

Genji Monogatari is the greatest single work in Japanese literature. It provides us with an informative look into the court life of the Heian Period, as well as give us a wealth of vivid characterizations along the way to developing the lineage of the hero, Genji. The reason for its being qualified as a classic is not the fact that it was the first novel, or its twisting plot line. It is Murasaki's subtle insights into the medieval Japanese way of life and thought that give this novel its immortality. Genji manifests the idea of *mono no aware*, loosely interpreted as a "sensitivity to things" (Varley, 1973, p.48), or more specifically, "the kind of emotional response to the beauties of nature or the more gentle of human relations that was likely to elicit such an expression of spontaneous feeling as 'Ah!'" (Varley, 1973, p.48) The "gentle human relations are those events that give the basis for the escapades of Genji, but it is the more subtle use of nature that gives us the backdrop for the story (and, incidentally, the basis for a paper).

The first way that Murasaki employs nature is in her precise characterizations of the dozens of main and minor players in Genji. From the season in which the character appears to the clothes that they wear to the portion of Genji's palace that they inhabit, without a more than casual appreciation to nature in reading this novel a great chunk of the literary value is lost. "[Murasaki] is not content simply to describe the charms of the different seasons, but they are skillfully harmonized with the feelings of the characters" (Shinkokai, 1970 p.55). The first example of this is in the Broom Tree Chapter (Chapter 2) in the conversation that Genji and To no Chujo carry on at length about the various merits of the ideal lady (Seidensticker, 1976 p 20) . The scene takes place during the summer rainy season on a particularly stormy night. Traditionally, summer was a time of abstinence because it was the crucial period for the cultivation of rice (Field, 1987 p. 121), and because the rains were so abundant that they prohibited travel to one's lover. This would have been recognized by an Eleventh Century audience, and when a discussion of relations with women is carried on during the summer rains, this adds a juvenile or inexperienced tone to the pair. To no Chujo even admits that "I'm not much of a hand at the game" (p 21). Even though they are relating their "conquests", Murasaki is quick to point out the truth to her readers: "as the rainy night gave way to dawn the stories became more and more improbable" (p 38) and even refers to one of the stories as "an outrageous story" (p 36). Obviously, our view of Genji changes dramatically (or we wouldn't have much of a story), but our picture of To no Chujo doesn't shift much. In fact, this scene lays the foundation for when Genji "takes the girl" away from him (Evening Faces). Another example of direct characterization through nature occurs while Genji is away in exile at Suma (Chapter 12). He is cast as the sensitive contemplative figure peering longingly up at the moon, trying to decide on his own the real reason he is sent to exile, and longing for his myriad romantic encounters. This is definitely a point Murasaki wishes to get across (she refers to the moon twenty-one times in this chapter alone), but the greatest example is his gaze into the harvest moon (p 238). "A radiant moon had come out. They were reminded that it was the harvest moon. Genji could not take his eyes from it. On other such nights there had been concerts at court, and perhaps they of whom he was thinking would be gazing at the same moon and thinking of him." Here Genji not only shows his mastery of *mono no aware*, but can be said to have become the moon. This, of course, needs some explanation. The culture in which Genji lived in depended ultimately on the moon. They decided when to plant their rice by it, made their years go by lunar cycles instead of by the seasons as in the west, and basically let their lives revolve around something that in actuality revolved around them. "So it was all through the court. Deep sorrow prevailed" (p 229). Even the name he is first given, the shining Genji, is a direct parallel to the moon. For just as the moon only reflects the grandeur of the sun, so Genji only reflects the love of the court, for he pines for them equally, if not more. As evidenced by his hasty return to the court, he is not the type of person that can

be expected to survive without others.

Another example of Murasaki's use of nature as a character development tool is Genji's palace and its layout.

NORTHWEST	(Winter)	Akashi Lady	NORTHEAST	(Summer)	Hana Chiro Sato
SOUTHWEST	(Autumn)	Akikonomu	SOUTHEAST	(Spring)	Murasaki

The four ladies are characterized by their positions and season which they represent. Winter and summer as a theme are rejected in Genji. Thus the women which represent them are named only for the seasons in which they met. As stated before, summer was not a time of love, and it is fitting that he not be consumed by the lady of that season. Spring and autumn are endeared by Murasaki's society to the extent that there was a popular debate about which was the most splendid. Genji begins the debate with Akikonomu, and she expresses her taste for the fall, thus she becomes Lady of the Fall. He states that he cannot decide, showing us that even though he can appreciate their beauty, he cannot choose over the seasons just as he cannot choose one woman. Spring is the season of Murasaki, and her garden's splendor rivals that of Buddha's paradise (Field 1987, p119),. The description of the splendor of her garden symbolizes her beauty as well.

Nature can also be seen as more than just a tool of characterization, but a framework upon which to hang the fabric of the novel. A quote best illustrates this point: "the chapters unfold the story in terms of the four seasons of a single year" (Ikeda, 1979 p. 96). The obvious chapter to turn to in this subject is again the Suma chapter. The chapter begins late in the Third Month, about mid May in our calendar (depending on which year it was set in). Then, after a little time is passed by visitors, the summer rains come. This is a time of letter writing and for thinking of family. Next we come to the brilliant description of Genji looking up to the Harvest Moon, and the "melancholy autumn winds" (p 235) blow harshly on the exiled prince. Winter is the inevitable next season to come to Suma, and it is the harshest of all. Toward the end of the chapter, New Years' Day and the first scatterings of orange blossoms are described, until we arrive at the last page and it is the beginning of the Third Month. The passage that follows is so impressive that it deems quoting in full:

Suddenly a wind came up and even before the services were finished the sky was black. Genji's men rushed about in confusion. Rain came pouring down, completely without warning. Though the obvious course would have been to return straightway to the house, there had been no time to send for umbrellas. The wind was now a howling tempest, everything that had not been tied down was scuttling off across the beach. The surf was biting at their feet. The sea was white, as if spread over with white linen. Fearful every moment of being struck down, they finally made their way back to the house. "I've never seen anything like it," said one of the men. "Winds do come up from time to time, but not without warning. It is all very strange and very terrible." The lightning and the thunder seemed to announce the end of the world, and the rain beat its way to the ground... This is poetic symbolism at its finest. The rain acts as to wash away the "sins" that he is being exiled for. Also, the extent to which it rains is noteworthy. It rains to such a degree that it can be seen as supernatural, telling us that Genji is no ordinary person and that he has the favor of the gods. Even though it is not the end of the world as some more rash might have thought, it is the end of Genji's world in exile, and it is not surprising that he declares that he is leaving only a few sentences later.

It is now a good time to introduce the seemingly impertinent idea of fractals into the discussion of the structure. I leave you in the capable hands of Michael Chrichtons' Ian Malcom:

"Fractals are a kind of geometry, associated with a man named Mandelbrot. Unlike ordinary Euclidean geometry that everybody learns in school--squares and cubes and spheres--fractal geometry appears to describe real objects in the natural world. Mountains and clouds are fractal shapes. So fractals are probably related to reality. Somehow... "For example," Malcolm said, "a big mountain, seen from far away, has a certain rugged mountain shape. If you get closer, and examine a small peak of the big mountain, it will have the same mountain shape. In fact, you

can go all the way down the scale to a tiny speck of rock, seen under a microscope--it will have the same basic fractal shape as the big mountain." (Crichton, 1990 p.170-171)

This relates to the structure of *Genji* perfectly. When you look at one chapter, such as the Suma chapter, you find that it is dominated by the passing of the seasons, usually one year. Then, if you pull back scale to a section of the text, you find that these two are dominated by their chapters' emphasis of a certain season that grouped together form a "year". For example, take the Rokujon section (Chapters 22-29). The Jeweled Chaplet (Chapter 22), is a flashback covering eighteen years, but dominated by winter in the Rokujon. Then, in *The First Warbler*, early spring is the chapter's dominance. Onward we have *Butterflies* dealing with spring, *Fireflies* with early summer, *Wild Carnations* with summer, *Flares* with early autumn, and finally *The Royal Outing* returns us to winter. If we step back even further, if we assume that "[Genji] is at once nature incarnate" (Field, 1987 p. 106), then the book begins in the spring of Genji's life, leading to his growth and development, hardships, and inevitably his death. The example would break down here if the story ended with his death. Only when we see the continuation of the tale through his progeny that we see the cyclical idea come up again. Thus we have a new idea as to the age old mystery of why the story does not end with his death. Normally biographies end with the death of the hero, but since Genji has been elevated to Nature incarnate, then he embodies the spirit of Buddhism that was so prevalent at the time--his story begins again like the souls trying to reach Nirvana.

Thus we begin to see that without properly understanding the use of nature in *Genji monogatari*, one can throw out any attempt at realizing the full scope of the novel. Not only does Murasaki use nature, and more specifically the seasons, to richly color her characters and give them realism, but she uses the passing of these seasons as a canvas upon which to paint, a frame upon which to build, bones upon which to hang a body, in a way that had never been done before and has never been equaled since. *Genji Monogatari* is the greatest single work in Japanese literature. It provides us with an informative look into the court life of the Heian Period, as well as give us a wealth of vivid characterizations along the way to developing the lineage of the hero, Genji. The reason for its being qualified as a classic is not the fact that it was the first novel, or its twisting plot line. It is Murasaki's subtle insights into the medieval Japanese way of life and thought that give this novel its immortality. Genji manifests the idea of *mono no aware*, loosely interpreted as a "sensitivity to things" (Varley, 1973, p.48), or more specifically, "the kind of emotional response to the beauties of nature or the more gentle of human relations that was likely to elicit such an expression of spontaneous feeling as 'Ah!'" (Varley, 1973, p.48) The "gentle human relations are those events that give the basis for the escapades of Genji, but it is the more subtle use of nature that gives us the backdrop for the story (and, incidentally, the basis for a paper).

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