Aesthetic and ethical values in The Tale of Genji are grounded on the paradox that accepting the impermanence and emptiness of all things is a necessary condition for appreciating the good and the beautiful. The recognition that loss, absence, and death are sources of beauty produces unsettling moments in the narrative that, because they are depicted as ultimately beyond representation in language, exhibit a sublime aesthetic charge. By virtue of its very excess, the sublime experience is disruptive, a form of trauma that, in Murasaki Shikibu’s text, is a source of both pain and pleasure.