The World’s Oldest Novel  
*The Tale of Genji* and its Refractions

Written over one thousand years ago by the court lady, Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物語) is the supreme masterpiece of Japanese literature and a work whose influence on subsequent arts and letters in the country cannot be overestimated. As the world’s earliest extant prose narrative by a woman writer, the *Genji* has received much attention in world literature and women’s studies programs and, with its rich psychological portraits of desire, guilt, and memory, has gained for itself a reputation as “the world’s oldest novel.” In this course, we will read the entire *Tale of Genji* in English translation and engage fully with its sophistication and complexity by employing diverse critical perspectives. We will investigate the tenth-century prose experiments that made the work possible and examine a number of later works in different genres so as to gain awareness of the impact of the *Genji* on the culture of every historical era since its composition. We will also have occasion to consider the reception of Murasaki’s masterpiece in the English-speaking world.

**Course Texts**

The required texts for the class are Royall Tyler’s translation of *The Tale of Genji* (Deluxe Edition, Penguin), Ivan Morris’s *The World of the Shining Prince* (Kodansha), and Helen McCullough’s anthology, *Classical Japanese Prose* (Stanford). (Haruo Shirane’s *Traditional Japanese Literature: An Anthology* is also acceptable.) The following book is optional, but highly recommended due to the complexity of the *Genji*: William Puette, *The Tale of Genji: A Reader’s Guide*. These can be purchased at Amherst Books. They are also on reserve at Frost. A few readings must be obtained from electronic resources, as noted in the course schedule.

**Course Reserves**


**Course Requirements**

This is a humanities course that emphasizes reading, writing, and discussion. It is also a writing extensive course, and the emphasis is on writing as a process.

*Readings: All readings should be completed by the day for which they are assigned.*
Participation: As a course given over almost entirely to discussion, its value depends greatly on your sustained and enthusiastic participation. Strong participation by all exposes you to ideas and interpretations you may have never considered on your own.

Journal: Students should keep a journal/blog throughout the second unit, which I will collect each Wednesday. This constitutes your forum for testing new ideas and learning how to ask productive questions of a literary work. Your journal can be paper or electronic, handwritten, word-processed, or web-based, depending on your preference. The method of submission will depend on the journal’s form. You should write a minimum of fifteen substantive entries during the seventeen sessions we spend on the Genji in Unit Two.

Two formal essays: There are two 5-page essays (double-spaced) in the class. These two formal papers are opportunities to expand and develop the ideas in a response paper. It is not necessary to use secondary sources, though you are free to do so if you wish.

Research essay: Toward the end of the semester, you will choose one of the short essays and further expand and develop it into a 15-page research paper (double-spaced) by utilizing secondary sources. You should use however many sources are necessary in order to successfully argue the thesis of your paper. Students who can read Japanese are encouraged to use Japanese language material. Please include a bibliography with your final paper.

Presentation: You will also give a presentation on your research topic during the final two weeks of the semester. I will generally organize students into “panels” of related topics on each day.

Evaluation of Student Work
Participation—25%; Journal—15%; Two short essays—20% (10% each); Presentation—10%; Research paper—30%

Campus Resources
Writing Center: Charles Pratt Dorm, Room 101. Trained consultants will give individual assistance with writing assignments at any stage of the process.
Frost Library Reference Desk: The librarians at Frost are very friendly and can help you locate useful materials for the final research paper.

Course Policies
You are allowed two unexcused absences during the semester. Additional absences will result in a reduction in your participation grade by 1/3 for each absence. Punctuality is also crucial so as not to cause a disruption to the class. Late essays are allowed only with prior permission of the instructor and only in exceptional circumstances. The grade will be reduced by one step (e.g. A to A-) for each day it is late.

Academic Honesty
Assignments and conduct in this course are governed by the College’s Honor System. Course assignments should substantially reflect your own work and ideas, and when that work is facilitated through a dialogue with others, you should acknowledge it. If you get information from a book, an article, a website, or a classmate, be sure to say so. The use of another’s words and ideas without acknowledgment constitutes plagiarism, a serious breach of the Honor System, which will result in a zero for the assignment and referral to higher authorities.

Please let me know if you have any disabilities that might affect your performance in class.
Course Schedule (I may make some minor changes during the semester)

Unit One: Contexts

Week 1
1/24 Mon Introduction to the Course
1/26 Wed Ivan Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince* (Ch. 9, pp. 251-264)
   Barbara Ruch, “Introduction” to *The World of the Shining Prince*
   Virginia Woolf on the Genji (e-reserves)
   David Damrosch, “What is World Literature?” (JSTOR)
   Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator” (handout)

Week 2
1/31 Mon Ivan Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince* (Ch. 1-6, pp. 1-169)
2/2 Wed *World of the Shining Prince* (Ch. 7-8, pp. 170-250)

Week 3
2/7 Mon *Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* (CJP, pp. 27-37); *Tales of Ise* (CJP, pp. 38-69); “Classical Japanese Poetry” (CJP, pp. 558-564); Bo Juyi, “Chang henge”

Unit Two: Reading *The Tale of Genji*

Part I: Youthful Romance and Exile

Week 4
2/14 Mon *The Tale of Genji*, ch. 1-4 (pp. 1-80)
2/16 Wed *Genji*, ch. 5-6 (pp. 81-131)

Week 5
2/21 Mon *Genji*, ch. 7-11 (pp. 132-225)
2/23 Wed *Genji*, ch. 12-13 (pp. 226-277)

Part II: Return and Rise

Week 6
2/28 Mon *Genji*, ch. 14-19 (pp. 278-361)
3/2 Wed *Genji*, ch. 20-21 (pp. 362-404)

3/4 Fri First short paper due today by 2:00 pm

Part III: Enter Tamakazura

Week 7
3/7 Mon Excursus: Exploring Heian architecture
3/9 Wed *Genji*, ch. 22-26 (pp. 405-478)

Week 8
3/21  Mon  *Genji*, ch. 27-30 (pp. 479-522)

3/23  Wed  *Genji*, ch. 31-33 (pp. 523-574)

*Part IV: Dangerous Obsessions*

**Week 9**

3/28  Mon  *Genji*, ch. 34-35 (pp. 575-671)

3/30  Wed  *Genji*, ch. 36-38 (pp. 672-716)

**Week 10**

4/4   Mon  *Genji*, ch. 39-41 (pp. 717-779)

4/6   Wed  *Genji*, ch. 42-44 (pp. 780-825)

4/8   Fri  **Second short paper due today by 2:00 pm**

*Part V: The Uji Chapters*

**Week 11**

4/11  Mon  *Genji*, ch. 45-48 (pp. 826-926)

4/13  Wed  *Genji*, ch. 49 (pp. 927-971)

**Week 12**

4/18  Mon  *Genji*, ch. 50-52 (pp. 972-1073)

4/20  Wed  *Genji*, ch. 53-54 (pp. 1074-1120)

**Due: Research topic, thesis statement, and working bibliography**

*Unit Three: Reception and Refractions*

**Week 13**

4/25  Mon  *Genji* in Pictures: Classical Refractions
In-class work on the *Genji* scrolls; no advance preparation required
**Student presentations**

4/27  Wed  *Genji* on Stage: Medieval Refractions
*Yugao, Lady Aoi, and The Shrine in the Fields* (e-reserves)
**Student presentations**

**Week 14**

5/2   Mon  Championing *Genji*: Early-modern Refractions
Motoori Norinaga, “The Jeweled Comb Box” (JSTOR)
**Student presentations**

5/4   Wed  Rewriting *Genji*: Modern Refractions
Tanizaki Jun’ichiro, “The Bridge of Dreams” (e-reserves)
**Student presentations**

**Research paper due date: Friday, 4/13 by 2:00 pm**

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