

Anxiety of Erotic Longing and Murasaki Shikibu's Aesthetic Vision

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This article takes the thesis of a recent Western scholarly work regarding a Western philosophical reaction to the pain of losing something one loves as an opportunity to examine similar themes in the writings of Murasaki Shikibu. Henry Staten assumes that his claims can be universally applied. The question is whether Murasaki Shikibu is as troubled by the pain of loss as Staten is, and, if so, whether she responds with similar creative strategies to alleviate pain. The article outlines Staten's argument that criticizes erotic love being transformed into the higher desire of love for philosophy and so where mortal beings as beloved objects are replaced by eternal objects such as Truth and Beauty. I then explore some of Murasaki's notions of beauty and its loss and note how they are founded in ideas traditional to Japan. I conclude that these ideas may provide a less anxious view of beauty's loss at the outset, but that there may indeed be similar reactions in Murasaki Shikibu's writing, particularly *The Tale of Genji*. But while Western philosophy tried to replace the love for transient objects with a love for eternal objects, Murasaki creates a universe where beloved transient objects may disappear but return in a similar form, as when Hikaru Genji loves Murasaki no Ue for resembling Fujitsubo no Chugu who herself resembled his mother. Further, Murasaki eroticizes and beautifies the process of loss and death itself.

Key words: HENRY STATEN, MURASAKI SHIKIBU, PLATO, GENJI MONOGATARI, EROS, LONGING, OKASHI, MONO NO AWARE, SYMPOSIUM, TRANSIENCE, SAKURA, UME, MAN'YOSHU, DEATH, ANXIETY, LOSS, SEPARATION

Introductory Comments

In this essay I will examine whether a Western philosophical reaction to the pain of erotic loss, supposed by Henry Staten in his *Eros in Mourning*, is in any way similar to Murasaki Shikibu's treatment of the pain of romantic loss in her writings, especially *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*, portions by 1008, complete before ca. 1021). I will conclude that there is indeed something like a defensive mechanism (in the psychoanalytical sense of the word) in Murasaki Shikibu's writings, one that mediates the anguish of loss in ways similar to those suggested by Staten for the Western philosophical tradition. Thus, considering how creative thought (as philosophy or literature) might serve, as one of its roles, as a defense against anxieties regarding erotic or romantic loss, and looking at possible cultural differences in those defenses, are the implicit topics of this paper and the reasons for testing Staten's thesis in the context of classical Japanese literature.

Two things should be remarked upon. First, when I use the terms "man" or "men" I mean to refer specifically to men, not generically to all humans. Staten's definition of terms (such as erotic desire), arguments and critiques of philosophic positions derive entirely from a tradition of male philosophers (especially Plato) and theorists (especially Freud). The anxiety of erotic loss that Staten critiques may be partially or wholly gender specific. Staten himself does not address this issue. By seeking to compare Staten's views of erotic desire and loss

with those that might be drawn from Murasaki Shikibu's writings, this paper splits itself across two discourses that have gender differences. Whether these are substantial or ineligious is left to the reader to decide, but the fault-line so to speak of the project has at least been noted.

Second, some readers might reasonably conclude that the adjective "erotic" of this essay is superfluous, that longing need not be erotic, and anxiety need not be sexual, either. This isn't the place to argue why Staten would probably insist we cannot eliminate "erotic" from "longing." He makes no explicit argument regarding this, but his reliance on psychoanalytic theory to challenge traditional Western philosophy binds him to the combination, and nothing in his book suggests he is uncomfortable with this. By taking up his thesis, this inquiry, too, is framed primarily within eroticism and anxiety.

Common ground? Staten's grief and Murasaki Shikibu's *mono no aware*

In his book, Staten raises certain issues germane to Heian literature and culture. While Staten works within the context of the history of intellectual thought in the West, his topic is the "hidden and continual grief" at the core of human experience as a consequence of the transitoriness of temporal things.¹ For those who spend time reading Heian period literature, this of course calls to mind Buddhist teachings of transience and Heian laments of passing beauty, both very much a part of the aesthetic world of Murasaki Shikibu's *mono no aware* as found in *The Tale of Genji*. Thus I will consider if the "hidden and continual grief" that Staten argues is the formative psychic pain around which the Western philosophical tradition *defensively* develops resembles mental anguish suggested by the "dark heart (*kurai shinjo*)"² of Murasaki Shikibu's writings, whether these texts, too, offer strategies against grief, and, if so, how these might measure against Staten's descriptions.

Yamamoto Ritatsu argues that Murasaki Shikibu used in *Murasaki Shikibu's Journal* (*Murasaki Shikibu nikki*, dates unknown, covers events 1008-10) her own personal sadness to set off the beauty of her sponsor, Chugu Empress Shoshi (Akirako). For example, she writes:

She must be in some distress but hides her feelings as if nothing were amiss, in a manner that really needs no comment; and yet I do find it extraordinary how she can cause such a change of heart in someone so disenchanted with life as myself, making me quite forget my troubles; if only I had sought solace for my unhappiness by taking service with Her Majesty much earlier.³

Yamamoto believes that Murasaki Shikibu selected this stylistic approach with the specific and competitive intention of surpassing in the literary arena Sei Shonagon's tribute to her own sponsor Kogo Empress Teishi (Sadako) of whose literary salon Shonagon was the leading representative.⁴ Sei Shonagon, as is well known, avoided describing the gloomier side of her patron's salon in *The Pillow Book* (*Makura no soshi*, partially complete by 995?-96?, substantial portions later). Today's topic is not Sei Shonagon but we should remember that Murasaki Shikibu's perhaps gloomier than usual interpretation of *mono no aware* could have been formulated with Shonagon's *The Pillow Book* in mind. We might be able to agree that there is a productive tension between these two positions—the one emphasizing the sad fleetingness of the human bond and the other seeking out what is *okashi* or *omoshiroshi*—both within and among literary works and literary history. Staten observes that, "In the realm

of erotics, there is a gay science and there is a melancholy science.”⁵ This would appear to be the case in classical Japanese literature as well, though the two “sciences” are perhaps more intermixed. Nevertheless, I would suggest that we can locate in Murasaki Shikibu’s writings one important articulation, if not source, for the Japanese aesthetic tradition or “melancholy science” which, through literary expression, beautifies grief, especially the pain of loss. Sei Shonagon’s *okashi*, on the other hand, draws on a strategy that confronts life’s difficulties, including the erotic anxiety that Staten describes, with a certain flip, but hardly naive, sense of vivaciousness. This strategy of coping with pain through laughter has, of course, a rich and varied history both in Japan and the West. One can think of examples as divergent as Italo Calvino’s literary category of “lightness” described in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Basho’s *haikai* aesthetic of *karomi*, Ihara Saikaku’s works, or even the laughter that appears with extreme pain described by Helene Cixous in her 1992 Amnesty International lecture. This tradition is an eminently worthy object of study, if not practice. Staten correctly sets it aside as not the dominant Western philosophic tradition, and it is the very domination of the “melancholy” philosophies that he wishes to challenge. Murasaki Shikibu’s writings do not show the same imbalance in discussing and describing erotic and romantic events. Despite a narrative that is deeply steeped in a *mono no aware* which hardly shies from the melancholy, Murasaki Shikibu’s *The Tale of Genji* has its sense of humor, even regarding romantic loss. Perhaps this is less a cultural difference, though, as it is a difference between the typical projects of philosophy and literature.

Yamamoto probably wouldn’t disagree that Murasaki Shikibu did more than find a technique which sets off the beauty of her patron by contrasting her own gloominess with Shoshi’s glory, or exploit a literary technique which was freshly different from her rival Sei Shonagon. Murasaki Shikibu effectively incorporated in her writings indigenous cultural attitudes that honored the specific and occasional, Buddhist concepts of karma and the suffering of this world, the emerging aesthetic ideal of *yugen* that added significance to visual and literary representations through its particular relationship of the dark to the light. Combining, probably more effectively than anyone else of the time, these important and disparate features of her cultural landscape, Murasaki Shikibu found an engaging way of narrating anxieties concerning erotic loss as beautiful, romantic, sensual and erotic events. While Staten describes a Western philosophical tradition that self-consciously addresses the fear of the loss of one’s beloved, it would be more accurate to say in Murasaki Shikibu’s case that she exploited the promising romantic narrative possibilities between her culture’s views on beauty, transience and erotic longing.

Staten’s argument

Staten argues that the gay science of Ovid and the Provençal troubadours fails in the West, never usurping a dominant Platonic discourse about the proper place of Eros. In Plato’s strategy, man’s sexual desires must be surpassed and or transformed (Plato’s famous black horse of the two-chariot Self where the recalcitrant, lustful black horse is bloodied into submission).⁶ In any event and at all costs they must be redirected towards higher goals. Staten reintroduces, in a new light, the dialogue between Diotima and Socrates in Plato’s *Symposium* where Diotima has Socrates conclude that men want possession of the beautiful

forever:

Diotima: Then may we state categorically that men are lovers of the good?

Socrates: Yes, I said, we may.

Diotima: And shouldn't we add that they long for the good to be their own?

Socrates: We should.

Diotima: And not merely to be their own but to be their own forever?

Socrates: Yes, that must follow.

Diotima: In short, that Eros longs for the good to be his own forever?

Socrates: Yes, I said, that's absolutely true.⁷

Here the assumption is that the best experience available to a man is the eternal possession of what he most desires, and what he desires is the "good." Plato is not naive. He knows that men desire more than just that which is the "good." Staten is locating here Plato's active effort to direct men's desire toward the sublime; to substitute high desires for low desires. This is achieved by eroticizing the search for truth. Diotima continues:

First of all...he will fall in love with the beauty of one individual body....Next he must consider how nearly related the beauty of any one body is to the beauty of any other, when he will see that if he is to devote himself to loveliness of form it will be absurd to deny that the beauty of each and every body is the same....

Next he must grasp that the beauties of the body are as nothing to the beauties of the soul....And from this he will be led to contemplate the beauty of laws and institutions....

And next, his attention should be diverted from institutions to the sciences, so that he may know the beauty of every kind of knowledge....And, turning his eyes toward the open sea of beauty, he will find in such contemplation the seed of the most fruitful discourse and the loftiest thought, and reap a golden harvest of philosophy.⁸

The reason, according to Staten, that Plato and all that follow him do this is because at the moment we engage in erotic longing we also defend ourselves against erotic mourning, for to attach ourselves to a transitory object is to prepare for the pain of the inevitable loss of that object. Love will be painful as long as its object is transitory. Thus, since we wish to love eternally and never lose what we love, we should love what we will never lose, namely, ideals or principles such as Plato's "good" or Christianity's God. It is this Western tradition of transcendentalism and idealism, unrivaled within its own culture, that Staten criticizes and from which he would like to find his freedom.

Staten's argument introduces two areas that we might interestingly test against Japanese traditions. First, he offers Western philosophy as a creative activity meant not to establish truth but to defend against pain. Staten thus also implicitly claims that the search for truth is a result of sadness originating from longing. This approaches somewhat the Buddhist position that wisdom is the path out of this world of suffering. (Though in Heian practice, aristocrats relied more heavily on representations of faith than the accumulation of wisdom for their religious behavior, that an awareness of the world's inevitable suffering was a first step towards salvations was widely, if not universally, accepted.) Second, Staten would like to make more possible within the Western tradition a space for romantic, transitory love of the body as the body, of the material object as a material object. In other words, love should be understood as always occurring in the presence of pain and that until the presence of pain is

acknowledged, love itself is not truly possible. Staten's critique of Western strategies of protecting against the pain of loss strongly suggests that currently we only go through the motions of loving instead of truly loving. Staten's critique suggests that the Western tradition of idealism has ultimately brought us farther from meaningful love, creating bereft relationships that function better at protecting against the pain of loss than they do in bringing us face to face with the issue of what it is to love another who is mortal and free. In this view we are, as Kristeva has suggested, aliens to ourselves in need of love. Staten writes:

Is it really unthinkable, as the idealizing-transcendentalizing tradition insists, to pour out all one's being toward merely mortal objects precisely as mortal, with no thought of any transcendence of any sort beyond that which is mortal love itself, of love for what is mortal precisely *as* mortal and because it is mortal? Would such love as this set off unbearable grief, a despair that would (as Plato argues in the *Republic*) unsettle the very grounds of possibility of rationality and of a community based on rationality?⁹

While both these areas introduced by Staten (philosophy's true agenda of defending against pain, and the search for a better way of loving) have promise as approaches for discussing Murasaki Shikibu's aesthetics, I wish to focus on the latter one. This, then, becomes the question: Is it, in Murasaki Shikibu's literary view, as "unthinkable" to love what is mortal as Staten argues it is in the Western tradition? If it is not "unthinkable" then we might have found for Staten one way forward in his own inquiry, as well as indicate something of the nature of Heian love, at least as Murasaki Shikibu depicts it. If, on the other hand, it is "unthinkable," then we will have perhaps extended to an entirely different location Staten's claim that a culture provides mechanisms for avoiding the anxiety of loss. *Mono no aware* then might be explored as a structure that assuages or negotiates psychic pain. I will approach Staten's question via *The Tale of Genji*, following Staten's suggestion that a tradition can only be critiqued through the texts proper to it,¹⁰ and *Genji* is surely a tradition-producing text. I will conclude that despite the episodic or serial nature of romantic relationships in the book (some would no doubt say shallow or frivolous), Murasaki Shikibu's presentation of love is not the "loving a mortal as a mortal" that Staten seeks. Instead, her literature forms around similar anxieties as those described by Staten and develops its own defenses, but differently. From one point of view we could call this a type of "transcendentalism" with a similar intent as Western idealism to recover the illusion of eternal presence of the desirable object and/or accept the pain of its loss. Whereas Staten's thesis is that Plato eroticized the search for truth, making philosophy a type of erotic mourning, my thesis is that Murasaki Shikibu posits love as forever returning through transformations and variations. In *The Tale of Genji* the romantic bond is even capable, in a sense, of transcending death. Murasaki Shikibu further mediates against the pain of loss by eroticizing the very event of loss, making mourning itself a highly developed amorous practice.

The image of *sakura*

The Tale of Genji is a rich source of ideas about the nature of longing and romantic loss. To focus the discussion specifically on an aspect of her treatment of the transient nature of the beautiful and the "grief" which results due to that, I will fashion the inquiry around the

image of the *sakura*, both cherry tree and its blossom. Ancient attitudes towards beauty as briefly-lived, romance as similarly flowering and fading and nature as a cyclical process which incorporates return are as much a part of Murasaki's narratives as are Buddhist influences regarding the suffering nature of the world of desire and karmic retribution. Both the brevity and return of beauty were already associated with the image of the *sakura* by Murasaki's time. Her association of Murasaki no Ue with *sakura* which occurs several times throughout the narrative makes a potent link between the special or model beauty of the *sakura* and model feminine beauty, associations that affect how both characters within the narrative and readers are to react to or understand beauty and its loss.

Sakura attracted the interest of Japanese at least several hundreds of years before Murasaki Shikibu's time. Ooka Makoto observes correctly that while the imported Chinese plum tree (*ume* or *mume*) and plum tree poems held an attraction for *Man'yōshū* poets—wherein almost 120 plum poems are collected while *sakura* poems total less than 40—it is nevertheless *sakura* that held a more loved and respected place in early Japanese culture.¹¹ By the time of *The Chronicles of Japan (Nihon shoki, ca. 720)* there were already examples of festivals using cherry blossoms. Folk traditions such as the belief that spring water where *sakura* grew was especially pure, are also evident. Some believed an autumn harvest could be predicted by the way *sakura* blossoms fell.¹²

By the time of the first imperial collection of Japanese poetry, the *Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems (Kokin waka shū, commissioned in 905 or 906)*, poetic images of flowers are primarily *sakura*. By the third imperial collection, *Gleanings from Japanese Poetry Anthologies (Shūi waka shū, ca. 1005)*, in other words, about the time that Murasaki's *The Tale of Genji* was written, the generic term "*hana*" can usually be taken automatically to mean *sakura*.¹³

Inquiring why *sakura* became the dominant flower image in the *Kokin* period despite the considerable interest evident in *Man'yō* poems towards the plum helps to understand Murasaki's effective use of its imagery. One reason is because *sakura* were of Japanese soil. Konishi Jin'ichi's admittedly nationalistic point of view argued in his *Bungeishi* is nevertheless correct, namely, that ancient Japanese believed the special spirit of their country resided primarily or solely in indigenous things such as *sakura*. *The Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems* was compiled as part of a political climate which was emphasizing indigenous expression as distinct from Chinese traditions: the emphasis on Yamato language diction in poetry, the rise of vernacular prose, both intimately related to the rapid spread of indigenously developed scripts to write the vernacular. A quick reading of *Man'yō* poems shows clearly that scenes of *sakura* are set primarily in the mountains while *ume* images are located in the garden. Thus the spirituality of the land itself, especially the power of the mountains, was already more associated with the wild cherry tree rather than the planted plum. As interest increased in exploring Yamato culture in a variety of ways, *sakura* were a better carrier of these values than were plum trees. Nakanishi Susumu argues in *Hana no katachi* and elsewhere from a position different from Konishi's but with similar result, namely, that the indigenous *sakura*, tree and blossom, had, long before Murasaki's Heian period, become a focal point for an archaic spiritual sensibility among Japanese. Nakanishi argues that the image or concept of the cherry blossom was already functioning as a repository for a way of thinking where the beautiful appears only in particular settings and briefly, where what is

beautiful is specific and fleeting, not eternal. As part of the natural world, however, the *sakura* also represents the power of nature to effect its own return. The intense flowering, fading and return of the *sakura* provides a representation (or stimulation) for cultural beliefs that link beauty with both death and rebirth. Such old, fundamental cultural positions could be neither easily usurped by the imported *ume* nor transferred onto it. Encountering or experiencing beauty, Nakanishi argues, was, for ancient Japanese, tied to an empirical situation, usually one with reference to, or in the context of, a natural situation. Further, the beautiful, as something within the context of the natural world, participates in the unending changes of that world; renewal is considered appropriate, sad but not an occasion for the profound grief of Staten's erotic mourning. Anything beautiful has in it the seed of its passing just as do all natural phenomena. By extension, romantic love (in terms of something which arises in response to beauty), also, is seen not as eternal but as something that naturally flowers and fades.

Consider the following story from the *Chronicles of Japan* which treats brevity as natural to beauty and love, and further indicates how an action undertaken (a night's love) brings the affair to an end, or at least places constraints on it:

It was in the Second Month, Spring, of the Eighth Year of the Imperial Reign that the Emperor [Ingyo] set out for Fujiwara. He gazed secretly upon Sotohoshi no Iratsume. That evening, she was alone, secretly longing for her emperor. She knew nothing of his being nearby, and composed:

<i>waga seko ga</i>	I feel this night
<i>kubeki yohi nari</i>	My lover might visit;
<i>sasagane no</i>	The spider's work
<i>kumo no okonahi</i>	In the <i>sasa</i> grass
<i>koyohi shirushi mo</i>	Is the night's foretoken.

He listened to her recitation, and was moved. He answered:

<i>sasaragata</i>	Untying
<i>nishiki no himo wo</i>	This brocade sash
<i>kakisakete</i>	Delicately woven,
<i>amata ha nezu ni</i>	Few are the times I have slept someplace
<i>tada hito yo nomi</i>	For one night only.

The next morning, the Emperor was gazing upon the cherry trees in bloom beside the well, and composed:

<i>hanaghashi</i>	Ah, I do love so
<i>sakura no mede</i>	This profusion of cherry blossoms!
<i>koto medeba</i>	If they are to be loved no differently,
<i>hayaku ha medezu</i>	Why did I not love sooner
<i>waga mezuru kora</i>	All these lovely ladies? ¹⁴

When the empress heard of the emperor's poem, she was "again greatly jealous." Sotohoshi no Iratsume asked that she be moved far away in order to ease the empress's jealousy. The Emperor did so, visiting her when he could on hunting expeditions.

A similar concept reappears without much transformation much later in this *Man'yoshu* poem where the act of loving is linked to the end of a romantic situation (MYS Spring Miscellaneous Poems X:1855):

<i>sakurabana</i>	The cherry blossoms
<i>toki ha suginedo</i>	Have yet to reach their peak,
<i>miru hito no</i>	Yet no doubt it is now
<i>kohi no sakari to</i>	When our love for them reaches its fullest
<i>ima shi chiru ramu</i>	That they fall. ¹⁵

The logic of this poem and the word play of *sakura* / *sakari* are its central interest. The logic is as follows: Though it is not time for the cherry blossoms to scatter, no doubt they will scatter for it is just now that people (or I, the author) love them the most. The falling of the blossoms marks a peak experience of supreme beauty. More accurately it associates the subjective experience of beauty with the ending of beauty—to love that which is beautiful is to have that which is beautiful disappear before one's eyes, with the implicit cause being one's own love.¹⁶ One's desire as interfering with rather than supporting the phenomenon of beauty, or the proper course of the natural world, is, I would suggest, an undercurrent in early Japanese aesthetics and attitudes towards romance. This attitude is no doubt supported in part by Buddhist beliefs of the place of the desiring human subject in the natural world. But it is also supported by Chinese traditional beliefs in the orderliness of the universe and the human subject's duty to harmonize with that order by regulating his heart and body.

One can find a similar concept in this Man'yo poem about plum blossoms (MYS Spring Miscellaneous Poems X:1833):

<i>ume no hana</i>	Wishing to share it
<i>furi ohofu yuki wo</i>	With you, my woman,
<i>tsutsumi mochi</i>	I try gathering the snow
<i>kimi no misemu to</i>	Piled atop the plum blossoms;
<i>toreba kenitsutsu</i>	It melts wherever I touch it. ¹⁷

Here the beauty is specific to the natural context. The poet desires to bring the snow's beauty to his lover but his intervention in the scene only makes the snow melt.

The play on the words *sakura* and *sakari* are part of the above poem's (the one about the falling cherry blossoms) poetic rhetoric. Nakanishi elsewhere argues that the origin of the word *sakura* is the conflation of *saku* "to bloom," *saki* "the end" and *sakari* "to flower, reach a peak." One could say that the Emperor Ingyo's delight in Sotohoshi no Iratsume that following morning is the same as his delight in gazing on the cherry blossom. The romantic occasion is, from his point of view anyway, brief and beautiful, indeed all the more beautiful for its brevity. Sotohoshi no Iratsume is moved away from her emperor precisely because he loved her (and so brought jealousy upon her). The pattern is not dissimilar from 300 years later when Kiritsubo no koi is moved away from court because Emperor Kiritsubo loved her. Murasaki's opening episode of *The Tale of Genji* is squarely grounded on long present concepts of the relationship of beauty and desire.

As a transition to Murasaki Shikibu's writings, I would like to consider one more Man'yo poem (MYS Spring Miscellaneous Poems X:1857):

<i>toshi no ha ni</i>	Every year
<i>ume ha sakedomo</i>	The plum trees bloom;
<i>utsusemi no</i>	Yet for this body
<i>yo no hito ware shi</i>	In this world
<i>haru nakariker</i>	There will be no Spring. ¹⁸

Here the author laments the imminent death of himself or his lover or perhaps simply the impossibility of renewing one's time.¹⁹ Two types of time are presented: the recurring natural cycle that returns each year with equal beauty and our unfortunate, personal time which proceeds in one direction and one time only (towards death). The world of the blooming tree refreshes itself with the seasons while the world of the human body does not. This gap between the natural and human world, already alluded to above, is perhaps even more evident here. Murasaki Shikibu will use to good effect the fertile narrative terrain between the human world wherein lies desire and the natural world wherein lies the object of desire.

Murasaki Shikibu's treatment of death

Murasaki Shikibu's use of what Aileen Gatten calls the "beauty of the moribund"²⁰ addresses, whether intentionally or not, the anxiety articulated in the above poem (*toshi no hani*...). Beauty doesn't die with the falling of cherry blossoms or the passing of people. Rather, it withdraws from view, to return again at another occasion. Murasaki Shikibu includes old, indigenous concepts of nature and Buddhist concepts of the karmic bond (which seemed to interest Murasaki more than karmic retribution) to elaborate a model of love that could continue in some form despite the physical death of the beloved. Death is primarily described in her narrative as an event within the erotic frame of romantic longing. *The Tale of Genji's* model of recurring love over generations via invisible karmic bonds presents the notion of death as a pathway to new or continuing love. Hikaru Genji sleeps with Fujitsubo no Chugu in a way he could not with his own mother (who died and for whom Fujitsubo is the substitute). The death of Hikaru Genji's first wife, Aoi no Ue, opens the road ahead with his passion for the adolescent Murasaki no Ue, and so forth.²¹

Further, in Murasaki Shikibu's strong association of Murasaki no Ue with flowers is presented the idea of natural (spiritual) beauty visiting this human world, beauty as something that exceeds this social world, that arrives from the more fundamental natural world. One occasion when Murasaki no Ue is compared to *sakura* follows:

Murasaki no Ue wore over a rich magenta robe, perhaps it was a type of *ebizome*, a jacket of light reddish brown, and over these the Lady's hair rested, hair far more luxurious than the others', and her form was somewhat larger, just as one would wish to have, and she seemed to fill the evening air with a fragrance—if we were to talk of flowers we should speak of the cherry's blossom—and yet she was superior to any other thing and anyone else.²²

This is from "New Herbs, Part Two" (*Wakana-ge*), when Murasaki no Ue is 37, an age when women frequently died, it was believed. Yet here are remarkable signs of Murasaki no Ue's vitality—her rich, thick hair, her size, and the room around her overflowing (the verb is *michitaru*) with a fragrance that seems to come from her. These resemble the cherry in full bloom where the peak and the end are close to one another. On the one hand, the cherry blossom is the very incarnation of vitality, the appearance in this world of pure other-worldly passion. It appears in this world not faintly but as an excess that consumes itself. Its stay is brief, must be brief, for excess is part of a cycle of the collection and expenditure of energy. Thus it should not be surprising that it is the next evening when Murasaki no Ue will become ill and experience her "pre-death" or "false death" (*gishi* 偽死, a term evidently coined by

Nakanishi). This is a type of death-like illness or event that precedes a narrative event of “true” death. Gatten notes that this structure is seen in *The Tale of Utsuho* (*Utsuho monogatari*, 970-999?) as well.²³ Nakanishi points out a similar structure in *Night Without Slumber* (*Yoru no nezame*, 1045-68?).²⁴ Nakanishi argues that such a death is more a form of renewal, a rearrangement of one’s life situation as it were, than an ending. Nakanishi reminds us that it is believed that in ancient Japan death was viewed as another form of life.²⁵

Murasaki no Ue is associated with *sakura* at another, important occasion. In the chapter “The Typhoon” (*Nowaki*), Yugiri, Genji’s son by his first wife Aoi no Ue, peeks through a fence and sees his step-mother for the first time. Murasaki no Ue is 28; Yugiri is 15:

He felt that he was seeing through a spring mist mountain cherry blossoms in a fascinating confusion of bloom. The delightful fragrance of this woman whose beauty was so rare as that it could only happen once in this world seemed to float across to his own rapt face, making that, too, beautiful. The curtain wafted in the breeze; her ladies pressed it back to place and for some reason she laughed. It was a remarkable scene. The blossoms were beautiful to the point of pain, he could not give up his gazing and go back inside. The women accompanying her, too, were elegant but he could not take his eyes from her.²⁶

This passage, too, is full of the signs of natural vitality. It is a moist spring scene—romantic, sensual and full of budding life. The women are likened to a profusion or confusion (the verb is *sakimidaretaru*) of cherry blossoms. The fragrance is a messenger from Murasaki no Ue to Yugiri delivering to him and onto him (*utsurikuru yau ni*) her disorienting, profuse, and peerless beauty. The narrator and Yugiri gaze at Murasaki no Ue who dominates the scene. Yugiri doesn’t even look at the other women who are also dazzling in their beauty. We could say that the young Yugiri is in love.

The text says, “*Fana domo wo kokorogurushigarite, e misutete iritamahazu,*” literally, “[Yugiri] did not look away and go inside because he was worried so what might become of the blossoms.” “Worried so” is *kokorogurushigarite* in the original. Of course he is worried whether the wind is going to blow all the cherry petals from the trees. But the clearly intended association of women with flowers suggests that the *women’s* beauty troubled him—not that they would be blown by the wind, but their beauty unsettles his heart. This is perhaps not dissimilar to the obverse side of beauty to which Staten alludes, where the attractiveness of beauty holds us to it through the anxiety it causes at its possible disappearance, and which is felt as an ill-defined demand made on us to which we cannot adequately respond. This is not a far-fetched interpretation of Murasaki Shikibu’s view of beauty. On the contrary, it is typical of her world of an aesthetics of desire, an aesthetic, I would argue, that is founded on, then formulated in sophisticated narrative forms, commonly held anxieties that what is beautiful might be spirited away²⁷ or endure but briefly. Murasaki Shikibu expands on the narrative fascination that such worries induce.

The passage pursues the mood of anxiety regarding beauty with an unexpected turn:

That Hikaru Genji acted to keep his son from her [Murasaki no Ue] was due to his deep understanding that she was so beautiful that anyone who saw her could not but love her. When Yugiri realized his father had gone so far as to think about him like that, Yugiri became vaguely unnerved, and went inside the mansion. Just then Genji emerged from the Western [Akashi no Hime] quarters.²⁸

What frightens Yugiri? He is frightened that Genji has imagined so well his own desire, that his father has seen the direction of his own desiring heart even before he himself was aware of it. Or, perhaps it is that through suddenly understanding his father's precautionary worries, Yugiri contacts truly for the first time the frightening pain of Murasaki no Ue's beauty. In either event, beauty is a cause for anxiety in one or both of them, and the issue is the possible loss of one's beloved and/or the concern that human desire spoils beauty.

I would like to consider one more passage in *The Tale of Genji* when Genji and Yugiri gaze together upon Murasaki no Ue, who is now dead. It is 15 years since Yugiri saw Murasaki no Ue amongst the cherry blossoms. Yugiri is now 30, Murasaki no Ue is 43. The chapter is "The Rites" (*Minori*):

"While you can see that nothing whatsoever has changed in her appearance, the signs of her death are clearly there," spoke Genji as he pressed the sleeves of his robe to his face, and Yugiri, too, and as he struggled to see through the tears that darkened his vision, no doubt a bottomless grief without compare was as a storm in his heart. The Lady's hair had been left untouched during her illness, and not a strand was amiss; there was no limit to its bewitching luster. In the resplendence of the room's lamps her face seemed to shine with its own white brilliance, and even more than when the breath of life was in her and she had tended to her appearance, the Lady laid out here, beyond words and soulless, was endlessly captivating. The two could not bring themselves to speak of it. As they gazed at this woman beautiful beyond all others, their hearts could not be controlled, and they hoped that the ghost rising up from the corpse might somehow take this corporal loveliness with it, keeping it as is.²⁹

Here are still the signs of Murasaki no Ue's vitality—her lustrous hair and the shining unsurpassed beauty of her face. Murasaki no Ue has died on the night of the Fourteenth, Eight Month—the night before the most beautiful of the full moons. The reader might recall that it was the night of the Fifteenth, Eighth Month, that the Kaguyahime of *Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* (*Taketori monogatari*, after 810 or 866, before 910) ascends to her lunar homeland. As with Kaguyahime—also renown for her beauty—Murasaki no Ue seems not to die, but rather to be transformed.

Except that there *is* a substantial difference. Murasaki Shikibu clearly states that the signs of death can be seen on the body. The text, on this point, is quite specific, and this can rightly be considered one of the hallmarks of Murasaki's writings. The text says, "the signs of her death are clearly there [*kagiri no sama ha shirukarikeru koso*]." This is not the first time Murasaki Shikibu has written of the death signs in a corpse. In "Heartvine" (*Aoi*), Aoi no Ue's corpse is also described in an early state of decomposition:

Thinking that on a number of occasions, spirits had possessed his daughter, he ordered that for two to three days the direction of the bed be left unchanged [to place the head north and face it to the west, in imitation of Buddha's death, would acknowledge his daughter's death]; however, with time there were changes that appeared in the body [*yau yau kawari tamafu koto domo*], and when these signs grew to the point of causing those who gazed on Aoi's figure to recognize her passing, there was not a single person who was not overcome with sadness.³⁰

Recurring time and final time are kept close to one another, continually capturing our interest. *This* instance of specific beauty passes, but the love for it continues and will find in

time a new specific situation in which to flower again.

The question that Staten might ask were he to read *The Tale of Genji* is: Is the pain that Yugiri feels on seeing Murasaki no Ue's living face the same or different from seeing her beautiful face after death? Common sense would suggest that the answer is no. Yugiri's pain is because he wants, but cannot have, his beautiful mother, as Genji could not have his Fujitsubo (though for a brief time he did). But, Staten would say, at a more fundamental level beauty causes the arising of pain because of a pre-knowledge that it is always beyond our reach. Or, to borrow Kristeva's interpretation of the same anxiety, beauty recalls the original loss of the one most important to us. For Kristeva, that is a *necessary* loss for we gain our self, our being, by casting out our "mother." If we were to achieve a reunion with her, we would lose our essential discreteness, our individuality would cease to exist. Thus the original lost one in us is, for Kristeva, the brilliance that would burn should we approach too closely. For Kristeva, we see our own painful birth in the beauty of Murasaki no Ue's face. This notion of loss as leading to life is at the deepest levels of psychoanalytic theory and is the ultimate affirmation which Staten seeks: we should allow loss to permit love, it is our constant defending against loss that leaves us ever anxious. Perhaps in Murasaki Shikibu's appreciation of the brevity of beauty and its return we see something of this affirmation. On the other hand, perhaps we might be glimpsing yet another way of managing psychic anxiety by promising the return of the beloved, or beautifying the very loss itself. In other words, while Plato wishes to stabilize the object of desire by idealizing it, Murasaki Shikibu similarly seeks its eternal return despite the more usual interpretation that Heian aesthetics and most especially Murasaki Shikibu's *mono no aware* are highly tuned appreciations of the moving quality of beauty's transience.

NOTES

- 1 Staten (1995): 2.
- 2 Yamamoto (1992): 18.
- 3 Bowring (1982): 43; S-NKBZ 26 (1994): 123.
- 4 Yamamoto (1992): 18.
- 5 Staten (1995): 96.
- 6 Phaedrus 254d-e.
- 7 Symposium 206a, quoted in Staten (1995): 1-2.
- 8 Symposium 210a-d, quoted in Staten (1995): 3.
- 9 Staten (1995): xii.
- 10 Staten (1995): xiii.
- 11 Ooka (1995): 15.
- 12 Inaoka (1994): 130.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 NKBZ 1 (1973): 436-38.
- 15 NKBZ 4 (1973): 54.
- 16 One might argue that this poem instead turns on the notion of irony: how beauty is lost just at the moment when it is most appreciated. This strikes me, however, as too modern a reading of Man'yo period poetry.
- 17 NKBZ 4 (1973): 50.
- 18 NKBZ 4 (1973): 55.
- 19 The original character in the Man'yo poem is *kimi* not *ware*. The NKBZ editors have followed prior scholars' arguments and replaced *kimi*. Nakanishi keeps *kimi* and imagines a sick or dying lover. Nakanishi (1980): 313.

- 20 Gatten (1993): 7 and 17.
 21 Nakanishi (1989): 31-70.
 22 NKBZ 15 (1974): 184.
 23 Gatten (1993): 18-19. In *Utsuho monogatari*, see the chapter "Atemiya".
 24 Nakanishi (1989): 40.
 25 Nakanishi (1989): 37-40.
 26 NKBZ 14 (1972): 257.
 27 NKBZ 12 (1970): 113, n. 80.
 28 NKBZ 14 (1972): 257-58.
 29 NKBZ 15 (1974): 495-96.
 30 NKBZ 13 (1972): 40.

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Henry Staten の〈anxiety of erotic longing〉

—紫式部の美意識をめぐって—

ジョン R ウォーレス

要旨：本稿は西洋哲学論理の中にある「愛する者を失した悲しみに対する慰め」の考え方を用いて、紫式部の作品を分析する。

個の論理は 1995 年に STATEN によって明らかにされた。STATEN はこの論理を普遍的な考え方として提示しているが、果たして、それが紫式部の描いた「嘆き」と同一のものか否か、もし同一なものだとしたら、その「嘆き」に対する反応はどうか。STATEN の論理によると、「嘆き」の原因は、愛するものがいつか無くなることであり、その「嘆き」を昇華〈sublimate〉するため、愛が受けられる永遠なものに変換する—たとえば、「真理」であり、または絶対的な「美」だ。

しかし、紫式部の作品、特に『源氏物語』の場合、STATEN が指摘する「嘆き」に対する反応は読み取れるが、むしろ有限なるものを永遠なるものに変換させようとするより、有限なるものは無くなった後、いつか形を変えてまた戻ってくるというような考え方だ。

たとえば、光源氏が若紫を愛したが、その若紫は、ある意味では、藤壺中宮の生まれ変わった姿であり、そして藤壺中宮も光源氏の生みの母の生まれ変わった姿だった。

その上また、紫式部は愛するものの無くなる事実そのものをエロチックに見ている。

以上、STATEN の論理を紹介しつつ、果たしてこの論理がどこまで普遍的と言えるかを、紫式部の美意識と比較しながら、論じている。