

## Primary Source Packet

### 1. Diary, Sei Shônagon 1

Sei Shônagon, a lady in waiting to Empress Teishi (or Sadako), left a journal of anecdotes, impressions, and commentary called *The Pillowbook* (covering the years 986-1000 C.E.) that has become a valuable source for the court society and cultural life of the Heian Period. Sei's description of natural scenes and phenomena are admired for their vividness and subtlety, their both poetic and painterly evocation of lighting and color, temperature and the tactile. It is a product of a life style lived in wooden residences surrounded by verandas, and whose walls were panels and latticed screens that could be opened up to the outside, bringing the sights, sounds, and scents of nature into the inside. The first passage below in effect taught the specific appeal of each of the four seasons for the rest of Japanese cultural history. The particularly close and subtle appreciation of nature within daily life is one of the most important legacies of Heian women's writing to Japanese culture.

*Source:* Morris, Ivan, trans., *The Pillowbook of Sei Shônagon*. London: Penguin Books, 1971.

#### **The Beauty of the Seasons**

In spring it is the dawn that is most beautiful. As the light creeps over the hills, their outlines are dyed a faint red and wisps of purplish cloud trail over them.

In summer the nights. Not only when the moon shines, but on dark nights too, as the fireflies flit to and fro, and even when it rains, how beautiful it is!

In autumn the evenings, when the glittering sun sinks close to the edge of the hills and the crows fly back to their nests in threes and fours and twos; more charming still is a file of wild geese, like specks in the distant sky. When the sun has set, one's heart is moved by the sound of the wind and the hum of the insects.

In winter the early mornings. It is beautiful indeed when snow has fallen during the night, but splendid too when the ground is white with frost; or even when there is no snow or frost, but it is simply very cold and the attendants hurry from room to room stirring up the fires and bringing charcoal, how well this fits the season's mood! But as noon approaches and the cold wears off, no one bothers to keep the braziers alight, and soon nothing remains but piles of white ashes.

#### **Rains and Ponds**

During the long rains in the Fifth Month, there is something very moving about a place with a pond. Between the dense irises, water-oats, and other plants one can see the green of the water; and the entire garden seems to be the same green colour. One stays there all day long, gazing in contemplation at the clouded sky—oh, how moving it is!

I am always moved and delighted by places that have ponds—not only in the winter (when I love waking up to find that the water has frozen over) but at every time of the

year. The ponds I like best are not those in which everything is carefully laid out; I much prefer one that has been left to itself so that it is wild and covered with weeds. At night in the green spaces of water one can see nothing but the pale glow of the moonlight. At any time and in any place I find moonlight very moving.

### **Snow**

It is delightful when there has been a thin fall of snow; or again when it has piled up very high and in the evening we sit round a brazier at the edge of the veranda with a few congenial friends, chatting till darkness falls. There is no need for the lamp, since the snow itself reflects a clear light. Raking the ashes in the brazier with a pair of fire-tongs, we discuss all sorts of moving and amusing things.

### **Winds**

A stormy wind. At dawn, when one is lying in bed with the lattices and panelled doors wide open, the wind suddenly blows into the room and stings one's face—most delightful.

A cold wintry wind.

In the Third Month the moist, gentle wind that blows in the evenings moves me greatly.

Also moving is the cool, rainy wind in the Eighth and Ninth Months. Streaks of rain are blown violently from the side, and I enjoy watching people cover their stiff robes of unlined silk with the padded coats that they put away after the summer rains. . . .

Towards the end of the Ninth Month and the beginning of the Tenth the sky is clouded over, there is a strong wind, and the yellow leaves fall gently to the ground, especially from the cherry trees and the elms. All this produces a most pleasant sense of melancholy. In the Tenth Month I love gardens that are full of trees.

## **2. Diary, Sei Shônagon 2**

Sei Shônagon, a lady in waiting to Empress Teishi (or Sadako), left a journal of anecdotes, impressions, and commentary called *The Pillowbook* (covering the years 986-1000) that has become a valuable source for the court society and cultural life of the Heian Period. By the Heian period, the gender parity that is believed to have existed in ancient times was giving way to a system of male domination. Particularly with the adoption of the Chinese bureaucratic system, all offices and ranks were designated for males, with only a few exceptions for the Handmaids' Office in the Palace. Ambitious women like Sei Shônagon decried the lack of offices women could aspire to and expressed envy of the honor and respect men garner when they are promoted through the hierarchy.

Source: Morris, Ivan, trans., *The Pillowbook of Sei Shônagon*. London: Penguin Books, 1971.

### **Women and High Office**

At long last a man has received the governorship for which he has been waiting. He looks radiantly happy. In the past everyone treated him with rudeness and disdain; but, painful as it was, he bore it all patiently, realizing that he had no choice. Now even his superiors respect the man and play up to him with remarks like, "I am entirely at Your Excellency's service." He is attended by women and surrounded by elegant furnishings and clothing that he has never known before. Seeing all this, one wonders whether he can really be the same man whom even simple servants used to scorn. Then this fortunate governor is appointed Middle Captain in the Inner Palace Guards. Oh, what a triumphant look he has on his face! To be a captain of the Guards seems far grander to him than it would to a young nobleman who received the same appointment.

High office is, after all, a most splendid thing. A man who holds the Fifth Rank or who serves as Gentleman-in-Waiting is liable to be despised; but when this same man becomes a Major Counsellor, Great Minister, or the like, one is overawed by him and feels that nothing in the world could be as impressive. Of course even a provincial governor has a position that should impress one; for after serving in several provinces, he may be appointed Senior Assistant Governor-General and promoted to the Fourth Rank, and when this happens the High Court Nobles themselves appear to regard him with respect.

After all, women really have the worse time of it. There are, to be sure, cases where the nurse of an Emperor is appointed Assistant Attendant or given the Third Rank and thus acquires great dignity. Yet it does her little good since she is already an old woman. Besides, how many women ever attain such honours? Those who are reasonably well born consider themselves lucky if they can marry a governor and go down to the provinces. Of course it does sometimes happen that the daughter of a commoner becomes the principal consort of a High Court Noble and that the daughter of a High Court Noble becomes an Empress. Yet even this is not as splendid as when a man rises by means of promotions. How pleased such a man looks with himself!

### 3. Diary, Sei Shônagon 3

Sei Shônagon, a lady in waiting to Empress Teishi (or Sadako), left a journal of anecdotes, impressions, and commentary called *The Pillowbook* (covering the years 986-1000) that has become a valuable source for the court society and cultural life of the Heian Period. For a Heian lady, service at court was the sphere for pursuing a career, the stage where she could develop and display her social and aesthetic talents and accomplishments. Not all fathers, however, allowed their daughters to enter court. The reasons no doubt had to do with the opinions Sei reveals below about the alleged immodesty and wickedness of court ladies. It is interesting to note that Sei accuses the men of the same immodesty, seeming to imply that if the conventional gender segregation is breached at court, it is done so by both men and women. The majority of noblewomen remained at home as wives, some of whom might have court connections and participate, through correspondence, in the cultural life there.

*Source:* Morris, Ivan, trans., *The Pillowbook of Sei Shônagon*. London: Penguin Books, 1971.

#### Service at Court

When I make myself imagine what it is like to be one of those women who live at home, faithfully serving their husbands—women who have not a single exciting prospect in life yet who believe that they are perfectly happy—I am filled with scorn. Often they are of quite good birth, yet have had no opportunity to find out what the world is like. I wish they could live for a while in our society, even if it should mean taking service as Attendants, so that they might come to know the delights it has to offer.

I cannot bear men who believe that women serving in the Palace are bound to be frivolous and wicked. Yet I suppose their prejudice is understandable. After all, women at Court do not spend their time hiding modestly behind fans and screens, but walk about, looking openly at people they chance to meet. Yes, they see everyone face to face, not only ladies-in-waiting like themselves but even Their Imperial Majesties (whose august names I hardly dare mention), High Court Nobles, senior courtiers, and other gentlemen of high rank. In the presence of such exalted personages the women in the Palace are all equally brazen. Small wonder that the young men regard them as immodest! Yet are the gentlemen themselves any less so? They are not exactly bashful when it comes to looking at the great people in the Palace. No, everyone at Court is much the same in this respect.

Women who have served in the palace, but who later get married and live at home, are called Madam and receive the most respectful treatment. To be sure, people often consider that these women, who have displayed their faces to all and sundry during their years at Court, are lacking in feminine grace. How proud they must be, nevertheless, when they are styled Assistant Attendants, or summoned to the Palace for occasional duty, or ordered to serve as Imperial envoys during the Kamo Festival! Even those who stay at home lose nothing by having served at Court. In fact they make very good wives. For example, if they are married to a provincial governor and

their daughter is chosen to take part in the Gosechi dances, they do not have to disgrace themselves by acting like provincials and asking other people about procedure. They themselves are well versed in the formalities, which is just as it should be.

#### 4. Diary, Sei Shônagon 4

Sei Shônagon, a lady in waiting to Empress Teishi (or Sadako), left a journal of anecdotes, impressions, and commentary called *The Pillowbook* (covering the years 986-1000) that has become a valuable source for the court society and cultural life of the Heian Period. Sei was not shy about expressing her opinions and exercising her wit on all manner of subjects, including the conduct of a love affair. It was the custom at this time for the lover (or husband, as the case may be) to arrive at evening and leave early the following morning while it is still dark in order to avoid detection. In the passage below, the fact that a woman is in effect legislating what is acceptable and not acceptable behavior during a love affair is almost as interesting as the opinion itself. Conducting a love affair would seem to be a kind of ritual or performance attended by implicit etiquettes; one's behavior before and after is at least equally important as the night spent together.

*Source:* Morris, Ivan, trans., *The Pillowbook of Sei Shônagon*. London: Penguin Books, 1971.

##### Lovers

[Hateful things] A lover who is leaving at dawn announces that he has to find his fan and his paper. "I know I put them somewhere last night," he says. Since it is pitch dark, he gropes about the room, bumping into the furniture and muttering, "Strange! Where on earth can they be?" Finally he discovers the objects. He thrusts the paper into the breast of his robe with a great rustling sound; then he snaps open his fan and busily fans away with it. Only now is he ready to take his leave. What charmless behaviour! "Hateful" is an understatement.

Equally disagreeable is the man who, when leaving in the middle of the night, takes care to fasten the cord of his headdress. This is quite unnecessary; he could perfectly well put it gently on his head without tying the cord. And why must he spend time adjusting his cloak or hunting costume? Does he really think someone may see him at this time of night and criticize him for not being impeccably dressed?

A good lover will behave as elegantly at dawn as at any other time. He drags himself out of bed with a look of dismay on his face. The lady urges him on: "Come, my friend, it's getting light. You don't want anyone to find you here." He gives a deep sigh, as if to say that the night has not been nearly long enough and that it is agony to leave. Once up, he does not instantly pull on his trousers. Instead he comes close to

the lady and whispers whatever was left unsaid during the night. Even when he is dressed, he still lingers, vaguely pretending to be fastening his sash.

Indeed, one's attachment to a man depends largely on the elegance of his leave-taking. When he jumps out of bed, scurries about the room, tightly fastens his trouser-sash, rolls up the sleeves of his Court cloak, over-robe, or hunting costume, stuffs his belongings into the breast of his robe and then briskly secures the outer sash—one really begins to hate him.

## 5. Fiction, *The Tale of Genji*

The greatest work produced during the Heian era was *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu, lady-in-waiting to Empress Akiko. Considered the world's first novel, the *Genji* is written as an absorbing portrait of Heian court life, the splendor of its rituals, and aesthetic culture. One of the most fascinating passages in the novel is a long conversation among the hero Genji and his friends one rainy night about women (where Genji himself remains mostly silent, an interested and sometimes skeptical listener) that has since become known among *Genji*-philes as “the rainy night disquisition on the types of women.”

Several recognizable types are taken up and critiqued by the men, who profess the greatest difficulties in finding and even determining what constitutes the ideal woman or the one who would make a good wife. Not the least interesting aspect of this discussion is the fact that it transpires among men only, but was conceived by a woman writer; this factor suggests that the men's opinions should be read with some irony or the proverbial grain of salt. Nevertheless, the “disquisition on types of women,” which occurs early, in Chapter 2 “The Broom Tree,” has also been read as a key to the subsequent development of the novel's plot and the various types of women who make their appearance in its pages.

What is indubitable is that it is a key to understanding gender relations in the Heian period. The first passage below presents a striking analogy between the wife and the emperor's minister; the second reveals the taboo against a woman openly expressing extreme emotions like anger and the male expectation that she will “overlook” his indiscretions and show understanding instead of resentment.

*Source:* Seidensticker, Edward, trans. Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.

### **Men Hold Forth on Women**

They talked on, of the varieties of women.

“A man sees women, all manner of them, who seem beyond reproach,” said the guards officer, “but when it comes to picking the wife who must be everything,

matters are not simple. The emperor has trouble, after all, finding the minister who has all the qualifications. A man may be very wise, but no man can govern by himself. Superior is helped by subordinate, subordinate defers to superior, and so affairs proceed by agreement and concession. But when it comes to choosing the woman who is to be in charge of your house, the qualifications are altogether too many. A merit is balanced by a defect, there is this good point and that bad point, and even women who though not perfect can be made to do are not easy to find. I would not like to have you think me a profligate who has to try them all. But it is a question of the woman who must be everything, and it seems best, other things being equal, to find someone who does not require shaping and training, someone who has most of the qualifications from the start. The man who begins his search with all this in mind must be reconciled to searching for a very long time.”

“There are those who display a womanly reticence to the world, as if they had never heard of complaining. They seem utterly calm. And then when their thoughts are too much for them they leave behind the most horrendous notes, the most flamboyant poems, the sort of keepsakes certain to call up dreadful memories, and off they go into the mountains or to some remote seashore. When I was a child I would hear the women reading romantic stories, and I would join them in their sniffing and think it all very sad, all very profound and moving. Now I am afraid that it suggests certain pretenses.

“It is very stupid, really, to run off and leave a perfectly kind and sympathetic man. He may have been guilty of some minor dereliction, but to run off with no understanding at all of his true feelings, with no purpose other than to attract attention and hope to upset him—it is an unpleasant sort of memory to have to live with. She gets drunk with admiration for herself and there she is, a nun. When she enters her convent she is sure that she has found enlightenment and has no regrets for the vulgar world.

“Her women come to see her. ‘How very touching,’ they say. ‘How brave of you.’

“But she no longer feels quite as pleased with herself. The man, who has not lost his affection for her, hears of what has happened and weeps, and certain of her old attendants pass this intelligence on to her. ‘He is a man of great feeling, you see. What a pity that it should have come to this.’ The woman can only brush aside her newly cropped hair to reveal a face on the edge of tears. She tries to hold them back and cannot, such are her regrets for the life she has left behind; and the Buddha is not likely to think her one who has cleansed her heart of passion. Probably she is in more danger of brimstone now in this fragile vocation than if she had stayed with us in our sullied world.

“The bond between husband and wife is a strong one. Suppose the man had hunted her out and brought her back. The memory of her acts would still be there, and inevitably, sooner or later, it would be cause for rancor. When there are crises, incidents, a woman should try to overlook them, for better or for worse, and make the bond into something durable. The wounds will remain, with the woman and with the man, when there are crises such as I have described. It is very foolish for a woman to let a little dalliance upset her so much that she shows her resentment openly. He has

his adventures—but if he has fond memories of their early days together, his and hers, she may be sure that she matters. A commotion means the end of everything. She should be quiet and generous, and when something comes up that quite properly arouses her resentment she should make it known by delicate hints. The man will feel guilty and with tactful guidance he will mend his ways. Too much lenience can make a woman seem charmingly docile and trusting, but it can also make her seem somewhat wanting in substance. We have had instances enough of boats abandoned to the winds and waves. Do you not agree?”

Tô no Chûjô nodded. “It may be difficult when someone you are especially fond of, someone beautiful and charming, has been guilty of an indiscretion, but magnanimity produces wonders. They may not always work, but generosity and reasonableness and patience do on the whole seem best.”

## 6. Fiction, The Tale of Genji

The greatest work produced during the Heian era was *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu, lady-in-waiting to Empress Akiko. Considered the world’s first novel, the *Genji* is written as an absorbing portrait of Heian court life, the splendor of its rituals, and aesthetic culture. One of the most fascinating passages in the novel is a long conversation among the hero Genji and his friends one rainy night about women (where Genji himself remains mostly silent, an interested and sometimes skeptical listener) that has since become known among *Genji*-philes as “the rainy night disquisition on the types of women.” In this passage Murasaki Shikibu has a young man from the Ministry of Rites regale Genji and the others with the comic story of his involvement with a very learned woman.

Learning, understood as the ability to read and write Chinese and knowledge of the Chinese classics, was expected of men, and their education in the Academy consisted of it. That it was highly anomalous in a woman to be so learned as to even use mainly Chinese in her correspondence is clear in the men’s incredulous reception of this story. Women were expected to write in the phonetic script called *kana*, and their essential education consisted of calligraphy, Japanese poetry, and music. As we know from Murasaki’s diary, and the allusions to Chinese poems and stories in the *Genji*, she knew Chinese well enough to read and even teach the Empress to read the poet Po Chü-i, though they had to keep these sessions secret. Sei Shônagon, a contemporary of Murasaki Shikibu, also liked to show off her Chinese knowledge in the *Pillowbook*, but then she made no secret of her satisfaction in besting men in their own spheres.

The story below features a woman who is so far advanced in her Chinese learning that she becomes her husband’s teacher. It is interesting to note the young man’s attitude of rueful self-deprecation in portraying himself as the student of a woman in a case of reverse gender difference in the field of writing and education.



Source: Seidensticker, Edward, trans. Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.

### **Chinese Literacy in Women**

Tô no Chûjô turned to the young man from the ministry of rites. “You must have interesting stories too.”

“Oh, please. How could the lowest of the low hope to hold your attention?”

“You must not keep us waiting.”

“Let me think a minute.” He seemed to be sorting out memories.

“When I was still a student I knew a remarkably wise woman. She was the sort worth consulting about public affairs, and she had a good mind too for the little tangles that come into your private life. Her erudition would have put any ordinary sage to shame. In a word, I was awed into silence.

“I was studying under a learned scholar. I had heard that he had many daughters, and on some occasion or other I had made the acquaintance of this one. The father learned of the affair. Taking out wedding cups, he made reference, among other things, to a Chinese poem about the merits of an impoverished wife. Although not exactly enamored of the woman, I had developed a certain fondness for her, and felt somewhat deferential toward the father. She was most attentive to my needs. I learned many estimable things from her, to add to my store of erudition and help me with my work. Her letters were lucidity itself, in the purest Chinese. None of this Japanese nonsense for her. I found it hard to think of giving her up, and under her tutelage I managed to turn out a few things in passable Chinese myself. And yet—though I would not wish to seem wanting in gratitude, it is undeniable that a man of no learning is somewhat daunted at the thought of being forever his wife’s inferior. So it is in any case with an ignorant one like me; and what possible use could you gentlemen have for so formidable a wife? A stupid, senseless affair, a man tells himself, and yet he is dragged on against his will, as if there might have been a bond in some other life.”

“She seems a most unusual woman.” Genji and Tô no Chûjô were eager to hear more.

Quite aware that the great gentlemen were amusing themselves at his expense, he smiled somewhat impishly. “One day when I had not seen her for rather a long time I had some reason or other for calling. She was not in the room where we had been in the habit of meeting. She insisted on talking to me through a very obtrusive screen. I thought she might be sulking, and it all seemed very silly. And then again—if she was going to be so petty, I might have my excuse for leaving her. But no. She was not a person to let her jealousy show. She knew too much of the world. Her explanation of what was happening poured forth at great length, all of it very well reasoned.

“I have been indisposed with a malady known as coryza. Discommoded to an uncommon degree, I have been imbibing of a steeped potion made from bulbaceous herbs. Because of the noisome odor, I will not find it possible to admit of greater

propinquity. If you have certain random matters for my attention, perhaps you can deposit the relevant materials where you are.’

“‘Is that so?’ I said. I could think of nothing else to say.

“I started to leave. Perhaps feeling a little lonely, she called after me, somewhat shrilly. ‘When I have disencumbered myself of this aroma, we can meet once more.’

“It seemed cruel to rush off, but the time was not right for a quiet visit. And it was as she said: her odor was rather high. Again I started out, pausing long enough to compose a verse:

“‘The spider must have told you I would come.

Then why am I asked to keep company with garlic?’

I did not take time to accuse her of deliberately putting me off.

She was quicker than I. She chased after me with an answer.

‘Were we two who kept company every night,

What would be wrong with garlic in the daytime?’

“You must admit she was quick with her answers.” He had quietly finished his story.

The two gentlemen, Genji and his friend, would have none of it. “A complete fabrication, from start to finish. Where could you find such a woman? Better to have a quiet evening with a witch.” They thought it an outrageous story, and asked if he could come up with nothing more acceptable.

“Surely you would not wish for a more unusual sort of story?”

The guards officer took up again. “In women as in men, there is no one worse than the one who tries to display her scanty knowledge in full. It is among the least endearing of accomplishments for a woman to have delved into the Three Histories and the Five Classics; and who, on the other hand, can go through life without absorbing something of public affairs and private? A reasonably alert woman does not need to be a scholar to see and hear a great many things. The very worst are the ones who scribble off Chinese characters at such a rate that they fill a good half of letters where they are most out of place, letters to other women. ‘What a bore,’ you say. ‘If only she had mastered a few of the feminine things.’ She cannot of course intend it to be so, but the words read aloud seem muscular and unyielding, and in the end hopelessly mannered. I fear that even our highest of the high are too often guilty of the fault.”

## 7. Diary, Lady Sarashina

The *Sarashina nikki* (Sarashina Diary, c. 1059 C.E.) is the memoir of a woman called Takasue’s Daughter, also known as “Lady Sarashina” from the translator Ivan Morris’ name for her. Her father, Sugawara Takasue, was governor of Kazusa Province (modern

Chiba, southeast of Tokyo) in what was then the remote Eastern region, where she spent some three years as a girl of nine to twelve years. Her memoir is remembered especially for two things. One is the poetic account of her family's journey from Kazusa back to the capital in Kyoto, which is viewed as a precursor of the poetic travel journal genre later developed by medieval poet pilgrims and the early modern haiku poet Bashō. The other is its thematization of her obsession with reading tales (*monogatari*), in particular the *Genji monogatari*, and how it detracted from her pursuit of religious piety. The passage below is particularly striking for the way it underscores the guilty pleasure of reading the *Genji* as against the priestly admonition to read instead the fifth volume of the *Lotus Sutra*, where a female, the Dragon King's daughter, famously undergoes buddhahood despite her inferior sex by first being transformed into a male.

*Source:* Morris, Ivan, trans. Sugawara Takasue's Daughter, *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams: Recollections of a Woman in Eleventh-Century Japan*. London: Penguin Classics, 1975.

### **Forbidden Tales and the *Lotus Sutra***

I was brought up in a part of the country so remote that it lies beyond the end of the Great East Road. What an uncouth creature I must have been in those days! Yet even shut away in the provinces I somehow came to hear that the world contained things known as Tales, and from that moment my greatest desire was to read them for myself. To idle away the time, my sister, my stepmother, and others in the household would tell me stories from the Tales, including episodes about Genji, the Shining Prince; but, since they had to depend on their memories, they could not possibly tell me all I wanted to know and their stories only made me more curious than ever. In my impatience I got a statue of the Healing Buddha built in my own size. When no one was watching, I would perform my ablutions and, stealing into the altar room, would prostrate myself and pray fervently, 'Oh, please arrange things so that we may soon go to the Capital, where there are so many Tales, and please let me read them all.'

...

'What a pretty girl you've grown up to be!' she [the author's aunt] said. As I was leaving she asked, 'What would you like as a present? I am sure you don't want anything too practical. I'd like to give you something you will really enjoy.'

And so it was that she presented me with the fifty-odd volumes of *The Tale of Genji* in a special case, together with copies of *Zai*, *Tōgimi*, *Serikawa*, *Shirara*, *Asauzu*, and many other Tales. Oh, how happy I was when I came home with all these books in a bag! In the past I had been able to have only an occasional hurried look at fragments of *The Tale of Genji*, and much of it had remained infuriatingly obscure. Now I had it all in front of me and I could sit undisturbed behind my curtain, bent comfortably forward as I took out the books one by one and enjoyed them to my heart's content. I wouldn't have changed places with the Empress herself.

Placing the lamp close to where I sat, I kept reading all day long and as late as possible into the night. Soon I came to know the names of all the characters in the book and I could see them clearly in my mind's eye, which gave me the greatest satisfaction. One night I dreamt that a handsome priest appeared before me in a yellow surplice and ordered me to learn the fifth volume of the Lotus Sutra as soon as possible. I told no one about the dream, since I was much too busy with my Tales to spend any time learning sutras. I was not a very attractive girl at the time, but I fancied that, when I grew up, I would surely become a great beauty with long flowing hair like Y\_gao, who was loved by the Shining Prince [Genji], or like Ukifune, who was wooed by the Captain of Uji [Kaoru]. Oh, what futile conceits!

## 8. Painting, Tale of Genji Scroll

The greatest work produced during the Heian era was *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu, lady-in-waiting to Empress Akiko. Considered the world's first novel, the *Genji* is written as an absorbing portrait of Heian court life, the splendor of its rituals, and aesthetic culture. *The Tale of Genji* has through the centuries been the subject of visual illustration and dramatization, from paintings to modern full-length films, cartoons, and animé.

The picture here is from the 12th-century *Tale of Genji Painting Scroll* (*Genji monogatari emaki*) was created over a century after Murasaki Shikibu's literary work, but is one of the oldest surviving illustrations of it. Only four of the original ten scrolls have come down to us (20 paintings and some 70 fragments of calligraphic text) and the paintings are severely damaged, with layers of paint peeling off, faded, or completely gone in places. Nevertheless they remain an invaluable historical source today on how readers then visualized the novel, which particular scenes they thought should be illustrated and which passages excerpted. The pictures also constitute visual evidence of court costumes, interior furnishings, and court manners, as well as the way in which faces are depicted in a stylized fashion.

For our purposes, it is sufficient to notice such aspects as the women's elaborate silk robes, which could be from six to twelve layers in all, depending on the weather and the formality of the occasion. An indication of a lady's cultivation and taste, the set of robes, each layer shorter than the last at the hem and sleeves, aimed to create a distinctive color harmony and aesthetic effect appropriate to the season and occasion, and is also an index to the wearer's creativity. Note the openness of Heian-period architecture: latticed windows and wall panels could be taken away, leaving only bamboo blinds to screen the interior.

In this painting from the Bamboo River (*Takekawa*) chapter scroll, we see a courtier, the lieutenant Kurôdo no Shôshô (in the lower right corner), stealing a glimpse from a facing gallery, of Tamakazura's two daughters seated half-hidden behind green blinds and a band of mist (now darkened) as they play *go* by the veranda in the company of their

waiting women. The rich costumes of the women, in predominant red, yellow, and green hues, along with the pinkish white blossoms of the cherry tree in the middle of the picture, evoke the splendid beauty of a day in springtime. By the time Murasaki Shikibu wrote the *Genji*, the cherry blossoms already had an important place in the poetic and cultural language of Japan, as did many other flowers, trees, birds and other natural phenomena, whose symbolic values would only deepen with their reiteration in the cultural products of subsequent centuries.

Source: "Bamboo River II," *Tale of Genji Painting Scroll*. Tokugawa Museum, Japan, c. 1120-1140 C.E. In Ivan Morris, *The Tale of Genji Scroll*. Introduction by Yoshinobu Tokugawa. Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1971.



## 9. Painting, Tale of Genji Scroll

The greatest work produced during the Heian era was *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu, lady-in-waiting to Empress Akiko. Considered the world's first novel, the *Genji* is written as an absorbing portrait of Heian court life, the splendor of its rituals, and aesthetic culture. *The Tale of Genji* has through the centuries been the subject of visual illustration and dramatization, from paintings to modern full-length films, cartoons, and animé.

The pictures here are from the 12th-century *Tale of Genji Painting Scroll* (*Genji monogatari emaki*) was created over a century after Murasaki Shikibu's literary work, but is one of the oldest surviving illustrations of it. Only four of the original ten scrolls have come down to us (20 paintings and some 70 fragments of calligraphic text) and the paintings are severely damaged, with layers of paint peeling off, faded, or completely

gone in places. Nevertheless they remain an invaluable historical source today on how readers then visualized the novel, which particular scenes they thought should be illustrated and which passages excerpted. The pictures also constitute visual evidence of court costumes, interior furnishings, and court manners, as well as the way in which faces are depicted in a stylized fashion.

For our purposes, it is sufficient to notice such aspects as the women's elaborate silk robes, which could be from six to twelve layers in all, depending on the weather and the formality of the occasion. An indication of a lady's cultivation and taste, the set of robes, each layer shorter than the last at the hem and sleeves, aimed to create a distinctive color harmony and aesthetic effect appropriate to the season and occasion, and is also an index to the wearer's creativity. Note the openness of Heian-period architecture: latticed windows and wall panels could be taken away, leaving only bamboo blinds to screen the interior.

A scene set in the autumn night is depicted from the Lady of the Bridge (*Hashihime*) chapter, where the hero of the novel's last ten chapters, Kaoru, has pushed the bamboo fence slightly ajar in order to glimpse the two Uji princesses, \_igimi and Nakanokimi, as they sit by the veranda wholly absorbed in playing music under the autumn moonlight. Music, along with calligraphy and poetry, was one of the three most important feminine accomplishments. Unfortunately, the silver moon in the upper right hand corner has tarnished to a brownish grey, as has the originally bluish-silver mist floating in a band across the upper part of the picture. This scene is the climax of the Lady of the Bridge chapter, for it depicts the moment when Kaoru falls in love with \_igimi after hearing her playing the zither (the *koto*; she is shown behind her younger sister, the inclination of her head and body evoking an attitude of complete absorption in the music) and glimpsing her face and manners, which indicate a refinement and proud nobility unexpected for someone brought up in an obscure village. This fateful glimpse deflects Kaoru from his determined pursuit of the Buddhist path, and initiates a tragic story about the futility of desire. The younger sister, Nakanokimi, is described this way:

Half hidden by a pillar, one had a lute before her and sat toying with the plectrum. Just then the moon burst forth in all its brilliance.

"Well now," she said. "This does quite well as a fan for bringing out the moon." The upraised face was bright and lively.

The other, leaning against an armrest, had a koto before her. "I have heard that you summon the sun with one of those objects, but you seem to have ideas of your own on how to use it." She was smiling, a melancholy, contemplative sort of smile.

"I may be asking too much, I admit, but *you* have to admit that lutes and moons are related."

It was a charming scene, utterly unlike what Kaoru had imagined from afar.

Source: "Lady of the Bridge," *Tale of Genji Painting Scroll*. Tokugawa Museum, Japan, c. 1120-1140 C.E. In Ivan Morris, *The Tale of Genji Scroll*. Introduction by Yoshinobu Tokugawa. Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1971.

