



The Tale of Genji

Murasaki Shikibu (973 or 978 – 1014 or 1031)

Read by:	Multiple readers	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
Length:	8 hours and 48 minutes	Catalog:	DB-1138
Language:	English	UPC:	0683422134371
Style:	Collaborative	MSLP:	\$9.99
Genre:	Fiction		

The Tale of Genji, also known as *Genji Monogatari*, is a classic and foundational work of Japanese literature that depicts the manners and intrigues of members of the court culture during the Heian period. The novel was written in the early 11th century and is attributed to Murasaki Shikibu, who is believed to have been a noblewoman and lady-in-waiting. Universally acclaimed as a masterpiece, it is also a work “firsts”: the first novel, the first psychological novel, the first modern novel, and the first to continue to be considered a classic. It was likely written in installments that were delivered periodically to an audience of aristocratic women. The first English translation was done by Suematsu Kencho in 1882, and it is this translation that is used in this audiobook.

The story takes place over a long period of time and centers on an account of Hiraku Genji, son of an emperor, and his relationship with a beloved concubine Minamoto. Genji has been removed from the line of succession and pursues a career as an imperial officer. The story focuses on Genji’s romantic escapades and depicts the highly regimented customs of the day. There little in the way of plot, and a cast of some hundred characters come and go as the years go by, events evolve, affairs produce offspring, lovers die, power changes hands, and unexpected consequences multiply. Most of the characters are never given names, but rather referred to by their social role. The book ends abruptly in mid-sentence, and scholars have debated whether it was the intended ending, if there are missing chapters, or if Murasaki Shikibu simply left it unfinished.

Murasaki Shikibu, known in English as Lady Murasaki, (973 or 978 – 1014 or 1031) was a Japanese poet and noblewoman best known as the author of the *Tale of Genji*. She was from the aristocratic Fujiwara clan and served as a lady-in-waiting to the Empress Shoshi. The names of women of the time were not recorded or publicly known. Murasaki Shikibu is a nickname derived from Shikibu, the ministry where father served and Murasaki, likely a court nickname possibly associated with wisteria and the color violet.

Her family had a strong literary heritage in addition to its social prominence: her great-grandfather and grandfather on her father’s side were both notable poets, and her father was a respected scholar of Chinese classics and poetry. It was unusual for women of her time to be educated or learn Chinese, the language of official affairs, but she achieved a fluency in Chinese classics and language as a child, which, in addition to her writing skills, earned her the invitation to serve at court. She married and gave birth to a daughter shortly; her husband died two years after their marriage. Scholars believe she started writing *The Tale of Genji* shortly after her marriage or her widowhood, and that she worked on the book for twelve years between 1000 and 1012. She retired from court life with the empress Shoshi to Lake Biwa, where she died in 1014.