

7. Feminine Veils over Visions of the Male

In certain scenes of *The Tale of Genji* one or more viewers, usually male, admire a beautiful man. Sometimes the viewer wishes the man were a woman; sometimes he imagines himself as a woman; in one anomalous case the female watchers compare the man favorably to a woman; and in other instances men are swept away by male beauty mediated by a feminine image. This intriguing motif might therefore be called “feminine veils over visions of the male” or, more concisely, “feminine veils.”

The meaning of the “feminine veils” motif and its variants remains elusive, but this last essay will discuss the passages in which it occurs and attempt a three-part explanation. First, male–male homoerotic feeling, hence presumably homoerotic relationships between adult men, was always possible at the Heian court. Second, the *Genji* author shied away from treating this possibility directly, although in three passages of the tale she alluded plainly enough to such relationships between men and boys.¹ Third, such feelings, or relationships, might be encouraged by a junior’s (perhaps a man’s as well as a boy’s) need for attentive, effective patronage. The essay will close by situating the theme of “feminine veils” in the context of Heian fiction in general, and of *The Tale of Genji* as a whole. This survey will reveal one final distinction between the earlier and later parts of the tale.

Men wish a man were a woman

The first *Genji* passage of this kind easily catches the reader’s attention. It occurs during the famous “rainy night conversation” about women in “Hahakigi.” Four young men (Genji, his friend Tō no Chūjō, and two junior officials) are gathered in Genji’s room at the palace. One of the officials has just evoked an imagined treasure of a girl “hidden away in some ruinous, overgrown old house.” The narrative continues,

[1] Oh come now, Genji thought, it is rare enough to find anyone like that among the highborn. Over soft, layered white gowns he had on only a dress cloak, unlaced at the neck, and, lying there in the

¹ These passages occur in “Hahakigi” (TTG, 44), “Kōbai” (TTG, 801), and “Yume no ukihashi” (TTG, 1116). The first is particularly famous.

lamplight against a pillar, he looked so beautiful that one could have wished him a woman [*onna nite mitatematsuramahoshi*].²

The appeal of this gracefully staged moment is difficult to define. The verb *miru* ("see") can range in meaning from "look at" to "be on terms of physical intimacy with," but the basic question remains the same. What are the onlookers actually thinking? The idea of a man contemplating another man with desire is simple enough, but not that of a man wishing the male object of his gaze were a woman. Marcel Proust wrote of having "always been curious about the effects of the transposition of a friend's or loved one's face from the masculine sex into the feminine and vice versa," and at the age of twenty or so he identified "feminine charm" as his favorite quality in a man;³ but the present case is not quite comparable. A contrasting passage from the same chapter highlights the issue. Genji is at the house of his father-in-law, where again all eyes are upon him. This time, however, the watchers are young women.

[Genji] amused himself chatting with such particularly worthwhile young gentlewomen as Chûnagon and Nakatsukasa, who were delighted to see him, loosely clothed as he was in the heat. His Excellency then appeared and talked with his son-in-law through a standing curtain, since Genji was not presentable.⁴

Here, too, Genji's casual state of dress gives him a special and entirely understandable allure. Moreover, both the women named are in love with him and probably already have a sexual relationship with him.⁵ In contrast with [1], there is nothing mysterious about this naughtily amusing scene.

A second example of the pattern seen in [1] occurs in "Momiji no Ga." Desperate to talk to Fujitsubo, who keeps him at a distance, Genji visits her home. There he meets the somewhat foppish Prince Hyōbu ("His Highness of War"), her brother and Murasaki's father. One may imagine Genji envying Hyōbu's easy access to Fujitsubo; feeling at the same time both guilty and defiant because of his own illicit relationship with Hyōbu's sister; and being, simultaneously,

² TTG, 24; GM 1:61.

³ Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life*, 141, 643. The youthful Proust's counterpart in a woman to "feminine charm" (*des charmes féminins*) in a man was "manly virtue and openness in friendship" (*des vertus d'homme et la franchise dans la camaraderie*).

⁴ TTG, 35–6; GM 1:91.

⁵ According to passages in "Suetsumuhana" (TTG, 116; GM 1:274) and "Aoi" (TTG, 182; GM 2:59)

mischievously pleased with himself because, unknown to Hyōbu, he has possession of Hyōbu's daughter, Murasaki.

[2] Elegant and romantically languorous as His Highness [Hyōbu] was, Genji speculated privately about the pleasures of his company if he were a woman [*onna nite min wa okashikarinubeku*] and, having a double reason to feel close to him, engaged him in intent conversation. The Prince, for his part, noted how much more open and easy Genji was than usual, liked his looks a great deal, and, unaware that Genji was his son-in-law, indulged his roving fancy in the pleasure of imagining him, too, as a woman [*onna nite mibaya to iromekitaru ōnokoro ni wa omōsu*].⁶

The “open and easy” corresponds in mood to Genji's earlier casual dress, and the current of feeling between the two men is palpable. However, it is still not clear what the reader is to make of it.

It is difficult to tell whether Japanese scholars have wondered the same thing, despite their evident interest in [1] and the other numbered passages discussed below. Yoshikai Naoto summarized seventeen articles on the subject published between 1928 and 1991,⁷ but none appears to have addressed the matter.⁸ Instead, scholars have focused on the precise linguistic pattern central to both [1] and [2], as well as to [3] and [4], below: *onna nite miru* (“see as a woman”). They have therefore touched only peripherally on those passages ([5] and [6]) in which the operative words are simply *onna nite* (“as a woman”) or *onna naraba* (“if I were a woman”) and excluded those ([10] to [12]) containing none of these three expressions.

Yoshikai showed that the accepted reading of *onna nite miru* has changed over the centuries. The pattern as it occurs in [1], in the form *onna nite mitatematsuramahoshi*, will serve as an example. The *mi*- of the third word means “see”; for the rest, *tatematsura*- conveys respect (the watchers all rank below Genji), while *mahoshi* expresses volition (“want to see”). Each watcher “wants to see [Genji] as a woman.” But to whom does *onna nite* (“as a woman”) apply? In *Amayo danshō* (1487) the poet and literary authority Sōgi, glossing the expression for the first time in writing, assigned *onna nite* to the watchers: each wishes not that Genji were a woman, but that he

⁶ TTG, 138; GM 1:318–19.

⁷ Yoshikai, *Genji monogatari no shinkōsatsu*, 329–30.

⁸ However, Kanda Tatsumi (*Monogatari bungaku, sono kaitai*, 40) argued that Kaoru and Niou are in a homoerotic relationship (*danshoku kankei*) with each other, even if this relationship is not necessarily carnal.

himself were a woman watching Genji. Later commentaries, through the monumental *Mingō nisso* (1598), take the same position, although *Kogetsushō* (1673) and *Genji Monogatari tama no ogushi* (1796) remain silent on the issue. In pre-modern times only Ishikawa Masamochi (1750–1830), in his undated *Genchū yoteki*, rejected Sōgi's reading. Hagiwara Hiromichi's important *Genji monogatari hyōshaku* (1854) then reaffirmed Sōgi's position. Not until 1928 did the grammarian Matsuo Sutejirō demonstrate conclusively that Sōgi and his successors were wrong.⁹ However, his article had little impact, and opinion remained divided until the immense authority of Tamagami Takuya settled the matter in the 1960s.¹⁰ In short, the demonstrably correct reading of the pattern *onna nite miru* in *Genji* gained full acceptance only in the second half of the twentieth century.

The Sōgi misreading is excusable, since in four passages of the tale ([5] to [8]) a man really does view another man from a woman's perspective. However, it is also curious. It at least confirms that *onna nite miru* has confused readers for a long time.

Women wish a male were female

As though to compound the confusion, two other examples of the same pattern lack the erotic tone evident in [1] and [2], presumably because the watchers this time are women. In "Sakaki," Fujitsubo contemplates her young son, the future Emperor Reizei:

[3] The older he grew, the kinder his eyes became, as though Genji's face had slipped over his own. Mild decay affected his teeth, darkening the inside of his mouth and giving him a smile so winsome that she would gladly have seen such beauty in a girl [*onna nite mitatematsurahoshū kiyora nari*].¹¹

The translation "would gladly have seen such beauty in a girl" is ambiguous, since it could mean that girls as pretty as this boy are rare. In the original, Fujitsubo clearly would prefer to see him as a girl. Why? His being Genji's son, not the Emperor's, has caused her anxiety now multiplied by his recent appointment, in a hostile political environment, as heir apparent. Things might indeed be easier if he were a girl, but that seems not to be the issue; nor, presumably, is desire. Passage [3] has given scholars seeking to grasp the *onna nite*

⁹ Matsuo Sutejirō, "Onna nite mitatematsuramahoshi."

¹⁰ Tamagami, *Genji monogatari hyōshaku*.

¹¹ TTG, 205; GM 2:116.

miru pattern particular trouble. At any rate, something similar appears in this description of retired emperor Suzaku (“Eawase”):

[4] His Eminence’s looks were such that one would have gladly seen him as a woman [*onna nite mitatematsuramahoshiki o*], but Her Highness [Akikonomu] did not seem unworthy of him, and they would have made a handsome pair.¹²

The observer is probably a generalized one, resembling above all a gentlewoman like the narrator.¹³ Her high but somewhat conventional-sounding praise of Suzaku’s looks seems intended mainly to extol Akikonomu’s. Despite the repetition of *onna nite miru*, these two passages seem remote from the first pair cited.

The hypothesis of imperial beauty

A thread that might link them after all involves a hypothetical conception of imperial beauty. The beginning of the thread can be found in the possibility, suggested by all four passages, that the author and her audience subscribed to an ultimately feminine standard of beauty. If so, then to wish a male were female is to find his beauty wasted on a male. A passage from “Miyuki” seems to point in this direction. From within her carriage, Tamakazura has surveyed the gentlemen of the court and found “none to compare with His Majesty [Reizei] seen in profile, stock-still in his red robes.” Then her eyes turn to the commander of the right (Higekuro, her future husband, although she does not know that yet):

The Commander of the Right, ever weighty and imposing, served His Majesty in great style today with a quiver on his back, but his heavy, black beard was thoroughly unprepossessing. What could such a face ever have had in common with a prettily made up woman’s?¹⁴

The context suggests that Reizei’s incomparable looks (so similar to Genji’s) are, in contrast, wholly compatible with a woman’s. Tamakazura is keen on Reizei and would gladly enter his service, but the narrative is discreet about desire. Her gaze is admiring and perhaps,

¹² TTG, 322; GM 2:372.

¹³ It could also be Genji who appraises Suzaku this way. Most modern editors refrain from committing themselves on the subject, but one explicitly includes this sentence in an interior monologue passage attributed to Genji (Abe Akio, *Kanpon Genji monogatari*, 387–8). In Yanai et al. (*Genji monogatari* 2:170, n. 7 [SNKBT]), *onna nite mitatematsuramahoshiki o* is interpreted as “be a woman in his intimate company”; but Abe et al. (*Genji monogatari*), and Ishida and Shimizu (*Genji monogatari*), take it as translated here.

¹⁴ TTG, 500; GM 3:292.

like Fujitsubo's, affectionate, but its mood little resembles that evoked in [1] and [2]. In the end, the significance of her appraisal of Hige-kuro slips away. After all, the narrator praises Genji's beauty repeatedly, chapter after chapter, without feeling the need to associate it with a woman's.

Yoshikai Naoto proposed the hypothesis of an all-but-feminine male beauty associated with the emperor and ranking princes. Noting that the object of desire or admiration in passages [1] to [5] is an emperor or an emperor's son, he suggested that male beauty capable of being extended by the imagination into a woman's is a mark of the imperial and lies beyond any commoner's reach.¹⁵ Another passage from the same "Miyuki" scene appears to support this idea.

[Tamakazura] secretly paid particular attention to His Excellency her father [Tō no Chūjō], but despite his dazzling looks and weighty presence there was only so much and no more to be said for him [*kagiri ari kashi*].¹⁶

Kagiri ari: Tō no Chūjō's looks "go only so far and no further." Elsewhere, precisely these words may distinguish a commoner from an emperor: the commoner's standing "has a limit" (*kagiri ari*), while the emperor's has none (*kagiri nashi*). This is exactly what Suzaku means in his mournful speech to Oborozukiyo ("Miotsukushi"):

"I wonder why you would not even give me a child," he said... "I know you will have one for [Genji], with whom your tie is so much stronger, and the thought makes me very sad indeed. After all, he is what he is and no more [*kagiri areba*], and your child will have a commoner father."¹⁷

Imperial standing seems to transcend power and wealth (the busy realm proper to commoners), and its special aura makes those endowed with it peculiarly desirable. Beautiful features, almost transcending gender as well, then confirm the imperial ideal.

This reasoning sounds promising, but it neither acknowledges nor explains the erotic mood of [1] and [2]; nor does it explain other instances, such as [7] or [9], below, in which the man viewed is not imperial. It also contributes nothing toward understanding the next motif: that of a man admiring or desiring another man from the imagined perspective of a woman.

¹⁵ Yoshikai, *Genji monogatari no shinkōsatsu*, 338.

¹⁶ TTG, 500; GM 3:292.

¹⁷ TTG, 281; GM 2:281.

The watching man adopts a woman's gaze

In four passages of the tale, a man looking at a beautiful man, or picturing him mentally, realizes that if he were a woman he would want to stay with the man forever. In two cases the watcher explicitly finds the man desirable, while in the third, desire seems not to be involved. In the fourth, desire is likely but unstated.

The first passage occurs in "Aoi." Genji is mourning Aoi, his late wife, when Tō no Chūjō ("the Captain," Aoi's brother and Genji's great friend) enters the room.

[5] The Captain, gazing at [Genji] with his mind as always on pleasure [*iromekashiki kokochi ni uchi-mamoraretsutsu*], knew that if he were a woman [*onna nite*] his soul would stay with Genji instead of setting off for the hereafter. Genji was in a very casual state of dress, and he simply re-threaded the cords of his dress cloak when the Captain sat down beside him...The Captain could hardly keep his eyes off him.¹⁸

Tō no Chūjō watches Genji with a fascination encouraged by Genji's casual dress. Instead of wishing Genji were a woman, however, he imagines himself as one pointedly unlike his sister, Aoi. Aoi never desired Genji, and she indeed left him for the hereafter. Could this roundabout way of elaborating on the desire explicit in the passage be meant to blur it, or to deflect attention away from it?

The next passage, however, lacks any obvious element of desire. In "Wakana One" Suzaku says to himself, as he considers marrying his favorite daughter to Genji,

[6] I would want to be close to [Genji] if I were a woman [*onna naraba*], even a sister. That is the way I felt when we were young. No wonder women cannot resist him!¹⁹

He is probably thinking both of his beloved Oborozukiyo, who loves Genji instead, and of his daughter's future happiness. Desire returns in a much later passage that repeats the pattern of [5]. In "Agemaki" Niou considers his friend Kaoru, who is wasting away with grief after the death of Ōigimi:

[7] After so many days of tears [Kaoru's] features had changed, though not for the worse, because they now had so fine a beauty and grace that [Niou], who deplored his own waywardness [*ono ga keshikaranu*

¹⁸ TTG, 181; GM 2:55.

¹⁹ TTG, 580; GM 4:28.

ōn-kokoro narai ni], saw that *he* would certainly lose his heart to him, if he himself were a woman [*onna naraba*].²⁰

Niou contrasts Ōigimi's rejection of Kaoru with the way *he* would feel about Kaoru if he himself were in Ōigimi's position, and he explicitly does so in a mood of erotic excitement. In all three passages ([5] to [7]), a man therefore views another man from the perspective of a particular woman, one well known to himself and the reader. The only instance that breaks this pattern is the last, from "Tenarai." The governor of Kii, a retainer of Kaoru, appraises Niou:

[8] His Highness of War is the one of really striking beauty, though. I would gladly be a woman in his intimate service [*onna nite naretsukōmatsuraba*].²¹

Since the speaker is talking to a group of women he hardly knows, his remark presumably puts personal feeling in conventionally accepted terms. This topic will reappear below.

Women see the man as a woman more beautiful than any woman

In the set of gender-shift motifs just discussed, a man imagines another man as a woman; a woman imagines a man or boy as female; and a man viewing another man imagines himself as a woman. The tale also contains a passage in which women watching a man see in him a perfection of feminine beauty unattainable by women themselves. The moment occurs in "Yûgiri."

After a journey through an uncharacteristically (for the author in this part of the work) theatrical landscape, Yûgiri has reached Ono, at the foot of Mt. Hiei, and stands before the house of Princess Ochiba, whom he is determined this time, at last, to possess. Her gentlewomen view him from behind blinds.

[9] He walked up to the double doors as usual and stood looking about him. The deep scarlet gown beneath his soft dress cloak, beaten beautifully transparent, glowed in the waning sunlight that lay guilelessly upon him, and with an entrancingly casual gesture he lifted his fan to cover his face, looking, so it seemed to the watching women, exactly as a woman should look, although none ever quite succeeds [*onna koso kō wa aramahoshikere, sore dani e-aranu o*].²²

²⁰ TTG, 912; GM 5:338.

²¹ TTG, 1107; GM 6:359–60.

²² TTG, 738; GM 4449.

The women's appraisal of Yûgiri exactly matches the stock explanation of why men perform female roles in *kabuki*: the *kabuki onnagata* is more feminine than any woman could ever be. This passage is unique in the tale. Yûgiri has been described as handsome, but nothing prepares the reader for this vision of him as a sort of trans-woman, and nothing later on supports it. The account of Yûgiri's journey to Ono and the scene of his arrival there are almost parodic. Intentionally or not, passage [9] especially parodies passage [11], quoted below from "Suma." The "Suma" scene is by the sea, the "Yûgiri" scene in the mountains; the "Suma" colors, centered on Genji's clothes, are blue and green, while the "Yûgiri" colors, centered on the costume worn by Genji's son, are red and sunset gold; the dazzled watchers in "Suma" are men, those in "Yûgiri" women; and while the watchers in "Suma" find Genji's male company even more consoling than that of their girlfriends at home, for those in "Yûgiri," Genji's son makes a better woman than a woman. In one way or another, and more or less diffusely, passage [9] reverses all the others quoted.

Men admiring a man

In a particularly interesting set of scenes, one more congruent with [1] to [8] than with the anomalous [9], the male gaze contemplates Genji in a mood of erotic and aesthetic excitement, but without imagined gender transformation on either side. For quotation purposes, all three will be collapsed as much as possible.

The first occurs in "Sakaki." Swept aside by the triumph of the rival political faction, Genji and Tō no Chûjō hold a literary contest to pass the time, inviting professional scholars from the government academy (*daigaku*) to join them. Tō no Chûjō ("the Captain") is obliged to host a banquet when his side loses.

[10] Two days later the Captain gave the loser's banquet...and...all joined happily in music making. One of [his] sons, a boy of eight or nine...sang and played the *shō* prettily...When the music picked up a little he gave full voice to a very fine rendition of "Takasago." Genji took a layer from his costume and placed the garment over the boy's shoulders. His face, flushed with unaccustomed excitement, gave forth a beauty beyond any in the world, and his skin glowed wondrously through the silk gauze dress cloak and shift, until the ancient scholars watching him from their distance wept.

"How I long for you, my lily flower!" the boy's song ended, and the Captain gave Genji a cup of wine. [He said,]

"All have longed to see those first blossoms this morning burst into full bloom,

*yet I contemplate in you beauty just as great as theirs!"*²³

In this full-flavored tribute to Genji's beauty, there appears initially to be no feminine presence at all, real or imagined. The young singer's role is suggestive, and the scholars' tears of ecstasy make a wonderful touch. The moment seems to be among men only. However, the image of a woman is there after all, in the song. The *saibara* "Takasago" is a lover's passionate appeal to the woman he desires. "Oh white camellia on the hilltop, oh lovely willow," the lover cries, "I want you [*mashi mo ga na*], I want you!"²⁴ The song therefore superimposes an imagined girl on the physical Genji, yielding an image analogous to the ones evoked in [1] and [2].

A passage in "Suma" achieves the same effect by different means. Genji and his small entourage are in exile on the shore.

[11] One lovely twilight, with the near garden in riotous bloom, Genji stepped out onto a gallery that afforded a view of the sea, and such was the supernal grace of his motionless figure that, in that setting, he seemed not of this world. Over soft, white silk twill and aster he had on a dress cloak of deep blue, its sash only very casually tied; and his voice slowly chanting, "I, a disciple of the Buddha Shakyamuni..." was to their ears more beautiful than any they had ever heard before. From boats rowing by at sea came a chorus of singing voices. With a pang he watched them, dim in the distance, like little birds borne on the waters, and sank into a reverie as cries from lines of geese aloft mingled with the creaking of oars, until tears welled forth and he brushed them away with a hand so gracefully pale against his black rosary that the young gentlemen pining for their sweethearts at home were all consoled [*urusato no onna koishiki hitobito, kokoro mina nagusaminikeri*].²⁵

The languid, come-hither melancholy of this tableau exploits Buddhist piety to erotic effect in a manner developed further in Part Three of the tale. As in [1], [5], and [10], Genji is casually dressed, and the pallor of his delicate hand against the black rosary contrasts artfully with the picture of him, flushed and excited, presented two chapters earlier.

As in [1], the young men's eyes are riveted upon Genji. Instead of having them imagine him as a woman, however, the author this time

²³ TTG, 216–17; GM 2:141–2.

²⁴ Tsuchihashi and Konishi, *Kodai kayō shū*, 381.

²⁵ TTG, 244–245; GM 2:200–1.

appeals to the memory of the woman each holds dear: his sweetheart in the city. In the reader's mind this image superimposes itself upon, or colors, or reshapes, or blurs the physical spectacle of Genji. Male-male desire seems to be evoked here, only to be rhetorically deflected. Under these ambiguous circumstances, the "consolation" experienced by the young men could conceivably be sexual relief. Genji's remark to the Akashi Novice in passage [12], below, suggests as much: "[Your daughter's] solace will see me through these lonely nights." It is true, however, that [11] follows a different pattern. Nothing can be excluded from it, but nothing can be proven.

In any case, the point of the passage is elsewhere. Before the spectacle of Genji's beauty, the young men experience a wave of relief at being with him, rather than with the comparatively insignificant girlfriends who had seemed so important to them until a moment ago. This relief combines emotional (as erotic as one pleases) and aesthetic satisfaction with a renewed conviction that, despite the risk, each has been right to follow him into exile. In Genji's perfect beauty, the token of his true worth, each sees boundless future advantage for himself. The young men love him not only for what he is in himself, but for what he promises them.

Other "Suma" passages similarly evoke the young men's wholehearted devotion to Genji. "[Genji] was so kind and such a delight to the eye that [his] four or five [companions] forgot their cares and found his intimate service a pleasure,"²⁶ the narrator assures the reader; and again, "In the depths of the night [Genji] would rinse his hands and call the Buddha's Name, which to his companions was so wonderful and so inspiring that they never left him."²⁷ However, it is a messenger from Rokujō at Ise who highlights a significant aspect of their feelings when he is "dazzled" and weeps at his glimpses of Genji's beauty.²⁸ He may believe that, through Rokujō, Genji's favor will reach him, too, but his very distance from Genji suggests a larger meaning for his tears. Through Genji's beauty he (or, rather, the reader) recognizes Genji's destined role as the pole star of the realm. Genji's personal beauty, like his celebrated light, is not merely an aesthetic matter. It signals a transcendent calling in which the viewer wishes, however humbly, to share. Genji's companions of course feel the same way. Being at once so powerful and so intimate, the spell cast by Genji naturally has an erotic dimension as well.

²⁶ TTG, 244; GM 2:200.

²⁷ TTG, 249; GM 2:208.

²⁸ TTG, 242; GM 2:195.

The last passage to be quoted on the theme of the desiring gaze illustrates the complexity of Genji's appeal. It is from "Akashi." Genji and his host, the Akashi Novice, drink together one evening and reveal their thoughts to each other. The occasion is momentous for both. Ever since his daughter's birth the Novice has been begging the Sumiyoshi deity, the protector of the imperial line, to provide for her a man like Genji and so to restore the dignity of his house. Meanwhile, Genji is extremely lonely, despite his devotion to the absent Murasaki. Commanding longings converge from both sides.

[12] It was late...and the sinking moon shone with a pure light. When all was quiet the Novice poured forth his tale to Genji...describing his plans when he first moved to this shore...and, all unasked, his daughter herself...

Genji...listened with tears in his eyes. "I had been wondering for what crime I was falsely accused and condemned to wander an alien land, but all that you have said tonight leaves me certain...that [the tie between your daughter and me] is indeed a bond of some strength from past lives...Distant rumor had told me of such a lady, but I had sadly assumed that she would recoil from a ne'er-do-well. Now, however, I gather that you wish to take me to her. Her solace will see me through these lonely nights [*kokorobosoki hitorine no nagusame ni mo*]."

The Novice was transported with delight.

"Do you know as well what it is to sleep alone? Think then how she feels, wakeful through the long, long nights by herself upon this shore!"

he said...

"But surely, someone accustomed to the shore...

How traveling wears through the long melancholy of the wakeful nights that keep a grassy pillow from gathering even dreams!"

Genji's casual demeanor [*uchi-midaretaru on-sama*] gave him intense allure and a beauty beyond all words [*ito aigyō-zuki, iū yoshinaki on-kehai naru*].²⁹

The Novice intentionally seduces the willing Genji for his daughter, and once their understanding is reached, the last sentence sums up the moment. Manners and dress loosened by wine, Genji glows with excitement at the thought of what awaits him, while the equally tipsy Novice sees in him the answer to all his prayers and a manifest divinity himself. Eros colors the whole scene. Genji anticipates lovemaking

²⁹ TTG, 264–265; GM 2:244–7.

with a lady of greater personal distinction than he had ever thought to find, while the Novice presumably looks forward to his daughter's pleasure in Genji's beauty, rather as Tō no Chūjō, in passage [5], imagines the pleasure that should have been his sister's. However, in [5] Tō no Chūjō seems to desire Genji. Does the Novice, too? He alone is present to experience Genji's "intense allure," and no doubt he does so. However, there is no point in trying to define more precisely, and especially more materially, the object of his desire, when it encompasses, in a single movement of the affections, both person and lofty aspiration.

Further reflections on the feminine veil in erotic scenes

The fluidity of view in passages [1] to [12] imperils whatever value one might assign to the motif of the feminine veil. Some of these passages suggest an ideal of imperial beauty that others undermine. Some are erotic in tone, but not all. Why does Fujitsubo imagine her son as a girl? Why is Suzaku described as wishing to be a woman, even a sister, close to Genji? There being as yet no answer to these questions, it is possible only to propose, for the more clearly erotic passages, the hypothesis summarized above.

The men in these passages may imagine another man as a woman, view another man through an imagined woman's eyes, or enjoy elaborately evoked male beauty in a manner also mediated by a variously imagined feminine presence. Desire roams freely through them, communicating itself to characters and audience alike. The feminine image that drifts in them between the seer and the seen seems to be, or at least makes sense as, a rhetorical device designed to temper, presumably out of respect for the audience's notion of propriety, a mode of feeling widely known and even appreciated but not openly discussed.

Two kinds of relationship can be discerned between the men involved in these scenes. The first is that between lower-ranking men and a great lord like Genji. The second is between men who are more nearly equals and so presumably less preoccupied with favor and patronage, although these elements cannot be excluded. Two passages of *The Tale of Genji* shed light on the first. They deal with relationships between great lords (Genji, Niou) and boys who are the sons of lesser fathers.

The first occurs in "Hahakigi." Most *Genji* readers remember the moment at the end of the chapter when, hurt and frustrated by Utsusemi's rejection, Genji spends the night instead with Kogimi, her

little brother.³⁰ As the narrator tells the story, Genji's interest in Kogimi is inspired entirely by his pursuit of Utsusemi herself. This "Hahakigi" passage therefore recalls in its way the ones already treated: the image of Utsusemi mediates Genji's desire for her brother. However, the wider context of Genji's night with Kogimi is particularly suggestive. Genji selected him from the start for the access he could provide to Utsusemi and cultivated him to the same end, showering him with benefits and advantages, and taking him into his intimate service. Seduced by Genji's charm and patter, no doubt dimly aware of the long-term value of the relationship, and in any case too awed to question Genji's will, Kogimi sought to please Genji in every way, including in bed. This does not mean that he was Genji's sexual plaything, still less that Genji was addicted to little boys. The night mentioned at the end of "Hahakigi" simply arose in the natural course of events brought about by Genji's pursuit of Kogimi's sister. It was incidental to this pursuit and to Genji's wider patronage of Kogimi. At the same time, however, such a relationship (close patronage on one side, intimate service on the other) clearly allowed at least the possibility of such nights. It established the pattern still visible among mature young men in passage [11] at Suma.

Such relationships were presumably familiar in the author's time, at the level of private confidence rather than public discourse. However, it was probably more common for a gentlewoman to play Kogimi's role. The man who desired access to a lady would then similarly cultivate one of her gentlewomen and, to secure her allegiance, become her lover himself as a step toward possessing her mistress. No such case is acknowledged in the tale, but many hints suggest the idea. Genji has intimate relationships with gentlewomen (such as Chûnagon), and so, too, does Kaoru (Kozaiishō). The narrative does not present these as bridges to anyone else, but Kozaiishō, in service to the First Princess who obsesses Kaoru in "Kagerō," could probably be bent to that purpose if Kaoru wished. Meanwhile, other gentlewomen certainly provide access to their mistresses in response to intense pressure from the men concerned, and the possibility that a man might gain access to a lady by suborning one of her women is evoked repeatedly as all too real. Kogimi's machinations on Genji's behalf recall Ōmyōbu's maneuvers to bring Genji to Fujitsubo, and one wonders in that light what hold Genji has on Ōmyōbu, to be able to make her do things so dangerous and so distressing to her mistress. Perhaps she can be

³⁰ TTG, 44; GM 1:113.

imagined caught in a trap, laid by Genji, that includes a sexual relationship with her.

The second example of the pattern under discussion occurs in "Kōbai." After repeated overtures, Niou succeeds in seducing a boy (one of Tō no Chūjō's grandsons) away from the heir apparent in order to pursue, through this boy, one of the boy's sisters. The heir apparent has been using the boy for the same purpose. However, these related episodes in "Hahakigi" and "Kōbai" differ entirely in tone. In "Kōbai" there is none of the disarmingly troubled sincerity that characterizes Genji's headlong adventure in "Hahakigi." Instead, Niou's motivation comes across as a mixture of frivolity and cunning. In the end, the target sister goes as a consort to the heir apparent, while Niou gets the boy, through whom he sets out to pursue another of the sisters. "I thought [the heir apparent] would never let you go," he says to the boy, "but it appears that someone else [the new consort] may have taken your place."³¹ Niou may only be teasing, but this insinuation that the boy had earlier been the principal object of the heir apparent's erotic interest is out of keeping with anything else in the book. Also unusual for someone of her considerable rank, because so light-heartedly crass, are the boy's mother's remarks to her husband (a grand counselor) after their son comes home reeking of Niou's perfume:

Our son was [at the palace] for a night on duty, and he smelled so good when he left that the Heir Apparent knew straight off he had been with His Highness of War [Niou], though most people thought nothing of it. "No wonder he no longer cares about me!" he complained. It was quite amusing.³²

Far from disapproving, or fearing her husband's disapproval, she is pleased with her son for capturing the interest of Niou, the darling of the court and a patron of unrivaled promise. Meanwhile, "most people" at the palace apparently take such carryings-on for granted.

This situation sheds light on passage [8]: "His Highness of War is the one of really striking beauty, though. I would gladly be a woman in his intimate service." The speaker, a man of the provincial governor class, is speaking casually. Presumably the remark is unexceptionable, first because he talks of wishing to serve Niou not because Niou is influential, but because he is beautiful. His appreciation of Niou's beauty makes a high-minded cover for more persuasive calculations of self-interest. Second, his talk of wanting to be a woman, and so

³¹ TTG, 799; GM 5:50.

³² TTG, 801; GM 5:53.

on, appears to legitimize the sort of relationship with Niou that could yield patronage most beneficial to himself. It is not that a man's "intimate service" to his lord necessarily involved erotic intimacy. However, service of this kind must have made such intimacy possible and advantageous in some cases.

Men already of very high rank, for whom the advantages of patronage and service (*vis-à-vis* each other) are more diffuse, are in a different position. The current that passes between Genji and Prince Hyōbu in [2], between Tō no Chūjō and Genji in [5], and between Niou and Kaoru in [7] makes no sense unless the sort of relationship it suggests could indeed occur. While *The Tale of Genji* acknowledges none openly, the slightly later *Sagoromo monogatari* is more explicit.

Although original in its way, *Sagoromo monogatari* betrays pervasive and sometimes startlingly obvious *Genji* influence. For example, one *Sagoromo* scene merges passage [3], above, with the moment in "Wakamurasaki" when Genji makes little Murasaki write a poem.³³

The *Sagoromo* hero has his little son, whom the emperor believes to be his own (another *Genji* motif), write a poem; and the boy's fetching looks, when he bashfully demurs, make the hero "wish he could turn him into a princess" (*onna miya ni zo semahoshige ni mietamau*).³⁴

The *Sagoromo* author's expression of this motif is distinctly the more assertive of the two ("make him into a princess," compared with "see him as a girl").

A similar directness makes another *Sagoromo* scene unique, unless the intention is to make explicit something unstated in *Genji* but obvious to eleventh-century readers. The hero, who is languishing for the love of an unresponsive lady, calls after a long absence on his friend the heir apparent. Begging the heir apparent to excuse him, the hero holds out his arm. "Look!" he says, "See how thin I am! I doubt that I am long for this world." The heir apparent has never seen so white an arm before, even on a woman. He exclaims, "Ooh, I'd like to go to bed with *that!*" (*imijū fushiyoge ni anmere*) and pulls the hero down beside him. "Oh no," the hero cries, struggling adorably, "it's so hot!"³⁵ The two are apparently established lovers.

Suggestiveness and indirection are gone, and the feminine image that in *Genji* mediates every desiring glance between males has vanished.

³³ TTG, 108; GM 1:259.

³⁴ Komachiya and Gotō, *Sagoromo monogatari* 2:369. Suzuki Kazuo (*Sagoromo monogatari* 1:336) is even more direct: *onnamiya ni zo semahoshiki*.

³⁵ Suzuki Kazuo, *Sagoromo monogatari* 1:72–3.

This suggests a further thought. The feminine veil is absent from surviving earlier fiction, except for a single precursor passage in *Utsuho monogatari* (late tenth century?); and, apart from the direct *Genji* imitation just cited from *Sagoromo*, it is to be found neither in *Sagoromo* nor in the slightly later *Hamamatsu Chûnagon monogatari*, which also shows *Genji* influence. It might be assumed to represent a Heian literary convention. In fact, however, this convention seems to have been especially favored, and perhaps even invented, by the *Genji* author herself, presumably in consonance with her own taste or purposes, or perhaps also in response to those of her immediate patrons.

Distribution of the feminine veil outside and inside *Genji*

The following account of the motif beyond *Genji*, *Sagoromo*, and *Hamamatsu* will rely on the work of Yoshikai Naoto. Yoshikai confined his search to items linguistically identifiable (because following or close to the *onna nite miru* pattern) with passages [1] to [4] and [5] to [8], above. The *Utsuho monogatari* passage just mentioned reads as follows:

On first seeing [Prince Hyōbukyō], one wanted to turn him into a woman and have him for one's own, or else to [become a woman and] be his own oneself [*kano kimi o onna ni nashite motaramahoshiku, sarazu wa, ware motaremahoshiku nan miyuru*].³⁶

This so explicitly covers both fundamental *Genji* transformations (male viewer or male object changed into a woman) and is otherwise so unusual in *Utsuho* that, given the confused state of the *Utsuho* textual transmission, Yoshikai saw in it a possible "reverse import" (*gyaku yunyū*) from *Genji*.³⁷ However, the inclusion of both possibilities in a single sentence is unlike *Genji*, as is the assertive phrasing ("turn him into a woman").

Among surviving works of fiction written within a hundred years of *Genji*, only *Sagoromo monogatari* and *Yoru no nezame* (late eleventh century) include the pattern defined by Yoshikai. The *Sagoromo* passage, on the model of [3], has just been discussed. *Nezame* is most plausibly attributed to the "Daughter of Takasue," who described in her *Sarashina nikki* the enchantment she felt upon reading *Genji*. She too, therefore, presumably wrote under *Genji* influence. However, on

³⁶ Yoshikai, *Genji monogatari no shinkōsatsu*, 338. The *Utsuho* passage is quoted from the "Naishi no kami" chapter (Nakano, *Utsuho monogatari* 2:160–1).

³⁷ Yoshikai, *Genji monogatari no shinkōsatsu*, 338.

the present issue that influence was slight. The pattern of [1] to [4] is absent, and only one passage recalls [5] to [8]. A young man known as Saishō no Chūjō longs to be a woman in order to give himself (*nabiki-yorinan kashi*) to Dainagon, the devastatingly melancholy hero.³⁸ Otherwise, the main female character twice finds her own son so pretty that, like Fujitsubo in [3], she wishes to see him as a girl.³⁹ Later Heian-style fiction has three brief passages on the pattern of [1] or [2] (one each in *Torikaebaya*, *Ama no karu mo*, and *Matsura no miya monogatari*). The *Genji* legacy is therefore visible but restricted. No doubt the twelfth-century *Torikaebaya* (rewritten in the following century, the original now being lost) features a languid brother and a tomboy sister, both equally beautiful, brought up with great success as members of the opposite sex, until the inevitable complications unmask the deception. *Torikaebaya* certainly confirms an enduring, collective interest in gender shifts and shadings. Compared to *Genji*, however, it belongs to the realm of fantasy, and in any case it is some two centuries later.

The theme of the feminine veil might therefore be almost invisible in Heian fiction but for *The Tale of Genji*, where it appears more often than elsewhere, in greater variety, and in fuller form. In this respect, as in so many others, *Genji* is unusual. However, the theme is by no means evenly distributed in *Genji* itself, as this table shows.

All the major passages occur in the first thirteen chapters of the tale, with the exception of the elaborately parodic [9] and the brief, possibly derivative [7]. Only five of the twelve passages listed occur past Chapter 13.

³⁸ Yoshikai, *Genji monogatari no shinkōsatsu*, 342–3; Suzuki Kazuo, *Yoru no Nezame*, 133. Saishō Chūjō reflects in a flight of hyperbole unknown in *Genji* that, if he were a woman, he would gladly give up being empress in order to do so. This sentiment recalls the *Sarashina* diarist's statement that, when reading *Genji* as a girl, she was so entranced that "I wouldn't have changed places with the Empress herself" (Morris, *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams*, 55).

³⁹ Yoshikai, *Genji monogatari no shinkōsatsu*, 342–4; Suzuki Kazuo, *Yoru no Nezame*, 431, 506.

Passage	Part 1 (Chs 1–33)	Part 2 (Chs 34–41)	Part 3 (Chs 42–54)
[1] Genji/young men	Ch. 2, Hahakigi		
[2] Genji/Hyōbu	Ch. 7, Momijinoga		
[3] Fujitsubo/son	Ch. 10, Sakaki		
[4] Suzaku/narrator	Ch. 17, Eawase		
[5] Tō no Chūjō/Genji	Ch. 9, Aoi		
[6] Suzaku/Genji		Ch. 34, Wakana One	
[7] Niou/Kaoru			Ch. 47, Agemaki
[8] Kii/Niou			Ch. 53, Tenarai
[9] Yūgiri at Ono		Ch. 39, Yūgiri	
[10] Genji/Tō no Chūjō	Ch. 10, Sakaki		
[11] Genji/young men	Ch. 12, Suma		
[12] Genji/Novice	Ch. 13, Akashi		

It seems natural that striking scenes like [1], [2], or [11] should occur during Genji's youth, if they are to occur at all. However, they are not inevitable. There are no such moments further on, with the exception of the anomalous [9]. In fact, in three passages later than Chapter 13, the viewer (the narrator, Suzaku, the governor of Kii) sees the object only in memory. It is not that Part Three, in particular, lacks erotic scenes. Rather, in Part Three the theme or motif of the feminine veil came to the author's mind no more often, and no more fully, than it did to the mind of those who wrote later works of Heian fiction. Passages [7] and [8] resemble brief acknowledgments of established motifs.

It is striking that nothing in surviving pre-*Genji* literature, apart from that single, doubtful *Utsuho* passage, should announce such passages as [1], [2], or [11]. *Ochikubo monogatari*, by an unknown male author and slightly earlier than *Genji*, contains nothing similar; nor does Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book*, in its way an authoritative expression of accepted feminine court taste in the years immediately preceding the writing of *Genji*. The cluster of motifs discussed here under the heading of the "feminine veil" appears therefore to have been devised by the author of Part One of the tale—an author whose erotic wit, inventiveness, and daring distinguish this part of her work in many other ways as well and go far toward making it unforgettable.