The Value of Vulnerability:  
Sexual Coercion and the Nature of Love in Japanese Court Literature  

MARGARET H. CHILDS

Introduction and Hypothesis

While modern readers willingly acknowledge the virtues of informing themselves about the ways the cultural contexts of fiction of various times and places differ from their own and the ramifications this may have for interpretation, we tend to assume that the emotions depicted in the fiction of other cultures are essentially the same as those we find in our own hearts. Scholars of literature exert considerable effort to help readers understand such things as contemporary political systems, kinship structures, marriage practices, and norms of etiquette, but we have not wondered whether the smiles, tears, and frowns of characters of other times and places reflect the same feelings as our own. Love, hate, jealousy, anger, joy, and sadness are popularly taken to be universal human emotions. However, classroom experience teaching classical Japanese literature and close readings of texts have led me to the conclusion that there are subtle but significant differences between the nature of love as depicted in premodern Japanese literature and love as we expect to find it in American society today.

I believe the key to unlocking a range of problematic issues involving the nature of love in premodern Japanese literature is the realization that emotional dynamics in love affairs were often driven by a high value placed on vulnerability. That is to say,

Maggie Childs is Associate Professor of Japanese at the University of Kansas.
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romantic love is frequently associated with the impulse to nurture someone who is weak or frail or in distress in some way. Both men and women often inspire love by first arousing someone's compassion or pity. To put it in modern terms, we might call it the erotic potential of powerlessness.\(^1\)

Current work in anthropology and social psychology bears out my supposition that emotions differ across cultures. Social scientists in these fields have lately been debating the extent to which emotions are universal or culturally specific (Ekman 1984; Lutz 1988; Scherer 1988; Solomon 1984; Russell 1991). Some, following Darwin ([1872] 1965) in emphasizing the physiology of emotional reactions, claim that certain basic emotional expression is evolved, innate behavior. These researchers have arguably demonstrated that seven facial expressions of emotion—joy, fear, anger, sadness, disgust, shame, and guilt—are universally recognizable (Ekman et al. 1987; Wallbott and Scherer 1988). While studies that probe more deeply into emotional experience find substantial similarities across cultures, they have also unearthed salient differences in how people appraise the events that incite emotion and how they evaluate and experience emotions (Mauro, Sato, and Tucker 1992). Some have postulated that culturally shared values, such as collectivism or individualism, influence both "display rules" and "feeling rules" (Triandis 1994; Matsumoto et al. 1988).

Virtually all of this research, however, looks only at emotions that are triggered by discrete events and are of short duration. The nature of love has not been addressed in this literature, except for one study which aimed to discover how people conceived and categorized their emotions, rather than, as is commonly done, presenting subjects with a list of often studied emotions and asking them about their experiences with those emotions. This more open-ended research project (Shaver, Wu, and Schwartz 1992) compared how emotions are conceptualized in the United States, Italy, and China, using an analytic framework categorizing levels of emotions as superordinate (wherein emotions are deemed simplistically either positive or negative), basic (broad categories of emotion such as joy, anger, and fear), and subordinate (subcategories of the basic emotions). Four of the basic categories were the same for American and Chinese subjects—joy, anger, sadness, and fear. Americans had one category the Chinese lacked, surprise; the Chinese had one missing from the American scheme, shame. Most interesting was a dramatic difference between the emotional landscapes of these two cultures with regard to love. Within an American basic category of love, for example, were found adoration, fondness, attraction, tenderness, compassion, desire, passion, and longing (p. 187). The Chinese, on the other hand, categorized a majority of loving feelings under the rubric of "sad love." Sad love has a negative superordinate value and includes the specific feelings "infatuation, unrequited love, attachment, remote concern, nostalgia, compassion, tenderness/pity, sorrow/love, sorrow/pity" (p. 194). Positive feelings of love and admiration were conceptualized by the Chinese as subordinate emotions within the basic emotion of joy/happiness.

The high degree of overlap in cross-cultural emotional experience that this study uncovered makes it easy to see why we might be lulled into assuming the universality of emotions, but it also shows the folly of that assumption. In China pity is a

\(^1\)Japanese anthropologists have noted the role of dependency in interpersonal relations throughout Japanese society (Doi 1973; Lebra 1976, 50–66) and even mentioned "empathetic pity" in love stories favored by high school girls (Lebra 56, 61), but have not extensively explored the implications of this dynamic in romantic relationships. Literary critics, on the other hand, have ignored the implications of anthropological research for literary analysis.
subcategory of love, while for Americans it is a subcategory not of love but of sadness. Americans identify love as a positive emotion, Chinese as a primarily negative one. To this extent, American love and Chinese love are blatantly, diametrically opposed.

We cannot extrapolate backwards in time from this contemporary research, nor draw conclusions about historical reality on the basis of literary fictions, but it is provocative to notice that classical Chinese literature prominently includes frail, fragile women. In *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, for instance, Dai-yu (Black Jade) is petulant and aloof but physically fragile, and Bridal Du, the heroine of *The Peony Pavilion*, falls ill and dies of unfulfilled desire. It is, however, in Japanese literature that vulnerability and lovability are explicitly linked.

In western culture we typically expect that love will be inspired by positive attributes, that one will fall in love with a person one admires for her or his beauty, brains, wealth, wit, or whatever. This does occur in traditional Japanese literature, as in the case of Kaguya-hime in *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* (mid-tenth century).² Far more common in the traditional Japanese context, though, are cases in which characters fall most deeply in love with other characters who arouse their pity. *The Tale of the Lady Ochikubo* (late tenth century) provides an early example. The man who rescues the Lady Ochikubo from her wicked stepmother does so in part because she is beautiful and kind hearted, but primarily because he finds her plight so pitiable (Whitehouse and Yanagisawa 1965, 5, 8). It is of course true that to be lovable a character had to be attractive and refined, but often what was most alluring was vulnerability. That vulnerability was valued is admittedly quite obvious, but it bears exploration because it is counterintuitive—especially for American students, to whom “pathetic” is a pejorative word—and because it is an implicit and yet crucial motivation. For one thing, this simple concept makes some other, more recalcitrant issues in the literature comprehensible. It makes sense of the fact, as Aileen Gatten has also pointed out, that people are perceived as most beautiful when they are tired, ill, or grieving (1993). More importantly, appreciating the value of vulnerability is key to understanding the dynamics of male sexual aggression.

My theory is that men typically employed limited aggression at an early stage in the seduction process in order to make women’s vulnerability tangible, and to provide men the opportunity to adopt a nurturing, consoling position. While we do see occasional moments of affection between partners interacting on equal footing and with mutual respect (there are such moments in the relationship between the author of the tenth-century *Kagerō Diary* and Kanei), I would suggest that a fundamental component of love was nurturance. There is a wealth of evidence to support this notion. One word that comes up with startling consistency in love scenes in *The Tale of Genji* (first decade of the eleventh century) is *rautasbi* (らうたし), which means “inspiring nurturing feelings, pitiable, frail and darling” (Nihon Daijiten Kankōkai 1981, 10:1248). *Itoshi* (愛し) and *itobashi* (いとほし) are also frequently used in love scenes in the sense of “pitiable.” The high correlation between fragility and beauty constitutes another type of evidence for this phenomenon. To mention just one among innumerable examples, Genji only comes to feel affection for his proud wife Aoi when she lies weak from childbirth.³ Expressions of love occasionally allude to a desire to

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²Kaguya-hime wins many men’s hearts through her beauty and the wealth she has brought her adoptive father. She is a remarkably spunky character, not the least bit vulnerable. Neither is she human (Keene 1978).

³The appeal of vulnerability helps explain Genji’s general coolness towards Lady Rokujō and his wife Aoi. Both are proud, strong women, in no need whatsoever of protective behavior on Genji’s part.
provide protection, as in “A Long Tale for an Autumn Night” (fourteenth century) where the monk Keikai compares his beloved to cherry blossoms in need of being sheltered from the wind. When this attractive vulnerability was not a preexisting condition, men could cause distress by temporarily resorting to aggression, creating an immediate need for consolation, and thus simultaneously further enflame themselves and assume the nurturing posture in which they might best win the hearts of women.

Many contemporary readers of The Tale of Genji, especially readers of Edward Seidensticker’s translation, view Genji as a man who resorted to rape to satisfy his erotic desires. Feminist readers even of Japanese versions, like independent scholar Komashaku Kimi, also tend to consider Genji a rapist (Komashaku 1991, 7). This is partly a function of careless readings of the text, but also the result of loosely using the term “rape” to refer to sexual intercourse accompanied not by just physical pressure but by almost any kind of pressure—psychological, emotional, economic. I use the word in a strictly legal sense to refer to nonconsensual intercourse. Certainly there are many scenes containing sexual aggression in The Tale of Genji and other premodern Japanese literary texts, but I believe that at least Genji deserves to be defended from this drastic accusation of rape. It is a charge that has been made frequently, rashly, with ideological motives, and unfairly. For one thing, it turns Genji into a criminal, or, at least, a cruel and brutal villain, a perception totally at odds with the view of the narrator and other characters in the work. I would agree that he is often selfish and inconsiderate, but I would submit that, ultimately, aggressive and manipulative as he sometimes is, he never coerces a woman to have sexual relations with him.

The fact is that, in Japanese court literature, encounters that begin with male aggression do not necessarily end in rape. Sometimes they evolve into mutually desired sexual intimacy or conclude when a disappointed and frustrated man gives up hope of accomplishing a seduction. The dynamics of such encounters are particularly suggestive of the nature of love and the value of vulnerability in Japanese culture. There are several such scenes in The Tale of Genji in which Genji engages in varying degrees of aggression, from simple intrusion to behavior that would now be labeled assault and kidnapping. He engages in the latter twice, with Utsusemi and Oborozukiyo, and rape appears imminent, but in my opinion the text does not clearly support an interpretation of rape. A close reading suggests that Genji is aggressive only momentarily, then turns gentle and conciliatory and seeks to comfort, to assuage the fear he has just caused.

The implications of accusing Genji of rape are more than just a hindrance to an appreciation of this particular eponymous hero. Accompanied by lamentations of the abuse and exploitation of women, such charges often constitute a knee-jerk condemnation of patriarchy, and reflect an ideological agenda in which men are stereotyped as brutes and women infantilized as defenseless. Komashaku Kimi is

by the younger Genji. Both are angry with Genji rather than saddened when he does not pay them sufficient attention. This concept also helps explain why Yūgao had such an impact on Genji’s psyche. His relationship with her is the first time he is involved with someone who treats him as a competent adult rather than as a callow youth. It is the first time someone is dependent upon him. He revels in his role as protector, taking her to a desolate place where she anxiously clings to him. Yūgao’s death represents his failure in this new role and this, in part, is why it is so especially traumatic for him.

“Alarmed that the wind might lure this blossom [the youth] away, he wished that his sleeves were large enough to shelter it.” Childs 1980, 135.
explicit about her ideological stance: "Since a woman in a weak position easily surrenders, in such a context rape and seduction are almost the same thing" (Komashaku 1991, 104). The same attitude is embedded in current, popular definitions of rape, such as this one found in an article entitled "Educators Work to Halt Sexual Assault," published in The University Daily Kansan, 6 February 1996: "It’s not successful seduction to pressure a woman to have sex with you. It’s rape." This is political rhetoric, not a legal definition. Pressuring a woman to have sex may not constitute a seduction, but neither is it rape. Rape is the crime of having sexual intercourse with someone who has not consented. Putting pressure on someone to have intercourse may be selfish and immoral, but if one gains the consent of one’s partner, it is not rape. Women’s ability to resist amorous pressure is certainly constrained in many ways, but we need not exaggerate the situation and we should not underestimate the status, abilities, and resources of women. In Heian Japan, as now, women’s status varied, as did their ambitions and other resources. Naturally, there were many times when they succumbed to pressure, or used sex as a resource to be bartered for material security. There are, indeed, clear cases of nonconsensual sex in the literature of the Heian and Kamakura periods, by men other than Genji. There are several examples of a female character rendered so distraught by a man’s intrusion into her rooms that she fails to resist at all. Men then self-serveingly interpret this docility as willing cooperation and continue to pay lip service to the norm forbidding sexual coercion. By our standards that require explicit consent to sexual intercourse, these male characters could be found guilty of rape. On the other hand, there are also women in the literature who were able to use their wits and wiles to fend off unwanted sexual experiences and, after all, a few men who at least sometimes respected a woman’s wishes regarding sexual intimacy. In The Tale of Genji, Kaoru, for example, is virtually defined by this very characteristic.

That women were vulnerable is transparent. Although women had broad economic rights, and certainly wielded considerable political power informally, they were restricted from holding all but a few official positions in the bureaucracy. Heian narratives sometimes give the impression that women existed solely to serve men as love objects, child bearers, and seamstresses. Women’s freedom of movement was severely constrained, weighted down as they were by cumbersome clothing and by the requirement to travel almost exclusively by ox cart. Social conventions also required women to hide themselves from the sight of all but a few males. They must have been physically weak due to lack of exercise. Yet, however vulnerable women were, they were not altogether passive or helpless. In fact, resistance to a man’s amorous advances was conventional.3 Courtship typically began with poetic exchanges that followed a pattern of male initiation of contact and announcement of interest, which a woman might simply ignore or to which she responded by flatly refuting his declarations of love. Men then made ever stronger avowals until a woman acquiesced

3A former High Priestess of Ise is criticized for her lack of resistance to Retired Emperor GoFukakusa’s amorous overtures because this makes for an uninteresting affair (Brazell 1973, 59, 65). Even in the case of an arranged marriage, the bride’s family was not expected to concede too quickly. Prince Hotaru was disappointed when his proposal to marry Prince Hyōbu’s daughter Makibashira is too readily accepted: "[Prince Hotaru] had expected more of a challenge.... [H]owever .... it was much too late to withdraw his proposal" (Seidensticker 1976, 590). Tamakazura remembers with shame that she may have appeared eager to marry Prince Hotaru many years prior (591).
and accepted the man’s suit or the man gave up. In this game based largely on wit and wordplay, women actually seem to have had the upper hand. Whatever the power dynamic between a pair of potential lovers at the stage of exchanging letters, in the context of a physical encounter men clearly had the upper hand. They had the advantages of mobility and strength and, often, surprise on their side. A great many scenes of intimacy in this literature reveal that women were physically vulnerable. The most common choice when seeking to avoid unwanted sexual intimacy was flight. Retreat to inner rooms and the company of other women apparently offered safety. Barred doors, however flimsy their construction, seem to have been sufficient deterrence. When flight fails, direct physical resistance is occasionally contemplated by a woman or her female attendants, but it is never implemented. Yet there are a few cases in which a woman successfully derails a man who is determined to consummate his amorous desires. A close look at these instances suggests that what limited strategies were available to women to deflect unwanted sexual attention were conditioned by the value of vulnerability. Specifically, women had to appear invulnerable. Because reluctance was a convention, sincere disinterest had to be expressed with extreme finality and persistence. Refusal had to be definitive and unrelenting. A unique strategy was to behave with the extreme passivity of total unresponsiveness, and the most effective strategy was to be utterly imperturbable. Stony silence, for example, could dampen a man’s ardor. The value of vulnerability meant that men were discouraged only by displays of extraordinary coldheartedness. Conversely, it appears that a woman who reacted to sexual aggression by displaying distress only increased the likelihood of being raped. Tears were therefore usually counterproductive. Additionally, men who responded to such vulnerability by taking advantage of it were not likely to have thought of themselves as having behaved coercively. Furthermore, it is significant that, however often this social norm was breached, there clearly was a notion that it was somehow wrong for a man to force himself on a woman, so long as the woman was of similar or higher status. Finally, it is also worthwhile to note that there was a degree of gender equity in the nature of love. Both sides of the stereotype of vulnerable women and invincible men need adjusting. Men’s greatest passion was usually aroused by vulnerable women,

6Good examples of this can be found in the poetic exchanges constituting Kaneie’s courtship of Michitsuna’s mother, which lasted the length of one summer (Arntzen 1997, 57–61) and in the failed courtship by Michitsuna of a woman from the Yamato area, in which Michitsuna persisted for about one and a half years (305–29).
7Legends about Ono no Komachi spurning desperate suitors suggest this possibility.
8There are two scenes in The Tale of Genji in which attendants consider physical intervention when men have intruded upon their mistresses, but in both cases the attendants decide against it. They are intimidated by the men’s status and reluctant to cause a commotion. The first instance is when Chūjō discovers that Genji is making off with her mistress Utsusemi (Seidensticker 1976, 42), and the second is when the Second Princess’s women find that Yūgiri has made his unwelcome way to her side (680). Similarly, in Yowa no Nezame, a companion of Nakanokimi’s discovers Chūnagon on the verge of sexual assault but chooses not to make a scene (Suzuki 1974, 55). The one time in this literature that a woman assaults a man, which is when Hīgekuro’s wife dumps a censer of hot ashes on him to express her jealous anger at his having taken Tamakazura as a second wife, she is deemed mentally unbalanced (Seidensticker 1976, 497–98).
9Lower ranking women were, however, categorized as fair game, as is clearly revealed in Yowa no nezame. Chūnagon, mistaking Nakanokimi for a woman of the provincial governor class, is described as deciding to intrude, though he is usually a restrained fellow, specifically because, insofar as she is of comparatively low social status, he looks down on her. Suzuki 1974, 54.
but women found vulnerability attractive in men as well. When men met with stiff resistance, they sometimes overcame that resistance by presenting themselves as vulnerable. The way they did this was to fall dramatically and obsessively in love, which meant becoming deeply dependent on a woman’s requiring their love. Falling in love made them needy, helpless, even hysterical. Literature often shows men as literally lovesick, confined to their beds by the ravages of their emotions. One early example is found in the *The Tales of Ise* (nineth century), episode 40. A young man, deprived of his beloved by his parents’ intervention, loses consciousness for more than a day (McCullough 1968, 97–98). In the Muromachi period (1392–1568) tale “The Three Monks,” Kasuya no Shirozaemon loses his appetite and takes to his bed for several days until a doctor diagnoses him as lovesick and his lord plays matchmaker to facilitate his recuperation (Childs 1991, 74–75).

**Seduction Strategies**

The first scene in *The Tale of Genji* that raises the suspicion of Genji as a rapist and that simultaneously demonstrates the appeal of vulnerability is his one and only face-to-face encounter with Utsusemi. I will argue that what we see here is the strategic use of limited aggression employed early in a process of seduction, not rape. Genji abducts Utsusemi and finds her fear and vulnerability touching. Once he has brought her to a secluded room and set her down, however, it does not appear that he again resorts to force. Instead, Genji is consistently portrayed as trying, with all his considerable charm, to persuade Utsusemi to surrender to his desires. Distraught as she is, Utsusemi never wavers in rejecting Genji’s proposal that they embark upon an affair. Many scholars see sexual intercourse occurring between the lines; the editors of both the *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (hereafter NKBT) and *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* (hereafter NKBZ) editions take this position (Yamagishi 1958, 1:97 n. 21; Abe 1970,1:178 n. 3). But there is nothing definitive to support such a reading. On the contrary, a metaphor presenting Utsusemi as indomitable and Genji’s later comment that he felt she had “defeated” him imply, to my mind, that Genji did not accomplish his goal of seducing her.

While Seidensticker is only following a conventional interpretation of this scene, his translation encourages a reading of rape far more than does the ambiguous original. In Seidensticker’s version, one of the first things Genji says to Utsusemi after he has made his way surreptitiously to her bedside sounds like a threat, albeit one he immediately tries to soften: “You are perfectly correct if you think me unable to control myself. But I wish you to know that I have been thinking of you for a very long time” (Seidensticker 1976, 42). I would render this passage as one in which Genji is not trying to intimidate Utsusemi but to win her trust by empathizing with her. Genji follows with a flattering remark: “You might naturally assume this abrupt visit is the result of a sudden impulse, but I have long wanted to tell you of my feelings for you.”10 It is the opening volley in a well-integrated effort to seduce her by convincing her of his long-standing interest. My interpretation of this line is seconded by the narrator’s evaluation of Genji’s attitude at this point, which

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10Uchitsukeni, fukakaranu kokoro no hodo to mitamafuran, kotowari naredo, toshigoro omohiwataru kokoro no uchi mo kikoeshirasemu to te nan (Abe 1970, 1:175).

うちつけに、深からぬ心のほどと見まつならん、ことわりなれど、年ごろ思うわたらる心の中も聞こえ知らせむてなん。
Seidensticker renders both accurately and gracefully: “His manner was so gently persuasive that devils and demons could not have gainsaid him” (Seidensticker 1976, 42).

Next, Seidensticker has Genji promising to behave himself: “I will do nothing unseemly” (Seidensticker 1976, 42). Promising not to act “unseemly” raises exactly that possibility, and so Genji again inaccurately appears as threatening. This translation is further seen to be illogical insofar as this is the point at which he picks her up and takes her into another room. Perhaps, to Genji, this maneuver is not “unseemly,” although Utsusemi and her attendant Chūjō certainly think it is. It seems more likely to me that with this phrase Genji is reassuring Utsusemi that he does not intend to trifle with her. That is, what he promises is not to treat her as a plaything. Thus, Genji is not alluding to possible impropriety but asserting that he is serious about developing a significant relationship with her. Furthermore, Utsusemi is here described as worrying, not about physical indignities that might befall her, but about what people might think. Nevertheless, her distress is extreme and Genji feels sorry for her. Having set her down in an out-of-the-way room, he attempts now to seduce her with words: As Seidensticker aptly puts it: “the sweet words poured forth, the whole gamut of pretty devices for making a woman surrender” (Seidensticker 1976, 43). The arguments Genji uses boil down to these two: his feelings for her are deep and, in any case, their tryst is a matter of fate. But Utsusemi is not moved. Her attitude of resistance is described in these terms: “Her natural disposition was to be flexible, but now she was firm, like young bamboo; it did not seem that she could be broken.”

It is precisely at this point that the NKBZ and NKBZ editors interject a note asserting their conviction that Genji and Utsusemi have sexual relations (Yamagishi 1958, l:97 n. 21; Abe 1970, l:178 n. 3). They indicate that a gap in the narrative between this and the following sentence, which describes Utsusemi weeping in frustration at Genji’s persistence, is when the sexual activity takes place. They do not comment on the implications of the metaphor. It may be possible to argue that the metaphor of the unbreakable bamboo refers to Utsusemi’s emotional stance rather than her physical impenetrability, but this seems unlikely to me. Perhaps they would suggest that at the beginning of the time unaccounted for, Utsusemi was “not to be broken,” but that by the point that the text picks up again (with “She was weeping.” Seidensticker 1976, 43), she has either acquiesced to Genji’s sexual demands or been raped. I, however, am inclined to give the metaphor substantial weight and do not see subsequent narrative passages as definitively referring to consummated sexual relations.

Editors’ notes and Seidensticker’s translation again imply or assert sexual contact in their handling of the next few paragraphs. Seidensticker’s “He had his hands full but would not for the world have missed the experience” (Seidensticker 1976, 43) is appropriately ambiguous. I can easily imagine Genji finding the contest of wills a worthwhile “experience,” even if it did not culminate in sexual relations. I grant the plausibility, but not the indisputability, of the NKBZ editors’ assertion that the

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12Hitogoro no tawoyagitaruni, tsuyoki kokoro wo shihite kuwahetareba, nayotake no kokorochi shite, susaga ni oru beku mo arazu (Abe 1970, l:177–78). Seidensticker gives “Naturally soft and pliant, she was suddenly firm. It was as with the young bamboo; she bent but was not to be broken” (43).
original "mizaramashikaba" (見ざらましかば) (literally, "if he had not seen her," Seidensticker’s "experience") means specifically, "if he had not had sexual relations with her" (Abe 1970, l:178). In translating part of a subsequent short speech of Utsusemi's, Seidensticker appears to agree with the NKBZ editors: "But this is hopeless, worse than I can tell you. Well, it has happened. Say no to those who ask if you have seen me." This use of the pronoun "it" strongly signals "sexual intercourse," and is thus closer to the modern translation given in NKBZ than to the original. The translation might instead read: “But I cannot endure the thought/prospect of a fleeting relationship such as this. Well, in any event, don’t tell anyone you have seen me.”

My position that we need not assume that Genji has consummated his desire for Utsusemi is reinforced, even in Seidensticker’s translation, several pages later when Genji, referring to Utsusemi, implies as much with these words: ‘He had thought the coldness of the governor’s wife, the lady of the locust shell,’ quite unique. Yet if she had proved amenable to his persuasions the affair would no doubt have been dropped as a sad mistake after that one encounter. As matters were, the resentment and the distinct possibility of final defeat never left his mind” (Seidensticker 1976, 62).

Rather than rape, I would suggest that what we see here is the strategic use of limited aggression, employed early in a process of seduction. Genji abducts Utsusemi and finds her fear and vulnerability pitiable (itohashi). He has employed force briefly to ensure privacy with her but maintains a cajoling rather than intimidating stance throughout. Once he has moved her from one room to another it does not appear that he again resorts to force. Instead, Genji is consistently portrayed as trying to talk Utsusemi into submitting to him. He is shown as expecting to win her over with his way with words, with his insistence and persistence. Utsusemi is, in fact, impressed with Genji, and admits that if it were not for her current situation, that is, if she were not married, she would be tempted to indulge in even an ill-fated affair with Genji. But this hypothetical observation is as close as she comes to acquiescing. While Genji continues to court Utsusemi for some time, he is clearly more motivated by the challenge she represents than real affection. Perhaps that is why his efforts lapse before too long.

Genji’s first encounter with Oborozukiyo has a similar structure but a different outcome. Genji comes across Oborozukiyo sitting near an open door in the dark. He takes hold of her sleeve, then picks her up and moves her from an inner room to its adjacent, enclosed gallery. She is frightened and calls out but no one comes. His first words to her seem ominous as they appear on the page: “It will do you no good. I am always allowed my way” (Seidensticker 1976, 153). Yet Oborozukiyo is reassured because she recognizes Genji’s voice. Although her fears are relieved, she is still “wabishi,” upset or dismayed, probably at the abruptness of this encounter. That she is not overly distraught by the situation is suggested by the fact that her thoughts turn to his opinion of her: “She did not want to appear cold-hearted or ill-mannered.” We may find this an unfamiliar motive for indulging in sexual relations, but it does imply that she was making a choice. Seidensticker, however, presents Oborozukiyo as having sexual relations with Genji, at best, by default, because she was too naive or immature to resist effectively. His translation unambiguously portrays Oborozukiyo as an involuntary partner: “she, young and irresolute, did not know how to send him on his way.” My reading of the original, supported by commentary, finds Oborozukiyo not necessarily unable to refuse Genji’s advances, but unwilling to refuse him. I would
propose this translation: "Being young and soft-hearted, she could not summon the resolve to rebuff him firmly." The juxtaposition of young and soft-hearted suggests not helplessness, but short-sightedness. That is, she is being reckless. A liaison with Genji is, after all, politically disastrous for both of them. As I see it, the implication is that she might have refused him if she had cared to. As I mentioned above, elsewhere in court literature it is made quite clear that it was conventional for a woman to present at least token resistance to a man's amorous overtures. Mild reluctance, then, represents a woman's challenge to a man to press his case, to earn her indulgence. It is only strong resistance that signals genuine aversion to intimacy. In contrast to Utsusemi, Oborozukiyō demonstrates token rather than sincere resistance.

Finally, Oborozukiyō's demeanor in the morning suggests that she does not regret physical intimacy with Genji. Her deepest concern is that their relationship not be exposed. She is also pessimistic about the prospect of another visit from Genji. She shows vulnerability throughout; he has resorted to physical force only to assure their privacy.

The two scenes in which Genji spends a night with Fujitsubo suggest both Genji's fundamental respect for her bodily integrity and also that women found vulnerability attractive in men as well as vice versa. Although Genji gains access to Fujitsubo's room (by pressuring her attendant) against her expressed wishes, it is clear that he never touches her in an aggressive way. It must be acknowledged that Genji's persistence in courting Fujitsubo, despite her explicit and firm rejections of him, would constitute sexual harassment in this day and age. Nevertheless, a close reading of the text suggests that the only time they engage in sexual intercourse is the one time when Fujitsubo's resolve to fend off Genji's advances is weakened by her pity for him. She has been graciously but resolutely refusing his advances for some time, apparently, when Genji says, poetically, that his unrequited love for her makes him want to die. In tears, he recites: "So few and scattered the nights, so few the dreams. Would that the dream tonight might take me with it" (Seidensticker 1976, 98). This pathetic plea inspires in Fujitsubo an echoing suicidal thought. Her concern is for her reputation, but there is a trace of resignation in her tone: "Were I to disappear in the last of dreams/Would yet my name live on in infamy?" Then there is a gap in the action; the next thing tersely described is their parting that morning. Clearly, it is when Genji expresses despair, when he reveals vulnerability, that Fujitsubo is moved to yield to him. There is no doubt that they had sexual relations, since Fujitsubo is soon revealed to be pregnant with Genji's child.

Five years later, when Genji next gains access to Fujitsubo's room for two nights and a day, she does not waver in her rejection of him. The first night she is described as remote and unresponsive, and then she suffers chest pains and fainting spells that bring her attendants to her side. Genji is forced to hide in a closet for a whole day. The second night he pleads his case yet again but she graciously deflects his passion. When he fails to evoke her pity the night ends without physical intimacy. The text is explicit here about Genji's attitude of respect for Fujitsubo's bodily integrity:

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13Onna mo wakau tawoyagite, tsuyoki kokoro mo shiranu narubeshi (Abe 1970, 1:427).
14... sasuga ni imikikereba... (Abe 1970, 1:306). さすがにいみじければ
“Forcefully contravening her wishes was unthinkable.”15 He does not flinch, however, from verbal aggression. He declares that he will die of his unrequited love, complains that his unshakable attachment to her will prevent his attaining salvation, and reminds her that her own prospects for salvation will also be hindered by it. This speech represents both a threat and an accusation. She, however, is unruffled. She firmly refuses to accept responsibility for his passion, telling him it is his own fault: “Remember that the cause is in yourself/Of a sin which you say I must bear through lives to come” (Seidensticker 1976, 198). Genji finally leaves. Interestingly, he soon reconsiders his strategy and reverts to trying to arouse pity in her instead of guilt. This he imagines he might accomplish by pouting: “He wouldn’t even write to her, so that she would realize how wretched he was.” Needless to say, this is fruitless.

To be fair I must present incriminating evidence, that is, a counterexample, one that suggests that Genji did contemplate sexual coercion as not beyond the realm of possibility. This attitude is revealed when the Akashi ex-Governor has arranged for Genji to marry his daughter. Typically, the father is not concerned with his daughter’s wishes, although he is afraid that she will be hurt if Genji does not find her attractive: “It would be very sad for the girl, offered heedlessly to Genji, to learn that he did not want her” (Seidensticker 1976, 261). When Genji finds that the lady does not welcome his visit, he “was annoyed and thought of leaving. It would run against the mood of things to force himself upon her, and on the other hand he would look rather silly if it were to seem that she had bested him at this contest of wills.” (263). It seems that out here in the provinces, with a woman of marginal social status (by his standards),16 Genji thinks of this courtship as a game and considers resorting to coercion to take what has been offered to him, but is held back by a notion of what would be appropriate to “the mood of things.” Commentators note that, having gained the father’s permission, all he needs now is the lady’s cooperation (Abe 1970, 2:260 n. 11), perhaps implying that it would offend the father to take by force what he has been offered and should be able to gain by cajolery. To his credit Genji only thinks of coercion in the context of having decided against it. Instead, he perseveres, using a gentle and polite manner. In fact, there is a touch of self-pity in his request that she keep him company: “Would there were someone with whom I might share my thoughts/And so dispel some part of these sad dreams” (263). At this point, Genji intrudes; the lady is distraught and flees. Genji next confronts a barred door. Seidensticker hints more broadly than the original that Genji is aggressive here: “Though he did not exactly force his way through, it is not to be imagined that he left matters as they were.” A more literal translation would read: “There is no indication that Genji forced his way in. But how could he leave things as they were?”17 Clearly the implication is that he resorted to persuasion, not brute force. The narrator seems a bit lazy here. Why not explain just how Genji managed to get that door opened? Given the minimal nature of this description, it seems especially significant that the text cautions its readers not to imagine Genji as forcing his way in.

Nevertheless, that the Akashi Lady is a reluctant partner is immediately acknowledged. Seidensticker’s version gives Genji’s feelings here a patronizing slant:

せめて従ひきこげざらむもかたじけなく Seidensticker 1976.
16Genji has already indicated that he has shown the Akashi Lady undue deference by visiting her. He had wanted her to be brought to his quarters (Seidensticker 1976, 260).
17... shihitemo oshitachi tamahanu sama nari. Saredo sanomimo ikadeka aramu (Abe 1970, 2:247). しひてもおし立ちたまはぬさまなり。されどさのみもいかでかあらむ。
“Pleasure was mingled with pity at the thought that he was imposing himself upon her” (Seidensticker 1976, 263). The NKBZ editors prefer to suppose that Genji is thinking that their karmic bond must be a particularly strong one to have brought them together despite the unlikelihood of the match (Abe 1970, 2:247 n. 25). Thus, this passage might be rendered this way: “When he thought of the strength of the karmic bond that had brought them together against her will, he was deeply moved.”

Earlier remarks of Lady Akashi’s indicate that her fears involve the long-term prospects of a relationship with Genji: Due to the status difference between them, she does not anticipate that it will result in anything but grief. Indeed, her fear that Genji is trifling with her lead her to thoughts of suicide (Seidensticker 1976, 264). Yet, she carries on and graciously indulges Genji. All this points to the probability that we are dealing with a situation in which Genji coaxed Lady Akashi into acquiescing to the marriage that her father has arranged. Much is left ambiguous in this section. The fact that her father offered her in marriage to Genji seems to suggest that she had no choice in the matter, but she is presented as believing she can veto the match: “She had resolved to admit him no nearer” (262–63). Perhaps Genji used high-pressure tactics, and perhaps this is just a step away from coercion, but the text specifically recommends that we read this scene as a seduction, not a rape.

Thus far, this review of Genji’s courtship strategies hardly allows us to avoid characterizing Genji as insensitive and selfish because of his unwelcome intrusions into women’s rooms and extreme persistence in expressing his unwanted affections, behaviors that clearly caused women extreme distress. The evidence, however, does not support the judgment that he was a rapist. In his efforts to seduce Utussemi and Oborozukiyo, Genji is aggressive insofar as he picks them up and moves them to nearby, secluded spaces. With the Akashi Lady and Fujitsubo his aggression is limited to unwelcome intrusion into their rooms. Following these moments of limited physical aggression, he relies on his considerable charm to win compliance. In the most challenging of situations, that is, with Fujitsubo, when his approach was to present himself as vulnerable (specifically, suicidal), he was indulged. When his strategies of persuasion were not effective, that is, with Utussemi and in the instance of his second encounter with Fujitsubo, he accepted rejection. The evidence suggests that he respected a woman’s bodily integrity when she definitively and persistently refused him.

Now, hoping that I have established some credibility for Genji as a man of at least minimal principle, let me turn to an episode that must be analyzed if Genji is to be cleared of all charges: the loss of Murasaki’s virginity.

I, too, on earlier readings of The Tale of Genji, felt that Genji raped Murasaki, but my evaluation has shifted with more recent readings. The key lies in paying close attention to Murasaki’s feelings on the morning after her first sexual experience with Genji. The text gives no indication of the conversation and behavior that accompanied the consummation of Genji’s marriage to Murasaki. However, Seidensticker’s translation of Genji’s thoughts as he contemplates having sexual relations with Murasaki beforehand encourages an interpretation of rape: For “shinobigatakunarite, kokorogurushikeredo,” (忍びがたくなりて、心苦しけれど) Seidensticker gives: “he could not restrain himself. It would be a shock, of course” (1976, 180). “Shinobi” means either “to endure, to be patient,” or “to suppress, to keep secret” (Ôno, Satake, and Maeda 1974, 643). Seidensticker’s use of the former definition implies a physical


かうあながちなりける契りを思ふにも、浅からずあはれなり。
urgency, but the context is that Genji has been enjoying a platonic, paternal relationship while waiting for four years for Murasaki to reach maturity. She is now fourteen, the appropriate age for marriage in Heian Japan. Commentators prefer the second meaning of shinobi and offer this interpretation: “While she had been too young for a romantic relationship, he had found her charming in an innocent way, but now he was unable to suppress his love for her as an adult woman” (Abe 1970, 1:63 n. 22–24).

The second phrase at issue here, “It would be a shock,” is also misleading. It makes Genji sound as though he is cold-heartedly anticipating a painful experience for Murasaki. Others interpret kokorogurushikeredo as referring not to Murasaki’s feelings, but to Genji’s. Norma Field translates this with an understatement: “Genji was not altogether easy about it” (Field 1987, 171). Kokorogurushi means he was distressed or anxious, that is, Genji was quite concerned about how Murasaki would respond to her sexual initiation. Why then, if he is worried about it, will he do it? He seems to have been balancing his desire against her potential distress for quite some time. Is it only that he has now grown impatient and is selfishly deciding to satisfy himself at her expense? Seidensticker’s translation leads us in that direction. It is also possible, however, to see the timing as dictated by Murasaki’s age. Timing is, after all, the only real issue here. Sexuality is a fundamental, virtually inevitable, aspect of adulthood. Murasaki’s childishness has been emphasized, but, as mentioned above, Murasaki is in fact now fourteen years old, not at all young for marriage in Heian court circles. Everyone else thinks Genji consummated the marriage long ago, when Murasaki was indeed too young, and they objected then. By this time everyone assumes they are a typical, sexually active couple. Indeed, it is indicated that they have been, literally, sleeping together. It has been pointed out that Murasaki is quite innocent of sexual knowledge. No matter the manner of its presentation to her, she is likely to be startled and surprised. If this is what Seidensticker meant to imply by the reference to Murasaki being shocked, it is not altogether off the mark, but juxtaposing it with the suggestion that Genji had uncontrollable physical urges has the unfortunate effect of implying that Genji did not intend to introduce sexuality to her kindly and gently.

In any event, we have minimal evidence to show how Genji managed Murasaki’s initiation into sexual relations; all we are given is a description of the morning after. Significantly, this is suggestive not of rape, but of seduction. Genji rises first, Murasaki stays in bed. He leaves her a poem, she only picks it up after he has left. Seidensticker describes her here as moving “listlessly” (Seidensticker 1976, 180), not as hurt, distressed, sad, or upset. “Listlessly” does not translate any particular word. It emerges from the description in the original of Murasaki as lethargic and nonchalant in her receipt of a note from Genji. A fairly literal translation of the passage that tells what happened immediately after Genji leaves an inkstone by her pillow would read: “When no one was looking, she finally raised her head and saw a letter. Casually she opened it and read it.”¹⁹ Only at this point, after she has read Genji’s poem, do we learn anything of her emotional state this momentous morning. The poem is this: “Many have been the nights we have spent together/Purposelessly, these coverlets between us.” The whole point of this verse is that Genji had been waiting for, planning on, and looking forward to having sexual relations with her. Murasaki reacts


人間に、からうじて頭もたげたままへるに、ひき寄びたる文御枕のもとにあり。何心もなくひき開けて見たまへば
vehemently to this. Suddenly she is angry. She reports being astounded at the sentiment expressed in the poem and regrets having trusted Genji. What is she upset about? Sex itself? Sexual coercion? Not necessarily. Not likely. Her feelings are those of someone who has been deceived. So we must ask, why does she feel duped and betrayed only when she finds out he has long intended to have a sexual relationship with her? The best explanation is probably to be gained by imagining how a man of 22, still young but quite experienced, would undertake the sexual initiation of a naïve and innocent young woman with whom he has had a four-year platonic relationship, and with whom he hopes to continue to have a long-term romantic relationship. Isn’t it more logical that he would seduce her, rather than rape her? Might he not have introduced sexuality to Murasaki as a new game, as a spontaneous adventure? What fits the context is that Genji coaxed and cajoled Murasaki, that he enticed her to participate in sexual intimacy on grounds that the poem then revealed to have been a lie. Murasaki is upset, then, because she has learned that she has been deceived and feels her trust has been betrayed. Genji may have been inconsiderate in choosing to use deceit in the process of initiating Murasaki into the world of adult sexuality and married life, but there is no evidence that he raped her.

Later the same day Genji is seen thinking of himself as, in Seidensticker’s terms, a “child thief” (Seidensticker 1976, 182). This raises the specter of statutory rape, a concept worth considering here. Whatever the minimum age for legal consent, the intent of such laws is to protect those who are incompetent to consent to sexual relations. While the reader may not have been counting, Murasaki has reached the appropriate age for sexual intimacy, although she is described as still naïve. It is not implied that we should consider her too immature to consent to sexual relations. The point, then, is that there is no reason to assume that Genji would not have been able to gain Murasaki’s consent. Where Seidensticker leads us to imagine statutory rape, the original is less inflammatory. A more literal translation would read: “Trying to placate her, he was amused to imagine, for the first time, what it might feel like to have stolen a bride.” The problem is that Murasaki, whom he loves, is angry with him. He is comparing his need for tact and diplomacy with someone he has recently alienated with the far more difficult task of trying to win the heart of someone who would be thoroughly hostile. Genji is patronizing toward Murasaki on this morning after their first sexual encounter, but he is also extremely solicitous and conscientious in arranging the ritual foods signifying marriage. The supposition that Genji raped Murasaki is sheer speculation and would seem inconsistent and unlikely. If we take the value of vulnerability into account, the innocent and trusting Murasaki is already vulnerable and appealing, and Genji is already in a nurturing role with her. There was no motivation for Genji to augment her desirability and maneuver himself into a benevolent position as he did by using limited aggression with the two women who were strangers to him, Utsusemi and Oborozukiyo.

Resistance Strategies

The value of vulnerability affected the type of strategies women might use to resist unwanted sexual encounters. Because feminine resistance was conventional, a

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君は、こしらへわびたまひて、いまはじめ盗みもて来たらむ人の心地するもいとをかしくて
generally reluctant woman had to be especially emphatic to get this message across to her unwelcome suitor. Alternatively, she might use coldhearted indifference as the means to convey her disinterest. Thus it was the case that passivity that arose from confident indifference might be effective, although passivity which stemmed from weakness or fear was no deterrent at all.

We have already seen what I count as two successfully thwarted seductions: Utsusemi fend off Genji with strenuous arguments about their differing social standing and her marital status and Fujitsubo rebuffs him resolutely yet graciously, "avoiding explicit rejoinder" and with "quiet dignity." The obstinate Genji forced these women to make extraordinary efforts to communicate the fact that their reluctance was real, but he ultimately acquiesced to their refusals.

A more common reaction to unwelcome amorous intrusions was passivity. Passivity is a dangerous strategy, especially in a culture that finds vulnerability appealing. Indeed, it worked only rarely or temporarily. Often it was not a consciously chosen strategy of resistance at all, but a failure to strategize, that is, a helplessness born of panic. This kind of passivity was worse than resistance. It seemed to enflame men and actually increase the likelihood of rape.

The only fully successful example of a display of extreme passivity used to rebuff an ardent suitor is found in The Changelings (Torikaebya monogatari, twelfth century). This example seems problematic at first because it is imperative to the plot that Saishō be thwarted in his attempt to seduce Naishi no Kami. The situation is that Naishi no Kami is actually a male posing as a woman and this secret is never to be revealed to Saishō. On the other hand, however, we may surely presume that the author would choose to depict Naishi no Kami’s resistance in a way that readers would have accepted as plausible. So, how does she manage to fend off this fellow? When Naishi no Kami finds that Saishō has sneaked into her bedroom, she is startled but not distraught: "being a prudent and restrained sort, she seemed to stay absolutely still" (Willig 1983, 79). Saishō is the one who "wept and was distressed." He spends two nights and the day in between with her, and seeks to win her compliance with his desires by alternating between reproaching her and weeping, but she never yields. Not until dawn on the second morning does she finally speak to him. Instead of responding to anything he has said, she simply remarks that she expects her father and brother to arrive soon and reminds him there will be trouble if they find him in her quarters. Then in the most prosaic of poems, she flatly announces that she has no intention of ever having anything to do with him. At this point Saishō finally gives up with the thought that "[t]here was nothing more [he] could say without being unkind" (80). What is intriguing here is that the text depicts Naishi no Kami as successfully defending herself by simply not reacting to this man. She seems to have remained impassive and virtually motionless the whole time. Although she does speak to Saishō at the last minute, she is completely calm and absolutely aloof when she does so. It seems significant that while none of the characters Saishō amorously pursues reciprocates his feelings, Naishi no Kami is the only one who escapes his embrace. (This is also an example of a man displaying vulnerability as a courtship strategy, although it does not work in this case. Nevertheless, Saishō's weeping and wailing to express his longing for Naishi no Kami is a tactic that the reader seems expected to

\[21\text{Asagao is a good example of confident indifference deterring Genji's interest from afar. Insofar as their relationship is conducted at a distance, however, it provides no useful data for this study.}\]
accept as an appropriate one.) It is because Naishi no Kami is stouthearted that she is able to maintain her stance of placid passivity for so many hours.

A strategy of passivity has its limits, however. In *The Confessions of Lady Nijō (Touwazugatari, c. 1310)*, the distraught passivity displayed by the youthful Lady Nijō on her first night in the company of Emperor GoFukakusa is a result of her shock and dismay at this sudden, arranged ‘marriage.’ She is to be a concubine and this relationship has been sanctioned by her father. Although no one has told her what to expect, she has been advised to be cooperative: Her father has cautioned her: “A lady-in-waiting should never be stubborn, but should do exactly as she’s told” (Brazell 1973, 4). Clearly she has no say in the matter and there is no need for the Emperor to go through the motions of courtship with her, but he does. When he finds her asleep on what is supposed to be the night of his first conjugal visit, he lets her sleep on, himself falling asleep by her side. When they both awaken, he confesses, at great length, his long-standing affection for her. Her only response is to cry; she seems to have expected him to take advantage of her complete and utter powerlessness. She writes specifically: “He did not attempt to force me” and describes how he continued to try to induce her to be responsive to his attentions. This situation lasted the whole night: “The night passed without my offering him even a single word of response” (5–6). The second night she again remained mute and reports that she ‘lay motionless’ (8). This time, however, her resistance to the Emperor is motivated by her loyalty to another lover. Her strategy of passivity worked the first night. The Emperor acquiesced to her reluctance for that one night, trying to win her cooperation first with declarations of love, and then by alternately “scolding and comforting” (6) her. He would not, however, tolerate the second night of refusal, and finally tore her clothes in the process of committing what is indisputably a rape. Lady Nijō’s account clearly shows the limits of the effectiveness of a strategy of passivity, but perhaps it is therefore all the more remarkable that this was the tactic she chose and that it was effective for any time at all.

An example of the fact that passivity accompanied by the display of emotional distress seems only to have exacerbated a man’s interest is found in *The Tale of Genji*. Kashiwagi and the Third Princess (Genji’s principal wife at the time) take vulnerability to new extremes. Whereas other men wooing women alternated between flattery, cajolery, and assertiveness, Kashiwagi’s only stance in his courtship of the Third Princess is that of the desperately lovesick admirer. He presents himself as thoroughly pitiable; his love has been causing him nothing but regret, pain, fear, and suffering (Seidensticker 1976, 613). Although he has frightened her by barging in, it does not occur to him to console her. Kashiwagi had imagined the Third Princess as haughty and dignified. If she had been such a person, his pathetic appeal might have gained him his simple desire, but she is, quite to the contrary, nowhere near as mature as her age of twenty-one years should warrant. She lacks the presence of mind to realize that she has the upper hand. She is so vulnerable herself that she is unable to muster the modicum of compassion he so desperately craves. Even though Kashiwagi anticipates no more than revealing his love for the Third Princess and longs for no more than a kind word from her, she is quite incapable of uttering a single syllable. In the course of their night’s encounter she is described as terrified, trembling, speechless, appalled, in a state of shock, and weeping (cf. 613–15). Having expected her to be aloof and intimidating, Kashiwagi finds her distress endearing. Kashiwagi now sees her as sweet, adorable, and docile. Thus, his intentions to control his feelings dissolve, a gap in the narrative implies the consummation of his desire, and she becomes pregnant.
In other scenes of sexual intimacy we garner at least a hint of the woman’s feelings directly from the narrator. Here there is no indication of acquiescence by the Third Princess anywhere except in Kashiwagi’s mind. His interpretation of her failure to resist as willingness to indulge him is completely arbitrary. However self-serving this is, the fact that he takes the trouble to convince himself that she has consented suggests that he does, on some level, possess a moral standard that forbids sexual coercion. Even more interesting is the fact that sexual intercourse does not satisfy him emotionally. He grows more and more desperate for an expression of sympathy from her. As she remains mute, he descends further into despair. He threatens to die of a broken heart if she does not at least tell him that she feels compassion for him. Consoled at the prospect of his leaving, the Third Princess finally manages to express herself and Kashiwagi departs, more in love with her than ever.

For another example of the uselessness of passivity born of distress, let us look again at the romantic career of Saishō, who was cowed by Naishi no Kami’s frigid rebuff. This is the only time he accepts such a defeat. Twice he has sexual relations with women who obviously do not want them. Neither woman is described as resisting Saishō, but their reluctance is perfectly clear. The first example is when he intrudes on Yon no Kimi, who is married to Chūnagon, a female passing as a man. This married couple enjoy a totally platonic relationship and Yon no Kimi is described as quite ignorant of the phenomenon of sexual intercourse. Saishō intrudes upon her so brazenly that she first assumes he is her husband, but when she realizes he is not, she hides her face in her robes and then cries out in fright when he pulls her into a curtained sleeping area. In contrast to Naishi no Kami’s cool impassivity, Yon no Kimi is distraught. Saishō is immune to this manner of expressing rejection. He does not give Yon no Kimi any chance to regain her composure. He seems to assault her immediately. He does not even speak to her, except for the poem he recited as he barged in, until after he has raped her. Only then does he try to comfort her and to rationalize his behavior by declaring their relationship a matter of fate (Willig 1983, 43; Suzuki 1976, 35). With Genji we could observe distinct stages of behavior that moved from limited aggression to efforts to calm a woman’s fears, and only then to sexual intimacy. Saishō, on the other hand, seems to have quickly forced himself upon a frightened and vulnerable woman and then expected her to make the best of it. His passion for Yon no Kimi first flared when he glimpsed her beauty, but now that she is pitiful as well as desirable, he falls deeply in love with her.

Some days later Saishō finally acknowledges Yon no Kimi’s feelings in thinking back over their encounter as he ponders his next move. This is when he seems to consider and reject the idea of rape explicitly, even though we have just read of him doing exactly that. When Saishō first realized that Chūnagon has not consummated his marriage with Yon no Kimi, he could imagine no other reason than some religious vow on Chūnagon’s part (Willig 1983, 44). Revisiting this question a few days later, it occurs to him that Chūnagon had chosen not to force himself on a reluctant Yon no Kimi. But Saishō has no such scruples. His next thought is to kidnap Yon no Kimi, although he immediately talks himself out of it. His logic is purely practical, not moral. He reminds himself that she does not at all reciprocate his love (indeed, she will not even communicate with him) and concludes that forcing his way into her quarters would be fruitless (Suzuki 1976, 38). Willig translates this as a moral

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22 Even in the case of Utsusemi, when sexual intercourse is assumed, it is calculated as coming after much effort by Genji to gain Utsusemi’s willing participation, immediately after the narrator compares her to unbreakable bamboo (Abe 1970, 1:178).
imperative, expressed colloquially: “I can’t force myself on her” (46). Rather, he seems to be thinking very specifically that it is not feasible a kidnapping could lead to a cordial relationship. What he is really doing is conceding that imposing himself on her is not a good strategy for winning her heart: “She no doubt remembers me as unfeeling and hateful” (47).

Yet Saishō does not give up his amorous pursuit of Yon no Kimi. He gains access to her by pressuring her attendant to let him into her quarters. Yon no Kimi continues to weep and worry through their encounters, but she begins to find Saishō attractive because Saishō also displays vulnerability: “at each of these fleeting meetings, the weeping and distraught Saishō seemed enchanting and attractive. As time passed, Yon no Kimi was obliged to recognize his sincerity” (Willig 1983, 49).

The second time Saishō imposes himself on an unwilling partner, he meets and ignores blatant rejection. One evening Saishō has been talking with his dearest friend Chūnagon (supposed ‘brother’ of Naishi no Kami and ‘husband’ of Yon no Kimi). Saishō has always found Chūnagon attractive in his own right and also because of Chūnagon’s relationships with two women Saishō loves (Chūnagon’s ‘sister,’ Naishi no Kami, and his wife, Yon no Kimi). Chūnagon has been treating Saishō affectionately, offering solace to his lovelorn friend. Suddenly Saishō embraces Chūnagon, declaring his love for him. Chūnagon is annoyed, verbally rebuffs Saishō, chastising him very bluntly three times, and tries to get up to leave. But Saishō ignores Chūnagon’s words, embraces his friend even more firmly, and discovers that Chūnagon is actually female. At this point Chūnagon’s resistance crumbles. He treats Saishō coldly, but otherwise ceases to object to Saishō’s embrace. He feels that, having been revealed as female, he must act like a woman, and the only behavior appropriate for a woman is passivity: “I [can’t] act manly and strong, for now he knows I am not what I should be” (Willig 1983, 85). Chūnagon’s efforts to pull away from Saishō and his protests at being embraced are the most emphatic resistance depicted in this literature, but it has no effect on Saishō. Saishō is a man with no moral constraints whatsoever. He was intimidated by Naishi no Kami’s calm indifference, but brushes aside a man’s direct opposition and is quick to take advantage of a woman’s weakness.

Chūnagon’s vulnerability has limits that seem to arise from her years of experience as a man. The relationship between Saishō and Chūnagon lasts long enough for a child to be born, but then she seizes a chance to flee and hide from him. Yet despite her indignation at the power Saishō has over her, Chūnagon is affected by Saishō’s own vulnerability. During their time together Chūnagon is occasionally touched by Saishō’s love when it is manifested through suffering. We read, for example, that “Chūnagon could not but be moved by Saishō’s pained expression” (Willig 1983, 89). She also accepts that Saishō is sincere based on the fact that “his tears had flowed so profusely” (98). Ultimately, Chūnagon grudgingly decides she should align her biological and social identities and live as a woman, but she is unable to tolerate being dependent on the fickle Saishō. With the help of Naishi no Kami, who has switched genders in order to find the missing Chūnagon, she escapes from Saishō’s clutches and eventually marries the Emperor!

There is one last relationship to consider, a case of varying degrees and methods of putting pressure on a woman to requite one’s love. The players in this drama are Lady Nijō and Ariake, a priest whose forbidden passion for Lady Nijō leads him to hysterical outbursts. After engaging in a casual affair with Ariake, Lady Nijō breaks it off when the secrecy required and Ariake’s deepening feelings become burdensome.
(Brazell 1973, 87). One way Ariake pressures Lady Nijō is to blame her for his own self-destructive urges triggered by his unrequited love. Another way is to prevail upon her uncle to intercede on his behalf. This uncle tries to make Lady Nijō feel responsible for Ariake’s anguish, and he articulates the threat implicit in Ariake’s pain (89): The contemporary belief was that when someone suffered from unrequited love, his or her soul might leave the body and inflict harm on a rival or the beloved.24 Lady Nijō is indeed terrified, but this motivates her to avoid, not approach Ariake (91). Her fears are confirmed and her resolve apparently strengthened when she soon thereafter suffers a nosebleed, briefly loses consciousness, and is bedridden for several days, since she attributes this illness to Ariake’s fury at being spurned. Some few years later, Ariake’s passion unabated, Emperor GoFukakusa learns of it and advises Lady Nijō to acquiesce to Ariake’s desire because he fears that Ariake’s anguish might lead the man’s uncontrollable spirit to do her serious harm (91, 123). Lady Nijō still seems disinclined to requite Ariake’s love, but when the Emperor arranges for her to be alone with Ariake, she yields to him (125). We should note that Lady Nijō was successful at resisting Ariake when he pleaded for her love at a distance. Her resolve did not waver, even in the face of severe pressure. Yet, in his physical presence, she never refused his embrace.

Initially averse to resuming romantic involvement and occasionally troubled by the intensity of Ariake’s passion for her, Lady Nijō ultimately gives her heart to him. Male vulnerability is a significant part of what wins her over, both during their first, casual affair, and again, when their renewed relationship leads to the birth of two children. Lady Nijō refers specifically to two things that move her: one is Ariake’s eloquence, and the other is his pain. To give just one example of the latter:

> We talked together through the night, laughing and weeping until the bells sounded at dawn. When I rose to leave, I saw Ariake choked with tears, struggling with the thought that we might never meet again. I was moved by the depth of his feelings.

> On my sleeves, reflected
> In tears, the dawn moon.
> If only it would remain
> Here, after daybreak.

> [A pun here adds the meaning, if only Ariake could stay.]

> I kept this poem to myself. Had I also surrendered my heart to love?

(Brazell 1973, 134)

Conclusion

I have argued that, judging from the situations presented in Japanese court literature, pity was a significant component of love, and vulnerability was a highly valued trait. I have also suggested that men in court society tended to consider sexual coercion of women, at least women of equal or higher status, to be bad form and usually refrained from it or rationalized it. The currency of this notion is almost obscured by the common use of aggression in the process of a seduction and by the fact that although this attitude might be called a norm, it was not enforced by the

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24It is provocative to note that when, in *The Tale of Genji*, Lady Rokujo suffered unrequited love, her spirit attacked her female rivals, while in this case of a man similarly suffering, his spirit avenges itself on the woman he blames. Is there some logic, other than that women must suffer, that would explain this asymmetry?
imposition of any consequences for violating it. Indeed, the phenomenon of the attractiveness of pitiable women undermined the disinclination to rape. Sexual aggression was one way to concretize a woman’s vulnerability, thereby enhancing her appeal and intensifying a man’s desire. But this was not always the case. Every aggressive maneuver was not a seamless sexual assault. Genji is depicted as having used limited aggression as a strategy to facilitate his taking a consoling, nurturing posture and thus, ironically, increasing his chances of winning a woman’s trust and indulgence. On the other hand, insofar as a woman’s interests tended toward ongoing relationships, 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. Both Yon no Kimi and Lady Nijō develop satisfying relationships with the men who initially assaulted them.

Another facet of the link between pity and love is that it was gender neutral. That is, women were also drawn to pathetic men. Men often found their love reciprocated once they revealed themselves as suffering the agony of unrequited love.

Finally, yet another new dimension is added to our understanding of the nature of women’s lives, at least as depicted in literature, when we realize that this link between pity and love gave women a means by which to discourage sexual assaults. Women were sometimes able to fend off unwanted suitors if they avoided appearing vulnerable. By behaving as if inert, a woman could convey such insensitivity that a man’s ardor might be dampened. Since emotionality was so highly valued, if a woman comported herself with the heartlessness of, as a common Japanese metaphor puts it, a rock or a tree, she had a chance, however slim, to control access to her body.

List of References


