

Chapter 5

Surrogacy and the Simulacra of Desire in Heian Japanese Women's Life Writing

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My contribution enquires into how a woman who is born and raised in a patriarchal society where desire is defined by men can become a desiring person in her own right. My argument is based on two propositions. First, that I am a palimpsest, a text that has been erased and re-inscribed by others; I read their inscriptions and try to discern the traces of what is lost. Secondly, that I can rewrite myself through reading texts of other women's lives; in doing so, I make a looking-glass journey into another world, where desire and the self are different, yet strangely familiar. Through the looking glass, I see myself differently and return to rewrite my self.

My working definition of desire is that it is a universal force that produces life in all its different forms. Desire is immanent, productive, impersonal and asocial. Human culture and sexuality are codifications or stratifications of desire.¹ Society seeks to regulate desire, to control its force; part of this regulation has been the attempt to extinguish woman as a desiring subject. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have criticised the Oedipal family structure, analysed and endorsed by psychoanalysis, as 'one of the primary modes of restricting desire in capitalist societies'.² The Oedipus complex has corralled desire within the nuclear family structure, thus individualising it and removing all but residual and commodified traces from the wider social domain, where capitalism regulates relations between groups of people.³ Jacques Lacan has re-read Sigmund Freud's writings in the light of Ferdinand de Saussure's and Claude Lévi-Strauss's interpretations of semiotics. Lacan sees the subject as defined in terms of lack and loss, through the stages of sexual reproduction, birth, separation from the mother, sexualisation as male or female, and the final and radical alienation from the real with the infant's entry into the symbolic order of language.⁴

Within the male symbolic order, the subject is cut off from the real through language, which mediates all other sources of signifiers.⁵ The subject is both opposed to, and constituted by, the other. As an alternative to this oppositional structure for subjectivity and relations, in which desire is a secondary function

of language and culture, Deleuze and Guattari propose the connective flow of desire as a primary, free-floating, unconscious and productive force which is immanent to the 'plane of consistency', that is, of 'unformed matter and anonymous forces from which the various strata of expression and content are formed'.⁶ Instead of the world of Platonic reality, with its dualism of essence and appearance, idea and image, original and copy, model and simulacrum, Deleuze posits a world where there is no original, only simulacra; no hierarchy of production, only simultaneity and multiplicity.⁷ A simulacrum is 'not a degraded copy. It harbours a positive power which denies *the original and the copy, the model and the reproduction*'.⁸ Simulation is an effect, in the sense of 'a "costume," or rather a mask, expressing a process of disguising, where, behind each mask, there is yet another ...'⁹

Lacan, Freud and others tell only part of the story about desire and subjectivity, but have made it the whole story, for all cultures and times. I have critiqued their interpretation of the dominant Western discourse of desire and subjectivity elsewhere.¹⁰ In this paper, I will use the ideas of desire and simulation that emerge from the writing of Deleuze and Guattari to interpret some texts written by court women in the mid-Heian period of Japan (late 10th through the 11th centuries AD). I am interested in comparing the writing of court women in a polygamous medieval Asian society with my own story of living as a bourgeois wife, mother and divorcee in a monogamous 20th-century Western society. I find it fascinating that such a different culture, apparently opposite to my own in many respects, could generate writings that speak to me with such power of myself, of my own life. The women whose lives are described in these texts are objects of desire that are dressed to conceal and suppress their individuality and embodied selves, and manipulated to remain hidden from men's eyes except in strictly defined circumstances. Yet, beneath the mask, there is an inner life that can be, variously, passionate, playful, jealous, vengeful, power-seeking, resistant, nostalgic, lamenting, world-weary, desirous of enlightenment. Although the Lacanian construction of desire as the search for the ideal lost object does explain the surrogacy of subjectivity in the Heian world, it does not explain the powerful richness and intensity of life behind the mask, for both men and women, and the remarkable achievement of Heian women's literature, which has stood the test of one thousand years and still speaks vividly to readers today. Such a phenomenon needs a more open-ended, multifaceted and complex interpretation than the binary and totalising view that Lacanian and other poststructuralist and postmodernist theories offer.

As the much-awarded English novelist, A.S. Byatt says: 'It isn't nice not to be writing a book. It isn't nice not to have a more real world than the real world we inhabit'.¹¹ Speaking of her desire to create more fictional worlds, Byatt claims that the imaginary world created by the author is more real than the

world she or he inhabits; by implication, this is also true for the reader who 'inhabits' the imaginary world of the book. The claim can be extended to any literary or artistic work, since all representation involves not only imitation, but invention, in varying degrees. As I read Byatt's statement, fiction is not merely an escape into an imaginary world. There are many reasons why a fictional world can be more satisfying than the world we inhabit, and escapism is only one of them. The permeable borders and points of exchange between fiction and reality are some of the lines of enquiry into the desiring self that this paper will pursue.

Is the mask more real than the inner life it hides? Certainly it does not hide absence, as Jean Baudrillard has told us contemporary culture does.¹² Must we have only two ways of seeing, realistic and disillusioned, or fictional and escapist? Or is there, as Brian Massumi argues, a third way—a way of seeing to which Deleuze and Guattari, in a theory of simulation that emerges from the corpus of their writing, open the door?¹³ Like Michel de Certeau, they see mimicry as strategic: '[t]here is a power inherent in the false; the positive power of ruse, the power to gain a strategic advantage by masking one's life force'.¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari do not, according to Massumi, address the question of

whether simulation replaces a real that did indeed exist, or if simulation is all there has ever been. Deleuze and Guattari say yes to both. The alternative is a false one because simulation is a process that produces the real, or more precisely, more real (a more-than-real) on the basis of the real.¹⁵

In a regular world of apparently stable identities or territories, simulation finds points of departure to create new forms that are more real than the real. 'Reality is nothing but a well-tempered harmony of simulation.'¹⁶ There are two modes of simulation, the regular, normal world of surface resemblances, and the world of art, that multiplies potentials. Reproving Baudrillard for whining—'The work of Baudrillard is one long lament'—for his nostalgia for the old reality that was, in fact, made up of simulacra, Massumi offers us Deleuze and Guattari's liberating vision that celebrates the simulacrum as 'a proliferating play of differences and galactic distances' and that opens the possibility of 'becoming realer than real'.¹⁷

The Heian period in Japan takes its name from the capital, Heian-kyo, now the city of Kyoto. My first acquaintance with women's writing in this period was through *The Tale of Genji*, a gift from my daughter, who was living in Japan with the Japanese man who became her husband. It sat on my shelves unread for some years, while I was doing my Master of Creative Arts degree, but when I picked it up, not expecting to be very interested, I was surprised and delighted by what I found. It became the inspiration for an anthology of contemporary Australian women's writing that I have collected and edited, titled *Hidden*

Desires. In the invitation that I sent out in 2003 to writers' associations and creative writing students, I said:

Do you have a story to tell? Murasaki Shikibu, a Japanese noblewoman of the eleventh century, escaped from the stifling conditions of a high-born woman's life by writing stories of desire and circulating them amongst her friends and acquaintances. Across the centuries, and across cultures, her tales speak of repressed desire, of the superior power of men, of the wayward nature of passion, and of the beauties of nature, poetry and music. Let us, Murasakis of the twenty-first century in the western world, tell our own tales of desire.

I received about 250 submissions, from which a selection was made; the anthology, co-edited by Jena Woodhouse, was published by Ginninderra Press in 2006. The attraction that I felt then to the remarkable work, *The Tale of Genji*, has become an obsession. I am reading it for the fourth time, and each time I read it, I find more subtle expressions of desire. In this paper, I will draw examples from it, as well as from the poetic diaries of Murasaki Shikibu and other Heian court women. I am aware that the *Tale*, a psychological romance that is recognised as having a strong claim to the status of the world's first novel, is not strictly life writing. However, I am using it as a mirror to my own life and writing; my practice and research focus on the desiring female self as represented in life writing across a spectrum from non-fiction to fiction. There is an element of fiction in all life writing, whether this is declared by the author or not, for the past is accessible only through memory, which is idiosyncratic and selective.

The Tale of Genji became widely known to the Western world through Arthur Waley's translation, 1925–1933. I first read this book of two volumes and 54 chapters in the 1976 translation by Edward G. Seidensticker. There has been another translation since his, by Royall Tyler; the latter is the text I will refer to here, as it is recognised as being, in many ways, closer to the spirit of the original text than its predecessors. *The Tale of Genji* is regarded in Japan as a masterpiece, as great as the works of Homer and Shakespeare in the Western world. It has spawned an immense body of scholarly and popular publications in Japan. As Tyler says: 'Scholars build careers on it. It has been turned into movies, plays, dance, modern novels, Kabuki, comic books (*manga*), musical theatre, and opera. A scene from it appears on a current banknote'.¹⁸

Murasaki Shikibu was born in the mid-seventies of the 10th century, the daughter of a provincial governor, and a member of the Fujiwara family who held power for over a century, from the mid-10th century on. This was a period in Japan of political stability, which allowed culture to flower at a time when, as Ivan Morris says in *The World of the Shining Prince*, much of Western Europe was in one of 'the bleaker periods of cultural history'.¹⁹ It was the period of transition in China from the T'ang to the Sung dynasty. Though Heian culture

and political structure derived many forms from China, official embassies to China had ceased in 894, and were not resumed till over four centuries later, and so the Heian was a period of adaptation and cultural emancipation.²⁰

Murasaki Shikibu is an interesting example of how women were involved in this emancipation. In her diary, she reflects ruefully on her reputation for learning, which was not an attractive attribute for an aristocratic woman:

When my brother ... was a young boy learning the Chinese classics, I was in the habit of listening with him and I became unusually proficient at understanding those passages that he found too difficult to grasp and memorize. Father, a most learned man, was always regretting the fact: 'Just my luck!' he would say. 'What a pity she was not born a man!' But then I gradually realized that people were saying 'It's bad enough when a man flaunts his Chinese learning: she will come to no good,' and since then I have avoided writing the simplest character.²¹

She goes on to confess that she gave the Empress secret lessons in reading the collected works of Po Chü-I, a T'ang dynasty poet.²² Chinese language and culture was the province of the ruling male class in Japan. A learned woman was a contradiction in terms, and women who surreptitiously acquired learning took care to conceal their knowledge. Yet women in the Heian period developed their own form of writing in the vernacular. *The Tale of Genji* is written in Heian Japanese (which is to modern Japanese as the language of Beowulf is to modern English) in *kana* or phonetic script, derived from Chinese characters, as distinct from *kanbun*, the official script of men, government and scholarship. Richard Okada tells us that this mode of writing was gendered feminine and referred to as *onna-de*, 'woman's hand', although men also used it.²³ Okada speculated that this feminine art allowed women 'a degree of freedom and confidence of representation in contrast to the *kanbun* mode'.²⁴ He goes on to point out that the word *kana* derives from *kari-na*, 'which means 'temporary, provisional or nonregular name', and thus denotes the surrogate nature of this script, and indeed, of writing itself.²⁵ Women who write in Heian Japan, then, are using a surrogate script to describe and express areas of experience that are themselves surrogate for the real, regular world of Sino-Japanese (male) culture and politics.

It is conjectured that Murasaki wrote *The Tale of Genji* before and during her period of court service, when she served the Empress; the book seems to be unfinished, and there is some scholarly dispute as to whether she is the author of all the chapters, or whether they were written in their present order. We know that the tale existed in something like its present form in 1024, when a young girl, returning to the capital from a distant province, received a complete copy of over 50 bound chapters from her aunt. This same young girl wrote a memoir, known as *The Sarashina Diary*. In it, she describes how obsessed she was with the romance:

Although I was still ugly and undeveloped [I thought to myself] the time would come when I should be beautiful beyond compare, with long, long hair. I should be like the Lady Yugao [in the romance] loved by the Shining Prince Genji, or like the Lady Ukifuné, the wife of the General of Uji ... Could such a man as the Shining Prince be living in this world? How could General Kaoru ... find such a beauty as Lady Ukifuné to conceal in his secret villa at Uji? Oh! I was like a crazy girl.²⁶

The diarist remembers herself as a young girl obsessed by the romance, imagining herself as one of the heroines, loved and pursued by the hero Genji, or by his lesser type, Kaoru. Compare this with the sad picture Murasaki paints of her self in her diary, a disillusioned introvert in the court circle where appearance is everything and gossip is rife; where learning is unwomanly, and even the feminine art of writing in the vernacular is frowned on if it is practised to excess. She describes a scene where the Empress and her handmaids are busy binding the stories (presumably Murasaki's) to send to people, when the Empress's father finds them and scolds his daughter for not resting; yet later he brings her paper, brushes and ink, some of which she passes on to Murasaki. Then, when Murasaki is attending the Empress, he sneaks into the author's room and steals her only fair copy of the *Tale*.²⁷ His show of disapproval is a front for secret collusion and appropriation of the artist's work, suggesting the envy and disguised admiration felt by a powerful male for the beauty and richness of the woman's writing, which he can only possess in a surrogate and illicit manner. Murasaki follows this vignette, which shows us how influential and yet how vulnerable both her position in court life and her status as a writer were, with a sad passage of reflection:

As I watched the rather drab scene at home, I felt both depressed and confused. For some years now I had existed from day to day in listless fashion ... doing little more than registering the passage of time. How would it all turn out? The thought of my continuing loneliness was unbearable, and yet I had managed to exchange sympathetic letters with those of like mind—some contacted via fairly tenuous connections—who would discuss my trifling tales and other matters with me; but I was merely amusing myself with fictions, finding solace for my idleness in foolish words. Aware of my own insignificance, I had at least managed for the time being to avoid anything that might have been considered shameful or unbecoming; yet here I was, tasting the bitterness of life to the very full.²⁸

Her complaint reflects a bad day, or few days, perhaps, in the life of an author; one any of us who write for an audience beyond our intimate circle can relate to! The loneliness, the introversion, the sensitivity to criticism, the comfort of a few like minds, the anxiety that what one is doing is trivial, insignificant, of

little worth in the real world. She expresses the sense that her writing, indeed her very existence—lonely and idle—are surrogate, of inferior worth in comparison with the 'real' world of courtly society. Yet she could not have felt like this all the time, or she would not have managed to write a book that is twice as long as *Don Quixote*, *War and Peace*, or *The Brothers Karamazov*,²⁹ and well over 1,000 years later, is still being read, enjoyed, and analysed by ordinary people and scholars in Japanese and in translation. Perhaps Murasaki's depression is an effect of her genius; she was pushing the boundaries of identity for a court woman by creating a work of fiction that was read by men and women in aristocratic circles, in a time when, so far, only men had created works of fiction, and other women were writing poetic diaries, but nothing as complex or ambitious as the *Tale*.

'Fictions and foolish words' are all she has to give her life a deeper meaning; the forms and rituals of the court occupy her daily life and give her a place in the real world, but she feels like an outsider at court. She questions the value of her writing: 'I tried reading the *Tale* again, but it did not seem to be the same as before and I was disappointed'.³⁰ She loses confidence even in the support of those with whom she has shared mutual interests: 'Those in whose eyes I had wished to be of some consequence undoubtedly thought of me now as no more than a common lady-in-waiting who would treat their letters with scant respect'.³¹ In her depressive state of mind, she feels 'as if I had entered a different world'.³² The world of court, in which she had found a kind of reality, seems empty, and her private life at home is no better. Retirement from the court does not relieve her depression and self-doubt. She misses her constant companions, and receives letters from them, including the Empress, and so she returns.

Murasaki Shikibu is an outsider, an observer of the world she inhabits, one of middle rank who, having lost her husband, has no official status other than through her service to the Empress. She cannot live independently, as a modern woman would have the opportunity to do; she is without a powerful man's favour, and her status as a writer is problematic. So she returns to court life, the pettiness of which continues to annoy her.³³ Later, in a long reflective passage, she reveals more of her situation at court. Even at home, she feels unable to be herself, aware of her servants' prying eyes, and finds that it is worse at court: 'where I have so many things I would like to say but always think the better of it, because there would be no point in explaining to people who would never understand'.³⁴ 'They' would never understand because of the standards they apply to other's behaviour—standards Murasaki sees as narrow and petty—'So all they see of me is a façade'.³⁵

It is that façade that interests me as the frontier or interface between the 'real' world of court and the aristocratic woman's hidden life that is not revealed because if it were, it would be dismissed as being of inferior worth, even

inauthentic. The façade allows Murasaki to move and be accepted in the Heian court world. From Murasaki's perspective, it is a frontier between the public fiction that the outside world sees, and the inner reality of her private world. A frontier is an articulation of the difference between the two things or states it divides; though it does not unite them, it allows exchanges to take place. Another way of putting it, perhaps a more culturally correct one, is to use the Japanese terms, *omote* and *ura*. Takeo Doi, in his study of the relationship of the Japanese individual to society, *The Anatomy of Self*, explains the pervasive concept that underlies Japanese culture: the opposite yet complementary ideas of *omote* and *ura*, 'the two sides of everything', which, in classical Japanese, were synonymous with *kao* (face) and *kokoro* (mind, heart).³⁶ He points out that though the face usually expresses the mind, it can also hide it; so *omote* or face both expresses and conceals *ura* or mind.³⁷ The relationship is not binary and divisive, but symbiotic and mutually constitutive.³⁸

In Heian court life, the construction of appearance and reality is not a mechanistic one where the surface is simply an abstract representation of the qualities that are valorised in that society, hiding emptiness or an inferior level of being. Rather, outer reality is both an outward and visible expression of, and a mask for, inner heart/mind. It is what allows the individual to relate to others while having an inner life that is at least partly hidden. Murasaki's façade is a simulacrum that is seen as authentic by others, but is a strategic device that masks her inner life, which, to her, is more real than her persona and the outer world she inhabits. The outer both discloses and protects the inner. Ambivalence is a way of life. Murasaki moves uneasily between her outward persona, constructed and constrained by her relationship to the powerful figures of the Empress and her Fujiwara relatives, and her inner self, which both performs and resists the life of a court lady, so highly regulated in behaviour and appearance. It is this tension that makes Murasaki fascinating to a modern reader, and allows us to enter and identify with the autobiographical consciousness of a subjugated being; one who manages to escape, in her imaginative life, from the limits imposed on her. The remarkable aspect of Murasaki's diary and fictional writing is that, in recording her sensitive and penetrating awareness of the ambiguity of living as a woman in this society, she achieved so much. The living, aching reality of leading a double life is revealed in her confessions, and in the introspection of the fictional characters she creates. Murasaki's court persona has an extra layer, a mask that self-consciously performs the multi-layered reality she inhabits. This is the mask of the writer, the teller of tales, who traverses between the outer and the inner world, and brings both to life in a form that outlives the author and her society.

De Certeau describes the individual in social life as determined by relations with others and with the surrounding culture; he qualifies this by saying that the individual is neither passive nor docile in his or her culture, but rather,

practises everyday life by 'poaching in countless ways on the property of others'.³⁹ Though he is describing contemporary culture, he sees such practices as an evolution of 'the age-old ruses of fishes and insects that disguise or transform themselves in order to survive'.⁴⁰ Individuals use the products of a dominant economic order in subversive ways that are not intended; for instance, the culture imposed by the Spanish colonisers on the indigenous Indians was used ambiguously. The apparently submissive natives did not reject or alter the rituals, representations and laws of the conquerors, but they used them 'with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept'.⁴¹ The colonised people, unable to challenge the power of their conquerors, 'escaped it without leaving it'.⁴² In similar ways, the narratives, both fictional and confessional, of Heian court women show the ambiguity of the female desiring self as *other* within the culture of men, outwardly conforming to rituals, representations and rules, yet inwardly resisting and escaping in subtle ways. One of these ways, their reading and writing of *monogatari* and poetic diaries, became, paradoxically, a flowering of cultural life that has outshone and outlived the works and lives of the powerful men who ruled their lives.

Rather than being artefacts masking an absence of reality, or bearing no relation to any reality whatever, as Baudrillard describes the simulacra of the contemporary world, the texts of Heian Japan dramatise a culture where the images and surfaces of court life conceal and protect, as well as express, a rich inner life that both complies with and resists the dominant codes of behaviour.

Murasaki is an artist who observes and mirrors the society she inhabits in a fictional world that is, to the reader, 'more real' than the historical world of the Heian court, which we can never know except through indirect and fragmented reports. *The Tale of Genji* is a complex and many-layered world of the imagination that we can enter as we turn the pages that number 1,120 in the Penguin edition of Tyler's translation. Though the court women's diaries of the period give fascinating glimpses of this world, they remain glimpses, written from one point of view, discursive and sometimes fragmented.

One such diarist, who lived and wrote a generation before Murasaki, describes the fictional romances that were popular in her time in disparaging terms. This predecessor is known to us only as 'The mother of Michitsuna', and her diary, *Kagero Nikki* (translated by Seidensticker as *The Gossamer Years*) is the record of her unhappy marriage to a Fujiwara who became regent. In the prelude, she describes herself in the third person as:

one who drifted uncertainly through [these past times], scarcely knowing where she was ... [A]s the days went by in monotonous succession, she had occasion to look at the old romances, and found them masses of the rankest fabrication. Perhaps, she said to herself, even the story of her

own dreary life, set down in a journal, might be of interest; and it might also answer a question: had that life been one befitting a well-born lady? But they must all be recounted, events of long ago, events of but yesterday. She was by no means certain that she could bring them to order.⁴³

Of course, the diarist had not read *The Tale of Genji*, and perhaps if she had, she would have revised her opinion as to the value of fiction as a surrogate world. Nevertheless, she is making an interesting comparison here between the artistic and therapeutic value of fiction and that of life writing proper. The claims she stakes for life writing are that it may be interesting, even if it tells a life that has been dreary and uneventful, and that it might question the way in which she was born—indeed constrained—to live her life. The diary starts in 954, at the beginning of Fujiwara Kaneie's courtship of her. What develops is an intense and bitter account of a woman who waits with unsatisfied longing for visits that become less and less frequent.

This dilemma is a common one for Heian women, in a society where women's status is determined by the social rank of their parents, by their relationship to the men who favour them, and, in the case of women in service at court, by their position in relation to the emperor and his consorts. The most desirable position for a woman is to be the official wife of the emperor. Imperial consorts are chosen from daughters of the powerful Fujiwara family, thus insuring that the head of their family will be the father-in-law or grandfather, or sometimes both, of the reigning sovereign.⁴⁴ Women are precious wombs, cultivated by their parents to be objects of desire. For a woman to be desired in Heian Japan, she must clothe her body in many layers of voluminous silken robes of blending patterns and colours, have long uncut hair that sweeps the ground, plucked eyebrows and blackened teeth; she must remain cloistered behind screens, curtains and fans, and not be seen uncovered, certainly never seen naked; she must be accomplished in the arts of poetry, poetic conversation, calligraphy, music and preparation of incense. Taste, good birth and artistic sensibility are the primary values by which women and men are judged.⁴⁵ It is a polygamous society, which means that even the most favoured women are insecure, since men constantly seek new conquests, and an official wife may be supplanted in her husband's attentions by an 'unofficial' wife, concubine or mistress. There are many degrees of favour, and the only formal way in which a marriage is recognised is for a man to visit a woman for three nights running, sending a poetic letter each morning, and celebrating the union on the third morning with a gift of special rice cakes.

Just as secrecy and concealment are essential strategies for the arousal and expression of desire in the Heian world, so is surrogacy. A surrogate or substitute is sought when the original object of desire is inaccessible. The machinery of

desire in Heian Japan is driven by surrogacy. By cloistering their women and rendering them virtually inaccessible, Heian men fuel the desire to penetrate the covers, to unveil the hidden, and if the object is persistently elusive or out of reach, to seek substitutes. In *The Tale of Genji*, desire is imagined through a bewildering range of surrogates, most of them women, whose disguises, substitutions and evasions drive the erotic pursuits of the hero.⁴⁶ Lady Murasaki, the central female protagonist in *The Tale of Genji*, is Genji's favourite wife and his 'live-in lover', yet she has lesser status than his principal wife, and is subject to the ambiguity of her status and the errant nature of his passions, just as his other less favoured women are. Murasaki has to suffer the torture of watching Genji, now middle-aged, marry the young Third Princess, not because he wants to, but because his brother, the retired Emperor, pleads with him to take her under his protection (which is, in Heian Japan, usually synonymous with marriage). The Third Princess has higher status than Murasaki, for though the latter is the granddaughter of an emperor, the unceremonious manner of her entry into Genji's life, as a 10-year-old child whom he abducts, marks her status as secondary or unofficial for the rest of her life.⁴⁷ She is, in fact, a surrogate for Fujitsubo, her aunt and consort to Genji's father, the Kiritsubo Emperor. Genji had an illicit passion for Fujitsubo, his stepmother, (who was only five years older than him), and fathered a child by her; Murasaki bears a striking resemblance to Fujitsubo, who was herself chosen by the emperor because she resembled the Kiritsubo Lady, Genji's dead mother. So there is a series of substitutions: Fujitsubo substitutes for the Kiritsubo Lady both as favourite consort of the emperor and as mother/mistress to Genji, and Murasaki substitutes for Fujitsubo as Genji's child/lover/secondary wife.

Though Genji has no intention of leaving Murasaki, she is the domestic spouse who has to perfume his robes for his obligatory visit three nights running to the Princess, and urge him to overcome his reluctance to go and do the honourable thing. Genji is caught between his desire for a succession of lovers and his great love and devotion to Murasaki. This tension becomes stronger as he ages, and apart from the Third Princess, who does not meet his expectations, and with whom he is a reluctant lover, he does not follow through with his erotic fantasies as he did when he was younger. On a plot level, the author creates narrative suspense through the dramatisation of Genji's inner conflicts when he courts other women, and of Murasaki's private suffering over his errant fancy. There is tension between the two plot lines, that of the romantic hero pursuing a string of women, some more desirable than others, and that of the shining prince who meets his match in the surrogate wife, whose beauty and grace outshine the attractions of all her rivals. This tension is played out in a minor key, that of the surrogate wife or mistress who wants to be 'the one', who wants to escape from the straitjacket of surrogacy. This theme and variations on it in the *Tale* are echoed in the diaries of other Heian women, such as the mother of

Michitsuna, who recorded that she wanted her lover 30 days and 30 nights a month, not just on the irregular and infrequent occasions that he visited her.⁴⁸ The tension of the major theme of the *Tale*—the Genji-Murasaki romance—sustains the narrative for more than half the novel, and is only resolved by Murasaki's death, and that of Genji not long after. It is, for this reader, this tension, and its reflections in the sub-plots of secondary heroes and heroines, which lifts *The Tale of Genji* out of the genre of medieval romance into that of the modern psychological novel, with its chiaroscuro of light and dark, comic and tragic, hope and despair, love and loss.

Though their domestic life continues when Genji takes the Third Princess into his entourage, it is complicated by Genji's obligations to the young wife who is of higher status in the eyes of the world than is Murasaki, and by other wanderings of his fancy. Murasaki believes her only release from the suffering of watching what she sees as the inevitable decline of Genji's affection for her lies in withdrawal from her worldly state into a religious life. Genji, however, refuses to allow her to renounce her sexual being and to cease social intercourse, which is what the religious life demands.⁴⁹ For Murasaki and other heroines in the story, 'becoming a nun is an act of self-expression that can only take the form of denial'.⁵⁰ She lives on another three years in her secular state, much diminished, and dies 'with the coming of the day' despite Genji's efforts throughout the night to restore her with scripture readings by monks.⁵¹ As Field comments, 'in Murasaki we see that to be a surrogate is to be not only homeless but imprisoned in this world'.⁵² The magnificent home that Genji has created for her and bound her to with his love is insecure and becomes a comfortless prison because it houses, in separate wings, not only the Third Princess, but other women who are under his protection. Her worldly state as a surrogate or secondary wife is, by its nature, temporary and subject to loss and rejection. The tragic irony of the *Tale* is that Genji himself suffers deeply because of the fragile and surrogate nature of his bond with Murasaki, and the transient nature of worldly pleasure, and does not survive long after her death, because he has no wish to live:

Very little in this life has really satisfied me, and despite my high birth I always think how much less fortunate my destiny has been than other people's. The Buddha must have wanted me to know that the world slips away from us and plays us false. I, who long set myself to ignore this truth, have suffered in the twilight of my life so awful and so final a blow that I have at last seen the extent of my failings ...⁵³

His death is a hiatus in the text; he dies between chapters. This may be an accident of the fragmented and corrupted state of the text that survived into the 13th century, when two scholars set out to restore it.⁵⁴ However, the fact that the reader is denied the tale of Genji's last days has a strangely poetic and

haunting effect; his absence casts a shadow over the other characters: 'His light was gone, and none among his many descendants could compare to what he had been', and over the rest of the narrative.⁵⁵

What is the relevance of this story and the poetic diaries of Heian court ladies to my quest for a desiring female self? The third way of seeing finds abundant and fertile play of differences within a rigid social system, such as that represented in the literature of cloistered women like those of the Heian court. The searcher expects to find similar patterns in the literature of other women who have lived and written within patriarchal cultures. And having seen with their eyes, freed from bondage to patriarchal patterns, from the belief that she is determined by them, she will be encouraged, like the replicant in *Blade Runner*, to return to the culture that has created her, and to seek to change the terms of her subjectivity that were her birth legacy, to live a desiring life on her own terms, to unmask the hidden and assume her full difference, and to create a 'more real than real' world of her own through art.

I commented at the beginning of this paper that my journey into the world of Heian women is a looking-glass experience. The differences between their lives and mine are many and obvious. Yet their voices speak to me of emotions that are familiar. They speak of loss, longing, exclusion, separation, loneliness and, above all, of repressed desire for emotional and material security and artistic freedom. If I merely read these texts, I am, as de Certeau says, a nomadic traveller poaching on other's territory, unable to keep for my own what I enjoy.⁵⁶ I want a place of my own as a desiring woman writer. My desire as a modern woman is for the freedom to live and love where I choose, to express myself emotionally and artistically.

Born into an Australian rural family, I was brought up in isolation in outback New South Wales by a mother whose values were Victorian bourgeois. My father left the family when I was eight years old, and I spent much of my childhood mourning his loss and trying to support my mother in running the farm. I married young to an older man, and found that security was not enough. My search for love destroyed my marriage and resulted in the loss of my three children, who were taken to America by my ex-husband without my consent. The process of understanding this story of my life began in earnest in 1999 when I enrolled for a Master of Creative Arts degree, and wrote an autobiographical novel and an exegesis on the construction of female desire in the bourgeois family. Since then I have continued to write and study desire, and have reached a point where I feel able to move beyond the syntax of loss and surrogacy.

Part of this freedom comes from visiting a world where women writers have created, in their diaries, poetry and fiction, a world that is more real than the real world they inhabit, to repeat Byatt's memorable phrase. To do this, Heian women developed genres that already existed—the poetic diary and the

monogatari or prose romance—to a level of complexity and richness unsurpassed before or since. They also developed a script, ‘woman’s hand’, that, though it was a surrogate for the official male script, became the vehicle for a literature that dramatises Heian vernacular culture so powerfully that it has, as Okada says, ‘come to be regarded as a great (if not the greatest) flowering of Japanese culture’.⁵⁷ It seems, to return to Byatt’s phrase again, that we have a circular relationship between fiction and reality, for fiction is a surrogate for a reality that is itself illusory or fictionally constructed, and the fiction becomes more real than the reality within which it is created.

I am grateful to Heian women writers for showing me a world where, though women’s embodied selves were concealed and their individuality suppressed, they still managed to have hidden desires and to express them in surrogate and indirect ways. I pass back through the looking glass, a contemporary woman who can desire in her own right and can live and love without surrogacy or subterfuge.

ENDNOTES

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, and H.R. Lane (New York 1977).

² Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari* (London 1989), 88.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York 1983), 149-64.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 164-5.

⁶ Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari*, 89, 148-9.

⁷ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. C.V. Boundas, trans. M. Lester with C. Stivale (London 1990), 226-63.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁰ Anne Christina Houen, ‘A deserting wife: the construction of female desire in the bourgeois family’, MA, Curtin University of Technology (Perth 2001).

¹¹ A.S. Byatt, television program, ‘Scribbling’, ABC TV, Sydney, 10 August 2005.

¹² Jean Baudrillard, ‘Simulacra and Simulations’ in *Jean Baudrillard: selected writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford 1988).

¹³ Brian Massumi, 1987, ‘Realer than real: the simulacrum according to Deleuze and Guattari’, *Copyright*, viewed 26 May 2005, <http://www.anu.edu.au/HRC/first_and_last/works.realer.htm>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Royall Tyler (trans.), *The Tale of Genji*, 2 vols (New York 2001), xii.

¹⁹ Ivan Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince: court life in ancient Japan* (Harmondsworth, UK 1979), 12.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

²¹ Murasaki Shikibu, *The Diary of Lady Murasaki*, trans. Richard Bowring (London 1996), 57-58.

²² *Ibid.*, 58.

²³ R.H. Okada, ‘Speaking for: surrogates and *The Tale of Genji*’ in B. Stevenson and C. Ho (eds), *Crossing the Bridge: comparative essays on medieval European and Heian Japanese women writers* (New York 2000), 11.

- ²⁴ Ibid., 12.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ A.S. Omori and K. Doi, 'The Sarashina diary', *Diaries of Court Ladies of Old Japan* (New York 1970), 20.
- ²⁷ Murasaki, *The Diary*, 33.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 33-34.
- ²⁹ Morris, *The World*, 275.
- ³⁰ Murasaki, *The Diary*, 34.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid., 35.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 56.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Self: the individual against society*, trans. M.A. Harbison (New York 1986), 23-24.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 26.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 152.
- ³⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. Rendall (Berkeley 1984), xii.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., xi.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., xiii.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ E.G. Seidensticker (trans.), *The Gossamer Years (Kagero Nikki): the diary of a noblewoman of Japan* (Tokyo 1973), 33.
- ⁴⁴ Ivan Morris, *The World*, 63.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 206-07.
- ⁴⁶ Professor Royall Tyler, in a conversation on Wednesday, 7 December 2005, indicated that he thought the device of surrogacy in *The Tale of Genji* can be explained in terms of the author's desire to keep her readers entertained. I agree that on the plot level, this is sufficient cause. However, though this accounts for conscious authorial intention, it does not address the unconscious dynamic of surrogacy, which operates on so many levels in the Heian world, not just in *The Tale of Genji*, but in all the literature that I have read from that period.
- ⁴⁷ Norma Field, *The Splendor of Longing in The Tale of Genji* (Princeton 1987), 168.
- ⁴⁸ Seidensticker, *The Gossamer Years*, 95.
- ⁴⁹ Field, *The Splendor*, 189.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 190.
- ⁵¹ Tyler, *The Tale of Genji*, 760.
- ⁵² Field, *The Splendor*, 198.
- ⁵³ Tyler, *The Tale of Genji*, 768.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., xviii-xix.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 785.
- ⁵⁶ De Certeau, *The Practice*, 174.
- ⁵⁷ Okada, 'Speaking for', 23.