

beyond the surface toward alternative trajectories outside the dominant web of identifications of Heian society.

What is most striking is the number of students who choose *The Tale of Genji* as the topic of their tutorial presentation or research paper for the course. The topics, almost invariably comparative, have led me to many European and non-European texts that I might not otherwise have considered as sources of comparative analysis for *Genji*. They have included the letters of Mme de Sévigné, the troubadours, the poetics of the *ci* in China, Mme de Lafayette's *Princesse de Clèves*, and such diverse contemporary writers as Joan Didion and Joan Collins. Harlequins and popular network soaps—most notably *Dynasty* and *Dallas*—also often serve as comparative cultural texts for exploring contexts of production and reception and the construction of pleasure in and around texts aimed at a predominantly female audience.

The primary goal of the introduction of *The Tale of Genji* into a feminist seminar is not simply to recuperate *Genji* as a feminist text but rather to encourage students to consider the possibilities and problems of bringing contemporary Western theoretical models to a classical text of this kind. The hope is that neither *Genji* nor the theoretical texts emerge from the encounter intact and that the students leave the seminar more willing to explore the multiple intersections of textual, sexual, and cultural boundaries.

They Also Serve: Ladies-in-Waiting in *The Tale of Genji*

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There are three main groups of characters in *The Tale of Genji*: highborn male principals, their female counterparts, and the ladies-in-waiting (*nyōbō*) that serve them. The last group has received relatively little critical attention. But an analysis of the function and development of the lady-in-waiting figure can significantly enhance the student's appreciation of the narrative strategies in the tale and of Murasaki Shikibu's growing control over her medium.

The terms *lady-in-waiting* and *serving woman* will here refer to aristocratic women in the service of the male and female principals, as well as to nurses (*menoto*) and to former ladies-in-waiting who have become nuns.¹ Those women are members of the same aristocratic society, albeit of lower degree, as the courtiers they serve, and they are thus far above the common servants who also appear in the work. It is a large group: approximately eighty ladies-in-waiting are expressly named or referred to in the text, and the word *nyōbō*, including its various permutations such as *nyōbōtachi* and *nyōbō-domo*, appears over one hundred times. Other terms that usually refer to ladies-in-waiting, such as *hito* 'person,' *hitobito* 'people,' *saburau hito* 'serving person,' *wakaudo* 'young person,' and *wakaki hito* 'young person' appear many times that often (Akiyama, "Nyōbōtachi" 413). Edward Seidensticker frequently provides such English equivalents as "women" or "attendants"; Arthur Waley prefers "maids," "waiting-maids," "waiting-women," "ladies-in-waiting," or "gentlewomen." The ubiquity of the lady-in-waiting figure is underscored by *The Tale of Genji Scroll* (*Genji monogatari emaki*, 12th c., trans. I. Morris), in which fifteen of the nineteen extant illustrations include one or more ladies-in-waiting among the people portrayed.

The *nyōbō* characters take on added resonance when it is recalled that their creator, Murasaki Shikibu, was one herself. She and other literary women who graced the brilliant salons of Empress Shōshi, Empress Teishi, and Princess Senshi (high priestess of the Kamo Shrine) in and around the year 1000 produced the literature of ladies-in-waiting (*nyōbō bungaku*) that constitutes the greatest efflorescence of Heian letters. Since it is put forth in *The Tale of Genji* itself that one role of the *monogatari* genre is to "plausibly depict moving situations that one feels could indeed occur," it is not surprising that the lady-in-waiting Murasaki Shikibu paid careful attention to her counterparts in the fictional world she created in order to achieve the illusion of "real life" she required in her art (NKBZ 3: 203; S 437; my own translations).

Though the ladies-in-waiting in the tale seldom vie with their masters and mistresses for the primary attention of the audience, the fictional world of the shining prince and the structure of the narrative evoking that world would

unobtrusively support their fictional households "from beneath the veranda," and it is therefore important to explore in the classroom their roles as characters, narrators, and rhetorical devices precisely because they serve with such self-effacing ability. Among the questions the instructor may pose to generate discussion of the manifold historical and rhetorical roles of the ladies are the following:

1. What do the *nyōbō* contribute to the operation of an aristocratic household in the world of *Genji*? to juvenile education?
2. What do their activities suggest about notions of privacy? What are some rhetorical implications of these notions?
3. What constitutes contemporary courting protocol and how do the *nyōbō* contribute to it? How are lovers introduced? How do they correspond? How are trysts effected?
4. What does society conventionally expect of highborn women, and what is the attitude of their ladies-in-waiting toward those expectations? Are ladies-in-waiting and their mistresses always united in their social and sexual goals and attitudes? Do they have the same attitudes toward male suitors?
5. How does the author exploit the social and historical roles of the ladies-in-waiting for rhetorical ends? How do those roles contribute to plot development? to the delineation of the main characters?
6. What do the ladies-in-waiting contribute to the narrative framework of the tale? Who are the narrators? Are they omniscient? If not, why?
7. How do the characterizations and rhetorical functions of the ladies-in-waiting develop in complexity over the course of the tale?

The pages that follow respond to these questions, particularly the last. The discussion suggests that Murasaki Shikibu's use of *nyōbō* both parallels the function of subsidiary characters in the theory and practice of Henry James and contributes to the gradual "novelization" of the work in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense of the term.

Let us begin with the first and most basic question posed here, the delineation in the tale of the ladies' social roles. The most important and obvious of these is, of course, to respond to the immediate requirements and commands of their masters and mistresses. That role involves seeing to their personal needs by, for example, assisting in the bath, washing hair, and sewing and perfuming robes. The *nyōbō* are also responsible for entertaining those they serve and for instructing younger charges. Women chosen for service as *nyōbō* must be gifted at poetry, calligraphy, music, and clever yet genteel conversation and, furthermore, must possess physical beauty, bearing, and a highly developed taste in manners and dress. Obtaining refined *nyōbō* is a special concern of parents, since the women appointed will constitute the

play a primary part in educating and advising them. After the birth of Prince Niou, for example, we are told that "for nurses and others in attendance, the emperor did not make random selections but instead chose only those in his service whom he knew to be of superior family and refinement" (NKBZ 4: 103; S 572).

One form of entertainment worthy of special note is the custom of serving women to read aloud to their mistresses in the manner described in "The Eastern Cottage" chapter: Nakanokimi "had pictures and such brought out, and [she and Ukifune] looked at them while Ukon read the texts" (NKBZ 6: 66; S 958). The rhetorical implications of this fact will be discussed presently.

In addition to their domestic activities, the *nyōbō* function as intermediaries between the outside world and the master or mistress of the house. Sometimes they serve as messengers, as when Myōbu (Yugei no Myōbu) conveys the Kiritsubo emperor's consolations to the mother of his deceased favorite.² More frequently, however, they act as intermediaries between their mistresses and the men who come to call on them. Shimizu Yoshiko points out that the best way for a suitor to approach a young woman is to enlist the services of one of her compliant ladies-in-waiting ("Genji monogatari no jidai to kizoku shakai" 50). The exchanges between the main characters via the *nyōbō* intermediaries, of course, require poems, and we see ladies-in-waiting replying to men on behalf of their coy mistresses throughout *Genji*.

It is only a short step, furthermore, from intermediary to confidante. Ukon (Ukon no kimi), the daughter of the nurse of the lady of the evening faces (hereafter Yūgao) and therefore Yūgao's "foster sister" (*menotogo*), is the only person, besides Genji's retainer Koremitsu, who is party to the secret of her mistress's death and thus one of the only two people to whom Genji can unburden himself of his sorrow.³ She is also the only one from whom he can obtain information on the background of his lost love. Consequently, "he summoned Ukon and talked with her on quiet evenings" (NKBZ 1: 257; S 78).

By serving as confidantes and by living in residences where privacy is nearly nonexistent, the ladies-in-waiting hear a great deal of privileged information, and their gossip fills the tale's pages. Accordingly, they also function as an intelligence network. The women at Niou's residence, for instance, discover the background of a certain lieutenant of the Bodyguards of the Left (Sakon no shōshō) because they have "connections near that gentleman who hear a good deal" (NKBZ 6: 39; S 947). Sometimes family ties among *nyōbō* with different employers contribute to the exchange of information, as when Kashiwagi learns about the Third Princess through his nurse, whose younger sister is the nurse of the princess. In so doing, Kashiwagi opens the way toward his final tragedy.

The *nyōbō* are also frequently consulted for advice. The advisory role is a

and privileged information but also because, as aristocrats themselves, they are well acquainted with the customs and requirements of upper-class Heian life. Thus a figure as important as the Suzaku emperor assembles "nurses and others known for mature judgment" to solicit advice about the future of his daughter, the Third Princess (NKBZ 4: 21; S 541). Such counsel is vital in particular for young mistresses with no strong family backing. Shōnagon (Shōnagon no menoto), the nurse of the young Murasaki, first tries to shield her charge from Genji's advances and then, after recognizing his sincerity, works to acquaint her young mistress with what is expected of her, even though "Murasaki paid no attention, much to Shōnagon's annoyance" (NKBZ 1: 324; S 107). After Murasaki has gone to live with Genji and he exiles himself to Suma, he puts Shōnagon in charge of his finances because he values her as "a responsible person" (NKBZ 2: 168–69; S 226).

The services that the ladies-in-waiting perform for the principals have a variety of rhetorical implications for the narrative. By using *nyōbō* as messengers and confidantes, for example, Murasaki Shikibu makes them a device for dramatic narration and dramatic expression of emotion. Having a subsidiary character hear or recount the thoughts and feelings of a main one allows the author to "show" rather than "tell" details of character and plot, thus heightening the artistic effect of her account and avoiding the monotony of straight, impersonal narration. When, for example, Genji summons Ukon for nostalgic reminiscences about her dead mistress Yūgao, the *nyōbō* becomes a foil through which Genji expresses his thoughts directly to the audience. Through the ensuing conversations between the main and subsidiary character, the reader (or listener) is dramatically introduced to Genji's reaction to the loss of Yūgao. It is not during the affair itself but only after it is over, during those dialogues with Ukon, that we discover Yūgao's identity, the reasons behind the actions of both principals, and Genji's deeper emotions regarding her death. By presenting that information in the form of dialogue, Murasaki Shikibu lessens aesthetic distance and increases dramatic effect.

One useful way to convey this device in the classroom is to compare it with the *ficelle* technique articulated by Henry James. M. Corona Sharp succinctly describes the Jamesian *ficelle* as

any device (literally "string" and by extension, "stage trick") used by James to obviate a difficulty in the method of narration or presentation of a character. The confidante as *ficelle* is primarily a device to obtain greater lucidity. The protagonist and center of consciousness needs another character from whom he can elicit facts and interpretations unknown to himself. Secondly, the *ficelle* is designed to elicit data, impressions, and feelings from the center, for the benefit of the reader.

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Each of these [*ficelles*] is but wheels to the coach; neither belongs to the body of that vehicle, or is for a moment accommodated with a seat inside. There the subject alone is ensconced, in the form of its "hero and heroine," and of the privileged high officials, say, who ride with the king and queen. . . . Maria Gostrey and Miss Stackpole then are cases, each, of the light *ficelle*, not of the true agent; they may run beside the coach "for all they are worth," they may cling to it till they are out of breath (as poor Miss Stackpole all so visibly does), but neither, all the while, so much as gets her foot on the step, neither ceases for a moment to tread the dusty road. (1: xviii–xix)

The *nyōbō ficelles* in *The Tale of Genji* bear some similarity to the black-clad *kurogo* assistants who aid the actors on stage in *Kabuki* and are by convention ignored by the audience. But unlike the *kurogo*, the *nyōbō ficelles* are themselves characters in the narrative, and, more important, their roles are not static but develop in complexity through the course of the work.

According to Sharp, "James preferred women to men in the *ficelle* role," which is exactly what we see in *The Tale of Genji* (xxv). With the exception of Genji's servant Koremitsu and Niou's Tokikata, gentlemen-in-waiting and lower-class male servants are introduced relatively infrequently. The male-female difference is well expressed in the Yūgao ("Evening Faces") chapter, in which "the women would seem to have excitedly discussed among themselves how to answer Genji, but his man, thinking it quite a bore, departed" (NKBZ 1: 215; S 61).

Murasaki Shikibu's manipulation of her subsidiary characters also resembles James's recognition that the challenge of the *ficelle* is to make the figure "important and essential—this without letting it inadvertently push on to stage center" (Miller 14). Ukon, for example, is characterized just enough to give her plausibility without detracting from the centrality of the main character. After her introduction early in the Yūgao chapter, she accompanies her lady and Genji to their trysting spot, experiences the horror of Yūgao's spirit possession and death, and finally is summoned into Genji's service at Nijō. It is only on the last occasion that we are given a single sentence of personal description: "Her robes were of the deepest black, and her features were not the best, but she was for all that not unpleasant to look at" (NKBZ 1: 256; S 78). At this juncture she has already been mentioned more than fifteen times. The parenthesis on her appearance serves merely to underscore the sorrow of the occasion (her robes "of the deepest black") and to show that she is worthy to serve as a surrogate for the dramatic expression of Genji's feelings. Furthermore, since the perspective from which Ukon is described is a blend of the narrator's and Genji's (more on this in a moment), the reader obtains information not only on Ukon but on Genji's manner of

As *ficelles*, ladies-in-waiting comment throughout *Genji* on the main figures in order to give them dramatic characterization:

The ladies-in-waiting would seem to have whispered among themselves: "His Lordship [the late Kashiwagi] was kindhearted and elegant in every respect. No one could rival his nobility and charm. But Yūgiri has such manly vigor, and the glow he gets—why, you can't help but be transported. No one else approaches him."

(NKBZ 4: 329; S 656)

The differing qualities of the ladies-in-waiting themselves can constitute a dramatized comment on the figures they serve. We are invited to think highly of Yūgao, for example, because "her ladies do not seem altogether unworthy of notice" (NKBZ 1: 218; S 62) and to lower our estimation of the governor of Hitachi because "a number of well-favored young women were in service [at his residence]. In dress and appearance they were above the common run, but they were apt to amuse themselves in a most unbecoming manner" (NKBZ 6: 13; S 937).

A lady-in-waiting may act as a *ficelle* not only to provide information about a main character but also to set the mood of a scene. Shinohara Shōji has suggested that such women are vital for the "visualization" *'shikakuka'* of *The Tale of Genji* and that they "vastly increase the depth of its fictional world" (*"Sakuchū jinbutsu"* 58). In a sense, they begin to delimit the historical patterns of reception by presenting examples of contemporary responses to narrative situations. Chūjō (Chūjō no kimi) provides one such example. Encountering Genji in the mansion of the governor of Kii just as Genji is carrying off her mistress, Utsusemi, Chūjō is dumbstruck: "This is unheard of—what can he mean by it?" (NKBZ 1: 176; S 42). Later Chūjō is portrayed as "thoroughly miserable" (NKBZ 1: 179; S 43) because of what has taken place. But she is not further characterized thereafter. The effort to "plausibly depict" events may have dictated Chūjō's presence in order to reflect the ubiquitousness of ladies-in-waiting in court society in the Heian period, but the author capitalizes on that imperative for the rhetorical ends of dramatically demonstrating Genji's sangfroid and of contributing to the reader's visualization of the event.

The fictional depth that ladies-in-waiting help create can also be productively discussed in terms of the multilayered "three-dimensionality" that Bakhtin requires of the "novelistic." As opposed to the "epic," which Bakhtin identifies with a centripetal and unitary voice, the novel delights in a "diversity of individual voices," a *heteroglossia* that mixes levels and sources of language and, in combining them, creates a centrifugal open-endedness rich in variety and irony (*"Discourse"* 262).⁴ The *nyōbō* provide Murasaki Shikibu with a plethora of secondary social voices and degrees of honorific language that she manipulates more and more effectively, indeed "novelistically" in Bakhtin's sense, as the tale progresses.

Together with their contribution to the dramatization and visualization of the narrative, and to its realization of the novelistic, the ladies-in-waiting serve the rhetorical purposes of the author by moving the plot forward, particularly in their role as intermediaries and advisers. One of the dominant characteristics of the serving women in *The Tale of Genji* is their willingness to look with favor on male suitors and to encourage their diffident mistresses to accept them. The admonition that "he will think it heartless and rude of you not to reply" by this or that lady-in-waiting shames many a mistress into replying against her initial disinclinations and moves the narrative forward through the dialectical process.

Murasaki Shikibu chose certain ladies-in-waiting to be the narrators of her story. Tamagami Takuya has provocatively hypothesized the contribution of the *nyōbō* character to the narrative structure of the tale in his "oral performance theory of *monogatari*" (*"monogatari ondokuron"*) (*"Genji monogatari no dokusha"*; *"Onna no tame ni"*). Tamagami's view, which was suggested in part by the depiction of the lady-in-waiting Ukon reading a tale aloud to Nakanokimi and Ukifune in the "Azumaya" (*"The Eastern Cottage"*) chapter, holds that the original mode of *monogatari* reception was oral. Early *monogatari* were, Tamagami believes, written by men, probably in Chinese, then orally realized in Japanese by *nyōbō* skilled in such operations. Such a practice led some *nyōbō*, most notably Murasaki Shikibu, to begin writing tales themselves, in Japanese. The narrative structure of Murasaki Shikibu's story was based on the oral performance paradigm. That structure, posits Tamagami, is multi-layered: the events in the story are witnessed by various ladies-in-waiting, who then years later tell their stories to another lady-in-waiting while adding their own occasional comments. That second woman, the scribe and editor, records those accounts with additional personal commentary. That written account is then read aloud by yet another lady-in-waiting to an audience, with further personal remarks. The ladies-in-waiting, then, provide the point of view from which the tale is told. And to the extent that the scribe-editor and the reciter are themselves an audience for earlier oral or written versions of the tale, they also become in a certain sense implied readers.

Critics of Tamagami's theory show that there are instances of interior monologue in which the *ondokuron* paradigm cannot logically apply.⁵ But in its general principles, the theory remains one of the most productive explanations of the tale's narrative structure. Students, in identifying the various narratorial voices in the tale, can begin to come to terms with the ways in which Murasaki Shikibu's narrative strategy compares with simpler and more familiar models of narration (first-person, third-person omniscient, etc.).

Here, too, the ladies-in-waiting help move *Genji* in the direction of the Bakhtinian "novel." Not only do they add a heteroglossic richness to the mix of social voices and honorific levels in the narrative, but they also speak as

narrators to each other and to the audience, elaborating, criticizing, and heightening the “dialogic imagination” of the fictional world. The device of the tripartite *nyōbō* narrative construct also adheres to Bakhtin’s sense of the novelistic by developing the tale’s sense of “contemporaneity,” the second quality that, in Bakhtin’s theory, differentiates the “novel” from the “epic.” Though *Genji* lies in the narrative past, it is still the past of living memory, shared by women who personally witnessed those events and conveyed to others in the present who hear their story. The oral performance paradigm brings the tale out of an absolutely distanced epic past, where the discourse is handed down by tradition rather than by individuals who had any part in it, and moves it into a present world accessible to personal experience, where the narrative is “of a contemporary about a contemporary addressed to contemporaries” (“Epic” 13–14).

As mentioned, Murasaki Shikibu’s conception of the lady-in-waiting character and its rhetorical potential is not static; she exploits her *nyōbō* with increasing skill through the course of the tale.⁶ One indication is the growth in individuation of the ladies-in-waiting in the story’s later chapters, a development mirrored by the portraits of the mistresses they serve, Ōigimi, Nakanokimi, and Ukifune. While it is difficult to tell much about the personalities of most of the ladies-in-waiting early in the work, some *nyōbō* emerge, subsequently, as individuals. In the Uji chapters, for example, we are told that Ukifune’s nurse is “officious” (NKBZ 6: 148; S 994), “unreserved, spirited, and strong-willed” (NKBZ 6: 56; S 955)—the only woman so characterized. Jijū is “a very pretty young woman” (NKBZ 6: 144; S 992) “of amorous propensities” (NKBZ 6: 145; S 993). Ukon (here Ukifune’s foster sister, not the serving woman of either Nakanokimi or Yūgao) is “a woman of experience” (NKBZ 6: 119; S 981) who says what she thinks, so much so that Niou’s man Tokikata jokes, “Your scolding is so frightening that I would run home even if I hadn’t been told to” (NKBZ 6: 120; S 981).

Increased individuation in turn intensifies the differences of opinion among women commenting on the same affair between the principals. Such conflicts begin to occur in the middle chapters, as when, for example, Yūgiri’s nurse asks Kumoinokari to ignore her father’s wishes and marry the young Yūgiri, while Kumoinokari’s nurse condemns such a union. Oppositions multiply in the Uji chapters, in which Ukifune’s nurse, Jijū, and Ukon all hold different views on the suits of Kaoru and Niou. Clashes among the *nyōbō* can become acrimonious, as when Jijū thinks Bennokimi “quite disgraceful” (NKBZ 6: 87; S 968).

Serving women also come into conflict more often with their mistresses. Shinohara Shōji remarks that it is only when we arrive at the Ōigimi and Ukifune stories that we find cases in which “the ladies-in-waiting begin to act on their own and, because their mistresses recognize what they are doing and resist it, those ladies-in-waiting begin to play major roles in the

development of the narrative” (“Ōigimi no shūhen 32). Ōigimi is the first main character to see clearly that her women are frustrating her will: “She hated it—her meddling, officious women opposed to her in everything” (NKBZ 5: 247; S 836). That feeling of helplessness is one of the prime causes of Ōigimi’s death. Ukifune too is agonized not only by the consequences, for Kaoru, Niou, and Nakanokimi, of the competition for her hand but also by the opposition of her women. It is, after all, Ukon, who, thinking to let in Kaoru, mistakenly admits Niou. And it is Ukon and Jijū whom Ukifune overhears as they disagree over which suitor is the better and then talk about the deadly rivalry between two men for Ukon’s sister in Hitachi: “How utterly devastating, what they are saying,” thought Ukifune” (NKBZ 6: 173; S 1004).

Murasaki Shikibu takes greater care, in the later chapters, to demonstrate that the opposition of the serving women to their mistresses is not simply a gratuitous emplotment device but rather the reflection of authentic social realities. It is another useful pedagogical exercise to discuss in class the reasons why the ladies-in-waiting tend to look with favor on suitors and to what effect. The *nyōbō*, for example, are ambitious for themselves as well as for their mistresses. A good marriage means security and high status for both; good marriages are especially critical, in fact, for the “hidden flowers” who have no strong familiar backing. The women are also disinclined to subvert budding romances between their mistresses and men of quality because of their own admiration for those men. There may be an element of vicarious pleasure or even voyeurism at work. Frequently the ladies-in-waiting act out of consideration for custom and etiquette, powerful motivators in a court society. To be unresponsive was to be rude: “Where are your manners,” asks Bennokimi of Ōigimi. “How disgraceful to leave Lord Kaoru seated outside! Young ladies don’t seem to know at all how to behave” (NKBZ 5: 135; S 787). The world of *Genji* sees courtship as the norm. And, finally, in some cases disparity in rank between a lady-in-waiting and a noble suitor makes it impossible for her to deter him—one recalls Chūjō’s inability to keep Genji from making off with Utsusemi: “Had he been an ordinary person, she would probably have separated them by main force” (NKBZ 1: 176; S 42). Students conversant in the principles of feminist literary criticism are quick to see the relation between such *nyōbō* attitudes and the contemporary patriarchal power structure.

Attention to characterization and motivation is accompanied by more instances, albeit isolated ones, in which the author relates the narrative from the focalization of a specific *nyōbō* character (as opposed to *nyōbō* narrator).⁷ In “The Drake Fly” chapter, for instance, Ukon and Jijū are shocked and saddened by their mistress Ukifune’s disappearance, and they respond for several pages to the queries of her two suitors and begin funeral arrangements. Amanda Mayer Stinchecum has pointed out that the Uji chapters show “multiplicity of perspective” derived particularly from an increase in

internal monologue on the part of Ukifune, Kaoru, and Niou and from a growing remoteness on the part of a narrator ("Narrative Voice," 34, 118). The expanding role of the ladies-in-waiting contributes further to the fragmentation in point of view.

That fragmentation is marked by more frequent use of the *nyōbō* as vehicles for dramatic irony. As *Genji* unfolds, situations develop in which the narrator vouchsafes the readers information denied this or that lady-in-waiting, who blithely continues to do what she thinks best for a character while actually injuring her. Perhaps the most complex use of the *nyōbō* to develop irony occurs in the chapter "A Boat upon the Waters," in which Ukifune's mother, a former serving woman now married to the governor of Hitachi, has a conversation with Bennokimi about Ukifune and Ukifune's half sisters Nakanokimi and the late Ōigimi. Both Ukifune's mother and Bennokimi expect her to become intimate with Kaoru, but the reader knows she has already done so with Niou. Then Bennokimi remarks that Nakanokimi's Ukon has reported, "Tayū's daughter says that Prince Niou is by and large a very fine gentleman, but, his propensities being what they are, the women are always helplessly wondering what he may do next to displease their mistress Nakanokimi" (NKBZ 6: 158; S 998). In fact, he has already become secretly involved with Ukifune. The irony of the scene is compounded by the fact that Ukifune herself overhears the serving woman's words. Ukifune's nurse, too, thinks that her charge is glad at being promised to Kaoru, though Ukifune is actually in despair over the conflicting attentions of Kaoru and Niou: "The ladies who knew were more and more worried, but the nurse happily set about dyeing cloth [for the time when Kaoru would send for Ukifune]" (NKBZ 6: 174; S 1005).

Because of the author's heightened emphasis on the motivations of the ladies-in-waiting, their relationships with their mistresses transcend fairy-story conflicts of good versus evil and become, instead, clashes of ineluctable incompatibilities and failures to communicate, resulting in pathos, or *mono no aware*. Nevertheless, since the romantic encounters in the tale seldom end happily, the ladies-in-waiting must share the onus with the men who initiate them. Because they are disinclined or unable to oppose the wishes of the male suitors, the serving women increasingly assume the role of antagonists to mistresses who would subvert the prevailing sociosexual order. They are culpable on Buddhist grounds as well, for they foster attachments to the phenomenal world and thus hinder religious enlightenment. The *nyōbō* are at all times firmly anchored in secular society and regard the taking of religious vows by a marriageable woman as a tragedy. Even the sister of the bishop of Yokawa, a former lady-in-waiting who has herself become a nun, sees Ukifune's desire to take Buddhist orders as incomprehensible. "How could someone as pretty as you are do such a thing?" she asks (NKBZ 6: 286; S 1051).

In addition, the growing complexity, irony, and conflict in the lady-in-waiting role helps generate "open-endedness," a third quality that for Bakhtin separates the novel from the epic:

The epic past is absolute and complete. It is as closed as a circle; inside it everything is finished, already over. There is no place in the epic world for any openendedness, indecision, indeterminacy. There are no loopholes in it through which we glimpse the future; it suffices unto itself, neither supposing any continuation nor requiring it.

("Epic" 16)

As ladies-in-waiting become more precisely delineated and simultaneously more fractious, the multilayered discourse is rent with gaps, evasions, and questions that demand audience involvement in an almost "writerly" way and thus continue to centrifugally propel the discourse into the future rather than into a closed, "epic" past.

But one must by no means infer from the growth of the *nyōbō* role that such women become full characters in their own right. "Downstairs" (*mutatis mutandis*) never contends for centrality with "upstairs" in *Genji*; neither Bennokimi nor Ukon ever assumes the fictional dimensions of Sarah the under house-parlormaid or Mrs. Bridges the cook in John Hawkesworth's novels. It is, rather, that they become better *ficelles*. Sharp points to an identical development in Henry James:

In developing the role of the confidante, James began with several simple *ficelles*, whose appearance is justified only by their technical use to elicit or give information. He was to expand the role . . . into a character of considerable dramatic importance. (3)

Despite her growing attention to the role of the serving women, Murasaki Shikibu keeps them from intruding on to stage center in several basic ways. We never see them except in the context of their masters' and mistresses' lives and seldom discover details about their private concerns. They appear and disappear according to the dictates of the characterization of the principals and the emplotment of their stories, not for the intrinsic interest of their own situations. Of the eighty or so *nyōbō* named in the text, we are told of the death of only one, the Third Princess's Kojijū (NKBZ 5: 154; S 797). Another aspect of their incomplete characterization is that they are almost never made to answer for misguided actions. They are *deus ex machina* agents who put the wheels in motion but never board the coach; they merely observe the consequences or disappear.

James himself, in his preface to *The Ambassadors*, states that "the '*ficelle*' character of the subordinate party is as artfully dissimulated, throughout, as may be . . . and anxiously kept from showing as 'pieced on,' this figure

doubtless achieves, after a fashion, something of the dignity of a prime idea" (1: xxi). But though the *ficelles* in *Genji*, like those of James, never achieve the full "dignity of a prime idea," their treatment in the later part of the work shows an increasingly deft handling of their rhetorical potential. I do not mean to imply that the ladies-in-waiting are the only figures who contribute to the gradual novelization of *Genji* in the sense in which Bakhtin defines it. The principal characters in the later phases of the book likewise grow in complexity and polyvalence. But the three-dimensionality, contemporaneity, and open-endedness of the tale would be impoverished and probably unattainable without their presence. They constitute, in sum, one effective demonstration of Murasaki Shikibu's progressive mastery of her art.

NOTES

¹The word *nyōbō* refers specifically to women who served at court and who were allotted rooms (hence *nyōbō*, literally, "woman's chamber") and in general to ladies-in-waiting in palaces and in the mansions of the aristocracy, or to serving women inclusively. For the sake of convenience, I have followed the usage of Akiyama Ken in applying the term *nyōbō* (and its English equivalents *lady-in-waiting* and *serving woman*) to nurses as well (Akiyama Ken, "Nyōbōtachi" 413). Strictly speaking, however, a nurse differed from a *nyōbō* not only in that she suckled the infant in her care but also in that her commitment to the child was both closer than that of a *nyōbō* and more permanent. A *nyōbō* might leave the service of her master or mistress at any time, but a nurse frequently went on to give advice on the marriage of the child she had tended as an infant. Some *menoto* accordingly acquired considerable power and influence. Murasaki Shikibu's own daughter, the poet Daini no Sanmi (999–c. 1083), was the nurse of the future Emperor Goreizei. For a succinct description of the ranks and functions of court ladies-in-waiting, see William H. McCullough and Helen Craig McCullough, *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes* 2: 818–22.

²Characters in *Genji* are not limited to a single form of address. Where potential confusion exists, I have provided, after Seidensticker's English translations, the full version of the name given in Tamagami Takuya, *Genji monogatari—jinbutsu sōran*, *jikō sakuin*, vol. 2 of *Genji monogatari hyōshaku: Bekkan* (19–74). Ladies-in-waiting are usually referred to by the province or court office with which a male relative is associated. Others are referred to by the mother's name plus a diminutive, and some use their own court office or personal name. Kojijū no kimi, "Little Jijū," for example, who leads Kashiwagi to the Third Princess, is the daughter of Jijū (Jijū no menoto, or Onna Sannomiya no menoto), the Third Princess's nurse, who in turn derives her name from the office title of a male relative.

³A *menotogo*, literally "nurse child" (cf. the English "milk brother," "nurse fellow," "foster brother or sister," etc.), is the real child of the nurse, as opposed to the child she has been engaged to raise. Shimizu Yoshiko remarks that nearly all the secret love affairs in *The Tale of Genji* are carried out via *menotogo* (*Genji no onnagimi* 153).

⁴The heteroglossia to which the *nyōbō* contribute is less a diversification of speech

do) than a complication of honorific levels and a multiplication of voices and perspectives.

⁵Nakano Kōichi, for example, points out that there is no logical way that a *nyōbō* narrator can have heard and reported poetry Genji ostensibly recited while alone. See Nakano 106–07.

⁶My argument, of course, assumes a general chronological compositional process for the three basic parts into which the work is conventionally divided—part 1: chs. 1–33 (the early life of Genji); part 2: chs. 34–41 (his darker, later life); and part 3: the ten Uji chapters, 45–54 (Genji's descendants) (chs. 42–44 are conventionally considered transitional). The fact that the initial chapters may have been written in a different order does not affect a larger-scale comparison of the first part of the book with the last. For more on the arrangement of the work, see Gatten, "Order of the Early Chapters," and Miner, "Some Thematic and Structural Features." Moreover, I am not addressing here the question of whether the implied author Murasaki Shikibu was an individual or corporate entity but simply demonstrating the increasing rhetorical sophistication of the implied author in the last stages of the tale, regardless of the number of actual writers involved.

⁷By "focalization" I refer to the instances in which the action is seen through the eyes of this or that *nyōbō*. I have borrowed the distinction between focalization (the one who sees) and narration (the one who speaks) from Genette 189–94.