3. Genji and Suzaku (2): The Possibility of Ukifune

This essay continues the previous one by suggesting that Suzaku’s bitterness toward Genji, precipitated by the misfortune of his daughter, may affect even the tale’s last heroine, Ukifune, through the mechanism of spirit possession. It also discusses more generally the nature and significance of Ukifune’s experience. Nearly all Genji readers, particularly non-specialists, have long taken it for granted that she throws herself into the nearby river in order to drown, but that she is instead swept downstream and washed ashore at the spot where she is then found. However, the narrative shows that a spirit, not the river, carries her. This spirit, the one exorcised in “Tenarai,” is the one that can be hypothetically associated with Suzaku.

Ukifune’s reputation

Ukifune is the last major female character in the tale, and the most striking part of her story is told in the final chapters (“Ukifune” to “Yume no ukihashi”). In “Ukifune” Kaoru and Niou, the young men most prominent in the Uji chapters, pursue her, and the success of both places her in an agonizing dilemma. She could save herself by choosing one lover over the other, but she remains unable to do so. Instead she sinks into paralyzing despair, and living as she does beside the Uji River, decides to drown herself. At the end of “Ukifune” the reader knows what she is about to do, and the next morning (the start of the next chapter, “Kagerō”) she has indeed disappeared. However, early in the chapter after that (“Tenarai”) she is found alive under a tree. Her rescuers take her home to Ono, on the western slopes of Mt. Hiei, where to sever all connection with her old life she has herself ordained as a nun. Late in “Tenarai” Kaoru hears of her, and in “Yume no ukihashi” he discovers where she is. Desperate to meet her again, he sends her younger half-brother to her with an appeal. However, in the book’s final passage she refuses either to accept Kaoru’s letter or to recognize her brother. The closing lines evoke Kaoru’s chagrin.

The author of Sarashina nikki (mid-eleventh century) described dreaming in her youth of languishing in romantically melancholy

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1 Kinugasa Teinosuke’s 1957 movie Ukifune and Hōjō Shūji’s play Ukifune both illustrate this assumption, and a video currently sold by the Tale of Genji Museum in Uji shows Ukifune leaping off the Uji Bridge. Endless such evidence could be cited.
isolation, like Ukifune at Uji; but the Mumyōzōshi author, although sympathetic to Ukifune’s plight, described her personally as a “tiresome character” (nikuki mono to mo iitsubeki hito). Since then Ukifune has continued to arouse pity and admiration in some, and mixed feelings in others. Sakamoto Tomonobu struck an often-heard note when he identified the theme of Ukifune’s story as that of “the establishment of self [jiga no kakuritsu]).”

Alone [Ukifune] decides to die; alone she sets out toward the place of her death. She sets out to part from all those whom she loves, all those to whom she is close. She keeps the sorrow of parting sealed in her breast, where she strives to bear it. Ukifune is strong. She is not swept on by fate; she decides her own fate...The movements of her own heart, the situation in which she has been placed: these things she can observe coolly, objectively...She certainly deserves pity, but the death that awaits her is a death that she has chosen herself, and the appearance of a young woman who can in this way, on her own, choose her own fate, suggests new possibilities for women.4

Many readers have particularly emphasized Ukifune’s Buddhist aspiration. Yamaji no tsuyu, an “apocryphal” Genji chapter attributed to Kenreimon’in Ukyō no Daibu (1157?–1233?), likewise credits her with steadfast courage in the pursuit of her chosen path in life.5 Some have seen in Ukifune the author’s meditation on the weakness of the human heart—a weakness that she resolutely overcomes.6 Her passage to a new life, through her failed drowning attempt, has also been described as a passage through death to rebirth.7 Nagai Kazuko connected all these themes when she wrote that to develop a full “self” Ukifune must pass the boundary between birth and death, and

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2 Akiyama, Sarashina nikki, 36, 75; Morris, As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams, 57, 87.
3 Higuchi and Kuboki, Matsura no Miya monogatari, Mumyōzōshi, 197. The Mumyōzōshi author placed her under the heading of “unfortunate women” (itōshiki hito) in The Tale of Genji. For more on the early reception of Ukifune, see Mostow, “On Becoming Ukifune: Autobiographical Heroines in Heian and Kamakura Literature.”
5 Yamaji no tsuyu, in Yamagishi and Imai, Yamaji no tsuyu, Kumogakure rokujō.
7 Hinata, “‘Genji monogatari’ no shi to saisei: Ukifune o chūshin ni,” 48–53.
that after her rebirth she transcends the self in a quest for the very source of her existence: the “other shore” (higan), or enlightenment, symbolized for her by the mother whom she still longs at the end to meet once more.\footnote{Nagai, “Ukifune,” 290–1.} Her example has even been called an inspiration for Kaoru, whose longing for the religious life remains unrealized at the end of the tale.\footnote{Washiyama, Genji monogatari shudai ron, 216.}

**Ukifune’s journey to the Uji Villa**

Ukifune, the unrecognized daughter of the late Eighth Prince, lives in a house beside the Uji River. Once her father lived there with his two recognized daughters, Ōigimi and Nakanokimi, but then he died, and Ōigimi after him. Nakanokimi moved away, leaving the house empty. In “Azumaya” Kaoru installs Ukifune there as his mistress.

In “Ukifune,” Kaoru’s great friend Niou tracks Ukifune down to Uji and impersonates Kaoru in order to make love to her. Thereafter she is torn between the two men. Propriety and good sense commend Kaoru, who knew her carnally first and who is also endlessly dignified and responsible. However, he is also a little dull. Pure pleasure commends Niou.

Ukifune’s mother lives with her husband and her other children (Ukifune’s half-siblings) in the city, but she sometimes visits Uji. On one such occasion Ukifune is already in black despair when she overhears her mother chatting with the other women of the household. Her mother knows about Kaoru but not about Niou, and she remarks that if Ukifune were ever to betray Kaoru, “I would want nothing more to do with her.” To Ukifune this is a “devastating blow.” “I wish I were dead!” she says to herself. “The awful secret will get out, sooner or later!”

The narrative continues, “Outside, the river roared menacingly past.” “Not all rivers sound like that,” her mother remarks, deploring the dismal wildness of the spot. A gentlewoman chimes in by telling how just the other day the ferryman’s grandson fell in and drowned. “That river has taken so many people!” she sighs. Ukifune has already been thinking that she wants to die. Now she realizes that she could drown herself.\footnote{TTG, p. 1032; GM 6:167–8.}

The tension rises as the need to decide between Kaoru and Niou becomes more pressing. Ukifune is prostrate with despair. Her two
most intimate gentlewomen then remonstrate with her, and one (Ukon) tells her a cautionary tale.

In Hitachi my sister had two lovers—this can happen to little people too, you know. Both were equally keen on her, and she could not decide between them, but she favored the more recent one just a little. That made the first one jealous, and in the end he killed the other!\(^{11}\)

So Ukifune realizes that Kaoru might actually harm Niou, and the fate of Ukon’s sister (who was never allowed to return to the capital) confirms her conviction that nothing awaits her in any case but misery and shame. Resolved to die, she destroys all her correspondence and writes two farewell poems to her mother. Darkness is falling. The reader knows exactly what she plans to do that night. Some will also have recognized in her situation a motif established in the *Man’yōshū* and elsewhere: that of the girl who drowns herself after finding herself caught between two or more men.\(^{12}\)

The next morning (“Kagerō”) she is gone. To keep up appearances the household stages a false funeral. Eventually the narrative moves back to the palace and, for the most part, to other matters. Early in “Tenarai,” however, Ukifune reappears on the very night of her disappearance.

“Tenarai” begins by introducing Yokawa no Sōzu (the Prelate of Yokawa), a senior and highly respected monk of Mt. Hiei, as well as his mother and sister. These two women, both nuns, live at Ono, but just now they are on their way home after a pilgrimage to Hasedera. When the Sōzu’s mother falls ill, the worried party send for him, and he hastens to her side. Since they can now go no further, they stop at a friend’s house near Uji. Unfortunately, the friend happens to be purifying himself for a pilgrimage of his own, and when he learns that one of the party is seriously ill he asks everyone to leave, lest the sick person die, pollute his house, and so render his preparations useless. The party will apparently have to go straight home after all, at whatever risk to the old lady. Suddenly a directional taboo makes that impossible. At last the Sōzu remembers a villa (Uji no In, “the Uji Villa”) that once belonged to Retired Emperor Suzaku. It is nearby, it is empty, and since the Sōzu happens to know the steward, he decides to go there instead.

\(^{11}\) TTG, 1037; GM 6:178.

These zigzags of circumstance (the mother’s illness, the friend’s purification, the Sōzu’s acquaintance with the steward) suggest that supernatural influence guides the party to the Uji Villa in order to have them find Ukifune.

Many Heian nobles had a country house at Uji. For example, Kagerō niki mentions an Uji no In owned by Fujiwara no Kaneie and located on the east side of the Uji River (the same side as Ukifune’s house), as well as another on the opposite (Byōdō-in) side owned by Fujiwara no Morouji. Uji was therefore a “resort area” (yūraku no chi) for aristocratic residents of the capital. By the mid-eleventh century it offered the services of singing girls (asobi), who came to be associated especially with the vicinity of the Byōdō-in. However, it was also associated with Buddhist devotion and reclusion. The previous essay discussed the monk Kisen Hōshi’s famous poem that plays on “Uji” and ushi (“dreary”), as well as the echoes of that poem in one by the Eighth Prince. Some villas at Uji were even turned eventually into temples. An example is the Byōdō-in itself, built by Fujiwara no Yorimichi in 1052 on the site of a villa inherited from his father, Michinaga. As for the Uji no In of the tale, modern conjecture (perhaps influenced by the idea that Ukifune actually threw herself into the river) places it near the east bank of the river, roughly 400 or 500 meters downstream from Ukifune’s house. However, most medieval commentaries identify it with the Byōdō-in site, directly across the river from the house.

The Sōzu and his party reach Uji no In at night. The place is so eerie that the Sōzu sends two of his accompanying monks, with a torch, to look around the deserted back of the villa for anything strange or threatening. The monks find themselves in a wood. Peering through the gloom beneath the trees, they make out what looks like a weeping young woman in white. They assume that it is a trickster fox, and so does the Sōzu when he hears their report. “I have always heard that a fox may take human form, but I have never seen one that has actually

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14 Goodwin, Selling Songs and Smiles, 17, 21; also Pigeot, Femmes galantes, femmes artistes dans le Japon ancien, 20–21. Both writers translate a letter in which Fujiwara no Akihira (989–1066) described the asobi of Uji.
15 Tsunoda and Katō, Genji monogatari no chiri, 129. The map locates the Uji Villa just where the river widens out into the now-drained Ogura no Ike.
done it!” he says before going to view their find himself. It is Ukifune.

Ukifune is not lying on the riverbank. The villa presumably faces the river, and she is in the woods behind it (ushiro no kata). While the narrative in “Ukifune” repeatedly emphasizes the river’s menacing roar, the wood in “Tenarai” is silent. There might as well be no river.

How did she get there? If she was swept downstream, she must have crawled past the villa to the wood, but that is impossible. Just above Uji the river emerges from a gorge. At the site of the Eighth Prince’s house it is wide and fast, with presumably (in the days before riparian works) rocky banks. In 1180, 600 men drowned here when a large Heike force swam their horses across the river to attack Minamoto no Yorimasa at the Byōdō-in. Moreover, the narrative of the days preceding Ukifune’s disappearance repeatedly mentions rain. The river is swollen. Ukifune could not have survived being swept several hundred meters down it, especially if she actually intended to drown in the first place; and if she had, she would have been bruised and half dead by the time she was washed ashore. She has swallowed no water, and as the Sōzu’s sister soon discovers, she has not a mark on her. She is not even wet, since just now it is not raining. Nor can she have walked to the wood, since her feet are intact. Her clothing is intact, too, perfume and all.

The two monks, who believe her to be evilly supernatural, send for their master, but the Sōzu recognizes her as human and has them carry her to the house. There his sister, now a nun, gladly takes charge of her. Having lost her daughter some years ago, she has just been to Hasedera to pray for a new one, and in a dream Kannon promised her this boon. Kannon therefore led the Sōzu’s party to the Uji Villa in order to bring them to this new daughter, whose arrival there alive is also, as the Sōzu and the reader eventually learn, Kannon’s work. Thus the story told in “Tenarai” begins as a typical Kannon miracle tale (reigen tan). However, it soon takes on a strangely ambiguous character, almost as though it had been turned inside out.

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16 TTG, 1078; GM 6:282.
17 Iimura, Genji monogatari no nazo, 218–27. Iimura also showed that Ukifune’s remembered sobbing when the spirit dropped her corresponds to the sobbing the monks hear when they find her.
The spirit

One scholar writing on spirits (mononoke) in the tale speculated that Ukifune must have walked in a trance-like state to the spot where she was found, or that she was perhaps kidnapped and abandoned by someone like a passing yamabushi. Another, recognizing that a spirit took her, assumed that the spirit carried her in its arms, or that she walked beside it. Still others have agreed with Nagai Kazuko that Ukifune never regained her memory of what happened while she was possessed and that "the author does not describe exactly what happened." The different descriptions of the agent involved seem to compound the difficulty. When exorcised by the Sōzu, the spirit declares itself to have been once "a practicing monk" (okonai sesshō hōshi). Next, Ukifune herself recalls "a very beautiful man" approaching her, inviting her to come to his home and taking her in his arms. Later on, however, she remembers a demon (oni) making off with her, and later still the Sōzu tells Kaoru that "a goblin [tengu] or a tree spirit [kodama] must have taken her to the spot by deceit." The narrative therefore proposes six seemingly conflicting appearances or identities for the spirit: a former monk, a beautiful man, a demon, a tengu, a tree spirit, and the fox mentioned when the monks first find her. These seem to cancel each other out, leaving the issue imponderable.

Several medieval documents resolve this difficulty. The fourteenth-century Genji commentary Kakaishō provides the first clue. In connection with the spirit’s speech to the Sōzu, in the exorcism scene, Kakaishō quotes Kojidan 211 in full. This anecdote tells how a high-ranking monk conceived lust for a woman (the Somedono Empress, 829–900), died, and became a tengu that then possessed her. Next, Kakaishō cites another version of the same story, according to which a holy monk was called in to heal the same empress and desired her so intensely that he vowed to die and become an oni in order to possess her, which he did.

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18 Abe Toshiko, “Genji monogatari no ‘mononoke’," part 2, 19.
19 Iimura, Genji monogatari no nazo, 230.
21 TTG, 1083; GM 6:296.
22 Tamagami, Shimeishō, Kakaishō, 595–6.
23 Later commentaries repeat these references, having nothing further to suggest. Mingō nisso simply quotes Kakaishō in full (Tanaka, Mingō nisso, 691–2); and Kogetsushō refers to the same material (Kitamura Kigin, Kogetsushō, 940–1).
These stories suggest that a ranking monk who succumbs to temptation because of a woman can become after death either an oni or a tengu. The spirit’s self-description (“Once I was a practicing monk”) therefore agrees both with Ukifune’s memory of it as an oni and the Sōzu’s belief that it may have been a tengu.

The Sōzu’s other suggestion, a kodama, is equally plausible. Japanese folklore has long associated tengu with tall trees, and the narrative amusingly emphasizes the tree-spirit aspect of Ukifune’s abductor. Ukifune is found lying under a tree that, according to the villa’s caretaker, is often haunted by supernatural creatures.

“Does any young woman live nearby?” [The monks] showed [the caretaker] what they were talking about.

“Foxes do this,” the caretaker replied. “Strange things can happen under this tree. One autumn, the year before last, they made off with a little boy just a year or so old, the son of someone in service here, and this is where they brought him. It is hardly surprising.”

“Did the boy die?”

“No, he is still alive. Foxes love to give people a fright, but they never actually do anything much.” He had seen it all before, and the arrival of a party of people in the middle of the night seemed to preoccupy him a good deal more.24

The monks’ discovery is old hat to the caretaker, who takes the material mischief of spirits for granted. However, his idea of a supernatural being that moves someone from one place to another is a fox (kitsune). Despite possible differences in degree of mischief, these entities are all continuous with one another.

The linked verse (renga) manual Renjū gappeki shū, by Ichijō Kanera (1402–81), confirms this continuity. Kanera listed both kitsune and oni as linking words for kodama, specifying that they refer to Genji, together with the place name Uji and the chapter name “Tenarai.”25

For the author as for the users of this manual, the key word associated with this episode in the tale—one that included the possibility of all the rest mentioned—was therefore kodama.

Ukifune’s perception of the beautiful man belongs under the same heading. She first recalls him this way:

24 TTG, 1079; GM 6:283.
25 Ichijō Kanera, Renjū gappeki shū, 184. For this reference, as well as those concerning other renga manuals and the two nō plays discussed below, see Goff, Noh Drama and The Tale of Genji, 80–3, 186. Kanera’s entry heading equates kodama with yamabiko.
I was...rooted to the spot, when a very beautiful man approached me and said, “Come with me to where I live!”; and it seemed to me that he took me in his arms. I assumed that he was the gentleman they addressed as “Your Highness,” but then my mind must have wandered, until he put me down in a place I did not know. Then he vanished.26

He has long been identified as Niou, although in recent times some have suggested Kaoru27 or even Ukifune’s father.28 However, these conjectures do not help because the figure is an illusion in the first place. Soon after recalling him, Ukifune says to the Sōzu’s sister:

My only dim memory is of sitting evening after evening staring out into the night and not wanting to live, until someone appeared from under a great tree in front of me and, as it seemed to me, took me away.29

She associates the figure explicitly with a tree. Tengu (to say nothing of foxes) are famous masters of illusion, and setsuwa literature contains many anecdotes about the elaborate hallucinations they create. An example is Konjaku monogatari shū 20/3 (also Uji shūi monogatari 2/14), in which a tengu appears as a buddha among the branches of a persimmon tree, shining and scattering flowers. When a suspicious minister’s relentless gaze finally breaks the spell, the buddha suddenly vanishes, and a large kestrel with a broken wing falls out of the tree. Ukifune’s beautiful man is a tengu-kodama trick that reveals nothing about the spirit’s nature or identity. It shows only that the spirit knows what form will appeal to her.30

According to Janet Goff, medieval renga manuals devoted to The Tale of Genji (as Renju gappeki shū is not, being general in coverage) ignore Ukifune’s exorcism scene.31 However, at the end of their section on the “Ukifune” chapter they attribute her disappearance to a kodama,

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26 TTG, 1083; GM 6:296.
27 Ikeda Kazuomi, “Tenarai no maki mono no ke kō: Ukifune monogatari no shudai to kōzō,” 166–70.
28 Bargen, A Woman’s Weapon, 235.
29 TTG, 1085; GM 6: 299.
30 In Konjaku monogatari shū 20/7, a third version of the story about the Somedono Empress, the demon (the former monk) rushes in and, with the empress’s eager cooperation, makes love to her in the presence of the whole court. The story describes the demon as naked, bald, and eight feet tall, with black, glistening skin, eyes like brass bowls, knifelike teeth, and so on; and presumably that is more or less what the courtiers see. However, it is probably not what the empress sees.
31 Goff, Noh Dama and The Tale of Genji, 80–1.
which they then specify as a linking word for “Uji.” An example is *Hikaru Genji ichibu renga yoriai no koto*, by Nijō Yoshimoto (1320–88), which states explicitly that the man Ukifune saw was a *kodama*.\(^{32}\) The much larger manual entitled *Hikaru Genji ichibu uta* (1453) not only makes the same connection with a *kodama* but also has the spirit in the exorcism scene describe itself as a *kodama* rather than as a former “practicing monk.”\(^{33}\)

Goff examined *renga* manuals in connection with her study of *nō* plays based on *The Tale of Genji*. Two plays, both of which exploit these manuals extensively, concern Ukifune.\(^{34}\) One is *Ukifune*, which Zeami (1363?–1443?) praised in *Sarugaku dangi* even though it is not by him. (Although still in the repertoire, it is rarely performed.) The *maeshite* is a nameless woman of Uji, and the *nochijite* is Ukifune. The text sheds little light on the matter under discussion, but it is noteworthy that, at the end of the first part, the *maeshite* describes herself as still possessed by an evil spirit (*nao mononoke no mi ni soite*).\(^{35}\) The discussion will return below to the idea that Ukifune remains at least partially possessed even after the exorcism.

The second play, *Kodama Ukifune*,\(^{36}\) is not in the repertoire and appears to date from the early sixteenth century. The *maeshite* is a nameless woman at Ono. The identity of the *nochijite* is confusing, but it seems to be above all the possessing spirit itself, as the *Genji* reader knows it from the exorcism scene in “Tenarai.”

Muromachi-period readers, including such authoritative literary figures as Nijō Yoshimoto and Ichijō Kanera, therefore gathered from the *Genji* narrative that a spirit transported Ukifune. The same understanding presumably underlies the gloss in most medieval commentaries, to the effect that the Uji Villa occupied the site of the Byōdō-in.\(^{37}\) The tale makes it clear where the house was, and the commentary authors must have known that the Byōdō-in site was directly across from it. The river itself could not have carried Ukifune there, nor could a living

\(^{32}\) Okami, *Yoshimoto renga ron shū*, 235.

\(^{33}\) Imai, *Hikaru Genji ichibu uta*, 284, 288.

\(^{34}\) For commentary and complete English translations, see Goff, *Noh Drama and The Tale of Genji*, 182–97.


\(^{37}\) Commentaries that mention the Byōdō-in or its site confidently include *Kakaishō* (1367), *Genji taigai shinpishō* (ca. 1430), *Rōkashō* (1476), *Bansui ichiro* (1575), and *Mōshinshō* (1574). *Sairyūshō* (ca. 1528) gives it as the main possibility, but *Mingō nisso* (1598) doubts the idea. Only *Kachō yosei* (1472) omits the Byōdō-in entirely.
person with a boat, since the boat would have landed further downstream. The only possibility left is a spirit.

If medieval readers were more or less agreed on the subject, when did the controversy about it arise? Perhaps Edo-period Confucians like Kumazawa Banzan (1619–91) were the first skeptics. No one will ever know what Banzan might have written about Ukifune, since he never took his *Genji* commentary (*Genji gaiden*) past “Fuji no uraba.” However, he believed that the tale was “written throughout with the basic purpose of the transformation of the style [of society] [fūka],” and his approach to it was thoroughly historicist and rationalist.  

James McMullen wrote, “Banzan provided rational, again sometimes psychological, explanations of the flourishing world of spirits in the novel.” For example, Banzan attributed Yūgao’s death to a psychological cause (fear) rather than to a supernatural one (the phantom woman seen by Genji), and he denied that Rokujō’s living spirit actually left her body to torment Aoi.

Banzan’s emphasis on rationality and psychology is certainly visible in modern discussions of the spirit that speaks in Ukifune’s exorcism scene. Perhaps the most authoritative of these now is the one proposed by Mitani Kuniaki and adopted by Fujimoto Katsuyoshi.

Mitani began by citing from Murasaki Shikibu’s personal collection a poem (*Murasaki Shikibu shū* 44) that comments on a painting. According to the *kotobagaki*, the painting showed a possessed woman with a demon behind her. The exorcist held the demon bound, while a man chanted a sutra. According to the poem, the man was the husband, the possessed woman was his second wife, and the demon (the possessing spirit) was his first wife, now deceased. The poem suggests that although the husband attributes his present wife’s suffering to the resentment of his first, this suffering is really due to his own “heart demon” (*kokoro no oni*), his bad conscience. Mitani concluded from this that although Murasaki Shikibu accepted the phenomena associated with spirit possession, she did not attribute them to the operations of an autonomous, external power. Instead, she saw the afflicting spirit as an expression of the guilt of the person whom its rantings addressed: in this case, the husband.

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Mitani linked this view to the psychology of the unconscious and then interpreted in this light the various possession events attributed in the tale to the spirit of Rokujō. Since in these cases Genji is the living person addressed, the spirit is a manifestation of Genji’s own guilt and fear, whether or not he is conscious of them. The same principle therefore applies to the possession scene in “Tenarai.” Since the spirit addresses the Sōzu (the exorcist), it is a manifestation of the Sōzu’s guilt and fear.

The Sōzu is indeed nervous about having come down to Ono from Mt. Hiei to exorcise a young woman, since his action could suggest that he is attracted to her in an unseemly way, hence that he has broken his vows and discredited Buddhism and his fellow monks. However, these misgivings do not adequately support Mitani’s argument. As noted also in the Introduction to this book, Murasaki Shikibu’s poem cannot reliably explain every possession scene in The Tale of Genji, since one cannot be certain in what spirit she wrote it or how generally applicable she took this example to be, and especially since there is no reason to assume that, through her narrator, she wrote her personal understanding into her fiction. Moreover, it is impossible to understand how a power that has carried Ukifune from one place to another and possessed her by this time for two months could be no more than a manifestation of this exorcist’s guilty feelings. Mitani accorded the spirit no significance other than to reveal the unconscious preoccupations of the Sōzu and then of Ukifune, who, after the exorcism, remembers seeing the “very beautiful man,” while Fujimoto denied that what Ukifune sees has anything to do with what the Sōzu hears because Ukifune does not remember ever having been possessed by a monk.

Apart from the circumstances of Ukifune’s disappearance and her own memories of what happened to her, the narrative repeatedly hints at possession and spirit abduction. When the women of the household see Ukifune so depressed (“Ukifune”), they immediately wonder whether a spirit is troubling her, and her nurse exclaims a little later, “The way you keep lying about, for some reason, there must be some spirit trying to spoil everything!”41 At the end of the chapter Ukon lies down beside Ukifune and says, “They say the soul of anyone with such cares as yours may go wandering far away. Perhaps that is why your mother had those [alarming] dreams [of you].”42 The hints grow broader in “Kagerō,” which begins with a remark that Ukifune’s

41 TTG, 1038; SNKBT 6:182.
42 TTG, 1044; GM 6:196.
disappearance resembles a maiden’s abduction in a tale—presumably one about a maiden being taken by a demon. Ukifune’s nurse is heard crying, “Whoever you are who took my darling, human or demon, oh, give her back!”; Ukifune’s mother “could only suppose that a demon had devoured her or that some fox-like creature had made off with her”; and Kaoru sighs about what an awful place Uji is, speculating that “[t]here must be a demon living there.”

Late in “Tenarai” the narrator actually tells the reader that a spirit took Ukifune. Having been called to the palace to exorcise the First Princess, the Sōzu stays on to chat with the empress and tells her about the young woman found at Uji. All the empress’s gentlewomen are asleep except one Kozaishō, who listens eagerly. When the Sōzu’s story is over she asks, “But why did the spirit take a well-born girl to a place like that?” The Sōzu, whose power and experience qualify him to know spirits, must have told the empress how Ukifune got to the Uji Villa.

The exorcism

Once found, Ukifune remains for two months or so in a sort of trance—a condition that any character in the tale would be likely to associate with spirit possession. The Sōzu’s sister clearly does so. Although to all appearances dying, Ukifune never dies. At rare moments she says a word or two—once to implore the Sōzu’s sister to throw her into the river—but normally she is silent, still, and inaccessible, although she apparently eats enough to survive and retain her looks. She has no memory of her past or of who she is. At last the Sōzu’s sister begs her brother to come down from Mt. Hiei and exorcise her. In order to succeed, the Heian exorcist had to get the possessing spirit to move into a medium. (The Sōzu has one with him.) Once it had moved, he could make it confess who it was and why it was causing trouble; then he could admonish it and dismiss it. The spirit would naturally resist this transfer, which a particularly potent one could

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44 The Princess who so fascinates Kaoru in “Kagerō.” Her need for exorcism may be only a plot device to bring the Sōzu and the empress together, but it may also be related to Kaoru’s interest in her. If it is, then the possessing power is the same one that afflicts Ukifune, and the Sōzu recognizes this, so that in his conversation with the empress he is naturally reminded of Ukifune.
45 TTG, 1102; GM 6:346.
46 TTG, 1081; GM 6:288.
make very difficult. In the narrative, the Sōzu attempts to follow these steps.

The Sōzu made a mighty vow that the rite he was about to undertake would succeed, whatever it cost him, and he went at it the entire night. At dawn he successfully got the spirit to flee into the medium, whereupon he and the Adept, his disciple, redoubled their efforts to make it say what sort of power it was and why it was tormenting its victim this way.

The spirit then makes the following declaration:

“I am not someone you may force here and subdue. Once I was a practicing monk [hōshi], and a little grudge against this world kept me wandering until I settled in a house full of pretty women. I killed one of them, and then this one chose to turn against life and kept saying day and night that she wanted only to die. That was my chance, and I seized her one dark night when she was alone. Somehow, however, Kannon managed to protect her after all, and now I have lost to this [Sōzu]. I shall go.”

“What is speaking?” [the Sōzu asked]. But perhaps the possessed medium was weak by then, because there was no proper answer.\(^{47}\)

The Sōzu compels the spirit to speak, but he cannot make it identify itself properly or explain its motive. He also cannot dismiss it adequately, since it leaves of its own accord. All this suggests that he has not fully subdued it and that it may be back. Meanwhile, it has revealed that Kannon was responsible for Ukifune’s presence at the Uji Villa: Kannon prevented the spirit from taking her all the way into death by making it drop her there. If Kannon had not done so, Ukifune would have been found dead the next morning on the veranda of her house: for this is the meaning of moteyuku (“take away”) or toru (“take”) when the subject is an angry spirit (onryō). The person “taken” dies on the spot.

If this spirit is identifiable, it must be someone known to the reader, and the needed clues must be present in its speech. Its opening words (“I am not someone you may force here and subdue”) are already a warning. Then it says, “Once I was a practicing monk.” The only figure in the tale who fits this description is Retired Emperor Suzaku, who died after several years as an ordained monk. An emperor’s spirit could

\(^{47}\) TTG, 1083; GM 6:294–5.
certainly speak this loftily. Moreover, the reader has already been told that in life Suzaku owned the Uji Villa.

The idea of an imperial curse

Angry spirits were feared in Heian times, and an emperor’s posthumous wrath was seen as especially dangerous. The threat was that such a spirit would “take” one or more people. *Eiga monogatari* reports that when Emperor Kazan (968–1008, r. 984–986) was gravely ill, he kept repeating, “If I die, I shall take all the Princesses with me before the end of the forty-nine days.” Then he died. All four of his daughters died within that time. He had indeed taken them with him (*mote-tori-yuku*), and that is what the spirit meant to do with Ukifune. The *Eiga* narrator remarks, “Everyone agreed that the strength of a high-born person’s will is a fearsome thing.”

*Kikki*, the diary of Yoshida Tsunefusa (1142–1200) recorded an imperial curse under the date Juei 2/7/16 (1183). Retired Emperor Sutoku (1119–64, r. 1123–41), in exile in Sanuki, copied the *gobu daijō* (“five-part Mahāyana”) in his own blood and wrote at the end, “This is so that in an unjust reign my merit for the life to come should destroy the realm” (*hiri no yo, goshō no ryō, tenka wo horobosubeki no omomuki*). The sutras he had copied were to be sunk in the sea. However, the court obtained them and instead dedicated them at a temple “in order to bring his angry spirit to enlightenment.” Tsunefusa wrote at the end, “Terrifying, terrifying!”

Retired Emperor Gotoba (1180–1239, r. 1183–98) even left first-person testimony on the subject of angry spirits. On Katei 3 8/25 (1237), in exile on Oki, he wrote a testament in which he recorded what Emperor Goshirakawa (1127–92, r. 1155–58) had once told him: that Goshirakawa hoped to escape the cycle of reincarnation but was also afraid of becoming a demonic spirit (*maen*). If that should happen, Goshirakawa told Gotoba, and something takes (*toru koto araba*) any descendant of mine, understand that none other than my own power will have done it. He continued,

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48 *Hōshi* is not too modest for a monk-emperor. In “Usugumo,” Emperor Reizei thinks of the ranking monk who tells him the secret of his (Reizei’s) birth as a *hōshi*, and in “Wakamurasaki” the word designates Murasaki’s great uncle, a monk of high rank.


50 The *Kegonkyō*, *Daihōdōdaishūkyō*, *Daibon hannyakyō*, *Hokekyō*, and *Nehangyō*.

51 Quoted in Katō, “Shōkū kyōdan ni yoru ichinichikyō kuyō,” 122.
If I turn all my good works and merit to evil and do anything of that kind, all that good will vanish, and I will enter deeper and deeper into evil. If any descendant of mine is then ruling the realm, he must perform no rite for the gods or buddhas but to pray for my enlightenment.

Then he went on,

Alas, I acted foolishly, paid little heed to what he had said, prayed for this and that, went on pilgrimage here and there, and now it has come to this [kakaru koto ni narinki]. If hereafter any descendant of mine rules the realm and performs any such rites that are not for my enlightenment, my curse will be upon him [ikko ni on-mi no tatari to narubeki koto nari].

Katō Gitai concluded from these examples that the greater the person’s power or prestige in life, the more powerful that person’s spirit will be after death, and that “When an emperor who has accumulated great Buddhist merit applies the power of that merit negatively and becomes an onryō, the result is a very powerful onryō indeed.”

Goshirakawa, Sutoku, and Gotoba were all bitter about what they had suffered at the hands of others. Goshirakawa had been forced to abdicate, while Sutoku and Gotoba had been exiled. No emperor faced exile in the time of The Tale of Genji, but forced abdication occurred (Kazan is an example), and succession issues, too, could cause acute resentment. One of these arose at the death of Emperor Ichijō (980–1011, r. 986–1011). In conformity with custom, Ichijō was to designate before he died his heir apparent’s (Sanjō, 976–1017, r. 1011–16) successor. According to Eiga monogatari he wanted to appoint his eldest son, a grandson of Fujiwara no Korechika (974–1010), but was obliged instead to appoint a grandson of Fujiwara no Michinaga. Eiga also records that Michinaga disposed of Ichijō’s

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52 Quoted in Katō, “Shōkū kyōdan ni yoru ichinichiyō kuyō,” 123. Katō noted that in Godaiteiō monogatari, a historical tale (rekishi monogatari) written prior to 1327, Gotoba plays a major role as an onryō.
54 Gukanshō describes fears that Goshirakawa’s onryō had become active. Okami and Akamatsu, Gukanshō, 293–4; Brown and Ishida, The Future and the Past, 168–71.
55 Yamanaka et al., Eiga monogatari 1:484; McCullough and McCullough, A Tale of Flowering Fortunes 1:309–10.
property after Ichijō’s death.\textsuperscript{56} He was therefore in a good position to find, as \textit{Gukanshō} reports him doing,

something that looked like an Imperial Mandate written in the deceased Emperor’s hand. At the beginning of the document were these words:

“The sun, moon, and stars wish to lighten the world, but they are hidden by great banks of clouds and the sky is dark.” Without reading further, Michinaga rolled up the document and burned it.\textsuperscript{57}

He had probably recognized a written curse. \textit{Eiga}’s silence about his discovery does nothing to make this unlikely. No such sentiments, written or oral, would be mentioned in \textit{Genji}, either, but the bitter succession struggle between the factions represented by Genji and Suzaku is central to the tale. The narrative describes the spirit of Genji’s father hurrying to the palace and glaring angrily into Suzaku’s eyes, and it also mentions the death of Suzaku’s maternal grandfather and the grave illness of his mother. Although the narrator blames neither the death nor the illness on Genji’s father, people might well have feared under the circumstances that he had “taken” one and meant to “take” the other. From the standpoint of the reader, whose sympathy lies with Genji, the Kiritsubo Emperor’s partisan intervention merely upholds right and justice. Seen from Kokiden’s side, however, he is an onryō. Suzaku could therefore be one, too, as long as a reason can be found to explain his condition.

\textbf{Suzaku’s “little grudge”}

That reason is the spirit’s “little grudge.” The expression (\textit{isasaka naru urami}) is a grim euphemism. Kashiwagi similarly cites a “little matter” (\textit{isasaka naru koto}) to explain his falling out with Genji: his violation of Genji’s wife, which leads to his own death.\textsuperscript{58} In “Hashihime,” a monk tells Retired Emperor Reizei that “a trifling matter” (\textit{hakanaki koto}) prevents the Eighth Prince from leaving the world: the fate of the prince’s two daughters, who would be alone and defenseless without him.\textsuperscript{59} Again, in “Agemaki,” Hachimiya tells the same monk in a dream, from the afterworld, that “little affections” (\textit{isasaka uchi-omoishi koto}) have kept him far removed from paradise.\textsuperscript{60} The spirit’s “little grudge” therefore involves attachment to a woman, one

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{56} Yamanaka at al., \textit{Eiga monogatari} 1:465–8; McCullough and McCullough, \textit{A Tale of Flowering Fortunes} 1:318.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Okami and Akamatsu, \textit{Gukanshō}, 173; Brown and Ishida, \textit{The Future and the Past}, 58.
\item \textsuperscript{58} TTG, 684; GM 4:316.
\item \textsuperscript{59} TTG, 833; GM 5:129.
\item \textsuperscript{60} TTG, 906; GM 5:320.
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so strong as to compromise the speaker’s spiritual wellbeing. The woman may be either a lover or a daughter. If the spirit is Suzaku’s, she can only be Suzaku’s cherished Third Princess.

Suzaku loved this wanly appealing creature beyond all reason, and to assure her future he married her to Genji. Then Murasaki became desperately ill, and Genji spent week after week looking after her. Unfortunately, his prolonged absence in favor of another woman who ranked far below the Third Princess amounted to an insult of which Suzaku was well aware. It also left an opening for Kashiwagi to make love to the Third Princess himself. She became pregnant, and Genji soon found out what had happened. He forgave neither Kashiwagi, who died under the burden of his wrath, nor the Third Princess, who became terrified of him. The birth of the resulting child, Kaoru, made Suzaku’s daughter ill.

Suzaku had felt unable to leave the world until the Third Princess was securely settled. Once her marriage to Genji was arranged, he therefore entered a “mountain temple” as an ordained monk. Unfortunately, he soon began hearing rumors that Genji was slighting or neglecting her. Next came the catastrophe of Kashiwagi. Of course it was kept from him, but, as “The Disaster of the Third Princess” explains, he worked it out anyway. Genji warned the Third Princess to behave and not “stand in [your father’s] way on the path towards the life to come,” 61 but when she became ill in connection with Kaoru’s ignominious birth, she could no longer contain herself. “I may never see [my father] again!” she cried, weeping bitterly. Genji had to tell Suzaku. A monk was supposed to be beyond all worldly care, but in answer to her need Suzaku came down from his mountain by night to be with her. No monk should have done such a thing, still less a cloistered emperor. His daughter immediately begged him to ordain her. The reader watches in astonishment while Suzaku and his daughter join forces against Genji to make her a nun. Genji has betrayed Suzaku’s hopes, and Suzaku’s obsession with his daughter has compromised his dignity, his practice, his vows, and all hope of spiritual peace. No wonder his spirit is angry.

This is the “little grudge” that leads his onryō eventually to settle in a “house full of pretty women.” It is the Eighth Prince’s house at Uji, inhabited initially by him and his two daughters, Ōigimi and Nakanokimi. In “Agemaki,” Ōigimi allowed herself to die rather than marry Kaoru,

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61 TTG, 666; GM 4:270.
and at the time her desperate deed seemed entirely her own. Now, the spirit suddenly announces that it killed her.

Why? The spirit has old reasons for bitterness against Genji, but Genji is dead, and the accessible focus for its anger is Kaoru. Moreover, Ōigimi and Ukifune are both Suzaku’s nieces (daughters of a half-brother), and the testimony of Goshirakawa suggests that an imperial onryō may have been more likely to attack a descendant. The spirit appears to have killed Ōigimi because she was the great love of Kaoru’s life, and to have tried to kill Ukifune because, for Kaoru, Ukifune is an explicit substitute for Ōigimi.\(^{62}\)

The Sōzu’s story about the young woman found at the Uji Villa frightens the empress so much that he “remained silent about what he had not yet told.”\(^{63}\) What had he not yet told? Probably what the spirit had said, since its words suggest so awful a conclusion. As for the Sōzu, he may have known. His failure to get a proper answer to the question “What is speaking?” may be a narratorial evasion, since no one addressing the tale’s original audience could have identified such a spirit clearly.

Ukifune deranged

Ukifune’s dramatic passage to the Uji Villa naturally lingers in the reader’s mind, but her exorcism attracts relatively little attention. As already noted, medieval renga manuals generally omit it. It has little to offer poetry. A modern study of spirits in the tale must discuss it, but an account of Ukifune’s experience may mention it only in passing as the moment when she returns to herself and begins her new life. Mitani Kuniaki discussed it not in order to affirm its importance but to illustrate the thesis of his article, which concerns the “absence” (fuzai) or the “hollowing out” (kūdōka) of any center in the Uji narrative.

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62 Suzaku may also be attracted to the Uji house by its music. In “Wakana Two” Genji observes to Kashiwagi, “[Yūgiri] is fully competent by now to serve the realm, but he seems not to have much of a gift for the finer things of life, few of which are foreign to [Suzaku]. His Eminence is particularly fond of music, at which he is expert, and I expect that despite his appearance of renunciation he is looking forward to enjoying it in peace” (TTG, 668; GM 4:277). Music seems to have been Suzaku’s sole genuine accomplishment. The idea that he is “looking forward to enjoying it in peace” is probably disparaging, since its pleasures were held in principle to hinder progress on the religious path. Genji seems to doubt that Suzaku will be able to resist those pleasures even then. His remark, which may foreshadow Suzaku’s inability to give up his concern for his favorite daughter, may also suggest why Suzaku’s spirit settled in that “house full of pretty women,” since the Eighth Prince, like Suzaku, had no skill other than music, which his daughters also favored.

63 TTG, 1102; GM 6:345.
Having argued that the spirit means one thing to the Sōzu and something else to Ukifune, in keeping with the unrelated, subconscious preoccupations of each, Mitani concluded that in the narrative’s larger context it actually means nothing at all.\(^{64}\) Some studies of Ukifune have even ignored the spirit, the exorcism, and every hint of the supernatural.\(^{65}\) However, if the spirit is Suzaku’s its role is surely significant, and its most obvious victim is Ukifune herself.

The narrative’s portrayal of Ukifune is confusing. Although she grew up in the wilds of the East (Hitachi), Kaoru’s first glimpse of her (“Yadorigi”) shows him a beautiful young woman so sheltered and refined that she hardly even knows how to get down from a carriage. The day’s journey from Hasedera has exhausted her, unlike her hale and hearty (hence crude) gentlewomen. Otherwise, she has little to say and few thoughts, apart from those associated with attachment to her mother and dismay over being caught between Kaoru and Niou.

Her education is puzzling.\(^{66}\) Kaoru finds her acceptably ladylike, and so in time do Nakanokimi and Niou. One readily assumes that her mother, who has always longed to marry her well and who knows life among the high nobility, has taught her proper deportment. However, it appears in “Azumaya” that she cannot play a single note of music, not even on the wagon (the instrument characteristic of the East),\(^{67}\) and in “Tenarai” that her “unfortunate upbringing” never left her “the time for such things.”\(^{68}\) Her mother’s ambition for her makes this incomprehensible. She also has no training in poetry, since she cannot join in when the nuns at Ono amuse themselves by composing poetry. Nonetheless, she manages in practice to write for herself, and to exchange with others, poems that show adequate familiarity with established poetic diction. Perhaps the most curious detail about her is her startling skill at go (“Tenarai”)—one that even she seems not to expect.

Ukifune is very pretty, although Kaoru and Niou both assure themselves repeatedly that she has nothing like the distinction of Ôigimi or Nakanokimi; she is susceptible to sensual pleasure, which the loftier Ôigimi shunned; and, in a dilemma that she cannot resolve, she is

\(^{64}\) Mitani Kuniaki, “Genji monogatari daisanbu no hōhō,” 102.

\(^{65}\) Akiyama, *Genji monogatari no sekai*, 249–69.

\(^{66}\) Nagai Kazuko (“Ukifune,” 287) likewise found the way Ukifune’s mother had neglected her daughter’s education incomprehensible.

\(^{67}\) TTG, 1004; GM 6:100.

\(^{68}\) TTG, 1085; GM 6:302.
prone to spend more and more time lying on the floor listening to other people talk. She is passive. Her one act of resistance occurs when Kaoru sends her a letter revealing that he knows what has been going on between her and Niou: she sends it back, claiming that it has been delivered to the wrong person. Kaoru smiles at her response, reflecting that he did not know she had it in her. Still, her gesture is one of passive rather than active resistance. A more ordinary man than Kaoru might laugh, wonder what kind of fool she takes him for, and either drop her or move her elsewhere immediately.

Her attempt to die highlights her passivity. She does not think of drowning until she hears her mother and the other women talking about how many people have drowned in the river. No doubt she makes active preparations (destroying her papers, writing farewell poems), but when the moment comes she cannot go through with it, as she herself recalls after the exorcism, when her mind clears and she remembers some of what happened to her.

I threw myself into the water (didn’t I?) because I could bear no more. But where am I now? She tried and tried to remember, and at last it came to her that she had been in dark despair. They were all asleep, and I opened the double doors and went out. There was a strong wind blowing, and I could hear the river’s roar. Out there all alone I was frightened, too frightened to think clearly about what had happened or what was to come next, and when I stepped down onto the veranda I became confused about where I was going. I only knew that going back in would not help and that all I wanted was to disappear bravely from life. Come and eat me, demons or whatever things are out there, do not leave me to be found foolishly cowering here! I was saying that, rooted to the spot, when a very beautiful man approached me and said, “Come with me to where I live!”; and it seemed to me that he took me in his arms. I assumed that he was the gentleman they addressed as “Your Highness,” but then my mind must have wandered, until he put me down in a place I did not know. Then he vanished. When it was over I realized that I had not done what I had meant to do, and I cried and cried. After that, though, I remember nothing.69

She became frightened and confused on the veranda (sunoko), and she never reached the river at all.70 Perhaps she wished to embrace

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69 TTG, 1083; GM 6:296.
70 A model of the Uji house, made at Chūbu University, shows the river running right past it, roughly in the place where the lake would be relative to a shinden dwelling in the city. A gallery broken by a “middle gate” (chūmon) runs from the house to where the tsuridono
death bravely, but in reality she cowered there and begged the spirits to come out of the dark and do for her what she could not do for herself.\textsuperscript{71} So one did. She was “taken” at her own request.

It is widely assumed that after the exorcism she recovers her wits fully and permanently. However, her attitude at Ono is unusual. She displays little human affect toward the nuns (the Sōzu’s sister and mother, and their women) who have gladly given her refuge, regarding them all with disdain. She who grew up in the East contemplates their drab colors and self-pityingly remembers the elegant women who used to surround her in the capital. One wonders when that can have been. Nor is she grateful to Kannon for saving her life. She refuses to accompany the Sōzu’s sister on a pilgrimage to Hasedera, reflecting that she has no wish to travel that way with people she does not even know and protesting silently that, in any case, Kannon has never done anything for \textit{her}. She seems to be elsewhere. In fact, she appears still to be under the spirit’s sway and so at least partially deranged.

She and the Sōzu both continue to suspect and fear the spirit’s presence. When she begs him to make her a nun (“Tenarai”), the narrator remarks:

His Reverence could not understand it. What could have caused her, with all her beauty, so profoundly to detest what she was? The spirit possessing her had talked about that, he remembered. Yes, no doubt she has good reason! Why, it is a wonder that she even survived! She is in fearful danger, now that that evil thing has noticed her.\textsuperscript{72}

And the Sōzu says when at last he tells Kaoru about her (“Yume no ukihashi”):

I performed [the exorcism], and after that the young woman at last revived and became human; but she told me sadly that she felt as though the thing that had possessed her was still with her after all, and that she wanted to escape its evil influence and devote herself to praying for the life to come.\textsuperscript{73}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{71} Similarly, in “Yokobue” the ghost of Kashiwagi comes to the sound of Yūgiri playing the flute that Kashiwagi once treasured; and in “Agemaki,” Ōigimi implores the spirit of her father to “gather me to you, wherever you are!”, whereupon her sister has a vivid dream of him.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{72} TTG, 1099; GM 6:336.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{73} TTG, 1114; GM 6:377.}
The Sōzu’s fear for her is one reason he ordains her, despite his doubts about the wisdom of doing so. He hopes that being a nun will help to protect her.

The wavering character of her memories recalls someone whose madness still leaves her spells of relative lucidity. She often insists that she remembers nothing, and although sometimes she seems to be lying, at other times she seems to be speaking the truth. She remembers more in her lucid moments, when the spirit’s grip weakens, and less when it grows stronger.

A moment of severe fright shocks her into her clearest memories in “Tenarai.” She is not yet a nun, and the former son-in-law of the Sōzu’s sister is pursuing her. To escape his advances she seeks refuge in a room she has never entered before, that of the Sōzu’s mother. The old nun wakes up in the middle of the night and sees her lying there. “Who are you and what are you doing here?” she demands to know. The terrified Ukifune takes her for a demon.

She is going to eat me! she thought. That time when the demon made off with me I was unconscious—it was so much easier! What am I to do? She felt trapped. I came back to life in that shocking guise, I became human, and now those awful things that happened are tormenting me again! Bewilderment, terror—oh yes, I have feelings! And if I had died I would now be surrounded by beings more terrifying still!74

The elusive original suggests that the “shocking guise” she remembers is that of a body—hers—possessed by an alien power: the one the monks found at the Uji Villa.75 She grasps that after her initial ordeal she remained in a non-human guise (since an angry spirit is not human) until the exorcism restored her sufficiently to humanity (hito to narite) that she could manage daily life; and in this moment when shock has returned her most fully to herself, she realizes that despite her usual remoteness and coldness she has human feelings after all. Her thoughts then begin to range “as never before over the whole course of her life,” which she now remembers in a normal way.76

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74 TTG, 1097; GM 6:330–1.
75 “Shocking” is imiji, the adjective used self-descriptively by the spirit of Rokujō in the possession scene involving Murasaki (“Wakana Two”).
76 In “Yume no ukihashi,” Ukifune describes her wavering state of consciousness as follows to the Sōzu’s sister: “You see, the reason I told you nothing is that I hated to imagine you then knowing that I had kept so much from you. The distressing spectacle I undoubtedly made must have offended you, but I could not remember anything of my past
These memories convince her that Niou was a reprehensible bounder whom she should have shunned at all costs, but she feels at the same time a fond regret for Kaoru. “No, no, I must not feel that way!” she silently reproves herself. “I will not have it!” She is determined instead to become a nun.

Ukifune first mentioned this desire after her exorcism and her recollection of the “very beautiful man.” At the time, the Sōzu’s sister allowed her to receive the five precepts given to laymen, but no more. Later on, when this lady and most of the rest of the household are away on pilgrimage to Hasedera, the Sōzu comes to the house, and Ukifune seizes this opportunity to ask him to ordain her.

This is a strange ambition for a young woman, as the narrative has pointed out before, and the “Tenarai” chapter stresses repeatedly that such a step is unnatural and dangerous, especially for a young woman with Ukifune’s looks. Whether she deserves praise for wishing to take it depends on the source of her desire to do so. To be praiseworthy it must be hers, conceived in response to an inner urge all her own. However, it could just as well be her demon’s, devised in the service of that demon’s own purposes; and the demon has reason to force her to become a nun. Long ago, disaster and dishonor left Suzaku’s daughter no other choice once she had borne Kaoru, who remains in thrall to the memory of Ukifune.

Ukifune begs the Sōzu to make her a nun immediately, pleading that she feels extremely unwell and that in fact she may be dying. “My state now is just as bad as it was last time,” she says, referring to when she received the five precepts, “and I feel so ill already that if I get much worse the precepts will no longer do me any good.” The narrative says nothing about the nature of her illness, but since she herself associates it with a time of great physical weakness and even worse mental disturbance provoked by spirit possession, her condition now probably has a similar cause. However, Imai Gen’e suggested then, I suppose because I was not in my right mind and because my soul, if that is the word, was no longer what it had been. But then I heard the gentleman they told me was the Governor of Kii talking to you about people I felt I had once known, and it seemed to me that I was beginning to remember things. I went on thinking about it all after that, but I still could not grasp anything clearly…” (TTG, 1118; GM 6:389) This moment occurs some time after Ukifune’s thoughts have ranged “as never before over the whole course of her life.”

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77 TTG, 1097; GM 6:331.
78 TTG, 1099; GM 6:337.
that in fact there is nothing wrong with her and that she is simply lying in the service of her higher aspiration.\textsuperscript{79}

Imai did so in the context of his argument that Ukifune is “a modern version of Kaguya-hime,”\textsuperscript{80} the heroine of \textit{Taketori monogatari}. Early in “Tenarai” the Sōzu’s sister herself made this association,\textsuperscript{81} and Imai and others, especially Kobayashi Masaaki, have developed the idea.\textsuperscript{82} Imai conceded that Ukifune is of the earth, unlike Kaguya-hime, whose home is the heavens, but he read her becoming a nun, hence liberating herself from the world, as a metaphorical parallel to Kaguya-hime’s return to the moon.\textsuperscript{83} Thus he accepted the fittingness of everything she thinks and does toward that noble goal, and approved her lies as skillful means.

However, Ukifune cannot really be Kaguya-hime, whose celestial nature is fundamentally different from that of the earthly couple who nurture her. Kaguya-hime is a fairy, a magical being, and it is no wonder that she should return in the end to another world. However, the Ukifune of “Ukifune” and earlier is not like that; nor is the one of “Tenarai” and later, except that the spirit seems to have separated her mind from her body. Her body remains as earthly as ever, but her mind rejects any relationship not only with her past, but also with her worldly present. She refuses to recognize any relationship between herself and the Sōzu’s sister or anyone else at Ono, as Imai acknowledged. He attributed this to her courage and her lofty resolve, of which he, like many others, wrote movingly.

Nonetheless, despite her wish to become a nun, the narrative conveys only her dismay at having to suffer the presence of the Ono nuns. To her, they are drab, officious, tedious, and crude. She has no sympathy for them and no gratitude, either. In time she becomes a nun herself, but she remains ashamed of her appearance. She may study the sutras, but there is no sign that she learns anything from them in the way of either wisdom or compassion. In her radically selfish state, her thoughts are unrelated to her own circumstances. Her memories of elegant surroundings in the capital (Kaguya-hime’s palace in the moon) are

\textsuperscript{79} Imai, “Ukifune no zōkei,” 62.
\textsuperscript{80} Imai, “Ukifune no zōkei, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{81} The Sōzu’s sister “was as wonder-struck as the old bamboo cutter must have been when he found Kaguya-hime, and she waited apprehensively to see through what crack [Ukifune] might vanish forever” (TTG, 1085; GM 6: 302).
\textsuperscript{82} Kobayashi, “Saigo no Ukifune” and “Ukifune no shukke.”
\textsuperscript{83} Imai, “Ukifune no zōkei,” 58.
hardly more than fantasies, and her conception of the religious life is so constricted that it is little more than a fantasy either. An earthly young woman whose thoughts are Kaguya-hime’s is deranged, and those who care for her risk serious trouble.

The Sōzu’s fall

The Sōzu is an example. Kozaishō is the only gentlewoman listening when he tells the empress about the young woman found at Uji. Kaoru, her lover, soon hears the story too and realizes who the young woman must be. By the end of “Tenarai” he is all but certain. At the start of “Yume no ukihashi” he visits the Sōzu on Mt. Hiei, questions him, and discovers exactly where she is. He also lets the Sōzu know that Ukifune is his responsibility. She is his, not the Sōzu’s, to dispose of.

Kaoru is a very great lord, and the Sōzu, a senior and respected member of the Buddhist hierarchy, wilts before him. Upon learning the truth, “His Reverence felt as though he had committed a grave error in turning a young woman so important to [Kaoru] into someone now dead to the world.”

Not that Kaoru flaunts his rank; it is simply self-evident. Having once removed himself entirely from the profane world, the Sōzu is now again under its sway. Like Suzaku, he has compromised himself by ordaining a young woman.

It all began at the Uji Villa, when he decided not to leave Ukifune to die, but his critical gesture was coming down from Mt. Hiei to exorcise her. After hesitating a moment, he reflected that “a tie already links me to her” and decided to proceed. His sister and his disciples both saw “that it might not redound to his credit if it were to be noised about that he had left deep retreat on the Mountain to pray earnestly for a woman who really meant nothing to him at all.” However, he brushed their objections aside.

“As a monk I am hopeless enough already,” he said, “and I am sure I violate this precept or that all the time, but I have never suffered reproach over a woman, nor have I ever erred in that direction. If I do so now, when I am over sixty years old, it will only have been my destiny.”

The exorcism therefore commits him further to Ukifune, and when at last she begs him to ordain her he cannot refuse. Now his fate is so entangled with hers that he has no choice but to cooperate ignominiously with Kaoru in undoing what he has done.

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84 TTG, 1114; GM 6:377.
85 TTG, 1083; GM 6:294.
Kaoru, who brought Ukifune’s young half-brother along to use as a
go-between, asks the Sōzu to give the boy a note for Ukifune. “It
would be a sin for me to play any such part in bringing you to her,”
the Sōzu replies, but Kaoru protests immaculate intentions:

I am mortified that my request should seem to you to carry the danger
of sin. I myself hardly understand how I can have lived this long as a
layman…I take care never to do what the Buddha forbids, to the extent
that I understand these things, and at heart I am no less than a holy
man myself. How could I possibly place myself at risk of sin in so
trivial a matter…I shall be perfectly happy if only I am able to discover
her circumstances for myself and to set her mother’s heart at rest. 86

It has often been suggested that the theme of the Uji chapters is
Kaoru’s simultaneous preoccupation with love and renunciation, 87
and this passage has been cited to show that this preoccupation
remains unresolved to the end. However, by this time Kaoru’s
protestations ring hollow, and his claim to be “no less than a holy
man” sounds fanciful at best. One can hardly tell whether he means
what he says, whether he is lying in order to secure the Sōzu’s
cooperation, or whether the narrator is simply repeating platitudes
about him. In any event, the Sōzu cannot presume to press him. He
must accept Kaoru’s words at face value. He therefore writes the
note, which is indeed a sin, and hands it to the boy, to whom he then
suddenly begins making unseemly advances. Such is his fall from the
venerable height that he occupied early in “Tenarai.”

The ending
In the last scene of the chapter and the book, Kaoru sends Ukifune’s
half-brother to her with the Sōzu’s note and a letter from himself,
effecting that the boy will talk to her and arrange for him to do the
same. Instead, Ukifune will neither acknowledge Kaoru’s letter as
concerning her nor recognize her brother, let alone talk to him.
However, the intense pressure on her (from a brother she once liked,
from her spiritual advisor, from Kaoru, from the nuns around her)
rouses her to nothing resembling self-possessed refusal. Instead it
incapacitates her. The more she is pressed to respond normally (angry
resistance, acknowledgment of the inevitable, affection for mother
and brother, concession of fondness for Kaoru, consideration for the
nuns, defense of her dignity as a nun, and so on), the more she recedes

86 TTG, 1115; GM 6:380–1.
87 For example, Mitani Kuniaki, “Genji monogatari daisanbu no hōhō,” 87–8; and Suzuki
into paralyzed inhumanity. Soon, nothing is left of her but a voice repeating that she is unwell, very unwell; that a letter plainly addressed to her must be for someone else; and that although she is trying to remember these people who claim to know her, she remembers no one and nothing. She can only lie prostrate with her face buried in her clothes. In her story all these signs, especially her failure of memory, are symptoms of possession. Kikuta Shigeo observed that the only way for Ukifune to resist the various pressures on her, so as not to stray from the long path to salvation that lies before her, is to “disguise herself in insentience” (hijō ni jiko o yosou); but the Sōzu’s sister gives the boy a better explanation. “There may be a spirit afflicting her,” she says. There is indeed.

Ukifune’s half-brother returns to Kaoru, and the lines describing his reaction close the book:

Kaoru, who had awaited him eagerly, was confounded by this inconclusive outcome. He reflected that he would have done better to refrain and went on to ponder, among other things, the thought that someone else might be hiding her there, just as he himself had once, after full deliberation, consigned her to invisibility.

Beyond the ending

Arthur Waley found this ending “perfect,” and for Mitani Kuniaki the void that follows it perfectly concludes the Uji chapters. Others, however, have wanted to know what happened afterwards. Yamaji no tsuyu therefore continues the story: Ukifune meets both Kaoru and her mother again, after all. Kumogakure rokujō (Muromachi period?) takes the story still further, in a thoroughly respectable manner. In the “Sumori” chapter, Kaoru returns Ukifune to lay life and entrusts her to his wife, the Second Princess; and in the “Nori no shi” chapter Ukifune figures as Sanjō no Ue, the mother of two of Kaoru’s children. She and Kaoru take the precepts together at Yokawa.

The following speculation about what happens beyond the end of the tale claims no virtue but consistency with the above discussion. It is offered in a spirit of play.

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89 TTG, 1119; GM 6:393.
90 TTG, 1120; GM 6:395.
Readers have often imagined Ukifune setting out resolutely toward a higher goal and, like the author of *Yamaji no tsuyu*, they have seen her maintaining this praiseworthy aspiration, under her present circumstances, into an indefinite future. However, it is difficult to see how she could do so. Unless she is to set out alone, begging her way along the roads and exposing herself at the same time to many obvious perils, she will continue to require the support and care of others who wish her well. For the moment these others are the Ono nuns, with whom her relationship is vital, whether she acknowledges it or not. Unfortunately, her complete withdrawal from human contact at the end of “Yume no ukihashi” leaves these nuns in an impossible position. If the Sōzu cannot defy Kaoru, the nuns can still less defy both of them. The first time Ukifune rejected a letter from Kaoru on the grounds that it was not for her, she risked provoking him either to abandon her or to reclaim her against her will. By doing so again, she abdicates any responsibility for her own fate. She can do nothing for herself, since she has removed herself completely from her own situation, and there is nothing the nuns can do for her either. They will have to yield in one way or another to Kaoru’s wishes. And this is to speak only of Kaoru. How long will Ukifune’s brother keep the news from his mother, and what dramatic scene will follow when she finds out? The author of *Yamaji no tsuyu* has Ukon (summoned by Kaoru) plan elaborate precautions to prevent an unseemly outburst and a dangerous failure of discretion before she and the boy tell Ukifune’s mother that Ukifune is still alive.

Above all, there is Niou. Near the end of “Tenarai” Kaoru reflects:

> How strange it will feel if this young woman really turns out to be she! How can I make sure? People may well think me an idiot if I start making inquiries in person, and if His Highness [Niou] were to hear of it he would certainly do everything in his power to prevent her from following the path she has chosen. Perhaps Her Majesty said nothing, despite her knowledge of this extraordinary matter, because he asked her not to. If he is involved I shall have to consider her well and truly dead, however strongly I may feel about her.

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92 Imai Gen’e, for example, wrote of her finding peace in spending the rest of her life as a solitary nun (“Ukifune no zōkei,” 61). However, Hirota Osamu cast doubt on this view when he characterized Ukifune’s story as one not of salvation but of “absence of salvation” (“Jusui shinai Ukifune, seichō shinai Kaoru,” in Sekine Kenji, ed., *Genji monogatari: Uji jūjō no kuwadate*, 144).

93 TTG, 1109; GM 6:366.
He can hardly think of Ukifune without fearing that Niou will find out, too, or that he may already have done so. This fear surfaces again in the book’s last sentence, when Kaoru ponders “the thought that someone else might be hiding her there, just as he himself had once, after full deliberation, consigned her to invisibility.”

In love and rivalry Kaoru and Niou have long been inseparable, and each in his way has been unswerving in his pursuit of Ukifune. The idea of giving up never occurs to either one. A year ago, neither knew what had happened to her, but now Kaoru has found out, and the plot mechanism of the Uji chapters makes it as certain as the orbits of the planets that Niou will soon find out, too. The author of _Yamaji no tsuyu_ felt the same inevitability. By the time her chapter ends, the only question in the reader’s mind is not whether Niou will find out, but when and how, and what will happen then.

The tale’s final sentence therefore hints that Kaoru’s renewed pursuit of Ukifune is about to be joined by Niou’s, although in a more corrupt mood. After all, Ukifune is now a nun, living among nuns. Seen this way, the narrative stops at a brief null point in a tormented process, the progress of which beyond that point can be imagined from what precedes it. In a manner painful for all concerned, Ukifune has turned Kaoru away. Stillness and reflection follow, but surely not for long.

Once, Ukifune could have chosen Niou or Kaoru, but inability to do so delivered her instead to an evil spirit. Kannon prevented the spirit from killing her, but it was too powerful to quell. Ukifune’s disappearance then suspended the rivalry between Kaoru and Niou.

The perfect way to revive that rivalry more destructively than ever is to ensure that once Kaoru and Niou find her again she remains incapable of choice, fight, or flight; and that is just what the spirit does. In her condition of infinite, mesmerizing passivity—one that demands everything and gives back nothing—she resembles a vortex into which all involved with her risk falling.

Neither Niou nor Kaoru could ever visit Uji easily, but the journey was always more difficult for Niou. Each trip there to see Ukifune placed his future in jeopardy. By the end of “Ukifune,” his success in escaping detection (except by Kaoru) already strains credulity. Once his rivalry with Kaoru resumes, past the end of the book, the tension between them will rise to a new pitch. One way or another the affair will come to light. There will be a colossal scandal, into which will vanish the Sōzu’s reputation, Kaoru’s career, the good name of Yūgiri (Niou’s father-in-law), and Niou’s viability as the next emperor. Niou is Genji’s grandson. His downfall will discredit not only himself, but also the
empress (Genji’s daughter) and her other children, including the current heir apparent (also Genji’s grandson). The succession will shift to another line, and no grandson of Genji will ever reign. Could the angry spirit, all that remains of Suzaku, wish for more?94

Conclusion: Ukifune and the author

This essay has argued that Ukifune was transported by a spirit, identified that spirit as Suzaku’s, and argued that the spirit continues to influence her to the end of the tale. But did the author really mean anyone to think of Suzaku? Or is the case for identifying the spirit as Suzaku’s merely an accidental by-product of the process of composition? It is impossible to say. The essay has further maintained that in the last two chapters Ukifune is deranged and that her future promises nothing good.95 This view, which differs from the usual evaluation of Ukifune and her role, undermines the autobiographical reading that makes of Ukifune an image of Murasaki Shikibu herself.

Tomikura Tokujirō remarked in a roundtable discussion in 1948, “When we moderns read Genji, we feel the youth or maturity of the author’s development and grasp the evolution of this great work from that standpoint.”96 He seems to have meant that the later parts of the book convey the author’s increasing maturity, which, for Saigō Nobutsuna as for others, culminates in Ukifune. Saigō wrote at about the same time:

I believe that the instant in which the author finished the Uji chapters must have been the very instant in which she plunged herself wholly into Pure Land teaching, and the instant, too, when monogatari literature approached complete dissolution of self [jiko hōkai]. One can say that the value of Genji monogatari lies in its critical depiction, to the extent possible at the time and thanks to trueness of spirit [tamashii no shinjitsusa], of the downfall of the aristocratic class.97

Saigō saw in Ukifune the author’s attainment of true Buddhist devotion and clairvoyant social awareness. Akiyama Ken wrote, “The attitude reached by Ukifune, that is to say, the position reached by the author

94 Niou is Suzaku’s grandson too, but nothing in the text discourages the reader from imagining the existence of another candidate for heir apparent, outside Genji’s line.

95 Mitani Kuniaki (“Genji monogatari daisanbu no hōhō,” 92) seemed to share a similar pessimism when he wrote, “The fact that Ukifune was refused even death, and that even intentionally becoming a nun could not bring her salvation, is merely a repetitive variation on [the] loss of identity that pervades the Uji chapters as a whole.”

96 “Zadankai ‘Genji monogatari no seiritsu katei’,” 58.

through the evolution of the world of the tale, is none other than a critical attitude toward aristocratic society”; and Enomoto Masazumi considered the figure of Ukifune to reflect the author’s “life experience.” More recently, Setouchi Jakuchō and Kawai Hayao gave this kind of interpretation mass prominence. Setouchi wrote that in describing Ukifune’s ordination the author was really describing her own; that through her the author expressed her own deep longing for salvation; and that by writing Ukifune’s story as a nun the author herself was saved. Kawai (a psychologist) meanwhile argued that through Ukifune the author herself achieved full psychological individuation. For Setouchi and Kawai, Murasaki attained full mastery and wisdom by creating a character dedicated to reaching that goal.

The reading developed in this essay discourages this approach, although it does not of itself put Murasaki Shikibu’s authorship in question. There is unlikely to have been any such straightforward parallel between the author’s state of mind at the end of the tale and the one that she imagined for Ukifune. However, there actually are reasons to question continuous authorship. Some matters already discussed bring the issue into focus with respect to the last two chapters. They suggest a possible change of author, or at least a transition to a new story, between “Ukifune” and “Tenarai.”

One of these matters is the way Ukifune gets from her house to the Uji Villa. Nothing remotely like this occurs earlier in the tale. Ukifune’s appearance under the tree at the Uji Villa has an arbitrary, fantastic character out of keeping with anything else in the book. Another is the confusion over how she traveled. A careful mise en scène in “Ukifune” convinces readers that Ukifune is about to drown herself, but most miss an even more elaborate one later on, designed to reveal that she did not. No doubt rationalist prejudices encourage this error, but the error also suggests a lapse of communication between the author and the reader. With Ukifune’s reappearance at the Uji Villa, the reader’s assumptions about the narrative fail. All unawares, the reader, too, enters a new world.

98 Akiyama, Genji monogatari no sekai, 267.
99 Enomoto, “Ukifune ron e no kokoromi,” 44.
100 Setouchi, Genji monogatari no joseitachi, 152–68.
101 Kawai, Murasaki mandara, 200–33.
102 Mitani Kuniaki (“Genji monogatari daisanbu no hōhō,” 103) pointed out that “Tenarai” begins with the expression sono koro (“at that time”), which he held to indicate a new narrator. Suzuki Hideo (“Uji no monogatari no shudai,” 390) also noted that after “Kagerō”
The exorcism in “Tenarai” is also so unlike earlier scenes involving the spirit of Rokujiō that it raises the same possibility. Even if Murasaki Shikibu did not write the understanding expressed in *Murasaki Shikibu shū* 44 directly and consistently into her fiction, Rokujiō’s major possession scenes have a clear psychological resonance. Murasaki’s suffering over Genji’s marriage to the Third Princess is fully adequate in modern terms to explain her illness on psychological grounds alone, and the possession scene in “Wakana Two,” which reveals Rokujiō as the afflicting agent, has therefore struck many readers as superfluous. The scene in “Tenarai” lacks this resonance completely. It recalls the literature of the fantastic.

Finally, the spirit’s announcement that it killed Ōigimi is surprising, when nothing in “Agemaki” suggests such a thing. Kaoru never orders an exorcism for her, although elsewhere in the tale that would be the obvious thing to do under the circumstances. The best one can say is that the text does not actually exclude the possibility of a spirit.  

If the spirit was active that early it must have influenced the whole Uji story and perhaps most of Kaoru’s life, making the Uji chapters a sort of black parody of the main ones, in which Genji rises to unheard-of glory despite the dark workings of Rokujiō’s bitterness. However, it is only one line (the spirit’s claim to have killed Ōigimi) that suggests such thoughts, and that line could have been planted, in a stroke of editorial genius supported by minor changes in “Agemaki,” to sensational effect. By whom? No one will ever know, but wondering does no harm.

Moreover, Suzuki seems to have found the post-“Tenarai” chapters so different from the earlier ones in the Uji sequence that he carried neither of his discussions of Ukifune (“Ukifune monogatari shiron” and the essay just cited) past “Kagerō.” However, these are merely indicative clues. Neither Mitani nor Suzuki suggested a significant discontinuity between “Ukifune” or “Kagerō” and “Tenarai.”

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103 Ikeda, “Tenarai no maki mono no ke kō,” 175–6.
104 Mitani Kuniaki (“Genji monogatari daisanbu no hōhō,” 92) observed that the Uji chapters turn the main ones “upside down,” although he had a different issue in mind. He wrote that while the “central theme” of the main chapters is kingship (ōken), the key concern of the Uji chapters is disempowerment and dispossession.