A Study of *The Tale of Genji*

Focusing on Interior Monologue

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DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis is written entirely on the basis of my own work,
unless otherwise indicated

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the theme of parts 1 and 2 of The Tale of Genji (Japanese, early 11th century). The tale is narrated through stories about male-female relationships: stories that use interior monologue to depict the inner lives of the characters. Interior monologue, a category of discourse that reveals thought and emotion from the character’s own viewpoint, provides insight into the character’s state of mind. The goal of the thesis is to pursue what lies behind these relationships. The thesis therefore explores the characteristics of the male-female relationships among the central characters, who are defined as those with a high frequency of interior monologue. Pursuit of this goal is grounded in close textual analysis. Genji has intrigued those who have read it, and it has inspired various kinds of critical writing. However, there have been few studies, especially of a comprehensive nature, of its theme. This attempt to clarify the theme can be regarded as a significant contribution to the study of the tale.

The thesis treats only parts 1 and 2 of the work, because the pursuit of the goal just described requires so much space. Quite apart from detailed textual analysis, it is necessary also to establish the concept of the narrator, hence the concomitant narrative structure; to categorise discourse; and to define discourse categories. Another reason for limiting the thesis to parts 1 and 2 is that these narrate Genji’s whole life.

This study establishes a new concept of the narrator, integrating distinctive features of the narrator of the tale with the concepts of eye-witness narrator and histor narrator proposed by Scholes and Kellogg (1966). The thesis adopts the term ‘the eye-witness narrator’, thus adding another viewpoint from which the narrator can see a character’s inner life. This new concept of the narrator stands in opposition to the concept of the narrator as a character (Mitani 1992, Yoshioka 1966). It reflects a
different understanding of the narrative structure, since the narrative structure is
indebted to the two modes of the narrator and the movement of the narrator’s
viewpoint (see Figure 3). These concepts, especially that of the narrator’s shifting
viewpoint, underpin the categorisation of discourse.

The study categorises discourse in the tale according to three viewpoints: (1)
that of the character, (2) that of the narrator and (3) that shared by both. The criterion
for categorisation builds on the criteria proposed by Kai (1980) and Noguchi (1987),
but focuses on the viewpoint expressed in a particular passage. Furthermore, the
discourse is subcategorised into seven categories under the three viewpoints (see
Figure 5). There are two distinctive characteristics of categorisation and definitions in
the thesis: one is the consistency of the criterion (viewpoint) for categorisation and
the other is the strict distinction between direct narration and indirect narration. The
categories and definitions proposed use a new criterion, viewpoint, to build on
various understandings of the terms customarily used in old commentaries, and on
definitions of individual terms proposed by many scholars. Reading with attention to
the new discourse categories allows one to recognise the viewpoint in a complex
passage. This in turn permits precise analysis, toward the goal of defining the theme.

As a result of examining the characteristics of the male-female relationships
woven by the central characters, the thesis proposes first a theme each for part 1 and 2,
and then an overarching theme for both parts. This overarching theme is the abyss
between man and woman. It flows through all male-female relationships in both parts,
like the main melody in a symphony.
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NOTE

All the Japanese names in the thesis follow the Japanese convention of placing the
family name first, unless the person uses the Western convention. The expression in
Japanese language is given in italicised roman script together with Japanese script
where the word first appears.