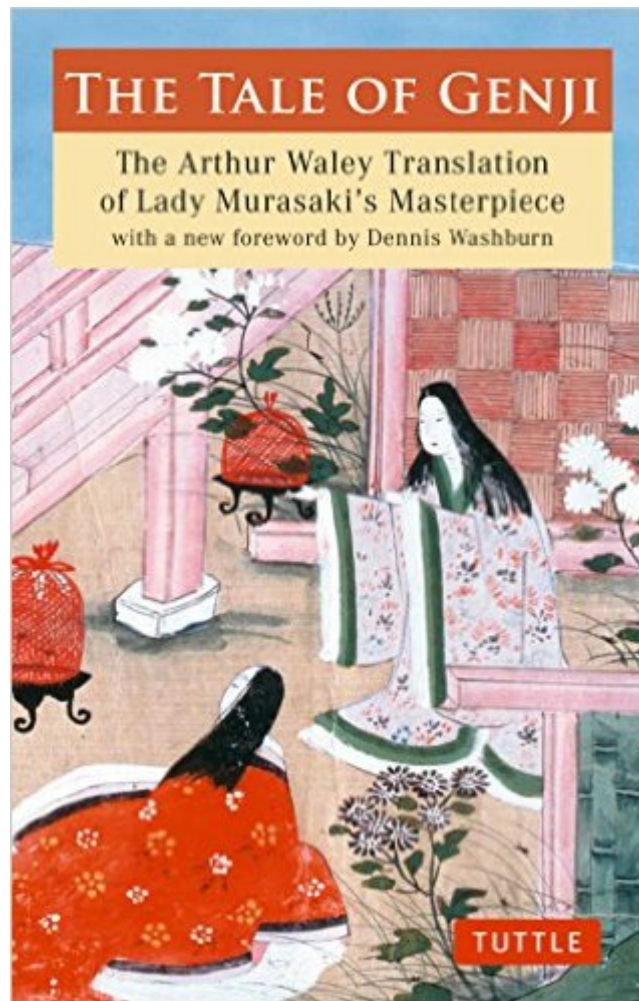


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The Tale Of Genji: The Arthur Waley Translation Of Lady Murasaki's Masterpiece With A New Foreword By Dennis Washburn (Tuttle Classics)



Synopsis

"What Waley did create is literary art of extraordinary beauty that brings to life in English the world Murasaki Shikibu imagined. The beauty of his art has not dimmed, but like the original text itself, retains the power to move and enlighten."âDennis Washburn, from his foreword

Centuries before Shakespeare, Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* was already acknowledged as a classic of Japanese literature. Over the past century, this book has gained worldwide acceptance as not only the world's first novel, but as one of the greatest works of literature of all time. The hero of the tale, Prince Genji, is a shining example of the Heian-era ideal manâ"accomplished in poetry, dance, music, painting, and, not least of all to the novel's many plots, romance. *The Tale of Genji* and the characters and world it depicts have influenced Japanese culture to its very core. This celebrated translation by Arthur Waley gives Western readers a very genuine feel for the tone of this beloved classic. This edition contains the complete Waley translation of all six books of *The Tale of Genji* and also contains a new foreword by Dennis Washburn with key insights into both the book and the importance of this translation for modern readers.

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The novel opens with the characteristic summary of the hero's background. Once that is out of the way, the tale properly begins in the second chapter with the hero Genji, his rival To no Chujo, and two other young men telling war stories about their conquests. But because this is the middle of the

Heian period and there is nobody to fight, the game is courtship and winning means getting behind the screen. To no Chujo knew a woman of exceptional beauty and taste named Yugao. He had a child with her but now both Yugao and the child are gone. Genji is entranced by what he hears and must have her. Such begins the cycle of discovery, courtship, possession, and loss that will be played out over three generations. As with most Japanese literature, and Kawabata comes easily to mind, the plot is not nearly as important as the descriptions of setting and a heightened sensitivity for the beauty and sadness of things (*mono no aware*). Genji is the hero of the story (Kaoru, of the later part) not because of his exploits with women or his machinations at court, but because he is sensitive and articulate enough to communicate what usually cannot be put into words: that life is a sad business of "unendurable beauty." One would expect that after a thousand years, the novel would have lost much its relevance, but this is not the case. In fact, the surprising thing about *The Tale of Genji* is that it contains the core of what, for want of a better term, may be called the Japanese sensibility. This is not to be confused with the often-maligned notion of Japanese uniqueness. That is a political thing. The Japanese sensibility as manifested in *The Tale of Genji* is a habit of being coupled with an aesthetic sense.

I have been reading *Genji* simultaneously in all three translations and I have found that they all have their uses. I must recommend the Waley translation to the English-speaking world for being the friendliest read. If you want to read *Genji* purely for your own enjoyment, as the women of Lady Murasaki's era undoubtedly did, please consider the Waley translation. There is often a complaint that Waley's translation is inaccurate at times and omits passages. But it is not so inaccurate as to give you the wrong impression of the book, and not so frequent in omissions as to be called an abridgment. Furthermore, its charming Edwardian prose makes for an English story that is just as compelling as the Japanese original. Here's an example from chapter 29, when Genji meets with an elderly woman: Waley: "She was evidently much enfeebled; but she was perfectly well able to carry on a conversation. 'I always know how things are going here by watching Yugiri,' Genji said to her. 'Lately he has been very absent-minded and depressed, and sometimes I have heard him sighing heavily when he was by himself. I knew this meant he was worrying about you, and I felt I must come and enquire on my own account.'" Seidensticker: "She was very weak and needed the support of an armrest, but her speech was clear. 'What a pleasure it is to see that you are not as ill as I had feared,' said Genji. 'My informant seems to have been an alarmist. He led me to fear the very worst.'" Tyler: "She talked to him very well, despite the evident weakness with which she leaned on her armrest. 'Your condition has not been that serious, I know, but it has greatly upset our young

gentleman, who seems so distressed for you that he has made me worry a great deal about how you are.

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