1. Genji and Murasaki: Between Love and Pride

The spark that brings Murasaki fully to life in *The Tale of Genji* flashes in the “Miotsukushi” chapter, when Genji offends her with his talk of the lady at Akashi and the daughter conceived there during his exile. “There I was, [she] thought, completely miserable, and he, simple pastime or not, was sharing his heart with another! Well, I am I!”¹ Her ware wa ware (“I’m me!”) sharply affirms the distinctness of her existence.

Akiyama Ken wrote that studying Murasaki, more than any other character, reveals the essence of the tale.² She is Genji’s private discovery and his personal treasure. Her fate in life depends so entirely on him that she might be a sort of shadow to him, without a will of her own, and yet at this moment, and later ones like it, she resists him. The pattern of give and take between the two is as vital to the unfolding of their relationship as it is to the development of the tale itself. Murasaki’s precise social standing vis-à-vis Genji and the court society they inhabit is essential, too. These interrelated issues in turn bear on the great crisis of Murasaki’s life: the disaster that strikes both her and Genji when Genji agrees to marry the Third Princess (“Wakana One”). The next essay will consider this crisis from the standpoint of Genji’s relationship with Suzaku, his brother, while this one emphasizes Genji and Murasaki as a couple. Their relationship has its crises, and the marriage to the Third Princess strains it nearly to the breaking point, but it lasts until the loss of Murasaki leaves Genji a mere shell of the man he once was.

Three critical scenes punctuate the relationship. Shimizu Yoshiko called them Murasaki’s “perils.”³ They are Murasaki’s hurt when she learns about the lady from Akashi (“Akashi” and “Miotsukushi”); her fear when Genji courts Princess Asagao (“Asagao”); and her shock when Genji marries the Third Princess (“Wakana One,” “Wakana Two”). These scenes have usually been given roughly equal weight when previously treated as a set, and discussed in isolation one from the other. However, they follow a clear trajectory. Each time Genji talks to Murasaki about another woman who is or has been important to

¹ TTG, 286; GM 2:292.
² Akiyama, *Genji monogatari no sekai*, 75.
³ Shimizu, *Genji no onnagimi*, 44.
him she resents it, her anger upsets him, and his effort to calm her miscarries because it is at least in part blind and self-serving. Each time there is more at stake for Genji, and the impact on Murasaki is more serious. It is therefore reasonable to see dramatic progression from one of these scenes to the next.

Many have wondered why Genji seeks with Akashi, Asagao, and the Third Princess the tie that so disturbs Murasaki, when he already has in Murasaki a wife who meets his personal ideal and for whom he cares deeply. The answer seems to be that Genji’s desire for all three involves less erotic acquisitiveness than thirst for heightened prestige.

First, Genji’s tie with Akashi, and the consequent birth of their daughter, opens for him the way towards that highest advantage accessible to a commoner: to be the maternal grandfather of an emperor. Reaching this peak—an aspect of his destiny fostered by her father’s devotion to the Sumiyoshi deity and announced by prophetic dreams—does not depend entirely on his will, but it requires from him a cooperation that he gives gladly. What Murasaki sees, however, is attachment to a rival who, to make things worse, gives him a child when she herself cannot.

Second, Asagao and then the Third Princess promise to round out Genji’s success—one that might be called less political than representational. By the time he courts Asagao seriously, let alone by the time he accepts the Third Princess, his supremacy is secure. He does not need them politically, but he still wants one and then the other in order to seal his increasingly exalted station.

Thus Genji is a flawed man like others, despite his gifts, and for him public ambition comes into conflict with private affection. Murasaki’s quality makes her his personal, but not his social equal, and her value to him, as well as her valuation of herself despite his slights, makes this conflict a theme that runs through the tale.

The following discussion will cover the reception of Murasaki as a character and the penchant for “jealousy” (shitto) that distinguishes her. It will then turn to her childhood and her marriage to Genji. The main part of the essay covers in chronological order the three “perils” that culminate in Genji’s marriage to the Third Princess.

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4 Doris Bargen, who included all three scenes in her discussion of Murasaki, pointed likewise to Genji’s incomprehension and self-centeredness (Bargen, A Woman’s Weapon, 109-49; see for example 137). The treatment of Murasaki here parallels hers in some ways, although it shares neither the foundations of her argument nor her conclusions.
Perceptions of Murasaki

Murasaki means so much to Genji, for so long, that she seems obviously to be the “heroine” (onna shujinkō) of Parts One and Two of the tale. However, Matsuo Satoshi argued in 1949 that she is no more prominent in Part One than any other female character and does not play a central role until “Wakana One.” In fact, Matsuo saw no connection between the Murasaki of Parts One and Two. Although his thesis was widely accepted, later writers proposed a qualified continuity after all. In 1993, after exhaustively discussing whether or not Murasaki is the heroine of both parts, Nagai Kazuko concluded that she is; but for some the doubt remains.

In any case, many do not respond to Murasaki. Tanabe Seiko wrote that in her youth she found her tiresomely perfect; Enchi Fumiko called her too “sheltered” to be a romantic heroine; Ōba Minako omitted her from her list of “female characters who have a brilliance, a strange beauty, and a romantic quality befitting the heroine of a monogatari [tale]”; and Norma Field wrote of her studied “banality.” Modest and untouched by scandal, she can seem colorless and perhaps even tediously privileged. Nonetheless, the text describes her repeatedly as a woman of extraordinary beauty, kindness, intelligence, and warmth. Shigematsu Nobuhiro evoked her this way with particular success.

Only one writer found Murasaki worse than dull. Matsuo Satoshi described her in Part One as coarse, ignorant, vain, petty, cold, and incapable of self-reflection; while in Part Two, he wrote, she “coldly” asks Genji several times to let her become a nun, knowing perfectly well that such requests wound him, then “betrays all his hopes” by “coldly” dying. Matsuo’s mirror image is the feminist critic Komashaku Kimi, with her passionate attack on Genji and her correspondingly militant defense of Murasaki.

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5 Matsuo Satoshi, “Murasaki no Ue: hitotsu no yaya kikyō naru shiron,” 151–166.
7 Tanabe, Genji monogatari kami fūsen, 106–7; Enchi, Genji monogatari shiken, 79; Ōba, “Special Address,” 19–40; Field, The Splendor of Longing, p. 175.
8 Shigematsu, “Murasaki no Ue no ningenzō,” 5–22.
10 Komashaku, Murasaki Shikibu no messēji.
Jealousy and self-affirmation

Murasaki’s silent “I am I!” conveys a pang of the jealousy that is a major theme in Japanese writing about her. The word is not quite fair to her, however, since it takes Genji’s part. Jealousy is what he sees, while hurt, fear, and anger are what she feels. She protests an injury done her by the person for whom she cares more than anyone else in the world and on whom her wellbeing depends. A symptom of her predicament in life is that in principle it is beneath her dignity to express such feelings at all.

*Ware* (“I”), even alone, occurs in many expressions that might not flatter a woman like Murasaki, since it easily suggests self-affirmation in a manner that the tale does not normally associate with feelings proper to a lady. The opening paragraph of “Kiritsubo” says of the women who were jealous of Genji’s mother, “Those others who had always assumed that pride of place was properly theirs [‘who thought pridefully, Me!’] despised her as a dreadful woman.” *Ware wa* (“Me!”) conveys not only the emotions of “those others” but their vulgarity in comparison with Genji’s mother.

Waka poetry associates the expression *ware wa ware* with a sharp awareness of self in the vicissitudes of a private love affair. In three of four occurrences earlier than the tale, a male speaker laments that because of love’s longing he has lost his “self,” while, in the fourth, a woman stolen from one lover by another feels estranged from any “self” she may properly possess. However, two of three poems roughly contemporary with *The Tale of Genji* use the words as Murasaki does in “Miotsukushi.” The full expression in both is *kimi wa kimi ware wa ware* (“you are you, I am I”). Izumi Shikibu evokes the distinction between “you” and “me” only to deny it (“Since nothing comes

11 Articles devoted to Murasaki’s *shitto* include Iijima, “Murasaki no Ue no shitto”; Morita, “Murasaki no Ue no miryoku”; Saitō, “Murasaki no Ue no shitto: tai Akashi no baai”; and Saitō, “Murasaki no Ue no shitto: Akashi oyobi Asagao no Saiin.” On her sense of self, see Baba, “Jiga no ishiki o motsu Murasaki no Ue.”
12 Most writers accept without question Genji’s view as the narrator presents it. For example, Fukasawa Michio saw in Murasaki’s *shitto* the sole, precipitating cause of Genji’s passage from glory to anguish (Fukasawa, “Murasaki no Ue: higekiteki risōzō no keisei,” 20).
13 TTG, 3; GM 1:17.
14 Gosenshū (951) 518; Shitagō shū (Minamoto no Shitagō, 911–983) 187; Asamitsu shū (Fujiwara no Asamitsu, 951–995), 72.
15 Gosenshū 711, the last poem addressed to Heichū (d. 923) by his mistress, in the story about how Heichū’s mistress was stolen from him by Fujiwara no Tokihira (871–909).
between us [to make us] ‘you are you, I am I’, how could our hearts be separate from each other?”).\(^\text{16}\) Ben no Menoto affirms it sharply: “You are you, I am I: that is the way for us, although we pledged ourselves to each other for life.”\(^\text{17}\) Murasaki’s “I am I,” which evokes especially “my” dignity in a private relationship, conveys the same mood.\(^\text{18}\)

For many Japanese readers, Murasaki’s jealousy is her salient trait. Genji seems to enjoy it, despite his complaints, at least until the “Wakana” chapters. It gives her a piquancy that he savors. Tanabe Seiko remarked that it is what animates her and makes her human.\(^\text{19}\) Shigematsu Nobuhiro contended that no woman as intelligent as Murasaki could fail to be jealous in her situation,\(^\text{20}\) and Komashaku Kimi noted with pleasure that Genji’s treachery and oppression had not after all “killed” Murasaki’s sense of self.\(^\text{21}\)

Murasaki certainly remains herself throughout her life, but her strongest feelings little become a lady, no matter how discreetly she conveys them. No avowed expression of jealousy is ever associated with Aoi, Genji’s original wife, and Rokujō’s jealousy toward Aoi is so far beneath her dignity that in her waking life she is not even conscious of it. Mitoma Kōsuke, who wrote of jealousy in Heian literature that ladylike behavior forbade it, observed that Toshikage’s daughter, the ideal heroine in *Utsuho monogatari*, never shows any such feelings and that jealousy never appears in *Ise monogatari*. He suggested that Murasaki gets away with it only because she is so beautiful.\(^\text{22}\)

Since Murasaki’s jealousy compromises her, some writers sympathetic to her feel obliged to explain it. They observe that her expressions of jealousy are fair and loyally meant. After all, the famous “rainy night

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\(^\text{16}\) *Izumi Shikibu shū* 410.
\(^\text{17}\) *Ben no Menoto shū* 85.
\(^\text{18}\) In “Matsukaze,” Genji makes the same words mean something quite different. Far from accepting Murasaki’s reproach, he insists that she agree to his definition of her standing. On returning from a visit to the Akashi Lady, he admonishes Murasaki, “In rank, there is simply no comparison between the two of you. You are you, after all: remember that” (TTG, 343; GM 2:422). More literally, he says, “Think, ‘I am I!’” The fourteenth-century commentary *Kakaishō* observes, “He means that Murasaki should take pride in being who she is and reflect that no one comes higher than she” (Tamagami, *Shimeishō, Kakaishō*, 356).
\(^\text{19}\) Tanabe, *Genji monogatari kami fūsen*, 127.
\(^\text{21}\) Komashaku, *Murasaki Shikibu no messēji*, 152.
\(^\text{22}\) Mitoma, *Genji monogatari no denshō to sōzō*, 76.
conversation” (*amayo no shinasadame*) in “Hahakigi” enjoins a woman to let her straying husband know tactfully that she knows and cares, and so to win back his affection. However, the rainy night conversation explicitly does not discuss women of the “highest class” (*kami no shina*), to which Aoi and Rokujō belong. Is Murasaki then not of this class? Feeling the difficulty, Akiyama Ken assigned her, at least as a girl, to the “middle class” (*naka no shina*) instead.23

On the other hand, the temper that helps to make Murasaki’s standing ambiguous also makes her accessible. As Tō no Chūjō remarks in the “rainy night conversation,” “Those of middle birth are the ones among whom you can see what a girl really has to offer and find ways to distinguish one from another.”24 Murasaki’s tendency to resist Genji over certain of his affairs gives her a similarly distinct individuality, which is why some recent Japanese readers have admired her as a woman of independent spirit. Baba Taeko, for example, wrote that her sense of self gives her a remarkably contemporary appeal.25 At the same time, Murasaki is of sufficiently distinguished birth that “middle class” will not really do. Surely her jealousy is a manifestation less of intrinsic personality than of contingent social predicament.

**The child Murasaki**

Many writers fail to see the mature Murasaki in the child. Tanabe Seiko wrote that what Genji glimpses through the fence, when he first discovers Murasaki, “has graven a little girl’s appeal in the hearts of the Japanese,” but she noted nothing individual in the scene. In fact, she held that until Genji’s exile Murasaki remains a “doll bride.” Akiyama Ken similarly called the young Murasaki a “living doll” without individual traits,26 although for Ōasa Yūji and Shigematsu Nobuhiro, Murasaki is recognizably herself from the beginning.27

Genji discovers Murasaki when he visits a healer in the hills north of Kyoto. As soon as he sees her he wants her. That she is a little girl does not matter, because he sees the grown-up already and is willing to wait. Her resemblance to his great and inaccessible love, his father’s empress Fujitsubo, captivates him above all.

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23 Akiyama, *Genji monogatari no sekai*, 77. See also Ko, “Murasaki no Ue no ron.”

24 TTG, 23; GM 1:58.

25 Baba, “Jiga no ishiki o motsu Murasaki no Ue,” 249.

26 Tanabe, *Genji monogatari kami fūsen*, 109, 126; Akiyama, *Genji monogatari no sekai*, 82.

In a way, Murasaki satisfies the adolescent longing that Genji felt at the end of “Kiritsubo,” when he “kept wishing with many sighs that he had a true love to come and live with him” at his mother’s home, now rebuilt after her death. Five years later, the “rainy night conversation” that broadens his knowledge of women includes this advice from the Chief Equerry (Sama no Kami): “It is probably not a bad idea to take a wholly childlike, tractable wife and form her yourself as well as you can. She may not have your full confidence, but you will know your training has made a difference.”

The idea of living apart from the world with a true love, and of forming her to his own ideal, is therefore present in Genji’s mind by the time he first spies Murasaki:

In among them came running a girl of perhaps ten or so, wearing a softly rumpled kerria rose layering over a white gown and, unlike the other children, an obvious future beauty. Her hair cascaded like a spread fan behind her as she stood there, her face all red from crying.

“What is the matter?” the nun [her grandmother and guardian] asked, glancing up at her. “Have you quarrelled with one of the girls?”...

“Inuki let my baby sparrow go! And I had him in his cage and everything!” declared the indignant little girl...

“Oh come, you are such a baby!” the nun protested. “You understand nothing, do you! Here I am, wondering whether I will last out this day or the next, but that means nothing to you, does it! All you do is chase sparrows. Oh dear, and I keep telling it is a sin! Come here!”

The little girl sat down...

“You hate even to have it combed,” said the nun, stroking the girl’s hair, “but what beautiful hair it is! Your childishness really worries me, you know. Not everyone is like this at your age, I assure you.”...

Child though she was, the girl observed the nun gravely, then looked down and hung her head. Her hair spilled forward as she did so, glinting with the loveliest sheen.

Genji soon discovers that her father is Fujitsubo’s elder brother and her mother a wellborn lady (now dead) with whom this gentleman had an affair. Her qualities therefore suggest that she will fulfil the promise

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28 TTG, 18; GM 1:50. Genji is in only his twelfth year. While omou yō naran hito (“a true love”) has been taken to refer to Fujitsubo, the expression is probably more speculative. He is dreaming of someone just like Fujitsubo.
29 TTG, 25; GM 1:64.
30 TTG, 86–7; GM 1:208.
of her looks. She is of good birth, she has a pleasing vividness of presence, and she does not talk back. He has seen her accept a scolding with downcast gaze and gathered that she would accept his own guidance meekly. He therefore dreams of making her his. “How he would love to have her with him,” the narrator says, “and bring her up as he pleased!”

Murasaki is certainly not cheeky, but she is not passive, either. She has a temper, she is possessive about her pet sparrow, and the way her grandmother’s plight fails to quell her high spirits suggests character and a mind of her own. That so lively a girl should accept her grandmother’s rebuke suggests more depth than simple docility: the capacity to honor her elders and to recognize that she is wrong. If she can do that, she can also see that someone else is wrong and respect herself for being right. She is not vain, but she has the intelligence to be justly proud. Genji senses that quality in her, too.

It is unusual that Genji should be able to observe Murasaki so directly and then imagine taking her home. She is well born, she is pretty, she is delightful, and she knows right from wrong, but what really encourages him to dream on is that she is so poorly protected. She has no ushiromi, no one to uphold her interests in a ruthless world, because her mother is dead and because her father dares not provoke his ill-tempered wife (her stepmother) by recognizing her. Her grandmother resists Genji’s interest in Murasaki because she fears how he might treat her; but when she, too, dies, Murasaki is left with next to no prospects. Her father then makes up his mind at last to bring her home, but Genji makes off with her first. Her father has no idea where she has gone. While people gather that Genji now has someone living with him, nobody knows who she is or realizes that she is a child.

Genji could not have abducted Murasaki if she had been her father’s recognized daughter, nor might he then have been so keen to have her, since success would have made him responsible to a second father-in-law. As it is, she passes from having a doubtful future to having whatever future Genji will give her. She is his in a way the well-screened and guarded Aoi could never be, and this suggests that she is more or less disreputable.

It is a shame that a prince’s daughter just ten years old should not be seen to act with Murasaki’s charming spontaneity, and no one could really criticize her for what she does or the narrator for what she tells.

31 TTG, 89; GM 1:213.
Still, once Genji has taken her home, and she has accepted him, her innocent affection leads her to behave in ways unlike those expected of a young lady. As Shimizu Yoshiko noted, Murasaki behaves wantonly when she sulks over Genji’s plan to go out one night and falls asleep on his lap. Aoi’s women pass on such rumors disapprovingly to their mistress. Shimizu also suggested that Aoi, whose gentlewomen do not know that Murasaki is a child, look down on Genji for his playfulness, his susceptibility, and his insistence on demanding from her the same kind of intimacy. In this way, Murasaki’s situation in her early years tarnishes her a little, just as her jealousy may raise an eyebrow later on.

**Murasaki’s marriage**

An inadequately protected girl in the world of tale, and still more those to whom her future matters, may fear that a suitor means only to toy with her. Genji’s approaches appal Murasaki’s grandmother because she cannot believe he is serious and clearly suspects him of strange desires. No one would believe him today, either, but he has no intention of treating Murasaki lightly or of misbehaving. Wakashiro Kiiko, among others, acknowledged the honorable character of his conduct when she wrote, “If Genji were insensitive he could never have waited so patiently for the little girl to grow up.” His abduction of Murasaki is certainly startling (Enchi Fumiko found it “uniquely manly and quite wild”), but in the long run it is no offense against her. While some condemn him for depriving her of her autonomy, she really has none to lose, and no hope otherwise of anything like such a marriage. Her stepmother would certainly see to that, lest Murasaki overshadow her own daughters.

Having treated Murasaki from the start with affection and respect, Genji at last consummates his marriage with her in the same spirit. It is understandable, however, that the radical feminist Komashaku Kimi should have viewed this consummation, from Murasaki’s perspective, as rape, as did Setouchi Jakuchō; while Norma Field wrote of “a betrayal both horrifying and humiliating.” Genji’s action has irreparably tarnished his character for some contemporary scholars and students, especially in the United States. In an effort to salvage

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33 Wakashiro, *Genji monogatari no onna*, 226.
34 Enchi, *Genji monogatari shiken*, 77.
his reputation, Margaret Childs argued that he “seduces” rather than rapes Murasaki, but the narrative really leaves no escape. Genji’s first intercourse with Murasaki is a complete surprise to her, and the issue of consent does not arise.

Unequivocal condemnation of Genji over this issue involves an appraisal of Genji, and a reading of the tale as a whole, that upholds contemporary moral, legal, and social standards over an incident that the tale’s author and her intended audience, whose world differed from ours, presumably enjoyed. Even in modern Japan, few writers on the tale criticize Genji over the issue, or even raise it. Tanabe Seiko called the marriage consummation scene wonderfully sexy, while Wakashiro Kiiko, who acknowledged Murasaki’s dismay, observed only that the author had perfectly captured “a girl’s feelings” (onna-gokoro). There is right on both sides, and the disagreement can be resolved no further. However, it is worth withholding condemnation and viewing Genji’s action in a wider context.

Genji actually tried to prepare Murasaki for this moment, but in vain. She did not even notice his attempts to stir her interest, once he believed her ready. “It was a pleasure to see that his young lady had turned out to be all he could wish,” the narrator says, “and since he judged that the time had now more or less come, he began to drop suggestive hints; but she gave no sign of understanding.” The true character of her situation is beyond her, and Genji has long refrained from pressing her. His decision to act ends her innocence, but nothing in the narrative suggests long-term resentment on her part; nor does it upset anyone else at the time. Her women, who assume that the moment passed long ago, are only surprised, and once the marriage cakes are eaten her nurse weeps with happiness, since under the circumstances nothing obliged Genji to go through a marriage ceremony at all.

As Murasaki enters womanhood, she is therefore all she should be. Her purity, untainted by any breath of desire, proves her quality, just as Genji’s patience towards her proves his. To respond to his advances and consent to first intercourse, she would have to divine what

37 Tanabe, Genji monogatari kami fūsen, 122; Wakashiro, Genji monogatari no onna, 228.
38 TTG, 186; GM 2:70.
39 The Introduction mentions a contention that the marriage is farcical and insulting to Murasaki. If it were, it would make a fool and a dupe of Murasaki’s nurse. Mocking humor of this kind occurs in the Uji chapters, but not earlier.
intercourse is and feel drawn to it, but if she did, she would not be a perfect young lady.\textsuperscript{40} That she is still perfect after years of sleeping beside him, and he therefore a perfect gentleman towards her, has something of the fairytale about it, but what matters is that each should be worthy of the other. Since they are, it is up to Genji to act. That is why he who loves her is only charmed by her outrage, and why the issue never comes up again.

Unhappily, marriage does not make Murasaki secure, despite Genji’s goodwill. She will always lack influential backing, being childless will always leave her a little vulnerable, and the flaw in her background will become a more and more pressing issue as Genji rises in rank.

The crisis over Akashi

In his twenty-sixth year Genji goes into exile at Suma, leaving Murasaki at home in charge of his affairs. Their three-year separation is painful (she is only nineteen when he returns), but it never occurs to her that he might not be faithful. Meanwhile, he misses her desperately and hesitates to take the opportunity that the Akashi lady’s father is so eager to press on him. Still, he yields in the end to the Akashi Novice’s urging, to the exotic enchantment of the place, and to the lady’s personal distinction, so unexpected in a provincial governor’s daughter. He returns from Akashi understandably full of his experience and especially of thoughts of the lady and the child she is soon to bear.

Genji feels “deeply content” once reunited with Murasaki, and he sees “that she would always be his this way.” At the same time, however, “his heart went out with a pang to [Akashi], whom he had so unwillingly left.”

\textsuperscript{40} The example of Tamakazura confirms that a lady could not decently agree in advance, on her own initiative, to first intercourse. In “Wakana Two,” Genji reflects as follows on her marriage night with Higekuro: “When [Tō no Chūjō] prevailed on an unthinking gentlewoman to help [Higekuro] make his way in to her, [Tamakazura] made sure everyone understood clearly that she had had nothing to do with it, that what was happening had full authorisation, and that for her part she was completely blameless. Looking back on it now, I can appreciate how very shrewd she was. It was their destiny to be together, and never mind how it began, as long as it lasts; but people would think a little less well of her if they retained the impression that she had willingly acquiesced. She really did it very, very well” (TTG, 662; GM 4:261). On the same theme, Jennifer Robertson wrote: “Before and even after the Meiji period, published writers and critics—the vast majority of whom were male—relegated sexual desire in females to courtesans and prostitutes” (Robertson, \textit{Takarazuka}, 62).
He began talking about her, and the memories so heightened his looks that [Murasaki] must have been troubled, for with “I care not for myself” she dropped a light hint that delighted and charmed him. When merely to see her was to love her, he wondered in amazement how he had managed to spend all these months and years without her, and bitterness against the world rose in him anew.\textsuperscript{41}

Despite the wonder of rediscovering Murasaki, anticipation of the birth and then the thought of his new daughter prolong the enchantment. A prophetic dream has already let him know that the little girl is a future empress and that in her his own fortunes are at stake.

However, Murasaki does not yet know about the birth, and Genji does not want her to hear of it from someone else. To mask all it means to him he behaves like a guilty husband, first claiming indifference and a commendable resolve to do his tedious duty, then passing to diversionary reproaches.

“So that seems to be that,” he remarked. “What a strange and awkward business it is! All my concern is for someone else, whom I would gladly see similarly favored, and the whole thing is a sad surprise, and a bore, too, since I hear the child is a girl. I really suppose I should ignore her, but I cannot very well do that. I shall send for her and let you see her. You must not resent her.”

She reddened. “Don’t, please!” she said, offended. “You are always making up feelings like that for me, when I detest them myself. And when do you suppose that I learned to have them?”

“Ah yes,” said Genji with a bright smile, “who can have taught you? I have never seen you like this! Here you are, angry with me over fantasies of yours that have never occurred to me. It is too hard!” By now he was nearly in tears.\textsuperscript{42}

Fearing Murasaki’s rebuke, Genji takes the offensive and obliges her to defend herself instead. Still, it is true that she does not quite understand. The child means more to him than the mother, and in time he will have Murasaki adopt her for that reason. Meanwhile, Murasaki remembers “their endless love for one another down the years, …and the matter passed from her mind.”

\textsuperscript{41} TTG, 276; GM 2:262. Murasaki alludes to Shūishū 870: “I care not for myself, who am forgotten, but grieve for the life of him who made me those vows.”

\textsuperscript{42} TTG, 285; GM 2:291.
In the ensuing silence Genji goes on, half to indulge his feelings and half to pursue loyal confidences. In so doing he manages to hurt Murasaki after all.

“If I am this concerned about her,” Genji said, “it is because I have my reasons. You would only go imagining things again if I were to tell you what they are.” He was silent a moment. “It must have been the place itself that made her appeal to me so. She was something new, I suppose.” He went on to describe the smoke that sad evening, the words they had spoken, a hint of what he had seen in her face that night, the magic of her koto; and all this poured forth with such obvious feeling that his lady took it ill.

There I was, she thought, completely miserable, and he, simple pastime or not, was sharing his heart with another! Well, I am I! She turned away and sighed, as though to herself, “And we were once so happy together!”

The pattern of this conversation recurs in the two other crisis passages yet to be discussed. There, too, once the danger seems to have passed Genji indulges in reminiscing about his women, especially Fujitsubo in the second and Rokujo in the third. In each case someone then becomes angry: Murasaki here, then the spirit of Fujitsubo, and finally the spirit of Rokujo. The role played by the three women in these scenes suggests their critical importance to Genji himself.

The injury Murasaki feels is of course painful, and her response springs from a fine quickness of spirit, but the scene is still touched by the lyrically beautiful anguish of those exile years. She is hurt but not yet in danger. No provincial governor’s daughter, not even one as unusual as Akashi, can really threaten her.

**Asagao: the question of Genji’s motive**

Three years after the birth of Genji’s daughter, Murasaki finds that her distress then was nothing to what she feels now as Genji courts Princess Asagao. She is acutely aware that, as Richard Okada put it, “she is forever vulnerable to threats posed by other women,” but in the meantime things have gone well. The lady from Akashi has come no closer, Genji has pursued no new affairs, and Murasaki has had the joy of adopting the little girl. Genji, now palace minister, has not yet built his Rokujo estate, but he is already the key figure at court.

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43 He foresees his daughter becoming empress.
Genji has known the highly respected Asagao for years. She first appears in “Hahakigi,” when he overhears women “discussing a poem that he had sent with some bluebells to the daughter of His Highness of Ceremonial, although they had it slightly wrong.” He seems to have attempted a liaison with her already in his youth, but although he remained in touch with her, she refused all new approaches. Once she had become Kamo Priestess (“Sakaki”) he pressed her nearly to the point of scandal, considering that a Kamo Priestess properly remained untainted by any suspicion of such concerns. When her father’s death obliges her to resign (“Asagao”), she retires to his house and begins there the life of Buddhist devotion that her role at the Kamo Shrine forbade. She clearly does not mean to marry. Social constraints discouraged the daughter or granddaughter of an emperor from marrying, and besides, she long ago noted that Genji only toyed with Rokujō and decided that she would not let that happen to her.

She has hardly retired from Kamo when, without a word to Murasaki, Genji lays siege to her. No doubt he has always liked her. In “Aoi,” for example, the narrator observes that Genji “was struck by how truly in her case ‘distance is the secret of lasting charm.’ Distant she might be, but she never failed to respond just as she should.” However, this does not sound like passion. What does he want with her? There are two lines of thought on the question. One, the simpler, is associated with Saitō Akiko. The second, dominant and more complex, was proposed by Shimizu Yoshiko and developed by other scholars, including Akiyama Ken and Suzuki Hideo.

Saitō suggested that Genji had always been drawn to Asagao by the difficulty of success and had courted her even at Kamo for the same reason he made love to Oborozukiyo (with whom he began a perilous affair in “Hana no En”): because of the risk. The “Asagao” chapter begins: “The Kamo Priestess had resigned because of her mourning. Genji, whose peculiarity [kuse] it was, as always, never to break off a courtship he had once started, sent her frequent notes.” Saitō gathered from this that Genji’s initial approaches to her are only “lukewarm” and that her rejection is what challenges him to conquer

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46 TTG, 37; GM 1:95. Asagao is translated “bluebell,” rather than “morning glory,” because the word is more likely to have referred in Heian times to the modern kikyō, a bluebell-like flower.
47 TTG, 182; GM 2:58.
49 TTG, 366; GM 2:469.
50 Saitō, “Murasaki no Ue no shitto,” 37.
her resistance at all costs. Norma Field agreed that Genji pursues Asagao because “her very resistance poses a challenge he cannot overlook.” While Saitō’s reading recognizes the urgency of Genji’s interest in Asagao and the need to explain it, it gives Genji, shrewd and powerful courtier though he is, no intelligible motive but a blind refusal to give up.

Several years earlier, Shimizu Yoshiko suggested that Genji courts Asagao out of nostalgia for Fujitsubo. Fujitsubo died in the previous chapter (“Usugumo”), in the third month of Genji’s thirty-second year, and “Asagao” begins in the ninth month of the same year. Genji must feel her loss deeply. The first time he visits Asagao, he finds at her house the Dame of Staff (Gen no Naishi) over whom he and Tō no Chūjō quarreled comically fourteen years before (“Momiji no Ga”). According to Shimizu, this reminder of a past now lost—the world of his father’s court—wakens memories of Fujitsubo, and he courts Asagao as his sole surviving link to those days. He desires her because she is now to him a token of Fujitsubo.

In the chapter’s closing scene, which Shimizu discussed at length, Genji and Murasaki sit with blinds raised before their moonlit garden, deep in snow. Murasaki has expressed her fears about Asagao, and Genji has sought to allay them. He then sends the girls of the household down into the garden to roll a snowball and begins to talk about Fujitsubo, who once did the same. He contrasts her favorably with Murasaki (her niece). Next he muses about some of his other women. When he has finished, Murasaki speaks a poem, and Genji sees her with new eyes:

Leaning forward a little that way to look out, she was lovelier than any woman in the world. The sweep of her hair, her face, suddenly brought back to him most wonderfully the figure of the lady he had loved [Fujitsubo], and his heart, which had been somewhat divided, turned again to her alone.

That night, Fujitsubo comes to him in a dream and reproaches him bitterly.

For Shimizu, Genji’s memories of Fujitsubo spill forth willy-nilly before the snowball scene, and he goes on talking about the others (Asagao, Oborozukiyo, Akashi) only to cover his indiscretion. As he talks, he

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53 TTG, 374; GM 2:494.
realizes that Murasaki looks exactly like Fujitsubo, and his longing for Asagao vanishes. However, Fujitsubo, who loved him, has heard him from the afterworld. She feels not only insulted that he should speak of her to another woman, but jealous that, to him, the other woman should have now become, as it were, she; hence she reproaches him in his dream. Shimizu did not wonder why Genji pursues Asagao so stubbornly, nor did she seem to believe that Murasaki’s fears, which she hardly discussed, ever had substance.

A few years later, Imai Gen’e analyzed Murasaki’s poem in order to illuminate her mood in the chapter:54

“Frozen into ice, water caught among the rocks can no longer flow, and it is the brilliant moon that runs freely through the sky.”

Having shown that the poem had always been read simply as an evocation of a beautiful winter scene, Imai argued that in reality it conveys deep distress: it is Murasaki who is “frozen into ice” and Genji who “runs freely through the sky” (spends night after night away, courting Asagao). Imai demonstrated that Genji misrepresents his interest in Asagao to Murasaki and that she recognizes his duplicity. He also stressed that Murasaki is upset about Asagao and that, while Genji has not actually done anything yet, so that he has nothing definite to tell her, her anxiety is understandable. For Imai, Genji’s silence, which is meant only to spare her feelings, alarms her more than would the truth.

While Shimizu gave Genji a motive and Imai understood the depth of Murasaki’s distress, both therefore considered her fears unwarranted. Their Genji may do as he pleases and is not accountable to Murasaki, and she has nothing to worry about as long as he has not actually succeeded in committing Asagao to himself.

Akiyama Ken’s interpretation of “Asagao,”55 published soon after Shimizu’s essay appeared, shared Shimizu’s belief that the snow scene resolves key tensions and Saitō’s that Genji’s pursuit of Asagao is helplessly compulsive. However, he particularly stressed the operations of the author, finding Asagao’s sudden appearance in the foreground of the narrative hard to explain except as a device to remind Murasaki of her insecurity vis-à-vis Genji and so to prepare for “repositioning” her (suenaoshi) in the tale. He argued that Genji is upset over the way he failed to resist trying to seduce Akikonomu (“Usugumo”), the daughter entrusted to him by Rokujō, and over the way he now cannot

54 Imai, “Murasaki no Ue: Asagao no maki ni okeru.”
55 Akiyama, Genji monogatari no sekai, 93–113.
help pursuing Asagao; and he suggested that, thanks to Genji’s preoccupation with Fujitsubo, these tensions are resolved for him in the snow scene. When Genji sees Murasaki as Fujitsubo, the “repositioning” is complete. Murasaki is no longer a substitute for Fujitsubo, but herself, and once the chapter is over Fujitsubo will all but disappear from the tale.

Suzuki Hideo continued this line of thinking in a further attempt to define the significance of the chapter. Taking Genji’s reassurances to Murasaki (“There is nothing serious to any of this”) at face value, he proposed that the author contrived the “device” of the closing passage about the snow and the moon in order to settle Murasaki’s fears. Rejecting Imai’s understanding of Murasaki’s poem, he wrote that in this scene Genji successfully draws Murasaki into harmony with his own attunement to the “nature surrounding their solitude.” He held that when Genji sees Murasaki as Fujitsubo, “and his heart…turned again to her alone,” she becomes for him, and will remain thereafter, what Fujitsubo had been.

Shimizu, Akiyama, and Suzuki held that in the snow scene Genji renounces his attachment to Fujitsubo in favor of Murasaki and that thereafter Fujitsubo ceases to figure in the tale. Even in the closing lines of “Asagao,” however, Genji longs to share Fujitsubo’s lotus throne in paradise. She and Murasaki still do not seem to be identical, and Genji’s attachment to her memory does not seem to have been ended by that single rush of feeling. The Shimizu reading, in particular, has Genji’s interest in Asagao extinguished by that moment under the winter moon, when it is not. At the beginning of the next chapter (“Otome”), the following spring, Genji is still writing to Asagao and sending her gifts, the narrator is still claiming that he has never meant to force her, the Fifth Princess (Asagao’s aunt) is urging her to marry him, and Asagao herself is still afraid that her gentlewomen will take things into their own hands. In fact, eight years later (early in “Wakana One”), bystanders are still saying, “One gathers that [Genji] deeply desires a lofty alliance, and that he has so little forgotten the Former

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56 TTG, 372; GM 2:490.
57 Suzuki Hideo, “Fujitsubo kara Murasaki no Ue e,” 140, 144. As evidence, Suzuki cited the way Murasaki keeps her peace even after Genji’s marriage to the Third Princess, and the admiration her silence arouses in Genji. He concluded that Murasaki’s suffering turns her definitively into Genji’s ideal, and that this transformation takes place in “Asagao,” under the winter moon.
58 Akiyama, Genji monogatari no sekai, 112; Suzuki, “Fujitsubo kara Murasaki no Ue,” 144.
Kamo Priestess that he still corresponds with her.” They assume that Genji’s preoccupation with Asagao remains unresolved because he still does not have a proper wife.

None of the readings just outlined acknowledges what would happen in practice if Genji were to succeed with Asagao. Both his life and Murasaki’s would change. In getting behind her curtains—those of a princess of unassailable standing—he would marry her, and he would then have to treat her properly as his wife. At his age and with his experience he could not doubt this or hope to get away with less. (The disasters associated with Rokujō stem from his having tried to do just that with her.) No wonder Murasaki is apprehensive. She understands the gravity of what he is up to, and his silence, far from sparing her feelings over an affair of no lasting importance, confirms that he understands it, too. The truth is too awful to confess. He must want to marry Asagao.

Rumor supports Murasaki’s fears. “He is courting the Former Kamo Priestess,” people said, “and the Fifth Princess has no objection. Those two would not go at all badly together.” This is how Murasaki first hears about Genji and Asagao: from her gentlewomen. Those spreading the rumor approve the match, as does the Fifth Princess, because Asagao, unlike Murasaki, has the rank to be worthy of Genji.

The Fifth Princess explains her position near the beginning of “Otome”:

“I gather that [Genji] has been keen on you for ages,” she observed to her niece [Asagao] when they met; “it is not as though this were anything new for him. [Your late father] regretted your life taking another course, so that he could not welcome him; he often said how sorry he was that you ignored his own preference, and there were many times when he rued what you had done [in becoming the Kamo Priestess]. Still, out of respect for [Aoi’s mother’s] feelings I said nothing as long as [Aoi] was alive. Now, though, even she, who commanded great consideration, is gone, and it is true, I simply do not see what could be wrong with your being what [your father] wished, especially when [Genji] is again so very eager that this seems to me almost to be your destiny.”

In other words, Asagao’s father wanted to marry his daughter to Genji and did not consider Genji’s existing marriage to Aoi an obstacle. The

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59 TTG, 580; GM 4:28.
60 TTG, 368; GM 2:478.
61 TTG, 380; GM 3:19.
Fifth Princess agreed, although she refrained from seconding him aloud. Both assumed that Asagao outranked Aoi, even if the prestige of Aoi’s mother and the power of Aoi’s father (the minister of the left) might have made the marriage politically tricky to achieve. Meanwhile, the Fifth Princess says nothing at all about Murasaki, who for her does not count. Social “commonsense” does not give Murasaki the weight to be taken seriously as Genji’s wife. The same will be true later on, when Suzaku ponders marrying his Third Princess to Genji. Murasaki does not count then, either.

Surely this is the problem that Genji knows he can no longer ignore, and his reason for courting Asagao. Perhaps Asagao’s prestige even partly explains why he began courting her in the first place, all those years ago. Now, his long relationship with her makes it easier to seek in her the solution to his difficulty. She has the rank, and he likes her. She is an old friend. He therefore moves quickly to court her when she returns from Kamo not because she reminds him of Fujitsubo, but because she is now there to be courted, as she had not been before.

Long ago Genji chose Murasaki himself, without reference to social convention, although he then found her birth adequate. She is the emblem of the private autonomy on which he insists. However, he realizes as he rises that autonomy outside the accepted social structure is not enough, and he comes to wish to conform to this structure in order to turn it to the ends of his own sovereignty. Therefore, if “Asagao” marks a change, that change is not in Genji’s view of Murasaki but in his view of himself and of what his position requires. The death of Fujitsubo and the reappearance of Asagao in private life wean him from the idea that to make one’s own way one must break the rules, as he did before with Murasaki and Fujitsubo, and persuade him to act. That moment before the snowy, moonlit garden may remind him that in Murasaki he has Fujitsubo after all and so console him for his failure with Asagao. However, his love for Fujitsubo, too, was irregular, and having Murasaki is still not enough. That is why he will eventually marry the Third Princess.

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62 Could it be that Aoi’s father engineered Asagao’s appointment as Kamo Priestess in order to remove this threat and that the reason given in the text (no other suitable princess was available) was only an excuse?
63 Only Tanabe Seiko (Genji monogatari kami fūsen, 145) attributed Genji’s interest in Asagao to social pressure and observed that he is “a little bothered by not having a proper wife.”
Asagao: the scene between Genji and Murasaki

Genji says nothing to Murasaki about his pursuit of Asagao in part because, for him, his ambition to marry Asagao is unrelated to his love for Murasaki, and in part because he knows that this time he is in earnest. Murasaki, who learns what he is up to only through rumor, says nothing either. Her silence measures the seriousness of the matter. She is not just hurt but frightened. Noticing her changed mood, Genji reproaches her as before, although with sharper deceit.

One evening, overcome by the empty hours, Genji decided on one of his so-called visits to [Asagao’s aunt]… “I gather that the Fifth Princess is unwell, and I thought I might pay her a call,” he said, on one knee before [Murasaki]; but she did not even look at him. Her profile as she played instead with her little girl suggested that something was wrong. “You are looking strangely unlike yourself these days,” he said. “I have not done anything. I have been staying away a bit because I thought you might find the same old salt-burner’s robe dull by now. Now what can you possibly have been making of that?”

“Familiarity often breeds contempt,” she replied and lay down with her back to him… She lay there thinking how naive she had always been, when such things as this could happen… As she watched him go… she ached unbearably to think that he might really be leaving her. 64

The way she turns her back recalls the ware wa ware of three years earlier. His conduct is beyond words. She can hardly speak to him.

Further, decisive rebuffs from Asagao leave Genji undaunted, but when Murasaki’s continuing torment troubles him and draws him back towards her after all, at first reluctantly, this crisis, too, begins to pass.

“You are looking curiously unlike yourself—I cannot imagine why,” Genji said to her, stroking her hair… “You are quite grown up now, but you still think seldom of others, and it is just that way you have of getting their feelings wrong that makes you so dear.” He tidied a wet lock of hair at her forehead, but she turned further from him and said not a word.

“Who can have brought you up to be such a baby?” he asked. It was such a pity, when life was short anyway, to have her so upset with him! But then daydreams would sweep him off again… “Please

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64 TTG, 368–9; GM 2:480. “The same old salt-burner’s robe” (a poetic allusion) means, roughly, “the same old me.”
understand that you have no need to worry." He spent the whole day trying to make her feel better.\footnote{TTG, 372; GM 2:489.}

That night a brilliant moon illumines the snow, and Genji waxes eloquent as he strives for reconciliation.

“More than the glory of flowers and fall leaves that season by season capture everyone’s heart, it is the night sky in winter, with snow glittering under a brilliant moon, that in the absence of all color speaks to me strangely and carries my thoughts beyond this world.”\footnote{TTG, 373; GM 2:490.}

Although justly famous, his praise of winter is not a good sign. He is becoming overwrought.\footnote{“Who are so much like her.”}

Keen to act and to be amused, Genji sends the girls down to the garden to roll their snowball, while exaltation sweeps him on to dream aloud about Fujitsubo. It is not that the thought of Fujitsubo, having filled his mind all the time he courted her stand-in, Asagao, has at last spilled over into words. His thoughts of Fujitsubo and his interest in Asagao are unrelated, belonging as they do to the realms of private feeling on the one hand and of public ambition on the other. Having failed with Asagao, he seeks solace and reassurance in memories of Fujitsubo, and he also seeks to bring Murasaki closer to him by confiding in her. Thus he flirts not only with betraying what Fujitsubo was to him but with taking her name in vain, so to speak, by putting her memory to the ends of his own self-satisfaction. “The smallest thing she did always seemed miraculous,” he says. “How one misses her on every occasion...She made no show of brilliance, but a talk with her was always worthwhile...No, we shall never see her like again.” He then goes straight on to compound his fault towards her and Murasaki by comparing Murasaki explicitly, and unflatteringly, to her and then to Asagao.

“For all her serenity, [Fujitsubo] had a profound distinction that no other could attain, whereas you, who despite everything have so much of the noble \textit{murasaki},\footnote{TTG, 373–4; GM 2:492.} have a difficult side to you as well and I am afraid you may be a little headstrong. The Former Kamo Priestess’s [Asagao’s] temperament seems to me very different. When I am lonely, I need no particular reason to converse with her, and by now she is really the only one left who requires the best of me.”\footnote{TTG, 373–4; GM 2:492.}
A discussion of Oborozukiyo and others follows, without comparisons. In the guise of confiding in Murasaki, Genji has complacently reviewed his secure emotional assets while simultaneously placating her and reminding her that she depends on his indulgence. Nonetheless, her protest has worked as a loyal wife’s was supposed to in the “rainy night conversation”: it has convinced him of his folly and returned him to her. After a day spent talking her round, he has come round himself. Having indulged in calling up the image of Fujitsubo, he sees that Murasaki, there before him, has exactly her quality. This is not a new discovery for him. He has made it before when failure to grasp some petty prize has opened his eyes again to the treasure he already has. Disappointment with the Third Princess will affect him the same way, but by then it will be too late.

Later that night Genji falls asleep thinking of Fujitsubo, and his performance earns its reward when “he saw her dimly—it was not a dream—and perceived her to be extremely angry. ‘You promised never to tell, yet what I did is now known to all. I am ashamed, and my present suffering makes you hateful to me!’”\(^{69}\) He awakes with a pounding heart to hear Murasaki crying out, “What is the matter?” Murasaki’s challenge to his willful ways has provoked a play of ambition, treachery, love, conceit, cajolery, and contrition with an eerie outcome, and this pattern will recur in connection with the Third Princess. Murasaki’s open unhappiness over Asagao recalls her behavior as a girl, when her sulking persuaded him to stay home instead of going out for the night. While her conduct then appeared wanton, she was really only an innocent child, and her feelings in “Miotsukushi” or “Asagao” are natural to any wife. Still, to Genji’s mind, especially when he compares her to Fujitsubo or Asagao, the sharpness of her temper is a flaw, even if an attractive one. It is the inner counterpart, and perhaps the consequence, of her flawed origins. “Who can have brought you up such a baby?” he asks. The girl he reared himself, hoping to form her entirely to his will, has a will, an “I” of her own. She has “a difficult side to her” (sukoshi wazurawashiki ki soite) and is “perhaps, alas, a little headstrong” (kadokadoshisa no susumitamaeru ya kurushikaran). That could not be said of Fujitsubo, who despite her great depth “never put herself forward” (moteidete rōrōjiki koto mo mietamawazarishikado). Supremely distinguished, she betrayed no sharp glint of wit or temper. No more does Asagao, who, apart from her stubborn refusal to engage with Genji, seems utterly bland. These two great ladies do not have Murasaki’s “prickles.” Murasaki is too

\(^{69}\) TTG, 374–5; GM 2:495.
proud, cares too deeply for Genji, and depends on him too much to hold her peace; while Genji, more headstrong even than she, loves her too much either to ignore her or to scold her outright. It is the exceptional strength of the bond between them that allows their story to grow through crises like these towards real disaster.

Suzaku’s daughter: preliminary remarks

The disaster comes in the opening pages of “Wakana One,” which in character and quality, as well as in narrative content, represent a new departure for the tale. It is as though the author paused after the preceding chapter (“Fuji no Uraba”) to look back over what she had done, reflect on her future purpose, gather all her skill, and then re-launch the work.

Feeling that he has little longer to live, Retired Emperor Suzaku seeks for his favorite daughter, the Third Princess, the “protector” (husband) she needs, and his choice settles on Genji. Genji’s acceptance culminates the series of Murasaki’s “three perils.” The danger does not pass this time. Neither her life nor his will ever be the same again.

In her thirteenth or fourteenth year, the Third Princess is still a child. Like Murasaki, she is a niece of Fujitsubo. Unlike Murasaki, she is, in her own person, a nonentity, but her father loves her extravagantly. Before leaving the world to prepare for death, he gives her almost everything of value that he owns. Rank and wealth make her a prize coveted by many ambitious gentlemen of the court. One of them is Genji.

In this connection, it is worth reflecting on what Genji is really like. Whether hero or villain, he is to most readers the lover, the man of endless charm and wandering fancy, whose unerring style and taste define a courtly age. However, he is also a man of ambition, power, and pride. For example, after returning from exile he spares none of those who had earlier turned their backs on him. The author only rarely and briefly evokes him as a statesman or political patron, a maker and breaker of men, but he is that, too. Early in “Wakana One,” Retired Emperor Suzaku puts it lightly but well.

“Yes,” he said, “it is true, [Genji] was exceptional [in his youth], and now, in his full maturity, he has a charm that reminds one still more of just what it means to say that someone shines. When grave and

70 Ōasa Yūji, Akiyama Ken, and others have noted that the writing in the “Wakana” chapters is qualitatively new (Ōasa, *Genji monogatari seihen no kenkyū*, 75; Akiyama, *Genji monogatari no sekai*, 150).
dignified he has so superbly commanding a presence that one hardly dares to approach him, and when relaxed and in a playful mood he is sweeter and more engagingly amusing than anyone in the world.”

The enchanting lover and host can also inspire awe.

The reader glimpses this Genji directly in “Wakana Two.” Aware of Kashiwagi’s transgression with the Third Princess, Genji has nonetheless been expressing publicly the most generous affection for him; but the reader also knows that he, who is now the honorary retired emperor, is outraged beyond forgiveness. Genji then hosts a party that the frightened Kashiwagi must attend and singles him out for attention with a venomous show of friendly banter.

“The older you are, the harder it gets to stop drunken tears,” Genji said. “Look at [Kashiwagi], smiling away to himself—it is so embarrassing! Never mind, though, his time will come. The sun and moon never turn back. No one escapes old age.” He peered at [Kashiwagi], who seemed far less cheerful than the others and really did look so unwell that the wonders of the day were lost on him.

Kashiwagi goes home ill, thinking, “I am not that drunk, though. What is the matter with me?” He soon takes to his bed, and a few months later he is dead. As Mumyōzōshi puts it, Genji has “killed him with a glance.” One does not trifle with such a man.

Hikaru Genji’s “light” (hikari) therefore suggests not only beauty, grace, and so on, but danger. Kashiwagi is already dying when he confides to Kojjū, the gentlewoman who knows his secret, “Now that [Genji] knows what I did, I shrink from the prospect of living—which I should say only shows what a special light he has...As soon as I met his gaze that evening my soul fled in anguish, and it has never come back.” Genji has extraordinary potency and charisma. However, that does not shield him from error. He may simply err more gravely than lesser men.

He does so in marrying the Third Princess, as once he had wished to marry Princess Asagao. The error springs from ambition and pride. Genji believes that he can successfully achieve perfect prestige by adding to his panoply the last ornament that it lacks (a suitably exalted

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72 TTG, 669; GM 4:280.
73 Higuchi and Kuboki, Matsura no Miya monogatari, Mumyōzōshi, 199. For this, the text calls Genji “despicable” (muge ni keshikaranu ōnkokoro).
74 TTG, 677; GM 4:295.
wife), while at the same time keeping the unreserved love of the only woman who really matters to him. In acquiring the first, he begins to lose the second, and as he does so he begins to lose himself. He soon compromises himself in the eyes of Suzaku and of society at large, for, despite his decision to marry Suzaku’s daughter, his love for Murasaki will prevent him from honoring the Third Princess as he should. Then his inability to tear himself away from Murasaki when at last she becomes ill leaves the door open for Kashiwagi to violate the Third Princess. That incident, which remains secret, nonetheless leads to the Third Princess becoming a nun, which reveals to all the failure of her life with Genji. Genji’s marriage is therefore a private disaster with respect to Murasaki and a public failure with respect to the Third Princess.

The Third Princess and Murasaki

Murasaki and the Third Princess make a contrasting pair, as many scholars have noted. The circumstances of the Third Princess’s birth and upbringing, described early in “Wakana One,” also suggest a mirror-image contrast with Genji himself. Suzaku’s daughter is visibly conceived as, so to speak, an anti-particle dangerous to both. Most Japanese scholars, and all writing in English, agree that Genji accepts the Third Princess because of her link to Fujitsubo. Some also point out an element of pity for Suzaku. Ōasa Yūji even suggested that Genji hopes for a new Murasaki and called the marriage a mistaken attempt on Genji’s part to relive the past. Fukasawa Michio, who saw the key theme of the tale in the stark contrast between the glory of Genji’s Rokujō estate and the miseries caused by the arrival of the Third Princess, held that the “occasion” of these miseries is none other than Murasaki’s jealousy.

It is Genji’s acceptance of the Third Princess, not Murasaki’s jealousy (her growing wish to disengage herself from Genji), which causes the misfortunes of “Wakana One” and beyond. However, Murasaki’s

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75 Haruo Shirane (The Bridge of Dreams, 39) wrote that “ultimately it is Genji’s amorous ways, particularly the memory of the Fujitsubo lady, that lead him to marry the young lady”; Norma Field (The Splendor of Longing, 25) called the Third Princess “a hoped-for Fujitsubo substitute”; Doris Bargen (A Woman’s Weapon, 128) held that “Genji is attracted to the idea of becoming her guardian because of her blood relationship to Fujitsubo”; and Charo D’Etcheverry (Love After The Tale of Genji, 95) described the Third Princess as “Genji’s own final substitute for Fujitsubo.”

76 Ōasa, Genji monogatari seihen no kenkū, 85, 88; Fukasawa, “Murasaki no Ue: higekiteki risōzō no keisei,” 20.
feelings are certainly central to these misfortunes. Akashi was no threat, even if the inexperienced Murasaki thought she was. Asagao resembled distant storm clouds that melted into the sky. However, the Third Princess actually moves into the Rokujō estate and she far outranks even Asagao. “By birth [Asagao] is worth what I am,” Murasaki assures herself in “Asagao” (in other words, “My father is a prince, too!”); but she knows that that is not the whole truth and must conclude, “I shall be lost if his feelings shift to her.”77 The Third Princess allows not even that spark of hope. Insignificant in her person, she is of crushing rank. Murasaki yields in silence. Senseless protest would only demean her further.

Decorum and discretion concerning Genji’s motives

Concerning Genji’s motives in general, the narrator of the tale is not necessarily as frank as she sometimes seems to be. For example, to excuse or explain his behavior she may cite his “peculiarity” (kuse), as she does in the opening passage of “Asagao.” The word resembles a wry apology, as though to say, “No, one cannot approve, but on the subject of so great a lord I can hardly say more, and besides, the things he does make such a good story.” When the narrator represents Genji himself, she may allow him to acknowledge a “warped and deplorable disposition,” but the effect is similar. The author of Mumyōzōshi likewise remarked that it is not for her to criticize Genji, even though there are many things about what he does that one might wish otherwise.78

What are these things? Every reader can imagine some, and the Genji narrator certainly spells some out, to a degree. It appears early that Genji’s kuse is in the realm of irogonomi (gallantry, a penchant for lovemaking). It is romantic—a compelling urge to seek to make love to certain women. However, the subjective content of that urge in particular cases remains undisclosed. Why, really, does Genji (or would a living man in Genji’s place) find Akikonomu or Tamakazura all but irresistible? How does he weigh the attraction of each and the consequences of success? Both are daughters of former lovers, which suggests the erotic nostalgia stressed by Ōasa Yūji.79 Still, other motives are possible as well—for example, a wish in the case of Akikonomu secretly to appropriate yet another woman destined (like Oborozukiyo, but higher in rank) for the emperor, or in that of

77 TTG, 368; GM 2:478.
78 Higuchi and Kuboki, Matsura no Miya monogatari, Mumyōzōshi, 198.
79 Ōasa, Genji monogatari seihen no kenkyū, 87.
Tamakazura to leave his mark less on Yūgao’s daughter than on Tō no Chūjō’s. The narrator could not possibly attribute such thoughts to him. Then there is Utsusemi, a provincial governor’s wife. Genji was experimenting after the “rainy night conversation,” and he took Utsusemi’s flight from him as a challenge. Naturally he felt driven to win, especially since he had nothing at stake in the matter except his self-esteem. However, talk of his kuse, or the claim that “[Asagao’s] coolness maddened him, and he hated to admit defeat,” does not suffice fifteen years later, when Asagao is a respected princess and he has recently been offered the office of chancellor. Discretion seems to have restrained the author from attributing to him the ambition, and the maneuvering to achieve that ambition, without which his actions make little sense.

A classic study of court society by Norbert Elias shows that discretion, reticence, and caution are essential to the courtier’s failure or success. Court society is a network of hierarchical relationships sustained by a sophisticated etiquette that is not vain show. Instead it is the substance of each courtier’s (male or female) legitimate concern, since skill yields heightened prestige and a lapse can mean social ruin. The courtier strives to divine the motives and feelings of others while studiously avoiding betraying his own.

The veil, or filter, that intervenes between Genji and the reader is therefore double. First, Genji veils himself from others. Nothing in the tale contradicts Elias on this point. He is also likely at times to veil his motives even from himself. Second, the narrator of the tale, and even the author of an appreciation of the tale (Mumyōzōshi), protect him because, fictional or not, he is a great lord in the very court society to which they themselves belong. The representation of Genji, as of everyone else in the tale who “is anyone,” is therefore bound to be compressed in dynamic range and painted in permissible colors. The earlier chapters relate about Genji all sorts of more or less scandalous stories of which the narrator often claims to disapprove, but these do not actually breach decorum because Genji at the time is relatively junior and because in any case it is made clear from the beginning that they do not impugn his essential dignity. Later, when he rises to palace minister (in “Miotsukushi”) and beyond, his risk-taking will cease as far as the audience knows. Most of those who write on the tale would then have it prolonged not by continuing maneuvers to enhance his prestige, as Elias leads one to expect of the successful courtier, but

80 TTG, 372; GM 2:488.
by nostalgic pursuit (Asagao) or acceptance (the Third Princess) of only coincidentally prestigious women—women who merely represent someone else for whom he felt passion in the past.

**Suzaku’s daughter: Genji’s motive**

Decorum and discretion are vital to the negotiations conducted between Genji and Suzaku over the marriage of Suzaku’s daughter. That is because Genji’s deeper motives have to do with the kind of self-interest that a skilful courtier, particularly one of Genji’s exalted rank, prefers to keep out of sight. As Mitoma Kōsuke recognized unequivocally from his perspective, that of the study of myth and folklore, Genji wants the Third Princess above all because of her rank and wealth, and he therefore maneuvers to obtain her.\(^{82}\) The Introduction notes the significance of this reading, which affects any conception of Genji’s character, ability, and role in the tale. It rests on the direct testimony of the Third Princess’s senior nurse, in conversation with Suzaku, and of this nurse’s report to Suzaku concerning what she has heard from her brother, a left controller (sachūben) in Genji’s service.\(^{83}\)

If Genji is to marry Suzaku’s daughter for her rank and wealth, he must nonetheless be seen by the audience to do so without compromising his dignity. The way the negotiations are narrated, without comment and almost entirely in the words (voiced or unvoiced) of the concerned parties themselves, helps to achieve this goal. Genji never expresses himself plainly to Suzaku on the issue and may even say the opposite of what he thinks. This sort of thing is probably typical of sensitive negotiations anywhere.

Suzaku believes that Genji is the only suitable match for his daughter. However, he cannot invite Genji straightforwardly to marry her without risking the embarrassment of being refused. He cannot safely approach Genji unless he already knows that Genji will say yes. For this reason he needs intelligence on the matter from informed bystanders (the nurse and her brother) who can speak plainly. Meanwhile Genji, who wants the Third Princess, cannot ask for her without lowering himself to the level of all the others, far beneath him, who have already done the same. He must therefore maneuver Suzaku into offering her to him. For this reason he needs a back channel (the nurse and her brother) that can convey his real wishes to Suzaku. Throughout these negotiations Genji has ample opportunity to let Suzaku know that, if asked, he would refuse. Since he does not, the process continues.

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\(^{82}\) Mitoma, *Genji monogatari no minzokugakuteki kenkyū*, 364.

\(^{83}\) TTG, 581; GM 429.
The weight and delicacy of these negotiations for both men can be gauged from the way they end. Even when the two at last discuss the matter face to face (by which time Suzaku knows Genji’s likely response), Suzaku still does not dare to ask Genji openly to marry his daughter. He asks him only to take on the responsibility of finding her a suitable husband, and on the surface that is all Genji agrees to do. However, the narrator immediately confirms that each man knows exactly what the other means. “With these words,” she says, “Genji accepted.”

Things then move quickly.

Nowhere in these pages, in speech or thought, does Genji mention any scruple toward Murasaki. She does not figure in his calculations. Suzaku’s only concern about her is that she might make local trouble for his daughter. She does not count, either, for the nurse, her brother, or the retainers whom they represent.

Speaking for herself and her brother, the nurse reports to Suzaku that everyone in Genji’s household recognizes the close relationship between Genji and Murasaki, but that they also take for granted Murasaki’s inadequacy as Genji’s wife and therefore would gladly see him properly married. Similar people were saying similar things (“Those two would not go at all badly together”) when Genji courted Asagao. The nurse also tells Suzaku that Genji himself “deeply desires a lofty alliance, and that he has so little forgotten [Asagao] that he still corresponds with her.” She further reports that, according to her brother, “[Genji] would undoubtedly welcome the idea [of marrying the Third Princess], since it would mean the fulfillment of his own enduring hopes.”

All this makes sound, if heartless, social sense. It illustrates the practical truth that underlings know about their masters many things their masters do not want spread abroad. However, it is so incompatible with accepted views of Genji that few writers on the tale in Japanese, and none in English, mention it; and those who do, do so only to dismiss it. According to Ōasa Yūji, the reader understands that Genji’s courtship of Asagao sprang from a “retrospective passion,” and the nurse’s report is therefore a “petty, irresponsible assumption.” “Ordinary people,” he wrote, “are hardly capable of understanding Hikaru Genji’s inner feelings.” Similarly, Akiyama Ken doubted that the nurse could possibly believe what she says and refused to take

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84 TTG, 587; GM 4:49.
85 TTG, 580; GM 4:27.
86 TTG, 581; GM 4:29.
87 Ōasa, *Genji monogatari seihen no kenkyū*, 76.
her brother’s words seriously. No two readings of the same material could diverge more completely, in the absence of explicit authorization for one of them by the text itself. Without the nurse’s testimony Suzaku might never resolve to approach Genji, but the reader remains free to dismiss it because the narrative never confirms it. Fortunately, it is not really necessary to argue that the Third Princess’s connection with Fujitsubo plays no role in Genji’s thoughts. It would naturally intrigue him, although his failure to inform himself about her as a person suggests that his determining interest in her is elsewhere. As in the case of Asagao, the old tie might make her seem somehow familiar and accessible. It might even tip the balance for him after a period of thoroughly justified hesitation. However, that would still not make it his main reason for accepting to marry her.

**Murasaki’s initial reaction**

Murasaki first hears the news from rumor, but she who objected to Akashi and feared Asagao does not believe it. “He had seemed in earnest when he was courting the Former Kamo Priestess, too, she told herself, but he avoided taking courtship to its extreme conclusion. She did not even bother to ask him about it.” After all these years, she finally trusts him.

Genji, who surely know this, still does not understand the gravity of what he has done. He thinks that he will manage to redeem himself yet again, sooner or later. Nonetheless, he lets a night go by without a word to Murasaki and brings the matter up only the next day, in the voice of the man who once claimed to be bored by the birth of his daughter at Akashi.

> “[Suzaku] is not at all well,” he remarked, “and I called on him yesterday. It was all very touching, you know. The thought of leaving Her Highness his third daughter has been a great worry to him, and

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88 Akiyama, *Genji monogatari no sekai*, 165 and 183, n. 4.
89 Bitterly disappointed by the Third Princess, Genji eventually blames himself in an interior monologue passage for having (in the Tyler translation) “allowed a wanton weakness to get the better of him” (TTG, 593, GM 4:64). This “wanton” seems to confirm an erotic motive, but whether the original term (adaashiku) does or not remains a matter of interpretation. “Frivolous” might be more accurate. While the note to the SNKBT edition (3:240, n. 9) specifies that Genji laments his excessive erotic susceptibility, the GM note (4:64, n. 2) explains that he regrets having been drawn by foolish curiosity to the idea of marrying a princess and then having been unable to refuse Suzaku’s request. The idea of marrying her for her rank, too, would now undoubtedly look frivolous to him.
90 TTG, 588; GM 4:50–1.
he told me all about it. I felt so sorry for him that I simply could not refuse. I suppose people will make quite a thing of it. It is all rather embarrassing by now, and unbecoming as well.”

He watches her as he speaks, wondering “how she would feel—she who, with her quick temper, objected to the least of his little amusements” and assuming that she is still as she was long ago, before weightier anxieties taught her silence. Murasaki does not react. She says only, “What an extraordinary thing for him to ask of you! For myself, why should I wish to dislike her? I shall be perfectly happy as long as she does not find my presence here offensive.” Disconcerted, he lectures her anyway on the wisdom of taking “things the way they really are.”

All on her own, Murasaki then struggles to take herself in hand and salvage her dignity. “This came on him out of the blue, she said to herself, and he could hardly avoid it; I refuse to say an unkind word in protest...and I will not have people gather that I am sulking.” Yet the shock reminds her after all of her own misfortune, and she remembers her father’s jealous wife. “His Highness of Ceremonial’s wife is forever calling down disaster on me,” she reflects. “How she will gloat when she hears about this!”

On this turn in her thoughts, the narrator comments:

Hers was no doubt a heart without guile, but of course it still harbored a dark recess or two. In secret she never ceased grieving that her very innocence—the way she had proudly assumed for so long that his vagaries need not concern her—would now cause amusement, but in her behavior she remained the picture of unquestioning trust.

Demeaned by Genji’s betrayal, Murasaki masks her resentment. He has at last driven her, too, to dissemble. Once the undoubted mistress of Rokujō-in, she must now defer to one who is hardly more than a child, and she does so with perfect attentiveness and grace.

“I was wrong after all to be so sure of him, and I shall never be able to trust him again,” Murasaki says to herself. When the disappointed Genji clings to her instead of returning to the Third Princess, as duty requires, she cries, “No, no, I will not let you do this to me!” (since people may blame her for detaining him) and sends him on his way. To her gentlewomen, she dismisses any worry that something might

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91 TTG, 588; GM 4:51.
92 TTG, 589; GM 4:53.
93 TTG, 589; GM 4:54.
spark an incident between her and the Third Princess. “It is just as well that Her Highness has come,” she insists, since he wanted her. “People seem to be talking as though there were a gulf between us. I wish they would not…and I do not see how anyone could disapprove of her.” In response, her women whisper to each other that their mistress is “being much too nice.”

That night, while she lies sleepless but painfully still, lest her women note her restlessness and understand, Genji (with the Third Princess) dreams of her and wakens in alarm, his heart pounding.

The Third Princess is so small and immature that one wonders about Genji’s dutiful nights with her. There cannot be much to them. Meanwhile, his relations with Murasaki are cool as well. His frustration soon shows when Suzaku’s departure for his mountain temple leaves Oborozukiyo her own mistress again. All at once, after long years of separation, Genji is desperate to see her, and nothing, least of all her own objections, stands in his way. He is extraordinarily tactless toward Murasaki in the matter. Despite his fibs and evasions she knows what he is up to. “Why, you are quite the young gallant again!” she says when he returns from his night with Oborozukiyo. “There you are, reliving your past, only to leave me wondering what will become of me.”

Murasaki wishes to become a nun

The contrast between Murasaki, Genji’s private treasure, and the Third Princess, his public prize, shows the folly of vain ambition. However, when the narrative returns to Murasaki after a gap of several years (“Wakana Two”), it begins by affirming that all is well.

[The Third Princess] had never surpassed [Murasaki], despite the widespread esteem that she enjoyed. The months and years only brought those two more perfectly together, until nothing whatever seemed to come between them.

However, the old tension remains, despite lasting affection on both sides. The narrator immediately raises a grave issue.

“I would now much rather give up my present commonplace existence and devote myself instead to quiet practice,” [Murasaki] quite seriously

94 TTG, 593–4; GM 4:66–7.

95 Apart from renewing a passionate relationship at a stressful time, Genji might also have in the back of his mind reasserting ownership of Oborozukiyo and so scoring off Suzaku, whose favorite she always was.

96 TTG, 600; GM 4:85.
said to Genji again and again. “At my age I feel I have learned all I wish to know of life. Please give me leave to do so.”

“You are too cruel,” he would reply. “I could not consider it! That is exactly what I myself long to do, and if I am still here, it is only because I cannot bear to imagine how you would feel once I had left you behind, and what your life would be then. Once I have taken that step, you may do as you please.” He would not have it.97

The religious life has attracted Genji ever since his youth, at least from a safe distance, but by now Asagao and Oborozukiyo have both done what Murasaki wishes to do, and the reader has already heard him fret that he is falling ignominiously behind. Nonetheless, when Murasaki opens the door for him to do what he claims to have long wanted to do, he accuses her of cruelty, and he will do so again whenever she broaches the subject. He clings to this world far more stubbornly than he would have even himself believe.

The matter continues to weigh on Murasaki’s mind, and evidence of Genji’s continuing favor does little after all to calm her fears for the future.

Seeing her own prestige rise in time so high above that of all others at Rokujō, [Murasaki] continually reflected that although the personal favor she enjoyed was equal to anyone’s, age by and by would dull her in his estimation that she preferred to leave the world on her own before that should happen; but she found it impossible to say so clearly, for she feared that he might condemn her for being too forward.98

He has chided her before, and the topic is no doubt an especially sore one for him now, not only because of his complex feelings about leaving the world himself, or about allowing Murasaki to do so, but because by this time the Third Princess has been promoted still higher in rank. People had already been whispering that he did not honor her enough, and this promotion has placed him under a still heavier obligation to put her visibly above Murasaki. Despite his struggle to resist while seeming to comply, he has had to make a show of spending more time with the Third Princess; and Murasaki, who knows that he cannot countenance her desire to become a nun, must sense also that tension over the Third Princess may sharpen his reaction to any expression of her desire to do so. Meanwhile, Genji begins to

97 TTG, 632; GM 4:167.
98 TTG, 636; GM 4:177.
divide his nights equally between the two. “[Murasaki] accepted and understood this, but it confirmed her fears, although she never allowed them to show.”99

Soon Genji must begin teaching the Third Princess the *kin*, to please her father, and the “women’s concert” (*onnagaku*) follows. The lady from Akashi, her daughter (the heir apparent’s consort), Murasaki, and the Third Princess perform at Rokujō for Genji and Yūgiri, his guest. The Third Princess does well, thanks to Genji’s patient instruction, but Murasaki plays the *wagon* more beautifully than Genji ever imagined, since he has never even heard her before on this instrument.

The next morning Genji begins the day with a tactless remark.

> “It is remarkable how well Her Highness does at the *kin*, isn’t it!”

Genji observed. “How did it strike you?”

> “I wondered about her when I first heard her play a little, over there, but she has become very good now. How could she fail to, when you have been giving all your time to her lessons?”100

Murasaki is hurt that he hardly taught her music at all. He explains that he had to teach the Third Princess because Suzaku and the emperor both expected it of him, and he goes on to assure Murasaki that her own performance, and the degree to which it impressed Yūgiri, made him extremely proud. This is poor consolation. After all, Akashi (Murasaki’s old rival), too, played superbly, and Murasaki knows as well as Genji that in her case as in others mastery of music has nothing to do with a lady’s real weight in the world.

**Murasaki asks again to leave the world**

As Murasaki’s weariness and anxiety mount, the narrator pauses to reflect with Genji that her very quality puts her in the way of misfortune.

> With such accomplishments as these, and the authority with which she looked after His Majesty’s children, [Murasaki] was a success in every way, so much so that Genji even feared for her, remembering the example of others, equally perfect, whose lives had not been long, for she was that rarity: someone who in every single thing she did remained beyond cavil or reproach…She was thirty-seven this year.101

99 TTG, 636; GM 4:177.
100 TTG, 644; GM 4:204.
101 TTG, 645; GM 4:205.
Many passages in the tale express a similar fear that someone too beautiful will not live long. Besides, as Genji soon reminds her, the almanac warns that a woman in her thirty-seventh year is particularly prone to calamity. His thoughts announce imminent sorrows. The way he seems to attribute these to the agencies of fate hint that he is either blind (if he does not suspect that he is to blame) or patronizing (if he does but dismisses the idea); but these opening lines concern less him than her. They evoke the flower’s full beauty just before the wind and rain, and they gently introduce a very dark passage.

Having apparently lost touch with Murasaki, Genji now goes on to muse aloud to her about the course his life and hers have taken, contrasting his sorrows and hardships with her sheltered tranquillity. His uncomprehending tactlessness is a shock, considering Murasaki’s distress and anxiety over the Third Princess, and her efforts to betray neither. He has never before spoken to her from so false a height.

“For you, though, it seems to me that apart from that time when we were separated there has been little either before or after it really to cause you serious unhappiness. The greatest lady in the land, all the way up to the Empress herself, is certain to have reason to be anxious. One is never at ease in exalted company, where the spirit of rivalry is a constant torment, but you have always lived with your father, as it were, and you have had less of that than anyone, ever. Do you see how in that sense you have been more fortunate than others? I am sure that it was difficult for you to have Her Highness turn up here suddenly, but since it directly affects you, you cannot have failed to notice how much more devoted I am to you since she came. You who understand so many things must have grasped that.”

Genji’s dramatic, relatively unfettered life, one that could only be a man’s, is not comparable to Murasaki’s, restricted as it has been by all that a woman must uphold and endure. He seems to imagine that, even now, she will believe she has no troubles just because he tells her so. His speech, which may also owe something of its tone to the pressure he feels himself, is a provocation that Murasaki cannot let pass without renouncing her own integrity and even her identity. The reader learned long ago that she will not do that and may feel that Genji should have learned the same.

“As you say,” she replied, “I expect that in others’ eyes I enjoy favor beyond what I deserve, but by now more sorrow than I can bear has

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102 Fujitsubo died in her thirty-seventh year.
103 TTG, 645; GM 4:207.
entered my life, and that is what has inspired all my prayers.” She
seemed to have much more to say but to be too shy to do so.
“Seriously, though,” she continued, “I feel as if I have little time left,
and the thought of spending this year, too, pretending otherwise
worries me very much. If you would kindly permit what I once asked ...
”\textsuperscript{104}

She knows that she cannot safely raise, again, the subject of becoming
a nun, but she does so nonetheless. Genji’s response is predictably
sharp.

“That is out of the question, I tell you. What would my life mean
without you? My greatest joy over all these years has always been
simply to be with you day and night. What I feel for you is
extraordinary. Please see my devotion through to the end!” That was
all he said, which hurt her, since she had heard that much before;
meanwhile he was moved to see her eyes fill with tears, and he talked
on so as to turn her mind to other things.

He concedes nothing. Instead, to distract her, he begins again to muse
out loud. His earlier talk to her, about how lucky she was, did him no
good. This time, with his judgment impaired by emotion, he tries
something worse. The situation resembles the one near the end of
“Asagao.” As though to reassure her by censuring others, and perhaps
even covertly to get back at her for contradicting his belief that she
should be content, he launches into reminiscences about Aoi and
Rokujō, and to these he adds the lady from Akashi as a model for
Murasaki. This is an affront, and also dangerous. When he reminisced
about Fujitsubo for the same purpose, under similar but more benign
circumstances, Fujitsubo came to him in a dream and reproached him
bitterly. This time the result is disaster.

After discussing Aoi, remarking that she was “so terribly proper that
one might say she overdid it a little,” Genji continues,

“[Rokujō] comes to mind as someone of unusual grace and depth, but
she made painfully trying company. I agree she had reason to be angry
with me, but the way she brooded so interminably over the matter,
and with such bitter rancor, made things very unpleasant. There was
something so intimidating about her that I could never enjoy with her
the daily intimacies of life; I could never drop my guard, lest informality
invite her contempt, and so she and I soon drifted apart. I regretted
her distress when scandal touched her and her good name suffered,

\textsuperscript{104} TTG, 645–6; GM 4:207–208.
and in fact, considering who she was, I felt in the end that I was to blame; but to make it up to her I ensured that her daughter (who of course was so destined anyway) rose to be Empress, ignoring by the way a good deal of slander and bitterness, and I expect that by now, in the afterworld, she has come to think better of me.”

Of this Tanabe Seiko wrote only that, as earlier in “Asagao,” Genji’s reminiscing about his women successfully restores harmony with Murasaki. She did not add that Rokujō soon possesses a girl of the household to pour out her complaint against Genji. Norma Field noted the parallel with “Asagao” (reminiscences followed by supernatural visitation) only in passing. The parallel is seldom mentioned elsewhere. However, Genji’s speech is unwise.

The least of his sins is that in response to Murasaki’s anguish he can do little more than talk about himself, which he does under the guise of confiding to her reflections on several of his other women. Nothing in the tale suggests that Murasaki fancies gossip, and although his remarks may interest her superficially, they could hardly bring her closer to him. A greater sin is turning the name and memory of the dead to one’s own selfish purposes and disclosing their secrets; but that is not all. Genji actually speaks ill of them—first of Aoi and then of Rokujō. He who twenty-five years ago saw what Rokujō’s spirit could do, when it possessed Aoi, still has the face to “treat her,” as his father put it to him reproachfully then, “as casually as [he] might any other woman.” Fujii Sadakazu wrote that Genji built his Rokujō estate to pacify (chinkon) Rokujō’s spirit, and others have agreed, but there is another way to look at the matter. Genji built his estate on the site of Rokujō’s residence, and no doubt in part with resources that passed from her to him when he undertook to see to her daughter’s future; but the place is Genji’s dream and Genji’s glory, not a gesture towards a late lover who “made painfully trying company.” Genji’s building of his estate is consistent with his attitude towards Rokujō, both twenty-five years ago and now. He still takes her for granted. In fact, he not only takes her for granted, he self-righteously claims to have bought her off by doing the right thing (in the end, after perilous wavering) by her daughter. The Rokujō whom the reader knows could never let this pass.

106 Tanabe, Genji monogatari kami fūsen, 165; Field, The Splendor of Longing, 59.
107 TTG, 166; GM 2:18.
108 Fujii, Genji monogatari: shigen to genzai, 157–60; Shirane, The Bridge of Dreams, 116; Bargen, A Woman’s Weapon, 120.
Genji’s talk turns next to Akashi, whom he praises now as in the past for a personal quality out of keeping with her station. “On the surface she yields and seems mild,” he says, “within she has such imposing dignity that she can be quite forbidding.” To this, Murasaki responds so self-effacingly that Genji is greatly moved to reflect that she who once had sharply resented the lady in question, now, out of pure devotion to the Consort, admitted her so indulgently to her presence. “You are not without your dark recesses,” he said, “but it is a wonder how well you adapt your feelings to person and circumstance.”

He is condescending to her. A short while ago he reminded her that she had always lived, as it were, with her father, as though both were still caught in that passage of their youth, and now he talks to her as though she were still the Murasaki who protested his affair with Akashi. He also makes her only a backhanded compliment when he praises her ability to feel, as appropriate, otherwise than she really feels in the “dark recesses” where she upholds her own worth and dignity against his slights.

The sentiments highlighted by this discussion have made Genji sound more sharply arrogant and patronizing than he does in the original. He really loves Murasaki, but other imperatives, as well as the passage of time and gradually failing judgment, have drawn him away from her. This essay may seem sometimes to set the two against one another in a sort of modern confrontation, but one should never forget the grace of the original, and its measured pace—and the grace, too, of the picture that Genji and Murasaki always make.

**Murasaki’s illness**

That night Genji goes to the Third Princess, and to pass the lonely time Murasaki has her gentlewomen read her tales. The atmosphere is heavy with a crisis that comes quickly.

These old stories are all about what happens in life, she thought, and they are full of women involved with fickle, wanton, or treacherous men, and so on, but each seems to find her own in the end. How strange it is, the unsettled life I have led! Yes, it is true, as he said, that I have enjoyed better fortune than most, but am I to end my days burdened with these miseries that other women find hateful and

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109 TTG, 646–7; GM 4:211.
unendurable? Oh, it is too hard! She went to bed very late and as
dawn came on, she began to suffer chest pains. Her women did what
they could for her. “Shall we inform His Grace?” they asked, but she
would not have it and bore her agony until it was light. She became
feverish and felt extremely ill, but no one told Genji as long as he
failed to come on his own.

Once, long ago, Murasaki thought, “I am I!”, turned away from Genji,
and sighed. A few years later she said, “Familiarity often breeds
contempt” and lay down with her back to him. This time, when he
has really done what she feared, and she is sick with hurt and anger,
she will not even tell him. Let him return when he pleases!

Murasaki’s illness will last off and on until her death four years later.
Soon, Genji moves her to Nijō, where they first lived together, and all
but abandons the Third Princess (at Rokujō) in order to be with
Murasaki while the priests pursue their rites.

In lucid moments Murasaki only spoke to reproach him, saying, “You
are so cruel not to grant me what I ask!”; but for Genji the sorrow
and pain of seeing her one instant, with his very eyes, wearing by her
own wish the habit of renunciation, rather than parting from her at
the end of life itself, would be more than he could ever bear. “It is
exactly what I have always longed to do,” he said, “but worry about
how you would feel, once you were left alone, has constantly detained
me. Do you mean to say that you would now abandon me?” That
was his only response.

Nothing has changed. What she asks is more than he can give. He
cannot allow her an independent existence and feel that he remains
himself. For love of her, he cannot bear her to have a will, a life of her
own. At least her illness has led Genji for now to forget the duties of
his political marriage, which would be all very well, were it not that
during his absence from the Rokujō estate Kashiwagi violates the Third
Princess and precipitates another tragedy.

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110 The passage on tales in “Hotaru” deserves its fame, but the way Murasaki turns to
tales here, in despair, is very moving. They are her only resource. She cannot seek solace
and guidance from the histories of China and Japan, as Reizei did after learning that he
was Genji’s son.
111 TTG, 647; GM 4:212.
The possession

Genji has at last left Murasaki to spend some time with the Third Princess when word reaches him that Murasaki has died. He rushes back to Nijō and summons the most powerful healers. In response to their prayers the afflicting spirit suddenly “moved into a little girl, in whom it screamed and raged while his love began at last to breathe again.” It is Rokujō.

Many studies of Murasaki and issues affecting her have neglected the dramatic scene that follows, and those who mention it may still dismiss it. Tanabe Seiko found it “tacked on” and recalled Shimizu Yoshiko saying that the author must have written it only because her readers liked the counterpart scene in “Aoi” and wanted more. For Kojima Yukiko, the text makes it perfectly clear why Murasaki falls ill: she is unhappy about the Third Princess. The possession scene, Kojima wrote, is simply a “device” to explain how the dying Murasaki can unaccountably revive and regain Genji’s attention.

Doris Bargen rightly treated the scene at length, but her conclusions amount to a denial that it represents what the text says it does: a renewed intervention in Genji’s life by a personage known as Rokujō. Bargen contended that the Rokujō who possesses the medium is not an autonomous entity but Murasaki’s own image of a woman whose “charisma” Murasaki appropriates to “empower herself”; and she charged “critics” with mistakenly adopting Genji’s own, biased “preoccupation with identifying the possessing spirit,” when here and in the earlier possession scene in “Aoi” they and Genji should both know that the real speaker is Genji’s possessed wife. However, it takes no preoccupation with anything to accept that the spirit is Rokujō. In “Aoi” the reader already knows that the spirit is Rokujō, and Genji recognizes her instantly. In this one, Genji behaves normally for someone addressed by a medium in a trance: he seeks to verify who the speaker is. His fear that he knows the answer already is all

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113 TTG, 654; GM 4:234. The influence of this spirit has been assumed from the start, since it begins its speech to Genji by saying, “For months you have cruelly confined me and inflicted on me such pain that I had thought I might teach you a proper lesson.”

114 Tanabe, Genji monogatari kami fūsen, 130; Kojima, “Murasaki no Ue,” 68.

115 Bargen, A Woman’s Weapon, 124–44.

116 Bargen, A Woman’s Weapon, 124, 27.

117 Bargen, A Woman’s Weapon, 26.
the more reason to make sure. To agree that the speaker is Rokujō is not to take Genji’s side. It is simply to read what is there.\footnote{Bargen’s reading requires a strange understanding of Rokujō. No degree of admiration or sympathy for Rokujō can explain why Murasaki or any other woman in the tale, however desperate, would seek the authority of someone so ill used by Genji. Bargen described Rokujō as “a proud, dissatisfied, and demanding woman who knew how to gain control over a man” (A Woman’s Weapon, 136), but Rokujō never gained control over Genji. If she had, he would have recognized his relationship with her publicly, as she wished. His failure to do so brought her years of intense suffering. To propose Rokujō as an inspiration to Murasaki is cruel to Rokujō and denies Murasaki any sense.}

There are three possible ways to explain the possession: Murasaki somehow provokes her relapse and Rokujō’s outburst in order to get Genji’s attention and rebuke him, as Bargen would have it; the author arbitrarily does it for her, as Kojima suggested; or Genji’s absence removes his protection from Murasaki, and Rokujō seizes the opportunity to capture his attention herself. Only the third follows from the narrative itself, even if it does not make modern, rational or psychological sense. The spirit says:

I kept my eye on you from on high, and what you did for Her Majesty [Akikonomu] made me pleased and grateful, but perhaps I do not care that much about my daughter now that she and I inhabit different realms, because that bitterness of mine, which made you hateful to me, remains.

The spirit’s remark that in the afterworld she cares less about her daughter than Genji assumes has a ghastly plausibility. The spirit also confirms that Genji’s indiscretion is the immediate reason for her renewed reproach:

What I find particularly offensive, more so even than your spurning me for others when I was among the living, is that in conversation with one for whom you do care you callously made me out to be a disagreeable woman.

That is just what Genji did. The spirit continues:

I had hoped, as I did then, that you might at least be forgiving towards the dead and come to my defense when others maligned me; and that is why, since I have this shocking appearance, things have come to this at last. I have little enough against this woman, but you are strongly guarded. I feel far away and cannot approach you, and even your voice reaches me only faintly.
None of this has anything obvious to do with Murasaki, although in this scene Murasaki and Rokujō certainly are briefly and eerily superimposed—superimposed, not merged. That this superimposition resists explanation neither diminishes its power nor authorizes the suppression of one of the pair. To accept it is to feel doubly the heart-rending force of this, the height of Rokujō’s speech:

The weeping figure, her hair over her face, resembled the spirit he had seen then [in “Aoi”]. Shuddering with the same fear and astonishment, he took the girl’s hands and held her down lest she embarrass him. “Is it really you?” he asked...“Say plainly who you are! Or else, tell me something to make it obvious, something no one else could know. Then I will believe you, at least a little.”

The spirit sobbed loudly.

“Yes, as I am now, my form is one new and strange, but plainly the while you are still just the same you, who always refuse to know.

Oh, I hate you, I hate you!” 119

The voice speaks the truth. Genji refuses to know. Murasaki, who does not hate him, could still say the same thing, but she does not.

Murasaki’s ware wa ware (“I am I”) long ago, over Akashi, was akin in spirit and rhetoric to love poems that set “I” against “you.” Rokujō’s utterance, which does so, too, belongs to the same family: I am no longer what I was, she says, but you are you (kimi wa kimi nari)—you are just the same as ever. It is the classic lover’s reproach become a nightmare voice, but Genji, who has no ears with which to heed it, will let this rebuke, too, pass.

**Murasaki’s death**

Murasaki survives another four years of crisis, weakness, and reprieve. Filled though these years are with sad or tender scenes and reflections, the distance between her and Genji remains. When the worst of the possession crisis seems to be over, Genji “cut a token lock of her hair to give her the strength to observe the Five Precepts, and he allowed her to receive them.” 120 However, this tiny concession, made under duress, changes nothing.

Murasaki therefore does what the unhappy Rokujō could never do: she gathers herself to rise above her situation. Komashaku Kimi wrote, “It is certain that, contrary to worldly appearances, Murasaki no Ue

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120 TTG, 656; GM 4:241.
died still burdened by her misfortune, a ‘woman’s’ misfortune.”¹²¹ This is not untrue. In “Minori,” Murasaki, who still hoped to leave the world, felt “angry with him because it would so obviously be unkind and contrary of her to act on her own, without his permission; but she feared, too, that her own sins might be weighing her down.” Her ware is not yet gone, and she still suffers. However, she who “asked nothing more of this life and, having no fond ties to detain her, did not particularly wish to stay” is also thinking of Genji, to whom the very thought of outliving her is appalling; for “at heart she regretted only what he would suffer when the bond between them failed.”¹²² Meanwhile, she seeks to make peace with her life as well as she can under the circumstances. She has herself in hand.

Most of those who have written on the end of Murasaki’s life have preferred to see her this way, and some have found her example inspiring. She has taken the difficult path of generosity, as her nature from the beginning disposed her to do. Feeling death approaching, [s]he hastened to dedicate the thousand copies of the Lotus Sutra that she had had made as prayers for herself over the years. The event took place at Nijō, which she considered her own home...She had never told him it was to be so solemn, and so he in turn had offered her no particular advice. The excellence of her judgment, and even her knowledge of Buddhist things, impressed him profoundly; his only role was to look after quite ordinary matters of altar adornment and so on.¹²³

She has never done anything like this before, and she does it entirely on her own, in the house she considers her own; and she does it magnificently. Kurata Minoru justly observed that with this event she achieves independence, and that the court’s full attendance makes her true standing plain. Yes, in the eyes of all she really is the wife of the honorary retired emperor.¹²⁴ One thinks back to Fujitsubo’s magnificent rite of the Eight Discourses on the Lotus Sutra, at the end of which she became a nun (“Sakaki”).

With this, Murasaki therefore rises at last to join Fujitsubo on the same high plane of perfect simplicity that Genji recalled admiringly when he described Fujitsubo to Murasaki in “Asagao.” “Although she displayed

¹²¹ Komashaku, Murasaki Shikibu no messēji, 152.
¹²² TTG, 755; GM 4:493.
¹²³ TTG, 755–6; GM 4:495. She had probably had these copies made to pray for permission to leave the world.
¹²⁴ Kurata, “Murasaki no Ue no shi to Hikaru Genji,” 331.
no extraordinary brilliance,” he said, “a talk with her was always worthwhile, and she did the smallest thing exactly right. We shall never see her like again.” He then looked at Murasaki and rightly saw Fujitsubo, but in those days he could not yet honor her as she deserved, and he never learned really to do so. She lacked the world’s unreserved approbation, and in any case he clasped her, like everything else, too jealously to himself. It is only in setting out on her own, within the confines of compassion towards a deeply loved but failing man, that she becomes at last in simple reality what he saw then, and the woman who by natural gift she had always been: like Fujitsubo, a born empress. Some have praised her “self-transcendence” at the end, but really she transcends nothing. Instead, thoughts of herself drop away—even the wonderful gifts (music, calligraphy, skill at dyeing, freshness of taste, beauty, quick wit) that she enjoyed even more abundantly than Fujitsubo. An empress has no “I,” no “prickles”; she does not deign to commit herself to personal traits. Only sorrow remains, and concern for others.

Lady Murasaki had many things on her mind, but wisely she never spoke of when she would be gone. She confined herself to a few, quiet remarks about the fleeting character of life, but the conviction in her voice conveyed her desolation better than any words...When the conversation took such a turn that her remarks need not sound ill-omened, she mentioned those who had served her well through the years and who invited pity because they had nowhere else to go. “Do give them a thought after I am gone,” she said. That was all.

She is beyond rank. Soon the present empress, her adopted daughter, will come to her while she lies dying to say good-by, as naturally as any daughter would come to her mother. There is nothing for Genji to do, nor will he ever do anything again.

Conclusion

This essay has sought to acknowledge that the Genji text conveys after all, through its wit and grace, some of the major realities of life. Haruo Shirane wrote, in agreement with many others, “In the Genji it is not the fulfillment or frustration of desire that becomes the focus of the narrative so much as the elegant and elaborate process of

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125 Shigematsu, “Murasaki no Ue no ningenzō,” 22–3; Maruyama, “Murasaki no Ue shōron,” 50.
126 TTG, 758; GM 4:502.
courtship...Almost every aspect of social intercourse is transformed into an aesthetic mode.”

A good deal of the narrative indeed concerns courtship, and perhaps some of this courtship really is “elegant and elaborate.” Some of it, however, is another thing first. Genji’s pursuit of Utsusemi is more naively brazen than intrinsically elegant, his pursuit of Susetsumuhana more comical, and his abduction of the child Murasaki more racily dramatic (or, as some now say, criminal). His conquest of Oborozukiyo is far from elaborate, and his courtship of Asagao, so unrelenting that she fears betrayal by her own women, lacks any elegance at all beyond the civilized forms that Genji still upholds. This is not to criticize the tale or its hero. Rather, it is to insist that, even in the realm of courtship, less rarefied realities show plainly enough through the tale’s “aesthetic mode.”

Moreover, much of the tale is not about courtship at all. Shirane continued:

Genji becomes a great lover-hero not simply because he conquers women but because he has also mastered the “arts”—poetry, calligraphy, music—of courtship. The same applies to Genji’s political triumphs, which are measured by a cultural and aesthetic code that transcends the usual notion of power and influence.

Genji’s mastery of the arts—assisted by his wealth, rank, skill, looks, and charm—undoubtedly makes him a cultural paragon in his world. However, his ambitions and triumphs, as well as his slow disintegration, also involve aspirations and personal maneuvering unrelated to any particular “cultural and aesthetic code.” Nothing in the narrative except its supernatural elements suggests that this aspect of Genji’s experience “transcends the usual notion of power and influence.” Far from being unusual, except in the degree to which he is gifted, Genji succeeds by the methods of any courtier and fails as might anyone whose extravagant success impairs his judgment.

Some writers on the tale have taken it for granted that Genji represents an “ideal.” Murasaki, too, has been seen as an “ideal woman.” However, this view seems to put beyond question certain things that, when examined, enrich the work and give Genji and Murasaki fuller life.

127 Shirane, The Bridge of Dreams, 30.
The notion of “ideal” associated with Genji is probably summed up by his peerless looks and grace, which the narrator evokes repeatedly, but his enchanting quality also diverts the audience’s attention from what he is up to. Many more or less troubling passages end when the narrator turns the scene into a beautiful tableau, or the gentlewomen, watching him leave, whisper to each other what a wonder he is to behold. He also has superb intellectual and artistic gifts, as well as the personal charisma that gives him, in Kashiwagi’s words, such a “singular light.” He is never ordinary. It is this quality that gives him in all circumstances a dignity commensurate with his exquisitely ambiguous proximity to the throne. However, while his beauty in this broad sense makes him fascinating, it does not make him a model of laudable thought or behavior. His “light” is not a sign of goodness. On the contrary, it lends grace and style to that in him which may not be laudable at all. At each moment the audience sees of him what the narrator wishes to show, but in the imagination the reader puts these moments together, looks beyond the words, and sees more or less distinctly a man. No one could think, talk, or write about “him” otherwise. This man is like other men, even if his gifts lift him above all others.

Naturally Genji has always stirred readers’ dreams, but Murasaki lives with Genji the man. It is he who claims her, tests her, hurts her, cajoles her, lies to her, loves her, and, even against her wishes, never lets her go. Some have described their love, too, as “ideal” and called its story “the fulfillment of ideal love.” However, their fate is not a happy one.

Genji alone provokes this fate, moved by ambition that requires more of Murasaki than she can give him. After the abdication of Emperor Reizei (“Wakana Two”), his secret son, he entertains before the reader thoughts if not of empire, then at least of dynasty. Already the grandfather of a future emperor in the female line, he nonetheless regrets not being the same in the male:

   Genji, at Rokujō, nursed his disappointment that Retired Emperor Reizei had no successor of his own. The Heir Apparent was his direct descendant too, it was true, but no trouble having ever arisen to disturb His Retired Majesty’s reign, Genji’s transgression had not come to light and now would never be known, as fate would have it, that line was in any case not to continue. Genji regretted this very much,

129 Wakashiro, Genji monogatari no onna, 223.
and since he could hardly discuss the matter with anyone else it
continued to weigh on his mind.\textsuperscript{130}

Thus Genji, who would really have reigned if his father had not
refrained from naming him heir apparent, has long wished to correct
this error and, so to speak, rewrite history. Dare one imagine that he
made love to Fujitsubo with that, too, in mind? At any rate, it is to
this sort of desire—one his gifts allowed him the hope of fulfilling—that
he sacrifices with deep but blind sorrow the woman he really loves.

Murasaki may understand little of this, but there is much that Genji
does not understand about her, either. She has her own destiny. If
he, in a truer world than the flawed one they inhabit, is a born emperor
whom only fortune has cheated of his realm, she in that truer world
is his equal, and in this one suffers a counterpart misfortune. Her
resistance to his three infidelities proceeds from no intrinsic trait, but
only from the predicament of a flawed birth that does not match her
nature. For him, reclaiming what should have been his requires such
manipulation of persons and circumstances that despite both genius
and supernatural favor he falls short after all. He wanted too much.
Reizei has no heir, the Third Princess slips from him, and these two
great transgressions (against his father and against Murasaki) cost
him the substance of what he is and has.

Murasaki, as beautiful as he, has never for a moment been ordinary
either. Still, she is a woman, and her different destiny depends on his.
Despite her repeated affirmations of distinctness, she does not free
herself from his appetites until his powers begin to fail and her own
death approaches; and if she were not thanks to him an empress’s
adoptive mother, that empress’s last visit to her could not seal her
life. Yet in rising at the end above happiness or unhappiness she
achieves something that he does not, for until lost to view he remains,
like many another great man, entangled in the complexities of an
extravagant pride.

\textsuperscript{130} TTG, 631; GM 4:165–6.