

= Murasaki Shikibu =

Murasaki Shikibu (? ?? , English : Lady Murasaki ; c . 973 or 978 ? c . 1014 or 1031) was a Japanese novelist , poet and lady @-@ in @-@ waiting at the Imperial court during the Heian period . She is best known as the author of The Tale of Genji , written in Japanese between about 1000 and 1012 . Murasaki Shikibu is a nickname ; her real name is unknown , but she may have been Fujiwara Takako , who was mentioned in a 1007 court diary as an imperial lady @-@ in @-@ waiting .

Heian women were traditionally excluded from learning Chinese , the written language of government , but Murasaki , raised in her erudite father 's household , showed a precocious aptitude for the Chinese classics and managed to acquire fluency . She married in her mid @-@ to late twenties and gave birth to a daughter before her husband died , two years after they were married . It is uncertain when she began to write The Tale of Genji , but it was probably while she was married or shortly after she was widowed . In about 1005 , Murasaki was invited to serve as a lady @-@ in @-@ waiting to Empress Sh?shi at the Imperial court , probably because of her reputation as a writer . She continued to write during her service , adding scenes from court life to her work . After five or six years , she left court and retired with Sh?shi to the Lake Biwa region . Scholars differ on the year of her death ; although most agree on 1014 , others have suggested she was alive in 1031 .

Murasaki wrote The Diary of Lady Murasaki , a volume of poetry , and The Tale of Genji . Within a decade of its completion , Genji was distributed throughout the provinces ; within a century it was recognized as a classic of Japanese literature and had become a subject of scholarly criticism . Early in the 20th century her work was translated ; a six @-@ volume English translation was completed in 1933 . Scholars continue to recognize the importance of her work , which reflects Heian court society at its peak . Since the 13th century her works have been illustrated by Japanese artists and well @-@ known ukiyo @-@ e woodblock masters .

= = Early life = =

Murasaki Shikibu was born c . 973 in Heian @-@ ky? , Japan , into the northern Fujiwara clan descending from Fujiwara no Yoshifusa , the first 9th @-@ century Fujiwara regent . The Fujiwara clan dominated court politics until the end of the 11th century through strategic marriages of Fujiwara daughters into the imperial family and the use of regencies . In the late 10th century and early 11th century , Fujiwara no Michinaga arranged his four daughters into marriages with emperors , giving him unprecedented power . Murasaki 's great @-@ grandfather , Fujiwara no Kanesuke , had been in the top tier of the aristocracy , but her branch of the family gradually lost power and by the time of Murasaki 's birth was at the middle to lower ranks of the Heian aristocracy ? the level of provincial governors . The lower ranks of the nobility were typically posted away from court to undesirable positions in the provinces , exiled from the centralized power and court in Kyoto .

Despite the loss of status , the family had a reputation among the literati through Murasaki 's paternal great @-@ grandfather and grandfather , both of whom were well @-@ known poets . Her great @-@ grandfather , Fujiwara no Kanesuke , had fifty @-@ six poems included in thirteen of the Twenty @-@ one Imperial Anthologies , the Collections of Thirty @-@ six Poets and the Yamato Monogatari (Tales of Yamato) . Her great @-@ grandfather and grandfather both had been friendly with Ki no Tsurayuki , who became notable for popularizing verse written in Japanese . Her father , Fujiwara no Tametoki , attended the State Academy (Daigaku @-@ ry?) and became a well @-@ respected scholar of Chinese classics and poetry ; his own verse was anthologized . He entered public service around 968 as a minor official and was given a governorship in 996 . He stayed in service until about 1018 . Murasaki 's mother was descended from the same branch of northern Fujiwara as Tametoki . The couple had three children , a son and two daughters .

The names of women were not recorded in the Heian era . Murasaki 's real name is not known ; as was customary for women of the period , she went by a nickname , Murasaki Shikibu . Women took

nicknames associated with a male relative : " Shikibu " refers to Shikibu @-@ sh? , the Ministry of Ceremonials where her father was a functionary ; " Murasaki " may be derived from the color violet associated with wisteria , the meaning of the word fuji , although it is more likely that " Murasaki " was a court nickname . Michinaga mentions the names of a few ladies @-@ in @-@ waiting in a 1007 diary entry ; one , Fujiwara Takako (Ky?shi) , may be Murasaki 's real name .

In Heian @-@ era Japan , husbands and wives kept separate households ; children were raised with their mothers , although the patrilineal system was still followed . Murasaki was unconventional because she lived in her father 's household , most likely on Teramachi Street in Kyoto , with her younger brother Nobunori . Their mother died , perhaps in childbirth , when the children were quite young . Murasaki had at least three half @-@ siblings raised with their mothers ; she was very close to one sister who died in her twenties .

Murasaki was born at a period when Japan was becoming more isolated , after missions to China had ended and a stronger national culture was emerging . In the 9th and 10th centuries , Japanese gradually became a written language through the development of kana , a syllabary based on abbreviations of Chinese characters . In Murasaki 's lifetime men continued to write in Chinese , the language of government , but kana became the written language of noblewomen , setting the foundation for unique forms of Japanese literature .

Chinese was taught to Murasaki 's brother as preparation for a career in government , and during her childhood , living in her father 's household , she learned and became proficient in classical Chinese . In her diary she wrote , " When my brother ... was a young boy learning the Chinese classics , I was in the habit of listening to him and I became unusually proficient at understanding those passages that he found too difficult to understand and memorize . Father , a most learned man , was always regretting the fact : ' Just my luck , ' he would say , ' What a pity she was not born a man ! ' " With her brother she studied Chinese literature , and she probably also received instruction in more traditional subjects such as music , calligraphy and Japanese poetry . Murasaki 's education was unorthodox . Louis Perez explains in *The History of Japan* that " Women ... were thought to be incapable of real intelligence and therefore were not educated in Chinese . " Murasaki was aware that others saw her as " pretentious , awkward , difficult to approach , prickly , too fond of her tales , haughty , prone to versifying , disdainful , cantankerous and scornful " . Asian literature scholar Thomas Inge believes she had " a forceful personality that seldom won her friends . "

= = Marriage = =

Aristocratic Heian women lived restricted and secluded lives , allowed to speak to men only when they were close relatives or household members . Murasaki 's autobiographical poetry shows that she socialized with women but had limited contact with men other than her father and brother ; she often exchanged poetry with women but never with men . Unlike most noblewomen of her status , she did not marry on reaching puberty ; instead she stayed in her father 's household until her mid @-@ twenties or perhaps even to her early thirties .

In 996 when her father was posted to a four @-@ year governorship in Echizen Province , Murasaki went with him , although it was uncommon for a noblewoman of the period to travel such a distance on a trip that could take as long as five days . She returned to Kyoto , probably in 998 , to marry her father 's friend Fujiwara no Nobutaka (c . 950 ? c . 1001) , a much older second cousin . Descended from the same branch of the Fujiwara clan , he was a court functionary and bureaucrat at the Ministry of Ceremonials , with a reputation for dressing extravagantly and as a talented dancer . In his late forties at the time of their marriage , he had multiple households with an unknown number of wives and offspring . Gregarious and well known at court , he was involved in numerous romantic relationships that may have continued after his marriage to Murasaki . As was customary , she would have remained in her father 's household where her husband would have visited her . Nobutaka had been granted more than one governorship , and by the time of his marriage to Murasaki he was probably quite wealthy . Accounts of their marriage vary : Richard Bowring writes that the marriage was happy , but Japanese literature scholar Haruo Shirane sees indications in her poems that she resented her husband .

The couple's daughter, Kenshi (Kataiko), was born in 999 . Two years later Nobutaka died during a cholera epidemic . As a married woman Murasaki would have had servants to run the household and care for her daughter , giving her ample leisure time . She enjoyed reading and had access to romances (monogatari) such as The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter and The Tales of Ise . Scholars believe she may have started writing The Tale of Genji before her husband's death ; it is known she was writing after she was widowed , perhaps in a state of grief . In her diary she describes her feelings after her husband's death : " I felt depressed and confused . For some years I had existed from day to day in listless fashion ... doing little more than registering the passage of time ... The thought of my continuing loneliness was quite unbearable " .

According to legend , Murasaki retreated to Ishiyama @-@ dera at Lake Biwa , where she was inspired to write The Tale of Genji on an August night while looking at the moon . Although scholars dismiss the factual basis of the story of her retreat , Japanese artists often depicted her at Ishiyama Temple staring at the moon for inspiration . She may have been commissioned to write the story and may have known an exiled courtier in a similar position to her hero Prince Genji . Murasaki would have distributed newly written chapters of Genji to friends who in turn would have re @-@ copied them and passed them on . By this practice the story became known and she gained a reputation as an author .

In her early to mid @-@ thirties , she became a lady @-@ in @-@ waiting (ny?b?) at court , most likely because of her reputation as an author . Chieko Mulhern writes in Japanese Women Writers , a Biocritical Sourcebook that scholars have wondered why Murasaki made such a move at a comparatively late period in her life . Her diary evidences that she exchanged poetry with Michinaga after her husband's death , leading to speculation that the two may have been lovers . Bowring sees no evidence that she was brought to court as Michinaga's concubine , although he did bring her to court without following official channels . Mulhern thinks Michinaga wanted to have Murasaki at court to educate his daughter Sh?shi .

= = Court life = =

Heian culture and court life reached a peak early in the 11th century . The population of Kyoto grew to around 100 @,@ 000 as the nobility became increasingly isolated at the Heian Palace in government posts and court service . Courtiers became overly refined with little to do , insulated from reality , preoccupied with the minutiae of court life , turning to artistic endeavors . Emotions were commonly expressed through the artistic use of textiles , fragrances , calligraphy , colored paper , poetry , and layering of clothing in pleasing color combinations ? according to mood and season . Those who showed an inability to follow conventional aesthetics quickly lost popularity , particularly at court . Popular pastimes for Heian noblewomen ? who adhered to rigid fashions of floor @-@ length hair , whitened skin and blackened teeth ? included having love affairs , writing poetry and keeping diaries . The literature that Heian court women wrote is recognized as some of the earliest and among the best literature written in the Japanese canon .

= = Rival courts and women poets = =

When in 995 Michinaga's two brothers Fujiwara no Michitaka and Fujiwara no Michikane died leaving the regency vacant , Michinaga quickly won a power struggle against his nephew Fujiwara no Korechika (brother to Teishi , Emperor Ichij? 's wife) , and , aided by his sister Senshi , he assumed power . Teishi had supported her brother Korechika , who was later discredited and banished from court , causing her to lose power . Four years later Michinaga sent Sh?shi , his eldest daughter , to Emperor Ichij? 's harem when she was about 12 . A year after placing Sh?shi in the imperial harem , in an effort to undermine Teishi's influence and increase Sh?shi's standing , Michinaga had her named Empress although Teishi already held the title . As historian Donald Shively explains , " Michinaga shocked even his admirers by arranging for the unprecedented appointment of Teishi (or Sadako) and Sh?shi as concurrent empresses of the same emperor , Teishi holding the usual title of " Lustrous Heir @-@ bearer " k?g? and Sh?shi that of " Inner

Palatine " (ch?g?) , a toponymically derived equivalent coined for the occasion " . About five years later , Michinaga brought Murasaki to Sh?shi 's court , in a position that Bowring describes as a companion @-@ tutor .

Heian Imperial court life was immensely fashionable , but also dissolute . Court women lived in seclusion , were known by nicknames and , through strategic marriages , were used to gain political power . Despite their seclusion , some women wielded considerable influence , often achieved through competitive salons , dependent on the quality of the attendants . Ichij? 's mother and Michinaga 's sister , Senshi , had an influential salon , and Michinaga probably wanted Sh?shi to surround herself with skilled women such as Murasaki to build a rival salon .

Sh?shi was 16 to 19 when Murasaki joined her court . According to Arthur Waley , Sh?shi was a serious @-@ minded young lady , whose living arrangements were divided between her father 's household and her court at the Imperial Palace . She gathered around her talented women writers such as Izumi Shikibu and Akazome Emon ? the author of an early vernacular history , The Tale of Flowering Fortunes . The rivalry that existed among the women is evident in Murasaki 's diary , where she wrote disparagingly of Izumi : " Izumi Shikibu is an amusing letter @-@ writer ; but there is something not very satisfactory about her . She has a gift for dashing off informal compositions in a careless running @-@ hand ; but in poetry she needs either an interesting subject or some classic model to imitate . Indeed it does not seem to me that in herself she is really a poet at all . "

Sei Sh?nagon , author of the The Pillow Book , had been in service as lady @-@ in @-@ waiting to Teishi when Sh?shi came to court ; it is possible that Murasaki was invited to Sh?shi 's court as a rival to Sh?nagon . Teishi died in 1001 , before Murasaki entered service with Sh?shi , so the two writers were not there concurrently , but Murasaki , who wrote about Sh?nagon in her diary , certainly knew of her , and to an extent was influenced by her . Sh?nagon 's The Pillow Book may have been commissioned as a type of propaganda to highlight Teishi 's court , known for its educated ladies @-@ in @-@ waiting . Japanese literature scholar Joshua Mostow believes Michinaga provided Murasaki to Sh?shi as an equally or better educated woman , so as to showcase Sh?shi 's court in a similar manner .

The two writers had different temperaments : Sh?nagon was witty , clever , and outspoken ; Murasaki was withdrawn and sensitive . Entries in Murasaki 's diary show that the two may not have been on good terms . Murasaki wrote , " Sei Sh?nagon ... was dreadfully conceited . She thought herself so clever , littered her writing with Chinese characters , [which] left a great deal to be desired . " Keene thinks that Murasaki 's impression of Sh?nagon could have been influenced by Sh?shi and the women at her court because Sh?nagon served Sh?shi 's rival empress . Furthermore , he believes Murasaki was brought to court to write Genji in response to Sh?nagon 's popular Pillow Book . Murasaki contrasted herself to Sh?nagon in a variety of ways . She denigrated the pillow book genre and , unlike Sh?nagon who flaunted her knowledge of Chinese , Murasaki pretended to not know the language .

= = = " Our Lady of the Chronicles " = = =

Although the popularity of the Chinese language diminished in the late Heian era , Chinese ballads continued to be popular , including those written by Bai Juyi . Murasaki taught Chinese to Sh?shi who was interested in Chinese art and Juyi 's ballads . Upon becoming Empress , Sh?shi installed screens decorated with Chinese script , causing outrage because written Chinese was considered the language of men , far removed from the women 's quarters . The study of Chinese was thought to be unladylike and went against the notion that only men should have access to the literature . Women were supposed to read and write only in Japanese , which separated them through language from government and the power structure . Murasaki , with her unconventional classical Chinese education , was one of the few women available to teach Sh?shi classical Chinese . Bowring writes it was " almost subversive " that Murasaki knew Chinese and taught the language to Sh?shi . Murasaki , who was reticent about her Chinese education , held the lessons between the two women in secret , writing in her diary , " Since last summer ... very secretly , in odd moments when there happened to be no one about , I have been reading with Her Majesty ... There has of

course been no question of formal lessons ... I have thought it best to say nothing about the matter to anybody . "

Murasaki most likely earned her second nickname , " Our Lady of the Chronicles " (Nihongi no tsubone) , for teaching Sh?shi Chinese literature . A lady @-@ in @-@ waiting who disliked Murasaki accused her of flaunting her knowledge of Chinese and began calling her " Our Lady of the Chronicles " ? an allusion to the Chronicles of Japan ? after an incident in which chapters from Genji were read aloud to the Emperor and his courtiers , one of whom remarked that the author showed a high level of education . Murasaki wrote in her diary , " How utterly ridiculous ! Would I , who hesitate to reveal my learning to my women at home , ever think of doing so at court ? " Although meant to be insulting , Mulhern believes Murasaki was probably flattered by the nickname .

The attitude toward the Chinese language was contradictory . In Teishi 's court , Chinese had been flaunted and considered a symbol of imperial rule and superiority . Yet , in Sh?shi 's salon there was a great deal of hostility towards the language ? perhaps owing to political expedience during a period when Chinese began to be rejected in favor of Japanese ? even though Sh?shi herself was a student of the language . The hostility may have affected Murasaki and her opinion of the court , and forced her to hide her knowledge of Chinese . Unlike Sh?nagon , who was both ostentatious and flirtatious , as well as outspoken about her knowledge of Chinese , Murasaki seems to have been humble , an attitude which possibly impressed Michinaga . Although Murasaki used Chinese and incorporated it in her writing , she publicly rejected the language , a commendable attitude during a period of burgeoning Japanese culture .

Murasaki seems to have been unhappy with court life and was withdrawn and somber . No surviving records show that she entered poetry competitions ; she appears to have exchanged few poems or letters with other women during her service . In general , unlike Sei Sh?nagon , Murasaki gives the impression in her diary that she disliked court life , the other ladies @-@ in @-@ waiting , and the drunken revelry . She did , however , become close friends with a lady @-@ in @-@ waiting named Lady Saish? , and she wrote of the winters that she enjoyed , " I love to see the snow here " .

According to Waley , Murasaki may not have been unhappy with court life in general but bored in Sh?shi 's court . He speculates she would have preferred to serve with the Lady Senshi , whose household seems to have been less strict and more light @-@ hearted . In her diary , Murasaki wrote about Sh?shi 's court , " [she] has gathered round her a number of very worthy young ladies ... Her Majesty is beginning to acquire more experience of life , and no longer judges others by the same rigid standards as before ; but meanwhile her Court has gained a reputation for extreme dullness " .

Murasaki disliked the men at court whom she thought to be drunken and stupid . However , some scholars , such as Waley , are certain she was involved romantically with Michinaga . At the least , Michinaga pursued her and pressured her strongly , and her flirtation with him is recorded in her diary as late as 1010 . Yet , she wrote to him in a poem , " You have neither read my book , nor won my love . " In her diary she records having to avoid advances from Michinaga ? one night he snuck into her room , stealing a newly written chapter of Genji . However , Michinaga 's patronage was essential if she was to continue writing . Murasaki described his daughter 's court activities : the lavish ceremonies , the complicated courtships , the " complexities of the marriage system " , and in elaborate detail , the birth of Sh?shi 's two sons .

It is likely that Murasaki enjoyed writing in solitude . She believed she did not fit well with the general atmosphere of the court , writing of herself : " I am wrapped up in the study of ancient stories ... living all the time in a poetical world of my own scarcely realizing the existence of other people But when they get to know me , they find to their extreme surprise that I am kind and gentle " . Inge says that she was too outspoken to make friends at court , and Mulhern thinks Murasaki 's court life was comparatively quiet compared to other court poets . Mulhern speculates that her remarks about Izumi were not so much directed at Izumi 's poetry but at her behavior , lack of morality and her court liaisons , of which Murasaki disapproved .

Rank was important in Heian court society and Murasaki would not have felt herself to have much ,

if anything , in common with the higher ranked and more powerful Fujiwaras . In her diary , she wrote of her life at court : " I realized that my branch of the family was a very humble one ; but the thought seldom troubled me , and I was in those days far indeed from the painful consciousness of inferiority which makes life at Court a continual torment to me . " A court position would have increased her social standing , but more importantly she gained a greater experience to write about . Court life , as she experienced it , is well reflected in the chapters of Genji written after she joined Sh?shi . Her nickname , Murasaki , was most probably given at a court dinner in an incident she recorded in her diary : in c . 1008 the well @-@ known court poet Fujiwara no Kint? inquired after the " Young Murasaki " ? an allusion to the character named Murasaki in Genji ? which would have been considered a compliment from a male court poet to a female author .

= = Later life and death = =

When Emperor Ichij? died in 1011 , Sh?shi retired from the Imperial Palace to live in a Fujiwara mansion in Biwa , most likely accompanied by Murasaki , who is recorded as being there with Sh?shi in 1013 . George Aston explains that when Murasaki retired from court she was again associated with Ishiyama @-@ dera : " To this beautiful spot , it is said , Murasaki no Shikibu retired from court life to devote the remainder of her days to literature and religion . There are sceptics , however , Motoöri being one , who refuse to believe this story , pointing out ... that it is irreconcilable with known facts . On the other hand , the very chamber in the temple where the Genji was written is shown ? with the ink @-@ slab which the author used , and a Buddhist Sutra in her handwriting , which , if they do not satisfy the critic , still are sufficient to carry conviction to the minds of ordinary visitors to the temple . "

Murasaki may have died in 1014 . Her father made a hasty return to Kyoto from his post at Echigo Province that year , possibly because of her death . Writing in A Bridge of Dreams : A Poetics of " The Tale of Genji " , Shirane mentions that 1014 is generally accepted as the date of Murasaki Shikibu 's death and 973 as the date of her birth , making her 41 when she died . Bowring considers 1014 to be speculative , and believes she may have lived with Sh?shi until as late as 1025 . Waley agrees given that Murasaki may have attended ceremonies with Sh?shi held for her son , Emperor Go @-@ Ichij? around 1025 .

Murasaki 's brother Nubonori died in around 1011 , which , combined with the death of his daughter , may have prompted her father to resign his post and take vows at Miidera temple where he died in 1029 . Murasaki 's daughter entered court service in 1025 as a wet nurse to the future Emperor Go @-@ Reizei (1025 ? 68) . She went on to become a well @-@ known poet as Daini no Sanmi .

= = Works = =

Three works are attributed to Murasaki : The Tale of Genji , The Diary of Lady Murasaki and Poetic Memoirs , a collection of 128 poems . Her work is considered important because her writing reflects the creation and development of Japanese writing during a period when Japanese shifted from an unwritten vernacular to a written language . Until the 9th century , Japanese language texts were written in Chinese characters using the man 'y?gana writing system . A revolutionary achievement was the development of kana , a true Japanese script , in the mid @-@ to late 9th century . Japanese authors began to write prose in their own language , which led to genres such as tales (monogatari) and poetic journals (Nikki Bungaku) . Historian Edwin Reischauer writes that genres such as the monogatari were distinctly Japanese and that Genji , written in kana , " was the outstanding work of the period " .

= = = Diary and poetry = = =

Murasaki began her diary after she entered service at Sh?shi 's court . Much of what we know about her and her experiences at court comes from the diary , which covers the period from about 1008 to 1010 . The long descriptive passages , some of which may have originated as letters , cover

her relationships with the other ladies @-@ in @-@ waiting , Michinaga 's temperament , the birth of Sh?shi 's sons ? at Michinaga 's mansion rather than at the Imperial Palace ? and the process of writing Genji , including descriptions of passing newly written chapters to calligraphers for transcriptions . Typical of contemporary court diaries written to honor patrons , Murasaki devotes half to the birth of Sh?shi 's son Emperor Go @-@ Ichij? , an event of enormous importance to Michinaga : he had planned for it with his daughter 's marriage which made him grandfather and de facto regent to an emperor .

Poetic Memoirs is a collection of 128 poems Mulhern describes as " arranged in a biographical sequence " . The original set has been lost . According to custom , the verses would have been passed from person to person and often copied . Some appear written for a lover ? possibly her husband before he died ? but she may have merely followed tradition and written simple love poems . They contain biographical details : she mentions a sister who died , the visit to Echizen province with her father and that she wrote poetry for Sh?shi . Murasaki 's poems were published in 1206 by Fujiwara no Teika , in what Mulhern believes to be the collection that is closest to the original form ; at around the same time Teika included a selection of Murasaki 's works in an imperial anthology , New Collections of Ancient and Modern Times .

= = = The Tale of Genji = = =

Murasaki is best known for her The Tale of Genji , a three @-@ part novel spanning 1100 pages and 54 chapters , which is thought to have taken a decade to complete . The earliest chapters were possibly written for a private patron either during her marriage or shortly after her husband 's death . She continued writing while at court and probably finished while still in service to Sh?shi . She would have needed patronage to produce a work of such length . Michinaga provided her with costly paper and ink , and with calligraphers . The first handwritten volumes were probably assembled and bound by ladies @-@ in @-@ waiting .

In his The Pleasures of Japanese Literature , Keene claims Murasaki wrote the " supreme work of Japanese fiction " by drawing on traditions of waka court diaries , and earlier monogatari ? written in a mixture of Chinese script and Japanese script ? such as The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter or The Tales of Ise . She drew on and blended styles from Chinese histories , narrative poetry and contemporary Japanese prose . Adolphson writes that the juxtaposition of formal Chinese style with mundane subjects resulted in a sense of parody or satire , giving her a distinctive voice . Genji follows the traditional format of monogatari ? telling a tale ? particularly evident in its use of a narrator , but Keene claims Murasaki developed the genre far beyond its bounds , and by doing so created a form that is utterly modern . The story of the " shining prince " Genji is set in the late 9th to early 10th centuries , and Murasaki eliminated from it the elements of fairy tales and fantasy frequently found in earlier monogatari .

The themes in Genji are common to the period , and are defined by Shively as encapsulating " the tyranny of time and the inescapable sorrow of romantic love " . The main theme is that of the fragility of life , " the sorrow of human existence " , mono no aware ? she used the term over a thousand times in Genji . Keene speculates that in her tale of the " shining prince " , Murasaki may have created for herself an idealistic escape from court life , which she found less than savory . In Prince Genji she formed a gifted , comely , refined , yet human and sympathetic protagonist . Keene writes that Genji gives a view into the Heian period ; for example love affairs flourished , although women typically remained unseen behind screens , curtains or fusuma .

Helen McCullough describes Murasaki 's writing as of universal appeal and believes The Tale of Genji " transcends both its genre and age . Its basic subject matter and setting ? love at the Heian court ? are those of the romance , and its cultural assumptions are those of the mid @-@ Heian period , but Murasaki Shikibu 's unique genius has made the work for many a powerful statement of human relationships , the impossibility of permanent happiness in love ... and the vital importance , in a world of sorrows , of sensitivity to the feelings of others . " Prince Genji recognizes in each of his lovers the inner beauty of the woman and the fragility of life , which according to Keene , makes him heroic . The story was popular : Emperor Ichij? had it read to him , even though it was written in

Japanese . By 1021 all the chapters were known to be complete and the work was sought after in the provinces where it was scarce .

= = Legacy = =

Murasaki 's reputation and influence have not diminished since her lifetime when she , with other Heian women writers , was instrumental in developing Japanese into a written language . Her writing was required reading for court poets as early as the 12th century as her work began to be studied by scholars who generated authoritative versions and criticism . Within a century of her death she was highly regarded as a classical writer . In the 17th century , Murasaki 's work became emblematic of Confucian philosophy and women were encouraged to read her books . In 1673 Kumazawa Banzan argued that her writing was valuable for its sensitivity and depiction of emotions . He wrote in his Discursive Commentary on Genji that when " human feelings are not understood the harmony of the Five Human Relationships is lost . "

The Tale of Genji was copied and illustrated in various forms as early as a century after Murasaki 's death . The Genji Monogatari Emaki , is a late Heian era 12th @-@ century handscroll , consisting of four scrolls , 19 paintings , and 20 sheets of calligraphy . The illustrations , definitively dated to between 1110 and 1120 , have been tentatively attributed to Fujiwara no Takachika and the calligraphy to various well @-@ known contemporary calligraphers . The scroll is housed at the Gotoh Museum and the Tokugawa Art Museum .

Female virtue was tied to literary knowledge in the 17th century , leading to a demand for Murasaki or Genji inspired artifacts , known as genji @-@ e . Dowry sets decorated with scenes from Genji or illustrations of Murasaki became particularly popular for noblewomen : in the 17th century genji @-@ e symbolically imbued a bride with an increased level of cultural status ; by the 18th century they had come to symbolize marital success . In 1628 , Tokugawa Iemitsu 's daughter had a set of lacquer boxes made for her wedding ; Prince Toshitada received a pair of silk genji @-@ e screens , painted by Kan? Tan 'y? as a wedding gift in 1649 .

Murasaki became a popular subject of paintings and illustrations highlighting her as a virtuous woman and poet . She is often shown at her desk in Ishimyama Temple , staring at the moon for inspiration . Tosa Mitsuoki made her the subject of hanging scrolls in the 17th century . The Tale of Genji became a favorite subject of Japanese ukiyo @-@ e artists for centuries with artists such as Hiroshige , Kiyonaga , and Utamaro illustrating various editions of the novel . While early Genji art was considered symbolic of court culture , by the middle of the Edo period the mass @-@ produced ukiyo @-@ e prints made the illustrations accessible for the samurai classes and commoners .

In Envisioning the " Tale of Genji " Shirane observes that " The Tale of Genji has become many things to many different audiences through many different media over a thousand years ... unmatched by any other Japanese text or artifact . " The work and its author were popularized through its illustrations in various media : emaki (illustrated handscrolls) ; by?bu @-@ e (screen paintings) , ukiyo @-@ e (woodblock prints) ; films , comics , and in the modern period , manga . In her fictionalized account of Murasaki 's life , The Tale of Murasaki : A Novel , Liza Dalby has Murasaki involved in a romance during her travels with her father to Echizen Province .

The Tale of the Genji is recognized as an enduring classic . McCullough writes that Murasaki " is both the quintessential representative of a unique society and a writer who speaks to universal human concerns with a timeless voice . Japan has not seen another such genius . " Keene writes that The Tale of Genji continues to captivate , because , in the story , her characters and their concerns are universal . In the 1920s , when Waley 's translation was published , reviewers compared Genji to Austen , Proust , and Shakespeare . Mulhern says of Murasaki that she is similar to Shakespeare , who represented his Elizabethan England , in that she captured the essence of the Heian court and as a novelist " succeeded perhaps even beyond her own expectations . " Like Shakespeare , her work has been the subject of reams of criticism and many books .

Kyoto held a year @-@ long celebration commemorating the 1000th anniversary of Genji in 2008 , with poetry competitions , visits to the Tale of Genji Museum in Uji and Ishiyama @-@ dera (where a life size rendition of Murasaki at her desk was displayed) , and women dressing in traditional 12

@-@ layered Heian court J?nihitoe and ankle @-@ length hair wigs . The author and her work inspired museum exhibits and Genji manga spin @-@ offs . The design on the reverse of the first 2000 yen note commemorated her and The Tale of Genji . A plant bearing purple berries has been named after her .

A Genji Album , only in the 1970s dated to 1510 , is housed at Harvard University . The album is considered the earliest of its kind and consists of 54 paintings by Tosa Mitsunobu and 54 sheets of calligraphy on shikishi paper in five colors , written by master calligraphers . The leaves are housed in a case dated to the Edo period , with a silk frontispiece painted by Tosa Mitsuoki , dated to around 1690 . The album contains Mitsuoki 's authentication slips for his ancestor 's 16th @-@ century paintings .

= = Gallery = =