empress, which, of course, made her superior to Kokiden.

Even after the Emperor's death, the secret of her fleeting affair with Genji weighs heavily upon Fujitsubo, and she finds but slender protection in her title. To make matters worse, Genji continues to prey upon her, thus increasing the risk of disastrous exposure for their young son Reizei as well as themselves. Dark thoughts invade her mind: "Even if I am spared Lady Ch'i's fate, I will surely become the laughing stock of the court" (2106, S 198, W 206-207). Lady Ch'i was a favorite consort of the Han Emperor Kao-tsu, who had thought to put his son by her on the throne after his death. Instead, his Empress captured Lady Ch'i, cut off her hands and feet, gouged out her eyes, burnt her ears,

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and forced down a burning potion that left her unable to speak ⁵ Fujitsubo decides to relinquish her rank as empress and take religious vows. It is none too soon, for some of Genji's sins come home to roost, and, in a parallel gesture, he chooses retreat before exile is forced upon him.

Like everyone else in Genji's faction, Fujitsubo lies low during the years of Genji's seclusion in Suma and Akashi. Prosperity, though not tranquillity, comes with Genji's return to the capital and Suzaku's abdication. Now Fujitsubo, as the mother of the new Reizei Emperor, is granted the emoluments due to a retired emperor ⁶ She uses her new-found power to scheme with Genji to secure Akikonomu, the late Rokujō Lady's daughter, as their son's consort even though she was coveted by the retired Suzaku Emperor. Then, having done everything in her means to assure the stability of her son Reizei's reign, she languishes to die at the age of thirty-seven ("A Rack of Cloud"). She returns once, wraith-like, to haunt Genji in chapter twenty ("The Morning Glory").

This is the explicit extent of Fujitsubo's role in the novel. It is surprisingly limited—as if, trapped in a secret relationship with Genji, she must be shrouded from our prying eyes, as if, being the incarnation of every ideal, she must be used sparingly. Even her poetry output is modest—twelve poems, of which ten are addressed to Genji ⁷ Obviously, Fujitsubo's importance to the tale far exceeds her visible activity. It would not be hyperbolic to suggest that she embodies the principal dynamic forces of the work. They constitute dichotomies whose interrelationships and transformations are the source of abiding interest in the novel, a testimony to its author's passionately intellectual imagination. Let us begin with a description of Fujitsubo's manner during that fateful night with Genji in the "Lavender" chapter. She thinks of their previous (unrecounted) meetings ⁸ Despite her resolve that there be no more, Genji had stolen in again "she was so wretched, she looked as if she could endure no more, yet she was sensitive and sweet, though as reserved as ever, reflective, even intimidating" (1305, S 98, W 95). This is one of the most generous descriptions ever given of Fujitsubo. It comes embedded in a moderately long "sentence" beginning in Fuji-