

Translation Fantasies and False Flags

Desiring and Misreading Queerness in Premodern Japan

SUSPECT TURNS OF PHRASE

Consider the following excerpt from *The Tale of Genji*, which recounts a scene in which an exiled Genji is visited at Suma's shore by his closest male friend and rival:

While the awful tedium of Suma wore on and on for Genji, Tō no Chūjō was made Consultant, laden with society's formidable acclaim due to his excellent character. But without Genji, the world felt woefully lifeless, and he missed him every moment, until he made up his mind—*What does it matter if word gets out and they charge me with crimes?*—and sped to Suma without warning. Upon laying eyes on Genji, tears of both delight and sorrow spilled forth. Genji's residence had an unspeakably Chinese air. Besides its surroundings being of the sort one would wish to paint, the crudeness of the woven bamboo fence encircling the house, its stone stairs, and the pine pillars was enchantingly exotic. Resembling a mountain peasant, Genji wore gathered trousers, with a charcoal-green hunting cloak atop a robe not of forbidden crimson but licensed rose with yellow overtones; his unassuming fashion was deliberately rustic, and looking at him, one couldn't help but smile at Genji's stunning beauty.

The furnishings he used were also bare-bones, and his exposed room let anyone peer right in. . . . Tō no Chūjō sang a bit of "Asuka Well," and between laughing and crying, the men shared tales of the past months. Since they talked on without end, I couldn't possibly recount everything they discussed, or even fragments of it. They didn't sleep, and instead traded Chinese poems through the night until dawn came. Although he'd said he cared nothing of the scandal that might erupt should he visit Genji, Tō no Chūjō nevertheless grew anxious at the thought of rumors of his exploits spreading and thus cut his trip short to hurry home, only heightening Genji's heartache. . . .

Both the men shed tears. Each of them seemed to regret having to part so soon. In the dim glimmer of sunrise, a line of geese crossed the sky. . . . Saying, "Take this to remember me by," Tō no Chūjō gave Genji among other things an exceptional flute

of some fame, though they made no keepsakes of anything that might elicit people's censure. Slowly but surely the sun rose, and with a restive heart beating, Tō no Chūjō glanced back again and again as he hastily set off; watching him leave, Genji looked all the more bereft.¹

How should we interpret these parting glances? Like the characters, we find ourselves deposited in a queer place. As daybreak quickens pulses, these bitter-sweet pivots heighten our perception. In exile, Genji dazzles, more radiant than ever in his impeccably rustic garb. With rank and privilege stripped, he lives more simply now, frequenting a room that lets passersby peer in past pine pillars and stone steps, through bamboo fencing whose taut weave belies the man wilting within.

Language falters at this site. This fragile setting's sheer exposure urges reticence as one man plots to meet another. The narrator herself conspires, preserving privacy by concealing the extent of all the men shared that night in lieu of sleeping. Stimulated by Suma's ocean air and unchecked view, they trade verses of Chinese poetry through the night, an exchange evoking intercourse.

Overcome by longing, Tō no Chūjō has thrown caution to the wind and paid an illicit visit to his banished companion. But fear of the rumors that might stain his reputation should he linger too long at Genji's side makes him abridge his stay. Dawn dissolves their night together; the men part as geese in flight remind them of the arrows leading home. Such strict lines chafe at a time like this, since this exilic interval lends reprieve from courtly protocol, allowing them to savor one another's presence beyond the Capital's purview.

During their fleeting reunion the men indulge in conversation, wine, songs, poems, and "flutes." Each medium accentuates associations layered to assuage the sense of loss that plagues them both. Pleasures accrue along the coarse shoreline, coaxing the companions away from brooding and toward windswept revelry. In the end, however, hints of stigma mar their secret seaside tryst. And we're left to wonder what more they might have shared, had shame not spoiled their makeshift harbor.

. . .

But not so fast. I've performed an evocative reading of this scene from *The Tale of Genji*. To be sure, all the tender innuendo I've teased out loiters there in the original's lines. But such a premodern portrayal of male-male affection also reveals our own proximate remove from the scene—"removed" because a millennium has passed, the characters are Japanese, and the scene is fictional; "proximate" because we'd like to think we know what true love (or at least sexual tension) looks like. My own account draws from a sensuous sensibility infusing the text. Yet I'm also cognizant of my own propensity to read—and potentially misread—the men's reunion through a lens conditioned by twenty-first-century conceptions of (homo)sexual orientation, identity, and politics. Such notions can help divulge textual subtleties,

but they also draw our focus away from facets of the text that prove less sexual, less fashionable, or less legibly subversive—more queer, in other words. So we might want to pause, pivot, and retract our reverie a bit.

How does such a scene become legible from our vantage? How do its rhetorical gestures come to feel foreign or familiar? How does it affirm or unsettle our capacity to evaluate textual possibilities—as menacing or promising? These questions sketch aspects of what we might recognize as “queer,” in a manner Eve Sedgwick theorizes in her essay “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading” (2003). When Sedgwick catalogs the hazards of paranoid reading—with its penchant for negative anticipation, strong theories, and rapacious hypothesizing—she faults a machismo that animates close reading’s commitment to unveiling. As J. Keith Vincent explains, “On the one hand, paranoid queer theory offered a set of analytical tools to expose the mechanisms of homophobia. This felt empowering and energizing, and often it led to crucial critical insights. But it also bred a kind of hyper-vigilance. . . . Occupying such a position, over the long haul especially, can become the opposite of empowering.”²

If, in Sedgwick’s words, “paranoia places its faith in exposure,” then we should beware that faith’s fundamentalist leanings.³ Habitually unquestioned, and even upheld as a badge of disciplinary expertise or a will to mastery, this paranoid faith in exposure can overshadow phenomena less scintillating than sex acts already stigmatized far in advance. By contrast, reading in a nonparanoid mode doesn’t covet predetermined transgressions but is instead attuned “exquisitely to a heart-beat of contingency.”⁴ In Ellis Hanson’s interpretation, “Reparative reading focuses not on the exposure of political outrages that we already know about but rather on the process of reconstructing a sustainable life in their wake.”⁵

In this sense, *A Proximate Remove*’s readings generally lean more toward the reparative than the paranoid end of an interpretive spectrum. Their driving objective is not to ferret out hidden traces of power’s dastardly machinations. Nevertheless, my look to examples of homosocial and potentially sexual relations is deliberate. Why do this, especially when my stated goal is to foreground the breadth of queer reading beyond concerns about sexuality? The answer relates to a methodological distinction between merely disclosing sexual secrets and opening interpretive possibilities.

In other words, within the context of performing queer readings, a provisional recourse to paranoia can function as a way to pivot toward reparative alternatives. We can mine the potential for misunderstanding precisely at moments in *Genji* signaling male-male eroticism, reading against the grain to interrupt knee-jerk interpretations and complicate the salience of sexuality. These scenes offer the opportunity to read with enhanced precision and therefore theorize more carefully. In returning to scenes where what seems like homoeroticism grabs the spotlight, the point is not to sensationalize such instances. Rather, it is to leverage them to generate insights that invite deeper inquiry not just into gender relations

but also into how characters perform a more sustainable relation to various facets of their world—human, living, or otherwise.

Against a routine of paranoid reading, a more reparative apprehension—not unlike the questioning pivots performed as *Genji*'s companion left the seashore—emerges to suggest more desirable, less totalizing methods of critical departure. Throughout this book, I emphasize and develop this apprehensive tendency as a basis for queer reading—an approach that maintains a proximate remove from demands for interpretive closure.

This chapter takes as its point of departure the notion of a false flag—an ultimately deceptive sign whose prominence and familiarity tempt us into misreading it—which we witness in the off-target assumptions about men's intimacy examined briefly in the scene above. The chapter performs two tasks. First, it maps the discourses that have framed dominant notions of sexuality in premodern Japan, with an eye toward highlighting their ideological underpinnings and their discontinuities. Since the book pivots on queering, I detail what this concept comes to mean in the project conceptually, politically, historically, and methodologically. I frame the foreignness of the modern English and Japanese term and then move into *Genji*, considering how *queer* might translate into a Heian context. I hope to estrange our sense of the term by articulating its cultural assumptions and potential blind spots. Ultimately, I recommend its energizing possibilities for reading *Genji*, proposing methods that encourage readers to rethink how to engage the text.

QUESTIONS OF INFLECTION: NOTES TOWARD A PROVISIONAL DEFINITION OF QUEER

What do I mean by “queer gestures”? I don't mean sex acts. Nor do I mean acts that connote sexual contact. But we'll begin provisionally with sexuality, if only to denaturalize it before long. Sex and sexuality matter more for the historical provenance of *queer* than for the term's conceptual potential. We should note that *kuia* (queer) in Japanese exists as a loan word, written in katakana, the script used for imported items and concepts, like *tabako* (tobacco/cigarettes) and *feminizumu* (feminism). This detail highlights the centrality of translation—lexically, politically, culturally, conceptually—when trying to discern the contours of the term and figure out which aspects might coincide neatly between source term and translation, and which aspects might not.⁶ From a linguistic standpoint, *queer* in a Japanese context is also interesting to consider beside a modern term like “same-sex love” (*dōseiai*), a gloss for homosexuality gradually superimposed on the long-established tradition of “male-male eroticism” (*nanshoku*). Neither of these terms denotes the range that *queer* indexes.⁷

These issues become especially pronounced when minding the gap between, say, a popular, twenty-first-century, U.S.-centered understanding of the term and

an aristocratic Japanese context from a millennium past. With that in mind, let's consider the question of *queer's* current connection to other categories:

In many ways, "queer" and "gay/lesbian" are overlapping terms; but some of their implications are very different. A lot of gay and lesbian politics, for example, accepts the concept of sexual orientation without questioning it in any way. Yet, exerting any pressure at all on sexual orientation, you see that its elements are potentially quite heterogeneous.

. . . That's one of the things "queer" can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, or anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically.⁸

Eve Sedgwick's explanation accentuates the dissonance between *queer* as an identity or political category and *queer* as the radical inability of such categories to account fully for the possibilities proliferating in their vicinity. She stresses how *queer* coincides with the "nondualist theoretical tendencies" of her work, and, writing in 2000, observes that "a lot of the most important recent work around 'queer' expands the term along dimensions that cannot be reduced to gender and sexuality at all."⁹ This observation correlates to her axiomatic assertion ten years prior that "it is unrealistic to expect a close, textured analysis of same-sex relations through an optic calibrated in the first place to the coarser stigmata of gender difference."¹⁰ Insofar as Sedgwick's primary concern is to generate nuanced readings, she recommends that *queer* not be beholden to gender and sexuality. For, as she puts it, "'Queer,' to me, refers to a politics that values the ways in which meanings and institutions can be at loose ends with each other, crossing all kinds of boundaries rather than reinforcing them. What if the most productive junctures weren't the ones where *everything means the same thing*?"¹¹ I find Sedgwick's distinctions helpful for avoiding a circumscribed sense of *queer's* meanings. Her emphasis in the quotations above cast *queer* not as a category of sexuality or identity politics but rather as a question of emphasis: a question of where and how one might exert interpretive pressure toward "productive junctures" where meanings seem to surge, lapse, or skew.

These motions evoke the *gesture* of "queer gesture." Two senses of the term compel me. One comes from Stephen Barber and David Clark, who read Sedgwick's work alongside Foucault's and posit that if queerness manifests "a 'moment,' it is also then a force; or rather it is a crossing of temporality with force."¹² This "crossing" suggests an instantiation whose direction, provenance, intention, or magnitude may be indiscernible, even as it is still perceived or felt. *Gesture* registers this figuration's vibration across time and space. The term also appeals to me for its bodily overtones.

The second sense of *gesture* I'm fond of comes from José Esteban Muñoz, who leverages the concept to undercut constrictive notions of evidence. Explaining that

“queerness has an especially vexed relationship to evidence,” he writes, “The key to queering evidence . . . is by suturing it to the concept of ephemera. Think of ephemera as trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumor.”¹³ I confess that I appreciate this phrasing in part because rumor is the lifeblood of Heian tales like *Genji*. But beyond that, this emphasis on ephemera complicates any sense of a stable archive by introducing a corporeal potentiality that precludes textual closure. He continues, “So much can be located in the gesture. Gesture . . . signals a refusal of a certain kind of finitude.”¹⁴ If *finitude* connotes certitude, rectitude, and pretensions toward objectivity, then *gesture*’s refusal of it—however gentle—forgoes these stabs at finality in favor of less conclusive routes. An epistemology attuned to *gesture*’s capacious surplus—wherein “so much can be located”—would lend more interpretive leeway than rubrics bent on hard facts. This gesture toward *queer*’s breadth opens up a wider range of possible questions regarding subjectivity, discipline, and method.

In this nonteleological vein, the account of *queer* I find most useful comes from Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, where she describes the term this way:

I have been using “queer” in at least two senses, and I have at times slid from one sense to the other. First, I have used “queer” as a way of describing what is “oblique” or “off line.” . . . Second, I have used queer to discuss specific sexual practices. Queer in this sense would refer to those who practice nonnormative sexualities, which as we know involves a personal and social commitment to living in an oblique world, or in a world that has an oblique angle in relation to that which is given. . . . I think it is important to retain both meanings of the word queer. . . . This means recalling what makes specific sexualities describable as queer in the first place: that is, that they are seen as odd, bent, twisted. In a way, if we return to the root of the word “queer” (from the Greek for cross, oblique, adverse) we can see that the word itself “twists,” with a twist that allows us to move between sexual and social registers, without flattening them or reducing them to a single line. Although this approach risks losing the specificity of queer as a commitment to a life of sexual deviation, it also sustains the significance of “deviation” in what makes queer lives queer. To make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things.¹⁵

Ahmed’s stress on the “oblique” angles at which queer phenomena and subjects orient themselves toward the world accommodates sexual and nonsexual relations alike. Her generous framing of the term allows for more explicit commitments incongruous with normative social practices, but it does so without mandating their direction or degree of force. Sidestepping such reductions, her formulation lets *queer* name a spectrum of deviation, unshackled from sexual identity. Most compelling is how Ahmed’s gloss underscores the term’s debt to deviation in a way that lets us transpose its propensity to “disturb the order of things” to contexts outside the exclusive province of continental philosophy or contemporary Western society.

This capacity for disturbance could issue from multiple sectors. For example, we could posit that all the violence and intrigue *Genji* recounts emerges as an effect of Genji's mother's death. To be sure, this maternal absence triggers chains of surrogation for which the tale is famous. But this displacement and the status damage it deals also mark Genji as deficient from the outset—even as his aberrant beauty and talent signify superabundance. Genji is too good for this world. He deserves the throne but is denied it; he can near it, but never occupy it.

This proximate remove from the seat of power makes for a precarious positionality that parallels what Ahmed identifies as one of phenomenology's queer dislocations. She develops her notion of queerness in relation to a disorientation Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains as involving not just “the intellectual experience of disorder, but the vital experience of giddiness and nausea, which is the awareness of our contingency, and the horror with which it fills us.”¹⁶ How should we understand this disorganizing yet invigorating awareness of contingency—the embodied experience of uncertainty, apprehension, and vulnerability—in relation to *Genji*? This notion of a visceral estrangement seems especially valuable to carry forward as we delineate *Genji*'s queer position amid competing disciplinary desires.

POSITIONING *GENJI*, POSITIONING DISCIPLINES

A Proximate Remove intervenes between the disciplines of premodern Japanese literary studies and queer studies. Its orientation owes much to the work of Kawazoe Fusae and Kimura Saeko on the one hand and that of Eve Sedgwick and Sara Ahmed on the other. For now, let's position this project within two contiguous contexts: discourse on Heian literature in general and *The Tale of Genji* in particular. Regarding the first context, Michael Bourdaghs explains,

Early Western studies of Japanese culture tended to stress the aesthetic beauty of Japanese art and literature, to the neglect of its intellectual or political content. Politics and abstract theory were supposed to be the domains of Western modernity; Japan was assigned the task of producing pretty pictures and lyrical poems. . . . This version of Japanese studies was created largely in the early Cold War period and was complicit with the need in the United States to transform the image of Japan from that of a treacherous enemy to a benevolent Asian ally.¹⁷

Of all the periods of Japanese history, the Heian era was most subject to “the task of producing pretty pictures and lyrical poems,” and *The Tale of Genji* outshone all other cultural products when it came to eulogizing loveliness.

Within this context, we should consider the longstanding perception of *Genji* having cachet as the truest repository of traditional Japanese feeling. Formalized by the nativist scholar Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), this belief trafficked in an essentialist discourse designed to elevate an affective susceptibility to natural

phenomena unique to the Japanese people above a stiff neo-Confucian rationalism imported from the continent. This spongy discourse hoped to also elevate the discipline of “national learning” (*kokugaku*). According to Tomiko Yoda, “Norinaga saw in [*The Tale of Genji*]—which revolves around amorous affairs of characters who appeared effete, sentimental, and weak from his contemporaries’ viewpoint—the most exemplary exploration of fleeting, ever-changing, and yet irrepressible human emotions.”¹⁸

Some late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century critics were influenced by Norinaga’s thesis but feared that *Genji* might in fact be too feminine to lead the charge for Japanese cultural eminence, especially given the butch image this new military power sought to flaunt on the international stage. For example, cultural ambassador Suematsu Kenchō (1855–1920), who first translated parts of *Genji* for a British audience in 1882, wrote, “Society lost sight, to a great extent, of true morality, and the effeminacy of the people constituted the chief feature of the age.” Even less charitably, Christian evangelist Uchimura Kanzō declared in 1894, “*The Tale of Genji* might have left beautiful language in Japan, but what has the *Genji* ever done to raise the moral spirit of Japan? Far from doing nothing, the *Genji* has made us effeminate cowards. I would like to exterminate such *bungaku* [literature] from our ranks!”¹⁹

Uchimura and other dogmatists bought and peddled a phobic logic of chauvinist ideology that energized discourses of Japanese modernity.²⁰ For these prudish nationalists, *Genji* posed a problem for being an iconic Japanese text that not only depicted episodes of what they deemed overindulgent emotionalism and sexual deviance but also impugned the imperial line’s mythic sanctity. The tale was squishy, salacious, and seditious at the same time. The trick thus became how to tout *Genji* as a classic of world literature and a symbol of Japanese cultural preeminence without drawing unwanted attention to these more suspect elements. Obscuring its true status as a *monogatari* (tale, narrative) to promote its distinction as the world’s first novel had the following consequence: it boosted *Genji*’s profile within an international arena in which the sophistication of cultural products coded for native intelligence while domesticating the tale’s queer aspects. Similarly, highlighting the narrative’s sensitivity to flora and fauna, cyclical seasonal flows, pathos, and true (read “sincerely heterosexual”) love helped make *Genji* more legible along sanctioned lines, as a saccharine romance.

In effect, these emphases helped eclipse the text’s portrayal of queerer facets like homoeroticism, spirit possession, sexual violence, and imperial illegitimacy. Deployment of a sentimentality that drew inspiration from Norinaga’s nativist faith in *Genji*’s lavish feeling served as a containment strategy for disagreeable elements that eventually chafed Cold War imperatives. Alongside this faith flourished a desire to view *Genji* as a romance and to focus on its heterosexual pairings and triangles, a proclivity I see as part of a broader geopolitical scheme according to which Japan was installed as subordinate to the United States. In this context,

the incessant emphasis on Heian literature's diaphanous aura and cultish aestheticism became a tactic to exoticize and thus marginalize this cornerstone of modern Japanese cultural forms. Labeling the Heian society *Genji* immortalized as *effete* thus served as a way to pronounce it benign and subdue the text's potential incursions into territory thought unseemly within a postwar democratizing mission to rebuild Japan in harmless humanistic terms.

With the departure of U.S. Occupation forces and much of the draconian censorship apparatus abetting the occupation, however, scholars could increasingly criticize institutions. Although much of this criticism lambasted the ultranationalism most closely associated with recent wartime mobilization, it also accompanied critical reflection on the much longer discursive history sustaining the Japanese imperial mythos. The emperor system made for an ideal target as both a structure operative in contemporary life and as an object of rhetorical analysis.²¹ As structuralist and poststructuralist readings of premodern Japanese literature proliferated after the late 1970s, led largely by those scholars affiliated with the Narrative Research Group (*monogatari kenkyūkai*), interpretations more critical of dominant political institutions also gained steam.²²

These new approaches to the politics of language, history, and embodiment affected premodern literary scholarship profoundly. On one level, they stripped much of the belletristic luster from them. On another level, they scrutinized canonical works to delineate their complicity with accepted narratives of sovereignty's integrity. This background helps us understand the privileged position *Genji* enjoyed not just as an icon of Japanese cultural identity but also as a valuable implement with which to probe chinks in the emperor system's armor. In many ways, the same queer aspects lambasted by those on the far right decades earlier became by the 1980s welcome fodder for leftist scholars' deconstructive interventions.

ESTRANGING *HOMOSEXUAL*: HEIAN DISCOURSE AND CONTEXTS FOR A QUEER *GENJI*

We now return to the question of how to approach *The Tale of Genji* as a queer text, albeit from a different angle. How should we contextualize the narrative to do so, and what historical and conceptual expectations would we need to revise to accommodate this reorientation? One way to start would be to foreground how *Genji* consistently accents the imperial line's susceptibility to misfire and deviation, thereby exposing the myriad flaws of patriarchy in its most enshrined forms and gesturing toward nonnormative alternatives. Given the predominance of this patriarchal system, we could proceed by complicating our understanding of the relation between homosexuality and homosociality during Heian times to develop a sense of what *queer* might offer our analyses.

As Sedgwick has formulated, *homosocial* refers to a range of same-sex relations, primarily but not exclusively between men, such as competition, friendship,

mentorship, or seduction. *Homosocial* is contiguous but not synonymous with *homoerotic*.²³ As a frame within which queer gestures can materialize, homosociality sketches a span of possibilities and practices more intricate than intercourse. Indeed, part of the challenge in reading *Genji*'s scenes of homosocial intimacy comes in interpreting gestures such that their erotic potential can be acknowledged without flattening other features of their queer terrain beneath the banner of "homosexuality."

The scare quotes defamiliarize the term *homosexuality* and help refine its distinction from *queer* in a Heian context. I would therefore follow Gregory Pflugfelder's usage of *male-male sexuality* instead of *homosexuality* because, "inhabitants of the Japanese archipelago before the [nineteenth] century did not usually draw a conceptual link between male-male and female-female forms of erotic behavior. Thus, to adopt the term 'homosexuality,' which implies an inherent connection between the two, is to accept uncritically the effects of a discursive process whose very emergence demands historical accounting."²⁴ We therefore need to unpack the terminological limitations of *homosexuality* in a Heian context before addressing questions of queerness in depth.

To contextualize *Genji*'s queerness within a broader cultural milieu, it helps to zoom out and consider other Heian texts whose themes and features cast the narrative's singular intervention into relief. One such text is *Taiki* (1136–55), a diary written by the courtier Fujiwara Yorinaga (1120–56). Keeping in mind that this text was written a century after *Genji*, we should be wary of retrospectively projecting late Heian ideas about male-male sexuality onto a mid-Heian literary text. Moreover, we also need to note the differences in script, style, documentary impulse, and political sensibility between the gender-specific genres of men's *kanbun* diaries, women's *kana* diaries, and women's fictional narratives. That said, *Taiki* nevertheless complicates our non-Heian understandings of what *homosexual* or *queer* could or should mean.

Specifically, Yorinaga's text documents dozens of sexual affairs with men, but it does so in a manner that has led many scholars to interpret them as a kind of diplomacy. That is to say, Yorinaga's text does not reveal some truth of his sexual identity. Rather, the style of aristocratic promiscuity *Taiki* chronicles queers *homosexual* by calling the very notion of a stable sexual identity into question. Yorinaga's diary shows that during the later Heian period, at least, sex between men of his status was customary, with a lack of stigma. As Paul Schalow points out,

Yorinaga was not unique, of course, in his choice of male sexual partners; records from the period show that the Emperors Shirakawa, Toba, and Go-Shirakawa, as well as Yorinaga's father Tadazane, and many, many others, also formed similar relationships. What is perhaps most interesting about Yorinaga's self-narrative is that it reveals male-male sexual alliances as part of his political and personal repertoire, which included all of the other ways the Fujiwara Regents traditionally deployed and expanded their power at court, such as marrying his adoptive daughter to an emperor and promoting the fortunes of his three sons.²⁵

While the fact of male-male sex was conventional, then, the sheer frequency and systematic mercenary thrust with which Yorinaga pursued his affairs stand out. This leads scholars to read in *Taiki* definitive evidence of Yorinaga's strategic consciousness regarding the political utility of sex with powerful men.

Kimura Saeko's work on premodern Japanese sexuality and its portrayals in medieval literature prove especially illuminating in this context:

Unlike the capitalist system, the system of sexuality of the court regency aimed at the production of power rather than simply children, with women arranged hierarchically with polygamous marital practices. It was not all women, but only women of high birth who were expected to bear children. Women were divided into two categories: those who carried out "productive sex" and those who carried out "non-productive sex." "Productive sex" was appropriate for the legitimate wives, who could reproduce not only children but also the political power of their father through the children.

Interestingly, the system of sexuality does not relinquish relations including "non-productive sex" but maintains them within the system. To consolidate a lineage and limit its legitimate heirs, all illegitimate relations were categorized as "non-productive." In a sense, "non-productive" relations can be seen as overlapping with homosexual relations. An example of this is the case of the retired emperor, who was shifted out of power and away from sexual reproduction to avoid producing further heirs. Whether he had homosexual ties to other monks within the monastery or heterosexual affairs with female attendants, these were both positioned as acts of "non-productive sex." . . . Similarly, homosexual relations could be seen as power-"productive" without being procreative.²⁶

By schematizing how status, procreative capacity, and power intersect, Kimura helps us see what *queer* might signify in a Heian context. Her description complements the *Taiki* author's assumptions regarding sex between men as a non-procreative but power-productive vehicle for social climbing and for maintaining advantageous political alliances. If out of habit we apply a modern Western notion of queerness, aglow with its subversive valence, to "homosexual activity," we fail to acknowledge that "homosexual" relations among high-ranking men did not necessarily contest dominant Heian ideologies. Quite the contrary, in fact, since such male-male sexual relations were often deployed to supplement the gains sought through fathering or adopting legitimate heirs. Fujiwara Yorinaga's practice of adopting several high-ranking nobles' daughters while concurrently having sex with several affiliates of the powerful Kayama-in and Kujō factions exemplifies this tack.²⁷ Whatever pleasure Yorinaga records, his male-male sexual affairs are not mere expressions of sexual identity or preference; rather, they evidence how shrewdly he hedged his political bets.²⁸

Thus Ōishi Mikito asks us to think about late Heian male-male sexual networks in terms of their political value, with sexual conquest representing a kind of diplomacy. The goal of these male-male sexual affairs for courtiers like Fujiwara Yorinaga was to take political initiative and shore up coalitions that had to be secured through channels other than marriage alone. Ōishi asserts that for men of

Yorinaga's standing, exploiting this network was not just about indulging pleasure but also about capitalizing on political opportunities granted by his homosocial milieu. And he suggests that in Yorinaga's particular case, this strategy had more to do with ensuring his daughter's protection and success than with chasing individual glory.²⁹

The capitalist logic of the nuclear family that casts a massive shadow over our modern consciousness fails to account for these Heian dynamics—even if concerns with sustaining patriarchal power and inheritance infuse both logics. As Gomi Fumihiko puts it in his discussion of *Taiki*, “Given the close relationship between sex and political power, using a modern perspective to deal with these phenomena becomes a misreading.”³⁰ *Taiki* suggests the appeal of a tactical male-male sexuality that was not *queer* in the vernacular sense of *nonheterosexual*. Instead, Yorinaga's strategy of building political relationships through sexual affairs with other men should be read as a checklist of moves designed to redress queerness, where *queerness* names the precarious context of constant insecurity or threat of dispossession by rivals. In this regard, the social context becomes queerer as political exigencies mount for aristocrats in Heian's waning decades.

If, following Ahmed's revision of Merleau-Ponty's notion of disorientation, we view queerness as being bound to instability, then strategic male-male sexual affairs cement the political alliances that promise to militate against risk. Male-male sexual relations among Heian aristocrats figure as a kind of buffer against the brutally territorial networks of political violence—which claimed Yorinaga's life in the Hōgen Rebellion (1156). Hence in his case, we might posit queerness as being synonymous with the precarity that characterized Heian court life. This queerness *as* precarity led Yorinaga to place a premium on male-male sex as a means of minimizing political vulnerability, and as a normative route to improving his life prospects. Crucially, male-male affairs played out *alongside* heterosexual marriage politics, as a welcome supplement to the grander procreative strategy of producing children with powerfully connected wives. While there is no need to erect a firm boundary between sexual pleasure and political advantage, it appears that male-male sex was, for Yorinaga, aimed more toward securing political advantage than indulging pleasure for its own sake. His mentions of pleasure and fondness for certain partners are vastly overshadowed by an emphasis on how the encounters fortified his authority as Minister of the Left. Sex between men of this class might thus be said to stem less from passion than from a comprehension of the perils pervading court life.

As we've seen, *Taiki* helps estrange our expectations toward Heian notions of sexuality, politics, and their textual representation. Moving to the context of Heian fiction, we're reminded that *queer* is not synonymous with *homosexual* or *strange*, though instances of male-male eroticism or asexual strangeness can be read as queer. One literary touchstone often invoked to discuss medieval notions of what we might refer to as queerness is *Torikaebaya monogatari* (*The Changelings*, ca.

1080; revised in the late twelfth century). In this story, a sister and her half-brother are raised as a boy and a girl, respectively; after assuming adult roles at court as a courtier and a gentlewoman, they later adopt gender identities that coincide with their biological sex. Instructively, the story seems to have been more remarkable for its portrayal of the siblings' ability to pass as normal than for the gap it divulges between their sex and gender per se. As Gregory Pflugfelder points out,

From the point of view of the central characters and the tale's early audience, what was significant about Himegimi and Wakagimi's predicament was that it was unusual—that it set the siblings apart from the rest of society. This sense is conveyed by the word *yozukazu* (literally, “not adhering to the ways of the world”), which recurs throughout the text, and similar phrases such as *yo ni nizu* [unworldly], *hito ni tagau* [uncommon, literally “against (the ways of) people”], and *rei nashi* [unheard of, unprecedented]. By differing from normative expectations, individuals might be perceived as “strange,” a realm demarcated by such frequently occurring adjectives as *ayashi*, *asamashi*, and *mezurashi*.³¹

Although *The Changelings* was written after *The Tale of Genji*, both the rhetoric of strangeness and an unconcern with anything we might recognize as sexual identity are consonant with the earlier Heian narrative. Notably, *Genji* trains attention on the main protagonist's momentous birth by discussing its anomalous nature, akin to that in *The Changelings*. Throughout the first chapter, we find phrases like “unexampled affection” (*onkokorobae no taguhi naki*) to describe the Kiritsubo Emperor's love for Genji's low-status mother, and “unworldly lustrous jewel of a son” (*yo ni naku kiyoranaru tama no onokomiko*). In the same vein, the narrator comments that Genji's beauty and temperament were “so singularly uncommon” (*arigataku medurashiki made*) that he seemed “so astonishing people couldn't believe their eyes” (*asamashiki made me wo odorokashitamahu*).³² These features mark him as outside normal human parameters of expectation in ways that might qualify as queer.

For, as Kimura Saeko notes in “The Queer Desire of Court Tales,” which focuses on the events of narratives such as *Hamamatsu Chūnagon monogatari* (*The Tale of Middle Counselor Hamamatsu*, ca. 1064) and *The Changelings*, queer desire in Heian literature is affirmed as it plays out not just in terms of sexual object-choice among humans but also across boundaries of ethnicity or even species.³³ She suggests, moreover, that in Heian narratives like these, rebirth represents a queer trope insofar as it involves not just changes in gender but in social station and mobility, too.³⁴ In this sense, queer elements constitute a pervasive, abiding facet of Heian literary production. Kimura's analysis is also suggestive for its reading against the prevailing misogyny of Heian Buddhist practice. Most significantly, by recuperating aspirations for rebirth and for improved circumstances more broadly as queer desires, her interpretation posits queer potentiality as a constitutive condition of life itself.³⁵ I find such transformative notions of a queer potential compelling, not least of all for how they highlight phenomena traditionally overlooked

by Anglophone queer commentary, offering new objects and subjects through which to transform it.

Kimura's 2014 article represents an improvement over earlier scholarship that sought to pathologize the mutability *The Changelings* showcases. As Pflugfelder notes about dominant twentieth-century treatments of the same narrative, "From a modernist perspective, the tale's central characters were no longer the victims of a strange fate, but had become case histories that could be classified according to a 'scientific' taxonomy of psychosexual dysfunctions."³⁶ The tendency to categorize a medieval tale in this fashion stems from a presentist—if not homophobic—impulse to detain queer phenomena within a heterosexual/homosexual binary. Queerness would thus become more legible within a modern idiom and less taxing for modern scholars to appraise. Even as we might laud the desire to illuminate the tale's shifting gender dynamics, aligning the breadth of its events to "homosexuality" truncates complexities queer might preserve. For the story's main value "may lie not in its validation of Japan's 'homosexual' past, but rather in its destabilization of all fixed positions of gender and sexuality."³⁷

Escaping this homosexualist rut can be hard. This difficulty derives from our modern inheritance of terms and stances toward sexuality whose naturalized status tempts us to domesticate earlier, more diverse practices, identifications, and experiences related but not reducible to homosexuality in particular—or even to sexuality in general, as David Halperin notes.³⁸ Halperin employs Foucault's genealogical method of delineating concepts' discursive emergence; his approach offers two useful elements.³⁹ First, the genealogical approach he advances helps in interrogating the provenance of some modern evaluations' nationalistic and homophobic spin on *The Tale of Genji*. Second, Halperin offers a list that helps situate premodern practices operative beyond "homosexuality's" limited scope: "The four pre-homosexual categories of male sex and gender deviance that I have identified so far can be described, very provisionally, as categories of (1) effeminacy, (2) paederasty or 'active' sodomy, (3) friendship or male love, and (4) passivity or inversion."⁴⁰

Halperin's framework helps describe a range of gestures in *Genji* that might be read as queer. For although *Genji* does not concentrate on homosexual acts—especially if viewed from the perspective of later medieval and early modern literature—it nevertheless depicts scenes that fall under the first three headings. For example, effeminacy appears in the text when the narrator says: "Atop layers of downy white gowns, Genji wore only the basic unembellished robe in nonchalant fashion, its cord a touch unfastened, and looked so gorgeous reclining beside a pillar in the lamplight that one wished to view him as a woman."⁴¹ This description also shows how a feminizing Heian rhetoric buoyed Genji's allure among male and female protagonists alike. We see an example of Halperin's second category when Genji opts to spend the night with Utsusemi's younger brother: "[Genji had] the page boy lie down alongside him. Since the boy was

so cheerily appreciative of Genji's youthful tenderness, it's said that Genji found him considerably sweeter than his cold-hearted sister."⁴² This encounter implies a pederastic rapport. Genji's relationships with Koremitsu, his servant and "breast brother" (the two nursed together), and with Tō no Chūjō signify different status-determined variants of devoted male friendship. And although "passivity or inversion" in the strict sexual sense Halperin names in his fourth category is not depicted, we might glimpse its symbolic silhouette in Genji's relinquishment of authority to his son, Yūgiri, as Genji hangs his head and languishes in grief over Murasaki's passing.⁴³

LOST IN TRANSLATION: ON AFFECT, EMOTION,
AND REPRESSING *GENJI*'S QUEERNESS

Here we should consider worldly phenomena whose contact with bodies exceeds a subject's evaluative or emotional response. This analytical move leads us toward a subtler sense of protagonists' bodily contact, susceptibility, and investment—in other words, along a continuum from gesture toward affect. Affect deserves exploring, especially at moments when simplification to a psychological denominator doesn't suffice. As we'll see, portrayals that accentuate intimacy and loss revel in such moments. Moreover, these portrayals let us read bodily response at an interstitial register, between the poles of posture and psyche marking subjective experience's extremities. Within this interval, a contemporary reader's affective sensitivity affords more flexibility in responding to our objects of interpretation, as Brian Massumi notes:

Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is. Formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage are the capture and closure of affect. Emotion is the most intense (most contracted) expression of that capture—and of the fact that something has always and again escaped. Something remains un-actualized, inseparable from but unassimilable to any particular, functionally anchored perspective.⁴⁴

Massumi's emphasis on affect's "escap[ing] confinement" is compelling; herein courses its potential for formulating more flexible engagements with the mercurial phenomena orbiting *Genji*'s portrayals of loss and intimacy. It is helpful to think of affect as that which remains fugitive from full consciousness and doesn't calcify into a predetermined pattern. In its evasion of capture or fixity, affect becomes a concept through which to link vital energies to aesthetic mediation in explicitly bodily terms, and an idea against which to leverage criticism of emotion's hold over analyses of Heian literary and visual culture.

We should make a distinction between affect and emotion here, especially given the facile connections traditionally made by commentators and scholars, Japanese

and otherwise, from the late eighteenth century up through the Cold War between Heian literature and the emotional delicacy it is presumed to exude. Due in part to female authors' prominence during the Heian period, studies of Heian literature since the Edo period have been marked by a tendency to take a heightened emotionality and effeminacy for granted. Tomiko Yoda criticizes this powerfully structuring rhetoric of effeminacy, showing that it influenced national learning discourse in the eighteenth century and consequently informed the development of the discipline of Heian literary studies in the twentieth.⁴⁵

Interlocutors succeeding Norinaga regularly truncate affect's spectrum, forcing replete, often hard to parse impressions into narrower emotional rubrics. Modern presumptions can buttress these reductive appraisals, purposely or inadvertently purging sensations that diverge from ideologies of virtue, beauty, and sophistication. Unlike the more vehement Meiji spokesmen itching to exterminate effeminate literature like *Genji*, Virginia Woolf, writing in 1925, takes a polemical tack but orients it in a less chauvinistically moralizing direction. She identifies with the female writer on the basis of a more "adult," nonmasculine sensibility, where "some element of horror, of terror, of sordidity, some root of experience has been removed from the Eastern worlds so that crudeness is impossible and coarseness out of the question, but with it too has gone some vigour, some richness, some maturity of the human spirit, failing which the gold is silvered and the wine mixed with water."⁴⁶ Woolf's notion, informed by Arthur Waley's translation, huddles around a well-worn Orientalist impression of languorous delicacy. In underscoring *Genji*'s sophistication, Woolf cleanses its "sordidity" and the powerful, if coarse, affects of horror and terror accompanying it.

We should acknowledge that this rosy view of Heian literature didn't take hold solely among modern Western aesthetes, for as Janet Goff explains, "[*Genji*'s] appeal as a source of inspiration and allusion was perhaps greatest . . . from the late twelfth to the sixteenth century, when the court was in an advanced state of decline. Writers and critics living in a chaotic world cherished *Genji* because, to them, it epitomized the ideal, aristocratic way of life for which they yearned."⁴⁷ In a similar vein, John Walter de Gruchy identifies the appeal of *Genji* for Europeans in the wake of World War I: "Waley's *Genji* might be called a romantic escape in prose from the aftershock of war and what Lafcadio Hearn called the 'monstrous machine-world of Western life.'"⁴⁸ Furthermore, de Gruchy underscores that "for Waley personally, the *Genji* was a release into a realm of aestheticism, and the depiction of a depoliticized, aristocratic world of delicate manners and highly cultivated aesthetic tastes was 'fortuitously consonant with the ideals of Bloomsbury.'"⁴⁹

Similarly, Donald Keene "savor[ed] the details again. I contrasted the world of *The Tale of Genji* with my own. In the book, antagonism never degenerated into violence, and there were no wars."⁵⁰ Yet, aligned as it is with the preceding examples' pacifist preference, Keene's account complicates our picture, standing

out moreover for how it links this nonviolent emphasis to *Genji*'s portrayal of an attractive style of masculinity:

The hero, Genji, unlike the heroes of European epics, was not described as a man of muscle, capable of lifting a boulder that not ten men could lift, or as a warrior who could single-handedly slay masses of the enemy. Nor, though he had many love affairs, was Genji interested (like Don Juan) merely in adding names to the list of women he had conquered. . . . I turned to [the text] as a refuge from all I hated in the world around me.⁵¹

Genji embodies an alternative to the brand of heroic masculinity Keene knows from Western ancient myths and early modern romances. The appealing ideal Genji encapsulates should be read in contrast to Western literary archetypes, the warmongering of World War II, and the macho U.S. military context in which Keene found himself not long after discovering *Genji* in autumn of 1940.⁵² Genji's appeal suggests a queer identification, one grounded in antisocial reclusion and an antiwar politics. Recalling Keene's fondness for *Genji*, de Gruchy reminds us that "Waley clearly found in *The Tale* much of what he wanted to find there, and he used it as a surrogate for his own repressed voice. At the same time, Waley's *Genji* was a challenge to the narrow moral restrictions of that society, offering a vision of alternative sexual identities and sexual practices as a natural part of a sophisticated and civilized culture."⁵³ In this reading, Waley's translation is conditioned by discourses of Bloomsbury aesthetics and Japonisme even as it operates at odds with post-Victorian mores regulating morality and sexuality. In Edward Seidensticker's warily reverential estimation, Waley "embroiders marvelously," "amplifying and embroidering" throughout his rendition.⁵⁴ We might glimpse in this embroidery traces of a queer quality in *Genji*, one that was not fabricated outright by Waley but rather merely accentuated and expanded.

Elsewhere, one finds a trope of emphasizing the emotionality or sensitivity of Heian literature to valorize its apolitical nature. For example, Arthur Waley's 1928 introduction to Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book* (*Makura no sōshi*, 1002) casts the literature of the mid-Heian period as "purely aesthetic."⁵⁵ Similarly, historian George Sansom's 1962 account characterizes Heian culture as "almost entirely aesthetic" and "even in its emptiest follies . . . moved by considerations of refinement and governed by a rule of taste."⁵⁶ Although Ivan Morris's explication of the Heian "Cult of Beauty" presents more nuance than Waley's or Sansom's notion of the epoch as governed by a rule of taste, it maintains its general tenor.⁵⁷ In this context, "Heian" epitomized an anodyne aesthetic realm, often to the exclusion of potential threats posed by political readings.

Here, the historical moment in which Sansom's and Morris's texts were written—the early 1960s—matters, for this insistence on aestheticism indexed an ideology of reading apolitically within the discipline of U.S. Japanese studies that was aligned with a Cold War paradigm of knowledge production. This program sought

ideological containment of undesirable (read communist) sentiment. As H. Richard Okada explains, “Sansom’s statement forms part of a larger postwar effort to construct a peaceful cultured nation that . . . served to counteract both the image of imperialist aggressor in the Second World War and the hold that Marxism had among the intelligentsia.”⁵⁸

These investments in a strategically delimited Heian aestheticism recall Massumi’s description of the “confinement” and “functionally anchored perspective” a discourse of emotion demands. I am drawn to read his account of bodily processes in terms of its implications for bodies of scholarship. Specifically, the rhetoric of emotion, bound to serviceable notions of femininity or apolitical essentialism, deadens interpretive possibilities. As Norma Field asserts, “Indeed, the principal consequence of [Norinaga’s] monochromatic drenching of the *Genji* in *aware* [sensitivity to poignancy] is the effacement of animating tensions.”⁵⁹ Hence to rescue affect from emotion’s clutches requires a shift of critical sensibility and a tolerance of animating intensities less legible than the shallow love, jealousy, or sadness with which Heian protagonists have customarily been stamped. This is not to say these emotions don’t matter but rather to suggest that recourse to an analytic of emotion proves too coarse a metric for grasping the intricacies of Heian textuality. As an interpretive trope, emotion—especially as subsumed by *aware*—blocks more texturally rich forms of creative critical engagement that ensue when we pivot to affect.

Furthermore, translation can exacerbate this tendency even as it helps readers access a text like *Genji*, such as when, according to Earl Miner, “[Seidensticker’s] clarity [in his 1976 translation of *Genji*] has the effect of smoothing out the original. . . . It eliminate[s] much of the sudden shifting, the easy grading of tone from the disturbing to the sensitive, from serious to sexual, from bantering to moral.”⁶⁰ Miner’s insight highlights a consequence of translating for the sake of making a Heian narrative like *Genji* legible, palatable, and enjoyable to postwar American readers: effacing the richly affective texture of the original text. Masao Miyoshi echoes Miner’s critique, insisting that the “clarity of modern ironic vision” Seidensticker imposes distorts the original:

The point is that the reader of the original doesn’t know precisely where, for instance, a quotation begins or ends, and I suspect no Heian reader really cared. Mr. Seidensticker’s version cleanses all such ambiguities, and turns the tale into a modern Western novel (or romance), unavoidably changing the nature of the Heian sensibility. . . . The original *Genji*, I repeat, flows and drifts. At every turn, the stream of narrative opens up an unexpected perspective which also revises what has come before.⁶¹

Miyoshi’s description of a subtle intermingling intimates an interactive susceptibility to the mundane phenomena reminiscent of Massumi’s account of affect. Also worth mentioning, in light of our discussion of effacements and the suppression of

animating tensions, is Miyoshi's emphasis on how *Genji's* characteristic flow has been severed for the sake of intelligibility. For some readers, this flowing sensibility, along with a tempered vulgarity, signifies a "triumph of Lady Murasaki's feminine sensibility."⁶² However, I consider this linguistic drift as embodying a queer gesture, not simply in its disinterest in overtly specifying boundaries between characters and settings but also because of the way, "at every turn, the stream of narrative opens up an unexpected perspective which also revises what has come before." This recursive, revisionary tendency of *Genji's* prose speaks to a queerness postwar translators like Seidensticker sought to straighten, not embrace. Resolving such tensions spares the reader the "taxing and arduous" task of having to keep alert for unfamiliar details like "subtle shifts in honorific level."⁶³ Thus, Seidensticker declares that "the Western tradition requires that fictional characters have solid, unshakeable names" in order to stave off "great confusion" and "unreadability."⁶⁴

One wonders, though, what else was at stake in stressing such solidity. Put another way, it seems important to consider the historical conditions under which a contempt for subtle shifts in tone or title, and an aversion to presenting readers with a challenging experience, emerged. For his part, Seidensticker locates himself away from Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's "musical vagueness" and "nearer [Yosano] Akiko and Waley": "Akiko is a crisp, no-nonsense Waley sort, bringing matters into a clearer and more businesslike world."⁶⁵ We might note that this "businesslike world" is also, in the 1977 of Seidensticker's writing, very much a Cold War world. Whatever queerness Waley's early twentieth-century translations magnified in the tale flared as egregious from the retrospective standpoint of the late 1970s. Indeed, the very prevalence of the "sudden shifting" Miner notes might have mobilized the translator's drive to flatten and partition "the easy grading of tone," effectively deadening a queer energy deemed unseemly according to a Cold War era paradigm aimed at trumpeting classical Japanese literature's unambiguous virtues.

Although the question of censorship was not nearly as pertinent with Heian texts as it was with works of twentieth-century literature, we should nonetheless consider anticommunism's capacity to influence cultural producers like translators of Japanese literature. Here, Christina Klein's notions of the global imaginaries of containment and integration help contextualize *Genji's* translation for middlebrow readers of English. Building on Alan Nadel's idea of "containment culture," Klein writes that "the global imaginary of containment also translated anticommunism into a structure of feeling and a set of social and cultural practices that could be lived at the level of everyday life."⁶⁶ According to Klein, this logic of containment "enforced 'conformity' everywhere" and rendered deviance in all its forms—sexual, political, behavioral—a source of anxiety and an object of investigation."⁶⁷ I would suggest that within the context of this containment culture, *Genji's* rhetorical contours could be flattened to fit the structures of feeling most agreeable to a Cold War middlebrow readership. Questions of *Genji's* potential "sexual, political,

behavioral” deviance notwithstanding, the text needed to be straightened to reach this readership most pleasurably, efficiently, and profitably. Seidensticker notes that “a decision was early reached, upon consultation with Mr. Harold Strauss of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., that the annotation must be minimal” for his translation of *Genji*, presumably to make the text less forbidding for a popular audience. On his score, it bears considering how the global imaginary of containment functioned in tandem with what Klein calls the global imaginary of integration, which “constructed a world in which differences could be bridged and transcended.”⁶⁸

In assessing the influence of the intertwined imaginaries of containment and integration, we can understand the work of translating Heian literature during the Cold War as working on both fronts simultaneously: stifling the expression of unsavory textual elements to help usher ancient, aesthetically palatable, and politically benign foreign stories smoothly into middlebrow American consciousness. By the time of Royall Tyler’s 2001 translation, the geopolitical terrain had shifted once more, and a post-Cold War sensibility—in scholarship and publishing—seemed more amenable to reviving some of Waley’s queerer rhythms, and those of the original, which cared little for stark clarities and “solid, unshakable names.” In Tyler’s view, “The original readers of *Genji* were in no hurry, and they appreciated a rich, copious work that required them to come forward, as it were, to meet it halfway, in a process of fully engaged listening or reading. I therefore hoped to draw the modern reader into something like that kind of active engagement. Among other things, I translated long sentences into long sentences, and I preserved the discretion and decorum of the narration.”⁶⁹ This solicitation of an undiluted engagement through a deliberate retention of *Genji*’s texture sets the stage for a potentially unsettling and energizing textual encounter I would posit as queer.

ASSESSING AFFECT’S CRITICAL PURCHASE FOR *GENJI*

Given translation’s fraught history, how should we bridge the gap between pre-modern Japanese theories of affect and their Western counterparts? Norinaga’s valorization of *Genji*’s overflowing feeling helps us in this task. As Tomiko Yoda elucidates, in distilling *Genji*’s essence to *mono no aware*, or “capacity to feel and be moved by the things and events in the world,” his “discussion of affect keeps turning to the shadowy realms of the human heart: the desire that crests against the prohibition, temptations that arise despite one’s better judgment, and the ambivalence and vulnerability that haunt even sage priests and fearless warriors.” Yoda explains that Norinaga “deployed [femininity] as the signifier of uncensored, true feelings,” which “escape the control of regulatory principles and rigid articulation—ever changing, multilayered, and often conflicted.”⁷⁰ Norinaga’s emphasis on the feminine lets him exempt feeling from the masculine, Confucian codes he resisted for being too prescriptive and unfaithful to the realities of human experience. Instead

of categories of action, virtue, and vice schematized by these codes, he advocates a more complex, “incessantly shifting” notion of feeling irreducible to the rigidities of emotional rubrics. His opinions anticipate those of present-day theorists who stress affect’s mercurial phenomenological qualities.

Lauren Berlant, for example, describes affect as “the body’s active presence to the intensities of the present” or, after Silvan Tomkins, as “the biological portion of emotion.”⁷¹ So, it is not just a feeling of sadness but sagging shoulders or strained breaths that register impacts past intellection’s surface. The *Illustrated Handscrolls of The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari emaki*, ca. 1160) give at least one example of this. Whereas the angular stylization of the majority of the scrolls’ paintings can make it difficult to ascribe distinct affective states to specific bodily postures, the “Wakamurasaki” painting of an ill, mourning Genji visiting a mountain healer offers a notable exception. Genji sits to the right, with a downcast expression. The parallelism of the two men’s opposing figures underscores his malaise, with Genji’s position starkly contrasting the ascetic’s straight-backed posture. Genji “was suffering from a recurrent fever,” but just before that he was “prone to spells of vacant melancholy” following his lover’s death.⁷² The illness of mourning precipitates physical ailment as Genji’s posture registers his anguish through a gloomy face and softened spine.⁷³

Blood rushing to cheeks, the dilation of pupils, or a watering mouth also evince affective swells and shifts. Berlant’s and Tomkins’s characterizations of the “body’s active presence” evokes episodes in *Genji* when “the Left had one more turn [in the picture contest’s final round], and when the Suma scrolls appeared, the Acting Counselor’s heart beat fast”; or when Murasaki crumples at a glimpse of a powerful letter: “In the City his letters aroused strong feelings in most of those who read them. [Murasaki] lay down at once, grieving and yearning, and she would not rise again.”⁷⁴ I want to be wary of positing a transcultural, transhistorical entity. And yet, insofar as it represents the biological portion of emotion, affect implies a sensory apparatus operating below or beyond the cognitive level of cultural mediation.

Therefore, while the same gestures can signify different things in different cultural contexts, we nonetheless notice transcultural overlap. For example, consider the loss of appetite Genji’s father experiences in mourning: “He only went through the motions of breaking his fast and took no greater interest in his midday meal, until all who served him grieved to see his state”; or Murasaki’s shift in posture on being touched by her grandmother’s tearful concern for her: “[Murasaki’s grandmother] wept so bitterly that the watching Genji felt a wave of sorrow, too. Child though she was, the little girl observed the nun gravely, then looked down and hung her head.”⁷⁵ As a final example, consider the following:

It was therefore only in the secrecy of his own heart that [Genji] sighed and thought, Ah, how short a life he was destined to live! His tears threatened to fall like rain while he pondered the fragility of life, but he stealthily wiped them away because

the character of the day forbade them, and he hummed to himself, "I have long known the sorrows of silent thought. . . . One or two of [Onna San no Miya's] women must know what happened. How I wish she would understand me! But no, to her I probably look like a fool. Never mind my own part in this, though—I feel sorrier for her than for me." Genji's face betrayed none of these thoughts. . . . Pity and regret drove the affront from Genji's heart, and he burst into tears.⁷⁶

This passage helps delineate the contiguity affect shares with emotion and highlights the insufficiency of any facile notion of "sadness" to account for the complexity of feeling's embodiment. Here, Genji is beset by a vexing cluster of affects that he tries—and fails—to master through the deliberate exertion of conscious will. Genji hates Kashiwagi for cuckolding him and fathering a son with one of his wives. This hatred only swells as Genji enters the public context of mourning Kashiwagi, thus the secret sighing, issued out of Genji's frustration that he must suppress his anger in this space.

This passage stands out for its description of the tension between affect and emotion's codified public display. To show sadness in this context requires adherence to mores. Genji's sorrow curdles, out of sync with the style of melancholy most mourners practice. His tears mustn't fall too freely lest he betray some hint of outrage: "There were tears in his eyes, and his tone was bitter."⁷⁷ While Genji's "face betrayed none of these thoughts," his sighs, hums, and tears tell a different story, as the sheer pressure of trying to regulate his emotions only detonates a mass of affects. Such episodes suggest how sensitive we must be when interpreting *Genji's* depictions of sensitivity. For indeed, this scene gives a sense of how Genji closets his true feelings even as he expresses sympathy.

THE PLACE AND ROLE OF SHAME

Examples of affects include joy, excitement, arousal, disgust, anger, fear, disorientation, or shame. Shame discharges an affective force omnipresent in *The Tale of Genji*. For those familiar with the historical trajectory of queer theory, emphasis on shame here will seem familiar.⁷⁸ But given the historical and cultural distance between Heian and Western traditions, the persistence of shame's circulation in *Genji* stands out.

Shame roils early as discredit surrounding Genji's maternal background, and as dismay at the necessity to ascribe Genji the rank of something other than crown prince. Indeed, this book's chapters each articulate venues for reading shame: it reappears when Genji crumples in an unlit aisle, emasculated by the wraith that kills his potential wife, Yūgao (chapter 2); it invades appraisals of Suetsumuhana's seeming disaffection as devotees to normative romance chasten her for not loving like they wish her to (chapter 3); it returns at Suma, as Genji learns to swallow his disgrace beside the sea (chapter 4); and Yūgiri feels it when he fails to play the perished Kashiwagi's flute adeptly (chapter 5).

In all of these cases, albeit to varying degrees, shame serves a purpose. It pulls characters together, binding them to places and states of being they often long to escape. Self-reproach fastens subjects to a social order that, while it might not have their best interests at heart, still lends something to rely on as they navigate loss. We also recognize shame's social utility within an ideological regime of romance geared toward ensuring heterosexual reproduction. The compulsory vector of this system attempts to suppress any aberrant body opting for other lines of allegiance. These tensions suggest a link between structures of judgment and queer modes of moving astray.

Recalling the modern homophobic and imperialist condemnations of *Genji* helps us recognize the potent workings of shame both outside the text and within it. For indeed, we can safely assume that what upset prudish commentators so much in that turn-of-the-twentieth-century moment was based in a fear of *Genji* outing some perversity of Japanese culture. *Genji*'s supposed effeminacy and unabashed portrayal of the imperial bloodline's corruption stood to invalidate the myths of national patriarchy and integrity central to Japan's modernization and militarization. During a period when proving the civilized might of one's nation seemed paramount, *Genji* stuffed Japan between a rock and a soft place. On the one hand, the text's heft and intricacy let it be championed as a masterpiece "novel" on par with any Western exemplars; on the other hand, it struck its Japanese spokesmen as womanish and depraved. Much to their chagrin, if not outright horror, *Genji* could expose to Western nations a sexual secret whose status as damningly regressive had itself only recently congealed with the avid incorporation of Western paradigms. Cast as homosexual—which was more embarrassing than being portrayed as merely effete—this secret was one discourses including sexology, psychology, social Darwinism, and literary criticism sped to repress.

Cognizant of *The Tale of Genji*'s shameful propensity to serve as a queer icon of Japanese culture, on the one hand, and its heavy thematic investment in shame as a rhetorical vehicle, on the other, we can approach shame from a different angle. Namely, we can bypass any moralizing bent and focus instead on how bodies register shame as part of their linkage to their social environment and also consider how such bodies become serviceable to ideological designs. It becomes helpful to acknowledge a link between shame and queerness, but also to decouple them to consider interpretive possibilities for *queer* outside a moralizing framework.

QUESTIONING ORIGIN THROUGH QUEER TEMPORALITIES

With the preceding conceptual and historical background under our belts, the question now becomes, How might we activate those insights in more direct and sustained relation to *Genji*? One way to read *The Tale of Genji* as queer is to note how the narrative itself begins by posing a question, in passing: "In which reign

was it . . . ?” (*idure no ohontoki ni ka?*). In Royall Tyler’s popular 2001 translation, the opening reads, “In a certain reign (whose can it have been?) someone of no very great rank, among all his Majesty’s Consorts and Intimates, enjoyed exceptional favor.”⁷⁹ This inaugurating rhetorical maneuver posits a posture of proximate remove from Murasaki Shikibu’s own historical moment and political circumstances. For the narrator to mention offhand that she cannot seem to recall when the fiction’s events occurred circumvents censure from those who might recognize too much overlap with actual events at court. But in feigning ignorance, the coy opening also questions the very nature of temporality’s relation to imperial ownership: Perhaps the very notion of time being emperors’ property deserves rethinking? Furthermore, the question twists imperial succession’s vector, loosening linearity’s hold on narration. A coy implication emerges: that regnal time has been naturalized as sovereign does not mean it must frame how all stories start or end. “Emperors may own eras, but I can’t be troubled to remember which of them owned this one,” the narrator hints, “and whose reign it was in fact matters far less than the story I’m about to share.” Whatever claim an emperor may have had on this era fades before an endeavor to recount less official, more enthralling episodes.

Genji’s opening line reads as queer for its nonchalant insistence on the speculative and for its circumspect detachment from a sanctioned temporal sequence. Moreover, its elliptical retrospection performs a world-building gesture by establishing a narrational frame proximate to yet removed from any designated imperial schema. These altered relations to time ally the eleventh-century tale with a repertoire of current queer temporal critiques—formulations in which *queer* denotes temporal orientations resistant to normative time. For example, Judith Halberstam criticizes “a middle class logic of reproductive temporality” wherein “long periods of stability are considered to be desirable.”⁸⁰ In such a frame, she continues, “queer time perhaps emerges most spectacularly, at the end of the twentieth century, from within those gay communities whose horizons of possibility have been severely diminished by the AIDS epidemic.”⁸¹ Similarly, José Muñoz rejects the oppressive present imposed by straight time to champion a queer aesthetic’s possession of “blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity.”⁸² This puts him at strict odds with Lee Edelman’s antirelational formulation of queer as being antithetical to the heteronormative tyranny of “reproductive futurism.”⁸³ In harnessing the indeterminacy of *queer*, Carla Freccero invokes anachronism as a temporal process constituting queer time to read “against history” and thus “counter to the imperative . . . to respect the directional flow of temporality, the notion that time is composed of contiguous and interrelated joined segments that are also sequential.”⁸⁴ Freccero’s conception, which “proceed[s] otherwise than according to a presumed logic of cause and effect . . . and otherwise than according to the ‘done-ness’ of the past,” develops a notion of spectral temporality in which the affective past haunts the present.⁸⁵ Moving from an early modern European to

a medieval European context, Carolyn Dinshaw forgoes the ghostly metaphor but still stresses disquiet in the temporal theme of asynchrony: “different time frames or temporal systems colliding in a single moment of *now*.”⁸⁶ And for Elizabeth Freeman, these collisions proliferate as queer fragmentations of “homogeneous empty time” that materialize as “asynchrony, anachronism, anastrophe, belatedness, compression, delay, ellipsis, flashback, . . . repetition,” and more.⁸⁷ Additionally, she helpfully articulates the concept of temporal drag, “a counter-genealogical practice of archiving culture’s throwaway objects” to extract usable pasts.⁸⁸

Many of these formulations resonate with spatiotemporal features of the queer scenic moments in *Genji* to which I alluded earlier. Among these formulations of queer temporality, it is worth noting those of Carla Freccero, Carolyn Dinshaw, and Heather Love for their focus on the problem of queer historicity and the desires surrounding it. These include, respectively, desires to do justice to the past that haunts the present; desires to mine nonmodern orientations to recognize the temporal heterogeneity of “now”; and a desire to embrace the vexing “backwardness” of historical queer figures routinely dismissed from idealistic considerations of modern queer identity.⁸⁹ In all three cases, the authors argue against barriers between premodernity and modernity to underscore the value of reckoning with the occasionally unsavory insights gained from confronting earlier sensibilities. Beyond their usefulness in reading *Genji*, I appreciate these critiques for their worldly refusal to relegate the nonmodern to an inferior position within contemporary debates.

Similarly, in raising doubts about the nature of temporal codification, *Genji*’s opening lines also pose questions of proximity, status, and desires oriented toward the past or future. As Masao Miyoshi insists, “The original *Genji* . . . flows and drifts. At every turn, the stream of narrative opens up an unexpected perspective which also revises what has come before. The subject of a verb is often unknown, then is revealed, then is lost again; the narrator blends with characters, who also intermingle with each other and with their environments.”⁹⁰ This rhetorical strategy of the text enacts a queer gesture in its flowing revision of earlier perspectives, and it dissolves partitions between characters and settings to produce vertiginous senses of proximity between them.

At another level, within the close-knit world of Heian nobility, the gentlewoman narrating voice can take for granted her affinity with readers. Hence she relies on the aristocratic audience’s shared social consciousness to trust they’ll catch the critiques nonetheless. By framing the tale as removed from the early eleventh century in which Murasaki Shikibu was writing, this narrator allays some readers’ suspicion. And yet, the very need to nudge the narrative away from their present attests to how well it translates to their own historical moment. Thus the initial question’s insinuation of remove in fact betrays the proximity of the tale’s insights to the tacit truths of Heian life.

FROM TRANSGRESSION TO DEVIATION:
GENJI'S QUEER CONCEPTION

To understand better how *Genji* animates queer reading, we should consider how the text's initial interrogative gesture opens up other avenues of questioning—not just normative timelines but also social norms around imperial succession and the transgressions that threaten it. Here, I would like to question the dominance of transgression as a lens for interpreting *Genji*. Instead, I would propose a move toward deviation, recuperated for its spatiotemporal implications as a positive term that avoids the reifying associations *transgression* tends to carry.

Scholars have generally used the language of transgression, sin, and taboo to characterize a foundational motif introduced in the narrative's first chapter. Such language is used most frequently to discuss Genji's affair with his stepmother, Fujitsubo, and, as Fujii Sadakazu has shown, to mark his desires as deviant from the perspective of a time when incest taboo prevailed.⁹¹ For Norma Field, "incest as transgressive love becomes indispensable" to complicating the trope of prophecy in the narrative and creating fictional interest, and she notes that "incest provides an ideal ground for the play of the mutuality of the political and the erotic, as well as of the sacred and profane, the mythic and the fictional."⁹² She is disinterested in interpretations that posit the violation, which disrupts imperial succession, as being transgressive in terms that are either primarily political or primarily sexual. Field's reading of these realms as entwined complicates our understanding by avoiding moralizing claims.

In a slightly different manner, Haruo Shirane has taken up transgression as a major theme in the text, inaugurating his analysis with a section titled "Kingship and Transgression" and ending the first chapter with "Transgression and Renewal." This frame posits Genji's incestuous affair as a convention of the "exile of the young noble" trope; his transgression of a normative kingship becomes an obstacle that must be overcome to allow him a "renewal" that will lead him back to courtly glory.⁹³ Although the narrative certainly references a banishment/return motif, this trope should not be read in a teleological fashion that locates renewal at a pole opposite transgression, or as its implied outcome. Doing so presumes a normative paradigm in which "transgression" names acts that ultimately just affirm the preexisting Heian order.

Rather than read transgression as the negative entity against which this order positively defines itself, it might be better to focus on how what is deemed transgressive activates new possibilities without merely reinscribing what has already existed. This might allow for more of a departure from the discourses of sexual and political norms bound to the emperor system. A queer reading could instead interpret the transgression discourse—in *Genji* and in its criticism—as an occasion to theorize how boundaries between licit and illicit desires, actions, or styles of sociality were constructed. As Keith Vincent notes, "The queer critique of norms is thus not a call to rid the world of norms and liberate sex, but to understand how

norms function and how to institute new and different ones that do less harm and more good in the world.”⁹⁴

Thus a queer reading might take a rhetoric of transgression as a prompt to regard the very category of transgression with skepticism, if not abandon it altogether. Therefore, I’d like to question how the frame of transgression, while helpful in some respects, might overdetermine our readings, compromising our ability to acknowledge alternatives. Emending this interpretive habit could involve using other potentially less rigid concepts, like deviation, which references a norm without necessarily announcing how the departure from it will travel or where it will land.

This returns us to questioning *Genji*’s own queer point of departure. In terms of status, the narrator’s demure caution bespeaks her own distance from the imperial seat, since greater closeness to it would lessen the need for equivocation or apology. We might posit that Murasaki Shikibu’s own middle-ranking status as an empress’s tutor allowed her a privileged yet precarious perspective on Heian society. With regard to the backdrop *Genji* establishes, for the emperor (Genji’s father) to favor someone of no very great rank (Genji’s mother) to a degree exceeding her station spells peril. The “exceptional favor” lavished on Genji’s mother diverges dangerously from convention. The emperor’s desire for a woman beyond the perimeters of precedent and aristocratic expectation sites an intimacy his nearest courtly peers despise and fear as aberrant and misguided—threatening in ways that summon pejorative modern valences of *queer*.

With this status-skewed devotion in mind, we can extend our reading of *Genji* as a queer text by considering the particular overlap it proposes between deviation and deviance, key terms in early studies of gay sexuality.⁹⁵ (Such studies might note, with relish, that in this particular case, the Kiritsubo Emperor’s behavior registers as sexually deviant precisely in its *heterosexual* capacity, producing an heir half-tainted by lower birth and thereby undercutting a monopoly on aristocratic privilege.) The queerness I explore spans these terms to delineate instances where adherence to established routines wavers. *Genji*’s critical potency emanates from its insistence on sensitizing readers to the deviations from prevailing mores that recur at Heian society’s highest tier. It is a text invested in elaborating the dramas of misalignment, from infinitesimally subtle to realm-shaking. Its dedication to interrogating these nonnormative formations and gestures orients it along a queer continuum.

We can begin mapping this continuum in the narrative’s very first chapter. Here, the inordinate interest Genji’s father takes in the boy’s lower-ranking mother sets the stage for a slew of incongruities to come, Genji’s birth among them:

The physiognomist was dumbstruck and made many a disconcerted nod. “I foresee him becoming father of this land, someone destined to ascend to the Monarch’s unequalled station; when I envision him in that mold, chaos and anguish seem to loom. When I foresee him becoming a bastion of the court, a figure who upholds this entire realm under heaven, the prophecy deviates unmistakably once more.”

The Emperor, who had according to his own wise impression using the native Yamato method of physiognomy thus far not named his son a Prince, deemed that the foreign diviner had been truly insightful to advise along the same lines. Thus he reckoned—*Since even my own reign's fate is quite uncertain*—that rather than letting the child float through the world alone, deprived of backing from his mother's side, he might manage to indeed support him all the more and afford him an auspicious future by having him serve as a commoner instead; hence he made the boy study the myriad paths of politics ever more in earnest. Given how exceedingly gifted the boy was, it was really regrettable to make him but a commoner, but since if he became a Prince everyone would surely suspect his ambitions, once consultation with one accomplished in the ways of astrology pronounced the same conclusion as his own, His Majesty made up his mind: it would be best to make him a Genji.⁹⁶

Genji's birth poses problems from day one. Fears of suffering and disorder overrun whatever hope the child inspires. His very existence exceeds reason. Hence he perplexes onlookers and draws suspicion. The tale's inaugural omen derives from a status warfare endemic to Heian courtly life. And indeed, Genji's queer characterization here derives not from his sexuality or gender but from the disconcerting mismatch between his questionable maternal pedigree and his capacity for greatness. Genji's mien, as read by experts and laymen alike, radiates such that all recognize his imperial potential. However, his lack of strong maternal backing makes it impossible for him to secure the future he deserves. At this incipient stage, he lacks the endorsement needed to anchor his claim and is thus displaced from a future of official rule by the faction that harassed his mother to death so as to promote their own heir. So Genji is made a commoner, a privileged one, but demoted nonetheless. This positions him as an oblique figure whose circumstances of being blocked from the throne despite his sovereign caliber confirm the hardships of factional strife.

We must remember how critical this framing trope is for the *Genji* narrative and for our sense of Genji as a queer figure. For indeed, the legacy of Genji's inaugurating dispossessions erupt in his unstoppable drive to fashion intimate relationships to remedy that primal maternal, material loss through a range of compensatory affections and affiliations. Genji's queerness revolves ultimately around his dispossession. The fracturing blow he suffers in losing his mother and being passed over as heir apparent hurls him into a tailspin littered with encounters with men and women through whom Genji might draw closer to a solace neighboring imperial glory. It is Genji's deeply felt sense of contingency that sets the stage for his searching—and at times desperate—attempts at interpersonal closeness.

This is not to pathologize Genji's relationships, nor is it to undercut their significance by highlighting how factors beyond conscious intention shape their paths. Instead, I want to notice how Genji's fundamental status anxiety tilts his tendencies toward the social actors most likely to grant him advantage—regardless of their sex.⁹⁷ Genji's own inclination might be said to morph with the playing

field's contours. So we see him with men like Tō no Chūjō or Kashiwagi and notice that he experiences moments of heightened desire, envy, or resentment. The quick shifts that occur stem from a relentless contingency plaguing Genji's life, which frames the sense of threat or tactical opportunity Genji fathoms in women and men alike.

Genji often practices an expedient promiscuity. Consequently, gender roles and sexual preference can matter less than strategic worth. Happenstance or karmic relationships aside, these assignments get subordinated to a political calculation, one whose propensity for error only betrays Genji's own provisional status. Genji's frequent repositionings, then, should not be interpreted as confusion or mindless gallantry. To the contrary, they read more convincingly as often flawed but earnest calibrations designed to inch him closer to his (rightful?) throne. The world's supply of cruel lessons helps Genji hedge his bets in a game he rightly suspects is rigged to bleed him dry.

To be sure, all the hyperbolic hand-wringing around Genji's birth is premised on his biological sex; had he been female, the stakes would plummet because women were effectively barred from rulership by this point. Nevertheless, this backdrop frames a set of dislocations and deviations that expand our sense of how queerness might signify within the narrative, allowing us to read Genji as a queer figure long before questions of sexuality arise. Sexual activity matters, but mainly as the primary means for maintaining patriarchal privilege. Heterosexual reproduction is hence taken for granted within *The Tale of Genji's* aristocratic milieu as a vehicle for attaining or preserving the good life—over and above the lives of one's rivals, and ideally over the course of countless generations.

This reproductive paradigm grounds our capacity to theorize Genji as a queer figure. Indeed, one striking difference between him and other male protagonists is that for all his sexual activity, Genji fathers only three children (only two of whom can be acknowledged), while the more normative Tō no Chūjō and Yūgiri both have houses full of them, making Genji's lack of fecundity seem queerer by comparison.⁹⁸ And yet biological and social reproduction only get us so far, especially given Genji's shifting gender presentations. Here, we recall Kawazoe Fusa'e's arguments about Genji's androgyny demonstrating the futility of defining him in terms of sexual preference or identity.⁹⁹ Similarly, taking a cue from the work of scholars such as Yoshikai Naoto, Tateishi Hikaru argues that Genji's androgynous beauty is tied to the danger he summons as an outlier and semimagical figure of imperial descent.¹⁰⁰ Yoshikai explains the characters exhibiting "male beauty" (*danseibi*) as emerging during a period when earlier heroic archetypes are gradually assimilated to fit more refined Heian aristocratic paradigms.¹⁰¹ By contrast, Tateishi focuses more on the trope of androgyny in *Genji* and earlier sources to delineate how gendered traits such as manliness and its softer variants play into Heian courtly society's function. Highlighting the link between eroticism and imperial power, specifically, Tateishi stresses the implications of the phrase "one longed to see

him as a woman” (*onna nite mitatematsuramahoshi*), which is used with regard to Genji, primarily, and his illicit son, Emperor Reizei. Given the numinous aura his androgyny emits, men’s “wish to view [Genji] a woman” not only expresses a kind of same-sex desire toward Genji; it marks moreover a desire to attenuate whatever political threats Genji might pose.

Tateishi’s observations help us understand possible relationships between a nonexclusive gender identification and the political system within which Genji operates. For one thing, androgyny can be taken as an index of a kind of queerness that goes hand in hand with a gossamer boundary between Genji’s ability to fascinate and his violation of imperial protocol. In this sense, androgyny marks Genji as a seductive figure whose presence energizes a space of anxious doubt all the more threatening for its capacity to upend the reigning social order. Indeed, it turns out that those concerns about the realm’s fate are well-founded, for by secretly fathering a son with his stepmother, Fujitsubo, Genji severs sanctioned imperial succession to interpose his own heir as emperor. We could, following the lead of Meiji-era nationalist discourse, read this predicament as perverse. But why not read it as a queering of the symbolic core around which other family schemas are arrayed?

Before androgyny and pseudo-incest enter the picture, Genji’s queerness is to an overwhelming degree structured not by sexuality but by an apocalyptic mismatch of status positions between his birth parents: “Even in China had society been upended and calamity ensued exactly due to things like this,” cautions the narrator in reference to Yang Guifei’s incendiary beauty.¹⁰² This sets the ideal schema of succession askew, as Genji’s birth ruptures what should have stayed an undisputed telos. Furthermore, his features foretell a career not as “future pillar of the court and support of all the realm” but as something less steadfast.¹⁰³ Genji’s rise must therefore wend slantwise to an official arc. So the sages shake their heads at the incongruity and ambiguity he presents, the calamity he heralds, confused and disappointed that this dazzling child supposed to assure faith in the future fails to ratify their hope.

We should consider this disappointment’s implications. On this point, Lee Edelman’s assertion that children symbolize within modern society the heterosexual ideal of “reproductive futurism” also proves useful in considering all the promise and threat Genji symbolizes. The terms of reproductive futurism “impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations.”¹⁰⁴ For Edelman, the child is deployed to direct energy away from present desires and toward the future well-being of innocent children as part of an agenda to vilify homosexuals and the perceived decadence of their daily lives. The child “remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention.”¹⁰⁵ Within this context and

against this horizon's narrowing of the sphere of political action, "queerness names the side of those *not* fighting for the children, the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism."¹⁰⁶

Based as it is not on sexuality but rather on Genji's mother's rank, the discrimination Genji faces does not coincide neatly with the bourgeois capitalist context Edelman has in mind. Yet despite the historical gulf separating modern American and precapitalist Japanese society, the specter of reproductive futurism manages to haunt the latter to its core. Granted, the context of Heian marriage politics finds no easy equivalent in contemporary American society. But one aspect of the disparate systems that translates well is their shared insistence on the reproduction of progeny who will inherit the future. In fact, the desperate measures taken by Heian nobles to ensure the success of their family line—including exile and outright murder—represent a brand of reproductive futurism whose stakes far outweigh those of their Western counterpart, mainly due to the indispensable role of heirs in extending an actual aristocratic family bloodline, as opposed to a more amorphous symbolic hope for a prosperity promised by capitalism. Indeed, Genji himself becomes both the victim and the purveyor of such violent ambitions. Concern about the fate of Genji's father's career as emperor only magnifies these stakes, "since even my own reign's fate is quite uncertain." Mounting anxiety about imperial succession makes Genji's already extraordinary birth all the more untimely given this anticipated regnal brevity. Alongside Genji's lack of maternal backing, this factor helps explain the antagonism he faces, since the more powerful Kokiden faction would be all the more keen to install their own heir if it seemed that the sitting emperor would cede the throne soon.

The distressing uncertainty that binds the potential consequences of Genji's birth evokes Judith Halberstam's description of queer time's ramifications: "Queer" refers to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time. 'Queer time' is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance."¹⁰⁷ Halberstam's tethering of *queer* to a host of "nonnormative logics" highlights common elements that bridge divergent histories. Bracketing the phrases "within postmodernism" or "bourgeois," we can nonetheless acknowledge Heian courtly society's own distinct yet related—and often more vicious—commitments to reproduction, longevity, safety, and inheritance, all of whose conflicts striate *Genji's* worldview and constrict Genji's available sphere of action. These investments aspire to an inevitability that would subdue the inexorable contingency imbuing them.

Yet in light of Halberstam's framing, we can read the narrative's opening as conjuring forth a queer time: a span in which conforming to the timelines of Heian politics needn't apply. Through this invocation, readers are summoned to leave the temporal frames of Heian social reproduction and regnal time in favor of an

altered, adjacent temporality where predominant logics don't rule. As protagonists and readers are invited into an interval removed from such restrictive frames, they ideally come to encounter *Genji's* world in a less hurried fashion whereby aristocratic society's commitments can be questioned more readily. The text's invocation of a queer temporality means this encounter can emerge as a more provisional unfolding present that, in being unscripted by a normative telos, is consequently less hidebound and unaligned with any outcome known in advance.

Genji's conception occurs in the midst of this queer time. His birth embodies a queer event that triggers waves of unease about the integrity of hierarchy, familial reproduction, and inheritance confronted when a gorgeous outlier comes to steal some faction's hard-won spot. Insofar as his ambiguous destiny does not neatly reinscribe the "perpetual horizon" of reproductive futurism Edelman outlines, Genji's untimely presence prefigures a looming failure of the social. Indeed, the recourse to catastrophic precedents in China seeks to stabilize the unnerving sense of anticipation surrounding this social collapse by tying Genji's unpredictably unfolding queer time to a predetermined historical referent. The anxieties unleashed around the epicenter of Genji's birth index the capacity of one anomalous child to detonate an entire realm. These fears engender the necropolitical violence that was routinized as part and parcel of the Heian reproductive regime, including the violence that kills Genji's mother, two of his lovers, and makes him crush the cuckold Kashiwagi, too.

Deviation intersects deviance at this cruel juncture to make Genji, in Michael Moon's phrasing, "precociously acquainted with grief."¹⁰⁸ The Heian backdrop of factional violence against which *Genji* unfolds authorizes brutality on behalf of the noble child. Following Edelman's logic, the system's queer potential would seem to be weakened by this violence insofar as it endorsed a reproductive futurism. Despite this, the Heian system's callous bent is telling: it evinces a desire to repress contingencies that threaten aspirations to secure the future through one's progeny. These contingencies stem at least in part from what Edelman calls "the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations."¹⁰⁹

In this vein, and in opposition to a normative organizing principle of communal relations within the Heian court, Genji's emergence marks a deviation that sets the narrative in motion by nudging succession's equilibrium off-line. This inaugural deviation not only provokes subsequent ones, it actually *necessitates* deviance—represented through spirit possession, cuckoldry, and secret heirs—to quell these divergences. If nothing else, this pattern makes for good fiction. But furthermore, such fiction teaches us how hard it is to condemn or pinpoint deviance when it flourishes in such systemic fashion. And indeed, this might be one of *Genji's* most profound lessons.

Akin to *deviation*, *deviance* denotes moral judgments that can seem at odds with the more radical critical work performed by the narrative—namely, the critical project of exposing the contingent, fictional character of prevailing myths of

inviolable imperial heritage. Where the propensity for noble bloodlines to veer astray was so ample, this Heian text relates the societal response to Genji's affair with his stepmother, the Imperial Consort, as a crime of sexual deviance laced with treasonous potential. His impropriety diverts the imperial line as his own vexed birth was augured to do, prying it further out of joint as he fathers an emperor from his commoner's station. Genji swerves out of bounds, queering this most sacred of family trees with an illicit desire whose consummation wreaks more havoc than gay sex ever could.¹¹⁰

With this queer reading of *Genji's* conception underway, we now enter more thoroughgoing engagements with a series of key moments in the narrative. The following chapter examines an especially dramatic instance in which intimacy and loss merge for an adolescent Genji, as his shattering experience of losing a lover to spirit possession sends him reeling toward his servant.