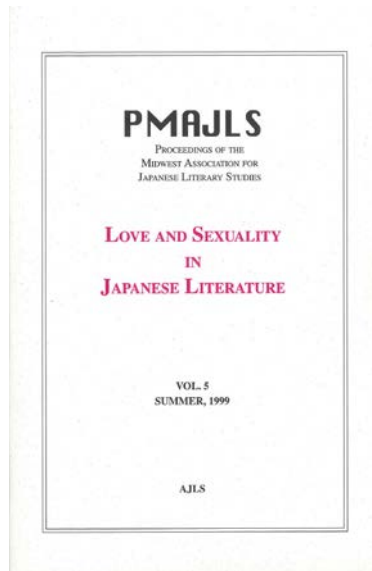


“Manufacturing Desire: Love in the ‘Tamakazura’ Chapters”

Lili Selden 

Proceedings of the Midwest Association for Japanese Literary Studies 5 (1999): 57–64.



PMAJLS 5:
Love and Sexuality in Japanese Literature.
Ed. Eiji Sekine.

MANUFACTURING DESIRE: LOVE IN THE "TAMAKAZURA" CHAPTERS

Lili Selden
University of Michigan

The narrative of Tamakazura's match-making is composed of a sequence of coincidence-riddled stories, and of episodes that range from the touching to the surreal, the insightful to the comical. These disparate moments are held together by the dual strands of psychological development and the manipulation of readers' expectations as Genji and his foster-daughter seek the closure promised by Tamakazura's integration into aristocratic society.

The ten "Tamakazura" chapters chronicle Genji's acquisition, preparation, and presentation of Yūgao's long-lost daughter in an effort to marry her off to his political advantage and in accordance with his aesthetic preferences. Genji so far has masterminded the selection of Akikonomu, another foster daughter, for empress; is grooming his younger daughter for marriage to the crown prince; and has himself been remarkably successful in courting women. This, however, is his first opportunity to arouse desire in numbers of men competing for a single woman, and he takes on the challenge with obvious delight.

The chapters also depict Tamakazura's dilemma in deciding how to respond to her various suitors, a process complicated by the fact that Genji himself takes an enthusiastic interest in her. Genji's promotion of Tamakazura, in other words, stimulates longing not only in her suitors, but also in himself. As a result, he attempts through rhetorical and physical overtures to induce her to desire him. Although his advances remind Tamakazura and readers alike of her vulnerability to the ever-evolving possibilities of her future, she eventually vanquishes Genji with her own displays of rhetorical skill. This triumph serves in the narrative to validate Tamakazura's sense of self-determination. The eventual consequence is, however, to lull readers into a false sense that Tamakazura, like Genji, can indeed be the master of her fate. This is why we are stunned by, yet in hindsight resigned to, Hige-kuro's unexpected and undesired marriage to Tamakazura.

Here, I wish to examine how we are drawn into the illusion that Tamakazura can control her destiny. I focus on two moments in Genji's and Tamakazura's rhetorical struggle that demonstrate the endless con-

struction and reconstruction of their relationship. These are the occasions on which Genji first suggests the potential in their special bond, and on which Tamakazura finally rejects his self-serving arguments.

I start with Genji's strategic and emotional involvement with every aspect of Tamakazura's courtship. In his manipulation of access, ambience, and other factors relating to Tamakazura's presentation to her suitors, Genji constructs his putative daughter as a repository of cultural signifiers. Tamakazura is not so much a partner in courtship as the object of negotiation between Genji and her suitors. Yet when Genji assumes the additional role of contender, he inscribes himself for her figurative consumption. Tamakazura, in turn, rewrites his self-presentations and manages to avoid being seduced while remaining in his good graces. The suspense is heightened for readers when Tamakazura's introspection allows us to realize that she is gradually finding herself attracted to Genji. She practically swoons over his appearance in one passage, demonstrating that she is as susceptible to Genji's grace and fashionableness as are countless other characters in the tale, both male and female.

Genji's tactic with Tamakazura is to blur the lines between his parental responsibilities and erotic interests so that he can exploit the ambiguities resonating between them. His is a subtle campaign, perhaps nothing more than flirtation in the beginning. He gives her his fatherly evaluation of Prince Hotaru's and Captain Hige-kuro's respective merits and demerits, then asks her opinion:

"With matters like these it is awkward to discuss one's feelings openly even with one's parents, but you are no longer so young. How could you not have developed your own understanding about such matters? For old time's sake, think of me as your dear mother. It would sadden me if you were to have reason to be dissatisfied."¹

It is conceivable that Genji, at this moment, has no ulterior motive and is merely trying to consider Tamakazura's feelings regarding the two suitors he perceives as worthy of her stature—or rather, of his. His reference to her mother is intended simply to make Tamakazura comfortable with him as guardian, and not so much as benefactor. Moments later, however, he takes advantage of his superimposition of Yūgao's image

¹ Murasaki Shikibu, "Kochō" chapter in *Genji monogatari*, Yamagishi Tokubei, ed. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1987), *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, vol. 2, p. 408.

over himself, and rhetorically shifts the emphasis from parental fondness to a different kind of affection. The narrator notes that Genji, too shy to make his feelings explicit, tries various other hints. But Tamakazura is steadfastly oblivious, and he leaves, sighing. As he departs, he tries one more time, with a poem:

mase no uchi ni	The bamboo shoot, my child,
ne fukaku ueshi	whose roots I planted deep
take no ko no	within my fence—
ono ga yoyo ni ya	must she too leave me
oiwakaru beki	to grow in a world apart?
Genji	Genji ²

“Bamboo shoot,” literally “bamboo child” in Japanese, designates Tamakazura as the daughter cared for within the walls of Genji’s home. “In a world apart (*ono ga yoyo*),” contains a pun on the homophones *yo* (“the world”) and *yo* (“joint on a stalk of bamboo”) that connects the metaphor at the levels of both image and diction.³ Because *yo*, or “the world,” often signifies the realm of the erotic in love poetry, Genji hopes to convey to Tamakazura an invitation to have an affair of the heart with him, rather than with one of her suitors. She, however, takes *yo* at face value, that is, to mean “her biological father’s home” as opposed to Genji’s. Her response is framed as a reassurance that she has no intention of moving away:

imasarani	After all that has passed
ikanaran yo ka	in what kind of world would
wakatake no	this young bamboo
oihajimeken	seek out the roots
ne o ba tazunen	whence first it grew?
Tamakazura	Tamakazura ⁴

Tamakazura echoes Genji’s “bamboo,” “world,” and “root” images to convey that she means to respect his generosity by staying in his home. The intrusive narrator reveals, however, that Tamakazura has not at all given up her wish to be reunited with her father. She is only resigned to the realization, culled from reading monogatari, that Genji is indeed far

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., fn. 2, 4.

⁴ Ibid.

more kindly and attentive than she can expect her own father to be, busy as he is with marriage plans for his other daughters.⁵ Though Tamakazura may be naive in the ways of men, she is entirely aware of her social vulnerability and recognizes that it is best to let Genji work on the timing of her return to her family.

Having presented his rhetoric that a romantic affair built on their parent-child relationship would lead to an extraordinarily meaningful bond, Genji naturally takes every opportunity to expand on the twist. Here, I analyze how Tamakazura rebuffs his most extensive rhetorical appeals to both her imagination and her sense of "propriety." Not long after the celebrated firefly incident in the "Hotaru" chapter, he teases Tamakazura and the women in his household for their avid engagement with frivolous prose tales. Women, he claims, must have been born to be fooled. Why else would they read such falsehoods, unconcerned with the tangles in their hair as they copy out tales in the steamy humidity of the rainy season?⁶ Certainly, he continues, these fabrications contain some affecting portrayals of the human condition, but ultimately, the stories sound like they originated from "the mouths of people accustomed to telling lies."⁷ Tamakazura archly responds that it would make sense for practiced liars to read *monogatari* in such a manner, but that she herself considers them to be very truthful (*ito makoto no koto*).

Genji thereupon launches into his "defense of the novel," conceding that, like Buddhist parables, *monogatari* do contain insights into the ways of the world. He concludes that, viewed positively, nothing is meaningless. The implication is that even "contrived" tales have value when interpreted allegorically. The narrator undermines the sincerity of Genji's lengthy pronouncements by ending his observations about parables with the remark, "monogatari o, ito, wazato no koto ni, notamainashitsu" (he explained, as if tales were something most grand and meaningful).⁸ This ironic comment signals to readers that Genji may have an ulterior motive in pontificating on the subject.

Indeed, Genji artfully shifts from lecture mode to a consideration of himself and Tamakazura as possible protagonists in a tale. Musing as to whether their "story" might not be a fitting one for transmission, he asks:

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., "Hotaru" chapter, p. 431.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 431-32.

⁸ Ibid., p. 433.

"Well, so are there any upright fools like me in these old tales? Not even a diffident lady in one of those could be as unyielding and oblivious as you. Let us create a remarkable tale of our own," he said, drawing near, "and have it recorded for the world."

Hiding her face with her sleeve, she replied, "We wouldn't have to do any such thing for this unique situation to become a matter of gossip." "So," he asked, "you too find this unique? Indeed, I have never witnessed such an attitude."⁹

In one stroke, Genji maneuvers the topic from a discussion of the merits of fiction to drawing an analogy between his relationship with Tamakazura and those of the heroes of such tales. With this transition, he is able to lend seeming legitimacy to his "accusation" that Tamakazura is being uncooperative despite his patience. Once again, she rejects his advances, although she does so with a delicate touch akin to the strategy she has used on previous occasions to respond to his poems. Utilizing the discourse of storytelling Genji has introduced, she offers the wry observation that theirs is already far too unusual an arrangement for people not to begin to take notice.

Instead of letting up, Genji twists Tamakazura's words to his advantage, borrowing a technique she herself has used often. Where Tamakazura intends "unique situation" to mean "Genji's inappropriate attentions," he spins it to mean "Tamakazura's heartless diffidence." He follows this with a poem and afterword that bind together the familial, amatory, and Buddhist discourses that have characterized their exchange up to this point:

omoi amari	Heart overcome
mukashi no ato o	I seek out a trace
tazunuredo	of long ago,
oya ni somukeru	but the child is so remarkable
ko zo tagui naki	as to turn upon her parent.
—Filial impiety is decried in the way of the Buddha too	
Genji	Genji ¹⁰

In its strategic pairing of lover's talk and parental indignation, Genji's words reverberate with an earlier exchange, centering on the motif

⁹ Ibid., pp. 433-34.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 434.

of "orange blossoms." There, Genji had cast their relationship as a parent-child one while deploying Tamakazura, as image, as a representation of her mother.¹¹ By virtue of these verbal transpositions, Tamakazura is simultaneously his lover and his daughter. It is thus most arrogant of her to resist the wishes of her father, her lover. In his postscript, Genji further urges her acquiescence by alluding to Buddhism as a social system, like Confucianism, that valorizes a sense of responsibility in children toward their parents. This reference to Buddhism leads readers back to

¹¹ *Ibid.*, "Kochō" chapter, p. 411. Genji's poem is as follows:

tachibana no	Comparing you
kaorishi sode ni	with that sleeve fragrant
yosoureba	with orange blossoms
kawareru mi tomo	I find I cannot think of
omo'oeni kana	you as someone other.
Genji	Genji

As in the "bamboo shoot" exchange, Genji frames their conversation in what initially might be a parent-child mode by tearily describing to Tamakazura how like her mother she is. But the romantic references in the poem to "orange," (poetic symbol of remembered love), "sleeve," and "fragrance" (together alluding to Kokinshū poem 139, "satsuki matsu hana-tachibana no ka o kageba mukashi no hito no sode no ka zo suru," or "Breathing in the fragrance of the orange blossom awaiting the Fifth Month, I find it to be the fragrance of one I loved long ago") leave no space for ambiguity in Tamakazura's mind. Genji has exploited the motif of her mother in order to draw her emotions to the surface and to naturalize his inappropriate feelings as the inevitable result of a daughter's resemblance to her mother.

Tamakazura is stunned by his overture, particularly when he takes her hand in his, but she spins the amorous nuance of his poem into a good-natured joke:

sode no ka no	By your comparison
yosouru kara ni	to a scented sleeve,
tachibana no	surely
mi sae hakanaku	this orange seed too
nari mo koso sure	shall perish.
Tamakazura	Tamakazura

Affecting a pose of nonchalance, she rebuffs Genji by suggesting that his yearning for Yūgao might lead to unhappy consequences for herself if he cannot keep their identities separate. If she can keep their exchange at the level of flirtatious banter, she seems to think, both of them can pretend that nothing untoward took place. Little does she realize that he is just getting started. . . .

Genji's discussion of parables, which was followed, as noted earlier, by the narrator's subtle questioning of Genji's agenda.

When Tamakazura remains silent—perhaps from disgust at the trouble he has taken to develop his absurd claim, perhaps from sheer exhaustion from his constant innuendo—Genji strokes her hair and glares at her until she reluctantly responds, presumably out of fear that her silence may frustrate him to take matters into his own hands:

furuki ato o	I seek out
tazunuredo geni	old traces—
nakarikeri	yet truly has this world
kono yo ni kakaru	never seen
oya no kokoro wa	such a parent's heart.
Tamakazura	Tamakazura ¹²

Tamakazura's poem shares with Genji's the image of "sought traces" and the conception of the parent-child bond. Where he chastizes her for lack of filial piety, she reminds him that the trouble is his irresponsibility as a parent. She achieves this quite persuasively through a seemingly minor change in diction that returns their interaction to its starting point in *monogatari*. Genji's reference to his former lover's child, expressed as *mukashi no ato* (traces from long ago) becomes a reference to old tales, or *furuki ato* (old traces). Tamakazura protests, in effect, that not one of the old tales she reads has prepared her for his unreasonable wish to be both her parent and lover. Tamakazura's rhetorical shift succeeds, for it creates hesitation in Genji, who refrains from further intimacy. When he previously invaded her spatial boundaries, she had resisted in terrified silence and his own conscience had helped him withdraw (recall, in the "Kochō" chapter, that Genji actually lay down beside her and disrobed, blending the movement of his silken layers within the rustling of the bamboo in the garden).¹³ This time she is able to subdue Genji, once and for all, with a display of rhetorical adeptness.

I have discussed two moments in the discursive gamesmanship through which Genji and Tamakazura define each other and their circumstances. Because these and other such incidents are woven into the narrative suspense over whom Tamakazura would attract as an object of desire, and whom she would choose as a desiring subject, we as readers are led to believe that these two are in control of their fates. The outcome is there-

¹² Ibid. "Hotaru" chapter, p. 434.

¹³ Ibid., "Kochō" chapter, p. 413.

fore a shock to Genji and Tamakazura, not to mention the reader. For Genji, it is a reflection on his seeming mastery over his world. In his brilliant packaging of Tamakazura for the world of high-stakes marriage politics, Genji succeeds so fully that he fails to take into consideration the possibility that anyone would operate beyond the parameters he has laid out in pitting suitors against each other. As a result, he must settle for an ambitious man who has tremendous political power but who does not possess the aesthetic sensibility Genji so prizes in suitors such as Prince Hotaru and Kashiwagi. As for Tamakazura, she is left with the recognition that any appearance of choice on her part is far more tenuous than she had come to suspect. By snatching away her decision, Hige-kuro reveals the illusoriness of female agency. As for the reader, this moment also marks the beginning of the unraveling of Genji's supremacy within his home and among his elite circle.

The Tamakazura chapters tell the story of Genji's cultivation of romantic interest in Tamakazura, and of Tamakazura's struggle to respond with irreproachable elegance both to her suitors' overtures, and to Genji's troubling advances—all while maintaining a sense of self. From Genji's perspective, Tamakazura is foremost an assemblage of physical and cultural attributes, with the added appeal of being the daughter of his beloved Yūgao. But by allowing Tamakazura to feel that the final choice in marriage is hers, he unwittingly leads her to imagine that destiny is hers to shape. When Hige-kuro claims her as his wife, Genji feels cheated of the opportunity to strengthen his political ties with the men whose suits he most favored. Ironically, it is his dramatic impositions on Tamakazura that alert readers to her vulnerability as an object of desire. Far more profound an implication for Tamakazura is that she must deal with the inarticulable realization that rhetorical and aesthetic capabilities are no match for the raw ambition that courtly accomplishment is designed to mask.

WORKS CITED

- Murasaki Shikibu. "Tamakazura" chapters (Tamakazura jūjō) in *Genji monogatari*, vols. 2-3. *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, Yamagishi Tokuei, ed. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1987.