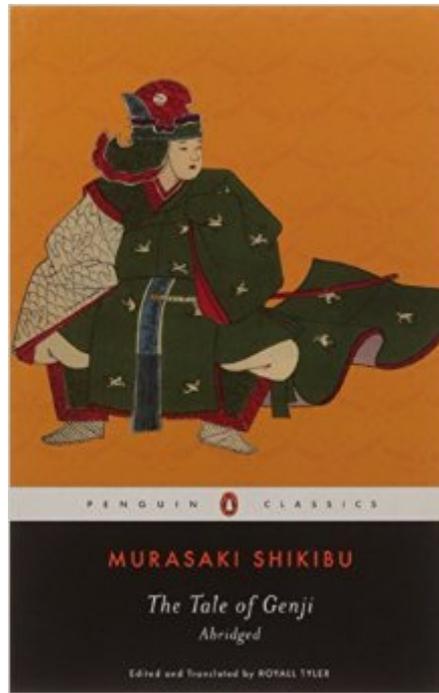


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The Tale Of Genji (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

The original novel is a classic of Japanese and world literature and a stunningly beautiful story. Written in the eleventh century, this exquisite portrait of courtly life in medieval Japan is widely celebrated as the world's first novel and is certainly one of its finest. Genji, the Shining Prince, son of an emperor, is a passionate character whose tempestuous nature, family circumstances, love affairs, alliances, and shifting political fortunes form the core of this magnificent epic. Royall Tyler's superb translation is detailed, poetic, and true to the Japanese original while allowing the English reader to appreciate its timeless beauty. In this deftly abridged edition, Tyler focuses on the early chapters, which vividly evoke Genji as a young man and leave him at his first moment of triumph. This edition also includes detailed notes, glossaries, character lists, and chronologies.

Book Information

Series: Penguin Classics

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Penguin Classics; Reprint edition (February 28, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0143039490

ISBN-13: 978-0143039495

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.6 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.2 out of 5 stars See all reviews (19 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

"The Tale of Genji" by Murasaki Shikibu is recognized as the world's first true novel. Written in the late 10th or early 11th century, it is a story of the life of "Genji", who is the son of an Emperor of Japan in the 9th century. Known as "The shining Prince", the story follows Genji's exploits over the course of his lifetime. The book gives insight into the lifestyle of a young, strikingly handsome prince who is revered by those he comes in contact with. The true author, known as Murasaki Shikibu, was the daughter of a governor of several provinces. She is recognized as writing the entire tale, which consists of 54 chapters in its original format. Because all of the original versions were handwritten, the version we know of today are edited and compiled from multiple versions that were copied from

the original, copied by an unknown scholar during the 13th century. The story gives insight as to royal life during the time period. Its unabashed views of the lifestyle of Genji, and those around him, do not spare the reader of the downsides of royal life. In fact, much of what is portrayed in the book could be considered scandalous in nature, given the positions of importance many of the characters in the book have in Japanese society of that time period. What strikes me as fascinating with this book is the obvious parallels to the life and human nature of those who live in today's world. The real life drama and adventure presented in this novel is compelling, if not somewhat scandalous. It is an absolutely compelling read, considering the time period it was written in, and it provides a fascinating look into the formality of royal life of the time period.

The tale is an old one — dating back as it does to around 1021, it precedes the Norman Conquest by a generation — and yet it is surprisingly contemporary. Written by a noblewoman during the last period of classical Japanese history, and at a time when the imperial court of Japan was at the height of its splendor, "The Tale of Genji" may be the first great novel ever written; and it offers all the qualities and pleasures that great novels have delivered in the thousand years since its composition. Not much is known about author Murasaki Shikibu, except that she served at court as a lady-in-waiting during the Heian period of Japanese history, and therefore knew well the court life about which she wrote in "The Tale of Genji." As translator Royall Tyler of Australian National University explains in an informative foreword, Shikibu was better-educated than most women of her time; she was fluent in written and spoken Chinese, even though women of her time were not supposed to know either. (Chinese was the language of the Japanese court, just as people in the Roman imperial court spoke Greek, and French was long spoken in the royal court of England; then, as now, fluency in a second language -- especially one associated with high culture -- was a mark of a superior education.) Because of her education, Shikibu was exposed to the magnificent heritage of classical Chinese culture and philosophy, all of which, combined with Shikibu's own gifts for detailed observation of human character, informs "The Tale of Genji." Genji himself is a prince — a son of the Emperor and a concubine, at a time when it is expected that the Emperor will have many children, both by his wives and as a result of, shall we say, more informal relationships.

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