

Introduction

Quiet as it's kept, *The Tale of Genji* is a queer text. But what might this mean, and how could engaging this medieval Japanese text's queerness alter and enrich how we read? *A Proximate Remove* contends that *Genji* queers, where to queer is to press into question predominant logics of thought, feeling, and movement. These logics both subsidize and compromise conditions of possibility for how characters in *Genji* live and how they relate to each other and to the wider world. Thus, in saying that *Genji* queers, I mean to emphasize how the text imagines alternatives through both portraying and encouraging a generative estrangement from inherited structures—within and beyond the text.

I argue that *The Tale of Genji* performs a queer critique in its insistence on the fictive, deficient, often unlivable nature of what prevails as the good life. Indeed, alongside its portrayals of intimacy and loss, especially, the narrative presents profound meditations on how—and even *if*—life should be lived. From the narrative's opening scene onward, stunning intimacies and losses trigger varied protagonists' fitful quests for viable ways to thrive. The narrative depicts destabilizing encounters that inspire the characters to question the environment they must inhabit. I read their questioning propensity as queer in its reluctance to take the configuring rhythms of the given world for granted or to accept them as sovereign. This book tells the story of how intimacy and loss spark that reluctance, kindling capacities to revise or reimagine the world.

A Proximate Remove explores the relationship between the aesthetic, affective, and phenomenological dimensions through which characters experience intimacy and loss. Part of this book's critical project is to explore desire's shifting topography through close thematic readings of *The Tale of Genji*. What I term "a proximate remove" assumes different forms over the book's chapters, figuring protagonists' embodied experiences of anticipation, disorientation, asynchrony, dispossession, and bereavement. Apprehending these experiences as queer, I theorize how intimacy and loss impact *Genji*'s characters' psychic and physical

sensitivities to the times and spaces they inhabit. A phenomenological method proves valuable insofar as I want to avoid positing relations as static or predetermined. Rather, my style of queer reading emphasizes the possibilities that emerge in the processual interface of bodies with the world through which they maneuver. I chart how a reshaping of sensitivities transpires as characters navigate loss and live on alongside it. And yet proximate removes are not chained to loss; they can also host the fragile promise of having.

My exploration proceeds by performing literary analysis of scenes in *The Tale of Genji*. Written during the Heian period (794–1185), commonly considered Japan’s aristocratic golden age, Murasaki Shikibu’s *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*, 1008) has been called the world’s first novel—albeit inaptly—and represents a canonical emblem of cultural identity.¹ Despite *Genji*’s roots in Heian Japan, the work’s radiance scatters like a supernova’s light, sparking countless remediations across centuries, among them stories, plays, paintings, clothing, comics, live-action and animated films, and even a special commemorative Japanese banknote in 2000 to toast the millennium and the twenty-sixth G8 summit.² Many of *The Tale of Genji*’s multigenerational plotlines detail the lusts and losses of the courtier “Shining” Genji, whose artistic brilliance and political wile allow him to seize power covertly and even illicitly father an emperor despite being unable to ever claim that title himself. For leading *Genji* scholar Mitamura Masako, this foundational paradox at imperial patriarchy’s core drives masculine desire in the tale and shapes *Genji*’s circuitous narrative structure.³ With its multiple registers, shifting perspective, and often elliptical style, the tale renders an elaborate portrait of the machinations undergirding Heian aristocratic society’s decorous veneer. Across fifty-four chapters, the narrative chronicles dozens of protagonists through episodes of sexual intrigue, spirit possession, exile, death, and subtler relinquishments. Given its blend of gravity, intricacy, and comedic traces, *The Tale of Genji* names less a text than it does a galaxy.

Add to this mix an opacity that can both seduce and estrange readers of various eras, and our sense of *Genji*’s queerness deepens. *Genji* poses, by virtue of its very formation, certain fundamental yet unanswerable questions. We don’t know the real name of the woman who wrote *Genji*, and no original manuscript in her hand exists. Like her text, the author leaves us no choice but to approach from an insurmountable remove. While *Genji*’s author is functionally nameless, we call her Murasaki Shikibu (973–1014?). Shikibu is derived from her father’s post as senior secretary in the Bureau of Ceremonial (Shikibu no daijō). Meanwhile, Murasaki is a moniker ascribed by fans of *Genji* enamored of its most beloved female protagonist, the Lady Murasaki (Murasaki no Ue). Thus the makeshift “Murasaki Shikibu” fashions a phantom intimacy with readers that effaces the fact of perennial distance.

The Tale of Genji revels in that distance, estranging readers from inherited structures along the way. Steeped in the conventions of Heian court culture, the

narrative highlights elites' reliance on marriage and heterosexual reproduction as strategic means of forging alliances, reinforcing lineages, and ensuring an ascendant path. Manifold desires and investments circulate under the banner of "Heian marriage politics."⁴ Yet the text also dramatizes the mercurial capacity of aspiration to elude staid routes. Part of what makes *Genji* queer, then, is not the prevalence of homoerotic innuendo but rather the text's relentless illustration of how strictures designed to govern desire routinely stoke impulses that outstrip those constraints. Indeed, in showing the fatal torment Genji's mother suffers on becoming the emperor's favorite consort in the absence of a politically powerful father's backing, the narrator condemns the aspirational tropes of Heian marriage politics—and the enforced vulnerabilities it demands—in *Genji*'s opening pages. As H. Richard Okada explains, "Rather than originating in 'love' or amorous passion as some would have it, the narrator seems to be showing us the tragic underside of a male desire that depends for the prosperity of a family on a feminine presence at the same time that it ignores the consequences of the practice for the women themselves."⁵ This inaugural critique of male desire embodies a queer provocation, as readers are urged to rethink the value or viability of patriarchal aspiration. Doing so constitutes a disorientation that can amplify a protagonist's or reader's awareness of contingency—their own or that of the ideological structures to which they consciously or unconsciously adhere.

Accordingly, I would agree with Lili Iriye Selden's characterization that *Genji* reveals the presence "of a critical subtext that is juxtaposed against two hegemonic discourses of desire. The first of these hegemonic discourses is an aesthetic discourse of idealized love that reflects the ideology of [the imperial poetry anthology *Kokinwakashū*, 905], and the second is a discourse of amatory conquest (*irogonomi*) that arose from the practice of marriage politics in premodern Japan."⁶ Conjectures about authorial intention aside, this critical subtext proves difficult to ignore. Importantly however, Rajyashree Pandey urges caution toward retrospective invocations of agency—or woman, or desire—that might skew our interpretation.⁷ With this caveat in mind, an implicit critical subtext establishes the terrain through which queer readings can weave without snagging on hegemonic ideals of romantic sport.

A queer reading would consist partly of examining how ambiguities in textual mediation and intersubjective encounters pervade this narrative terrain, consequently keeping these reductive discourses in abeyance. Even in acknowledging the *Kokinwakashū*'s role in promoting a hegemonic discourse of idealized love, we should also recognize, as Gustav Heldt argues concerning male homosocial desire, that "the court-sanctioned form of love poetry found in imperial anthologies encompassed a much more polymorphous spectrum of erotic desires than is commonly acknowledged in modern readings."⁸ Awareness of such a spectrum—of desires and of the rhetorical techniques through which they are expressed—should encourage an awareness of correspondingly diverse ways to theorize them.

GENJI'S QUEERNESS / GENJI QUESTIONS

To suggest that *Genji* queers notions of romance, proximity, intimacy, or loss unspools an array of questions that exceed facile or familiar stances. Heterosexual romantic coupling; domestic security; material possession; procreation; the reproduction and maintenance of privilege; healthful longevity; an auspicious future—I argue that *The Tale of Genji* frequently presents this trajectory as a favored paradigm while undermining it as ultimately untenable, beset by instability, violence, and indelible ambivalence. To give just one example, we might consider Genji's prudence in fathering only three children—compared to characters like Tō no Chūjō and others, who father heaps of them; we can read this restraint as queer insofar as it suggests a wary disinclination toward favored modes of social reproduction.⁹

Genji in fact belongs to a longer lineage of such Heian literary critiques. Jonathan Stockdale notes that the *Genji* forbear *Taketori monogatari* (*The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, late ninth century) is striking for its “somewhat radical discontent” and “a deep antagonism toward Heian sexual politics and toward the constellation of power in court society that arose from Heian marriage practices.”¹⁰ Similarly, by emphasizing this system's injustice and fallibility, the *Genji* narrative exposes certain templates for ambitious living as brittle—if not lethal. Repeatedly, we witness compulsions to align with a vector of striving that may temporarily supply pleasure but eventually depletes lives. Consequently, when it comes to the intersubjective negotiations coordinating social intercourse, the text interrogates notions of normalcy and prosperity, laying bare an abiding queerness that suffused Heian courtly life.

But how specifically does this queerness surface in *Genji*, and what would queering the text—foregrounding less discernable encounters with uncertainty and disorientation—entail? In some ways, my project negotiates between two impulses in queer theory, distinguished historically as early versus later scholarship. As J. Keith Vincent explains, “Anglophone queer studies since the 1990s has been characterized by its rejection of fixed identity categories, its anti-normative stance, and its critique of linear and developmental temporality. One might call this ‘classic’ or ‘first generation’ queer studies.”¹¹ As queer studies has shifted away from sexuality, identity, and embodiment and toward questioning broader normative paradigms such as, in the case of posthumanist queer theory, the category of the human itself, I have sought to incorporate these more recent ideas into my readings. Hence, *A Proximate Remove* takes cues from different moments in the history of queer reading as practiced in an Anglophone and Japanese context. Put schematically, the critical work queering does in this study involves (1) identifying homoerotic impulses as they get redirected to homosocial bonding; (2) showing how desires for authority, stability, and prestige underpinning Heian life are questioned; and (3) apprehending the affective and sensorial emergence of these impulses and desires through scenes of intimacy and loss to imagine alternative modes of living and becoming.

Moving beyond associations with sexuality or gender, I propose queering as an interpretive strategy that resists closure and observes aporias where desire, doubt, discomfort, disorientation, deferral, detachment, and disenchantment undo certainties of knowledge. All of these experiences accentuate a multimodal susceptibility to forces irreducible to pat notions of gender, agency, or embodiment. Moreover, they entail a heightened degree of distance from the familiar: a remove from routines that establish normative axes the text continually calls into question. Although gender and sexuality often provide a provisional departure point, my readings accent other aspects adjacent but not anchored to those categories. Rajyashree Pandey's realization resonates here: "What struck me as noteworthy in my readings of texts such as the *Genji* was not so much the presence of individuals as active agents, imbued with initiative and will and driven by desire, but rather the existence of a force field of erotic and affective sensations . . . which created a pleasurable ambience and generated in those who came under its spell a propensity, if you will, to react and respond."¹²

As I discuss below, this textual disposition challenges traditional tenets of feminist and queer theory. Methodologically, exploring the propensity Pandey describes involves lingering over hesitations or irruptions in the text, locating moments askew of the narrative's most prominent vectors of authority, sexuality, or temporality. More specifically, *A Proximate Remove* attends to spatial, visual, aural, and tactile attributes of scenes, "providing a sensorial account that aims to untether *Genji* scholarship from the questions of imperial power and gender that have dominated, and proposing sonic reverberations, architectural porosity, and bodily (dis-)orientation as literary devices that unspool what the text's logic may otherwise contain."¹³

When I say that *Genji* queers, I mean that it imagines alternatives through its questioning of inherited structures of thought, action, and feeling. Queering does not need to center on sexuality and antinormative subversion; it can instead bring attention to the embodied experience of contingency, instances where physical or psychic stability is threatened. Consider this inventory: "As Koremitsu hunted to and fro for Genji, the ages it took for dawn to break made that single night feel like it eclipsed a thousand years;"¹⁴ "Because of Genji's aspect as he rode wobbly in an unsteadied saddle, Koremitsu was once again right by his side to help, but Genji still slid from his mount to the ground of the Kamo riverbank;"¹⁵ "Thinking how awful it was that she'd let her guard down, Taifu felt so rueful for Her Highness that her face feigned ignorance and she withdrew to her quarters;"¹⁶ "Taifu's face flushed red as she looked on;"¹⁷ "Genji had very few people with him; as they slept he alone lay awake, his pillow propped to listen to the winds whirling from all directions as the waves felt as though they were washing right up to where he lay;"¹⁸ "[Genji] pressed a sleeve to his face while [Yūgiri], his vision blurred by tears, squinted firmly to keep looking [at Murasaki's corpse], without getting his fill."¹⁹

Queer energies animate each of these scenes of intimacy and loss, emerging in the agonizing dilation of time Genji spends waiting to be rescued; the tottering

saddle his servant steadies; Taifu's sympathetic downcast eyes and retreat; her flushed cheeks; Genji, lonesome, listening to ravishing waves; and Yūgiri's drawn-out melancholic stare, flickering to keep focused. The pauses, touches, approaches, and compressions we discern allude to disorientations and reorientations brought by brushes with compromised conditions of possibility. Far more than any inklings of seduction or insurgence, a disorganizing and vitalizing encounter with contingency is what marks these instances as queer. A queer theorization of these scenes helps us fathom their affective shape, their micropolitical intricacy, and their implications for our own present-day capacity to rethink—or transform—worldly relations beyond the text.

Queer approaches help me assess the disorganizing, vitalizing impulses saturating *Genji's* world. They encourage a slowed consideration of such forces and their implications at individual and social levels. And yet I want to avoid affixing a thematic core that forecloses too much, since to posit that *The Tale of Genji* is “about” affect or love—not to mention loss or intimacy—can unduly occlude other perspectives. Therefore, throughout the book, I track a host of interrogative gestures presented in the narrative. In simple terms, “a proximate remove,” refers to an embodied adjacency to familiar forms or relations that unsettles in critically generative ways. Proximate removes are spatiotemporal fissures, intervals in which to suspend belief in normalizing structures and to rethink habituated patterns of occupying the world. Proximate removes become openings that arouse questioning. Genji himself arouses, too, appealing to people across a range of ages, social stations, factional lines, and locales. But whatever sensuous appeal “Shining” Genji radiates, he simultaneously poses problems for established sensibilities; predominant logics of sociality and feeling thaw in his vicinity. Genji's encounters with the phenomenal world suggest shades of affection or apprehension unfastened from rote love or longing. Hence, Genji figures a provisional focal point in the narrative's insistent questioning of established patterns. Such questioning opens an interval to pause, and to reorient attention.

Queering a text therefore involves apprehending the extent to which these textual moments, in their uneasy adjacency to enduring social mores and hegemonic discourses, challenge the primacy or stability of such norms to suggest other modes of thinking, desiring, moving, living, and having. Proximate removes—whether wrought by exile's enforced privations or by mourning's ambivalent withdrawal—serve as nodes that can be used to track how desire travels and transforms. Through these sites, I theorize the repercussions of experiencing intimacy and loss. I contend that such encounters in *The Tale of Genji* foreground the precarious consistency of dominant discourses. Collectively, these portrayals question habits of feeling, affiliation, separation, and aspiration, urging readers to reckon with these divergences as queer and volatile.

Queer moments coax us to discern desires for proximity to entities or archetypes with renewed wariness—as presences ostensibly within reach yet receding

out of hand. Indeed, *Genji* dilates on the question of aspiration itself, elaborating the casualties suffered for striving's sake. A queer reading of *Genji* recognizes its protagonists' experiences with intimacy and loss as being suffused by a contingency that makes them inescapably circuitous, and often only barely navigable. Although compromised capacities to thrive are unmistakably heightened in intervals of intimacy and loss, the narrative articulates these as ubiquitous features of its landscape. Therefore, I demonstrate that queer gestures are not peripheral to the text but pivotal. In *Genji*, misgivings permeate scenes of ostensible success to spotlight considerable potential for failure. This propensity for failure figures an excess that upends our sensibilities. Hence, I argue that the movements of *Genji*'s protagonists materialize as generative estrangements, queer questions that trouble any faith in business as usual—as shown by an ancient Japanese text, or as sanctioned by contemporary academic disciplines.

MINDING THE GAP

How might queer theory transform our interpretations of medieval Japanese literature, and how might medieval Japanese literature reorient the assumptions, priorities, and practices of queer theory? *A Proximate Remove* explores these questions by turning to *Genji* as a text through which to read these two fields in productive proximity to each other. One of my goals is to draw from scholars both within and outside of premodern Japanese literary studies to improve approaches in this discipline. The aim is not to use queer theory as a route away from Heian literature. To the contrary, my hope is that a dialogue between *Genji* and queer theory might bring us back to Heian literature with new questions and better ways to read.

Moving between the disciplines of premodern Japanese literary studies and queer studies, and building on previous scholarship in both areas, the book performs a critical engagement with medieval Japanese texts that integrates close thematic readings with queer conceptual tools. *A Proximate Remove* stages a dialogue between these contexts to pursue conceptual possibilities informed by both but confined by neither. Granted, perfect reciprocity proves elusive. While some of the conversation's asymmetry stems from the very nature of working between disparate fields, more of it owes to my formal disciplinary location in premodern Japanese literary studies. That said, I do hope the book generates interpretive tools that readers from diverse disciplinary locations removed from Japanese, literary, or premodern studies might draw from.

After all, my decision to pursue this project was partly influenced by a disappointment with the lack of queer theoretical scholarship dealing with archives that were both non-Western and nonmodern.²⁰ I have followed work in queer studies for more than a decade, and it has been exciting to observe the field expanding its scope, methods, and ambition to include queer of color, postcolonial, emergent

media, and posthumanist critiques. And as a medievalist, I find that rigorous analyses of premodern discourse by scholars like Carolyn Dinshaw, Jonathan Goldberg, and Carla Freccero have been welcome counterweights to queer studies' overwhelmingly modern slant.²¹ I'm intrigued by what kinds of insights surface once capitalist modernity and its attendant ideologies can't be presumed as a frame of reference. Such a backdrop provides a convenient basis for tracing confluences across boundaries of nations, media, or experience. But this backdrop's sweep can also overdetermine too much too soon.

Of course, certain touchstones of social organization also existed for premodern societies. But much of the appeal of medieval texts is their failure to align with capitalist modernity's categories of normativity, embodied subjectivity, and politics. My goal isn't to fetishize a continuous narrative across epochs or to posit some historical schism that would let me tout premodern Japan as a bastion of radical otherness. Rather, I want to underscore a gap in scholarship formed by several intersecting disciplinary proclivities: toward modern and early modern U.S. and European cultural production in queer studies; toward modern and early modern cultural production in Asian studies; and toward sexual discourse in modern and premodern queer studies. These interwoven dispositions have fostered blind spots that *A Proximate Remove* tries to address.

The book's overarching goal is to energize critical discourse on premodern Japanese literature and queer theory among established and emerging scholars alike. I offer these readings not as some final take on queerness or *The Tale of Genji* but as a cluster of pedagogically useful provocations for readers to find examples, ask questions, and develop approaches that this study can't predict. Moreover, I've written *A Proximate Remove* with students in mind, especially those who run into trouble when they encounter depictions of same-sex relations like this: "Well, then, so be it. You, at least: don't ditch me,' Genji said, having the page boy lie down alongside him. Since the boy was so cheerily appreciative of Genji's youthful tenderness, it's said that Genji found him considerably sweeter than his cold-hearted sister."²²

Such episodes can spark classroom discomfort, excitement, curiosity, and critical thinking. This can lead to the insight that "Genji's gay" (or, as one recent undergraduate emphasized, "hella gay"). As a class, we enjoy unpacking this earnest, if misleading claim, mostly because of how it highlights certain ill-suited cultural and historical assumptions about sexual identities and practices. I get to ask what *gay* denotes, exactly, and if our current lingo's connotations match what Genji was up to with the appreciative boy in a story written a millennium ago. I can propose that Genji is not necessarily gay, and my students listen to me skeptically: "He's lonely, ruined by his mother's death and his uncertain status in being denied the throne; he's also a connoisseur of pleasurable, advantageous intimate relations to people and things (partially and unconsciously because of these losses); plus, he's feeling a little more unloved than usual this particular night. He is wounded, tender, cunning, unapologetically radiant, and relentlessly affectionate, but *gay*?" *Gay*

proves too glib and myopic to encompass the celestially smoking hot mess that is *Genji*. *Queer*, though, might characterize better his complicated breadth.

As the following chapter unpacks, textual episodes like this in *Genji* raise the issue of learning to differentiate between apt confluences and false flags. Such suggestive scenes yield opportunities to reconsider hasty misrecognitions of sexual identity. Yet the book's larger critical project is to practice an apprehensive mode of reading, warily distant from absolutist pronouncements regarding desire, politics, textuality, or method. Indeed, one benefit of a queer theoretical emphasis can be its skepticism toward aspirations for epistemological closure or empirical potency. "A proximate remove" can thus also refer to the tentativeness marking this style of inquiry. As a metaphor, the phrase names an interval where characters within the fictional realm—and, ideally, the attentive reader as well—come to regard these experiences of wanting. Hence, "a proximate remove" connotes a venue for mapping and questioning both desire and the often disorganizing sensory experiences that infuse it.

POSITIONING THE INTERVENTION

At its heart, *A Proximate Remove* is an act of literary criticism with commitments to queer conceptual approaches. Simply put, this monograph is the book about sexuality, spatial representation, and sensation I wish had existed when I first encountered premodern Japanese literature in college. It has been invigorating to see multiple pieces of scholarship arrive since that time to fill important gaps. Most exciting among these has been Rajyashree Pandey's *Perfumed Sleeves and Tangled Hair: Body, Woman, and Desire in Medieval Japanese Narratives* (2016), which delves deftly into questions of embodiment and sensation in *Genji* and other texts to a degree previously unseen in English-language scholarship. In its sensitive interrogation of fundamental categories of literary analysis, I consider Pandey's study an important touchstone for queer approaches to premodern Japanese literature, even if it doesn't couch itself in these terms.

Although scholarship on *The Tale of Genji* is vast, no full-length study in English or Japanese has yet examined the text explicitly through the lens of queer theory in a sustained manner. Despite this, delineating several strands of the broader mesh of Japanese and Anglophone scholarship surrounding these issues helps demonstrate how earlier contributions ground the readings performed here. *A Proximate Remove*'s intervention is to read Heian literature and queer theory in productive relation to each other. I see my work on Heian literature as a continuation of queer theory, which is not a fixed idiom but one I am trying to enrich and develop in new directions as a scholar of premodern Japan. After all, my readings are merely meant to contribute to a broader conversation that Japanese scholars, particularly those affiliated with the Narrative Research Association (*monogatari kenkyūkai*), have already been having for decades.

A poststructuralist recourse to phenomenology resulted both in a new focus on media and mediation and in heightened attention to the relationship between language and space, as pioneered by renowned *Genji* scholars such as Mitani Kuniaki beginning in the mid-1970s.²³ Broadly, this attention could analyze asymmetries between margin and center, especially as they framed factional gender politics. At a smaller scale, the phenomenological emphasis underscored the significance of natural barriers like mountains and rivers and man-made structures like gates, fences, and folding screens as mediating objects to be theorized in relation to their effects on discursive maneuvers and interpersonal intimacies within the narrative. This was a brand of textual criticism newly alert to well-worn objects and armed with fresh lenses through which to examine the political implications of these inanimate objects' animating narrative function.

With regard to scholarship in English related to the topics of love and loss in premodern Japanese literature, gender studies criticism in a feminist vein has proved most popular since the mid-1980s. Andrew Pekarik's influential edited volume *Ukifune: Love in the Tale of Genji* (1982) heralded later gender studies approaches to *Genji* in English. Crucially, Norma Field's *The Splendor of Longing in the Tale of Genji* (1987), the first full-length study of Heian literature in English to focus primarily on the literary representation of the narrative's "heroines," arguably inaugurated this trend of Anglophone feminist readings of *Genji*. Doris Barga's *A Woman's Weapon: Spirit Possession in the Tale of Genji* (1997) joined a series of feminist readings of premodern literature appearing from the late 1990s, participating in a broader trend toward exploring the theme of gender within English-language scholarship. Besides Barga's study, the following works form a thematic cohort: *The Woman's Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women's Writing* (1996), edited by Janet Walker and Paul Gordon Schalow; *The Father-Daughter Plot: Japanese Literary Women and the Law of the Father* (2001), edited by Rebecca L. Copeland and Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen; Edith Sarra's powerful *Fictions of Femininity: Literary Inventions of Gender in Japanese Court Women's Memoirs* (1999); and Charo D'Etcheverry's *Love after the Tale of Genji: Rewriting the World of the Shining Prince* (2007). Within this broader mix, three of the most famous English-language monographs on *Genji* approach it explicitly from a feminist vantage: Field's *Splendor of Longing*, Barga's *A Woman's Weapon*, and Tomiko Yoda's *Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts and the Constructions of Japanese Modernity* (2004). However, Kimura Saeko notes a tendency, visible in Japanese and Anglophone feminist scholarship, to unduly subsume Heian texts beneath modern discourses that might misread their treatments of sexuality or violence.²⁴

Whereas Yoda, Kimura, and H. Richard Okada have drawn attention to the politics of discursive space, there have been comparatively few theoretically inclined treatments focused on more concrete Heian literary depictions of architectural or geographic space.²⁵ However, Terry Kawashima's *Writing Margins* (2001) and *Itineraries of Power* (2017) address the spatial tenor of gendered constructions

and textual movement, respectively; and Jonathan Stockdale's *Imagining Exile in Heian Japan* (2015) interprets literary depictions of banishment from the court's political center. Similarly, Doris Barga's *Mapping Courtship and Kinship in Classical Japan* (2015) considers the link between genealogical networks and their manifestation in social, spatial, and architectural terms within *Genji*.

One gap we find, however, is the absence of queer treatments of Heian literature, which stands out against the notable number of monographs offering feminist readings. This relative paucity can seem strange given the wealth of Japanese and English-language scholarship on other periods and in other disciplines that emphasize nonheterosexual relations. Stephen Miller's edited volume *Partings at Dawn: An Anthology of Japanese Gay Literature* (1996), which included texts from a range of eras, broke ground as the first such anthology of its kind and signifies an important contribution to queer studies research in Japanese literature. Research on medieval literature includes articles on *chigo* (adolescent males attached to Buddhist temples) by Margaret Childs (1980) and Paul Atkins (2008), which treat the post-Heian genres of "acolyte tales" (*chigo monogatari*) that portrayed relationships between monks and temple-boys.²⁶

Most research on male-male or nonbinary sexuality has focused on the Edo period (1603–1868). This includes Gary Leupp's *Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan* (1997), which examined homosexuality primarily as a historical phenomenon; and Gregory Pflugfelder's influential *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600–1950* (1999), which brought further attention to the topic of homosexuality within historical studies of Japanese modernity. Meanwhile, monographs by scholars such as James Reichert (2006), Michiko Suzuki (2009), and J. Keith Vincent (2012) pursue the topic of homosociality in modern fiction.

Articles related to these issues in a Heian context are a slightly different matter. They include Pflugfelder's "Strange Fates: Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in *Torikaebaya Monogatari*" (1992), pivotal for its sophisticated incorporation of contemporary gender theory into an analysis of *The Changelings* (*Torikaebaya monogatari*, twelfth century) that highlighted gender's provisional embodiment, the performance of androgyny, and Buddhist notions' role in shaping conceptions of intersexuality. Complementing work by scholars such as Susan Mann on the multiple styles of male bonding practiced in Chinese culture, Gustav Heldt's "Between Followers and Friends: Male Homosocial Desire in Heian Court Poetry" (2007) represents a valuable, more recent foray into queer literary studies.²⁷ Stressing the vital ambiguity infusing the "codes of poetic intercourse" men practiced, Heldt argues that "the slippery surface of the language through which Japanese court poetry expressed male-male desire enabled it to refer to these multiple [hierarchies of rank and kinship] while also maintaining the potential to call these hierarchies into question."²⁸ This type of linguistic ambiguity sets the stage for queer reading by maintaining both a proximity to male-male desire and a critical remove from it.

Paul Schalow's *The Poetics of Male Friendship in Heian Japan* (2007), which examines some of *The Tale of Genji's* male-male relationships, would seem to occupy this space and gesture toward queer critique. Schalow's study explores what he terms "poetics of courtly male friendship" in Heian texts and "inherits these concerns about the transcendence of love and the suffering of women from feminist scholarship and carries it into a new realm of inquiry—of the suffering of noblemen and the literary record of their hopes for transcendence through friendship."²⁹ Although the book is helpful for its attention to this theme of male friendship in several works of Heian literature, it simultaneously seems to keep the potential for queer readings at arm's length, with friendship serving as a buffer by which this possibility is deflected. "Homosexuality" is mentioned only once in the book, during a reading of *Kagerō nikki* (ca. 974), with a fifteenth-century reading of male-love (*nanshoku*) in *Ise monogatari* (ca. 980) receiving a double mention.³⁰ Though he doesn't use the phrase in his work, Schalow details literary aspects of male friendship that Eve Sedgwick would place along a continuum of "male homosocial desire," one whose contiguity with homoeroticism warrants further investigation given her positing of "male friendship" and "mentorship" among possible manifestations of this desire.³¹

Unlike Schalow's account, my approach considers friendship as a form of intimacy whose affective and spatiotemporal features should be rethought in queer terms explicitly. As Heldt explains, multivalent terms like *tomo* (friend/follower) and *kimi* (my love/milord) highlight a degree of fluidity in male-male friendship that Schalow's account attenuates: "this homosocial category had the potential [*sic*] to confuse the boundary between private and public relationships, creating a type of bond that was defined by neither kinship nor kingship."³² Hence, I would argue that this blurred boundary presents an opportunity for queer reading—namely, to examine how affinities formed outside these hierarchies potentially question them and can even generate other unanticipated modes of relation in the process. Heldt's analysis advocates for highlighting such linguistic ambiguity without rushing to resolve it, with the benefit of "breaking the habit of reading poems in a manner that forces us to choose between the sexual . . . and nonsexual."³³ This recommendation continues a trend pioneered by Japanese scholars of Heian literature more than a decade earlier.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK: JAPANESE QUEER READINGS OF HEIAN TEXTS

In the context of Japanese-language Heian literary criticism, a queer studies approach develops largely out of the fertile research of Narrative Research Association scholars. In particular, Kawazoe Fusae and Kimura Saeko offer ways to think beyond simpler notions of social reproduction and to take seriously forms of sociality not defined primarily by an obsession with patrilineal succession. In

Japanese, an emblematic article considering *Genji* from what could be called a queer studies perspective is Kawazoe Fusae's "Genji monogatari no sei to bunka: androgynusu to shite no Hikaru Genji" (*The Tale of Genji's sex and culture: Hikaru Genji as androgynous*, 1995), in which she examines Genji's ambiguous erotic depictions in relation to male homosociality. Kawazoe's article stands as a significant early experiment in the queer reading of Heian literature. Occasionally in the essay, Kawazoe registers some dissatisfaction about various terms' applicability to Genji's particular shifting disposition. She demonstrates how the terms *heterosexual*, *homosexual*, *bisexual*, and *androgynous* all fail to fit Genji, due largely to how his interactions play up the gap between shifting erotic practices and any static sexual identity. Kawazoe stresses that *The Tale of Genji*, like many premodern Japanese narratives, disallows any notion of sexual identity akin to that asserted later, in the early modern period or within modern societies.

Even as *androgyny* frames Genji's orientation less clunkily than *bisexual*, Kawazoe implies that the term *androgynous* itself might presume too harsh a gender binary. Usefully, she situates *The Tale of Genji's* androgynous depictions of its main protagonist historically. She notes that although a 970 edict prohibited sex between men, by the time Fujiwara Sukefusa's journal *Shunki* was composed in 1039, attitudes toward such behavior had changed completely to become much more permissive heading into the *insei* period of cloistered rule by retired emperors.³⁴ Remarkably, this locates *Genji's* composition, circa 1010, roughly midway between these two benchmarks, suggesting that Murasaki Shikibu's narrative registered and participated in the gradual normalization of male-male sexual relations and the gender expectations that slid along with them. Moreover, in a vein extended by scholars like Pandey, Kawazoe lays the groundwork for a radical rethinking of what even defines a body. In this way, Kawazoe parallels a conceptual turn taken within queer studies from initial critiques of gender systems and the politics of embodiment to more recent posthumanist approaches.

Two of Kawazoe's insights seem especially valuable. Firstly, the scenarios *Genji* depicts ultimately don't parse easily into modern categories of sexual identity or preference, where heterosexual and homosexual are counterposed: "Sexual love in *The Tale of Genji* is not something that tells of protagonists' sexual habits; it is narrating human reciprocal relationality itself [ningen sōgo no kankeisei sono mono]."³⁵ Secondly, Genji's interactions with various characters can actually suggest modes of relation (*yukari*) that are less rigid and overdetermined than what sexuality denotes. Kawazoe's argument challenges the significance of sexual object-choice in favor of affinity. Untethered from sexual object-choice, affinities of this sort imply more provisional, improvisational eroticism or affection that blooms momentarily and then evaporates or shifts course. Instructive is the way Kawazoe reads *Genji* closely to consider the utility of homosociality as an interpretive frame while remaining attuned to Heian concepts that helpfully refract such foreign terms.

One detail that highlights the complex scholarly environment in which these terms circulate is that Kawazoe's article, which invokes homosociality, doesn't cite Eve Sedgwick's foundational 1985 book, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Instead, it cites modern Japanese literature scholar Komori Yōichi's 1994 article, "Kokoro ni okeru dōseiai to iseiai" (Homosexuality and heterosexuality in *Kokoro*).³⁶ This citation speaks to the prevailing networks of translation (or lack thereof) for queer studies scholarship. As J. Keith Vincent notes, "Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, both published in English in 1990, made it into Japanese together in 1999, whereas Sedgwick's book had to wait until 2008 to be translated into French, and Butler's *Gender Trouble* until 2006. The same cannot be said, incidentally, of more recent works in queer theory."³⁷ Worth noting here are the relative speed with which certain works of queer theory were translated into Japanese and the relative slowness with which queer theory made it into premodern Japanese literary studies—as mediated through research on modern Japanese literature. Symptomatic of a politics of translation that differentially structures the rate and depth at which concepts from Anglophone academia enter subfields of Japanese literary studies, this secondhand citation itself symbolizes a proximate remove of sorts: a deferred access to queer theory despite an attraction to its interpretive promise.

Building on the work of scholars like Kawazoe, Kimura Saeko's *Koisuru monogatari no homosekushuariti: kyūtei shakai to kenryoku* (Love tales' homosexuality: Court society and authority, 2008) and "Kyūtei monogatari no kuia na yokubō" (The queer desire of court tales, 2014) exemplify a more recent move, especially by Japanese feminist scholars of Heian literature, to incorporate a queer studies emphasis into analyses of gender politics.³⁸ Kimura's investment in queer theory seems based on a desire to identify textual moments where prevailing gender politics yield a potential to imagine otherwise. I draw inspiration from Kimura's provocative ability to highlight how literary depictions can prompt us to reconsider aspects of gender and authority we might take for granted as being prescribed or totalized by Heian systems, such as wet-nursing and the serviceability of "nonproductive" female bodies to reproducing an aristocratic order.³⁹ Such an emphasis on nonproductive female bodies allows us to read them, and their relationships with Genji's own unusual body, as queer.

In her earlier research, Kimura unpacks the limiting assumptions of the term *homosexuality* while foregrounding the social utility of male-male sexuality despite its lack of reproductive value biologically. However, her later work names its concerns queer explicitly, loosening a customary analytical tie to bodies, sexuality, and gender politics per se. Instructively, Kimura shows how queer desire in Heian literature emerges not simply in sexual object-choice among humans but also across ethnic or species boundaries, with rebirth signifying a queer trope for its capacity to transform gender, status, mobility, and existence itself.⁴⁰ Remarkable here is the way a Buddhist worldview fundamental to Heian texts informs a

style of posthumanist queer reading beyond a Western modern queer theoretical frame of reference. Readings like these, advanced by Japanese scholars like Kawazoe and Kimura, enrich my project's conceptual framework.

QUEER'S STAKES AND ORIENTATIONS

This delineation of relevant strains of inquiry in Anglophone and Japanese studies of premodern Japanese literature begs the question of what a rethinking along queer theoretical lines would entail: What resources would it require, and what critical habits might it produce, unsettle, or redress? How should we understand the stakes and conceptual, historical, and political orientation of *queer*? Such a rich concept deserves a multifaceted response. My goal in this and subsequent sections is therefore to clarify which concepts and tendencies circulating in the interface between Heian literary studies and Anglophone queer studies I find most useful.

Claudia Freccero argues that "all textuality, when subjected to close reading, can be said to be queer" in order to resist the term's "reification into nominal status designating an entity, an identity, a thing, and allow it to continue its outlaw work as a verb and sometimes an adjective."⁴¹ I appreciate Freccero's stress on the term's verbal resonance but am wary of widening the term's scope to include "all textuality." More useful is her claim that the "indeterminacy of the queer . . . may in fact constitute its usefulness as a deconstructive anti-identitarian and political practice."⁴² Analyzing the nature of this indeterminacy is a priority, and I find more fruitful the deconstructive anti-identitarian strain of queer theory than the activist one.

My own use of "queer" as a figure of indeterminacy is strategic: I hope to spark discussion about the concept's meanings and uses among scholars, trained respectively in queer studies and premodern Japanese studies, who tend not to share archives or conversations.⁴³ This is a modest hope for transdisciplinary exchange. Even so, such hope might nonetheless signify as queer insofar as it recalls Elizabeth Dinshaw's notion of a queer historical impulse, which she describes as "an impulse toward making connections across time between . . . lives, texts, and other cultural phenomena left out of sexual categories back then and . . . those left out of current sexual categories now. Such an impulse extends the resources for self- and community building into even the distant past."⁴⁴ I hope this study expands that impulse and, in time, makes it more sustainable.

The political practice that motivates *A Proximate Remove* involves assessing the politics of disciplinary formation and reproduction within both the Heian text and the contemporary university. My goal is to perform readings that make *queer* both desirable and viable as a textual approach within studies of premodern Japanese texts, ideally in a fashion that erodes some of the discipline's enduring positivism and conservatism. Taking a genealogical approach, I chart discontinuities pervading prevailing senses of what's viable historically, politically, and pedagogically. In

its verbal mode, “to queer” is to rework established patterns. I therefore deploy the concept as a way to rethink notions of desire, relationality, feeling, knowledge, and learning.

As the subsequent chapter demonstrates, thematizing *The Tale of Genji*'s portrayals of feeling in terms of emotion, sentimentality, and romance has a checkered history of appraisals that have frequently oversimplified the text. Hence, much English-language discourse and some Japanese commentary continued from the late nineteenth century until the linguistic turn of the late 1970s to cast *Genji* in alternately rhapsodizing, moralizing, or patronizing reductions.⁴⁵ Such responses were fueled by geopolitical contestations in which Heian literature as a paragon of Japanese civilization was cast as exceptionally aesthetic and romantically lush. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this characterization supported arguments for Japan's cultural sophistication being on par with that of Western nations, while in the post-World War II and Cold War periods it helped hawk Japan's humanism and apolitical (i.e., non-Communist) harmlessness. Hence, sentimentality and effete sensibility consistently overshadowed the narrative's tenor of systemic violence, not to mention its undesirable sensibilities and affections. Historicizing this containment strategy targeted at premodern Japanese texts invites comparison with corollaries such as those described by Alan Sinfield and Deborah Nelson in U.S. Cold War culture.⁴⁶

To queer intimacy and loss is to question the normative structures—like privacy, propriety, or property ownership—that encompass them.⁴⁷ Gesture and affect matter as embodiments of these questions at differing scales. Gesture becomes a site to interpret the reverberations of disparate stimuli as they stir bodily motion; affect helps consider such movements in a granular register. I build on work like Mitamura Masako's *Genji monogatari kankaku no ronri* (*The Tale of Genji: A logic of sensation*, 1996), which bases its readings in protagonists' sensorial experiences to consider how sensation attunes us to interpretive potentials beyond standard critiques of imperial authority. Although scholarship in this vein did not label itself as queer, its explorations of the conceptual possibilities of phenomenology and *shintairon* (embodiment criticism) suggest conceptual congruities with queer commentary. I also engage Sara Ahmed's queer reading of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to assess the critical purchase it holds for rethinking *Genji*'s depictions of spatial practices. *A Proximate Remove* incorporates and extends these approaches to theorize the text's portrayals of intimacy and loss.

One way I do this is by reading between Japanese- and English-language accounts of phenomenological and affective modes of encounter. I take a cue from Matsui Kenji's *Genji monogatari no seikatsu sekai* (*The Tale of Genji's lifeworld*, 2000), in which Matsui theorizes *Genji*'s depictions through Husserl's phenomenological notion of collective intersubjective perception of the lived world. Matsui's project shares a sensibility with Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* (2007), another reference point for my own text. Through theorizing what Stewart conceptualizes as

the potential that animates the ordinary, I delineate the affective dimensions in *Genji* of experiencing intimacy and loss in their most inconsequential guises.⁴⁸ In this regard, my investigation echoes feminist and queer studies' turn toward the everyday as a critical site.⁴⁹ Still, I stress how the quotidian is conditioned by overt stratifications like patriarchal and status hierarchies. For instance, mid-Heian courtship, with all its flirtations and infractions, represents an ordinary girded by arrangements that disproportionately disadvantage women. The emperor system and its reproduction of imperial authority underwrote this unfair arrangement as part and parcel of women's and men's pursuits of pleasure, distraction, sex, security, and intimacy. Thus the world of the inconsequential everyday possesses intimate ties to prevailing discriminatory structures. My analyses focus on status and gender asymmetries to delineate the processes of subjection and orientation—institutionally and in the realm of individual sensory experience. Affect in particular becomes a concept through which to consider the gnarled, disorganizing capacities of intimacy and loss in a more capillary register, offering a means, like *queer*, to unravel normativity.

Nonetheless, given queer theory's basis in civil rights struggles around sexuality and citizenship, readers familiar with queer studies will note my project's disinterest in lauding subversion or *anti* stances. According to Annamarie Jagose, antinormativity has played a formative role in animating and organizing queer concerns, "enshrined as the signature value of a newly emergent activist and academic movement."⁵⁰ But as the field has progressed, as Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson note, "mak[ing] normativity queer theory's axiomatic foe" now seems questionable.⁵¹ Anglophone queer studies scholars have thus recently taken up the task of interrogating this conceptual keystone to rethink the history and future of queer theory and activism.

This move itself exemplifies queer critique in its willingness to displace a constitutive component of its disciplinary identity, making the term *queer*, in Judith Butler's account, "remain that which is in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes."⁵² With similar skepticism, my interest in queer doesn't rest in its historical allegiance to *anti*. Instead, I'm more compelled methodologically by its adjacency to reparative gestures less bound to identitarian struggles, not for lack of solidarity, but rather because such ongoing campaigns' motivating assumptions and aims—about identity, autonomy, privacy, capacities for action, citizenship, justice—don't fit my ancient Japanese objects well.

For one thing, queer as a sexual or more broadly behavioral designation based in typical modern understandings of antinormativity doesn't pan out in a premodern Japanese context. To mention just two prominent examples briefly, socially normalized and codified practices such as male love (*nanshoku*) between samurai during the Edo period (1603–1867) and a tradition of male-male sexual relations among Buddhist clergy and temple attendants especially from the thirteenth

century onward complicate if not invalidate accounts of sexual normativity bound to religious and legal prohibitions on sodomy. (We could add the absence of mandated religious confession and less draconian attitudes toward polyamory and matrimonial relations as other relevant variances from Western societies.) Indeed, *nanshoku*'s banality as a basic social fact and salient feature of institutional life announces a marked divergence from studies of sexuality in medieval Western cultures. The analytical impetus differs because there is less to expose on this score, especially in the early modern period. Sex does not become *the* secret coveted by the repressive mechanisms Michel Foucault diagnoses.⁵³ This lessens the need for and appeal of a symptomatic or paranoid hermeneutic, sapping their payoff. Hence, same-sex relations (among men at least) mostly figure as biographical truism, not as juicy fodder to be pried from the closet.

Queer critique does not merely oppose norms but also energizes doubt through its disinclination toward hasty foreclosure. Consequently, far more promising than a hunt for queer epitomes of antinormative resistance is queering as a mode of revising critical attention. Through this revision, queering can transition from mere critique to fashion a critical commitment to styles of thriving that are out of sync with dominant routines. Here, José Muñoz's utopian ambitions for the term stand out: "Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. . . . Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present."⁵⁴

For Muñoz, just occupying the site of objection isn't enough. He tilts the vector of queer forward, using its dissenting spirit as a springboard to imagine enhanced futures. Its status as a "crusading slogan" and matters of gender identification or activism aside, queering questions inherited sensibilities to pursue renewed capacities for thinking, relating, and living.⁵⁵ Such questioning rehearses an "educated mode of desiring" that transcends current constraints. Thus to queer is to rethink prevailing tendencies and become more attuned to, more educated about, and more desirous of better alternatives—for approaching *Genji* and for engaging vital questions beyond the text.

In the case of *Genji* specifically, a queer intervention informed by Muñoz's framing would entail looking past the text's "romances of the negative": the doomed relationships *Genji* seeks out in melancholic pursuit of substitutes for his dead mother and lost status. What Muñoz suggests would also mean forgoing the negative conceptual baggage inherited from non-Heian times and places. Doing so would entail deemphasizing themes of pessimism or lack in our analyses to read in more reparative ways. Case in point: *Genji*'s exile to Suma, despite the dispossession and toil it entails, could also be read in terms of the comfort it lends and the educational insight exile offers into a mode of artistic creation not circumscribed by the immediate demands of courtship or reproducing an aristocratic social order.

CONCEPTUAL SYNTAX

With a fuller sense of this terrain in mind, I'll now parse the book's title to map relationships between its guiding concepts.

Proximate

adjective

1 (esp. of a cause of something) closest in relationship; immediate: *that storm was the proximate cause of damage to it.*

• closest in space or time: *the failure of the proximate military power to lend assistance.*

2 nearly accurate; approximate: *he would try to change her speech into proximate ladylikeness.*⁵⁶

As a concept, proximity prods thought. The definitions above highlight two broad senses of the word: (1) a degree of immediacy and (2) a gap in accuracy or fidelity between proximate phenomena. The example phrases mention “damage,” “failure,” “military power,” and a push toward “ladylikeness.” The implied violence, capacity for structural failure, and pressure to comply with gender norms all issue from a destabilizing impulse that spatiotemporal closeness transmits.

Proximate connotes connection but needn't denote a particular vector or orientation. In this regard, it shares some of the appeal of *beside*, which, according to Eve Sedgwick, “permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object.”⁵⁷ There is potential energy in proximity that has yet to acquire purpose: “*Beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations.”⁵⁸

The book's title hinges on visual and aural affinities between the phrase *a proximate* and the word *approximate* because I want to stress questions of inflection from the start. Meaning and stakes shift according to how one opts to emphasize the gap before *proximate*. Whereas *a proximate* pronounces spatial separation, *approximate* makes us doubt the fidelity or depth of that discrepancy. Both permutations undermine the detachment of *remove*; both versions make us wary of the intervals they open. *Approximate* in verb form ventures outward, reaching to mime or reproduce a model referent. To approximate is to aspire in some way, desiring closeness or even equivalence with an ideal such that that ideal encases the (queer) aspirant. As Sara Ahmed points out, “The aspiration to ideals of conduct that is central to the reproduction of heteronormativity has been called, quite understandably, a form of assimilation.”⁵⁹

But these aspirational desires to approximate, incorporate, or assimilate can blur boundaries; as Lauren Berlant notes, “Intimacy only rarely makes sense of things.”⁶⁰ Does the act of approximation ultimately simulate or dissimulate? Can

everybody hit the mark with an equal shot at success? And what are the emotional, material, and relational costs of coinciding—for the subject, the object, the social body whose strictures magnify the stakes of meeting guidelines—especially where success implies an inability to differentiate between entities that overlap? The process of approximation smuggles with it plenty of anxious energy.

Moreover, *approximate* raises the specter of attrition, reminding us that something always goes missing (or gets taken) in the effort to aspire. Hence in the realm of social life, Berlant observes, it becomes “hard not to see lying about everywhere the detritus and the amputations that come from attempts to fit into the fold; meanwhile, a lot of world-building energy atrophies.”⁶¹ Berlant foregrounds the paradoxical nature of aspiring by formulating “cruel optimism,” which “names a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility.”⁶²

An analytical move I find compelling is that cruel optimism includes both banal and obsessive affections—phenomena occurring at varying scales—in its interpretive scope. Berlant’s formulation also assists my inquiry by positing “proximity to the scene of desire/attraction” as a vital aspect of the subject’s (un)conscious calculations concerning how to invest in the world.⁶³ I’m interested in such deliberate or unwitting adjustments in *Genji* as a function of spatiotemporal distance and as activated by desires whose full force or significance are incalculable. Epistemologically, uncertainty abiding despite or because of closeness to the attracting scene complicates evaluations of feelings’ truth or magnitude. Proximity thus becomes part of theorizing desire and sensation in ways that complicate implications for the subject’s life prospects.

We can read cruel optimism’s manifestations in impulsive or tactical calibrations of how to maneuver in relation to one’s past, present, and future commitments. *Genji* shows these maneuvers to be saturated by intimacies and losses large and small. Indeed, *Genji* himself is a figure of fraught thriving; he often embodies cruel optimism incarnate. His and other protagonists’ desire to thrive, even as attachment to ideals of worldly success impair thriving, requires a reckoning with intimacy and loss that reads as queer in its unrelenting contradiction.

Remove

Remove resonates in several registers, too. It anticipates the “loss” of the book’s subtitle, albeit with a more active valence. *Remove* marks displacements large and small, concrete and abstract. For example, it should be understood against a Heian backdrop marred by the escalating seizure of women’s landholding rights.⁶⁴ But it can also signify the barest wedge of space between courtiers as they merrily share a carriage (see chapter 3); exile’s understated devastation (see chapter 4); or the mournful echoes emanating from musical mementos (see chapter 5).

The wary distance connoted by *remove* lends productive friction when juxtaposed against *proximate*: as one term pulls close, the other peels away. As a verb phrase, *to approximate remove* means to fabricate an impression of distance, especially when the subject is drawn closer than it can comfortably sustain. Bad

breakup aftermath comes to mind, as do instances when Genji assumes a connoisseurial stance toward incense, calligraphy, and dead or living women. Here, distance connotes prudence, poise, and insulation—a circumspect or less vulnerable vantage. This occurs when Genji is attacked by a spirit and acts tough to quell the turmoil of his emotions and environs—only to ultimately flee the scene in shambles, rescued by a lesser man (see chapter 2).

Such gestures try to tame the disorganization wrought by death and other losses. One might have to fake it till they make it, playing brave until grief abates. In classical psychoanalysis, this simulation animates Freud's account of mourning.⁶⁵ In Freud's narration, the work of mourning is symbolized by a child's repetition compulsion to master his mother's absence through manipulating a proxy object. The object's rhythmic removal from sight, followed by its return, mitigates the loss, transposing it tangibly nearer until it approximates what's absent. This nearness, vibrating along a spectrum of affects and object relations, carries phenomenological implications for other subjects and objects.

Queering

My readings of *Genji* demonstrate the irreducibility of queerness to matters linked exclusively or primarily to sexuality, as *queer* entails a far broader array of relations. The following chapter delineates the historical specificity, conceptual implications, and methodological promise of *queer* and *queering*. Suffice it to say for now that the terms mark a desire to question the formation of dominant, normative logics governing the embodied experience of space, time, and feeling. To queer is to nudge these logics' viability into doubt and to propose alternate modes of dwelling in the world. In *Genji*'s case, these logics include the workings of aristocratic patriarchy and imperial succession, and the affections that nourish both.

Often, these affections sprout along a homosocial continuum. *Homosocial* both describes the aristocratic Heian sphere in which *Genji* was composed and designates a rich subgenre of relations that it treats in compelling ways. As Sedgwick has outlined in her seminal study of homosocial desire, *Between Men*, homosocial relationships needn't include sexual contact but may be characterized by relations that are contiguous with the sexual, such as rivalry, mentorship, paternalism, misogyny, and care. For Sedgwick, "[*homosocial*] is applied to such activities as 'male bonding,' which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. To draw the 'homosocial' back into the orbit of 'desire,' of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual."⁶⁶ While eroticism does not necessarily tinge these relations in *Genji*, Sedgwick's notion highlights desire's propensity to affect social impulses in ways irreducible to identity or libido alone.

Among the many ideas Sedgwick presents, three stand out as potentially useful for thematic reading. First is her observation that female characters situated between men—often an ostensible love interest for whom the men compete—

function as conduits for male protagonists' erotic desire for each other. These female characters' presence helps conceal the homosexuality that would threaten the patriarchy. Second is the de-eroticization of male-male relationships through homosocial bonding, which preserves patriarchy by letting men uphold each other's interests. And third is the idea of desire being "strongly mimetic in that rivalry to *be* (or best) the other is just as strong as heterosexual desire."⁶⁷ Readers familiar with scenes of Genji's more or less rivalrous relationships with characters such as Tō no Chūjō, Kashiwagi, Suzaku, Koremitsu, or his own father and son can appreciate how homosocial desire animates their interactions and thus might enrich our interpretations.

At a more meta-discursive level, Sedgwick's formulation proves valuable in its ability to bypass the binary heterosexual/homosexual categories organizing modern social relationships. As Gustav Heldt explains, because "there is no way for us to determine, in any given exchange between two men, whether or not the emotions expressed are informed by their relationship as lovers, as friends, or as patron and client . . . Eve Sedgwick's category of male homosocial desire is a particularly apt way of describing the expression of longing between men in Heian poetry."⁶⁸ Simultaneously, however, what can potentially make it less helpful is its basis in premises of agency, repression, and subversion that don't apply to a Heian context, where male-male sexuality isn't as threatening or prohibited. Thus, a notion of homosociality can help illustrate Heian literary texts while not mapping neatly onto them.

Such an impasse presents an opportunity for a mutual revision whereby Heian literature might alter the terms of queer theory, not just the other way around. After all, it isn't just that Heian specialists need queer theory but that queer theory also needs Heian specialists to enrich its lexicon. To give just one example, Heian texts generally don't fit the dominant narrative of prohibition, discrimination, and anti-normative subversion foundational to queer studies. Although I pursue this more thoroughly in chapter 1, at a basic level, the structuring assumptions about sin, sexuality, and social cohesion operative in a postmedieval Western context simply don't apply, primarily because no comparably draconian discourse defined male-male sexual practices in medieval Japan. For William LaFleur, *medieval* denotes "that epoch during which the basic intellectual problems, the most authoritative texts and resources, and the central symbols were all Buddhist."⁶⁹ Thus, in contrast to Judeo-Christian dogma, a Buddhist worldview did not ascribe a similar contempt to male-male sexuality, with male-female relations actually being marked as more sinful for their contribution to suffering through biological reproduction.

As one scholar notes, "There is no compulsory hetero-sexuality in Heian Japan; there is, however, a politics of reproduction that emphasizes hetero-sexual gamesmanship to get a well-born girl, and ensure the perpetuation of power and privilege through progeny."⁷⁰ Removing the linchpin of prohibitions on sodomy enshrined in Western contexts poses some problems for traditional queer

theory: How should we discuss the concept of “queer” devoid of a compulsory heterosexuality against which it might be defined? How should we interpret homoeroticism when male-male sexuality does not prove threatening per se? And furthermore, what happens to our conventional ideas of resistance or gender politics when we realize how ill-suited notions of desire, gender, or agency can be to this context? As Pandey frames the issue, “Underlying modern conceptions of agency is the assumption that behind every act there is the presence of an autonomous individual, who has the innate desire to strike out against the norms of her society. What if we were to let go of this anachronistic assumption, and were to decouple agency from liberal thought?”⁷¹

One consequence of this decoupling would be a need to rethink any notion of politics as it related to literary study. Ideally, this letting go could also mean loosening our grip on habits of paranoid reading that feel most productive and familiar, but that might also overshadow other, less legible alternatives. As Sedgwick wrote in acknowledging such a method’s limitations, “To apply a hermeneutics of suspicion is, I believe, widely understood to be a mandatory injunction rather than a possibility among other possibilities.”⁷² One benefit of performing queer readings of Heian literature is the noninjunction to explore other possibilities outside the purview assumed by a queer studies reared on paranoid readings of post-Victorian Western texts. An aspect of queering discussed in the following chapter recognizes homosociality as linked to a host of other questions without overemphasizing it as an analytic crutch. Hence, queering takes up homosociality as just one, albeit important, facet of a wider relational landscape.

Intimacy

Intimacy is trickier. It can be queer regardless of whether or not sexual relations occur. It shares *proximate*’s ambit but implies more. *Intimate* denotes not just close but deep or thick as well; think “intimate knowledge” or “intimate description.” It would seem to presume mutual assent between subjects. But intimacy possesses spectral qualities that insinuate the workings of nonsovereign agency.⁷³ While it connotes a closeness, that closeness may not always coincide with actual physical proximity or consciousness—or reality, for that matter. Throughout *Genji*, characters imagine a bond to be intimate irrespective of the object’s recognition or consent.

In Lauren Berlant’s formulation, “Intimacy builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relation. Its potential failure to stabilize closeness always haunts its persistent activity, making the very attachments deemed to buttress ‘a life’ seem in a state of constant if latent vulnerability.”⁷⁴ With its wayward leanings, intimacy can travel without our blessing, ripen without our knowledge, and fashion tenuous linkages according to a provisional will of its own, “for intimacy refers to more than that which takes place within the purview of institutions, the state, and an ideal of publicness. What if we discerned it within

more mobile processes of attachment? . . . It can be portable, unattached to a concrete space: a drive that creates spaces around it through practices.”⁷⁵ Intimacy proves more evasive or porous than authority prefers. Here, I think of the “intimate public sphere” and the queer counterpublics congealing—if only provisionally—within and against it.⁷⁶

Although Berlant’s notion is developed in relation to a modern Western regime wherein compulsory heterosexuality and a hegemonic discourse of family values exert outsize influence on how intimacy is framed, it still proves useful for Heian literary studies. Specifically, her emphasis on the instability of intimate relations, their ungovernable mobility, and their ability to produce alternative spaces through provisional practices jibes with earlier cited features of Heian literary culture noted by Kawazoe, Kimura, and Heldt. Their work dismantles a notion of sexual identity to focus instead on textual performances whose “failure to stabilize closeness always haunts its persistent activity,” in Berlant’s terms.

This formulation fits within a longer queer theoretical lineage of recuperating the productive value of failure in social relations, as represented by scholars such as Heather Love, José Esteban Muñoz, and Judith Halberstam.⁷⁷ But note here that this destabilizing failure is played out through various forms of social intercourse that, as Kimura reminds us, can often seem nonproductive, depending on their distance from the site of biological reproduction of aristocratic progeny and privilege. Whereas Heldt’s analysis demonstrates how “the indeterminacies enabled by court poetry . . . could simultaneously affirm social hierarchies *and* suspend them as the occasion (or intended audience) required,” what Berlant’s formulation adds to Heian literary scholars’ insights is the accent not on just alternative forms of social praxis or blurring the public/private boundary but on intimacy’s capacity to usurp existing spaces, create new spaces, and even build worlds.⁷⁸

Much queer studies scholarship on intimacy extends a feminist insistence on the overlap between private and public life, whereby personal decisions constitute political acts. Catalyzed by the AIDS crisis, this scholarship also narrates personal accounts of intimacy as a refusal to conceal sexual relationships demonized as abnormal and as a commitment to affirming the legitimacy of queer desires, erotic practices, sociality, and claims to equal rights. As Sara Ahmed notes, “Loss implies the acknowledgement of the desirability of what was once had. . . . As such, the failure to recognize queer loss as loss is also a failure to recognize queer relationships as significant bonds, or that queer lives are lives worth living.”⁷⁹ To affirm queer intimacy was thus to assert a humanity heteronormative mandates denied by degrading the viability of other forms of human relation. In the wake of this affirmation, queer theory has moved to consider other types of relation removed from the strictly human.⁸⁰

Intimacy comes to mind as a relationship between two people—lovers, friends, rivals. But it also rustles in connections between human subjects and

inanimate objects, as Matsui Kenji demonstrates in *The Tale of Genji's Lifeworld*. In *Genji*, these objects include artisanal paper, a rival suitor's calligraphic lines, ocean air, scented robes, and a perished companion's cherished bamboo flute. Sometimes, these intimate objects serve as keepsake proxies for absent human owners, but they also furnish palpable occasions to reorient of one's sense of loss.

Less narcissistic and anthropocentric relationships exist, too. As Mel Y. Chen explains, there are innumerable points at which intimacy operates past the threshold of human subjectivity per se:

When physically copresent with others, I ingest them. . . . There is nothing fanciful about this. I am ingesting their exhaled air, their sloughed skin, and the skin of the tables, chairs, and carpet of our shared room. The myth that we all cherish of our neatly contained individuality, our separateness, is shattered. We are bundles of molecules that are ever-moving and bonding with other molecules that move from other subjects and objects. In fact, the lines we draw between the living and the non-living, between subject and object are now up for question and revision. We are constantly intimate with each other, with nonhuman animals, with furniture, with chemical elements in ways we may have never realized.⁸¹

The Tale of Genji prefigures this account of subdermal, interspecies, and (toxic?) chemical intimacies with its own permeating traces. After all, presence can be difficult to pin down in *Genji*, especially when possessing spirits prowl the mundane realm to trouble the boundary between embodied subjects, to say nothing of any partition divorcing the immaterial from the concrete (see chapters 2 and 5). Hovering somewhere between lurid nightmares and ribbons of incense, these spirits infiltrate *Genji's* built spaces and human bodies both, spurring some relationships while truncating others. As Kaoru Hayashi notes, "Spirit possession . . . represents a site in which the past, bodies, and emotions tend to be salient, vulnerably revealed and narrated. By sharing these moments and spaces, the participants deepen their sense of mutuality of being and experience the formation and reinforcement of kinship."⁸² Although kinship in *Genji* is a thoroughly vexed enterprise, Hayashi's accent on spirit possession's role in deepening a sense of mutuality highlights an encounter where the porosity of temporal, spatial, and corporeal boundaries allows intimacy to assume unanticipated guises.

My readings theorize this encounter, influenced by Takahashi Tōru's theories of a spectral, roving narrational presence and by Chen's work on animacy.⁸³ Chen's formulation extends the possibilities of Takahashi's focus on narration not bound by a single embodied subject position. A benefit of this extension is having to take seriously a far broader, less anthropocentric range of interactions that undermine firm notions of what it means to possess or be possessed, as not just spirit possession but other less dramatic forms of contact blur what it means to exist or to lose oneself—or another.

Loss

Next comes *loss*, the gravest term of the lot. Although I have discussed the aesthetic, performative facets of mortality elsewhere, *A Proximate Remove* takes up death as just one point along a gamut of deprivations deserving our attention.⁸⁴ As David L. Eng and Alexander Kazanjian explain, “‘Loss’ names what is apprehended by discourses and practices of mourning, melancholia, nostalgia, sadness, trauma, and depression.”⁸⁵ Eng and Kazanjian’s volume focuses on twentieth-century experiences of loss (e.g., war, globalization, AIDS), reading them primarily through the frame of melancholia, joining a broader set of psychoanalytic and poststructuralist critiques that address mourning and melancholia as main avenues for theorizing queer loss.⁸⁶

Freud’s classic psychoanalytic account describes mourning as “the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on.”⁸⁷ His description emphasizes how loss of a loved object can damage the mourner’s self-regard and, by extension, impoverish their sense of the wider world. Although the work of mourning “proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object,” he acknowledges that “this opposition can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of hallucinatory wishful psychosis.”⁸⁸ Despite being less central to the book than explicitly queer approaches, Freud’s account of mourning schematizes the workings of adoration, substitution, and attachment in ways that prove helpful across the ensuing chapters’ readings of intimacy and loss. In particular, confronting the destabilizing effects of being torn between desired attachment and demanded withdrawal characterizes how the unsettling adjacency of proximate removes are experienced in the *Genji* narrative.

Not all loss is final or even tragic, however. Part of my argument about privation, exile, and disorientation concerns characters that get lost, becoming displaced from familiar channels and losing a sense of where their pursuits will lead. Such circumstances call for the more challenging realization that tenderness may not merely involve sexual desire but also entail the mourning of other lost possibilities—not just concrete objects. Importantly, psychoanalytic accounts of loss can stress its productive aftermath, where indulging “hallucinatory wishful psychosis” might be read less pejoratively as an imagining of paths past suffering. This creative practice of working through can include crafting attachments—manic or otherwise—to new objects; a burgeoning creative impulse aimed at sublimating inner emptiness through artistic externalization; and the desire to reorient and build toward different spaces than before.⁸⁹ In *Genji*’s case, the primal traumatic loss of his mother generates an extraordinary sensitivity to the phenomenal world we might read as queer. Loss, for whatever pain it might cause, can also bring unexpected joys, such as when losing out on a female lover galvanizes ties between two men (see chapter 3) or when exile emboldens male friendship (see chapter 4). In this, I take

cues from Elizabeth Freeman's turn away from queer studies' darker emphasis on grief and loss. Her approach tempers that melancholic fixation toward something less grim and less overdetermined by the "capaciousness of meaning" melancholia grants Eng and Kazanjian.⁹⁰

That said, *Genji* broadcasts that there's still plenty of grieving to be done. In the narrative's very first chapter, for example, we observe how loss and textual mediation enfold. Genji's father, the Kiritsubo Emperor, loses his beloved wife. This death sends him reeling in effeminizing grief as he seeks solace, ensconced in the women's quarters, poring over pictures and poems like "The Song of Everlasting Sorrow."⁹¹ He forfeits masculinity and imperial authority with this escapist relocation. This aesthetic mourning practice also connects him to an imagined male homosocial community of cultural workers whose art helps ease his pain. This trope of seeking consolation through an intertextual practice of identification is mirrored later in the *Sarashina Diary* (*Sarashina nikki*, ca. 1060), when the narrator soothes her grief at losing intimates by sinking irrevocably into the realm *Genji* renders.⁹² Both examples reveal textual mediation to be vital to the work of mourning, as it can help distance bereavement's brutal reality, providing simulations that distract or console mourners.

The disorienting imprint of loss interweaves its aesthetic, spatial, and affective dimensions. This multimodal assemblage can take the form of sublimation, as when Genji assuages the pain of exile through intensively painting the stark landscape surrounding him at Suma (see chapter 4). Consolation can also prove elusive, as when Yūgiri samples the musical instruments his dead friend abandoned in an attempt to restore traces of a vacant tone (see chapter 5). Music fails to soothe his grief, but it fails in ways that manage to resonate, if not repair. Both examples show protagonists negotiating loss, trying to mediate and mitigate its pain across sensory registers.

The chapters that follow chart such efforts to confront and reshape loss, efforts that alter the spatiotemporal contours of intimate relationships among subjects, objects, and the mediating presences through which they touch. I use the term *mediating presence* deliberately to denote the ethereal echo produced when breath leaves the barrel of a haunted flute, as well as the unnerving thingness of murky, crumbling mansions as spirits stalk the halls. Divulging the ubiquity of loss, these apparitions rend bodies and buildings with their voracious entrances and exits—snatching consciousness, security, or human lives.

Loss unsettles and refigures relationships, be they aesthetic, spatial, or interpersonal. Certain bonds are ostensibly severed only to be revived in altered form, such as when Genji surrogates his mother's absence through proxies like his stepmother, Fujitsubo, and her niece, Murasaki. Loss also rescales spatial proportions and investments, as when exile displaces Genji from the Capital, intensifying his receptivity to the oceanic vista and the seamen encircling him. While scenes in *Genji* centering on human death provide the most memorable examples of loss,

other absences and relinquishments also deserve to be worked through. Despite death's prevalence in the narrative, however, it is crucial to acknowledge loss as grounding the potential for *having*—not as totalized possession, but as a gesture toward sustaining, however briefly, intervals of living that deprivation can't eclipse. Indeed, the modest aspiration to have, to grasp for a desired life amid haunting loss or intimacy, can itself signify as queer.

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Methodologically, to queer intimacy and loss is to question those notions without an epistemological imperative to eradicate uncertainty. Therefore, the readings advanced here take on an interrogative posture: they refract established logics to reorient our critical relation to them and expand inquiry. Each of the book's five chapters focuses on a different setting and medium but asks the same basic question: How should we understand the spatiotemporal contours of *Genji's* portrayals of intimacy and loss, and how might we theorize them as queer? By asking this guiding question in different contexts, each chapter maps how loss and intimacy are queered according to the spaces and moments in which they transpire. Each chapter focuses on a different setting and medium: (1) premodern Japanese notions of queerness and the geopolitical context of *Genji's* modern reception; (2) the walled aisles of a crumbling house and courtship poetry; (3) fraying hedges and a lapsed household's servants; (4) paintings and intertextual poems assembled in exile; and (5) the echo of musical instruments beside a pillar in a haunted room. Combined, the chapters' readings theorize from varied perspectives how intimacy and loss suffuse and elicit queer gestures—spatiotemporally, aesthetically, and affectively.

Finally, a word about the rationale for choosing certain *Genji* chapters over others. Chapters 2 through 5 of this book each focus on a single chapter from the *Tale of Genji*. Although the issues I discuss surface throughout *Genji's* fifty-four chapters, "Yūgao," "Suetsumuhana," "Suma," and "Yokobue" have been selected specifically for two reasons: (1) because they foreground in particularly concentrated fashion the sensorial reverberations of intimacy and loss, making them well-suited to a phenomenological analysis; and (2) because they do this within a context of portraying how male or female homosocial desire can imply eroticism while also suggesting other modes of affection, social relation, or connection with the phenomenal world irreducible to lusts for political power or sexual contact. This intersection makes them fascinating and particularly ripe for queer reading.

Chapter 1, "Translation Fantasies and False Flags: Desiring and Misreading Queerness in Premodern Japan," assesses the critical purchase and potential pitfalls of *queer* for reading Heian texts. I discuss what the concept of queering comes to mean in the project conceptually, historically, and methodologically. My goal is to estrange *queer* by accenting its discursive discontinuities. By first framing the foreignness of the modern term and then moving into *Genji* by considering how

queer might translate into a specifically Heian context, I complicate our vernacular sense of the term by charting its cultural assumptions and blind spots. In the process, I stress elements that infuse and confuse modern, non-Japanese understandings of premodern Japanese sexuality and textuality, to say nothing of our overt and covert desires toward them as objects of knowledge.

My main question here is, What can we learn by theorizing the history of *Genji*'s translation, reception, and disciplinary location as queer? My critical genealogy begins by historicizing queer theoretical contributions, premodern Japanese discourses on sexuality and nonsexual queerness, and *Genji*'s reception, attentive to the discontinuities and contestations that animate them. In each of these contexts, questions of translation—including terminological distinctions, sexual and moral taxonomies, and cross-cultural appropriations—become crucial. These questions involve discourses of modernity, sexuality, and the formation of Japanese studies as an academic discipline in the wake of World War II. Consequently, I argue that the question of *The Tale of Genji*'s queerness cannot be addressed without considering the geopolitical and disciplinary conditions under which *Genji* becomes desirable as an object of cultural knowledge—and pleasure—in scholarly and middlebrow popular imaginations.

Chapter 2, "Chivalry in Shambles: Fabricating Manhood amid Architectural Disrepair," asks, How should we understand the relationship between masculinity and built-space? I read the "Yūgao" chapter to examine how *Genji*'s tragic tryst in a rundown residence produces queer affinities when conventional heroism collapses. I argue that the architectural setting's disintegrating borders allow *Genji* to be emasculated as supernatural forces infiltrate the estate. Relying on his male servant, *Genji* tries to redress emasculation and rebuild his self-regard after losing both his pride and his woman. I theorize *Genji*'s melancholic, visceral destabilization as queer.

Chapter 3, "Going through the Motions: Half-Hearted Courtship and the Topology of Queer Shame," asks, How should we understand the social structures of feeling marshaled to discipline queer subjects? Having lost Yūgao, *Genji* searches for new women to repress the humiliation he suffered in the haunted house. This leads him to the mysterious princess Suetsumuhana. *Genji* is not alone in his pursuit, and Tō no Chūjō trails him to the woman's untended residence. Consequently, at "a concealed spot where only the splintered fragments of a see-through fence remained, *Genji* found another man who'd been standing there the whole time."⁹³ This chapter examines the peripheral sites where such encounters occur to theorize how frustrated romantic desire sustains male and female homosociality. Even as the reclusive Suetsumuhana becomes a conduit augmenting *Genji* and Tō no Chūjō's connection, her outmoded wardrobe, dilapidated residence, and reluctance to devote herself to courtship rituals mark her as a queer figure who short-circuits the Heian marriage machine. I recuperate her queerness as a generatively unsettling mode of inhabiting an unforgiving system.

Chapter 4, “Queer Affections in Exile: Textual Mediation and Exposure at Suma Shore,” bridges the book’s concerns about spatial practices and how loss is mediated aesthetically. I argue that intimacy plays out on two levels. First, it emerges as a practice of intertextual homosociality. For Genji, banishment to Suma induces a desire for closeness with the infamous men who have preceded him in exile and evokes an archive of poetic and pictorial references that help orient him. Second, Genji experiences intimacy in exile through an unprecedented degree of physical and emotional exposure to both the natural elements and other men’s gazes. This exposure stirs homoeroticism while exceeding it with a radical susceptibility that amplifies the affective intensity of his political dislocation and his disaffection with aristocratic mores.

Chapter 4, “From Harsh Stare to Reverberant Caress: Queer Timbres of Mourning in ‘The Flute,’” considers sound and touch in order to theorize the reverberance of queer gestures. I theorize the work of mourning as a practice of discerning resonance to reorient attachments. I foreground a queer erotics of mediating loss orally, aurally, and haptically as the mourning Yūgiri performs elapses between caresses and musical echoes. I argue that Kashiwagi’s passing produces timbres of loss that should be discerned within the context of a homosocial intimacy shared with Yūgiri.

The conclusion, “Learning from Loss,” revisits *Genji*’s depictions of intimacy and loss to identify lessons that seem pedagogically promising. I synthesize reparative readings from the preceding chapters to outline how a queer critical sensibility might complicate—and *enrich*—our approach to teaching, if not living. Moreover, I consider the benefits of feeling our way past expertise to explore the promise of other, less anchored approaches toward knowing.

Ultimately, the goal is to perform readings that transform our sense of what *queer* and *Genji* might promise when apprehended in intimate juxtaposition to one another. The chapters revisit themes of queerness, distance, and loss in various intersecting arrangements, mapping their permutations. Although I move through *Genji* according to its chronological chapter sequence, my hope is that, like *The Tale of Genji* itself, my own chapters convey a cadence without carving a telos.