

Literature review on the tale of genji

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Authorship: Murasaki Shikibu's classic Japanese novel "The Tale of Genji" is in three parts. The first two parts revolve around the rise, fall and death of Genji, the primary hero of the novel. The last part revolves around the early years of Genji's two prominent descendants. All three parts are self-contained, and each part seems like it is a separate novel on its own.

Theme(s): Although love, lust, and the interaction of male and female characters is a central theme of Shikibu's novel, particularly Genji's love life, the different themes of affection, family bonds, filial loyalty, and friendship are explored in the novel as well.

The structure of the story this novel tells is inspired but simple. Genji – the son of a Japanese emperor – and his young well-born male friends from the court are depicted sitting together earlier in the novel. They seem to be attempting to decide the relative advantages of women who are good conversationalists or housekeepers, or women who are great beauties. While his friends give up, Genji sets out to test their hypotheses, and eventually his life intertwined with that of To no Chujo, Genji's best friend and secondary main character.

The difference in 10th century Japanese upper class social arrangements should become apparent to modern readers. Well-born women of that time lived in isolation, surrounded only by their husband and other women. The well-born men often had multiple wives and multiple legitimate children, whose claims to status depended partly on their own accomplishments and good looks and partly on their mothers' families' influence and power.

Murasaki Shikibu's novel is about rivalries and secrets in Genji's household and life, so the novel does not mention the political and military happenings

in Japan at that time. Shikibu goes into explicit detail when describing clothing, gardens, interiors, and the ritual progress of the seasons. The letters and poems with traditional forms and symbols through which the characters frequently communicate have also been reproduced in the novel. Despite his superiority in many ways, Genji does not seem to have strong moral principles. Even though his relationships with women are usually described as seductions, he has been accused of crimes against women, including rape (Shoji). Even Murasaki, who was his favorite wife, had been moved into his house with the promise that he would be a father to her. Murasaki did not bear any children, but she did raise several of the children from Genji's other wives.

The Tale of Genji seems more like a long scroll than a novel that has been intentionally written to progress at a dreamlike pace. The proficiency of the author shines in her descriptions, dialogues, and the way she reports what the main characters are thinking. The details of the relationships of the main characters make the novel seem more familiar since any reader can understand them. The level of complexity of everyday life, convenience and luxury which the author portrays seem nearly modern.

Murasaki Shikibu has written Kaoru's story in a more sophisticated manner. Despite being as good-looking as Genji, Kaoru is a more serious and sober individual because of the unpleasant circumstances in which he is born. The author describes him as having a natural fragrance, which she frequently compares to the most aromatic and rare perfume.

The plot in the third part of the story keeps on twisting, and the social setting is a development over the first two parts. Unlike the first two parts, the

balanced action in terms of description and narrations seems to change in the third part. Dramatic torments replace the majestic progress of Genji as in the first two parts, while a stream of action that can hardly be kept organized by the narrative takes the place of the descriptions of nature and ritual that were in the first two parts.

One notable thing that has been demonstrated by Murasaki Shikibu in her novel “ The Tale of Genji” is that every lengthily written prose inherently includes some psychological analysis, i. e. the narrator always provides a theory for the actions of the protagonist. At eleven hundred pages, this novel may seem that it is rather long, but the fact that it spans 60 years of life actually makes it quite short.

Works Cited

Shikibu, Murasaki. *The Tale of Genji*. New York: Knopf, 1978. Print.

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