

The Tale of Genji, Chapters 1 to 4 – Progress!! Also, the men in Genji are awful – Chapter 2 contains a discussion of women and the perfect woman is basically someone without character (but also alluring) that will let men sleep around as much as they want. Honestly, in my view (with pretty modern sensibilities), the only thing Genji seems to have going for him is his looks.

I've also read another two chapters of The Tale of Genji by Murasaki Shikibu. So now we know that Genji is probably a pedophile (I mean, he spins it as this karmic bond between him and Murasaki, but the girl is ten and even her guardians don't think Genji has the best intentions). That said, Murasaki is brilliant at making her characters come to life, so while I don't like Genji, I'm still going to press on.

One more chapter of The Tale of Genji. There is one funny section about how Genji's best friend thinks that Genji is having an affair with a much older lady (around sixty, so old by their standards), so he decides to have an affair with the same lady to see what it's like and the two end up in a standoff that neither of them wanted to be.

One more chapter of The Tale of Genji – Genji has managed to make all this big mistakes, so if I remember correctly, he's going to be exiled fairly soon. One thing that gets me about The Tale of Genji is how Genji basically gets by on his good looks. For example, his father-in-law tends to be exasperated by Genji's neglect of his wife, but when he looks at Genji or sees him dancing, he can't help but spoil his son-in-law/be so moved by Genji's dance he cries. Genji is spoiled, is what I'm saying.

Aoi:

- I finished another chapter of The Tale of Genji, and what a doozy it was. This is the chapter entitled Aoi and it contains: the climax of Genji's affair with the lady Rokujo, the birth of Genji's son by Aoi and her death, and Genji consummating his relationship with Murasaki.
- The first thing I noticed about this is the exquisite way that Murasaki (the author) writes emotions. While I cannot understand a lot of the ways Heian society works (mostly their treatment of women), Murasaki's depiction of the jealousy of Lady Rokujo and the grief of Lady Aoi's parents at her passing, and Murasaki's disgust at Genji after he first sleeps with her (her having seen him as a guardian figure) resonate because they are essentially the same emotions that exist today. I have to admit, Murasaki's negative reaction to the consummation of her relationship with Genji surprised me because I mainly remember her as the one that Genji managed to groom into the perfect wife.
- And of course, the impossible standards Genji places of women are especially clear in this chapter (which kind of echoes the discussion of women in Chapter 2). Genji basically warms up to his wife when she's so weak from her pregnancy that she's near death because she's finally approachable (personally, I don't blame Aoi from being reserved in the face of Genji's many affairs). He seems unable to understand Rokujo's jealousy and her 'neediness', and it seems like it's practically impossible to continually keep Genji's attention. Too clingy and he recoils, too aloof and he pouts.
- By the way, another thing that surprised me – I remember reading that Lady Rokujo was older than Genji and always had the image of her as someone in her late thirties, but I found out in this chapter that she's only 29 years old (to Genji's 22 years)! Everyone is so young.

Finished two more chapters of The Tale of Genji, to just before he goes into exile. And right now my feelings about Genji are negative, given that the Lady Rokujo is finally taking steps to get over him and he decides to re-pursue her now. He's basically being an ass, though I seem to recognise his behaviour as being fairly modern.

One more chapter of The Tale of Genji – He's finally in exile. It took half the chapter (Genji had to say goodbye to each of his ladies) but he's there and everyone is miserable. It's pretty interesting that it's a voluntary exile, but it's being treated as though he's sent there by the emperor.

The Tale of Genji: I've finished another two chapters here! Genji's been to exile and he's back (and his baby girl might be coming back soon). His exile experience was interesting, especially the part where he and his half-brother sees their dead father (apart from Lady Rokujo haunting Aoi, this is the next most overtly paranormal episode in the book).

The next chapter, his return to capital, had some unpleasant moments though. It might be Genji's high point in his career, but there's something that feels very manipulative about the way he treats Murasaki. He kind of just guilts her into not being 'jealous' (or wavers between finding the jealousy cute and thinking about how he raised her not to be jealous).

Yomogiu:

- Interestingly, this chapter (Yomogiu) shows Genji in a pretty good light. One of his lovers, the Princess Safflower, started off as one of Genji's many lovers. She is poor, un-graceful, and has a red nose. Genji pretty much makes her his lover because he mistook her inability to answer as aloofness and saw it as alluring. Well, since Genji went into exile, the little money that she had was spent and all her servants has deserted her in a crumbling house (so terrible that, as the book puts it, "even the most pitiless, ruthless thieves ignored the place on the assumption that the villa was so desolate and deserted-looking that there couldn't possibly be anything of value to steal"). One night, Genji passes by the palace and remembers her (previously he was just spending time with Murasaki) and seeing her dire straits, takes it upon himself to support her financially. He fixes the house, gets servants for her, and basically builds one house for his lovers in financially bad situations to live in comfort. While the book is clear that Genji isn't attracted to her, it does also say that "in no way did he treat her lightly or with disrespect". It's a nice thing for him to do, especially when he never needed to do such a thing.

Four more chapters of The Tale of Genji!! I'm so proud of myself for doing this! Genji's in his prime right now, but to be honest I'm reading mostly for the women characters in the book. Despite the fact that multiple lovers are very common in Heian Japan, the Akashi lady and Murasaki display jealousy. I think Murasaki's case is especially striking because she was brought up by Genji to be the perfect lady. To me, it indicates that this polyamory might not have been something that women wanted – but something that came about because the men in society wanted it.

I've only finished one more chapter of Genji and we're back to Genji doing things that do not gel with my modern sensibilities. It's basically his disdain for the fact that a woman ages* and the fact that he tries to gaslight Murasaki into not being jealous (sends love notes because a woman says no to him but then says it's nothing serious). Genji possibly being threatened by a ghost (or maybe his guilty conscience?) actually feels like a consequence to his actions. Which it is, actually, because it's the ghost of Fujitsubo** telling him she can't rest in peace because of their affair.

I think that because this re-read is moving at a much slower pace than the first time I read it, I have a lot more time to disapprove of Genji's actions and ask myself: why am I reading this?

*There is a princess that used to be on good terms with his father that he visits. He doesn't have any romantic liaisons with her, but he was dismayed that she had visibly aged.

****Reminder, his stepmother. And also the reason he kidnaps Murasaki as a child – because she resembled Fujitsubo. I'm really not selling anyone on the merits of Genji as a compelling reason to read The Tale of Genji, am I?**

Otome:

- We start to see a shift away from Genji to his family. A large part of this chapter is concerned with Genji's son (un-named in this chapter but later will be identified as Yugiri). Yugiri is in love with his cousin, but To no Chujo, Geni's good friend and brother-in-law, does not approve. Genji is actually a pretty good father when he tries, because he decides not to promote his son too fast but make him work for it. He's even okay with his son bearing a grudge about it because he believes Yugiri studying more would be beneficial for him. We also see some of Genji's ladies moving into his new apartment, and it's starting pretty well.

Tamakazura:

- This chapter shifts to focusing on Tamakazura, the daughter of Yugao. Yugao appeared in chapter four, and was To no Chujo's lover until Genji stole her away and she dies during their tryst. Yugao's daughter has been raised in the countryside of Kyushu and a chance meeting has Genji bringing her back to the capital as his daughter.
- These two chapters seem to mark the start of a shift from Genji to his family members. The last part of the book is actually all about Genji's son and nephews and it makes sense that the book starts to introduce the other characters now. Despite the myriad of supporting characters, we don't actually get to know them in much detail. It's all about how Genji perceives them, which is probably how we don't know anything about To no Chujo's wives and children until they interact with Genji's families.

After March Rereading Challenge:

Kocho - Tokonatsu:

- Genji's in the prime of his life (in terms of power) but also behaving despicably towards Tamakazura. Don't remember the narrator censuring him so strongly before but because he's trying to take on the dual role of father and lover that we see how perverse Genji can be and how much grief it's causing Tamakazura (also: victim blaming in that he blames her personality for attracting him)
- Male relationships don't seem as developed to me - We are told that Genji and To no Chujo's relationship has become strained but because we've only been seeing his romantic relationships, don't really feel this. Had to be told to us instead.
- Tokonatsu: look how snobbish they are wrt to the girl from Omi (and subtly making fun of her even if she does have her own charms)

Nowaki:

- Genji's son gets a look at Murasaki and it seems like history might repeat itself?

Miyuki, Fujibakama, Makibashira

- to no chujo finds out about Tamakazura
- Feeling the theme of outsiders from the lady from Omi and Safflower. Don't think I thought about them much but they are a bit pitiful in this reading, and the court is really quite snobbish
- Transition to Makibashira is a bit of a jump, that the Major General has slept with Tamakazura when she was going into the palace?

- Genji is good at rewriting history e.g. the way he convinces himself he never listed after Tamakazura
- Makishibara: a very sensitively drawn portrait of the effects of an unwanted affair/second marriage to the wife. Interesting her emotions are attributed to possession by a spirit. Lack of consent with Tamakazura shows the limited power of women

Umegae - Fuji no Uraba

- “These older brocades and damasks are more pleasing and better made” , also “everything is corrupted in the latter days of Buddha’s law [...] and the arts today are superficial and inferior to works of the past in every respect save one ... the writing of Kana is much better nowadays” - tendency to see the past as better
- Incense competition
- Crown Prince & Akashi Princess’s coming of age, preparation for Akashi Princess to be sent to the palace
- Genji continues to insist he behaved well and was unjustly called a take
- Genji’s son finally married Kumoinokari after To no Chujo relents
- Genji turns 40 in Fuji no Uraba

Wakana Part 1 and 2

- Suzaku about Genji “the only word that does justice to him is ‘radiant’.” -> origin of name Hikaru Genji
- Both Emperor Suzaku and his son think a 13/14 year old girl (Third Princess) is suitable as a wife for Genji (39, turning 40 in this chapter after his marriage to the princess)???
- Genji: “oh no, Murasaki is gonna be jealous”. Also Genji when Murasaki doesn’t show jealousy: “you don’t love me anymore??”
- Kashiwagi sees the Third Princess and falls in love/lust
- Third Princess visits father. Still immature but can perform the 7 string koto
- Kashiwagi rapes the Third Princess, feels sad when she doesn’t fall in love with him. Third Princess becomes pregnant
- Murasaki falls ill (aged 37, unlucky year), Genji is visited by a spirit (Rokujo lady) because he talked badly about her to Murasaki.
- Kashiwagi falls ill

Kashiwagi - Yokobue

- Making the Third Princess do the emotional labour of helping Kashiwagi not die with regret
- Third Princess gives birth to a son (Kaoru), Genji considers it his just desserts.
- Third Princess wants to be a nun. Her father is quite a doting father and comes to see her secretly.
- Rokujo is possessing the Third Princess.
- Kashiwagi dies
- Interestingly, Genji misses Kashiwagi, even though he betrayed him. Good example of the pain and love mingled when a friendship is betrayed.
- Kashiwagi appears to Yugiri (Genji’s son with Aoi)

Suzumushi - Yugiri

- (Suzumushi) Third Princess becomes a nun, Genji assists

- (Yugiri) Genji's son has decided to court the second princess but Kumoinokari's suspicions stop him.
- Every time a woman turns down a man, they end up guilt-tripping her "I had expected that, at the very least, you would come to recognise how I feel about you, but instead it seemed you were pretending not to notice and remaining aloof ... and so with no other way to let you know, what else was I supposed to do? Even if you find me callous and hateful, all I want is for you to listen and understand my sorrows, which would wither and vanish if I continued to keep them inside my heart. You have been unspeakably cruel, but because I humbly respect you, I have not forced myself on you."
- So Kumoinokari is upset because she's used to monogamy (and thinks it's unfair that Yugiri should expect that she behaves like Genji's many lovers).
- Yugiri barges into the second princess's room
- Kumoinokari is upset and moves home. Yugiri is upset because of that. Turns out he's also been having an affair with Koremitsu's daughter even before he married Kumoinokari.

Minori - Maboroshi

- Timeskip - we find out that Murasaki never fully recovers and just fades away as years pass. She wants to be a nun but Genji refuses.
- Murasaki dies, everyone is sad
- (Maboroshi) Genji starts sleeping by himself, finally realises that his actions have hurt Murasaki.
- Basically Murasaki's death has elevated her into a saint in Genji's eyes.

This ends Genji's story - the translator makes the argument that there is no lost chapter called Kumogakure, but that the story was meant to end there. And that Kumogakure was later fanfiction.

Niou Miya

- Niou (Genji's grandson) and Kaoru (Genji's illegitimate son) are the next two protagonists but the book makes it very clear that they do not have the same radiant light as Genji
- Yugiri has become Minister of the Right
- Kaoru smells good naturally so Niou gets jealous and becomes a perfume master

Kobai

- Four years later
- This is part of the chapter that transitions from Genji to Niou and Kaoru
- Kobai: married the favourite daughter of Tamakazura's husband but then started an affair with Sochinomiya's wife and made her his second (and principal) wife after he died
- Kobai's wife is amazing because this took this all in her stride and of course she "came off looking admirable"
- Kobai decides to marry his daughter off to Niou however Niou pursues his stepdaughter instead but she's smart and "had no wish to marry and assume the conventional role of wife simply for the sake of appearances."

Takekawa

- Another story not directly related to Niou and Kaoru. Very "gossipy" opening, with the narrator telling the reader that she heard this from "certain attendants".
- "As a rule, personal connections among the rich and powerful are seldom close."
- "Of course, now that I'm in my forty-third year, I am much older than I was when I pursued you... indeed, you will probably consider me too old to be a desirable match for your daughter and dismiss my request. But at least you could think of me as a reliable father for there. That's why I ask you to give her to me."
- Kobai is Tamakazura's half-brother

- Tamakazura marries her older daughter off to Reizei, making the Lesser Captain (who has seen her once) fall into despair. He makes himself seem so pitiful that the daughter send him a message (the “one word” that he says he wants) and then he starts to complain to her, saying that “the gossips will blame no one but you.”

Hashihime

- Tale of two baby girls born to an old couple, and the wife dying in childbirth.
- “This younger girl was truly beautiful - so much so that it made people uneasy, since her looks might be ill-omened” - check with the beauty book about whether this was normal?
- Economics dictate that servants leave when you are too poor.
- Kaoru develops an interest in this hermit and makes him a sort of mentor, and in turn his attention brings more visitors to the old prince.
- One day, Kaoru visits the old prince while he is away, is enchanted when he spies on the daughters. Also meets a servant who is related/knows Kashiwagi and finds out the truth about his parentage.

Shiigamoto

- Niou goes on a trip (and also to stop by Uji).
- “Niou, of course, was a different matter - his desire to have the Uji sisters was extremely intense, suggesting that he shared a karmic bond with them from a previous life.”
- Old prince prepares to die/dies
- Niou cannot understand that people who are grieving might not want to answer his letters and gets upset.
- Kaoru seems to fall in love with the older princess, but at the end of the chapter the younger princess looks at Kaoru and she is “ravishing”

Agemaki

- It's been a year since the priest died
- As the princesses are preparing for the memorial services to mark their father's death, Kaoru comes in and flirts with the older princess
- Kaoru decides to get their old attendant, Bennokimi's help by... complaining about how the older princess is too proper and suggesting she might be someone else's mistress (sigh)
- “The haughty, contemptuous attitude that she displayed as she disdainfully chided him made her even more alluring”
- With the help of Bennokimi, Kaoru makes his way into the princess's bedchamber and because the older sister flees, sleeps with the younger sister. Turns out he likes both of them now that he's seen them.
- But then Kaoru helps Niou to sleep with the younger princess and he visits two nights in a row. They prepare for the third night, which would signal the nuptials.
- Niou finishes the marriage rites but then he has to go back to the capital and can't see the princess.
- During the sakura season - “the most interesting passages of the poems in Chinese were recited, and there were many poems in Japanese written for the season as well.”
- Because Niou has a sakura party at Uji but doesn't go and see his bride, the princesses are convinced that he is fickle. The older sister is so despondent that she let this happened that she stops eating and die -> Kaoru wants to become a monk but cannot take the final step.
- Niou finally visits again but the younger princess refuses to meet him.

Sawarabi

- “Sunshine shines on all alike, even through the densest thickets”
- Younger sister loses weight due to grief and “her slender figure and pale features made her seem all the more elegant and noble, so that she was now the very image of her late sister.”

- Niou, for some reason, is okay if Kaoru wants the younger princess
- Genji's son (Yugiri?) wanted to give his daughter Roku no Kimi to Niou but Niou has moved the younger sister to the capital. The younger sister is distraught at having to leave her home

Yadoriki

- There is a Fujitsubo princess, who is the daughter of the Fujitsubo Consort (one of the wives of the Emperor who married the Akashi princess)
- Just before her coming of age ceremony at 14 years old, "a malevolent spirit possessed the Fujitsubo Consort, who fell ill and passed away"
- Because of this, the emperor is worried about the Fujitsubo princess and wants to marry her to Kaoru. Genji's son also wanted to marry Roku no Kimi to Kaoru so he's a bit put out about it.
- Arrangements are made for Niou to marry Roku no Kimi and the Uji princess feels really sad and abandoned.
- Niou marries Roku no Kimi, starts to fall in love with her too
- Uji princess is pregnant, Kaoru tries to start an affair but she rejects him, she gives birth to a son
- Kaoru learns about the Uji princess's half sister, marries the Fujitsubo Princess
- Kaoru meets Ukifune, the Uji princess's half sister

Azumaya

- Kaoru is a bit worried about the low status of Ukifune so he doesn't send her any notes
- The vice governor, who spent a long time in the provinces, is shown to be a person with no taste, rich but easily fooled into buying worthless things for his other daughters (while his wife hides the good things for Ukifune)
- A go-between changes the husband for Ukifune to one of her step-father's favoured daughters (stepfather very crassly talks about money)
- Chujo no Kimi, Ukifune's mother, begs the Uji princess to take her half-sister in
- Niou tries to sleep with Ukifune when he sees her so Ukifune moves her sister to Uji
- Kaoru visits Ukifune and takes her away to Uji because he wants to use her to replace his dead love.

Ukifune

- Niou's inability to have slept with Ukifune/learn her name "filled his temperamental heart with regret and frustration" and he says this to the Uji princess: "It's absurd of you to get so worked up over a trivial matter like this. I never expected you'd be jealous. It's unpleasant" and "his bitter complaint was humiliating to the Uji princess."
- Kaoru is preparing a place for Ukifune but in the meantime, he doesn't go to her
- Niou discovers Ukifune and takes her as his lover and she falls in love with both of them

Kagero - Ume no Ukihashi (end)

- Ukifune is missing, presumed to have committed suicide as she contemplated in the previous chapter
- Both Kaoru and Niou grieve
- Tenarai: a monk/priest finds Ukifune
- "She really is quite beautiful, isn't she! No doubt she was born with such features as a reward for good deeds performed in a previous life."
- Ukifune confirms she threw herself in the river due to emotional turmoil, she just wants to hide and rejects romantic advances
- Kaoru hears about a lady that might be Ukifune but doesn't know if he should call on her
- Yume no Ukihashi: Kaoru finds out that it is Ukifune and goes to see her, but she refuses to meet him (and gets censured for it)

- Kaoru wonders if someone is hiding her from him and the book ends