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Seeking Refuge in Prepubescent Space: The Strategy of Resistance Employed by *The Tale of Genji's* Third Princess

So back I drew tiptoe from that Princess,
Because it was too soon, and not my part,
To start voluptuous pulses in her heart,
And kiss her to the world of Consciousness.
(Wilfred Owen, "The Sleeping Beauty," 104)

There had been no clashing of temper between Dorothea and her
husband since that little explosion in Rome, which had left such strong
traces in her mind that it had been easier ever since to quell emotion
than to incur the consequences of venting it.
(George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 316)

Feminist criticism has recently been offering rereadings of Murasaki Shikibu's *Genji monogatari*, translated into English as *The Tale of Genji*, as less the story of the eponymous hero than that of all the women he encounters and with whom he enters or would like to enter into amorous relationships. Viewed from this angle, the world's first great novel becomes the examination of a tremendous range of female lives, with the Shining Genji and other males, including his putative son Kaoru, serving merely as the thread leading readers from one fascinating woman to another.¹ Such female characters include the long-suffering principal heroine Murasaki, the cool and haughty Aoi,

1 A recent article by H. Richard Okada comments rightly that Genji "come[s] to seem less the grand or romanticized male, the heartthrob of Heian women, than as a contingent representation who can only move 'forward' in the text with the aid of female surrogates who 'serve' (in all senses of the word) to put him in his place(s)" ("Speaking For," 11).

the demur yet determined Akashi Lady, the orphaned Ôigimi who would rather starve to death than submit to unwanted advances, and countless others, each thought-provoking in her own way. This extraordinary author reveals a deep and abiding concern with possible female fates, presenting readers in both ancient Japan and the modern world with insights into the widely varying ways women can choose to respond to the challenges inherent to living in a patriarchal society, responses that often take the form of resistance.² This article will explore how and why Murasaki Shikibu presents the Third Princess (Onna Sannomiya) as perpetually child-like and innocent, despite a storyline that sees her marry, become involved in an illicit affair, bear an illegitimate child, and finally take vows as a Buddhist nun. The present character study aims to suggest a new way to read this princess' apparently immature behaviour as a sign of agency, albeit expressed within strictly limited parameters.

Citations will be drawn primarily from Edward Seidensticker's 1976 translation (1989 Knopf edition). This is certainly not to assume that the use of a translated text is unproblematic — any translation necessarily offers a partial and subjective interpretation of a piece of literature, and further analysis into whether Seidensticker accurately and felicitously transmits the intended literary effects of his author would provide fodder for countless other papers.³ For the limited purposes of the argument made here and in the interests of accessibility by a broader audience, however, this most commonly read English-language version will suffice, with the original terms and phrases introduced only where specifically relevant. It is hoped that this article will prompt both those familiar

and unfamiliar with Japanese literature to pay due attention to a character who should draw the eye even as she shrinks from it.

2 In his book inspired by poststructuralist theory, *Figures of Resistance*, Okada points out instances of resistance in female characters ranging from Kaguyahime in the early Heian *Taketori monogatari*, or *Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, and Lady Ise of the *Ise monogatari*, through to the mid-Heian period, and is fascinating to consult on that point. The polyvalent concept of resistance with which he is concerned, however, focuses primarily on "the resistance of language itself to its own readings, interpretations, theorizations, and totalizations" (14). His stated aim of "examin[ing] the texts with an eye toward those aspects that effectively resist resolution or rationalization" (287-88), renders his discussion unfortunately beyond the scope of this exploration of the Third Princess.

3 For my own analysis of how Seidensticker seriously misrepresents the author of the 10th-century *Kagerô nikki*, for example, see "Translating Woman: Reading the Female through the Male."

There is nothing arbitrary about the fact that the *Genji* insists repeatedly on the Third Princess, the official wife of Genji's later years, being "a mere child" (Seidensticker 554 and *passim*). When first introduced, this character is indeed only some thirteen years old (which, nonetheless, was a marriageable age in Japan during the 8th - through 12th -century Heian period), but even as the years pass, her immaturity continues to be emphasized.⁴ While "childhood" is a problematized term, the very concept arguably a nineteenth-century European invention, it is undeniable that most cultures recognize stages of pre-adulthood where one is protected from certain realities while acquiring the knowledge and skills required to become a fully fledged member of society. I will argue that what should logically be a transient, eventually abandoned state, the Third Princess seeks to translate into a permanent refuge. Murasaki Shikibu is here exploring one possibility for coping with the threat of violation: that of retreating deep within childhood space and thus attempting to render oneself ineligible for the mating game. Behaving in an infantile manner, although "of course in point of years she was not a child at all" (Seidensticker 558), the princess is refusing to step within the exploitive confines of her society's definition of woman.

This heroine has rarely been given the attention she deserves (a noteworthy exception in North American scholarship is Doris G. Borgen's sustained discussion of the Third Princess in relation to the theme of spirit possession). She has been described as "literarily uninteresting and [one who] comes to life only through Kashiwagi's illicit attachment" (Field 234) and "an uninteresting little thing [who] turns out to be [...] nothing like the young Murasaki. It never occurs to Genji to fall in love with her" (McCullough 17). In this article, however, I will seek to demonstrate that the Third Princess' employment of a deliberate and subversive strategy to avoid drawing attention to herself is actually of great interest. By denying her adult sexual role, she actively discourages men from falling in love with her and creates a refuge, albeit temporary, from unwelcome masculine attentions. Susan Bordo reminds us that feminist theory is "an 'outsider' discourse, that is, a movement born out of the experience of marginality, [...] and thus] contemporary feminism has been unusually attuned to issues of exclusion and invisibility" (141). The Third Princess is triply excluded and invisible as a too often neglected character in a text that belongs to a distinctly non-European tradition, and a pre-modern one at that. An analysis that is fundamentally informed by gender and by a need to shift our point of departure away from Western literature, and where this outsider serves as centre rather than margin, can offer new ways to theorize agency and the condition of women.

4 While Murasaki also is described as childish throughout the text, it should be noted that the manner of her immaturity could not be more different. First of all, unlike the Third Princess, she exhibits undeniable competence in myriad areas. As well, Murasaki never fails to charm Genji by her cheerfully independent or, conversely, pouting and endearing girlishness. The contrast between that kind of (to Genji) titillating childlike behaviour and the passive, bland demeanour of the Third Princess, who appears frustratingly out of her league and utterly unpromising, prompts the reader to probe the author's rationale for offering us this example of immaturity.

The Japanese critic, author, and Buddhist nun Setouchi Jakuchō has characterized *The Tale of Genji* as a sort of sex education manual designed at least in part to instruct Empress Akiko, who was a mere child ignorant of romantic love and adult sexuality when she entered the Court, about the complexities of male/female relations.⁵ In this context, the character of the Third Princess offers a highly subversive metatext concerning Murasaki Shikibu's attitude toward the likelihood of finding wedded bliss. Komashaku Kimi, a feminist critic in Japan, has described the author's message as follows: "donno yō ni zen'i no otoko, ii otoko to musubaretemo onna wa fukō da" ("entering into relations with a man, no matter how kind or good he may be, means unhappiness for the woman"; 220). This unlikely heroine makes unremitting attempts to define herself as asexual or, more accurately, pre-sexual. The logic of this strategy is revealed by the disaster that results from the one occasion where her femininity is accidentally revealed. It is not in fact Kashiwagi's attachment that brings her to life, but rather her inevitable exposure as a living, breathing, sexual woman that spurs his attraction on to its fated end. The events leading up to and following this famous episode constitute an ingenious examination of a unique strategy of resistance based on remaining in a state of suspended sexuality. The point of this woman's story is that the men in her life (father, husband, and self-styled lover) control her destiny, which point is firmly underscored by the author's tactic of denying the Third Princess any voice until quite late in her story.⁶ She poses as a "passive and virtually speechless" (Field 234) non-heroine. Nevertheless, this mute and outwardly childish character paradoxically serves a specific and very useful purpose: to demonstrate one of many responses to the demands that a predatory patriarchy can have on women.

Our author has deliberately placed the Third Princess within an inarticulate space, where others feel authorized to speak on her behalf as adults would for a child.⁷ This woman is significantly objectified, accessible almost exclusively via male readings (e.g., by the Suzaku emperor, Genji, and Kashiwagi) or the occasional and usually complicit female reading (e.g., by Murasaki and nursemaid Kojijū). Norma Field's comment that the princess is "always closed to us" (285) is accurate most of the time. In few cases is the Third Princess accorded a voice to speak

5 "Akiko wa jūni-sai de kōkyū ni hairaretan dakedo, nenne de, ren'ai mo sekusu mo wakaranai. O-ningyō mitaina hito deshō. Tsumari, 'Genji' wa isshu no seikyōiku hon datta no yo" ["Akiko was twelve years old when she entered court, and knew nothing of love and sex. She was like a little doll. In short, 'Genji' was a sort of sex education book."] (Tawara Machi 45).

6 Although the Third Princess is introduced on p. 537 of Seidensticker's translation, the first time she is allowed to express an opinion of her own appears on p. 565, when she remarks on how kind Murasaki is to her. The only other indications of her thoughts are the panic described some 21 pages later, and after six years have passed, when she realizes that Kashiwagi has seen her, and on p. 613, when she realizes that this man is in her room. She is not permitted direct speech until her poem on p. 615. Throughout the description of her marriage and relocation to Genji's residence, our author keeps her heroine's thoughts a secret.

7 On the issue of appropriation of voice generally with regard to this text, see Okada's "Speaking For: Surrogates and *The Tale of Genji*."

for herself, and so the sympathetic reader who wishes to hear her story must read between the lines and take with a grain of salt the frequently distorted or self-serving attempts by other characters to interpret her behaviour and wishes. A verse written by Izumi Shikibu, a contemporary of Murasaki Shikibu, is instructive here:

Ikade ka wa	How could you see,
Maki no toguchi o	When the pine-wood gate
Sashinagara	Was locked and barred
Tsuruki kokoro no	Whether or not
Are nashi o min	My heart was cold? (Cranston 139)

Just because she has been rendered silent does not mean that the woman is neither thinking nor observing. As we will argue below, it may well be that her thoughts and observations are literally unspeakable within Heian society. The author of the *Genji monogatari* was certainly not unaware that her own position as a respected writer, a woman to whom both sexes listened eagerly (at least where her poetry and prose were concerned), was relatively unique. On this level, the princess represents the more typical Heian female deprived of any space where she can express her socially disregarded and possibly unacceptable desires. A woman of her high social standing was under even greater restrictions as to proper behaviour than one from the middle ranks or lower. By means of her virtually voiceless presence, in any case, the princess underscores the oppressive nature of certain aspects of their society and implies a challenge to the system.

Our heroine's objective is both physical and psychological refuge via metaphorical isolation within a fictive eternal childhood as an alternative to exploitive adult relationships. In addition to remaining silent, the Third Princess opts for as marginal a role as possible, and how better for a princess to become marginal to the sophisticated and rather libertine Heian court than by remaining "wakabitamaheri" (NKBZ 15:56), eternally prepubescent? She seeks the sidelines of marriage politics, avoiding anything that could remotely be taken for womanly flirtatiousness: "[s]he did not seem shy before [Genji]," instead exhibiting a most unromantic "openness and freedom from mannerism" (Seidensticker 558). She manages to disarm her groom by not responding according to the prescribed mores for young newlywed females.⁸ Even following consummation of their marriage, the Third Princess continually seeks to (re)define herself as a pre-sexual entity by clinging to an infantile demeanour ("chigo no omogiraisenu kokochi shite"; NKBZ 15:66). Despite its fictitiousness, this false childhood does serve as a kind of temporary sanctuary. Genji finds

8 This strategy is even more successful where onlooker Yūgiri is concerned. Mildly aroused by the presence of his extremely young stepmother, "Yūgiri was not exactly consumed with longing and curiosity, but he did hope that he might sometime have a glimpse of her too" (Seidensticker 580). Regardless, "certain evidences of immaturity had had the effect not exactly of cheapening her in his eyes but certainly of cooling his ardor" (603).

himself rather bored with his bland and unaccomplished new bride and is thus dissuaded from frequent sexual contact and extended social intercourse with her.

The Third Princess belongs to a venerable line of women in life and letters who behave in a so-called inappropriate manner. Examples of such rebels can be found in all countries, cultures, and time periods. While it has always been perilous for the disempowered to rebel against societal expectations⁹, some consciously or subconsciously choose to risk incurring the scorn or potentially even violence of those around them by doing so, seeing this action as the lesser of two evils. Most famous of these subversive female characters in Classical Japanese literature may be the late-Heian, comic “Lady Who Loved Insects,” who refuses to conform to restrictive customs and arbitrary standards of beauty (such as by shaving her eyebrows or blackening her teeth), rendering herself unattractive to potential suitors: “‘What a sad case!’ thought the Captain. ‘If only she took an ordinary amount of trouble with herself she really would not be bad-looking’” (Waley 174). It is surely no accident that this “strange girl” (Waley 170) prefers to tend to her caterpillars and snails in solitude, limiting communication with other humans to conversations “through a chink in the half-raised blinds” (Waley 171). She turns the tables on those who would dictate her behaviour by citing a common proverb that ghosts and girls should be neither seen nor heard, which sentiment suits her preference to be left alone. Yet another psychological sister to the Third Princess can be found in an anecdote related in the Muromachi-period *Tsurezuregusa*:

The daughter of a certain lay priest in the province of Inaba was reputed to be very beautiful, and many suitors asked for her hand, but this girl ate nothing but chest-nuts, and refused to touch rice or other grains. Her father therefore declined the men’s proposals, saying, “Such a peculiar person is not fit to be married.” (Keene 37)

To be deemed unmarriageable (for whatever reason) provides an obvious escape from the sexual exploitation often experienced by women in a patriarchal society. There are very few males deemed worthy of the Third Princess, and it would have been far from unprecedented for someone of her exalted rank to have remained unmarried.¹⁰ Regardless, the Third Princess’ father will soon become a priest and can see no alternative means of providing for his own “peculiar” daughter but to marry her off. Similarly to both young ladies mentioned above (although exercising more caution by choosing, in place of truly aberrant behaviour, a role that may once have been fully acceptable, but has now become developmentally inappropriate), the Third Princess expresses her opposition and asserts her will by

9 In this connection, consider the famous lines by Dickinson (poem #435): “Assent — and you are sane — / Demur — you’re straightway dangerous — / And handled with a chain —.”

10 Many women at the Heian court were prevented from marrying for a variety of reasons (see Fukuto 37, cited in Arntzen 31), one of which was high rank. According to an oft-cited footnote in NKBZ (4:23 n. 25), merely 15% of princesses, a total of 25 women, were wed in the first 200 years of the Heian period, owing to the paucity of adequately high-status males. Only quite late developments would have allowed a real-life counterpart to the Third Princess to marry Genji at all, since, despite his high birth, he is nonetheless a commoner.

refusing to play along.

The refusal is passive rather than active, given that resisting more obviously might expose one to social opprobrium and loss of *ushiromi* (social backing or support). Like the Akashi Lady, for instance, the princess has been irrevocably placed by her father within Genji's sphere, and the husband has now become her sole defender. There is general acknowledgement that she is utterly reliant on his goodwill, which fact gives the father pause:

He said several times that Genji must not think about him but must follow his own judgment in his treatment of the princess. He could not even so hide his disquietude. She was so very young and defenceless. (Seidensticker 559)

The retired Suzaku emperor worries ceaselessly about his favourite daughter, whom he perceives as ill equipped to defend herself. He would like to arm his child against the difficult world in which she must live, but does not know how to go about it. Even the best possible training in the accepted womanly arts seems to have left many of her literary predecessors and peers in a sad and dependant position, as we can see by examining any number of female characters in the *Genji* and other works. By default, in what appears to be almost a capitulation to the hopelessness of a woman's desiring any significant degree of autonomy, she has been allowed to remain in the unschooled space of childhood much longer than is usual.

Marian Ury has written that "much of the *Genji* can be read as an indictment of female incompetence. The character of Onna San no Miya is a prime example" (187). Yet the unprecedented level of incompetence displayed here can be interpreted as a self-defence strategy consciously or even unconsciously employed by someone who, recognizing her own impotence to make a place for herself in a frequently hostile world, withdraws from the game. The princess' apparent childishness and lack of the usual accomplishments for a girl of such high socio-economic status shock Genji. When he receives the first traditional correspondence from his bride, he sees that it "was every bit as bad as he had feared, scarcely even a child's hand — [. . . the letter was] evidence of almost complete uselessness" (Seidensticker 558). The reader should, however, consider what advantage the typical ladylike talents would be to someone whose objective is precisely to avoid attracting the male. By contriving to appear a useless addition to a man's harem, she can perhaps avoid having much to do with him. With her insipid and unworldly behaviour, she succeeds in rendering herself uninteresting to her new spouse, and thus in shielding herself from many of the usual attentions. It is important also to note that her father has not provided her with the sophisticated and talented retinue one would expect for the daughter of a retired emperor, but merely a group of often similarly infantile playmates:

Nor did there seem to be women of substance among her attendants. [. . .] Genji might not be enormously pleased at the sight of all these little girls at their games the whole day through, but he was by nature neither an uncharitable man nor a reformer, and he did not interfere. (Seidensticker 580)

There is virtually nothing about this princess or her attendants to attract and hold any man's attention.

Genji is far from an unsympathetic husband, of course, especially for his time. The 19th-century American writer Kate Chopin writes ironically of everyone "agree[ing] that Mr. Pontellier was the best husband in the world. Mrs. Pontellier was forced to admit that she knew of none better" (Chopin 50). Likewise, for the Third Princess, it is not a matter of desiring a more suitable choice from among the pool of potential marriage partners, but rather of recognizing that Heian relationships are by definition unbalanced and exploitive. On most occasions, the Shining One accepts his wife's child-like demeanour with grace, although it does reflect badly on him: "He was embarrassed that the princess should be so immature for her years" (Seidensticker 564). It never occurs to him to inquire as to the causes of this peculiar conduct. That the great romantic hero of this tale remains so oblivious in the face of the Third Princess' insubordination is quite a damning comment on the self-involved Heian male. Nonetheless, although Genji cannot help but be disappointed by his new wife, he charitably does his best to insulate her from unflattering societal judgement:

He did not want to have secrets from Murasaki, and yet he did not want her to see the princess's hand, at least for a time. To display the princess in all her immaturity seemed somehow insulting. (Seidensticker 558)¹¹

As we see with a number of other characters in this tale, the princess does not reject the quite chivalrous Genji *per se*, rather she rejects all members of the male sex. As Komashaku again puts it in explaining what she calls the "irokoki messēji" ("dark message") of the *Genji*:

Onna no fukō wa, aite no otoko ga tamatama warui otoko de atta to iu yōna koto dewa nai, to Murasaki Shikibu wa hakkiri ninshiki shite ita. Dakara, Ōigimi ni

shitemo Ukifune ni shitemo, aite no otoko ga ki ni iranai kara kyōhi suru no dewa nai. Donna aite de atte mo, kyōhi suru de aru. (221)

(Murasaki Shikibu was fully aware that a woman's unhappiness is not a matter of her chancing to meet up with an evil man. Accordingly, neither Ōigimi nor Ukifune reject their suitor because he does not appeal to them. They reject any suitor regardless of who or what he is.)

¹¹ The *Kagerō nikki*, for example, reveals that not all gentlemen of the period were so delicate when it came to exposing the infelicitous attempts of some of their less gifted female correspondents. See, for example, Arntzen 287, where Kaneie and Michitsuna's Mother laugh together over the rather unsuccessful epistle penned by one of his conquests.

The Third Princess should be characterized in some of the same terms that critics have used to describe Ôigimi: namely, the “supreme resister” (Okada, *Figures*, 173) and “riaruna me o motsu onna” (“a woman who has her eyes wide open”; Komashaku 160) with respect to the sexual politics underlying the *Genji*.

When she so chooses, the Third Princess reveals that she is not after all as socially or aesthetically incompetent as is commonly thought:

The Third Princess, upon being informed that she was to be hostess to such a gathering, put her little girls into robes of a rich yellowish green, white cloaks lined with green, and jackets of magenta. Though there was nothing overdone about this finery, the effect was of remarkable richness and elegance. (Seidensticker 600)

Although still reluctant to draw attention to herself, she here demonstrates acquisition of one of the vital and highly desirable talents of a Heian noblewoman. This accomplishment is echoed in the musical skill she also displays when performing at the concert that same day. Her husband does not hide his fears that she is likely to embarrass them all: “Worried lest the Third Princess seem inadequate, Genji himself tuned her seven-stringed koto for her” (600). Regardless, we learn that

the Third Princess was not quite a complete master [of the instrument] yet, but her playing had an assurance that did justice to her recent labours. Her koto took its place very comfortably among the other instruments. [...] she had acquired a most admirable touch. (602)

On this occasion, she appears to forget herself and inadvertently drops her habitual air of puerile uselessness:

Genji glanced at the Third Princess. [...] Hers was not a striking sort of beauty, but it was marked by very great refinement and delicacy. [...] One knew that she was the most wellborn of ladies. (602)

Her koto playing, which we can take as standing metaphorically for her overall behaviour that day, “had a fine sureness and lucidity. One looked in vain for signs of immaturity” (605). In fact, the normally incompetent princess “gave evidence of real understanding,” and those in attendance “can scarcely believe it is the same person” (606). But by the evening, when Genji pays one of his now infrequent visits to her quarters, the princess has again retreated to a more childish, safer space: “Immersed in her music, she was as youthful as ever. It did not seem to occur to her that anyone might be less than happy with her presence” (609). Hiding behind the persona of inconsequential, rather tedious child once again — “very young in her ways and very innocent” (541) — she seeks to deflect sexual or other interest.

The act is not solely for the male's benefit. Behaving in a blatantly juvenile manner also means that the jealous and potentially dangerous Murasaki will eventually judge her to be no significant threat, even though the princess is outwardly acknowledged as Genji's principal wife in her stead. The Third Princess is not allowed to remain in a separate residence belonging to the maternal line, and is instead promptly moved into her husband's Rokujō household. At the mercy of his other women, therefore, it behoves the new wife to act submissively in a bid to enlist their protection and avoid hostilities.¹² This reality is explicitly recognized by her father, who writes directly to Murasaki: "I fear I have left an unthinking child on your hands. Do please be tolerant" (559). There is no way of predicting whether the beloved princess' more experienced and ambitious rivals will be kind, and he feels responsible for having placed her into a veritable lion's den: "He should not have left his artless daughter in a house where the other ladies were so subtle" (559). Fortunately, the first among these other ladies, like Genji himself, cannot help but take on a pseudo-parental role with respect to the new addition: "Murasaki then went to see the Third Princess. Yes indeed — still very much a child. Murasaki addressed her in a motherly fashion" (565). This nominally demoted wife can afford to be generous, reassured of her secure place in Genji's affection and esteem, once the "kita no kata" (literally translating as "person of the North," but used to designate a man's most important wife) is proven to be no true challenger: "She left the princess feeling, in a childish, half-formed way, that this was a kind and gentle lady, not so old in heart and manner as to make a young person feel uncomfortable" (565). We see that the purported usurper, for her part, is just as relieved as the one usurped. The Third Princess appears to be successfully crafting an ideal, reclusive fantasy into which she can slip unmolested, and to a certain extent both the new husband and rival wife are co-operating. Yet ultimately, our heroine will have to reckon with irresistible forces impelling her into adult realities.

There is much narrative misdirection about how Genji must spend his nights with the Third Princess if he does not wish to offend her. Lack of sustained husbandly interest is normally perceived as humiliating to a woman (consider the continual machinations of Tō no Chūjō's family earlier in the story to ensure that Genji visits the neglected Aoi from time to time, for example). Readers are, nevertheless, made well aware that this young bride is disinclined to desire the presence of her spouse. Despite Murasaki's resigned acceptance that he will "divid[e] his time evenly between her and the Third Princess" (Seidensticker 597), Genji rapidly tires of the latter and ceases his regular visits, "ma[king] do with an exchange of notes" (560). The gossips, sure that she is having "a sad time of it" (585), speculate that "the Third Princess was spending lonely nights and days of boredom" (611). Little in the text, however, would suggest that this (in name only) principal wife herself fears either humiliation or boredom caused by spousal inattention. Instead, she likely views his coolness as a welcome development in their relationship. This princess prefers to be left alone, and if "she was no great competitor for Genji's affection" (580), well, she has clearly never

12 Fujitsubo's sadly besieged married life reveals the consequences that result when a woman is unable to enlist the support of her husband's other wives.

hoped to be one. On a superficial level, Genji is aware that she does not desire his attentions, but he does not pause to consider her rationale when the results are so clearly in his own interests:

He was in no hurry to visit the Third Princess. She did not seem to care a great deal whether he came or not [. . .]. If she had made trouble he would probably have been more worried about her than about Murasaki; but as it was she worried him no more than a pretty, harmless toy. (563)

The strategy is working. The princess is more than happy to be “losing out” (612) to Genji’s other, lower-status wives if this means fewer intrusions into the female sanctuary she is attempting to create for herself: “On nights when His Lordship does not come the princess has swarms of women in her room, and always several of her favorites right beside her” (612). Most of these ladies-in-waiting are youthful playmates, although Kojijū at least functions as a maternal figure, reinforcing the princess’ illusion of eternal childhood.

This is no gender-neutral *Peter Pan* fantasy of escape from adult responsibilities, but rather one that is informed by a specifically female experience. Many Western readers will find that *Sleeping Beauty* comes to mind, and that work of children’s literature proves instructive in this particular case. The well-loved fairytale has been described by more than one critic as a puberty myth, where Girl is awakened into Woman and takes her preordained place within patriarchal society. What we have here is a grim variation, wherein the subversive Beauty, an attractive and highly desirable (socially speaking) young female, resists being awakened by her Prince Charming: “The Third Princess was the one who refused to grow up. She was still a little child” (Seidensticker 597). There appears to be an intuitive understanding that acknowledging either male or female sexuality is dangerous, in that it exposes the woman to phallic invasion and is doomed to lead to something other than happiness ever after. As we will see below, the dire consequences resulting from the one occasion where our heroine does allow herself to be seen as sexually ripe are evidence of how right her reclusive instincts are. In a deliberate act of avoidance, the Third Princess is shielding herself from carnal knowledge and the appropriation of the female self that it represents by seeking virginal interiority. Rachel Brownstein makes a related point about the heroine of George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*:

She is terrified of open spaces. Her fear of the world’s wideness and her awareness of her own vulnerability are symptoms of her intelligence [. . .]. Willed ignorance keeps her snug and smug [. . .] most of the time. (212)

Like Gwendolen, our princess shrinks from the world and resolutely refuses to accept maturity when it offers nothing but exposure. Another critic rightly states that “the erotic is Genji’s mode of bringing women into his sphere of influence” (Field 109), and therefore attempting to render oneself ineligible for an erotic role is a highly justifiable strategy for a woman who seeks agency.

Despite her immaturity, our princess is a married woman. She nonetheless stubbornly refuses to come of age

emotionally, with a view to being dealt with in a paternal fashion. We have already demonstrated that Genji, old enough to be her parent, is in fact forced into more or less the role of surrogate father:

The other side of the matter was that she did have a certain girlish charm. She listened quietly and answered with whatever came into her mind. He must be good to her. In his younger days his disappointment would have approached contempt, but he had become more tolerant. (Seidensticker 559)

His “tolerance” in the face of such childishness was exactly what she was counting on, and the Third Princess continues this preternaturally juvenile act (in Butlerian terms, “performing” childhood) for several years, enjoying significant success with her subterfuge:

Though [. . .] in her early twenties and very pretty, she was tiny and fragile and still very much a child. He [Genji] wished that she might at least look a little more grown-up.

“Your royal father has not seen you in years,” he would say. “You must show him what a fine young lady you have become.” (599)

To emphasize her characterization as Child, not only does she take refuge in a psychologically prepubescent state, she is described (a few pages earlier) as being physically like the very young: “She was tiny and immature physically, and she gave a general impression of still greater, and quite extraordinary, immaturity. [. . .] The Third Princess was like a baby” (554). The smaller the body, the less likely it is to attract the male gaze. In the Uji chapters of this tale, we see how Ōigimi embarks on a strategy of self-starvation from a similar desire to eliminate her own physicality. Luce Irigaray has taught us that bodies are as much metaphorical as material, and by reducing the extent of their corporeal boundaries, these women hope to pass unnoticed through a hostile world. In the words of Doris Bergen:

Genji has the impression that the Third Princess is *hidden inside* her clothes. As Murasaki Shikibu puts it in an unusual expression, the Third Princess tends to be all clothes [see S:558; 4:66: “ito onzogachi ni”]. Although startled by this, *Genji does not feel compelled to dis-cover her*. (152-53; emphasis added)¹³

By retreating within, presenting herself as a creature of little if any substance or self — “mi mo naku” (NKBZ 15:66) —, the princess hinders discovery or violation of that self. Elizabeth Bronfen makes the following useful comment:

13 Seidensticker’s translation reads: “It was as if there were no flesh holding up the great mounds of clothing.”

Staging disembodiment as a form of escaping personal and social constraints serves to criticize those cultural attitudes that reduce the feminine body to the position of dependency and passivity, to the vulnerable object of sexual incursions. (142)

The Third Princess seeks shelter inside the multi-layered sartorial armour available to Heian noblewomen, as flimsy as it may be, in an effort to hide or even erase herself. Of course, as is clear from other stories in the literature of the period, the single-minded nobleman rarely co-operates in respecting a woman's desire to remain concealed. Feminine modesty usually serves but to pique his curiosity.

Several commentaries argue that, irrespective of all the talk of him taking over almost altruistically from his half-brother the responsibility of raising the young princess, Genji's interest in this girl has, from the start, always been far from avuncular. In Helen Craig McCullough's words, he "accepts [the new bride] with mingled reluctance, gratification at the connection, and curiosity" (17), with the last emotion likely uppermost. As niece to his stepmother, in exactly the same relationship to Fujitsubo as Murasaki herself, she intrigues this suitor who is constantly seeking substitutes for his doomed first love. Ever the tireless sexual adventurer, our hero is obviously titillated by this new and very well-connected find. As Haruo Shirane has it:

Genji's decision at the beginning of "Wakana I" to accept the daughter of the retired Suzaku emperor is governed by external circumstances — the retired emperor's illness, his determination to take vows, and the uncertain future and immaturity of the Third Princess — but ultimately it is Genji's amorous ways, particularly the memory of the Fujitsubo lady, that lead him to marry the young lady. (39)

The text itself informs us that "it would seem that Genji still has all the old acquisitive instincts" (Seidensticker 541). Tempted, he begins to lust after the as-yet-unseen Third Princess, musing that there are "such fine looks on both sides of [her] family" (545). Despite the platitudes about Genji "look[ing] upon her, still very much a child, as someone to educate and improve" (565), he has no intention of renouncing his conjugal rights. The princess is destined to be sacrificed to the insatiable sexual appetite of the male, consumed just like the young herbs that give this chapter its title, which fact is made explicit: "the main southeast hall in which Genji had sampled the new herbs became her boudoir" (554).

The Third Princess practices her own unique tactic of seclusion. Unable to remove herself physically from society, at least that admittedly small part of it to be found within the gates of Rokujō, she seeks to isolate herself emotionally by clinging to a physiological and psychological state where she may be judged sexually inaccessible. Even on the three traditional wedding nights, this motherless girl hesitates to abandon the illusory security of her substitute mother and sisters: "Still a child, the princess kept her women close beside her" (Seidensticker 556), and is described by her nurse as "really so very innocent and inexperienced, astonishingly so, indeed" (542). She rejects the

role of coy young bride and instead disingenuously plays the extreme innocent, hoping to deflect Genji from notions of copulation and thus protect herself from violation.

Owing to the Suzaku emperor's decision to abandon the world and consequent concerns about leaving her alone, the Third Princess was denied a proud and isolated virginity that might have been possible had she been permitted to remain single. Her father marries her to the already much-married Genji, seeing this choice as preferable to leaving her vulnerable to other, marauding males:

there are unmarried princesses who suddenly find themselves alone in the world, quite without protection. In the old days people were diffident and respectful and would not have dreamed of violating the proprieties, but in our own day the most determined and purposeful lady cannot be sure that she is not going to be insulted. (543)

Far from a strong personality, the princess is actually "the most inadequately protected" (548) of women, and will prove to require even more protection than her concerned father has been able to provide in this way. Outwardly, she is given all the respect owing one of her exalted birth, as Genji "[kept] up appearances" (580) and "paid her due honor" (592). All the proprieties are observed, and "her superior social status is acknowledged by the spacious quarters assigned to her and her attendants" (McCullough 17). Nevertheless, the husband ostensibly chosen to protect her asserts his universally recognized right of access across her spatial and corporeal boundaries. In spite of her clinging to prepubescent space, she is unable to preserve or recreate the innocent insensibility that she would like to claim as a form of security.

Like so many other heroines, the princess learns soon enough that beauty is her downfall. While she attempts to conceal her attractiveness behind an utterly non-erotic facade, the very artlessness and lack of coyness she displays often ironically serve only to lead men on. The Third Princess' good looks and political usefulness as the treasured child of a retired emperor will prove fatal to her own desire to find privacy and security of person. Kashiwagi, for example, "had known when she was still a child that she was very pretty and that she was her father's favorite. It was from these early beginnings that his love had grown" (611). No matter what tactics of avoidance she employs, libidinous males will come sniffing around her door.

The princess has tried desperately to retain control, to keep her sexuality under wraps, and thereby restrict the damage it might cause to herself, by posing as a child. The attempt proves futile, as she is eventually exposed in a moment of carefree abandon that has incontestably sexual overtones. The scene in which Kashiwagi glimpses her chasing her escaped pussycat functions as a magnificent metaphor of the bursting forth of a woman's hitherto denied sexuality. As Bergen so aptly phrases it:

By disobeying the imperative of female reclusiveness, the princess subverts the male topos of *kaimami*.

The freak accident exposes for the first time her unbridled sexual anima, made visible in an erect body and

associated with the animality of the cat. [...] Both temperamental creatures break through the blinds that symbolize civilized behavior and rules of etiquette. [...] Under Heian behavioral norms, the Third Princess, once she has been glimpsed through an accident that achieves the effect of *kaimami* without conforming to its structure, has become fair game for Yūgiri and Kashiwagi. (Bargen 157)

The Third Princess finds herself ineluctably betrayed by the sexuality that has always been lurking beneath the surface and can no longer be dissimulated. As Adrienne Rich writes of Dickinson: “The woman who feels herself to be Vesuvius at home has need of a mask, at least, of innocuousness and of containment” (108). The Princess has succeeded until now in containing her libido, hiding behind a mask of innocuous girlhood. However, something in the air that fateful afternoon will cause her customary barriers to fall. Among the band of young men gathered in the grounds of Genji’s mansion, as well: “a certain abandon was to be observed” (Seidensticker 581-82). For his part, Kashiwagi reveals where his thoughts lie from the very beginning, stealing furtive glances toward the Third Princess’ rooms.

She is playing with her kitten when it escapes beyond the curtains, simultaneously allowing Kashiwagi to catch a glimpse of her as she runs about in an unguarded moment. This is highly irregular among the Heian nobility, where high-status women never allow themselves to be seen “erect,” and even once the male is allowed to penetrate the habitual screens and other barriers, formal poses are *de rigueur*.¹⁴ In this moment, her true, undeniable self is fatally revealed. Dickinson once wrote (poem #512):

The soul has moments of Escape —
When bursting all the doors —
She dances like a Bomb, abroad,
And swings upon the hours . . .

This unusual *kaimami* (the “peeping tom” motif omnipresent in Japanese literature) incident presents an image of escape from rigid confines, admittedly self-imposed, but one that ultimately proves ruinous, as it explodes her idyllic fantasy. Patriarchal powers have typically conceived of the female libido as a destructive force. Ironically enough, this is especially true from the Third Princess’ perspective as well, in that she sees sexuality as a trap luring her into being exploited. It is important to bear in mind that Kashiwagi’s viewing implicitly means possession, and has even been termed visual rape, within the mores of their day.

14 As an interesting parallel in “The Lady Who Loved Insects,” that atypical heroine also allows herself to be seen “at full length” (Waley 175).

Her women, fearful for their mistress' reputation and their own as her guardians, quickly step forward in the princess' defence. Kojijū pleads with Kashiwagi:

Do not let it be known, I pray of you,
That your eye has fallen on the mountain cherry.

"It will never do, never." (Seidensticker 586)

Unfortunately for the Third Princess, no self-respecting Heian male would allow himself to be so easily dismissed: "Kojijū's answer was not unreasonable, and yet it seemed rather brusque. Was there to be nothing more? Might he not hope for some word from the princess herself?" (587). The smitten young nobleman is not about to let this prize slip through his fingers. In Heian literature, persistently scheming men are forever trying to position themselves to take advantage of women once they are left unprotected. "Nothing in this world is permanent, and Genji might one day make up his mind to leave it. Kashiwagi kept after Kojijū" (581).

Kashiwagi develops a rather disturbing interest in the cat as a sexual fetish: "Mewing prettily, it brought the image of the Third Princess back to him (for he had been ready to fall in love)" (584). Interestingly enough for our purposes, the comments ostensibly directed at and about the kitten are not inappropriate to the lovely yet unresponsive princess herself. It is a "perfectly charming little thing" and "a handsome beast [. . .] but it does not seem terribly friendly" (589). Kashiwagi is optimistic, confident that the object of his obsession will eventually come around, just as the cat does: "Once the initial shyness had passed it proved to be a most affectionate animal" (589). Just as Genji seeks substitutes for Fujitsubo throughout the tale, Kashiwagi covets the pet as a replacement for the as-yet-unattainable Third Princess:

He thought of the princess's cat and suddenly longed to have it for himself. He could not share his unhappiness with it, perhaps, but he might be less lonely. The

thought became an obsession. Perhaps he could steal it — but that would not be easy. (588)

Kashiwagi does eventually attain satisfaction by stealing the cat (and later its mistress). He actually treats it with more consideration than he does its owner. While he thoughtfully inquires as to the silent feline's wishes — "You are here to remind me of someone I long for, and what is it you long for yourself?" (589) —, Kashiwagi is untroubled by the possibility that its human alter ego may not share his passion. He is determined to proceed on the assumption that the similarly voiceless Third Princess' desires must be identical to his own or at least as malleable as the cat's.

After viewing the princess virtually *en déshabille*, Kashiwagi writes to her of his infatuation. Her immediate

response to his letter is to fear castigation by the husband, rather than the real and more serious threat posed by the aroused roving male: “She was terrified. Had Yūgiri seen and told Genji? Would Genji scold her? She was indeed a child, that fear of Genji should come first” (586). Our narrator here informs us that, to a woman in the Heian period, fear of men in general, and young licentious ones such as Kashiwagi in particular, should rightly take precedence. On this occasion, the Third Princess proves to be as naive as the text implies, and does not at all anticipate the subsequent illicit encroachment into her space, both domestic and corporeal:

The princess had gone off serenely to bed. She sensed that a man was in her room and thought that it would be Genji. But he seemed rather too polite — and then suddenly he put his arms around her and took her from her bed. She was terrified. Had some evil power seized her? (613)

The “evil power” is none other than Kashiwagi, who is less than obliging where her desire for privacy and security of self is concerned. As we see elsewhere, the ladies-in-waiting behave complicitly: “she called for her women, but no one came” (613). And even when the male experiences a twinge of sympathy for her plight, he ignores it: “Though he could not help feeling sorry for her, he thought this agitation rather charming” (613). Kashiwagi is relentlessly determined to act out his monomania, despite the Third Princess’ refusal to encourage him in any way:

She was pretty and gentle and unresisting, and far more graceful and elegant, in a winsome way, than most ladies he had known. His passion was suddenly more than he could control. Was there no hiding place to which they might run off together? (614)

Disingenuously ignoring the fact that he has himself just destroyed the virtual hideaway she has been at pains to create for herself, however imperfect and permeable it may have been, Kashiwagi again assumes that she must share his feelings. As usual, we see the Third Princess resort to the strategy, already demonstrated to be a pathetically feeble one, of playing the helpless young girl: “She wept like a little child and he looked on with respectful pity” (614-15).

Even though he may feel pity, the young man does not let that emotion stand in the way of taking what he wants. The following morning, Kashiwagi bodily removes her from even the repeatedly violated sanctuary of her rooms and exposes her to direct and humiliating visual scrutiny:

He took her in his arms and carried her out. She was terrified. What could he possibly mean to do with her? He spread a screen in a corner room and opened the door beyond. The south door of the gallery, through which he had come the evening before, was still open. It was very dark. Wanting to see her face, even dimly, he pushed open the shutter. (615)

The spatial metaphor in this passage is striking. As he bears his trophy past screens, doors and shutters, the permeability of all of these usual defences and the futility of the princess’ desire for control of her own person are

made manifest. Throughout this invasion of her space, the princess remains utterly, intransigently silent. In this connection, Joshua Mostow makes a highly intriguing observation with regard to the earlier Japanese romance entitled *Ochikubo monogatari*, to the effect that a suitor's sexual "actions remain rape unless and until the lady speaks" (308). When the aggressor unavailingly begs her for a word, egoistically certain that whatever she has to say will be in sympathy with his own destructive passion, the narrator bluntly tells us: "She did want to say something. She wanted to say that his conduct was outrageous. But she was trembling like a frightened child" (Seidensticker 615). The princess continues to play dumb and, with daylight approaching, Kashiwagi is no longer able to remain in her quarters for fear of discovery:

He finally seemed to be leaving. So great was her relief that she managed an answer:
"Would I might fade away in the sky of dawn,
And all of it might vanish as a dream."
She spoke in a tiny, wavering voice and she was like a beautiful child. (615)

The customs of the time allow him to believe that the Third Princess' behaviour has been merely a conceit of modesty and resistance. Like other deliberately

obtuse men in the literature, he acts "as if he had only half heard" (615) the dissent she actually expresses.

While sporadically successful, the Third Princess' strategy of erecting a barrier of childhood has in the end proved inadequate to repel either marriage to Genji or the salacious attack of her unlawful suitor, and is even revealed as ineffectual in defending her against an unjust scolding by Kojijū for carelessly allowing her husband to discover Kashiwagi's letter. The princess' fondest wish is to retreat from the brazenly intrusive patriarchal world back into her infantile haven, fictive as it may have been. She pretends to be blind and deaf to the entreaties of her concerned husband, the Shining Genji: "There was nothing emphatically wrong with her, it would seem, but she refused to look at him [Genji]" (616). Once again our hero proves to be less than truly insightful. He fears "that she was out of sorts because of his long absence" (616), and still later: "Interpreting her silence as resentment at his long absence, he set about reasoning with her" (621-22). Rather than letting her alone, the thoughtful but eternally uncomprehending Genji seems to redouble his efforts: "So cheerful and even frolicsome at other times, she was subdued and refused to look at him. It must be that she thought he did not love her" (623). Showering her with attention that she has never sought, rather has always shunned, the husband responds patronizingly to her inability to cheer up: "She seemed so very young. He thought her charming" (623). The reader is well aware that she has in actuality been forced to grow up quite abruptly.

Kashiwagi's own dogged attentions have deleterious effects on her health:

The Third Princess had been unwell since that shocking visitation. [...] Unable to contain himself, Kashiwagi would sometimes come for visits as fleeting as dreams. She did not welcome them. (621)

Of course, the cause of her indisposition turns out to be pregnancy. Cuckolded Genji is profoundly irritated that, despite all his kindness, “she had responded by choosing a man like Kashiwagi!” (625). And yet we have demonstrated repeatedly that, left to her own desires, far from “choosing” this suitor, she would have opted to avoid all sexual activity had that choice been available to her. Just as she has pretended to be other than the adult woman she is, she now desperately attempts to deny the reality of this violation, refusing to read Kashiwagi’s letters of entreaty. While her women feel for her predicament, they have little choice but to side with the patriarchy. Kojijū repeatedly allows him into the princess’ space both physically and metaphorically, thrusting Kashiwagi’s correspondence at her mistress covering among the bedclothes and “pull[ing] the princess’s curtains closed” (623), thereby effectively trapping our heroine with incontrovertible evidence of her vulnerability and the hopelessness of the situation.

The men involved in the Third Princess’ life are constantly “waiting for her to grow up and become just a little more aware of things” (543). Surely her defiant resistance to growing up like other women is evidence of how aware she actually is. The events in this character’s story show that a desire to remain a child and thus avoid or at least delay entry into the complicated mire of adult relationships is far from unreasonable. When Genji and the Suzaku emperor were originally discussing what was to become of her, they had concluded: “Yes, the safest thing by far would be to find someone whom the Third Princess can depend upon in everything” (548). With marriage to the loyal and powerful Hikaru Genji, “the future of the Third Princess seemed secure” (549).¹⁵ In the male-centred Heian society, however, no man proves really dependable, and women remain pregnable in a variety of ways. Exposed to multiple male incursions and her husband’s scorn, the Third Princess has no option but to get herself to a nun nery. Again, the apparently passive act of withdrawing from the world conceals an active rejection of that world. As Field writes:

It is clear that for these women, becoming a nun is an act of self-expression that can only take the form of denial. Sexual relations have governed their lives, and they resolutely turn their backs, usually in the face of variously interested opposition. No doubt there is an unarticulated desire to expend the energy of guilt in religious practice (a desire overlapping with concern for salvation), but the sheer need to announce a departure from the world of men is at least as strong. (190)

The religious life will provide her with the maximum degree of solitude and peace allowed women by Heian society,

15 In a lovely bit of foreshadowing as to the prospects of the princess finding warmth and security in this marriage, our author tells us that the day after this marriage contract was settled “was dark, with flurries of snow” (Seidensticker 549). The reader is momentarily led astray by the suggestion that it will be jealousy from Murasaki that threatens the happiness of this new couple, only to discover that the threat is instead inherent to relations with the masculine element.

as she finally achieves the asexual status that has hitherto eluded her. Taking the tonsure substitutes for the failed tactic of behaving in a prepubescent manner.

For years, the Third Princess has stubbornly refused to abandon childhood, which for her represented an insulated, paradisiacal territory offering even a slim chance for achieving security of self. Unfortunately for our heroine, neither Genji nor Kashiwagi have been willing to let her remain in the blissful pretence of ignorance she has chosen. Ruthlessly, or at least obliviously, they attempt to stir her to the consciousness of awakened adulthood, one by marrying her, the other through an unwanted seduction/rape and impregnation. Unlike the hero in the Wilfred Owen poem cited as epitaph, they do not tiptoe gently away, being unable or unwilling to recognize that waking her might well constitute an unwelcome act of aggression. Her suitors, as different from each other as they are in many ways, are identical in their egocentric inability to consider that this woman's goals and notions of security might well be other than theirs. Kashiwagi assumes that she must respond to his desire, for example, and that it is solely extenuating circumstances that keep her from rushing into his arms:

A lesser lady might have found an excuse for leaving the house, a taboo or something of the sort. But she was a princess and he must contrive to send word of his longing through thick walls and curtains. (Seidensticker 585)

He never stops to consider that, far from looking for excuses to slip out for a lover's tryst, she has sought isolation and self-preservation behind these very walls and curtains. The two men see her as nothing more or less than a prize to be won, and neglect to realize that a woman may well prefer remaining in the somnolent dark to waking into a world fraught with danger.

In her pursuit of security, control, and enclosure through adoption of the regressive identity of a child, the Third Princess is doomed to failure. Her strategy, a deliberate pretence at remaining within the realm of sexual inaccessibility, is inherently faulty in that only the most extreme youth could realistically (and even then merely until the onset of puberty) be viewed as a refuge from male violation. As well, denied a physical space that can honestly be called her own, being displaced from her childhood home to a wing of her husband's mansion, the princess cannot escape being subject to his whims. Even once she has discouraged Genji's interest by flaunting her immaturity, the fantasy of finding true asylum within prepubescent space is exposed by Kashiwagi's violation. In the end, she does manage to escape the clutches of both men, but only by taking orders at a shockingly young age. While the reader is denied much direct access to the princess' thoughts, Murasaki Shikibu's skilful use of the metaphor of her character's withdrawal into a mental space as a form of resistance renders the invisible visible and allows the mute to speak. What is spoken is a highly pessimistic view of a social system that would deny agency to women. The Third Princess' response has been to reject the falsified self-determination that the externally defined status of woman would give her, and instead seek the only refuge she can: a place of childhood that is ultimately revealed to be false and vulnerable.

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