

The Seasons of Genji

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by
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INTRODUCTION

The Tale of Genji or *Genji Monogatari* was written for Empress Fujiwara no Shoshi by Murasaki Shikibu, a fellow court noblewoman, during the Heian Period of Japan (794 AD to 1185 AD), estimated to have been completed around the year 1021. The setting of the tale reflects the environment of both its author and its audience; a lavish world of aristocrats built around complex social hierarchies and an appreciation for the arts. Through the protagonist of her tale, Shikibu performs a great service to historians, as her work catalogues the various pastimes and crafts of elites. Along with its historical merit, *The Tale of Genji* is a literary achievement remembered for its intricate world composed of characters with intersecting pasts and fateful encounters.

The life of prince Hikaru Genji takes shape in overlapping cycles and tangled personal connections. Through these cycles the fortune of his life waxes and wanes, he suffers from his own shortcomings and is vulnerable to the whim of fate. His melancholic life is bridged together by the affairs and romances he pursues; his relationships are predicated on the exchange of waka poetry. “In addition to prose, Murasaki Shikibu had at her disposal the versatile poetic form of *waka* (thirty-one-syllable poetry) to help flesh out these characters. Composing *waka* was central to communication between men and women of the elite classes, and nearly every episode of the tale includes a poetic exchange” (Carpenter and McCormick 19-20). *Waka* is a form of classical Japanese poetry which was popular in the Heian imperial court. The tale includes *waka* crafted by Shikibu as well as intertextual references to the wealth of poetry which permeated the communication of the Heian elite. Many of these references contain seasonal imagery.

Although the in-universe time allotted to the tale's fifty-four chapters can vary between months and years, the tale is carefully organized according to the cycle of seasons. The seasons are expressed through the exploration of natural imagery, as the tale is saturated with images of flowers, trees, birds, insects and weather. The importance of the seasons to the tale is expressed through Genji's desires, "quite apart from these weighty hopes of mine, I should like to indulge in the pleasures of the seasons—the blossoms, the autumn leaves, the changing skies" (Shikibu 359).¹ In the height of his success, Genji remodels his estate into four quadrants, each containing a garden fitted for a specific season. Reverence for the seasons did not originate from *Genji*. Rather, *The Tale of Genji* was born from an pre-established appreciation for nature and the seasons in Japanese literature. Many of the natural images are established in imperial poetry anthologies such as *Kokinshû* (905 AD) and *Manyôshu* (759 AD), which are organized around poetry praising the seasons. "The ubiquity of nature and the seasons in Japanese literature is apparent in too many ways to count" (Shirane Introduction).² In this paper, I will be analyzing the relationship between *The Tale of Genji* and the seasons, specifically how Murasaki Shikibu uses poetic seasonal imagery, such as flowers and weather, to compliment the emotional tone of various episodes in her tale.

For my analysis I will be using Royall Tyler's English translation of *The Tale of Genji*. Tyler's version is lush with footnotes, each providing meticulous historical background for so many details in the story, contextualizing the 10th century setting of the tale. Tyler's notes define

¹ As her text is necessarily and profusely quoted in this analysis, all quotations with a page number and no author's name will represent quotes from Shikibu's text. Her name will not appear after every quote, for the sake of readability.

² For this analysis, I referenced the Kindle edition of Shirane's *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons*, which does not offer pagination. In place of pagination, I will be citing the appropriate chapters from Shirane's work.

integral Buddhist customs and literary references in the text. From these literary explanations, Tyler breaks down the significance of seasonal artifacts, such as the seasonally appropriate color of a robe or the poetic associations with Autumnal wind and languishing *hagi* fronds.

Haruo Shirane, in his book *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons*, further deconstructs natural imagery and seasonal associations in poetry. He lists seasonal imagery found in imperial poetry anthologies such as *Kokinshû* and *Manyôshu*, providing context for their poetic tones and meanings. By Shirane's own account, this information is necessary for a reading of *The Tale of Genji*, "indeed, a fundamental grasp of *The Tale of Genji* requires an understanding of the literary implications of a wide variety of plants, flowers, atmospheric conditions, and celestial bodies that provide not only the names of the characters but also the settings in which they appear" (Shirane Introduction). Shikibu's work is heavily reliant on the bed of pre-existing metaphors compiled in Heian literature. She regularly employs the symbols which Shirane describes.

Given the cultural impact *The Tale of Genji* has had on Japanese culture, there is an abundance of art centered around recreating the tale across a broad spectrum of mediums. The extensive history of *Genji* art was explored in 2019 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art through the exhibition *The Tale of Genji: A Japanese Classic Illuminated*. The collection of works displayed are preserved in the exhibition catalogue, which also contains essays from prominent art historians such as Melissa McCormick, John T. Carpenter, Monika Bincsik, and Kyoko Kinoshita. The collections contain works which reference the careful attention to the seasons in the tale, and display continued veneration for the cycle of the year. One such work is a series of sixty fan paintings arranged on a folding screen. The work is dated back to the Muromachi Period and is attributed to a colleague of Tosa Mitsunobu. The painted fans each contain a scene

from the tale, and are arranged according to the respective season of each sequence, rather than their chronology in the plot. According to the description from the catalogue, the fans are brimming with seasonally and thematically appropriate plants from each chapter. The Wakana Part I fan for example displays a scented plum tree with a warbler to represent Spring.

In order to analyze the role of the four seasons in *The Tale of Genji*, the first part of my research paper will be organized into four chapters, one for each season. Within each chapter I will explore a selection of scenes from the tale related to that season, beginning in Summer and ending with Spring. In the second portion of my paper I will describe a series of oil paintings I have made in response to six of the seasonal scenes in the tale. The paintings will be selections of specific scenes from the tale which embody the general tone of each season as I have explored them throughout this paper. The Summer season contains themes of obfuscation and nostalgia as expressed through the rain. Autumn carries implications of grief and loss with images of plants and birds. Winter conveys uncomfortable relationships through snow and pine trees. And Spring communicates the transaction between birth and death through seasonal flowers.

SUMMER

I have chosen to lead my analysis of the seasons with Summer because pivotal events in Genji's development are detailed in chapters with major Summer themes. Summer is a season of impediments. The Summer rain for example, is a frequent feature of the season. It seeps into many of the chapters listed here, its assault on Heiankyo displaces characters, interrupts routines, and restricts movement. However, the rain is a mechanic often employed to represent the general pervasive and challenging nature of the season at large. Summer has little to offer in the way of pleasantries, its presence often indicates discomfort or upheaval.

The Summer section of this paper begins with an analysis of the characters' discussion in the Hahakigi chapter or Broom Tree chapter, as it establishes important themes of the tale. The political function of relationships in the Heian court is explained by the men in this discussion. Genji is seventeen years old in this chapter, and as an impressionable youth, the opinions of his peers define his approach to women and relationships. The Summer rain stages this impromptu meeting, which expands on the dynamics of Genji's world. The topic of Summer rain is further explored in the Sakaki Branch chapter in which the Summer rain collapses in on the court and restricts movement as it does in Hahakigi. However, the Summer rain in this chapter is foreboding and incites one of Genji's greatest stumblings. There is a brief break from the rain in the Hanachirusato chapter which takes place explicitly after the Summer rain has ended. And finally, the Summer section ends with the first portion of Yugao, which highlights the challenging qualities of this season.

KIRITSUBO: THE PAULOWNIA TREE, CHAPTER ONE OF THE TALE OF GENJI

The most impactful Summer storm occurs in the Hahakigi chapter, as the consequences of its rain permanently reconfigure Genji's maturation. However, in order to understand the Hahakigi Chapter, it is necessary to also understand the first chapter of the tale, Kiritsubo or Paulownia Tree chapter. The first two chapters of *The Tale of Genji* are the bedrock of Genji's identity. The Kiritsubo chapter begins by focusing on Genji's birth and its complications. Genji is the son of the Emperor, yet "His Majesty resolved to make him a Genji" (14) - a commoner. The death of his mother is imprinted upon him at a young age. Shortly after, his grandmother also dies and he is allowed to be raised at court near his father. All of these details give insight into Genji's legacy at court and the early experiences which will shape him as an adult. "In fact, if I were to list all the things at which he excelled, I would only succeed in making him sound absurd (13)". Yet despite his radiance and innate talent he is ineligible to become emperor. His beauty and eloquence makes him attractive, however he will never recover the woman his mother was and is doomed to find only pieces of her in other women. Genji is tacitly oedipal, but he does not specifically search for a woman who replaces his mother. Rather, his mother's death bores the hole Genji ineffectually seeks to fill.

HAHAKIGI: BROOM TREE, CHAPTER TWO

The Hahakigi chapter which follows Paulownia continues to build on Genji's character through the events of a special Summer evening. While Paulownia frames how Genji is viewed

by others, Hahakigi establishes the purpose Genji finds in his relationship. The Summer rains push an impressionable Genji into a room with his peers and confronts him with their opinions. Taking place when Genji is seventeen years old, he finds himself sequestered in a period known as *monoimi* - a time in which one must hide from evil spirits. His quarantine takes the shape of a room full of young noblemen in a house consumed by the ongoing Summer storms. Their unplanned gathering slowly builds into a discussion which will take root in Genji's mind for the rest of his lifetime. Surrounded by men more experienced in romance than himself, Genji listens eagerly to their accounts of love affairs and great women. The conversation is pointed at the elusive qualities of the perfect woman; "I have finally realized how rarely you will find a flawless woman, one who is simply perfect" (22). The pursuit of a perfect woman becomes Genji's all consuming purpose, and was inspired by this coincidental meeting.

Summer rains coupled with a time of quarantine force characters into a confined space. Without the interference of the season, Genji would not have found himself in the situation he was in. Hunkering in place, surrounded by people who would otherwise be elsewhere, the Summer rains shrink and direct movement in such a way that changes the trajectory of the story.

The conversation begins when To no Chujo brings up the topic of women and their talents. It is immediately apparent that he has a more refined perspective on romance than Genji does. He discusses how a woman's social class relates to their value, he provides observations of each position from low to high. This might suggest To no Chujo has had experience with any of these women, and at the very least has refined his preferences through experience. Genji on the other hand innocently exposes his naivete, specifically his lack of discernment in connecting with women. He asks, "But do you suppose any girl could have nothing to recommend her?" (23).

Class, finance, and family lineage are important mechanics in the world of Genji. He will act as both a philanthropist and representative at court for the various women he is involved with.

But the discussion of class exists to support the central theme of the conversation; the true definition of the “perfect woman”. To no Chujo asserts that women of the “middle grade” are often the ideal. “Those of middle birth are the ones among whom you can see what a girl really has to offer and find ways to distinguish one from another” (23). Women of high society are either too inaccessible or turn out to be over exaggerated and disappointing. And the women from lower classes are hardly relevant to men of their standing.

“I wonder about these levels of yours, though—the high, the middle, and the low. How can you tell who belongs to which? Some are born high and yet fall and sink to become nobodies, while common gentlemen rise to become senior nobles” (23). Genji interjects with an important observation about the true nature of status in the Heian court. The tale is driven by the ebbing and flowing of Genji’s prominence. To no Chujo claims that women who either rise or fall in social status occupy the middle grade.

The various women appearing in the gentlemen's stories foreshadow Genji’s lovers. “It is probably not a bad idea to take a wholly childlike, tractable wife and form her yourself as well as you can” (25); this line, for example, refers to Murasaki no Ue, whom Genji discovers as a child and raises to be his wife. Another woman who frequently enters the conversation is Yugao. This is the woman who slips through To No Chujo’s fingers. His amorous description of her is the inspiration which will draw Genji to her; “the really fascinating girl is the one of whom no one has ever heard, the strangely appealing one who lives by herself, hidden away in some ruinous, overgrown old house” (24).

The Summer rains insulates an intimate conversation. You can picture a company of distinguished men, huddled in the candlelight with the Summer rain pattering in the background. The nature of this occasion is strange, the hosts of the house have felt obligated to have their guests stay so as to avoid spiritual harm. This pushes the characters together, bringing about one of the most important conversations of the novel.

SAKAKI BRANCH: GREEN BRANCH, CHAPTER TEN

In the Sakaki Branch chapter we find Genji at one of the lowest stages in his life, the toll of which culminates in the Summer portion of this chapter. The events of the Sakaki Branch chapter span over a year's time but are connected by Genji's lamentation over the various defeats and losses he has experienced. Just as he appeared to have a breakthrough with his wife, Aoi no Ue, she dies in a spirit possession. However, even more prescient in Genji's mind, he is reliving the rejection of his lover and proxy mother, Fujitsubo. Another woman he is close with, Lady Rokujo, is moving to Ise city with her daughter where she will be inaccessible to Genji. And on top of everything else, Genji's father, the retired emperor, passes away.

Genji's mental anguish in this chapter is best summarized by his desperate exchange with Fujitsubo. "Bitterness and despair so blinded him to all thought of past or future that he lost his head" (203), Genji tries to reconcile his lost relationships but fails, only deepening his misery. The Sakaki Branch chapter is named for the poem and accompanying branch Genji offer's Rokujo during their bittersweet meeting. "Now, however, he was undone by all that this rare meeting brought back to him from the past, and he wept helplessly over what lay behind them"

(195). However touched she may be by his display of emotion, she is resolute in her decision to travel to Ise with her daughter, and so her affair with Genji ends.

The Summer portion of this chapter occurs toward its end after Genji is approximately twenty-five years old. In his grief, he has taken up an affair with a mysterious woman who he deems Oborozukiyo. Tyler explains that her name translates to “Night with a Misty Moon”, which refers to a Springtime poem by Oe no Chisato, featured in *Shinkokinshû*. Shirane describes the use of atmospheric conditions such as mist and rain in *Kokinshû* as reflecting “a strong preference for obscured sight and veiled landscape” (Shirane Ch.1). In the context of the tale, Genji’s first encounter with Oborozukiyo occurs the night of the cherry blossom festival. “All lay quiet in the beauty of brilliant moonlight, Genji remained drunkenly unwilling to grant that the night was over” (156), when he came upon this mysterious woman. Genji wonders at her true identity, correctly guessing that she is one of the Kokiden Consort’s many sisters. In this case the moon and the mist represent hidden danger and disillusionment.

In the Summer of the Sakaki Branch chapter, the obfuscation of the Summer storm and the obfuscation of Oborozukiyo’s metaphorical mist presents a risk to Genji. Oborozukiyo is promoted to Mistress of Staff, but she returns to her family home after falling ill. “He dreaded the consequences if their affair should become known, but that familiar quirk of his probably made him more eager than ever” (200). He continues seeing her despite her proximity to his greatest political adversary, this “familiar quirk of his” continually getting him into trouble.

At the end of Sakaki Branch, Genji sneaks in to see Oborozukiyo “when one night, just before dawn, rain suddenly came pelting down and thunder roared” (217). Similar to what happened in the Hahakigi chapter, the Summer rains restrict Genji’s movement, “people were everywhere, the gentlewomen gathered nearby in terror, and the desperate Genji found no

escape” (217). However, the malevolence of the rain has greater influence over Genji in The Sakaki Branch chapter. “The homophonic association between samidare [summer rain] and midare (troubled) linked the summer rains to depression (mono-omohi) and “tangled” (midare) hair” (Shirane Ch.1). Although the rains let up, “the sudden shower drowned out the sound” (217) of Oborozukiyo’s father’s arrival. This is the moment when Genji’s affair is discovered and is almost immediately relayed to the Kokiden Consort, who condemns Genji to exile.

Punctuating a chapter of lamentation and failed reconciliations, the Summer storms are what brings the tower crumbling down. Summer appears in this chapter in the form of ominous rains which once again trap characters, however unlike in the Hahakigi chapter, the rains lead to something more sinister. Ultimately, Genji is ensnared in its omens and the consequences are severe as he is condemned to exile.

HANACHIRUSATO: FALLING FLOWERS, CHAPTER ELEVEN

Following the Sakaki Branch chapter, Genji is making preparations for his exile in Suma. Even though a year has passed since his father’s death, Genji still thinks of the people who are affected by his loss. He thinks specifically of Lady Reikeiden, who “had never been the greatest of favorites, [Genji’s father] nonetheless esteemed her gentle sweetness” (224). At the time of the Hanachirusato chapter, she is retired, living in an increasingly obscure estate. Genji himself is feeling unhappy with the world, and in a “rare break in the summer rains he could not resist calling on her” (223).

Intersplicing the chaos of the summer rains from the previous chapter and the vacancy of Suma in the next, Genji finds quiet respite in the village of the falling flowers. The world of the

retired Reikeiden Lady and her sisters feels pleasantly isolated from the rest. Genji “heard from a little house set among handsome trees a full-voiced koto played brightly in the azuma mode” (223), the house away from the capital is surrounded by fragrant orange blossom trees, birds, and music.

During a break from the rain, Murasaki Shikibu dedicates this chapter the attractive qualities of Summer. She decorates the Reikeiden residence with popular Summer symbols, most notably the cuckoo bird and the orange blossom. “Just then a passing cuckoo called. This was encouragement enough” (223). In poetry both of these symbols are associated with nostalgia.

Since the compilation of the *Kokinshû*, the first imperial poetry anthology, the mandarin orange and the cuckoo bird have been closely tied to each other. “The mandarin-orange flower, somewhat like the small cuckoo, became closely associated with personal memory and nostalgia,” (Shirane Ch.1). Likewise Genji takes this chapter to reflect on his life so far, as he is confronted with one of his greatest failures, his exile from the court. Before arriving on the salty shores of Suma, the cuckoo bird leads him to the house of an old acquaintance. The orange blossoms and cuckoo bird reappear in this chapter to punctuate Genji’s memories. “The scent of orange blossoms nearby called up many a fond memory” (224), as he sits quietly in the dark with his aging friend.

Of all the memories he could focus on, Genji is of course preoccupied with images of his past lovers. “He seems to have cared forever for each one of his loves. The passing years never effaced his feeling for any lady he had known, although this only aroused in many the sorrows of the lovelorn” (224). The scent of orange blossoms echo his feelings.

Heian literature and poetry would favor the scent of blossoms to their appearance. We can see this trend recurring in Murasaki’s writing; later in the story there is a moment in which

Genji attributes Mursaki's beauty to a cherry blossom, lamenting that people would not appreciate its beauty (Murasaki's virtue) because of its weak fragrance (Murasaki's lack of hereditary nobility). The admiration of fragrance would extend so far as to appear in the names of the characters, such as Kaoru (fragrance) and Niou (smell). In terms of the orange blossom, its scent is associated with the memory of former lover, as best exemplified in an anonymous poem from the summer section of *Kokinshû*:

“When I catch the scent of the orange blossoms waiting for the Fifth Month, I am reminded of
the sleeve of that person of long ago” (Shirane Ch.1).

YUGAO: THE TWILIGHT BEAUTY, CHAPTER FOUR

Despite its early appearance in the sequence of the tale, the Yugao chapter captures some of the most climactic events of Genji's life. It is also constructed from a wealth of explicit seasonal images. The most famous events of the Yugao chapter take place in Autumn. However its beginnings in the Summer season when Genji is seventeen years old, build upon the pattern of Summer symbolism as it appears throughout the tale, specifically that which employs Summer as the anticipation of death, and consequent grieving in Autumn. This chapter marries and forges important plotlines; Genji cancels a visit with the Lady at Rokujo to visit his former nurse, who is coincidentally the neighbor of To no Chujo's former lover and the mother of his child. First, Genji's casual attitude toward his obligations to Rokujo provokes her jealous spirit, which is answered for at several points throughout Genji's life. Furthermore, Genji's star-crossed affair with the mysterious woman, who is dubbed as Yugao, is steeped in a complex history of

interweaving relationships that extend far beyond herself and Genji. She is both the “one of whom no one has ever heard, the strangely appealing one who lives by herself, hidden away in some ruinous, overgrown old house” (24) and the mother of the “little pink” (31), whom To no Chujo refers to in the Hahakigi chapter and a woman of consequence to Genji. Having been involved with this woman before, To no Chujo correctly muses on Yugao’s fate, “she is a perfect example of the woman you cannot keep long and cannot actually depend on” (33).

Summer plays an important role in introducing Genji to Yugao, as it contributes to the setting he finds her in, the setting being the thing which draws him to her. Firstly, his former nurse is on her deathbed, dying in Summer as his mother had died before. Given that this woman would have looked after him following the death of his mother and grandmother, her death seals Genji’s lack of maternal connection in the living world. Genji bids her farewell like he has to so many others, lamenting to her, “everyone who should have loved me left me” (57). This meeting is what delivers Genji to Gojo where both the nurse and Yugao are living.

In the neighborhood separated from the opulence of the palace, Summer serves as the climate for this humble street in Heiankyo. Murasaki Shikibu emphasizes the meak appearance of the area. Genji surveys his unlikely surroundings, noting the “unprepossessing spectacle of the avenue” (55). The hovel next door particularly attracts Genji’s attention, as there is a group of tall, cool-looking women peering out from within. The intrigue surrounding the true identities of the hut’s inhabitants is dependent on their humble surroundings. Genji is influenced by “that rainy night spent talking over the different levels of women, curiosity seemed to have inspired in him an inclusive interest” (59).

Summer compounds the unappealing qualities of the hut and the events at Gojo as Summer itself was not among the favored seasons of Heian literati, perhaps because of

monsoons and relentless heat. In both the *Manyōshū* and *Kokinshū*, in which seasonal poetry is divided into separate sections, Summer is one of the shortest collections. “The arrival of summer was marked by intense heat and high humidity in the Nara and Kyoto areas... [and] is a time of regret” (Shirane Ch.1) for the passing of Spring. The topic of heat was often avoided in Summer poetry, “perhaps because it was too unbearable” (Shirane Ch.1). Instead the search for coolness was a preferred topic, as poems recounting the pleasure of a pine tree’s shade were more frequent. Perhaps Murasaki Shikibu is influenced by these habits, as she seldom mentions heat throughout the tale, (the word “heat” appears only 14 times in the Tyler translation). Oftentimes when it is mentioned, it is being alleviated through the displacement of a curtain or with loose clothing or wet hair. Conversely, Murasaki Shikibu uses the term “cool” or “cool-looking” to describe pleasant people and places. In the Yugao chapter itself, Shikibu describes the hut as having “four or five of these [shutters] open, and through very pale, cool-looking blinds he saw the pretty foreheads of several young women” (55). Tyler specifies that Shikibu is implying these blinds are new, indicated by their pale color, which could also insinuate that the presence of its new inhabitants is transient. Thus, although the Summer heat is not explicitly stated as interfering with the environment, Genji’s attention is drawn to the objects of coolness, a demarcation of Summer and the desire to escape from its heat.

Furthermore, just as Summer was intended for the mourning of Spring, it is simultaneously the anticipation of Autumn. Throughout the chapter, the reader is anticipating Yugao’s demise, which takes place in Autumn. Yugao’s passing is heavily foreshadowed, not only through To no Chujo’s comments about the frailty of a connection with a woman like her, but also through the flower for which Yugao is named.

The object at the center of the chapter is the Yugao, a white flower which Genji notices clambering up a plain wood fence in the neighbors yard. Genji's servant explains the significance of the flower's name, "they call that white flower 'twilight beauty'" (56). The Japanese name for the flower comes from the kanji "evening" and "face", invoking the image of a person. This is a clear reference to the enchanting woman who occupies the house. However, also implied by its name, this flower is characterized by its peculiar growth pattern; it only blooms at night. In the morning, its petals close, which is indicative of Yugao's sudden passing over night.

"The neighborhood houses were certainly cramped and shabby, leaning miserably in every direction and fringed with snaggle-toothed eaves, but the vine was climbing all over them. "Poor flowers!" Genji said" (56). So there is a lovely flower whose habitat is unbecoming. Much like the Yugao flower, the woman Genji finds in the mysterious house, is woefully above her station. She turns out to be the hidden gem he has been aspiring to find since receiving To no Chujo's advice in Hahakigi. Not only is she attractive, she is refined and courtly. It is revealed that her personal history mirrors that of Genji's mother; she was involved with a man at court but was marred by the jealousy of other women. And just as jealousy drove Genji's mother to sickness then death, Yugao first exiles herself, seeking refuge from To no Chujo's wife, and is then possessed and killed by the jealous spirit of one of Genji's scorned lovers. The reader is informed of her approaching doom, and so the Summer portion of the Yugao chapter anticipates her departure with the arrival of Autumn.

AUTUMN

In the season of changing colors and exposed branches, Genji's intimate relationships are transformed with time, as connections wither and break away. The upheavals caused in Autumn are interpersonal, transforming Genji's relationships with his lovers and his son. In the following chapters, Genji's relationship to his wife and his son are compromised.

I will now transition the discussion of Yugao into the Autumn section, which will begin the analysis of Autumnal chapters. The Yugao section contains a variety of explicit Autumnal images which serve to complement the emotional overtures of Genji's relationship to Yugao, these symbols initiating the reader to the intense and fleeting nature of their affair. The Yugao discussion initiates an Autumnal pattern which is echoed in the Aoi section, as the spirit of the Lady at Rokujo haunts Genji's lover once in the Autumn of his seventeenth year and then reappears in the Autumn of his twenty-fifth. The Rokujo attacks are tangled in Genji's personal accountability to his lovers and his maturity in the face of disaster. A discussion of the Suma chapter follows to reinforce the meaning of Autumnal images, specifically that of wild geese and the pain of isolation from a loved one. Finally the Nowaki section provides an example of the Autumnal storm, which provokes a transgression from Genji's son Yugiri. Taboo compromises the boundaries supporting Genji's paternal relationship with Yugiri.

YUGAO: THE TWILIGHT BEAUTY, CHAPTER FOUR

The transition from Summer to Autumn is made apparent in the Yugao chapter by the arrival of various Autumnal sounds and animals. Genji continues to visit Yugao, while disguising his true identity. Genji sits with Yugao in her room on Gojo, Murasaki Shikibu uses the dilapidated setting as an opportunity to expose Genji to various conditions of Autumn, specifically those which are expressed in *Kokinshû*.

Given the frailty and vulnerability of Yugao's home, Autumnal sights and sounds are able to seep through the walls and floor boards. The first element of Autumn which Genji is confronted with is moonlight; "on the fifteenth night of the eighth month, bright moonlight poured through every crack into the board-roofed house" (63). "Although the moon appears in all four seasons, the association of the moon with autumn was so strong in the imperial waka anthologies that eventually the moon came to symbolize autumn itself" (Shirane Ch.1). The moon is not only a common association for Autumnal poetry, but in *Kokinshû* the light from the Autumn moon denotes the full arrival of Autumn. In both *Manyôshu* and *Kokinshû* the Autumn moon is often associated with wild geese. Mingled with the assorted calls of Yugao's neighbors, Genji hears the cry of wild geese overhead, "these and many other sounds roused him to painfully keen emotion" (63).

Complicated by their extensive appearance in poetry, both the moon and wild geese have robust and circumstantial meanings. However, in reductive terms they both bring about a sense of melancholy and loneliness. In relation to Genji and his sojourn with Yugao, the arrival of Autumn, the moonlight consuming Yugao's house, and the flight of wild geese likely inspire his anxiety over his tenuous arrangement with this mysterious woman whom he holds so dear. Genji

is seventeen years old in this chapter, and as tensions build in the story, Murasaki Shikibu explains how Genji's lack of maturity prevents him from managing himself properly. Moreover, he is young and going through an intense secret love affair. "Leaving her in the morning or being away from her only for the day made him miserable enough to wonder whether he had lost his senses, and to struggle to remind himself that nothing about her required this degree of passion" (62). Coupled with these emotions, Genji is plagued with paranoia, as if having internalized To no Chujo's words about a woman like Yugao being destined to disappear. "It worried him that he would never know on what day she might go, or where" (62). With the sound of geese and the sight of moonlight overwhelming his senses, Genji's sense of desperation is reinvigorated, and so he asks Yugao to spend the night somewhere else, in hopes of deepening their relationship while he still can.

Another common symbol of Autumn appears when Genji and Yugao are together at her residence and they decide to open a shutter to look out on the garden. The garden presents clumps of bamboo, glistening with dew, and "insects of all kinds were singing, and to Genji, who seldom heard even a cricket in the wall, this concert of cries almost in his ears was a bizarre novelty" (63). While the cry of insects is also an Autumn signifier, their appearance along with the dew bejeweling the bamboo, provides important contrast for the setting of the climax to the chapter. Although the sounds of insects, geese, voices, and rice polishing being carried into Yugao's home is framed as unpleasant and embarrassing for her, they are kind and familiar relative to the sounds and sensations of the abandoned house. The dew which "gleamed as brightly as elsewhere" (63) in Yugao's garden is replaced with the fog, wading around the abandoned house, which drenches Genji's sleeves. Outside the abandoned house, instead of the

cries of wild geese and insects, “the pines were roaring like a whole forest, and an eerie bird uttered raucous cries; he wondered whether it was an owl” (68).

The chaos of the desolate mansion is ignited by the sudden arrival of a wandering spirit. “Late in the evening he dozed off to see a beautiful woman seated by his pillow” (67). Her presence tears the wind from the pines and pulls Genji from his sleep. The twang of a bow, the retrieval of a sword, the eldritch echo of an unheeded cry for help, initiate the reader to the danger of the spirit. As was foreshadowed in the description of wild geese and the foggy unkempt garden, Yugao does not survive the night. The identity of the spirit is revealed through the words she speaks in Genji’s dream; “you are a wonder to me, but you do not care to visit me: no, you bring a tedious creature here and lavish yourself upon her. It is hateful of you and very wrong” (67). The spirit of the Lady at Rokujo is delivered to Genji in search of vengeance for his neglect of her. Rokujo’s spirit becomes a recurring figure in Genji’s life as she haunts her rival lovers. The season for such attacks is Autumn. Beginning in the Yugao chapter, her arrival initiates a benchmark examination of Genji and how he survives the season of grief at different junctures in his life.

During the ordeal with Yugao, Murasaki Shikibu emphasizes to the reader how immature Genji is. At the sight of Yugao’s death, “despite his wish to be strong he was too young, and seeing her lost completely undid him” (68). Genji behaves erratically and is in denial, “the awful thought that he might cause her death gave the place terrors beyond words” (68) even after Yugao had already gone, Genji carries on desperately under the delusion that she could still be alive. He is a teenager getting into trouble as teenagers do, “he knew how anxiously His Majesty now must be seeking him” (66). Except now the mischief has gone seriously wrong, and he is stranded in a place he ought not to be. Koremitsu’s arrival to the house returns some level of

order however, Genji is still desperate as Yugao's body is lifted away. His grief inflicts him with a physical illness. After returning home, his concern is to seek out her body as it is prepared in secret by mountain nuns, as he clings to her even in death. In the aftermath of the dilemma, secrecy becomes a priority as Genji lies to his attendants about his affliction and makes sure to conceal Yugao's death from her own attendants as well. "Yes, that is true. At her house the grieving women would weep and wail, and there are so many houses around that the neighbors would all notice. Everyone would soon know. At a mountain temple, though, this sort of thing is not unknown, and in a place like that it might be possible to evade attention" (69) His concern is with himself and the protection of his place at court.

AOI: HEART-TO-HEART, CHAPTER NINE

The next time Genji encounters Rokujo's spirit he is twenty-five years old, and is caring for his ailing wife. Aoi means Heart-to-Heart, which refers to an ivy with heart-shaped leaves and shares a name with Genji's first wife. "At His Excellency's a spirit, it seemed, was making the lady extremely unwell, and her family was alarmed" (171). This time, in the looming presence of death, Genji rises to the occasion. Preceded by his bitter past with Aoi, in the wake of her illness he mends his behavior and becomes more attentive to her. He is no longer a traumatized child, but is instead a husband taking care of his pregnant wife, "he took her hand[,] "This is dreadful! What a thing to do to me!" When weeping silenced him, she lifted to his face her expiring gaze, so filled in the past with reproach and disapproval, and tears spilled from her eyes" (174). Despite their differences, Genji sets aside the past and earnestly performs his obligation to her as her husband. During this time, he also tries to show the Lady at Rokujo the

respect she deserves. He visits her when he can but his priority is necessarily to his wife, and thus he is often required to leave her, “she could not bear to leave him, but now that he had reason to devote himself more than ever to the one who commanded his first allegiance” (172). Ironically, Rokujo’s encompassing desire for Genji is what drives him closer to his wife, as her jealous spirit wanders out of her control, she strikes once again in Autumn.

One day in Autumn, Aoi’s father and brothers leave the house to receive their Autumn appointments, “the residence was quiet, for there was hardly anyone about, when she was suddenly racked by a violent fit of retching. Before word could reach the palace, she was gone” (176). Genji is rightfully distraught in the aftermath of Aoi’s passing. However, unlike the conclusion to the Yugao chapter, Genji takes her passing as an opportunity to try and heal the rot eroding his personal life. In the next chapter, Sakaki Branch, Genji pays a final visit to Rokujo in hopes of reconciling their relationship and perhaps convincing her not to move to Ise with her daughter. However, as Rokujo is resolute in her decision, Genji’s losses in this period accumulate without resistance. The compounding afflictions he suffers culminate in his affair with Oborozukiyo and consequent exile.

Through the employment of the Rokujo spirit Murasaki Shikibu cements Autumn as a period of mourning in Genji’s life. Through the comparison of these two Autumns, we can see how Genji matures from a mischievous teenager into a man devoted to his ailing wife.

SUMA: SUMA, CHAPTER TWELVE

Genji’s exile in Suma breaks open the sheltered world of the Heian court and exposes him to the harshness of the outer world. “Aristocratic women rarely ventured out from behind the

multiple layers of standing screens, curtains, and sliding doors that separated them from the external world... for the most part, the only nature that such women encountered was in the gardens of their palace-style” (Shirane Ch.1). The Suma chapter confronts Genji’s party with the terrors from the natural world across several seasons.

In the Autumn portion of the Suma chapter, Murasaki Shikibu uses Autumn symbolism, specifically wild geese, to capitalize on the loneliness of the characters as they get the sense that they are losing themselves to the wilderness. “Are these first wild geese fellows of all those I love, that their cries aloft on their flight across the sky should stir in me such sorrow?” (245) Genji recites a poem upon seeing the flight of wild geese. He is followed by three of the companions he brought with him to Suma. The gentleman left their families behind for Genji’s sake, just “to lose themselves this way in the wilderness?” (244).

Just as wild geese are meant to invoke nostalgia, Genji “longed for the music at the palace” (246), his thoughts drifting through memories of the people most important to him. He thinks specifically of Suzaku and his father, recalling fondly “how intimately that night His Majesty had spoken of the past and how much he had then resembled His Late Eminence, and he went in, singing, “Here is the robe he so graciously gave me...” (246).

NOWAKI: THE TYPHOON, CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Nowaki translates to tempest in English, and refers to the merciless storm that defines the events of this chapter. The discussion of the Autumn storm has characteristics which distinguish it from those of Summer storms. Murasaki Shikibu decorates the beginning of the chapter with

images of fragile flowers. They are emphasized for their beauty and, most notably, some of the flowers have been planted by Genji himself “the flowers Genji had planted in Her Majesty's garden flattered the eye this year as never before, for they were of every hue and kind” (487). They are lovingly protected by the various ladies in Genji’s life. “She seemed to crave sleeves wide enough to cover the autumn sky. She lowered her shutters as night fell and the storm raged on unseen, since it was so frightening, but she continued even then to tremble for her flowers” (487). In this season of life, Genji has successfully brought a lady to court and fluently campaigned for her position as Empress. Genji wins Akikonomu her betrovement to Reizei during the picture contest in Eawase with the paintings he made while in exile. In this way, he has effectively used the lowest point in his life so far to build his greatest achievement. However, the Autumn tempest threatens to tear away the beauties he has planted.

In the confusion created by the storm, people are displaced from their residents as the winds blow apart buildings from their roofs. In an effort to abate the damage of the storm, “the screens had been folded up and moved aside because of the wind, and [Yugiri] could see straight through to a lady seated in the aisle room” (488). The Autumn tempest wind collapses a failsafe established by Genji in order to prevent the repetition of history. Yugiri’s vision of his step-mother enchants and entreats him, the way Fujitsubo once captivated Genji.

Yugiri’s glimpse of Murasaki and subsequent view of Tamakazura, intersplices the Autumn chaos with balmy images of Spring. Murasaki, the Lady of Spring, appropriately evokes the image of “a lovely mountain cherry tree in perfect bloom, emerging from the mists of a spring dawn” (488). Tamakazura’s appearance likewise casts the image of kerria roses in Yugiri’s mind; “there came to his mind all at once a picture of richly blooming kerria roses, laden with dew in the light of the setting sun. The image did not match the present season, but

still, it felt right” (493). Kerria roses and cherry blossoms are both Spring flowers, which Murasaki Shikibu uses here to contrast the serene beauty of these two women with the tumult of the Autumn storm. The invocation of these flowers is wrong for this season, just as it is wrong for Yugiri to look upon these women. Furthermore, as Tyler points out, these flowers can both be connected to the wind in poetic references, which should ultimately relate them back to the seasonal imagery of the chapter. Cherry blossoms for instance often fall apart in the wind, the wind scatters their petals. The kerria, on the other hand, is more explicitly related to the wind through its Japanese title. *Yamabuki* comes from the kanji “山” (*yama* - mountain) and “吹” (*buki* - blow), which is a reference to how mountain breezes tug at the pliable stems of kerria roses.

Much like the reference of Spring flowers in Autumn, the tempest winds themselves are perhaps an example of contradictory seasonal imagery. One line in the chapter discusses the aging *hagi*³ fronds; “this wind cruelly surprised the languishing hagi fronds” (487). Tyler explains the term “languishing” in this instance to refer to the developmental stage of the *hagi*. *Hagi* fronds sprout spirals of magenta pea-flowers which bloom in order from the base up. Thus when a frond is “languishing”, the base flowers have already ceased to bloom while the flowers on the end are open. This causes the branch to droop, and indicates the advancement of the *hagi*’s lifecycle. This stage is simultaneously a poetic reference to *Kokinshû*, in poem 694, in which the *hagi* fronds await the wind just as lovers wait for one another in Autumn. The image of pining for a lover, sighing softly while one waits patiently, is juxtaposed by Murasaki Shikibu

³ Hagi are referred to as Japanese Bush Clovers in English. Throughout my paper I have been referring to plants and flowers with the names Tyler gives them in his translation. This means using a blend of English names, such as kerria rose and cherry blossom, and Japanese names, such as *hagi* and *yugao*.

with the harshness of the Autumn wind's arrival. This reinforces the damaging of flowers in the Autumn tempest and the force the wind signifies.

Not even Akashi's garden is spared from the storm. "The low fences entwined with her specially planted bluebells and gentians were scattered far and wide" (492). Genji visits her in a brief excursion but quickly leaves. Upon his departure Lady Akashi utters the poem:

"The sound of the wind passing as the wind will do, rustling the reeds, seems, unhappy as I am,
to bring a new touch of chill," (492).

The subject of this poem, the passing wind, is significant as Akashi uses the conditions of their meeting to compose her poem, those conditions being the Autumn wind. In this case the wind rustling the reeds is Genji's sudden departure. Before Genji's arrival, Akashi had already been sadly plucking at her koto among her ruined garden. The spark of hope brought with his appearance is quickly extinguished. The brisk duration of his company brings a new touch of chill. Genji uses the storm as pretense to visit his various ladies, however, through poetry, Akashi effectively weaves the general weather into a piece of personal expression.

WINTER

Winter resembles Summer in that it is a season of extremes and immutable conditions, and as such Winter generally presents uncomfortable moments in Genji's story. These situations serve as reminders of the underlying functions of the Heian court. As the world turns inward, sheltering at home from the cold, the Winter sections explore the pretenses of filial bonds and how one's birth and upbringing shapes their future.

This chapter begins with an analysis of Suetsumuhana, in which Winter compliments the out of place character of the Hitachi Princess. Winter is an immutable season, frozen upon itself, thus her would-be romantic stroll with Genji is ill fated. The chapter is meant to be lighthearted, the failings of its characters do not greatly impact the story. Rather, from the jilthy tone of Her Highness's flaws, we are reminded of the value system enforced upon women in Heian culture. The Usugumo section likewise presents sobering realities regarding the place of women at court, through a bitter Winter parting. The events of this chapter are severe, karmic developments in the character's lives as the Akashi Lady's daughter is removed from her care to be brought up at court by Murasaki no Ue. Both the Suetsumuhana chapter and the Usugumo chapter reflect on the consequences of a woman's upbringing and parentage.

SUETSUMUHANA: THE SAFFLOWER, CHAPTER SIX

Suited to the Hitachi Princess herself, the final romantic encounter with the Lady of the Suetsumuhana chapter, or Safflower chapter, appropriately occurs in an awkward season,

Winter. The preceding chapters of the tale build cornerstone relationships in Genji's life.

Suetsuhana on the other hand presents a relationship which Genji is less serious about and serves as a kind of comic relief chapter. The manner in which this story pokes fun at its central Lady is indicative of the values from the rest of the tale and by extension the Heian court. For example, in a world of lavish processions and palaces, the estate of Her Highness is in ruin and everything about her mode of expression is shy and outdated. "It pains me to see you behaving so much like a child, my lady. It is quite acceptable for the most exalted lady to retain a girlish innocence as long as she has her parents to look after her, but it simply is not right for you in your present unfortunate situation to remain shut up forever in yourself" (119).

Her Highness is a princess and as such her introduction assumes high social standing. However, following the death of her father, her world is broken from the rest. Many details of the estate are used to emphasize the eccentric nature of Her Highness, such as her maids' tattered clothes and outdated utensils. Her Highness's own clothes are likewise antiquated, "over a deplorably faded layering of sanctioned rose she wore a dress gown dark with grime... no doubt distinguished attire in ages past but a shockingly eccentric getup for a lady who after all was still young (124). The derision targeted at her appearance is received as being mean spirited. However, throughout the tale characters are distinguished by the attention and taste they display in their appearance. For example, previously in the Wakamurasaki chapter, Genji observes Murasaki's grandmother. "Past forty and very thin, with elegantly white skin, she nonetheless still had a roundness to her cheeks, fine eyes, and hair so neatly cut that to Genji it seemed much more pleasingly modern in style than if it had been long" (86). Tyler points out that her hair is cut because it was Buddhist tradition for women to do so after they have retired. So in this example, we have an "older" (by Heian standards) woman who still makes herself attractive with

modern features. Likewise in the same chapter, Genji notes Murasaki's yellow, kerria colored robes, which were appropriate for the Spring season. Appearance and social sensibility determine a woman's value in Genji's world, but Her Highness struggles to meet these demands.

Her shy demeanor causes Genji to spend nearly a year courting her, as for months he never receives a response to his letters. "Both were soon apparently writing to Her Highness. Neither got an answer, which baffled and irritated them" (117). In a world such as Genji's, where poetic prowess is used in daily conversation and small decisions such as the color of paper are agonized over, Her Highness is hopelessly inept for her shyness. Genji loses interest in her only for his will to be impetuously reignited by his rivalry with To no Chujo; "the thought of how pleased with herself she would be after casting aside her first suitor was more than he could bear" (117). The consequences of these factors draw out their courtship from Spring, into Autumn, and finally Winter.

"On a night when the moon would rise so late that the wait for it seemed endless, when the only light was from the stars and the wind moaned in the pines, the lady, weeping, began to talk of the past. Taifu saw that the moment was at hand" (118-19). In this moment, Her Highness seems to be acting appropriately for the season; it is Autumn as indicated by the mention of moonlight and wind in the pines, which Her Highness uses as a moment to reflect on the past. This moment is an uncharacteristic display of sensitivity for her surroundings, which is perhaps why Taifu uses this as an opportunity to summon Genji. However, upon his arrival, "at last the moon rose, only to illuminate gloomily for him the stretch of ragged fence at which he was gazing" (119).

Her Highness's face is not revealed until Winter. "Dawn seemed to have come at last. He raised the shutters himself and looked out over the snow-covered garden. No footprint broke the

vast, empty, and chillingly lonely expanse” (124). The two are about to go on a walk in the snow together. With some ushering from her maids, she finally emerges from behind her screen. This is the moment that exposes the truth to Genji, through sideways glances he pieces together her appearance. “Next came the real disaster: her nose. He noted it instantly. She resembled the mount of the Bodhisattva Fugen. Long and lofty that nose was, slightly drooping toward the end, and with at the tip a blush of red—a real horror” (124). It should be noted that Fugen’s mount is an elephant. Once again, this description of her is as unkind as it is uncharitable. Nevertheless, their ill-omened encounter is perhaps foreshadowed by the inopportune season it takes place in. “When it came to the unpleasant or difficult seasons, summer and winter, aristocratic poetry and culture sought to depict not what nature was actually like but what it ought to be”. (Shirane Introduction). In contrast to what Shirane describes, it seems that in this chapter Murasaki Shikibu is using the extremes of the Winter season to convey an unpleasant encounter.

USUGUMO: WISPS OF CLOUDS, CHAPTER NINETEEN

Keeping with the unpleasant harshness of Winter, the first section of Usugumo takes place in Winter. “Ōi became drearier still with winter, and the lady there spent her days feeling completely lost” (346-47). Winter in this case is the backdrop for Lady Oi (formally the Lady of Akashi) and her decision to relinquish custody of her daughter to Genji and Murasaki no Ue. Just as she had been separated from her parents for the promise of a better life, in Winter she is separated from her daughter. Her daughter will instead be raised in the palace by Murasaki no Ue, which should ensure her success as a woman. “An imperial son's rank seems to come from

his mother, and I expect the reason why [Genji] is a mere official, despite his extraordinary qualities” (348). This principle likewise applies to daughters.

Naturally, the decision to be separated from her only child is a bitter one. She herself refuses to attend palace life for fear of embarrassment, the kind that Genji’s mother suffered. And thus her daughter goes without her. In the process of saying goodbye to her daughter, Akashi recites a poem for her;

“Now that I am torn from my little seedling pine and her years ahead, when shall I with
my own eyes see her as a mighty tree?” (349).

Pine trees in *Kokinshû* are often associated with New Years and Early Spring, suggesting that this exchange might have taken place on the cusp of Winter and Spring. “The waka observes that the green of the pine, an evergreen and a symbol of the unchanging, becomes even more intense with the arrival of early spring” (Shirane Ch.2). By invoking a tree as immutable as a pine tree, Akashi is perhaps indicating the grand expectations she has for her daughter's future.

SPRING

As the New Year begins for the characters in *The Tale of Genji*, Spring necessarily brings old cycles to a close in preparation for their renewal, with the implication of birth and mortality. The arc of the Akashi Novice spans half of the tale and yet it is contained in Spring, as this season announces the cycle's beginning, stages its completion, and then reintroduces it with a new set of characters. Moreover, karmic attachments appear to Genji in Spring through Murasaki and the Lady of Akashi. These Spring affairs and fateful encounters are complicated and involve some degree of upheaval, such as in the foreshadowing of an elder's death. However, there is always hope that the chaos will resolve itself and make way to new blessings.

I will necessarily begin this chapter with a description of the events in Suma which provide the foundation for the events of Wakana (Part 1). Both chapters present the mysterious, sometimes obscure blessings of Spring. Wakamurasaki likewise introduces Genji's titular lover, while also presenting themes of innocence, commissary, and mortality. All of the Spring chapters expound on a wish for a better life and detail the strange events which make that vision attainable.

SUMA: SUMA, CHAPTER TWELVE

The Wakana Chapter completes an arc first established in the Suma Chapter. The Akashi Novice reveals to Genji the prayer he has pursued throughout his life in The Suma Chapter, a prayer which is ultimately fulfilled in the first Wakana Chapter. Although these two chapters cover periods of months and years, the Akashi Novice arc both begins and ends in Spring.

As anyone already familiar with Genji would know, the Akashi Novice is not the central figure of this arc. Instead he merely precludes and contextualizes the Akashi Lady. His introduction to Genji is framed by a Spring tempest ravaging Suma where Genji is exiled. Regardless of the season, tempests and storms play an important role throughout the tale, such as in the Hahakigi chapter, the Sakaki chapter, and of course, the Nowaki chapter. The Spring tempest is no exception. Genji is marooned in Suma, the storm manifesting the climax of his lonely desperation, “thunder boomed, lightning flashed with such awesome violence that they feared a strike at any time, and none of them remained calm” (258). The Spring tempest in Suma is not a garden variety thunderstorm, it is perhaps the most violent storm of Genji’s life. “It is strange and frightening enough that for days now there has been no letup in the rain, and that the wind has kept blowing a gale,” the man said, “but we have not had hail like this, such as to pierce the earth, or this incessant thunder” (257-58).

In past examples, the power of storms has been employed to restrict movement such as in the Summer storm of the Hahakigi chapter. This principle reappears in Suma, as Genji gets word from the capital, the palace “streets are all impassable, and government has come to a halt” (257). Storms have also brought about upheaval, such as in Sakaki and Nowaki, making irreversible changes to the course of Genji’s life. The Spring tempest is no exception, however the nature of its transformation differs significantly from the storms of other seasons. The Summer storm from Sakaki restricts movement and disorders people’s appointments, resulting in Genji’s entrapment in the wrong place and wrong time. That storm dooms Genji to exile, permitting the unjust vengeance of a political rival. The Autumn storm in Nowaki breaks a filial law between Genji and his son Yugiri, which echoes Genji’s own youthful transgressions and

harbrings the conclusion of his upward trajectory. This tempest brings finality to Genji's most successful period.

The Spring storm however, finds Genji at one of his lowest lows, and after tossing him around delivers him a partnership which will one day bring him pride. Unlike past storms, the Spring storm delivers hope and new beginnings, which are shipped with the Akashi Novice as he sails into Suma. "In a dream early this month a strange being gave me a solemn message that I found difficult to believe," the Novice began, "but then I heard 'On the thirteenth I will give you another sign. Prepare a boat and, when the wind and rain have stopped, sail to Suma'" (260). The Akashi Novice does not know why he has been directed to go to Suma, however he is compelled by a divine message he received in a dream. The gifts of the Spring tempest are karmic in nature.

Reinforcing the lofty occasion of Genji's exile, the storm, and the Akashi Novice's arrival, Genji has his own divine dream just before the end of the storm in which he is visited by his late father. "His Late Eminence stood before him as he had been in life" (259). In this brief reunion with his father Genji pours out his destitution, to which His Late Eminence replies, "all this is simply a little karmic retribution" (259). He then promises to visit Genji's half brother, the Emperor, on Genji's behalf, hinting that there is hope for Genji's eventual return to the capital. The appearance of the Late Emperor's spirit after he has revoked the world is serious and strange and quantifies the weight of dreams in the tale. "Something now went wrong with His Majesty's eyes, perhaps because he had met his father's furious gaze" (267). This surreal encounter primes Genji to accept the Novice's equally bizarre mission brought to him in a dream.

The "karmic retribution" Genji's father spoke of is not just Genji's karma but is the culmination of the Akashi Novice's Buddhist devotions. "I believe that your brief stay in a land so strange to you may be a trial devised by the gods and buddhas in compassionate response to

an old monk's years of prayer" (264-65). The prayers he is referring to are for the future of his daughter. Having failed to distinguish himself at court and through a series of misfortunes, the Akashi Novice found himself and his family separated from the capital by a great distance. His life since then has been devoted to a singular wish for his daughter. "I want a great lord from the City to have her, and that desire runs so deep that I have incurred the enmity of many and suffered much unpleasantness because of my pretensions. None of that matters to me, however. I tell her, 'As long as I live, I will do my poor best to look after you. If I go while you are still as you are now, then drown yourself'" (265). He has been asking for a transformation in his daughter's circumstances through prayer. The Akashi Novice does not technically reveal this to Genji until Summer. After their first encounter, Genji and the Novice grow closer to each other. The Novice tells Genji many stories however, he is too shy to mention his true desire to Genji and does not find the courage to do so until the beginning of Summer. Ultimately however, the Spring storm is what brings the two together.

WAKANA I: SPRING SHOOTS I, CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

The blessings of the Spring tempest are not immediately evident. Rather, the case is more like the seed was planted in Spring and takes years to bloom. The true value of Genji's affair with the Akashi Lady would not be revealed until the events of Wakana Part I. Once again Spring provides the promise of new life and new beginnings, this time without a violent storm. The first year of this chapter relates Spring to the completion of a cycle and the beginning of the next. This is expressed from the artifact of Tamakazura's consideration for Genji, which the chapter is named for. Wakana refers to Spring shoots or green shoots. Tyler explains that Spring

shoots were scavenged by court ladies in the first month of the year to celebrate the arrival of Spring. In celebration of Genji's fortieth year, Tamakazura arranges a Spring shoot banquet for Genji. Thus Spring is associated with the beginning of Genji's fortieth year and the transition to a new age.

In the third month of the following year, the Kokkiden Consort, Genji and Akashi Lady's daughter, gives birth to the Heir Apparent's first son. This means Genji's lineage has produced one Empress and one Emperor through his union with the Akashi Lady, as The Consort will be Empress, and her son will be Emperor. It is the last major achievement of Genji's life and sets up the next era of the Heian court. It also grants the Akashi Novice his wish for his daughter's success.

Lady Akashi's position in caring for her grandchild is described by Tyler as, *mukaeyu*, assistant to the Bath Nurse, which "underscores both the Akashi lady's prudent modesty and her still-ambiguous standing" (1121). Murasaki raised The Consort from the age of three, because her proximity to the court would elevate the child's status. Thus the Akashi Lady is not officially recognized as the Kokkiden Consort's true mother. Akashi Lady frequently expresses embarrassment for her rustic upbringing throughout the tale, her involvement in her grandson's birth is no exception. The Wakana chapter features a sober reflection on the Kokkiden Consort's origins, "the Consort's mother had never really told her daughter about the past... the Nun, [Lady Akashi's mother], bursting with happiness, therefore approached her now and described in a trembling voice, amid frequent tears, what their life had once been" (607). Via juxtaposition, the dredging up of Lady Akashi's former seaside life serves to emphasize the high status she has achieved. The Nun looked upon Lady Akashi and "could hardly believe that a young lady this exalted was her daughter" (608).

And with that, the Akashi Novice's prayers had been realized. "I can leave this world behind with a light heart" (610), the Novice spends his final months copying sacred texts until it is his time to wander alone into the mountain forest. His cycle ends in Spring, coinciding with the birth of the future emperor. Furthermore, the cycle ends with the finality of death, only to immediately reincarnate in the retired Suzaku emperor, who cannot earnestly renounce the world until the fate of his youngest daughter is secured. In the same chapter the Akashi Novice is released from his prayers, Suzaku entrusts Genji with Onna San No Miya.

WAKAMURASAKI: YOUNG MURASAKI, CHAPTER FIVE

Going back to the Spring when Genji is nineteen years old, the Spring of the Wakamurasaki chapter impacts upon its reader the idea of youth and innocence. This chapter establishes iconic Spring flowers and uses them to express the underlying tone of each scene. Genji seeks treatment for his malaria in the northern hills of Heiankyo, where the mountains are dappled with the signs of Spring. "The blossoms in the City were gone now, since it was late in the third month, but in the mountains the cherry trees were in full bloom" (83).

This chapter introduces the heroine of the tale, Murasaki no Ue and all of the complicated emotions she represents which are expressed through seasonal flowers. She is precluded by the title of the chapter, Wakamurasaki or Young Murasaki. Like most of the women in the tale, she is referred to by her flower nicknames, as Tyler explains that in Heian culture it was inappropriate for people to refer to each other with their family names. The name which Genji uses to refer to her as is Murasaki or "紫", in Japanese this refers to the color purple or lavender or to a gromwell. The color association with Murasaki's flower name follows the pattern

established by Kiritsubo and Fujitsubo. Kiri “桐” refers to the Paulownia Tree which grows purple flowers, and Fuji “藤” is wisteria, also a purple flower. These three women resemble each other and captivate Genji. The first woman, Kiritsubo or The Lady of the Paulownia Court, appears only briefly in the first chapter as Genji’s mother whom he loses at a young age. Her position next to the Emperor is later filled by Fujitsubo, The Lady of the Wisteria Court.

Fujitsubo’s beauty closely resembles that of Kiritsubo, “she resembled that other lady to a truly astonishing degree, but since she was of far higher standing, commanded willing respect” (14). Genji succumbs to an oedipal attraction to her and from their taboo union arises Reizei, Genji’s secret son. Murasaki no Ue, who is introduced in the Wakamurasaki chapter, likewise resembles Fujitsubo in her physical appearance. An explanation of her importance to Genji will follow, but first it is important to acknowledge that her initial appeal to him is premised on her resemblance to Fujitsubo.

Cherry blossoms are a Spring flower which quell the appearance of lavender and gromwells, especially in the Wakamurasaki chapter. Despite being named for a different and purple flower, throughout the tale Murasaki is often compared to the pink cherry blossoms. When Yugiri catches his forbidden glimpse of her in the Nowaki chapter, “there was no mistaking her nobly warm and generous beauty: she looked like a lovely mountain cherry tree in perfect bloom, emerging from the mists of a spring dawn” (488). And in the Wakana chapter, Genji summarizes the jealousy and rumors stirred up about the rivalry between Murasaki and Onna San no Miya “This is how blossoms should smell,” he said. “If only one could give cherry blossoms this perfume, I doubt that people would care any longer for any other kind” (595). Tyler explains that Murasaki is the cherry blossom, her lack of scent equates to her lack of noble lineage compared to Onna San no Miya who is the daughter of an emperor. This quote neatly

summarizes Genji's plight throughout the tale; Murasaki is by all accounts the perfect woman, and yet he still finds something to be desired. Thus he is doomed to wander for an eternity as a hungry ghost, with an insatiable desire for something more. This is the corruption of the Hahakigi chapter which taught him of the infinite talents of women and the simultaneous shortcomings of each, as one woman could never embody them all. Likewise, in the Wakamurasaki chapter, we are treated to persistent images of cherry blossoms. The farewell exchange between Genji and His Reverence employ symbolism with cherry blossoms through poetry, "I shall go forth now and describe to all at court these mountain cherries" (92). Moreover, among the parting gifts the Reverence bestows upon Genji, "dark blue lapis lazuli jars containing diverse medicines and tied to sprays of wisteria or cherry blossoms" (93). The wisteria reference the woman Murasaki is preceded by and pairs them with cherry blossoms, instead of lavender or gromwells. Murasaki becomes the Lady of Spring in Genji's completed Rokujo-in residence, and thus it is appropriate for her to be associated with such an iconic Spring flower. Her appointment as "Murasaki" is born from her likeness to Fujitsubo, the color association with their names tying them to each other. However, Murasaki would become more to Genji than Fujitsubo ever could be. As Genji's lifelong companion, she is expansive enough to have more than one flower association. To reduce her to the flower which compares her to two other women, while saying nothing of her personal merit, denies one of the stories most important characters her individuality. Thus, the mountain cherry tree and its blossoms symbolize her as well as the gromwell.

During his sojourn to visit a holy healer, Genji "melted into the heavy twilight mists toward the brushwood fence that had caught his eye. He then sent the others back and peered through the fence with Lord Koremitsu" (86). The Spring mists and the earlier mentioned cherry

blossoms work together to paint a delicate landscape of Spring's finest features. "In Kyoto, the spring mist (kasumi) appears in the mountains from around February 10... the blossoming of the cherry trees, which has been the highlight of spring from the Heian period onward, occurs in what is now the middle of April. " (Shirane Ch.1). Shikibu constantly reminds the reader that the place Genji is visiting is beautiful, "the lightening sky was thick with mist, and mountain birds were singing everywhere. Flowers Genji could not even name carpeted the ground... a sight so wonderful that all thought of his fever melted away (91). The Spring mountains have a dreamlike serenity. The majesty of mountain views become a topic of conversation between Genji's companions, "but, my lord, this is nothing yet. How much more beautiful your painting would be if only you had before your eyes the mountains and seas of other provinces!" Someone else extolled Mount Fuji and another peak" (84).

From the comparison of mountains, "the coast at Akashi in Harima deserves special mention" (84). As if in obligation to Spring, the Akashi Novice suddenly appears here too, with the same spontaneity he displays later in Suma. He and his daughter's arrival are foreshadowed by a conversation had between Genji and his companions; one of the men describes the Akashi Novice and the eccentricity which alienated him from court. And of course, one can not help bringing up his daughter, a noblewoman being raised in obscurity. Genji, who has never heard of the Novice or his daughter, "was keenly intrigued. His marked taste for the unusual ensured that he would remember her story, as his companions clearly noted" (85-6).

While peering through the fence, "came running a girl of ten or so, wearing a softly rumpled kerria rose layering... unlike the other children, an obvious future beauty. Her hair cascaded like a spread fan behind her as she stood there, her face all red from crying" (86). Tyler notes the color of Murasaki's robes. Kerria refers to the yellow kerria roses which are often

associated with Spring, and are referenced to by Murasaki's seasonal yellow robes. She is crying and runs to her grandmother because another girl released her pet sparrow.

As Genji eavesdrops on this exchange, he hears a nurse begin to scold the girl for her imprudence. "Oh, come, you are such a baby!" the nun protested" (86). "Your childishness really worries me... Your late mother was ten when she lost her father, and she perfectly understood what had happened. How would you manage if I were suddenly to leave you?" (87). Murasaki's exchange with the nun emphasizes her immaturity and the precariousness of her circumstances, as the nun is the last person alive who can care for her. Murasaki recites: "When no one can say where it is the little plant will grow up at last, the dewdrop soon to leave her does not see how she can go," (87). Her immaturity is summarized by the "little plant" that can not grow under the pressure of uncertainty. The source of her uncertainty stemming from the impending mortality of her grandmother, her last surviving caregiver.

The uncertainty of Murasaki's plight resonates with Genji. "I myself was very young when those who would have brought me up were taken from me, and the life I have led ever since has been a strangely rootless one. Her situation and mine are so alike that I have longed to beg you to recognize how much she and I share" (91). Thus this chapter establishes the deep connection Murasaki and Genji have with each other. A glimpse of Murasaki's innocence is provided in a chapter buoyant with the splendor of Spring. The ugly reality which threatens to take that innocence away is also present. Following the death of the nun, Genji takes Murasaki to be his ward. Echoing the Spring in the Wakana chapter, death in Spring precludes the beginning of a new chapter.

CONCLUSION

Inspired by the chapters from my analysis, I have composed paintings which reflect the emotional impact of the seasons in *The Tale of Genji*. I rely heavily on the human figure and portraiture as subjects for my oil paintings. By appropriating scenes and characters from the tale, combined with seasonal imagery such as plants, flowers, and atmospheric conditions, I hope to use these figures to express the emotional impact of each season.

The figures I have painted are meant to display the broad spectrum of emotions associated with the seasons in *The Tale of Genji*. One might hear that *The Tale of Genji* is a book full of beauty, poetry, and women named after flowers, and imagine it to be a sweet, romantic tale of a prince and his lovers. While Genji is a shining prince with poetic affairs, the



Oborozukiyo, Oil on Canvas, 22"x 28"

focus of the tale never lingers too long on the sweetness of love or the beauty of the seasons. Some of the sweetest moments of the tale are tinged with bitterness and foreboding. Misty cherry blossoms in Spring conceal ambiguous lovers and looming mortality. Soft cries of cuckoo birds and sweet scented orange blossoms in Summer invoke nostalgia and painful reflection. The wind carrying wild geese in Autumn can turn to moaning gales full of maleficent spirits. Charming walks in

Winter snow are not as idyllic as they seem. For this reason, many of the paintings contain subjects related to loss and sorrow.

Of my six paintings, there are two for each Spring and Autumn and one each for Summer and Winter. I emphasized Spring and Autumn through the number and size of paintings dedicated to them, as these two seasons were preferential in Heian literature.

The theme of the Summer painting is lighthearted, in contrast to the heavy tones of the Spring and Autumn paintings. This painting depicts the discovery of Genji's affair with Oborozukiyo during the Summer rains of the Sakaki Branch chapter. I was eager to capture a Summer rain scene, given the Summer rain is such an integral piece of the season. Oborozukiyo is reclining in an undefined dark puddle, with the suggestion of raindrops and ripples in the pattern behind her. Oborozukiyo is an obscure, mysterious figure. Her identity is shrouded in mist and moonlight as reflected in her name. As such there are elements of obfuscation in the painting. Her arm obscures the bottom of her face, as do patches of color.



Yugao, Oil on Canvas, 36"x 24"

My selection of Autumn scenes comes from the Yugao chapter and the Kiritsubo chapter. The Yugao chapter contains some of the most explicit Autumnal imagery in the tale. Of the Autumn symbols in the chapter, I chose to emphasize the moon, while also evoking a general Autumnal atmosphere through the colors of plants and trees. Conveying the loneliness and destitution of the scene was a priority. I depicted Yugao reclining, alone, with the overgrown garden and tattered shoji screen behind her. The tangled black hair in the foreground functions to echo the tangled branches in the background and also pays homage to the black hair iconic to Japanese horror stories. The depiction of this scene is wild and chaotic in the tale, with thrashing wind and rachorous wailing, however in my depiction I preferred a still, uncanny image.



Kiritsubo, Oil on Canvas, 48"x 36"

Of all my paintings, my depiction of the Paulownia chapter veers furthest from the original text. The chapter includes a single line depicting the emperor mourning Genji's mother

as he sits in the garden, surrounded by his favorite noblewomen, who try to comfort him with poetry. I have replaced the Paulownia tree with a *hagi* or Japanese Bush Clover. On one hand, the *hagi* retains the purple color of the Paulownia tree flowers. It is also an external reference to the image of the stag with *hagi* flowers, a common pairing in waka poetry used to represent the pain of separation from a lover. I have made the emperor a stag, with large gold antlers extending from his lowered head. Although I gave this chapter less attention in my analysis, it summarizes the sense of loss associated with Autumn.

Similar to my Summer painting, my depiction of Winter from the Suetsumuhana chapter is the only painting from its season and is intended to be lighthearted. In relation to the rest of the tale, Suetsumuhana is written as a sort of comic relief chapter, which is how I chose to depict it.



Suetsumuhana, Oil on Canvas, 16"x 20"

This is also the only painting which includes Genji himself, for no other reason than for him to play off of his friend, Taifu. As they approach the estate, Taifu is the only one who has actually seen Her Highness's face. Her Highness is seen in the background, leaning on a railing. Her face is a reference to Genji's later observation that her nose resembles that of an elephant's.

For my Spring paintings I chose to depict the Wakamurasaki chapter and

the Wakana chapter. The Wakamurasaki chapter is saturated with Spring mist and flowers, which stage the entrance of Genji's central love interest, Murasaki no Ue. This is a painting of the moment when Murasaki is ten years old and is seeking consolation from her grandmother because her pet sparrow has escaped. In the original text, Murasaki's robe is a Spring ochre color. In my painting however, I have chosen to depict her in pink. This chapter emphasizes her childishness and innocence, and from personal bias, I see pink as being a youthful or naive color. Furthermore, in my analysis, I make the case for why I believe Murasaki is associated with cherry blossoms.



Wakamurasaki, Oil on Canvas, 36"x 48"

In this chapter in particular, the characters make special note of the mountain cherry trees, the branches of which are included at the top of the painting. The viewer's perspective is near to what Genji's would have been in this chapter. Rather than frame the painting in the gaps of a fence, my objective was to make the figures seem strange and looming. The grandmother in particular, looms over Murasaki, making her seem that much smaller.

Wakana Part I is the ideal chapter for representing Spring because it captures the multiplicity of the season. Its plot centers around birth, death, and renewal. Birth plays

an explicit role in the chapter, though the birth of the new emperor. His birth relates to the death of the Akashi Novice, as the realization of his prayers frees him. The woman in the center of the



Wakana Part I, Oil on Canvas, 28"x 22"

painting, the daughter of Genji and Akashi, holds her newborn son. She is flanked by the two women who raised her. Her stepmother, Murasaki, is on her right and her biological mother, Lady Akashi, is on her left. Lady Akashi is mourning her father. Now that his daughter has achieved high esteem he can revoke the world, clean of attachment. He is depicted travelling to his death in the top right corner of the painting. The stream beside him carries open lotus blossoms. These reference the opened lotus blossom the Akashi Novice says he will be reincarnated on.

The Suzaku Emperor finds himself in a similar predicament to the Akashi Novice. He is depicted in the top left of the painting, facing upward and to the left, symmetrical to the Akashi Novice. Although the Suzaku Emperor is not dying, he is expected to relinquish all earthly connections and commit himself to religious observation. However he cannot truly detach himself from the physical world until he is comfortable with his daughter's security. Just as Genji took in Lady Akashi, the Suzaku emperor entrusts Genji with his daughter to ensure her future, thus the cycle is repeated.

Rather than romantic sweetness, the tale explores the cycles that take grip of Genji's life and the control they have over his relationships. "Everyone who should have loved me left me" (57). Genji's relationship to his lovers is disappointingly human, as he loves them deeply and wrongs them at every turn. "The narrator insists several times that Genji never forgot any woman he had once known, and the tale bears this out" (Introduction). And yet Genji is doomed to lose them all to time. Furthermore, Genji is the victim of his own habits and temptations, which are painfully transparent, spoken in the language of seasonal imagery, "this is how blossoms should smell," he said. "If only one could give cherry blossoms this perfume, I doubt that people would care any longer for any other kind" (595). The scent refers to Onna San no Miya's nobility, which Murasaki lacks. Genji once again laments that even Murasaki cannot satisfy him and he cannot help himself but to seek out yet another flower elsewhere. Cherry blossoms only bloom for a short while, if one were to be distracted by plum blossoms, they might miss the former. And that is the frustrating cycle of Genji's life. The seasons are not only a cycle in themselves, but their characteristics become the language for expressing the patterns in Genji's life.

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THE SEASONS OF G E N J I

ELIZABETH MUDRY

Fisher Studio Arts Gallery
Bard College
North Ravine Road,
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May 15 - 21, 2021

The Seasons of Genji

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
Elizabeth Mudry

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2021

Artist Statement

The Seasons of Genji

The Tale of Genji was written for Empress Fujiwara no Shoshi by Murasaki Shikibu, a fellow court noblewoman, during the Heian Period of Japan (794 AD to 1185 AD). One could dismiss *The Tale of Genji* as a romantic tale of a prince and his lovers, a story full of beauty, poetry, and women named after flowers. While Genji is a shining prince with poetic affairs, the focus of the tale never lingers too long on the sweetness of love. Rather, the tale explores the cycles that grip Genji's life and the control they have over his relationships. The seasons are one of the many cycles which add depth to Genji's story. In Japanese *waka* poetry, the seasons are entangled with poetic weight, and Shikibu references the anthologies that circulated among her contemporaries to shape important scenes in Genji's life. In my paintings I seek to accentuate the presence of seasons in the tale, using painting to highlight their importance. The seasons remain a cornerstone in Japanese culture, considering their constant and shifting impact on the natural environment, they dictate everything from fashion to the celebration of festivals, even rotating snacks in convenience stores. *The Tale of Genji* establishes the importance of seasons early on in Japanese cultural history, which I would like to explore in my paintings.

Although my project is predicated on a showcase of the seasons, my work relies heavily on the human figure and portraiture as subjects for my oil paintings. By appropriating scenes and characters from the tale, interlaced with seasonal imagery (such as plants, flowers, and atmospheric conditions) I hope to use the figures in my work to impart the language of the seasons.

Outside of my own experiences, my works are referenced from a series of collages composed from photographs and paintings. One major type of influence in my work is

Pre-Raphaelite painters, such as George Henry Grenville Manton (1855 - 1932), as the works from this movement are generally romantic images composed around the female figure in nature. *The Tale of Genji* compliments Pre-Raphaelite ideals, as both share an interest in women, beauty, nature, romance and death. *The Tale of Genji* takes place in the distant, aristocratic court of Heian Japan, the details of which elude modern historians. In an effort to observe the style of the period, I looked to the vast canon of *Genji* art produced in Japan. Works by masters such as Tosa Mitsunobu and the Tosa School inspired the clothing and settings in my work.

For my paintings I selected scenes which both exemplify the emotions of the seasons and have a lasting impact on Genji's life. As such, my paintings include scenes of birth, death, and discovery. I also prioritized the many women of Genji's life, as Genji himself only appears in one painting. The tale is essentially Genji's fictional biography, his decisions drive the course of the plot. However, Genji is overshadowed by the relationships he builds, and thus the women of the tale shape his existence. Each woman is named by Genji for a flower she reminds him of, as many of these relationships are defined by the season Genji finds them in.

Originally, I was attracted to *The Tale of Genji* because it sits at the intersection between so many facets of Japanese culture. As a pillar of Japanese literature and an internationally recognized classic, I began reading the tale with my own preconceptions of what kind of story it would be. Having taken nearly four months to complete the tale, it has done more than defy my expectations of it being romance. Having painted the characters, spent time giving them faces, their sense of loss and joy has become more palpable, and closer than ever.

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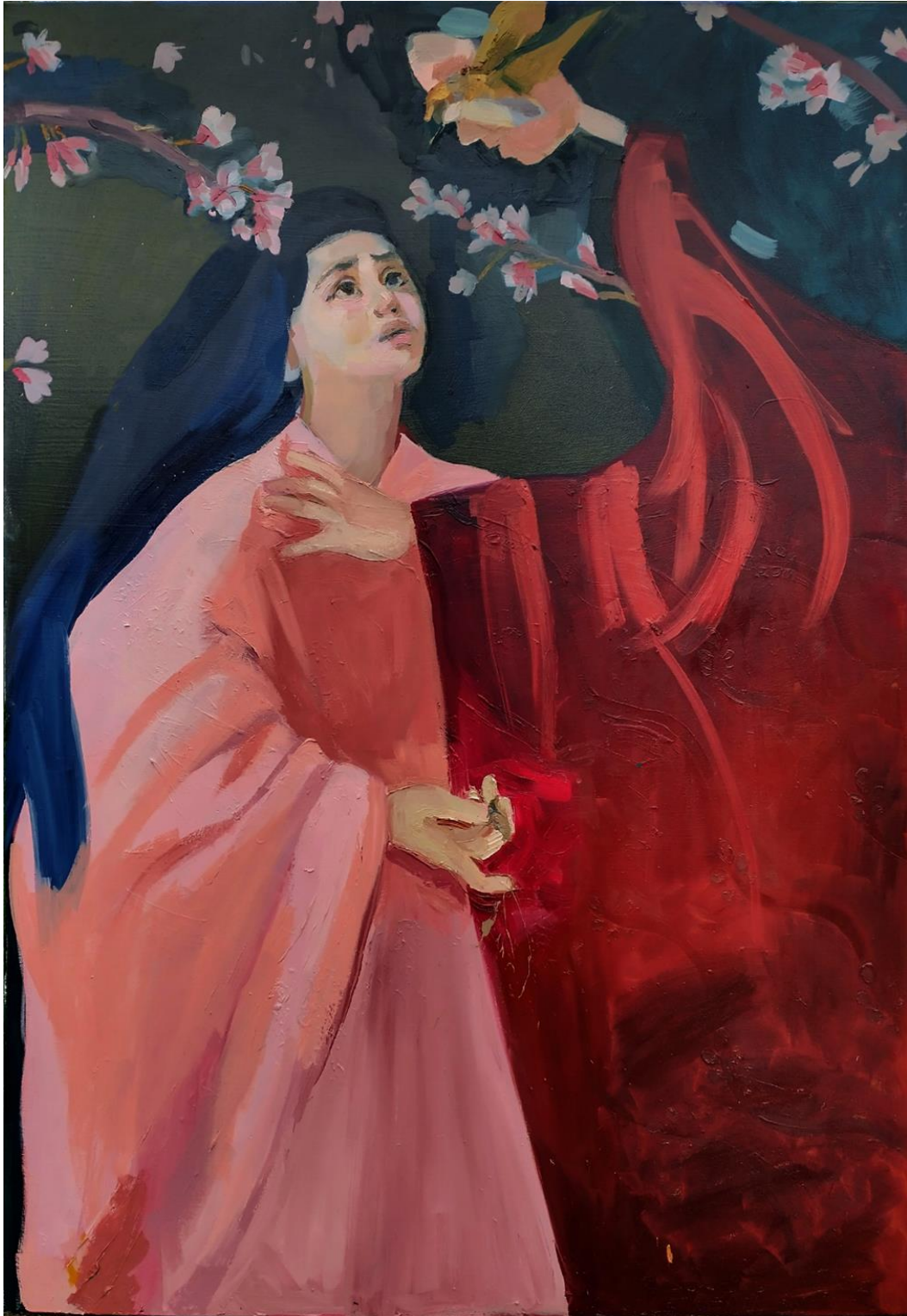
Oborozukiyo, Oil on Canvas, 22"x 28"



Yugao, Oil on Canvas, 36"x 24"



Suetsumuhana. Oil on Canvas. 16"x 20"



Wakamurasaki, Oil on Canvas, 36"x 48"



Kiritsubo, Oil on Canvas, 48"x 36"



Wakana Part I, Oil on Canvas, 28"x 22"



Oborozukiyo, Charcoal Sketch, 24"x 18"



Aoi, Charcoal Sketch, 24"x 18"