

Iris Murdoch and *The Tale of Genji*

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The paper discusses Iris Murdoch's fascination with Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji*, beginning with biographical evidence, including her visit to Ishiyama-dera to see the place of its composition.

I then show how passing allusions in Murdoch's work to *The Tale of Genji*, including the famous cat-stealing episode, witness to her continuing engagement with the work and go on to discuss the similarities between the psychology of the protagonists in *The Tale of Genji* and that of Murdoch's characters.

The major points of comparison are that of the complications of multiple erotic relationships, the pains of jealousy and frustrated love and, above all, the tendency of characters to find substitutes for lost love objects. Centuries before Freud, Murasaki Shikibu shows us how Genji seeks a substitute for his dead mother in the person of Fujitsubo, whom his father the Emperor has married due to her resemblance to her – thwarted in this forbidden relationship (though not before he has impregnated his father's wife) he then finds a substitute for her in her ten-year old niece Murasaki, though he must wait for her to grow up. Meanwhile, he is involved in a string of other substitutive satisfactions, losses and abandonments which have close parallels with the *girouettes d'amour* which Murdoch gives us in her novels. The theme of abandoning the world in *The Tale of Genji* also has links with this recurring trope in Murdoch's novels.

Finally, I discuss specific passages in *The Black Prince* and *The Sea, the Sea* which correspond to episodes in Genji – the Yugao episode and Genji's exile at Suma and Akashi.