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一位女性主義者的進化：紫式部《源氏物語》新解讀

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摘要

11世紀日本女作家紫式部的長篇小說《源氏物語》，是幾個世代以來，在日本學校中被用來教導學生，並且被公認是日本準則的基石。這一本著名的浪漫長篇故事，敘述著光源氏與所遇女子們之浪漫史。然而，當代的讀者，對此故事卻有著不同的解讀；他們認為光源氏不能稱為一個風流倜儻的英雄，而是為他所傾慕的人帶來痛苦，災難甚至是死亡的好色成性勾引者。

在這篇論文裡，我從光源氏負面的影響力中來探討並利用三部中三組亦敵亦友的角色，來顯示作者在書中，對於故事敘述的態度由明漸至黑暗的徵象，並且，指出作者在寫作當下所延伸其對於男性特權的獨有觀點。也因如此，作者在書中最後的部份，她對於男性的同情完完全全地轉向了那些受害於情色意圖下的女性身上。而，我的論點是：作者紫式部，就某些層次而言，反駁了Spivak（斯皮瓦克）“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 中的論點。那也就說，女性可以透過文學覺醒的力量，讓從屬階級也能反抗如此佔優勢及壓迫人的霸權當局。

關鍵詞：源氏、日本文學、陸軍中尉、抵抗、霸權、斯皮瓦克

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The Evolution of a Feminist: A New Reading of Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji*

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Abstract

Lady Murasaki Shikibu's 11th century story, Tale of Genji, or The Genji Monogatari, has been taught in Japanese schools for generations, and is recognized as the cornerstone of the Japanese canon. It has been celebrated as a romantic adventure story, detailing the amorous pursuits of a wonderfully handsome and artistic young nobleman, Prince Genji. However, contemporary readers see the tale differently: far from a romantic hero, Genji was a predatory seducer who brought pain, suffering, and even death to most of the objects of his affection.

In this paper I look at the negative impact that Genji had on those around him and demonstrate, by showing the slowly darkening attitude of the narration towards the three sets of "rival-buddies" from the three different parts of the book, that the author's own view of male privilege evolved as she was writing the book, and by the end of the tale her sympathies had completely switched from the side of the men to the side of the women whom the men victimize through their amorous pursuits. My argument is that Murasaki, to some extent, disproves Spivak's argument in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" by showing that, through the power of literary awakening, the subaltern can come to resist dominant and oppressive hegemonic authority.

Keywords: Genji, Japanese literature, Subaltern, Resistance, hegemony, Spivak

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Nine years ago, in 2008, *The Economist* gave a nice summary of how Lady Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* was received on its birthday:

> *First mentioned in a diary exactly 1,000 years ago, in late 1008, it has over the centuries been subject to changes, adaptations, mutations and translations (not to mention being remade as a manga comic), all of which have helped it not just survive, but flourish. Today this account of the amorous escapades of an aristocratic aesthete is widely regarded as the first modern or psychological novel.*

The Tale of Genji's historical importance is almost universally recognized, but for many, the exact reason why is not clear. For example, one journalist points out that *Genji* has been "called alternatively the world's first novel, the first modern novel or the first novel to be considered a classic; precisely which is a matter of debate by those who make a living debating such things" (Gillespie). Being the first and the oldest is, of course, a privileged position, but the work has another key advantage that makes it especially remarkable: the story gives us a privileged view into the feminine world of the 11th century—something which is almost impossible to find anywhere else. As Sonja Arntzen explains, "Something *The Tale of Genji* offers that is unavailable in Western literature until perhaps the works of Jane Austen [700 years later] is a complex picture of male-female relationships from a woman's perspective…[because] poetry is exchanged between the lovers…we hear a woman's voice, and that moreover her desire is expressed equally with that of the man" (29). This value, however, took a long time to be recognized in the West, where Asian literature has frequently been

marginalized and ignored. As late as 1981, Hide Ishiguro could write:

> *Some twenty years ago, not long after I came to England, I heard a talk by Rayner Heppenstall asserting that English and French were the only two cultures which had a continuous literary tradition from medieval times. Sceptical as I was about his claim, even in the European context, I was taken aback by the lack of curiosity which it demonstrated. Listening to the applause of the audience, I wondered what it reflected of the general attitude of the reading public in Britain…[they did not know] The Tale of Genji, a psychological novel written at the beginning of the 11th century by a Japanese court lady.*

It seems that the vast majority of Westerners, even those who considered themselves to be literary scholars, had no idea that this work existed, nor other extended works by Japanese women of the 11-13th centuries. Perhaps the existence of such works was simply too far out of their expectations. The reason Japan has ancient masterpieces written by women is based on a paradox: women at this time were not taught formal, sophisticated writing—which was done in Chinese. As a result, like Japanese children, women writers wrote in a natural, colloquial Japanese using the simple, phonetic, hiragana script while the men clumsily aped the style of Chinese scholars. The men's writing, for the most part, has been abandoned by posterity, while many of the women's writings have entered the canon of world literature. This surely would have come as a great surprise to the literarily inclined men of that era!

In rigid patriarchal societies—that is basically all of Western and Eastern "civilized" societies up until the early modern era, and sometimes much later

—literary production by women was discouraged. The reason for this is well known: women, as the "second" or "colonized" sex, were held in an inferior position by patriarchal hegemonic power; granting women "voice" could threaten the stability of that hegemonic/subaltern power structure. Men absolutely dominated literature in the West (including historical, philosophical, scientific, and political writing) until the early nineteenth century, and in Asia the male grip on literary production was even more monolithic, with some important exceptions. In nineteenth-century in Europe male authors still dominated, but a shifting tide could be seen, especially in England and America, and by the early twentieth century women had become a powerful voice in all facets of literary life, an event coinciding, not by chance, with their achieving suffrage and increased political rights. A similar trend can be seen in China, Japan, and other Asian countries.

Why would patriarchal control so fear the female voice? Basing his ideas on Marxist philosophy, Antonio Gramsci famously asserted that no hegemonic dominance is completely stable, but must constantly be reasserted to overcome challenges, real or potential, from the subaltern (Gramsci, 1971). As a result, voices from outside the hegemonic domain must be suppressed, or at least carefully monitored and controlled to be sure that they pose no threat of subversion. However, it is impossible to completely monitor all of the writing by half the population. The threat from female writing always has the potential to become a threat to male dominance, no matter how loyal and committed the author may be to the status quo, because of a simple truism: writing is reified thinking. Even though a female author may begin with an abhorrence of subversion and accept absolute submission to

patriarchal authority, if her writing accurately reflects society, the contradictions and subterfuges inherent in hegemonic authority will begin to emerge and problematize her works' allegiance to the existing power structure.

Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak famously asked: "Can the Subaltern Speak? What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? The question of 'woman' seems most problematic in this context" (294). After engaging in a circuitous and multi-faceted argument, she eventually answers her own question negatively: "The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with 'woman' as a pious item" (308). Spivak asserts that minorities, the colonized, women, and other oppressed groups inevitably allow themselves to be defined and categorized by the hegemonic authority, and as a result, the voice of the subaltern cannot fail but re-inscribe the unequal power relation, even if it wants, at some level, to expose and overthrow it. If one's entire culture and self-identity is steeped in a completely naturalized sense of inequality, it will have become internalized and accepted. As a result, "the subject of exploitation cannot know and speak the text of female exploitation, even if the absurdity of the nonrepresenting intellectual making space for her to speak is achieved. The woman is doubly in shadow" (288). Although Spivak is mostly speaking for the post-colonial other, Murasaki Shikibu, writing from the position of the controlled, subordinated, and silenced sex, seems, on the surface, to suffer the same fate. In the first portion of her *Tale of Genji*, at least, she does not seem to completely grasp the way her sex has been oppressed, and so inadvertently reinforces patriarchal beliefs (and it is only the fast-moving, romance-filled first part of the sprawling, multi-generational story, that most Japanese readers are familiar with—as it is the part which has been serialized

in manga, portrayed in romantic movies, and is included in high school textbooks). Or so it was generally thought until recently, when more and more readers, themselves becoming more politically and socially sophisticated, began to think more deeply about what was really going on in her writing; many modern readers sense that her implicit message may, all along, have been quite different from the way the book has been generally received and interpreted for the last 1000 years, especially in mainstream phallocentric Japanese society. It is not that no one was aware of the negative content, but simply that it was elided or ignored. Like most novels, when *The Tale of Genji* was read at all, it was read for pleasure. The content that provided pleasure tended to be focused on, and the content, or interpretation, that was disturbing and unpleasant was glossed over or completely skipped. With a change in cultural thinking about women and their rights, this focus has changed or even been reversed. What was before seen as the odd, extraneous, and dark parts of the book are now receiving attention as the "real message."

Whether it was done intentionally or sub-consciously, Lady Shikibu may have implanted content within *The Tale of Genji* that is more subversive than its historical reception (by the patriarchy, anyway) suggests.

> *There are two basic evaluations of Genji's love relationships. One, established for centuries and still current, accepts the position taken repeatedly by the narrator herself, to the effect that Genji is all but irresistible; that he values character as highly as he values looks; and that he never abandons any woman with whom he has established a bond. These are striking or admirable traits, and Genji has often been*

> *praised by both men and women as representing an ideal. However, a reaction against this sort of view has set in recently in Japan, North America, and no doubt elsewhere. The dissenters charge Genji with crimes against women. (Tyler, 2002)*

The tale has been read by Japanese students for centuries, and generally in a way that sees the eponymous protagonist as an ideal, heroic figure. But when one pays more attention to his actual behavior, and the impact it has on other people, Genji can be seen as a selfish and destructive egoist—and, to put it bluntly, a rapist. It is interesting that this whole facet of the tale has tended to be ignored or suppressed by readers, both male and female, for so long. However, with the rise of feminism and the light that it has cast on the hidden and normalized nature of sexism, double standards, and chauvinism, a much more critical view of Genji is becoming more common. For many modern readers it may even be the dominant view.

> *Genji, in short, is the classic abusive male. He professes undying love and devotion toward the women he desires; but if they in any way resist his wishes he forces himself upon them… the women of this culture are classic facilitators, accepting his right to victimize them and continuing to adore him or at least sympathize with him no matter how dominating his behavior becomes…Thus, a woman writing of such a man could praise him as a "Shining One" and perceive his sexual impositions as acts of romantic love. Sadly, this is not an uncommon pattern in the history of human civilization. (Bennett, 2016)*

My argument in this paper is that one of the great works of the world

literary canon, *The Tale of Genji*, was allowed to flourish because it seemed to safely situate itself within the accepted norms of patriarchal domination. However, a closer analysis of this work reveals the process of the author's own gradual disillusionment with the male oppression that dominated her sex in society. This paper has two main parts. First I will go through the Genji-centered portion of the tale and recount its basic thrust, with a focus on the consequences of many of Genji's actions, and then compare the three main parts of the novel, which are each structured upon a different pair of male figures, and trace how Murasaki's view of the men's actions becomes steadily darker, more critical, and more negative, thus demonstrating her own gradual disillusionment with the Japanese patriarchal dominance of women.

Murasaki Shikibu's 1400 page epic, *The Tale of Genji,* is set wholly within the extraordinarily circumscribed world of the tenth-century Heian court. Both horizontally and vertically, the cast of the story is limited to the upper and middle ranks of the imperial court, some officials and governors and their families, and some of these various dignitaries' well-born attendants. Although making up only a tiny fraction of a percent of the population of Japan at the time, those not falling within these parameters are rigidly excluded from the text. *The Tale of Genji* is structured upon various romances that, within this strictly hierarchical universe, manage to "jump rank." That is, characters break strict social custom, even the law, by engaging in romantic relations with those of a different social status than themselves. One of the greatest challenges (and charms) of reading the book lies in merely teasing out the nuances of the near infinitesimal gradations of many of these romantic "transgressions" of class and position.

For the conservative Murasaki and her Heian highborn readers, however,

even the mildest transgression of proscribed social bounds was dangerous, not just to the transgressors themselves, but perhaps even to the natural order. In the moral universe of *The Tale of Genji*, amorous "border jumping," leads to grief. The central hero of the book, Genji, however, manages to do so in adventure after adventure. His son and grandson, who take over as protagonist after Genji disappears from the narrative, attempt to duplicate his adventures, but with disastrous consequences. Why should this be? Does Lady Murasaki write hundreds of pages about these failed lovers to highlight their inferiority to Genji? Or has her own thinking about the inappropriateness of this type of "romance" evolved? Close analysis suggests it is the latter.

In a traditional epic, a hero's birth is generally marked by good omens which manifest his greatness. Initially, however, Genji's birth is presented as merely the exquisite byproduct of the tragic infatuation of the emperor for a woman of inappropriately (just barely of course) low rank. This establishes a motif and sets the tone of the first chapters of the book, which are devoted to exploring the rich and attractive allure of transgressive matches, and the ultimate karmic retribution they inevitably bring.

Genji himself is apparently tainted in some way by the heedless and finally fatal ardor his father bore for Genji's mother. She was a frail and fatherless girl from the fringes of Heian court society, and was not able to attain the status that would enable her to be an official consort for the emperor until, ironically, after her premature death. Their gorgeous and charming product, Genji, exhibits his artlessly perilous seductive powers almost from birth: the emperor's excessive fascination with the incomparable infant threatens to throw the royal succession—and hence the future of the country—into doubt.

The paradoxical power of young Genji's innocent charm is further revealed when his father, the emperor, takes him to a soothsayer, who sees only danger in Genji's future. He predicts that if Genji were "to achieve the Sovereign's supreme eminence" there would be "disorder and suffering," and even if he rises "only" to the level of the "pillar of the court and the support of all the realm, there again appears to be a mismatch" (Tyler, 2001, 13). Although the seer clearly diagnoses our hero as a potential danger to the realm, Genji's charms still manages to blind this sage advisor to his own prognosis. Far from feeling apprehension, the seer is filled only with "joy at having met so extraordinary a boy, together with sorrow upon parting with him" (Tyler, 2001, 13).

This is the power of Genji. If we define "romantic" as the tendency to follow one's heart over one's reason, then Genji is perhaps the quintessential romantic hero. Throughout his story, his desires tend to lead both him and his lovers into transgressions, often those which flout the rules of class and rank, most often to the grave misfortune of everyone but Genji himself.

After hearing the seer's warnings, the emperor denies Genji the official status of prince, in theory curtailing his power to assert undue negative influence over the realm by making him a commoner. But it is already too late. A prince who is not a prince, Genji will become the ultimate boundary jumper. He will be unrestrained by true regal status, yet as the beloved and favored son of the emperor, no doors will be closed to him. The tainted seed planted by the emperor's transgressive love for Genji's mother has grown and become incarnate, and eventually rebounds even into the emperor's own boudoir when the commoner Genji seduces the very empress chosen to replace his late mother in the emperor's bed, planting an

illegitimate offspring into the line of succession, a breach that, according to the beliefs of the time, disrupts the very harmony of heaven and earth.

But that is merely one climactic trespass of the many that are the ribs and backbone of *The Tale of Genji*. As stated previously, the novel's world consists only of the upper and middle ranks of Heian society, and "these two sharply delineated social worlds inform the structure of the narrative" (Shirane, 2008, 62). The engine driving the narrative, and the essence of the novel, lay in the fact that Genji himself does not obey the rules of this social bifurcation; he constantly pursues romance outside of his appropriate social sphere. "Genji leads a dual existence: as the prized son of the emperor…and as the private lover who exposes himself to the uncertainties, dangers, and chaos of the 'marginal' world" (Shirane, 2008, 62). Genji does, in fact, expose himself to these elements, but except for a lot of weeping and perpetually damp sleeves, which never come even close to damping the fire that keeps his many irons hot, it is the women who continually bear the brunt of the real suffering and consequences of Murasaki's hero's "border jumping."

This tendency is planted in the "Broom Tree" chapter, at the novel's beginning, in a series of "lighthearted tales" exchanged by the young men about courting women outside their appropriate class. These invariably end in tragedy for the women, who are forced to flee into oblivion or even end up dying as a result of the importunate young "heroes." This is the talk that seems to inspire many of Genji's later actions.

Certainly the highest and most transgressive of all of Genji's liaisons is with the empress, his stepmother, Fujitsubo. Although Fujitsubo probably really does care for Genji, she at no time seeks him out, and we have no

reason to believe that their meetings brought her any feelings other than guilt, grief, and torment—even to the extent that her life is threatened. Infatuated, Genji hounds Fujitsubo passionately. Their meetings bring respite to his longing, but bring her guilt and fear as she becomes an adulteress and betrays both the emperor and her country when her illegitimate son is made the heir apparent. Genji's incessant importuning makes discovery a constant threat, and to protect the child's future as well as her very health and well-being (imperiled by the stress caused by Genji's hounding) the still young Fujitsubo is forced to renounce the world and become a nun.

This example begins a trend that runs throughout Genji's escapades. He sets out on a romantic "adventure," and generally gets the woman whom he desires, but while he eventually escapes the situation unharmed, the women end up with great suffering or death. In the first part of the novel, the author seems to "side with" Genji, and lavishes him with praise. He is selfish and self-gratifying, but never acts maliciously, and the narration seems to be as smitten with his charms as are many of his conquests. These "stories about [Genji's] liaisons are concentrated above all in the first dozen chapters (out of fifty-four), but since these are the ones most widely read and remembered, the general reputation of the tale tends to rest upon them" (Tyler, 2002).

The empress Fujitsubo is more fortunate than Genji's other high-ranking paramour, the lady of Rokujo. Rokujo apparently really loves Genji, and wants nothing more than to be recognized and acknowledged as his wife, but Genji's courting and then improperly neglecting a woman of such high position breaks social taboo. Although chastised for his behavior towards Rokujo by the emperor himself, his inappropriate actions actually have a negative effect on the balance of nature itself: the "Rokujo haven" becomes

destabilized, and in a deranged state lady Rokujo astrally-projects her malignant doppelganger outside of her body. It murders Genji's wife Aoi, and perhaps another of his unfortunate lovers, as well.

Aoi, to whom Genji is actually married, is a particularly complex case, and perhaps best illustrates how Genji blithely causes chaos and suffering for those around him. Aoi is the daughter of a princess and the minister of the left. Gifted and of immaculate reputation, she is in line to marry the heir apparent and become empress, a role for which she has been groomed since birth. However, her father becomes utterly taken with the charming young Genji, and rashly and illogically cancels these plans, severs her imperial connections, and marries her to the "commoner" Genji. This is clearly not because Aoi is smitten with the young man. She shows him no favor or particular interest during their early meetings. In fact, later she seems unable to forgive Genji for affecting this change in her fortunes, although perhaps it is his constant infidelities she cannot forgive. In either case, she is murdered by the malignant spirit of Genji's neglected lover, Rokujo. As with Utsusemi, a governor's wife who refuses Genji's advances, resisting the charms of the chaos-sowing prince does not serve as a moral victory that might allow happiness. Both women are manifestly less happy as a result of their relationships with Genji. Aoi is forced into the role of frigid wife (and finally murder victim), and Utsusemi ends up regretting her own marriage and the direction of her life, later writing that because her sense of propriety forces her to reject Genji, "secretly, O secretly, these sleeves are wet with my tears" (Tyler, 2001, 52).

In other romantic pursuits, by covertly going *down* the ladder in his amorous adventures, Genji transgresses the social order nearly as much as when going up. When he is smitten by the beauty of a country woman,

Yugao, and stays overnight in her home, it seals her doom. In spite of Yugao's terror, Genji drags her away from her house and her attending women, and within a day she too falls victim to a malignant spirit.

Genji's relationship with young Murasaki is his only serious attachment in the first section of the novel that is not marked by tragedy (although later she will die young as well). Perhaps she is initially spared because, in this case, Genji's transgression does not violate class and rank but merely nature. Murasaki is a ten-year-old child, and Genji essentially kidnaps her because he finds her so perfect and charming. In this case Genji does show a modicum of restraint and waits until Murasaki is of age before consummating their adult relationship. Eventually he informs her father that he has her (thus receiving social sanction for the alliance) and finally makes her his legitimate wife. It is easily the healthiest relationship in the book.

One may wonder why the tale's author, Murasaki Shikibu, an intelligent woman, would write such a book, create such an appealing but inadvertently harmful hero, and glibly subject so many fine heroines to so much misery and suffering. In writing about Murasaki Shikibu, Haruo Shirane gives us some interesting biographical information about the author that may cast some light on these questions.

Unusual for her era, Lady Mursaki was raised in an environment steeped in "masculine" Chinese poetry, and was herself so adept in its study that "her father wished she had been born a boy" (Shirane, 1985, 218). Unlike the surviving letters of women of her era, Murasaki's correspondence is not romantic love letters written to men, but "almost entirely exchanges with other women" (Shirane, 1985, 218). Where women of her class typically married at the beginning of their teens, Murasaki married at around thirty, to

a much older provincial governor, “a situation reminiscent of the Governor of Ki and his stepmother Utsusemi, the wife of the elderly Vice-governor of Iyo” (Shiranu, 218-9). (As stated earlier, Utsusemi did not engage in any romance with Genji, but apparently regretted not being able to do so.) Murasaki herself was soon widowed, and thereafter returned to court as one of the empress’s ladies-in-waiting.

Murasaki Shikibu’s romantic life was at this point presumably over, and what is more, she had become completely confined within the rigid vertical and horizontal social constraints of her post and position, as well as within the physical constraints of the imperial (for her, presumably, almost exclusively feminine) household. This is the exact same environment into which Genji was born. Looked at from this perspective, we can see why Murasaki’s Genji does not necessarily serve as a traditional hero, but rather as a medium through which she and the women around her could escape the confines of their narrow world, and safely enter into a sphere of romance, adventure, norm-violation, and empowerment. The author and female audience could identify with Genji as a hero—an identification perhaps made stronger by his often being overtly feminized—and vicariously experience transgressive romance through his many paramours. In this manner, they could both “experience” excitement and passion, and also rein in and assuage the moral pangs these identifications might cause through the various ways the transgressors are ultimately punished. This is perhaps as satisfying at some levels as the romances themselves.

Through such an approach, we can see that the interplay between the rigidity of societal constraints and their regular violation work together to form the fundamental structure of the action, with risk-taking and sexual adventure followed, eventually, by a resolution consisting of the punishment

of the transgressors. It is remarkable that Genji himself, although frequently speaking and writing about the depth of his suffering, is (compared to his ladies) never punished for anything. Even his banishment brings to him the second great love of his life. And yet there is a tension throughout the narrative between how good Genji himself seems, and how much harm he actually creates. It is as though Murasaki wants us to see how karma punishes wrongdoing, but cannot bear to inflict ill upon Genji, or use her power as narrator to show him in a bad light.

And thus, his amorous adventures have been read and interpreted over the centuries by generations of Japanese as acceptable—he is the hero of the story, and therefore the "good guy." However, although Murasaki seems to favor Genji in the first one-third of her tale, there is reason to believe she did not, ultimately, want him, and men like him, to be seen in such a favorable light. There is much more to *The Tale of Genji* than the eponymous protagonist and his actions. Genji has a close friend, To no Chujo, who, to a certain extent is his dyadic foil. Later in the story, two other similar pairs of male friends dominate the story, but the ways in which they are represented show how Murasaki really thinks about such men and their behavior. In the rest of this paper we will see how Murasaki represents not only Genji, but the other leading males in her story. What is important is that the other male characters do almost the same things as Genji has throughout his life. In fact, these others are generally not as transgressive, selfish, or extreme as Genji. However, they are clearly shown by the narration to be rude, unpleasant, boorish, and at times creepy.

These Dark and Decadent Days

There are timeless statements, tending towards the conservative, that express an idea that the world is a worsening place: “Things aren’t what they used to be,” “I don’t know what has gotten into people these days,” “They don’t make them like that anymore.” These are perhaps reactionary sentiments in any time or place or culture where change is taking place. The *Tale of Genji*, especially the second half, after Genji is gone from the story, is written from within such a frame.

Several times we hear in the text the refrain that, in comparison with the past, we have entered “Dark and decadent days,” or as Genji himself puts it, “Everything is on the decline, compared to the old days…everything has lost all depth” (Tyler, 2001, 552). Although in this case he is speaking specifically of the arts, within the tale the line resonates at a deeper level; we can see the breakdown in the moral quality and nature of the characters within the tale—both within individual characters through time and within analogous characters in later generations.

To prove this point, I will look at the trio of male “buddy-rivals”: Genji and To no Chujo; Yugiri and Kashiwagi; and finally Kaoru and Niou, focusing on the steady decline through time of the quality of these men as stable and respectable figures within the text, with particular focus on how they function as bellwethers of the author’s own attitude towards “the worsening times” of the tale itself, and how this perception of “worsening” is itself not necessarily actual, but perceived. We will see that these male character’s morality does not actually decline through time. In fact, from generation to generation it almost certainly improves. However, the narrative itself, by taking a more critical and ironically distanced perspective of the exploits of these male characters, as well as by gradually shifting its point of

view from males to females, paints a progressively darker and more disturbing portrait of society, human relations, and the actions men take when trying to win the affections of women.

Genji and To no Chujo

From Genji's birth through his youth and young manhood, the narration focuses on his amorous pursuits. Although very satisfying to read, if one looks objectively at his actions and encounters, they are almost horrifying in nature.

As mentioned previously, Genji is married when very young to a fine and upstanding young woman of high rank, Aoi. However, he generally ignores her until her death, an act perpetrated by the spirit of another lady of the highest rank and refinement, who was herself driven to this act, a species of sub-conscious madness, through having been courted, made love to, and then neglected and spurned by Genji. In other words, Genji is indirectly responsible for making a woman turn into a kind of ghost-witch and killing his own wife. Genji will also abduct a young and frightened woman, Yugao, who will die a horrible death while in his custody, and he will pursue and attempt to "forcibly seduce" a young married woman (Utsusemi) who has been rejecting his advances. He will use (and seduce) Utsusemi's "12 or 13 year old" younger brother in attempting to get to her, and will accidentally deflower another woman living in the same house, whom he mistakes for the real object of his desires. Later, he will also abduct a young girl, whom he will raise as his daughter/wife (Murasaki), and will force himself upon another woman in straightened circumstances (Setsumuhana), who seems frightened of everything, is perhaps even borderline autistic. Finally, he will

seduce and impregnate the empress, his stepmother.

Now remember, this is the protagonist! The hero of the story, who is a beloved icon in Japan. Even though he does all of these things, he doesn't seem like a villain, because the author constantly turns our attention to his beauty, his lovely poetry, his excellent taste, and his patrician refinement.

The exploits of Genji's closest friend, To no Chujo, are not as well documented, but we do know from the "Broom Tree" chapter that one woman died as a result of his importuning, and another, who had borne his child and was tormented by his constant neglect, eventually fled into hiding to avoid the threats of To no Chujo's wife. This second woman would eventually be discovered by Genji, living in anonymity and, for one of her station, relative poverty. To no Chujo would also have many, many children by various women, many of whom he would lose track of.

Throughout all of these activities, the author remains loyal to these two men, especially Genji. All of these wild adventures are treated lightly, as the hi-jinks and exploits of spirited young men doing what comes naturally to them. They are romantic figures, and their lives are steeped in beauty and poetry, both literally and figuratively. Genji is certainly not painted as an innocent, yet he is portrayed as basically goodhearted and even a little naïve. Far more attention is paid to the suffering he undergoes than to that which he causes. Constant reference is made to his frequent tears and unhappiness, as well as to his constancy to "any woman he has loved." It would seem that, for the author, his sincerity and his suffering do not so much "pay for" or "make up for" his transgressions as prove that he acts not out of selfishness, or even simple lust, but out of the impulses of a romantic and pure (if thoughtless and undisciplined) heart.

In these chapters the author frequently holds Genji up as a paragon of

talent, style and beauty. When we see him from another character's point-of-view, it is almost always coupled with plentiful praise "all who saw him were overwhelmed at his grace and wondrous good looks…" Genji himself is close to oblivious to any sense of responsibility for the harm that he does, and the narration does not directly comment on this during his early years, stressing only his positive attributes. It is no accident that in the Whaley translation he is constantly referred to as "The Shining Prince." His gifts seem to be of divine origin, and thus his actions become difficult to reproach.

In direct complement to stressing the positive reactions of those who encounter Genji, those who have negative reactions to him have those responses downplayed. One of the most striking examples of this occurs whenever Genji is forcing his advances upon the unwilling. The narration filters its perception of reactions of the object of Genji's "affection"—her tears, resistance and suffering—through Genji's own vantage point, and he tends to regard such displays as "delightful and charming"! Readers are shielded from the potential discomfort, if not downright horror, of such scenes through the complicity of the narration, which cues the reader to regard these actions in the spirit of romantic, lighthearted adventure. Although the narrative will become more critical and ironic as the story progresses, both Genji and To no Chujo are regarded with the utmost respect by their contemporaries (which in the absence of authorial irony is generally a good indicator of how they are to be judged by readers), as well as by the author's own comments.

On several occasions in the first third of the story, the narrator does step forward and criticize Genji. However, she does so in such mild terms that

she seems to be winking at his transgressions. In “The Broom Tree” we are told, “Genji had a dislike for casual relationships and frivolity, but he had an unfortunate tendency to become enmeshed in the most impossible and painful affairs, and as a consequence his behavior was not untainted” (Tyler, 2001, 37).

So we see, Genji is not violent, aggressive, insensitive, or rapacious, but because of “an unfortunate tendency,” apparently beyond his control, he is “not untainted.”

Describing Genji’s amours with the young lady, Yugao, the author steps forward again, in a slightly more critical vein. However, once again Genji’s stunningly cavalier behavior is dismissed lightly, and what is more, the author seems to be announcing her complicity. Although the word “wicked” is used, the paragraph reads like an apology for having misrepresented Genji by making him appear worse than he actually is:

> *I had passed over Genji’s trials and tribulations in silence, out of respect for his determined efforts to conceal them, and I have written of them now only because certain lords and ladies criticized my story for resembling fiction, wishing to know why even those who knew Genji best should have thought him perfect, just because he is the Emperor’s son. No doubt I must now beg everyone’s indulgence for my effrontery in painting so wicked a portrait of him. (Tyler, 2001, 80)*

As the years go by and Genji grows older and rises in rank, the allegiance of the author becomes less firm. By the time he has built his new Rokujo manor and moved all of his women into it, the ironic barbs against Genji increase dramatically. This tendency is preceded by a move within

the narration to grant more time to the perspective of the women within the new household, and opens a window upon a new way of looking at our hero. Now he is frequently revealed as something other than the merry and fun-loving young man we knew earlier in the book.

As Haruo Shirane puts it in her book *The Bridge of Dreams: a Poetics of the 'Tale of Genji,'* "In stark contrast to the reckless youth of the early chapters, the Genji who appears in the Tamakazura sequence is calculating and somewhat devious—if not decadent—middle-aged man who depends heavily on his skill as a stage manager" (1987, 97). And in so doing "the author offers an increasingly ambivalent portrait of the hero's pursuit, education, and "fatherly" treatment of orphaned daughters" (1987, 94).

It is difficult to say exactly what causes this change. However, Shirane's pinpointing it as occurring in the "Tamakazura" sequence is intriguing. It is tempting to wonder if this darkening of opinion came about almost accidentally in the writing of the long sequence in which young lade, Tamakazura, is forced to fight her way back from Kyushu to the capitol. This is the first extended sequence in the story in which Genji is not the central figure. Did looking through a woman's eyes for such a stretch of time lead to a more critical view of Genji's behavior? Or might it have been the other way around? Did Murasaki become less happy with the scruples of the Genji character she had created, and therefore chose to divide her time between his perspective and that of the women? Whichever is the origin of this change in view, once the floodgates open, Genji becomes fair game for authorial criticism in the tale. As Genji ages, we are given numerous critical impressions of him, both through sympathetic women characters and through direct and indirect authorial comment in which the "winking"

attitude that accompanied most of her earlier criticisms of Genji becomes strained or is dropped altogether. The unmitigated praise which Genji had previously inspired is a thing of the past.

When he attempts to seduce a new young woman, Tamakazura, the young lady has feelings of “revulsion” (Tyler, 2001, 450), is “profoundly upset and disgusted with him” (451), and finds him “hateful” (450). Genji had been turned down plenty of times in the earlier portions of the story, but never with feelings like these! The author also criticizes him severely: “The real nature of his interest in her was too shocking to confess” (448), and his designs are deemed “disgraceful” (472). The irony is no longer light and playful but very thick and dark when the author notes after one of his speeches to Tamakazura (in which he asks her to trust him like a family member), “He had a very strange way of being a father” (450).

To no Chujo’s representation will also suffer, although not as much as Genji’s. The narrative will never suggest that his youthful philandering was reprehensible, although it will make fun of him for becoming stout, stiff, and pompous as he ages. He will be compared numerous times to the still nimble and graceful Genji, and will fall far short every time. As with Genji, however, To no Chujo is always respected in the tale as an upstanding man of great spirit, a heroic figure embodying those attributes that are most appropriate for a great leader and a great lover. He has foibles, but his heart is in the right place.

Both Genji and To No Chujo will represent the bar that the “buddy-rivals” of the succeeding two generations will be unable to rise to. Both Genji and To no Chujo are larger-than-life types of a heroic age. Despite the narration’s attempts to salvage them, the qualities of Yugiri and Kashiwagi, as well of those of Kaoru and Yugao, will appear only as distorted

and misshapen replicas of the two original templates.

Yugiri and Kashiwagi

Yugiri is Genji's only acknowledged son, and inherits from him his looks and intelligence. Compared to Genji, Yugiri is honest, thoughtful, considerate, and anxious to follow social norms and avoid violating taboos. Judging by this, he should be a very fine man and a more than worthy successor to his father. If we were to look upon him objectively as a historical figure, we would no doubt find a better man than Genji. Unfortunately for Yugiri's reputation, however, he is not a historical figure but a character in a book of fiction.

As a hero in a story, Yugiri is a hopelessly dull character. Although he would seem to have all the tools for success (looks, brains, status), he lacks the spirit and desire that made Genji such an engaging hero. He is not much of a womanizer, he is not very duplicitous, he dislikes danger and recklessness, and he does not have the ability to effortlessly charm and seduce people. For the most part, Yugiri is an upright and proper pillar of society.

When Yugiri finally does try to pursue an amorous adventure, winning over a frowsy and neglected widow, he is painfully unsuccessful in spite of dogged determination—until he finally marries her against her will. Painful is a key adjective in describing this pursuit because we are clearly told about the Second Princess's discomfort, revulsion, and suffering. In other words, the narration has started to side with the women (a.k.a. "victims") rather than the men (assaulters). Although Yugiri's obstinacy is reminiscent of his father's, because his point-of-view is not privileged, we cannot dismiss his

actions as either romantic or comical; we see the pain and damage his actions cause other people.

In this generational movement, Yugiri seems not to take after his own father but after the other rival-buddy of the previous generation: To no Chujo. Yugiri is prolific and has plenty of children, but casts his glances neither as far nor as recklessly as his own father — who is in many ways his psychological opposite. Although neither as amorous nor as passionate as To no Chujo, Yugiri does slowly and conservatively increase his social status and ascends through the ranks as a statesman.

His friend and foil, Kashiwagi, on the other hand, has a character that seems considerably closer to Genji's — especially when compared to Yugiri. When Kashiwagi sets his heart on a romantic encounter, he refuses to give up until he has succeeded in achieving it. Like Genji, he does not let propriety stand in his way, and also like Genji, he ultimately succeeds in his conquests. However, there is a key difference between the two. Once Genji makes up his mind, he never looks back or second guesses himself. He never regrets what he has done, and is able to bear the guilt and grief which might result from his actions. For example, Genji never admits the emperor is his own illegitimate son, the result of cuckolding the previous emperor, his own father.

Kashiwagi does not have this kind of strength. After he laboriously seduces the wife of his best friend's father, a man he personally respects above any other, he is wracked by regrets. He is not strong enough to reign in and conceal the relationship while it is going on, and he cannot live with what he has done afterwards. He eventually wastes away and dies of guilt.

Kaoru and Niou

Kaoru and Niou are the third and last generation of buddy-rivals in the *Tale of Genji*, and they are similar to the earlier pairs: once again there is a drop in their fundamental moral and heroic "quality level," again there is a contrast between the two, with one being a reckless womanizer and the other being rather cautious and conservative, and again there is something of a role reversal between which man has which qualities.

Kaoru is descended from Genji. He has inherited his good looks and charm, but almost none of his reckless passion. In addition, he has an other-worldly bodily aroma which, although new in the tale, is very reminiscent of Genji's god-like attractiveness and charisma. In spite of his lineage and attributes, he is as close to sexless as any character yet seen in the tale. Determined from youth to "leave the world" and become a monk, Kaoru avoids relationships that might act as bonds to hold him back. When he envies his friend for having a daughter, the narrator, in a vicious jab, implies he may not know how to produce one himself. Although kaoru becomes enamored of and pursues women in the story, he is not clear, forthright or passionate enough to win their hearts. Like Yugiri, in spite of Kaoru's wonderful looks and status, he tends to frighten and alienate the women he pursues. Although he pledges his undying love and devotion to Oigimi, an orphaned girl whose father made it clear before his death that the wealthy, well placed and kind-hearted Kaoru would make a good husband, she decides that it would be better to starve to death than be his wife. Kaoru has only slightly better luck with Oigimi's sister and half-sister.

Kaoru's friend, Niou, on the other hand, is shamefully aggressive. He is the son of the quiet and staid (although accomplished) Akashi princess and

an unnamed emperor. Without compunction, Niou does things that would have made Genji blush with shame. No woman is safe from him, even his wife's guest in his own house. He even impersonates Kaoru, his best friend, in order to deceive Kaoru's wife, and in such a way that he would eventually be certain to be found out. Although he wins over and marries the reticent Naka no Kimi, his passion is extremely short-lived. Once she is established in his house and bears a child, he is after her half-sister, Ukifune, and, apparently, almost anyone else.

Eventually both Krou and Niou's attentions are focused on Ukifune. However, by this time the narrative sympathy has completely abandoned the men and sided with her, making her the central character of the final portion of the novel. As readers, we sincerely hope that these two irritating men will just disappear. In the end, Kaoru seems little more than a confused, hypocritical, and perhaps deeply disturbed young man, whose saintly pretensions thinly conceal an enormously selfish and manipulative character.

We now also recognize that Niou, although he is passionately obsessed with Ukifune, he is such a womanizer that his interest in her would probably wither were she to submit to him. Even if it did not, as she is the half-sister of his wife, any relationship between them would be untenable.

The authorial tone in the last chapters of the novel could not be more different from what it was in the beginning. The story has reversed its position regarding what is acceptable behavior in men. At the beginning of the book we identified with Genji and the other male participants in "The Broom Tree" chapters, following their pursuits of romantic and (for them) fun, lighthearted "seductions" of aristocratic women in straightened circumstances. Now, at the end of the tale, we identify completely with just this type of women, pushed to the brink of self-destruction by similarly

selfish young men, and want nothing so much as to see the women escape their would-be suitors' dangerous and unwanted importunities.

As far as the representation of men goes, there is a steady falling off in likability as the story progresses. Although the men may not actually have become worse, or the women's lives more terrible, they seem that way due to the shifting of the author's sympathies from the side of the patriarchy to that of the oppressed women throughout the course of the narrative. The first two-thirds of the book take place in a tightly structured world, carefully controlled and ordered by strong male figures strongly embedded in a strict, rule-bound, hierarchical, formal society. Initially we were near the top and center—in the capitol, near or at the imperial palace, and surrounded by highest-ranking royalty. After the death of Genji, this world begins to unravel. At the end of the tale we are in the distant countryside with men who seem weak, divided, and unable to control their circumstances, their women, or their environment. In addition, the oppositional voices of the women receive more attention and gain more clout as the story progresses, and as a result we see that the power structures which before had seemed simple, solid, and sacrosanct are in fact fissured, chaotic and oppressive. By the end, *The Tale of Genji* has morphed into a political and a feminist work which casts into question the justice and fitness of the social institutions and practices tacitly embraced at its beginning.

There is a general feeling that we, along with the author, have learned something by the end of the book. Spivak argues in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" that the subaltern, ultimately, cannot speak. Acclimated to the power-structures built into their culture, they cannot break out of the patriarchal frame they have been born into. But perhaps literature has the

power to rupture this frame, even when it is not the author's conscious intention. Murasaki began her work very traditionally, with adventurous men pursuing traditional goals—in this case, seducing women. However, it seems that the more Murasaki came to consider these women and look through their eyes, the more she came to sympathize with them, care about them, and prefer them. She grew to recognize what caused their suffering was exactly the same male actions she had been celebrating at the beginning of the story.

Why is it that it took until early in the 21st century for people to notice this? Well, for one thing, school curriculums and other settings where the book has traditionally been used were controlled by men, and they had a simple solution for this problem: only read the beginning sections which support the patriarchal power system (i.e. "the good part"), and then stop. More recently women editors, journalists, and educators, have taken over the dissemination of the story, and they have made very different decisions about what parts deserve to be highlighted, and which characters' feelings should be examined. Finally, after a thousand years, it seems as though Murasaki Shikibu's real feelings are finally being recognized, and made clear. After a thousand years, we are finally ready to recognize and learn the lesson that she set out to teach all those centuries ago. Truly, she was a woman ahead of her time.

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