Genji's gardens: negotiating nature at the Heian court

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Chapter 6

Genji's Gardens

Negotiating Nature at the Heian Court

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INTRODUCTION

Much time in *The Tale of Genji* is spent in, or looking at, gardens. Gardens amplify and prompt the emotions of the tale's protagonists. In Chapter 40 "Minori," for example, Genji's great love, Murasaki, lies dying, and as she is being visited by the Akashi Empress, Genji drops in. It is autumn.

> At dusk a dreary wind had just begun to blow, and she was leaning on an armrest looking out into the garden, when Genji came. "You managed to stay up very nicely today!" he said. "Her Majesty's visit seems to have done you so much good."
>
> With a pang she saw how happy her little reprieve had made him, and she grieved to imagine him soon in despair.
>
> *"Alas not for long will you see what you do now: any breath of wind may spill from a* hagi *frond the last trembling drop of dew."*

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It was true, her image fitted all too well: no dew could linger on such tossing fronds. The thought was unbearable. He answered while he gazed out into the garden,

"When all life is dew and at any touch may go, one drop then the next,
how I pray that you and I may leave together!"
He wiped the tears from his eyes. (t759)

This is in many ways a pivotal scene; little wonder that it was selected for representation in the twelfth-century *Tale of Genji Scrolls* (*Genji monogatari emaki*, ca. 1120–50), incidentally the oldest extant manuscript of the Genji text (Figure 6.1). The scrolls give us one of the earliest visual representations of a Heian garden, or more properly the *senzai* (var. *sezai*), the plantings in the part of the garden that is close to the house. Identifiable are bush clover (*hagi*), mentioned in the first poem, pampas grass (*susuki*, var. *obana*), and a plant variously identified as thoroughwort (*fujibakama*), maiden flower (*ominaeshi*),

Figure 6.1 Murasaki's deathbed scene, in the twelfth-century *Tale of Genji Scrolls*, which features one of the earliest visual representations of a Heian garden. Courtesy of The Gotoh Museum.

or bellflower (*kikyō*); there are traces of two other flowers as well, again thoroughwort or maiden flower and bellflower.[1] The colors have faded to the extent that a positive identification is difficult. All are autumn flowers that together with the pink (*nadeshiko*) and the kudzu vine (*kuzu*) make up the so-called seven plants (*nanakusa*) of autumn, a conceptual category already present in the eighth century. Autumn is the fitting season for imminent departure from life, as it calls forth the end of a cycle.

The garden is explicitly mentioned in Murasaki Shikibu's text, yet its depiction stresses certain rhetorical effects of the natural world. Just as the scrolls' so-called tangled writing (*midaregaki*, or *kasanegaki*), put to the paper as though in a spasm and used in the subsequent passage describing Murasaki's death, echoes and emphasizes the inner turmoil and emotional stress of the protagonists,[2] so does its illustration bring out their fragility of body and mind in this scene. The painted autumn grasses bend in the wind, visibly rippling the bamboo blind (*sudare*), which literally brings home life's parallels with the evanescent dew, mused upon in the poems, and underscore the wistful tone of this passage. Given the arrangement of the scrolls, in which each excerpt of the text ends with an illustration that both marks off the section and captures its essential qualities, one may infer that the autumnal plantings visually concluding Murasaki's deathbed scene highlight how nature can express the emotional states of literary characters.

This essay offers a series of readings of related gardens in *The Tale of Genji*. These readings are framed in a larger survey of garden design theory, practices, and uses in the Heian period (794–1185). Gardens

1. For reproductions of this scene and identification of the flowers in them, see for example *Kokuhō Genji monogatari emaki*, pp. 114–15; Shirane, *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons*, p. 3.
2. For this argument, see Jackson, "Scripting the Moribund," pp. 23–30; Shimizu, "The Rite of Writing," pp. 56–58; Okamoto-MacPhail, "Interacting Signs in the *Genji Scrolls*," pp. 277–79.

in this tale offer profound insights both into how Heian courtiers related to the natural world and into the structure of the tale's protagonists' relationships. In this sense, then, ideas of "nature" and basic structures in the tale are intimately connected.

"NATURALNESS" VERSUS "NATURE"

While one may safely assume that Heian gardens express some relationship with the natural world, it is debatable whether Heian court culture entertained any abstract concepts of "nature" as such, in the sense of the totality of objects and phenomena not created by man. The word used in Japan today to designate this notion of "nature," *shizen* 自然, is in essence a modern term, used from 1878 onward as a translation of the English concept. Although the term is listed as *jinen* (or *shizen*) in the twelfth-century vocabulary *Iroha jiruishō* (Dictionary, classified by pronunciation) and quite regularly appears in Sinitic (*kanbun*) texts of the Heian period, and sporadically in *The Tale of Genji* as well, it is normally used adverbially and means something like "spontaneously" or "unsurprisingly." Occasionally *jinen*/*shizen* is a noun, but in such cases, too, the word means "spontaneity" or even "unforeseen-ness"; maybe "natural-ness," but not "nature."[3]

The term *shizen*, then, is not helpful. However, *Iroha jiruishō* is instrumental in exploring the parameters of a more cultural-historical understanding of the worldview of the classical court. The dictionary does not provide definitions, but its internal organization makes it clear that the world was conceptualized through concrete objects and concepts. It classifies words first by pronunciation and then by a

3. For example when Yoshishige no Yasutane (?–1002) comments on the traumatic death of an acquaintance's daughter, he observes that her death "truly is the principle of naturalness [*jinen*], it is the tragedy of this-worldly limitations." *Honchō monzui*, pp. 421, 370.

standard set of twenty-one categories: heavenly phenomena (*tenshō* 天象), earthly forms (*chigi* 地儀), plants (*shokubutsu* 植物), animals (*dōbutsu* 動物), people (*jinrin* 人倫), the human body (*jintai* 人体), human affairs (*jinji* 人事), food and drink (*inshoku* 飲食), miscellaneous things (*zatsubutsu* 雑物), colors (*kōi* 光移), positions (*hōgaku* 方角), numbers (*fusū* 負数), single-character words (*jiji* 辞字), repeat-character words (*jūten* 重点),[4] compound-character words (*jōji* 畳字), Shinto shrines (*shosha* 諸社), Buddhist temples (*shoji* 諸寺), provinces and districts (*kokugun* 国郡), offices (*kanshoku* 官職), family and lineage names (*seishi* 姓氏), and personal names (*myōji* 名字). It is in the huge category of these assorted compound-character words that we find "*jinen/shizen*."[5] Yet where it concerns the natural world, as embodied in the first four categories, the dictionary as a whole places overwhelming emphasis on the concrete and the tangible. "Heavenly phenomena" are, for example, lightning, hail, rain, stars, and rainbows, and "earthly forms" consist of mountains, rocks, rivers, hot springs, ponds, woods, plains, and so on, but also man-made structures such as pavilions and gardens.[6]

In his recent discussion of aspects of nature in Heian court culture, Haruo Shirane draws a distinction between "primary nature" and "secondary nature" (*nijiteki shizen*),[7] a distinction between nature in the raw and nature cultivated or mediated by humans. In the latter case, one can argue that with Heian period nature one is dealing

4. *Jūten* are character compounds consisting of the same two characters in which the second character is indicated by a repeat graph (々).

5. It should be noted that different manuscripts of this dictionary can differ in content. For example, the *Iroha jiruishō* manuscript, copied out in 1838 and accessible through the Waseda University Library website, does not contain the word *jinen/shizen* (call. no. *ho* 02 00596).

6. In his recent treatment of "nature" (*shizen*) in the context of Genji's world, Kurata Minoru, too, focuses on natural phenomena such as mist and earthquakes. In other words, "nature" in relation to *The Tale of Genji* is conceived not as an abstract concept but as a set of concrete phenomena. See Kurata, "Shizen."

7. Shirane, *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons*, pp. 4, 9.

with culturally codified nature. In *The Tale of Genji*, as in Heian literature generally, one deals exclusively with represented "nature."[8] Furthermore, Heian texts do not offer a natural world that one could call "wilderness"; "nature" never seems to truly leave the confines of a human-inhabited world. Untouched primary nature was beyond conception, and consequently beyond description. Any depiction of what one may think of as nature in the raw becomes an instance of nature tamed, through the very act of representation.[9]

NATURE AND EMOTION: CULTURAL CODIFICATION OF NATURAL PHENOMENA

An important template by which to understand Heian domestication of natural phenomena is provided by the imperial anthologies of Japanese poetry (*waka*). The first of these is *Kokin wakashū* (A collection of poems ancient and modern [914]), usually abbreviated to *Kokinshū*, and it provided a norm for aesthetic appreciation of the natural world. The anthology established love and the progression of the four seasons as *waka*'s main themes, and often as connected categorical themes at that. Nature imagery was imbued with emotional projection, and, conversely, emotions could find expression in nature imagery. The first six of its twenty books are occupied with the four seasons; the poems in them are arranged in the sequence of progression throughout the year, from the first breeze of spring through the pine trees shimmering through the snow at year's end.

8. The same point is made by Takahashi in "Genji monogatari to shizen," p. 46.
9. The storm so central to Chapter 28 "Nowaki" is arguably a manifestation of nature in the raw, yet is described primarily through its aftermath. Its main narrative function is to allow Yūgiri to see his father's women during the survey of the damage the storm has done to the garden.

With this first royal collection, *waka* established itself as poetry that knew a substantial number of formal limitations yet would prove extremely creative in its explorations of established themes. As in traditional Chinese poetry,[10] "nature" in *waka* expressed itself through tangible objects, and there is relatively little variety in the species of trees and birds named. The repertoire of flora and fauna was not random; concrete nature imagery could and was grouped under specific headings in poetry collections such as *Wakan rōeishū* (Japanese and Chinese poems to sing [early eleventh century]) under specific headings, such as "Deer" or "Mountains and Waters." The images operated along the principle of categorical association (Ch. *lei*, Jp. *rui*), a symbolic correlation system made explicit in classical Chinese poetry and operative in Japan as well, which tied together a variety of phenomena into the same category.[11]

One result is that scenes of natural beauty correspond with the inner states of poets and fictional characters, and vice versa. When Genji's son Yūgiri visits his secret love Ochiba no Miya at her retreat in the hills at the foot of Mount Hiei, on a day in late autumn, he ventures into what seems unorchestrated nature. She is in mourning for her mother, who has just died, and the anxious and lovelorn Yūgiri, not quite knowing how to deal with this, passes through the hills; the scenery and the animals that inhabit it mediate his feelings for her.

> It was a little past the tenth of the ninth month, and no one, however dull, could have failed to be stirred by the prospect of the moors and hills. Down a mountain wind that stripped the trees and swept a rushing storm of leaves from the kudzu

10. Smits, *The Pursuit of Loneliness*, pp. 24–25.
11. For examples of such categorical lists, see Shirane, *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons*, pp. 32–45.

> vines on high came faint scripture chanting and the calling of the Name. The place was all but deserted beneath the gales; a stag stood by the garden fence, untroubled by clappers in the fields, while others belled plaintively amid the deep green rice, and the waterfall roared as though to rouse the stricken from their sorrows. Crickets among the grass sang forlornly, in failing voices, while tall, dewy gentians sprang from beneath withered weeds as though autumn were theirs alone. These were no more than the sights of the season, but perhaps the place and the moment made them unbearably poignant. (t737–38)

The description of the autumn scenery is full of poetic overtones: the reference to the wind sweeping leaves from kudzu vines carries an echo of an anxious love poem;[12] the lone deer is a stock image for the yearning lover; the waterfall is none other than the Otowa fall, with its powerful resonances of tears; concealed insects sighing without comfort call forth Yūgiri's lover in her hidden mountain village; and the purple gentians (*ryūtan* or *rindō*) were autumn flowers with a long pedigree in court poetry, of which Sei Shōnagon had observed,

12. Commentaries point to an older anonymous poem in a royal anthology that was compiled as Murasaki Shikibu was writing *The Tale of Genji*:

kaze hayami	The wind is swift,
mine no kuzuha no	so leaves from the kudzu vines on high
to mo sureba	are apt to shift
ayakari ya suki	their sides as easily as
hito no kokoro ka	someone has a change of heart.

Shūi wakashū 19.1251, "Miscellaneous, Love," "Topic unknown," "Poet unknown."

"I love how it appears brilliant in colour when all the other flowers have withered in the frost."[13]

While this passage counts in most commentaries as an instance of natural imagery employed in a sustained way to sketch the emotional state of a fictional protagonist, Heian literature also professed a sense that natural beauty was to be appreciated as a stimulus to the senses. "These were no more than the sights of the season, but perhaps the place and the moment made them unbearably poignant," Murasaki writes. Yūgiri's despondence is as much a reaction to the view he passes through as the scenery is an echo of his feelings. Takahashi Bunji points out how already in the tenth-century *Kagerō nikki* (The Kagerō diary) the woman known as Michitsuna's mother (936–95?) would use landscape scenes as a trigger for, rather than resonating with, emotional response.[14] On her way to Hase on a pilgrimage, she passes Uji and takes in the view in a series of observations interlaced with the explicit comment of how "moving" (*aware*) all the sights are.

> Gazing out, I see the surface of the water sparkling in between the trees and find it so moving. . . . In the direction of the river, when I roll up the blind and look out, I see the fishing weirs stretched across. As I have never seen lots of boats plying to and fro like that, it is all so moving and fascinating. . . . After eating lunch, the carriage is loaded on a boat, and as we go along smoothly from place to place, they say "Here's Nieno Pond" and "Here, Izumi River," where there are so many birds flocking together; the scene soaks into my heart; it is moving and enchanting. Having come secretly on my own like this, connecting with everything, I feel tears welling up.[15]

13. *Makura no sōshi* section 65, p. 120, translated in Sei Shōnagon, *The Pillow Book*, tr. McKinney, p. 58 .
14. Takahashi, "Genji monogatari to shizen," pp. 51–52.
15. *Kagerō nikki*, pp.159–60, translated in *The Kagero Diary*, tr. Arntzen, p. 153 .

Takahashi's point that Murasaki Shikibu's treatment of elements from the natural world operated both along normative lines of "secondary" nature codified in *Kokin wakashū* and in sync with the response-model provided by the *Kagerō nikki* is well taken. When one reads garden scenes in *The Tale of Genji*, it should therefore be with some caution that one invokes poetic schemata as the sole interpretative principle.

The idea that an emotional reaction to natural beauty is a very instinctive response also ties into a long-standing idea in East Asian poetics, the conviction that a poem is in essence "sincere" because it expresses a sincere emotion (Ch. *qing*, Jp. *jō*) in a given situation or scene before the poet (Ch. *jing*, Jp. *kei*). This explicit correlation of emotion and "scene" dates from the Song period (960–1279), but is implicit already in the classic formulation of this axiom in the Great or Mao Preface to the *Shijing* (Classic of poetry),[16] and it was echoed in the preface to *Kokin wakashū* as well.[17] Scenes of natural beauty were one important trigger of emotional response. Unsurprisingly then, a century or so after *The Tale of Genji* was written, a Heian poet voiced this idea in Sinitic verse that resonates quite strongly with Yūgiri's experience. On his way out of the capital, he passes a small shop at the city's outskirts and takes in the autumn view:

16. "The poem is that to which what is intently on the mind goes. In the mind it is 'being intent'; coming out in language, it is a poem. The affections are stirred within and take form in words." *Maoshi xu* (preface to the Mao Poems, ca. second century B.C.E.), in Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, pp. 40, 41.
17. "The seeds of Japanese poetry lie in the human heart and grow into leaves of ten thousand words. Many things happen to the people of this world, and all that they think and feel is given expression in description of things they see and hear." *Kokin wakashū*, p. 17, translated in Rodd and Henkenius, *Kokinshū: A Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern*, p. 35.

野店秋興	***Autumn inspiration at a vending stall in the fields***
釈蓮禅	Priest Renzen [1082?–after1149?]
郊西秋興触望多	In the western suburbs autumn provides an inspired view;
児店柴穿夕日斜	a rural stand in need of repair, the evening sun shines through.
林戸紅深桑梓影	Deep crimson its forest door: the light through mulberry and catalpa trees;
水畦雪冷稲粱花	frozen snow on paddies: the blossoming of rice and corn.
虫糸織草心機乱	Grasshoppers busy in the grass unsettle the heart;
雁陣結雲眼路遮	a line of geese bonding with clouds obstructs my view.
勝絶風流依造化	The beauty of this place is all because of Creation:
不斯人力以相加	any human effort to add something is pointless here.[18]

In the final couplet (l. 7) one encounters a word that does occasionally surface, albeit always in Sinitic texts of the Heian period, and that is often translated as "Nature": *zōka* 造化 (Creation), which refers to Heaven and Earth as the producer of all things. In other words, it is a physical force, and as such "Creation" could apply itself to the work of uncannily crafty human hands as well. Gardens provided that ideal space where "nature" could be recreated in such a way that the results of Creation were most visible.

18. *Honchō mudaishi* poem no. 462, *Honchō mudaishi zenchūshaku*, vol. 2, p. 427.

GARDEN VIEWS

That gardens in Heian Japan occupied a liminal position between the world of man-made objects and phenomena and materiality of the natural world is attested by *Iroha jiruishō*, which puts gardens in the category "earthly forms." Like pavilions, gardens are man-made, yet form part of a scenic view as a collective manifestation of natural phenomena. Motonaka Makoto has shown that Heian assessments of gardens focused on two core concepts: the grounds or the lay of the garden (*chikei*), and the view (*chōbō*).[19] With "view" Heian courtiers often referred to what was visible beyond the residence and the garden itself. In other words, gardens combine ideas of a represented natural world and of viewed landscapes. Japan's oldest extant treatise on garden design, the twelfth-century *Sakuteiki* (On creating gardens) opens with the exhortation that garden designs are best modeled after "landscapes in their innate disposition" (*shōtoku no senzui*).[20] It becomes apparent that landscape's inherent state lies less in its details than in the idea of an essence it embodies. Gardens must strip the natural landscape down to express it satisfactorily. As Thomas Keirstead observes, "The garden must mirror nature, but a natural landscape is emphatically not the desired result."[21] Gardens represent "nature" as summarized in a landscape so much more capably than nature itself manages, precisely because of their artifice.

Landscapes are constructs, cultural processes of human interaction with one's surroundings.[22] Like stellar constellations, landscapes exist in the eyes of the beholder and do not have meaning outside them. The English term "landscape" is intimately connected

19. Motonaka, *Nihon kodai no teien to keikan*, pp. 100–224, esp. p. 175.
20. *Sakuteiki*, ed. Hayashiya, p. 224.
21. Keirstead, "Garden and Estates: Medievality and Space," pp. 299–300.
22. Hirsch, "Landscape: Between Place and Space," pp. 2–9.

to painting, and likewise Heian discourse concerning scenes of the natural world and representations thereof is couched in the language of painting. Indeed, painting and garden design belonged to same, or at least very closely related, areas of expertise. *Sakuteiki* mentions a "Master (*ajari*) En'en" (?–1040), a garden designer who was also well known as a painter. En'en was dubbed "the painting master" (*e-ajari*) and is mentioned as the possessor of transmitted knowledge regarding the placement of stones.[23]

The term for landscape (*senzui*, var. *sansui*) used in *Sakuteiki* is literally "mountains and waters," and one sees that, true to this etymology, in Sinitic poetry and painting "landscapes" always are configured from bodies of stone or earth and of water. In fact, garden design, concretely, consisted of the art of "placing stones" (*ishi o tatsu*). The all-importance of stones and the ways to place them in a garden is also apparent from the existence in Heian Japan not just of garden architects but also of people specializing in the trade of "elegant specimens" of stones (*fūryū aru mono*), that is, "bizarre rocks and strange stones."[24] In addition, great attention was paid to the placing of stream beds. No garden was complete without channeled meandering streams (*yarimizu*) and a pond south of the main building. The overall sense one takes away from reading *Sakuteiki* is that in representing nature one outlines nature's essential features by marking space with stones and bodies of water. The plantings, then, are the "filling in" of the essential layout, creating an apparent hierarchy between streams and stones, which are fixed, and plants, which are seasonal. One may note that descriptions of gardens emphasize the immovable: they always contain flora, but the only fauna regularly mentioned are waterbirds.

23. *Sakuteiki*, p. 243.
24. *Gōdanshō*, pp. 32, 80–81, 500.

Anyone reading vernacular narrative fiction from the Heian court will at some point realize that certain categories of *realia* are described in great detail, whereas others are merely sketched. Minute varieties in clothing get much attention, for example, but spaces do not. Dwellings and gardens as a rule retain an abstract quality. As spaces, they seem to be adequately described as conforming to generic patterns. This helps to explain why Heian gardens look so much alike[25] and why contemporary scale models of Heian mansions tend to do so, too. This generic structure of gardens allowed for fluidity of a garden's function. Quite regularly after an owner's death, substantial mansions were donated to monastic organizations and became temples. Uji's Byōdō-in is only one such example. The metamorphosis from a private mansion's garden to a temple garden representing the Pure Land of the Amida Buddha did not necessarily require physical intervention; it was sufficient to reinterpret the garden's layout.[26]

THE GARDENS OF THE ROKUJŌ ESTATE

This brings us to a set of gardens designed by Genji together with his principal ladies. In Chapter 21 "Otome," at the height of his political power, two years after his appointment as chancellor (*dajō daijin*) at age thirty-three, he builds an extended villa and garden complex at Sixth Avenue. Here he will bring together six women dear to him. The text is not very clear about how exactly Genji comes into possession of this vast tract of land, but one-quarter of it had already

25. Hida, "Hiraizumi to Kyōto no teien no ruijisei," pp. 229–60.

26. On Pure Land gardens, see Motonaka, *Nihon kodai no teien to keikan*, 224–374; Ono, *Nihon teien no rekishi to bunka*, pp. 51–69. For examples other than Byōdō-in, see Ono, *Nihon teien no rekishi to bunka*, p. 52. Many of these temples grew out of chapel-like buildings already present on the estate.

been occupied by the former mansion of the Empress Akikonomu, and it is generally inferred that her mother, the Rokujō Haven, a former lover of Genji, left the property to Genji after her death. The building project of what becomes the Rokujō-in (Rokujō estate) quite literally lays the ground for the ten chapters that form the so-called Tamakazura sequence (from Chapter 22 "Tamakazura" to Chapter 31 "Makibashira") that is central to *The Tale of Genji*. This villa complex was divided into four sections, each of which was designated for an important woman in Genji's life. Hence, we may also say that the Rokujō-in aims to emulate the "rear quarters" (*kōkyū*) of the imperial palace complex; at the same time it functions as a physical summary of the tale so far.[27]

Genji had already experimented with the idea of bringing together different women in one ideal house. A few years earlier he refurbished his east pavilion at Nijō, which he inherited from his father, and partitioned it into separate lodgings with the intention of bringing both the lady called Falling Flowers (Hanachirusato) and his second formal wife, the lady from Akashi, to live together there (t283, 333). However, Rokujō-in is different. To begin with, its scale is enormous. Where a regular high-ranking noble's mansion would normally occupy one square city block (*chō* or *machi*) of approximately ten thousand square meters, Genji's new estate occupies "four *chō* of land at Rokujō and Kyōgoku" (t401), that is, a good ten acres.

More important, although earlier Heian fiction had created residences with gardens that cover comparably vast areas,[28] the Rokujō estate is designed according to a unique coordinating plan, one that

27. Field, *The Splendor of Longing*, p. 112; Shirane, *The Bridge of Dreams*, p. 129.

28. According to the fourteenth-century *Genji* commentary *Kakaishō* (Notes on rivers and seas), a model for Rokujō-in's overall garden design is found in *Utsuho monogatari* (Tale of the hollow tree, ca. 970–99). *Kakaishō*, 220 .

hinges on its use of gardens. The four gardens, one for each section, express the identity of the women occupying that part of the mansion complex and may be thought of as their substitutes. At the same time, the gardens together form a full cycle: all are thematically organized by season. For practical reasons, but also symbolizing their correlation, the four sections are connected through roofed passageways. The text first introduces the bigger scheme of Genji's new estate:

> Genji's Rokujō estate was finished in the eighth month. Her Majesty had the southwest quarter, no doubt because that was where her residence had once stood. The southeast quarter was for himself [and Murasaki as well as Genji's young daughter by the lady from Akashi, Akashi no Himegimi]. He gave the northeast to the lady from his east pavilion [Hanachirusato, and eventually the young Tamakazura, too] and the northwest to the lady from Akashi. He had the existing hills and lake shifted about as necessary, changing the shapes of mountains and waters to suit each resident's wishes. (t402)[29]

Each garden's theme is expressed primarily through its plantings. Murasaki Shikibu's text is quite specific about these. The southeastern garden, for Genji and Murasaki, has as its theme spring; its plantings are five-needled pines (*goyō*), red plums (*kōbai*), cherry trees (*sakura*), wisteria (*fuji*), kerria roses (*yamabuki*), and rock azaleas (*iwatsutsuji*). The autumn garden in the southwest, for the Akikonomu Empress, has "trees certain to grow in rich autumn colors [*momiji no iro*]," autumn fields (*aki no no*), and flowers that "bloomed in all the profusion of the season." The summer garden in

29. For the technical terms of these four compass directions, see below. For the specifications of the plantings, see t402.

the northeast quarter, belonging to the lady called Falling Flowers and Tamakazura, is filled with plants that prove shade and cool—Chinese bamboo (*kuretake*), tall groves with depths of shade "as in a mountain village"—and furthermore has deutzia (*unohana*), orange (*hanatachibana*), pinks (*nadeshiko*),[30] roses (*sōbi*), peonies (*kutani*), and sweet flag (*sōbu*). Finally, the northwest wing's garden, for the lady from Akashi, has "a dense stand of pines [*matsu*] intended to show off the beauty of snow," "chrysanthemums [*kiku*] to gather the morning frosts of early winter," and oaks (*hahaso*), all appropriate for winter, as well as "a scattering of nameless trees transplanted from the fastnesses of the mountains." At another level, seasons also define the Rokujō estate narrative: the first eight chapters of the Tamakazura sequence progress along the cycle of a year, beginning in winter in Chapter 22 "Tamakazura" and ending in winter again in Chapter 29 "Miyuki."[31]

Although the four gardens collectively represent the full cycle of the four seasons, they are not arranged in cyclical order. That is, the seasons represented by the four gardens are not arranged clockwise or anticlockwise; if one wishes to follow the year's cycle, one must visit the four sections in a zigzag route. In fact, when Genji inspects the damage done by the typhoon that sweeps over the estate at the beginning of Chapter 28 "Nowaki," he does so in a clockwise route that underscores the hierarchy of the four quarters. Starting in his own spring section, he proceeds to the autumn section and from there to the winter quarter in the northwest, and on to the summer section in the northeast.

30. Since the eighth-century *Man'yōshū*, the *nadeshiko* was one of the "seven grasses of autumn," and as such one might be surprised to see it in a summer garden. The *Shinpen nihon koten bungaku zenshū* edition does not comment on this, but *waka* do exist that connect the *nadeshiko* to summer (e.g., *Shika wakashū* poem nos. 71–72, mainly because of its alternative name *tokonatsu* (everlasting summer).

31. Field, *The Splendor of Longing*, p. 113.

THREE VIEWS OF THE ROKUJŌ GARDENS

The larger designs of the Rokujō gardens follow the principle later outlined in *Sakuteiki*, that is, to think in terms of landscape and to understand that "landscape" is in essence the sum total of "the shapes of mountains and waters" (*mizu no omomuki, yama no okite*) through which Genji creates the layout of each garden. The generic quality of garden design allowed for reinterpretations of space, and indeed, the organization gardens of Genji's Rokujō estate can be understood through more than one morphological system.

The standard way to understand the gardens' noncyclical arrangement is to look at the organization of poetry anthologies. The overall design of the Rokujō-in is organized by season, as codified in *Kokin wakashū*, Japan's first imperial anthology of Japanese poetry (*waka*).[32] As noted, the first six of its twenty books are occupied with the four seasons: spring (Books 1–2; 134 poems), summer (3; 34), autumn (4–5; 145), winter (6; 29). Their respective spacing shows that an unequal appreciation of seasons overrides their cyclical progression: spring and autumn are more important than summer and winter. The more dramatic moments tend to take place in these two seasons, and it is this hierarchy that organizes the layout of the four sections of the Rokujō estate.

The two important gardens belong to the spring and autumn sections. They are the most colorful and will have the best extended views. Moreover, these two gardens are directly connected through their lake system. That the Akikonomu, or "autumn-loving," Empress secures such an important garden and the fact that its theme is

32. The main proponent of this rhetorical-poetic interpretation is Nomura, "Rokujō-in no kisetsuteki jikū." In English, see Field, *The Splendor of Longing*, pp. 111–25.

autumn is entirely logical. It is equally understandable that Murasaki, the one woman who is a constant and extremely close companion to Genji, but also the woman whom circumstances do not permit him to recognize as his official first wife, occupies the other prime season, spring.

The hierarchy of the two main seasons was constantly debated and is one strategy by which the subtle rivalry between Murasaki and the Akikonomu Empress is expressed. Once the Rokujō estate is ready, it is autumn, and the Empress sends Murasaki a box with autumn leaves and the words

> *"You whose garden waits by your wish to welcome spring, at least look upon these autumn leaves from my home, carried to you in the wind."* (t404)

Murasaki, out of season, responds by filling a box with an artificial five-needled pine branch and writes back:

> *"They are trifling things, fall leaves scattered in the wind: I would have you see in the pine gripping the rock the truest color of spring."* (t404)

This invitation is taken up in spring when in Chapter 24 "Kochō," ladies in waiting to the Akikonomu Empress visit Murasaki's spring garden and imagine themselves visiting a Daoist realm of immortals. In autumn again, Chapter 28 "Nowaki" opens with fading memories of spring and the glory of the autumn garden. "Autumn had always had more partisans than spring in the debate over which is to be preferred, and those who once favored that celebrated spring garden now turned, as people do, to look elsewhere" (t487).

Another, quite different set of interpretations is not based on poetical rhetoric, but on spatial organizations that are informed by divination systems from ancient China and by Buddhist traditions.

Sakuteiki regularly emphasizes the four directional animals, or "four deities," as yet one more organizing principle in garden design, because of their protective qualities: "By planting trees in the four cardinal directions of one's dwelling, one makes it a place completely protected by the four deities."[33] These four deities entered Japan in about the seventh century and are the Azure Dragon (*seiryō* var. *seiryū*; east, or left)[34] associated with spring and represented by a stream; the White Tiger (*byakko*; west, or right) or a broad avenue, representing autumn; the Vermilion Bird (*suzaku* var. *sujaku*; south, or front) or a pond, associated with summer; and the Black Turtle-Snake (*genmu* var. *genbu*; north, or back) or a hill, and representing winter. Lacking stream, avenue, pond, or hill, *Sakuteiki* specifies, one can replace these by planting respectively nine willows (*yanagi*), seven catalpa trees (*hisagi*), nine *katsura* trees, or three cypresses (*hinoki*). This "four directions" logic of geomancy informed the planning of the entire city of Heian-kyō, but operated on a smaller scale as well.

It will be noted that the organization of the Rokujō estate and its gardens does not adhere to the four principal compass directions, but is forty-five degrees off. Its four sections are oriented toward the southwest, southeast, northwest, and northeast, indicated in the original text by directions on the zodiac compass: "sheep-monkey," "dragon-snake," "dog-boar," and "ox-tiger," respectively. One practical reason for this deviation must be that the Rokujō estate had to adhere to the north–south, east–west grid of the Heian capital. Even in fiction, urban planning simply did not allow for an estate covering an area consisting of four square city blocks (*machi*) to upset the course of major roads and intersections. Within one block, one could

33. *Sakuteiki*, p. 243. For an introduction to the four directional deities in Japan, see Van Goethem, "Feng Shui Symbolism in Japan" pp. 35–48.

34. The orientation in traditional East Asia is always facing south.

organize an east–south–west–north orientation; on a scale such as Rokujō-in's, with four separate mansions, one could not. That said, *The Tale of Genji* does on occasion seem to force the four gardens of the Rokujō estate to snap to the rhetorical grid of the four deities and the seasonal associations of the four main compass points. The northwestern quarter of the lady from Akashi is called "western block," the lady called Falling Flowers lives in the "eastern direction," while Murasaki's southeastern garden is referred to as the "southern block."[35]

Even so, it is eminently clear that the governing principle of Rokujō-in's coordinating plan is a "four directions, four seasons" scheme. The first reference to such a garden organization is mythical: the story of Urashima Tarō's visit to the palace of the dragon king on the bottom of the sea, "where one can see a different season in each of the four directions."[36]

Another parallel is that with the early life of the Buddha, when as Prince Siddhartha he lived on his father's estate. His father built "mansions for the three seasons" (*sanjiden*): a warm one for winter, a cool one for summer, and a neither cold nor warm one for the two rainy seasons, which in India did not require separate treatment. There Siddhartha lived with his three wives, one in each mansion. In an early Chinese alternative life story, *Xiuxing benqi jing* (The sutra of the [Buddha's] practices and origins; early third century), with

35. Respectively, Chapter 21 "Otome," Chapter 22 "Tamakazura," and Chapter 28 "Nowaki." Tyler silently corrects this to "northwest quarter," "to the northeast," and "southeast quarter," respectively (t402, 422, 491, 493). To point out the obvious: these compass assignations do not match the seasons associated with these quarters. See also Mitani, *Monogatarishi no kenkyū*, pp. 407–09.

36. Ibid., pp. 414–15. The Urashima Tarō legend is an old one; versions of it, albeit without the "four directions, four seasons" gardens, appear in eighth-century *Tango fudoki* and *Man'yōshū*, and tenth-century *kanbun* versions exist as well. The idea that the dragon king's palace at the bottom of the ocean boasted gardens divided into seasonal quarters already existed in the Heian period, and is referred to in, for example, *Eiga monogatari*. William and Helen McCullough, trs., *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes*, p. 631.

an adaptation to China's climate, there is mention of four halls, one for each of the four seasons.[37] This parallel with the Buddha's living arrangements does on occasion surface in *The Tale of Genji*, for example when the fragrances of Murasaki's spring garden call forth the Buddha's realm.

> What delights there were to be seen, then, in the jewel-strewn garden before Genji's residence, and how poorly mere words convey the exquisite beauty of the gardens of his ladies! The one before the spring quarter, where the scent of plum blossoms mingled with the fragrance within the blinds, especially recalled the land of the living Buddha, although actually the mistress of the place lived there in peace and quite at her ease. (t431)

A third reading of the Rokujō garden ensemble, which takes one away somewhat from the notion of seasons per se, but does help to broaden the scope of what landscapes could signify in Heian court culture, is intimately tied to the idea of a genealogy of the Rokujō estate. Admittedly, the first explicit identification of Genji's estate with a historical but equally mythical estate in the same location, designed by another "Genji" (or Minamoto) minister, dates to the fourteenth century.[38] Medieval readers of *The Tale of Genji* associated Genji's estate with the "Riverside Mansion," or Kawara-in, for a number of reasons: both estates occupied roughly the same coordinates in the capital, both covered the equivalent of four square city blocks, both harbored fanciful landscapes, and both were built

37. *Konjaku monogatarishū*, vol. 1, p. 60; see also ibid., pp. 17–18, note 5 (where Siddhartha's three wives are mentioned). See also Mitani, *Monogatarishi no kenkyū*, pp. 416–17; Saeki, *Genji monogatari ni okeru 'kangaku*,' pp. 303–13.

38. *Kakaishō*, 220. Japanese studies that discuss the Rokujō estate in relation to Kawara-in and Minamoto no Tōru, as well as Uda, and the realm of the immortals abound. For a recent one, see Yuasa, "Hikaru Genji no Rokujō-in."

by sons of emperors turned commoner by taking the lineage name Minamoto. Kawara-in was the legendary estate of Minamoto no Tōru (822–95), a statesman and poet with a deep interest in the Daoist cult of immortals.[39] This heritage combined with a rhetoric dominant in both Sinitic literature and *waka* poetry to sketch ideal landscapes in terms of the immortals' realm. Tōru turned the gardens of the Rokujō estate into "an unknown land," the "middle islands" in their ponds calling forth the "mountain above the turtle," one of the three or five mythical mountains in the eastern sea where immortals dwell, of which Mount Penglai (Jp. Hōrai), or "turtle mountain," was the one in the middle (t442).[40]

Since the "certain estate" to which young Genji brings his lover Yūgao, with its "unkempt and deserted garden . . . , its ancient groves towering in massive gloom," was also identified by readers as Tōru's Riverside estate, the Rokujō grounds become a horticultural palimpsest (t64, 65). Ghosts not only of the Genji minister, then, but also of former lovers, including the dead Rokujō Haven, who bequeathed the estate to Genji in the first place, haunt the sculpted landscapes of Genji's gardens.

CONCLUSION

In *The Tale of Genji*, the natural world as mediated through and exemplified by gardens provides an understanding both of courtly cultural attitudes toward "nature" and of the emotions of the tale's protagonists as well as their respective relationships. A Heian garden

39. Frank, *Démons et jardins*, pp. 133–37.

40. The "Poetic Exposition on the Kawara Mansion" (*Kawara-in no fu*, ca. 971) by Minamoto no Shitagō (911–83) also explicitly ties Tōru's garden to Mount Penglai: "When it is clear, we look out from the immortals' terrace: / distant, Mounts Penglai and Yingzhou seem near." *Honchō monzui*, pp. 126–27.

presented nature broken down into the material and the tangible as well as landscapes reduced to their elementary constituents through stones and water. This nature was extremely codified and as such intimately connected with the human realm: the natural world explained as well as triggered emotional response. A garden's views and seasonal plantings combined to stress a hierarchy of seasons and of protagonists and to underscore dramatic moments. "Nature," then, is one fundamental means to unlock the world that *The Tale of Genji* represents.

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