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Violation: Murasaki's Challenge to the Scholarly Consensus on Sexual Assault in *The Tale of Genji*

SEAN O'REILLY

Is rape always wrong in every cultural context, no matter the time or place? Or is it a mistake to impart modern-day feelings of outrage over such acts if they occurred in long-ago civilizations? Is there any way of uncovering what ancient cultures actually believed about acts that today would fit the definition of rape if they do not appear to be widely condemned in the social commentaries of that time? Let us examine a test case.

A young stepfather of about twenty-two spends day after day with his adopted daughter, who is roughly thirteen or fourteen, laughing, talking, and playing various games. It is clear their relationship is quite good, as they are relaxed and happy in each other's presence in their well-established roles as father and daughter, just as they have been for years. They are not legally father and daughter, since he always intended to marry her someday, but she does not seem to understand what exactly that will entail. They are so comfortable with each other they often sleep in the same bed, though platonically. Yet one such evening, as the night wears on, the father can no longer restrain his desire and, seizing his protesting daughter, drags her kicking and screaming into the world of adulthood by raping her.

Although this may sound like the plot of a horror—or at any rate, a horrifying—story, it is in fact paraphrasing a memorable episode from the ninth chapter, "Aoi," of one of the most famous books in the history of world literature, *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物語, completed ca. 1000). It describes the character usually referred to simply as "Genji" (or Hikaru Genji, meaning "The Shining [Prince] of the Minamoto Clan") in his role as surrogate father to a girl named Murasaki (later called Murasaki no Ue or "Lady Murasaki"), whom he had been bringing up and educating to be the perfect wife for him. But though she may have been aware on an intellectual level that she was destined to marry Genji, Murasaki viewed and trusted him as her father. She was clearly not prepared for the physical reality of this marriage, as her extremely strong reaction to Genji's behavior demonstrates. Some—including no less an authority than Royall Tyler himself, in his cautionary essay on Heian sexuality[1]—have argued against reading this passage with any modern-day moral outrage. Others, such as established scholar Margaret Childs, have deployed moral relativism to shield the beloved "shining prince" of the tale from any moral condemnation and from accusations of statutory rape.[2] In addition to powerful declarations

1 Tyler, "Marriage."

2 Childs attempts to resolve potential cognitive dissonance here by claiming that legal concepts of statutory rape do not apply to Murasaki because they are meant to "protect those who are

that Genji "never coerces a woman to have sexual relations with him,"[3] Childs even subtitled an early version of her 1999 article on the subject with the unequivocal "Genji, at Least, Was no Rapist."[4] Scholars like Tyler and Childs were reacting to an earlier generation of critics who had denounced Genji as a rapist,[5] and pushed hard at the pendulum, eventually succeeding—in my opinion far too well—in swinging it away from "rapist" in a more sympathetic direction.

On the surface, resistance to the use of labels like "rape" is not without merit. For example, there is no evidence that eleventh- and twelfth-century Japanese readers batted an eye at the scene in question. In T. J. Harper's analysis of "Genji Gossip,"[6] among the lists of forty-eight *koto* 事 (matters), there was no mention at all of Murasaki's forced sexual encounter with Genji or subsequent distress, despite several categories that seemed likely candidates: Disgusting Deed (*nikushi koto* 憎し事), Heartbreaking Scene (*ito oshiki koto* いと惜しき事), Anguish (*kokoro gurushiki koto* 心苦しき事), Deplorable Thing (*urameshiki koto* 恨めしき事), or Deplorable Deed (*wabishiki koto* わびしき事). In fact, Genji showing the adult Murasaki only the outside of his letter from Lady Akashi—an act symbolic of his refusal to reveal to Murasaki the substance and nature of his relationship with Akashi—was apparently considered much more deplorable (*urameshiki*) than whatever happened to Murasaki sexually.[7]

We might thus be tempted to conclude that the practice of young girls sleeping with somewhat older men was deemed perfectly natural by Heian 平安 (794–1185)-era society. "Natural" here refers to Roland Barthes's sense of cultural values (myths) being almost invisible and indeed utterly unquestionable. There is only one problem: the text does not support this dismissal of our moral concerns. *The Tale of Genji*, far from being a key exemplar of moral and cultural relativism, might in fact be more of a universal condemnation of at least certain types of sexual acts and situations: they are presented as neither invisible nor unquestionable. The author of *The Tale of Genji*, Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部 (ca. 973 to 1014 or 1025), whose sobriquet of Murasaki, incidentally, probably came from the close association in readers of later centuries between the author (whose exact name is unknown) and Murasaki no Ue herself, chooses not to portray young Murasaki's rape in the same generally permissive or even sympathetic-to-Genji tone as was used for his other sexual encounters.

I will argue in the following close analysis of the text of chapter 9 that the author intended to suggest, by painting such a vivid picture of Murasaki's sense of violation, that what happened to her was indeed wrong. And by implication, so was the apparent callousness of mid-Heian society towards the feelings of young girls in general.

Whether Murasaki Shikibu was writing from experience, having herself endured such a shocking and distressing event, is unknown. But what is clear is that in this chapter she seems much more sympathetic to young Murasaki than to Genji, who comes off as a blustering, ignorant buffoon with his knowing smiles to

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incompetent to consent to sexual relations… [but] Murasaki has reached the appropriate age for sexual intimacy" before continuing, "although she is described as still naïve" and finishing off with "The point, then, is that there is no reason to assume that Genji would not have been able to gain Murasaki's consent." Childs, "The Value of Vulnerability," p. 1073. Genji cannot have raped Murasaki, because (1) she was at least thirteen, the age defined in the Heian 平安 era (794–1185) as maturity, and (2) Genji was skilled in the art of persuasion/sexual coercion, so whatever sexual activity they undertook was ipso facto consensual. It would seem, in this view, that there is simply no way for a skillful and persuasive lover to rape anyone, at least if the person is thirteen or older!

3 Childs, "The Value of Vulnerability," p. 1062.

4 To be fair to Childs, her argument evolved from that initial 1998 statement (a polemic challenge to then-prevalent criticism of Genji as a rapist). However, even in the final and more persuasive 1999 version, the nucleus of the argument defending, among various other male aggressors, Hikaru Genji from accusations of violation, such as that "subtle but significant differences" to the nature of love exist that make the application of modern-day morality inappropriate to the world of Genji (and in particular, that the vulnerability of Murasaki no Ue and others like her was a highly prized and sexually desirable trait, thereby potentially excusing Genji from wrongdoing), remains unchanged. Childs, "The Value of Vulnerability," p. 1059. While Childs's broader reading of East Asian literature may support her overall conclusion, and even though she may be correct that the highly charged term "rape" has been bandied about too quickly in some respects in discussions of, for example, premodern Japanese literature more generally, I argue that the specific example of Genji and his conduct towards Murasaki—and more importantly, the narrator's detailed description of Murasaki's distress afterwards—is worthy of greater scrutiny.

5 Childs identifies an early 1990s surge of rape accusations against Genji and surmises they were inspired by Edward Seidensticker's translation, with its unsympathetic portrayal of Hikaru Genji. Childs, "The Value of Vulnerability," p. 1062.

6 Genji Gossip refers to supplementary materials (conversational in tone rather than works of serious scholarship), for example lists of superlatives, produced by later Heian-era enthusiasts (mostly or entirely women) of the original novel.

7 Harper, "Genji Gossip."

Koremitsu, his right-hand man, not to mention his callous treatment of Murasaki, including feigned bewilderment at her outrage. The author presents, as Genji's only excuse for his assault on Murasaki's childhood world, the claim that her charm at length overwhelmed him and he could no longer help himself. If the author had really wanted the reader to be convinced by this sophistry, it was certainly within her rhetorical powers to describe Genji's action in a more flattering, or at least a less condemnatory light (as she had done in most, perhaps all other cases of sexual coercion involving Genji). The author choosing not to do so here is telling, especially in light of the fact that she makes a concerted effort to make young Murasaki's feelings intelligible to her audience and render believable her sense of violation.

Before looking closely at the text, some general background might be helpful. Genji's initial interest in Murasaki stemmed from the fact that she greatly resembled his secret, forbidden love, Fujitsubo, a consort of Genji's father, the retired emperor. Fujitsubo is a conscious or unconscious stand-in for Genji's longing for his own late mother, Kiritsubo, permanently out of reach, and in fact, Murasaki is Fujitsubo's niece. This chapter, "Aoi" (the name of Genji's wife, which comes from a vine-flower that Royall Tyler translates as "Heart to Heart"),[8] actually features all four of the women with whom Genji is most strongly connected over his entire life: his secret and forbidden lover Fujitsubo (with whom Genji had an illegitimate son who would later become Emperor Reizei 冷泉天皇 (950–1011, r. 967–969), his mistress the Lady of Rokujō, his wife Aoi, and the young Murasaki.

Over the course of the chapter, the other women gradually move out of reach for Genji, until only one is left: Murasaki herself. Fujitsubo, as the favorite of His Eminence, his father, the retired emperor, is now—just like his deceased mother Kiritsubo—definitely off-limits, as she is described as being "with His Eminence constantly, without a break, to the extent that she was like a commoner" (*ima wa, mashite himanau, tada udo no yō nite, soi owashimasu o* 今は、ましてひまなう、ただ人のやうにて、そひおはしますを)[9] making it quite unlikely Genji would be able to find any time to meet with her intimately, as indeed he proves unable to do. Bitter jealousy between his mistress and his proper wife flares into the open in a battle of carriages in which Rokujō is humiliated.[10] She subsequently seems to have possessed Aoi and caused her a great deal of distress, perhaps leading directly to Aoi's death soon after the birth of a son, later named Yūgiri.

By dying, Aoi has of course placed herself out of Genji's reach. Rokujō's possible role in Aoi's death makes continuing to consort with her very difficult for both Genji and she herself. This leaves only Murasaki, the one person who cannot run away, who has no support, no other adult figure, and certainly no lover (like Fujitsubo does) to rely upon, and is moreover unlikely to die suddenly. Especially if we consider the principle of proximity in determining attraction, it comes as no surprise that Genji—who in the period of mourning after Aoi's death even abstains from dallying with the servants as he usually did—is filled with desire for Murasaki. To a certain extent, then, the author has provided a subtle narrative explanation for the timing of Genji's decision to switch from "father" to "husband" mode. But does the author condone this sudden and irreversible change?

The Days of Innocence

It is worth looking at the passage just before Genji's sexual assault on Murasaki in some detail to set the scene for the fateful moment. In it, Genji shows considerable paternalism towards his ward.

> On the day of the festival, Genji removed himself to his house on Nijō Avenue, and it was from there that he went out to see the festival. Crossing over to the west wing, he had Koremitsu bring the carriage around, asking "Gentlewomen, will you be going then?" and smiled as he gazed upon the young lady Murasaki, who had arranged her appearance in a most lovely way.

8 For the Aoi chapter in translation, see Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, pp. 162–90.

9 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author, from the Japanese text presented in Yamagishi Tokuhei's *Genji monogatari*, vol. 1, and in consultation with Tyler's notes in *The Tale of Genji*. This is my translation of lines 3-4 of Yamagishi, *Genji monogatari*, p. 305.

10 Though "jealousy" is perhaps not the best word, Childs argues that women's feelings of resentment towards female rivals in texts like *The Tale of Genji* are not sexual jealousy per se but rather insecurity over their potential loss of status or face if the rival succeeds in usurping their place with the male lover. Childs, "Coercive Courtship," p. 120.

"Come with me, my lady. We shall see the festival together," he declared, and then noticing that her hair was even more beautiful than usual, he stroked her tresses, saying "It would appear you have not had it cut for a long time. Today is probably an auspicious day to have it trimmed," whereupon he summoned a learned scholar of the almanac [of divination], and had someone ask him about the proper time for hair-cutting.

Meanwhile, "Gentlewomen, you come out first" he called, and observed the pleasant air the children all had. The edges of their entrancing hair, all cut across in a gorgeous line, stood out vividly against the wandering pattern of their hakama. "I shall cut your hair myself," he declared, but soon exclaimed, "There are places where it is just so thick; I wonder how long it will eventually grow?" and was at some difficulty in cutting it.

"Those with very long hair still seem to have somewhat shorter forehead locks, but your complete lack of stray strands just won't do at all!" he said [in jest], and finishing his trimming, he uttered the wish for "a thousand fathoms," something that left Shōnagon [Murasaki's nurse], who was observing, both moved and humbly grateful.

The depths unmeasured of the thousand fathoms weed,
miru *of the sea;*
To see where their growth will end is a joy reserved to me

he said, whereupon she wrote down this reply on a scrap,

A thousand fathoms? I know not if they are so deep, since the changing tide
Ebbs and flows so restlessly, and will not settle on a side

And her appearance as she wrote such a skillful poem was both young and fetching, so that he thought it splendid.[11]

Why is Shōnagon "grateful" if not for Genji's intimate involvement with young Murasaki, teasing her a little and going so far as to stroke her hair, and above all for his paternalistic condescension in cutting her hair personally? To Shōnagon, who (as we shall see below) is scheming to place her young mistress first in Genji's heart, these are signs of his enduring interest in Murasaki as a potential wife.

Yet what would they mean for Murasaki? It is a different kind of paternalism that the child must have seen in his actions, because she viewed him as her father, and in his innocent fondling of her hair and his teasing, she saw only fatherly indulgence. How could she be expected to understand the physical requirements of her future marriage to Genji? Could a girl of thirteen or fourteen,[12] who moreover had long been accustomed to viewing this man as her father, expand her mental parameters to conceive of the dramatic change that was to take place in their relationship?[13]

When Genji hints in his poem about that coming change by employing the pun on *miru* みる, which refers both to a kind of seaweed and to the concept of "seeing" and thereby possessing a woman—since in Heian society women went to great lengths to avoid being seen by men and to be seen was thus a deeply intimate experience[14]—does she understand just what it will mean for her to be "seen" by Genji, an event that is rapidly approaching? Can we read her poetic reply as evidence of tacit understanding of what is coming, and of an awakened sexual jealousy against the other women with whom Genji has amorous relations, or should we rather view it as a more innocent exercise in poetic wit, expressing platonic jealousy that her father's attentions are too intermittent? In the absence of any evidence for the former, and given the abundance of support for seeing her as a "young" child attached to her father, we must assume the latter.

In this stage of their lives, early in the chapter, Murasaki is still manifestly a child. Genji himself has one wife plus one secret mistress and one (more or less) open mistress among whom he divides his affections; thus, in a sense, Genji has no need of Murasaki as a wife yet, so he makes no effort to rush the ostensibly happy event along. He is temporarily content to wait—though given the circumstances and Murasaki's extreme youth I hardly think this "patience" is worthy of praise as proof of his moral quality, as Tyler argues[15]—but after the disaster with Aoi and the taint of Aoi's death hanging over his relationship with Rokujō, his outlets for both

11 This section begins on p. 311, line 9, of Yamagishi, and continues until p. 313, line 9.

12 There is some confusion over how to express her actual age given the premodern Japanese convention of children being counted as one year old at the moment of birth and advancing one year in age each New Year's Day.

13 Murasaki's powerlessness is only accentuated in light of her own biological father Prince Hyōbu's lackluster effort to locate her after Genji kidnaps her. I am grateful to the anonymous peer reviewer for pointing out that Murasaki's tragic isolation is greater due to the failure of her biological family to protect her.

14 Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, p. 169n.

15 Tyler, "I am I: Genji and Murasaki," p. 443.

sexual and emotional gratification have dwindled to nothing. It is a very different Genji, therefore, who returns home to Nijō from the palace late one night a few weeks after Aoi's death, and looks in on Murasaki.

The Surrogate Wife

In the next portion of the passage from chapter 9 that culminates in his sexual assault of Murasaki, we witness Genji plotting to replace Fujitsubo (and Aoi) with his erstwhile daughter.

> Changing his robes, Genji crossed over to the west wing. He saw that the seasonal change [of robes and decorations to winter style, which occurred on the first day of the tenth month in the lunar calendar][16] had brought to the room's furnishings a fresh brightness unclouded by melancholy, and the attire and appearance of the young ladies of noble birth as well as the girls was arranged in a matching manner pleasing to the eyes. He thought the exquisite way Shōnagon was treating him had no aspect that troubled his heart at all.
>
> The young lady [Murasaki] was very beautifully dressed. "Long it has been since I was here last, and I find you so incredibly adult-like!" he said, and when he lifted up her little curtain to gaze upon her, her graceful air of embarrassment as she looked aside was flawless. The sidelong glances she gave him in the lamp-light, the arrangement of her hair, and all her other features showed that she [Murasaki] would come to resemble perfectly, without a single aspect different, the one [Fujitsubo] for whom his heart longed; and looking upon her, Genji was most pleased.[17]

We have already seen how Fujitsubo was off-limits given her constant attendance on the retired emperor, and indeed it was mostly because of her resemblance to Fujitsubo, essentially beyond his reach even then, that Genji had originally adopted Murasaki, intending from the very start to have the next best thing to his secret, forbidden lover: a younger, more pliable look-alike who best of all could be his and his alone. And now, he sees that dream coming true before his very eyes: when he ends his weeks-long absence from Nijō, during which he was grieving at the house of his parents-in-law for the departed Aoi, he sees that Murasaki has come to resemble Fujitsubo down to the last detail, and since Fujitsubo is a grown woman, one must assume this means that to his eyes at least, Murasaki is now sexually mature.

Innocence Shattered

Once Genji establishes—in his mind at least—Murasaki's suitability as a sexual partner, he soon thereafter acts upon his desire and makes her his newest wife.

> Coming up close beside her, he spoke of his period of distress and worry, and of other matters, saying "I do long to speak freely with you of the happenings of recent days, but as I think it would be unlucky to do so, I shall go to another place and rest for a little while before returning. From now on, you will see me so ceaselessly that you will come to find me repellent" (*itowashū sae ya, obosaren* いとはしうさへや、おぼされん).
>
> Hearing this, Shōnagon was happy, yet she still thought him unreliable. "He has so many peerless ladies with which he has trysts that a troublesome one from among them might rise up and take the place of my mistress" she thought, revealing her mean and scheming heart.
>
> Crossing over to the other side [the east wing, to his own apartments], Genji surrendered his legs over to the lady called Chūjo to be massaged, and then fell asleep. The next morning, he sent a letter to the apartments of the young master, his son. Looking upon the moving reply plunged him back into unending grief. He now had nothing at all to do, which made him apt to stare off into space, yet he remained too melancholy to make up his mind to resume his casual trysts.
>
> The young lady had been arranged to perfection, something he was pleased to note, and because to his eyes (*minashi* 見なし)[18] she had reached an age no longer

16 Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, p. 186n.

17 See Yamagishi, *Genji monogatari,* vol. 1, from line 7 to line 12 of p. 344.

18 As the author of *The Tale of Genji* is, for the time being, limiting description of the scene to Genji's perspective, this could be interpreted as an endorsement of the male gaze: Genji sees evidence of Murasaki's physical maturation (even if she does not or cannot appreciate what that might mean) and chooses to act on it. But if the author were content to leave the viewer with the impression that progression to a sexual relationship was not only inevitable (which, given the

ill-suited for marriage, he tried occasionally hinting at his intentions, but she appeared not to understand his meaning.[19]

His days were free, and he spent them with her, passing the time playing Go and the character radical guessing-game; and as the days passed thus, her endearing, fetching disposition, and her beautiful, graceful gestures she displayed while in the midst of play, were such that for Genji, given the months and years he had held off while she was still a child, when she had only a child's charms, it became more than he could bear (*shinobigataku narite* しのびがたくなりて), and so even though it pained him to think of the distress this would cause her (*kokoro gurushi keredo* 心苦しけれど)…[20]

Note that the rape itself is never described or even referred to directly; the reader is left to surmise what had happened solely based on this suggestive unfinished sentence, combined with the sudden shift (discussed below) after this point to a very distressed Murasaki.

In the passage above, clearly Genji thinks he has observed a change in his young lady, something to convince him she has become a woman and is ready to experience the particulars of married life. But perhaps it is only his recent loss, the grief of which he experiences again when he gets the reply to his letter to his son's apartments, that suddenly repaints Murasaki from child to woman, from object of fatherly affection to object of lust. And even if she is showing obvious visual signs of puberty, that certainly does not indicate anything about her mental state. In any case, whether his suggestive behavior took the form of flirtatious comments or body language, since it appears to have gone completely over her head, it was obviously not enough to help Murasaki change her mental parameters regarding Genji's identity to her. Thus, she is still incapable of seeing him in a romantic light when he suddenly finds himself unable to endure his desire any longer and acts upon it. And so, as it turns out, his prediction that she would come to find him repellent (*itowashū*) was all too accurate.

Yet the most shocking aspect of this situation is not Genji's act itself, but the fact that he did it despite knowing it would upset Murasaki. He cannot pretend he was unaware it would cause Murasaki distress; the author is careful to include the comment "even though it pained him" (*kokoro gurushi keredo*), referring to the emotional sympathy Genji feels for Murasaki as he acts on his desire. It is therefore hard to see in Genji's behavior anything but an act of callous sexual gratification—after a relatively long period of abstinence from all sexual activities, in fact—that he knew beforehand would distress her. He knows she is not ready to accept him as a lover on her own terms—he knows this, but he indulges himself anyway.[21]

The *Merriam-Webster* dictionary defines rape as follows: "Unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against the will usually of a female or with a person who is beneath a certain age or incapable of valid consent." Except for the single word "unlawful" it seems this modern Western definition fits Genji's act here perfectly. Murasaki definitely did not consent, and given her traumatized reaction, it seems likely she protested Genji's advances, but he continued anyway, making this a case of forceful sexual assault upon someone who had not given consent.

Many scholars, notably Childs, have strongly objected to using a modern dictionary's definition of an act that was surely understood differently in Heian Japan. Such critics essentially argue for the relativism of concepts like "rape" or "sexual assault" as well, but while

predilections of the male protagonist, it may very well be) but also in some sense "natural" and unobjectionable, all she had to do was have the narrator continue to describe things in a manner sympathetic to or at least neutral towards Genji's conduct. Instead, as we shall see below, we are given insight into Murasaki's mental and emotional state, shifting reader sympathy away from Genji in this instance.

19 Note that this lack of understanding is not the same thing as what Childs identified as the sexual enticement of vulnerability: Murasaki embodies innocence and perhaps weakness, but not a knowing vulnerability/fear, neither distress (feigned or genuine) nor coldhearted refusal, but mere puzzlement. Childs, "The Value of Vulnerability," p. 1064.

20 See Yamagishi, *Genji monogatari*, vol. 1, from line 12 of p. 344 to the final line of p. 345.

21 Here I must differ substantially from Childs's analysis of this crucial episode; to Childs, his years of restraint, patiently waiting until Murasaki has reached puberty (Childs further cites in Genji's favor the fact that many others assume disapprovingly he consummated their relationship years earlier, allegedly illustrating his great restraint in not doing so), is evidence of his kindheartedness, whereas to me everything hinges on Genji's understanding that even at her current age sex would cause her great distress and was something she could not yet fully comprehend. The author is careful to draw the reader's attention to Genji's awareness of the serious consequences of his act, making the interpretation Childs attempts more difficult to sustain. Childs, "The Value of Vulnerability," p. 1071.

Childs or others may be able to excuse the majority of Genji's sexual acts in the tale, no apologist has yet delivered a convincing explanation for the case of Murasaki no Ue.[22] There is ample evidence in this very passage for the universality of the consequences of rape as well as for the ethical knowledge that certain acts are moral transgressions. Genji, after all, is described as aware that what he was doing would hurt Murasaki deeply—and thus, presumably, that it was morally indefensible, a fundamentally unloving act—but chose to proceed anyway. Moreover, Murasaki's virulent reaction (analyzed below) to Genji's violation shows that the consequences of rape were very real for her, and the author's choice to include her reaction makes it more difficult to explain away the real-life consequences of such a transgression.

The issue is not whether Heian society viewed sex between thirteen-year-old girls and men—or even whether physical coercion/rape could in that society be seen—as permissible, whatever moral implications that might have.[23] The key issue, rather, is that some members of Heian society as conceived of by the author, up to and including Genji himself, were aware that under some circumstances, such as when the other person was too young to understand completely what was happening, to groom a girl or very young woman and then force her to have sex would cause great distress. Genji consciously transgressed when he seized Murasaki in his arms that night. The traumatized Murasaki shows us ample evidence of the seriousness of Genji's violation with her reaction.

Childhood Lost

In the final portion of the passage describing—however obliquely—Genji's sexual assault on Murasaki, the point of view shifts to her thoughts and feelings on the incident, detailing how her childlike love for Genji turned, at least temporarily, to hate.

> What could have happened? There was no outward sign that would allow anyone to tell that the nature of their relationship had changed (*hito no, kejime mitatematsuri waku beki on naka ni mo aranu ni* 人の、けぢめ見たてまつり分くべき御仲にもあらぬに), yet there came a morning where the gentleman (*otoko kimi* をとこ君) rose early, but the lady (*onna kimi* 女君) did not rise at all. Her ladies-in-waiting murmured in concern, "What can be ailing her, to keep her thus from rising? She must not be feeling her usual self."
>
> As Genji crossed over to his own apartments, he placed an inkstone box inside her curtain. In a break between people [i.e., when no one was around], she made a great effort (*karōjite* からうじて) and raised her head, and noticed that there was a knotted letter (*hiki musubitaru fumi* ひき結びたる文) on her pillow.
>
> When she innocently (*nani kokoro naku* 何心なく) pulled it open and looked at it, she found:
>
> *How senseless it was, to have a barrier between; the nights piled up*
>
> *Yet still we lay—intimate, but with a robe between us*
>
> It looked as though he had written it playfully. That he had *this* kind of heart she had never dared think, and so she could not help but feel revolted (*asamashū obosaru* あさましう思さる) as she thought, "Why ever did I blindly put my faith in one whose heart would cause my own such pain?"
>
> At noon Genji crossed over to the west wing, and said "It seems you are feeling out of sorts; how do you feel now? I shall be lonely if we do not play Go today," but sneaking a glance in at her only caused her to pull the bedclothes over her head even more where she lay. Her ladies-in-waiting withdrew as he approached her; he said, "Why are you treating me so poorly? The

22 Indeed, Childs argues persuasively in her analysis of Genji's kidnapping of (and "limited aggression" towards) another of Genji's sexual conquests, Utsusemi, that, far from definitive evidence of rape, there are textual grounds to conclude that Genji was ultimately unsuccessful in having sex with her at all. Childs, "The Value of Vulnerability," p. 1066. But the author's ambiguous treatment of the situation with Utsusemi only enhances the shocking and unambiguous nature of how she chooses to describe Genji's assault on Murasaki.

23 Childs, very much to her credit, acknowledges countervailing textual evidence in *Genji monogatari,* with the author describing the shining prince as at least occasionally consciously considering coercion/rape as one possible tactic in his seductions. But while Childs uses Genji's sexual encounter with the daughter of the former governor of Akashi as proof of Genji's fine character (since he ultimately decided not to use this tactic), we might equally well use it as evidence, not only that Genji was capable of rape, but also that the author/narrator wished to alert the reader to this aspect of his personality rather than leave everything ambiguous and open to interpretation, as she had done with Utsusemi. Childs, "The Value of Vulnerability," p. 1069. This is in line with Childs's own evolving position on the issue of rape. She points out, "Even if they [Genji and his two sons] renounce rape… the very fact that they consider it implies that rape may not have been uncommon," but I would counter that Genji et al. are also being signaled in the text as willing to consider rape. Childs, "Coercive Courtship," p. 121.

unthinkable (*omoi no hoka ni* 思ひのほかに) has happened: you have taken a dislike to me (*kokoro uku* 心憂く), haven't you. How strange your gentlewomen must be thinking this," and pulling back her covers, he found that she was completely soaked in sweat, even down to her forelocks (*ase ni, oshi hitashite, hitaigami mo, itō, nure tamaeri* 汗に、おしひたして、額髪も、いたう、ぬれ給へり).

"My, my," he exclaimed, "what a mess. You act as though it were such a serious matter!" (*kore wa, ito, yuyushiki waza zo yo* これは、いと、ゆゆしきわざぞよ). He tried all manner of ways to calm her down, but she genuinely seemed to look on him with great bitterness (*ito, tsurashi* いと、つらし), and uttered not even a single word in answer (*tsuyu no on irae mo shi tamawazu* 露の御いらへもし給はず, literally "granted not so much as a drop of dew [in response]").

He said resentfully, "Alright now, do not cry—from now on, you will not be seeing me anymore. I am so embarrassed [at the way you're treating me]" (*ito hazukashi* いと恥づかし), and so on, and opened the inkstone box, but found nothing inside when he looked, prompting him to think "How juvenile her attitude is!" (*waka no on arisama* 若の御有様) and look upon her as adorable (*rōtaku* らうたく). Yet though he spent the entire day with her behind her curtains, trying to console her, she would not relent (*toke gataki on keshiki* とけがたき御気色), making her seem all the more adorable (*itodo rōtage nari* いとどらうたげなり).[24]

In this one episode, the author's sympathy seems to shift over to Murasaki entirely. The passage gives us insight into her point of view and also focuses throughout on her suffering, offering a strong contrast to the portrayal of Genji's other sexual escapades, which are described more neutrally even in cases of what Childs calls "assault and kidnapping" that appear to stop only just short of outright rape.[25] At the very beginning of this passage, the author shows us Genji and Murasaki were indeed used to sleeping in the same bed, as his later poem hints, with the line *hito no, kejime mitatematsuri waku beki on naka ni mo aranu*, meaning "there was no outward sign that would allow anyone to tell that the nature of their relationship had changed." Since they were of course sleeping in the same bed that night, but we are told that nothing had changed, this indicates that they had been sleeping in the same bed regularly. Once again, since Murasaki has until this night clearly not been thinking of Genji in a sexual manner, their erstwhile platonic intimacy was part of their father-daughter relationship, a childhood environment of love and safety that Genji destroyed that night.[26]

The author demonstrates the sexual nature of the encounter, despite the oblique language of the passage, by describing Genji and Murasaki as a man (*otoko*) and woman (*onna*), which was a literary convention in romantic episodes. Yet this "woman" is still in reality a child and finds the once-shining figure of her surrogate father, Genji, for whose undivided attention and company she had longed in their earlier poetic exchange, utterly repulsive (*asamashū*) because of what he has done to her. Filial love has turned to visceral hate, as evidenced by her attempt to hide from him under the covers—a flimsy shield against his unwanted presence, but the only one she had, given that she was a dependent in his household and there was no one she could rely upon except for him.

Furthermore, the author draws explicit attention to the physiological symptoms of her distress, as shown in the description of her profuse sweating. This should not be interpreted merely as the natural result of being under the covers; she is described as "completely soaked" (*oshi hitashite… itō, nure tamaeri*), a condition that sounds more like evidence for psychological distress than merely being too hot. She also feels listless; she raises her head only after a great effort (*karōjite*), suggesting that at the very least, she is severely depressed.

Yet what can Murasaki really do? She is a girl of thirteen or fourteen, forced to have sex with someone who had more or less signaled from the beginning that he meant to marry her. Her naivete made one of the only resistance strategies available to female characters in Heian-era literature, namely extreme passivity,

24 See Yamagishi, *Genji monogatari*, vol. 1, from line 1 of p. 346 to line 7 of p. 347.

25 Childs identifies Genji's forcefulness towards Utsusemi and Oborozukiyo as two such moments. Childs, "The Value of Vulnerability," p. 1062.

26 As Childs argues, Genji's attraction to many of his lovers (including Utsusemi and even Lady Rokujō herself) hinged upon their playing hard to get, but this logic does not apply in Murasaki's case, as she was too childlike to know how to play this game; perhaps something darker and more primal inspired his desire for this child-woman than the courtly dance of romance, the "game of moans." Childs, "Coercive Courtship," p. 132.

unavailable as well: if one cannot understand the nature of the coming threat, how can one be expected to cold-shoulder the potential assailant in a conscious effort to dissuade the assault?[27] Who would listen to her objections that she had not been ready? And here, completely in Genji's power, in his Nijō house, her home for years now, to whom could she appeal, anyway? Shōnagon, ostensibly her closest companion, was desperately hoping Genji would do exactly what he did, because it would guarantee Murasaki's future—and her own. Indeed, it is this aspect of the situation, Murasaki's powerlessness, that is particularly heartrending, because she is still a dependent of Genji when it happens.[28] She certainly cannot run away, because she has nowhere to go and no one to aid her in escaping, anyway.[29] So what can she actually do to show her displeasure?

Her only weapon is to refuse to give Genji the satisfaction of her company, and this she does with a vengeance. She will not get out of bed, categorically refusing to participate in Genji's world; when he shows his hateful face, she tries to hide, then when even that last flimsy defense is stripped from her, she refuses to speak; but most of all, she utterly confounds the strong cultural expectation for the woman in such a situation to write a poem in response to the man's love poem. Earlier in the chapter the author showed us that Murasaki is perfectly capable of writing poems, and writing them well, and that poetic exchange occurred partly to set up this new, failed moment, when Genji writes her his flippant "Why did I wait this long?" poem and she dramatically refuses to follow suit.[30] For her, it is no laughing matter, no happy moment to be celebrated by a literary exchange.[31]

And lest the reader be tempted to agree with Genji's later claims that Murasaki is just being childish, that she is making something out of nothing, the author chooses to have the narrator offer insight into Murasaki's inner state, what Murasaki herself is thinking. All of a sudden, the author takes us inside the mind of this character who until now had been little more than a pretty, well-behaved prop for Genji to trot out and admire, a stand-in for Fujitsubo. It is at this very moment of crisis that the author chooses to let us hear Murasaki's thoughts, and so in a sense, it is out of this moment of crisis that the character of Murasaki is in fact born. We discover that she is a real person for whom Genji's action has had real consequences; we hear her bitterly remonstrating over her folly in putting her faith "in one whose heart would cause my own such pain" and looking upon Genji with revulsion (*asamashū*). This moment of psychological agency for Murasaki is fascinating, and it is not the last time in the chapter she demonstrates that she is more than just a foil.

Genji's reaction to her behavior is at best insensitive, and at worst, a deliberate attempt to exculpate himself by blaming her for overreacting. He continuously tries to laugh off her behavior, disingenuously commenting "It seems you are feeling out of sorts" before going on to declare, "I shall be lonely if we do not play Go today," trying to shame Murasaki into relenting and forgiving him. He continues his gaslighting tactics of feigning surprise at her reaction and trying to make her feel guilty by asking, "Why are you treating me so poorly?" As if he doesn't know! He continues to pretend not to understand the cause of her malady with the expression *omoi no hoka*, meaning "surprising" or "[it is] unthinkable," implying that the fact she has taken a dislike to him (*kokoro uku*) is unexplainable or astonishing. And

27 Childs provides evidence that somewhat older women/female characters did attempt, and at least one succeeded at, this extreme passivity strategy, but Murasaki would have needed to understand exactly what was coming in order to deploy this tactic effectively. Childs, "The Value of Vulnerability," p. 1074. Since she is unable to use any of the existing defensive strategies—being too young to understand them or indeed what is about to happen—it is very hard to see (especially in light of her outraged reaction to his assault) any hint of "consent" here.

28 As Childs points out of Murasaki, "Her status is… totally dependent upon Genji's love." Childs, "Coercive Courtship," p. 134.

29 This is where Childs's analysis, while convincing for women not entirely under the thumb of the male lover, cannot really apply to Murasaki: as she points out, lovers like Genji usually seem to conclude that literal rape "is not a good strategy for winning her heart," but what of someone like Murasaki, without any viable option, nowhere to run, no other would-be protector to turn to but him? Childs, "The Value of Vulnerability," p. 1076. She must have gritted her teeth and stayed with her rapist, both father and husband, and somehow forgave him. In Childs's own words, "the connections leading from desire to rape, to pity, and then to a loving attachment meant that a woman might, on occasion, salvage something worthwhile from having suffered a sexual assault." Childs, "The Value of Vulnerability," p. 1078.

30 As Childs points out, a written poetic reply, in matters of the heart, was de rigueur, as not preparing one "was immature, rude, insensitive, or cruel" especially (as here, with Genji) when the man was of very high rank. Childs, "Coercive Courtship," p. 127.

31 It is possible that a woman dramatically deciding not to reply in writing on the morning after may have been, or was in the process of becoming, a demonstration of extreme distress; Childs found one other example of a woman in another written work, *The Confessions of Lady Nijō* (*Towazugatari* とはずがたり, ca. 1307), who refused to answer a love letter after the wedding night, in her case because she was deeply in love with someone else at the time. Childs, "Coercive Courtship," p. 128.

he notches up the guilt by reminding Murasaki of what her ladies will think if she keeps giving him the cold shoulder.

Genji tries to laugh away the physiological evidence of her distress (her profuse sweating, and presumably ample tears as well) by suggesting she is making a big deal out of nothing. He complains "You act as though it were such a serious matter!" (*kore wa, ito, yuyushiki waza zo yo*), and proceeds to try to fix the mess he well knows he created by employing various methods to cheer her up—none successful, of course. He finally resorts to threatening to stop visiting her completely, blaming her for his embarrassment, though since he goes on to spend the entire day with her after this, one wonders if he said it in more of a mock-serious voice than a genuinely reproachful one.

He also manages to interpret her obvious anguish and resentment toward him as making her more endearing, her refusal to write him a poem in response endearingly childish. Again and again she is described, in Genji's eyes, as "adorable" (*rōtashi*), and the more she refuses to yield to his efforts at reconciliation, the dearer she becomes.[32] This suggests that despite his awareness that his act would cause her distress, he has decided to believe his own arguments that she was overreacting, and that what happened was no big deal. Indeed, there is every indication to believe that the next passage, in which they are served baby boar cakes, implies he sleeps with her again that night, since he stays in the west wing all day and night, even though given her reaction after the first night it is impossible to imagine her relenting willingly the second night either. Given that his presence had become hateful to her, night two must have only exacerbated her sense of betrayal, yet that night we see Genji going out and ordering wedding cakes for night three (the final night in the loose ceremony of a Heian-era courtly marriage), giving his trusted right-hand man Koremitsu a knowing smile (*hohoemite no tamau on keshiki* 頬笑みてのたまふ御気色)[33] as he does so.

And then we have the worst emotional betrayal of all:

> As Genji wore himself out trying to cajole Murasaki out of her silence, he felt for the first time what someone who steals a woman must feel, which was most pleasant. "The degree to which she moved me in years past has become just one aspect of how I feel. The human heart is so distressing!" He could not help but feel that now, the idea of being apart from her for even one night was too much to bear.[34]

Here we have Genji reveling in the psychological consequences of forcing a (very young) woman into a sexual relationship against her will. The resistance, the anger: it is what he imagines men who carry off women must experience, and he finds that thought most pleasant (*ito okashikute* いとをかしくて). What is it that has caused Genji to fall more deeply in love with her? It is her resistance, and the depth of her outrage! This is as far from a consensual relationship as one can get, nor can her lack of consent be dismissed essentially as coquettishness, or an inability to say either yes or no without putting one or both of them in an awkward position, as Tyler (and to some extent Childs) try to argue, because it is too long-lasting and heartfelt.[35]

Murasaki does not soon forgive Genji his betrayal. Even on the occasion of her Donning of the Train ceremony (*onmogi no koto* 御裳着の事, a key coming-of-age ceremony for young women), she still has not relented:

> [B]ut the young lady now thought of him with the most unparalleled dislike, thinking only with bitterness that

32 This focus on Murasaki's traumatized reaction as a key component of her appeal to Genji might *prima facie* seem to fit nicely with Childs's overall argument about the importance of (a show of) vulnerability of sexual relations and attraction in Heian literature, but then again, there is nothing coquettish about her angry reaction to his betrayal. Childs argues her anger stems not from the sex itself but from the discovery that he had intended to convert her into a bride all along, thus spoiling the seductive nature of the sexual encounter from her perspective. Childs, "The Value of Vulnerability," p. 1071. As the narrator does not describe their first night together at all, this is certainly one possible reading of the situation, but the strength of her sustained anger would seem to suggest this is a lot more than mere pique over Genji's long-term secret (?) plan. Murasaki's outrage can thus support a reading not merely of sexual coercion the night before but, potentially, of literal sexual violence. It is hard to imagine the narrator describing such an assault in any detail, not if the reader is meant to retain any empathy for Genji, so the absence of an explicit description of rape is not, in my view, evidence of absence (proof it did not occur). The author of the tale does seem to feel deep ambivalence, and indeed a kind of moral condemnation about this moment, as expressed by the narrator's extended description of Murasaki's reaction the morning after the encounter.

33 Yamagishi, *Genji monogatari*, vol. 1, final line of p. 347.

34 Ibid., p. 348, lines 7–10.

35 See Tyler, "Marriage."

> "those years in which I placed my trust for everything in him, twining myself around his little finger, now bring my heart only disgust," and indeed, she refused to meet his glance. She could not bear his jests (*tawabure* 戯れ), which brought her great pain, and was silent, plunged into dark thoughts (*warinaki mono* わりなき物), not at all as she used to be. Witnessing this changed appearance of hers, Genji found it both amusing and heart-wrenching, and he said resentfully, "The years I thought of you [tenderly] have not turned out as I hoped, and I find it most painful that your attitude has not increased in familiarity toward me," and with that came the New Year.[36]

Once again, here we see Genji attempting to defuse her disgust by laughing it off, but his jests are not well received by Murasaki. He continues to alternate between trying to dismiss her outrage as overreaction through his jesting, and trying to shame her into giving up her cold-shoulder campaign, even as he alternates between finding her antics amusing and painful. But once more, the strongest condemnation of Genji is not necessarily his act itself, but his tendency to gaslight her and specifically to treat her distressed reaction as a joke. She is sunken in silent depression (plunged into dark thoughts), and her childlike innocence is gone forever, yet Genji finds this at least partially amusing. There are few things more universally reprehensible than a person taking pleasure in another person's suffering, but it seems that in a sense, this is exactly what Genji does here.

The author may have chosen this narrative tack possibly out of a strategy to make the character of Genji more realistic and believable. He is shown as capable of behavior that is borderline unforgivable—and the narrator explicitly draws our attention to this in chapter 4, apologizing for giving the reader such a negative impression of Genji. Exploring Genji's moral nadir gives him room to grow (which he arguably does throughout the middle of the book) as he reflects on the karmic weight of his misdeeds, regarding his misfortunes later in life as just desserts. What fun would it be to read a long story about a character who is perfect and therefore need never change, after all? But can—or should—Genji's later personal growth erase moral outrage over his treatment of Murasaki, especially as it is an outrage apparently shared by the author/narrator, who this time offers no apology for showing Genji at his worst?

Indeed, far from striking a forgiving tone or even simply minimizing the extent of his crime by pivoting away from Murasaki's reaction to it, the passage above signals the persistence of Murasaki's hatred towards Genji. We are told that he continued to spend his days with her, pleading with her to relent but to no avail, until the New Year. We know that the baby boar cakes were eaten on the first day of the boar in the tenth month of the luni-solar calendar, meaning somewhere between the first and the twelfth day, and the rape occurred the night before, so we can narrow down the time frame to between the first and the eleventh day of the tenth month as the beginning of her withdrawal, which has not changed even by the first day of the first month, probably about eight weeks later.[37] By chapter 10 of *The Tale of Genji*, they have at last reconciled, but one thing is clear—her resentment was no short-lived flight of fancy, nor can it easily be dismissed, as Tyler and Childs try to do, as merely an obligatory refusal to consent initially, coupled by a little pouting to show her high quality.[38]

Ultimately, the virulence and length of her negative reaction to Genji's act are precisely what separates this situation from others in which the woman seems reluctant to acquiesce in romantic situations. That Murasaki was not merely putting on a coy show of reluctance is clear from the physiological (her profuse sweating) and psychological (sunken in dark thoughts) evidence and from the extraordinary duration of her obstinacy in refusing to warm to Genji afterwards. If we can grasp the acute nature of Murasaki's distress, we will avoid falling victim to an excessive cultural relativism that might dismiss contemporary concepts like rape as inapplicable, as all part of the culture of the time and thus above moral reproach. Even the compelling claims of scholars such as Tyler and Childs—arguing that for a female virgin, sexual assent was not up to her but rather her father—cannot excuse Genji, as he essentially had kidnapped Murasaki, removing her father's opinion from consideration and seeking to fill that role himself: at a stroke, he became both assenting father and

36 Yamagishi, *Genji monogatari*, vol. 1, p. 351, lines 2–8.

37 For a note about the practice and dating of eating baby boar cakes, see Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, p. 187n.

38 Tyler, "Marriage"; Childs, "The Value of Vulnerability."

deflowerer.[39] While it is no doubt important not to project twenty-first century notions of morality on eleventh-century literature, it would nonetheless behoove us to rise above a permissive relativism to take note of the textual evidence of the author's own engagement with this issue.

Conclusion

My purpose in this article has been less to vilify Genji than to draw out the echoes of young Murasaki's anguish, to highlight the hints the author has left us of the real consequences, be it ever so culturally permissible, of sexual violation. That Murasaki was later able to forgive Genji despite her suffering at his hands is strong evidence of her resilient and forgiving nature (or possibly of Genji's success in grooming her), not proof that she was never upset in the first place or that those feelings were somehow invalid. I hope her young voice, crying out in fear and dismay as her childhood was forcibly ended, will not be drowned out by those too ready to dismiss her life story as merely an amoral relic of the ancient culture of Japan.

> *Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,*
> *Imprison her soft hand, and let her rave*
> — John Keats, "Ode on Melancholy"

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39 Childs cites Tyler to make the case that sexual relations cannot be rape if the woman's father gave his blessing, but that argument cannot adequately excuse Genji in this instance. Childs, "Coercive Courtship," p. 119.