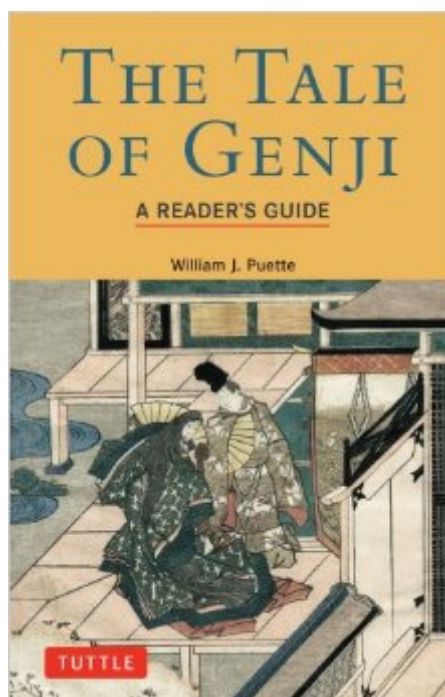


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# Tale Of Genji: A Reader's Guide (Tuttle Classics)



## Synopsis

"Those who wish to deepen their acquaintance with Murasaki's wondrous world will certainly find Puette's guide most helpful." —The Japan Times  
This is the most complete reader's guide available on Japan's highly revered novel, the eleventh-century classic, *The Tale of Genji*, by Murasaki Shikibu, referred to by Nobel Laureate Yasunari Kawabata as the "highest pinnacle of Japanese literature." Written specifically to accompany the translation of the work by Arthur Waley and Edward G. Seidensticker, this guide offers detailed summaries and thematic commentaries, as well as cross-referenced notes on the novel's many characters. It also charts the essential progress of *The Tale of Genji* and introduces the reader to the more subtle complexities, literary devices, and conventions of Lady Murasaki's Heian Japan. No longer does the reader have to try and guess the novel's cultural and historical milieu. The author presents brief, illustrated essays on historical, philosophical, and cultural features of the novel, and discusses such relevant aspects as the balance between the tenets of Shintoism and Buddhism, the pervasive concepts of karma in human relationships, and the poetic aspects of *aware*. Both general readers and literature students will find the background information contained in this "companion" indispensable to their reading and interpretation of this complex novel.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There IS "a detailed, modern English edition of *The Tale of Genji*." Royall Tyler's 2001 translation is

heavily annotated and filled with illustrations of the Heian world and its artifacts mentioned throughout the novel. It is FAR superior in its translation as well to Waley's fast and loose 1935 translation and Seidensticker's workmanlike but less inspired 1976 translation. Anyone wanting to read and/or understand Genji should definitely read Tyler's translation. I can't tell from this page if Dr. Puette has updated his book to include Tyler's translation, if so I'd certainly repurchase it and likely raise my rating to five stars; I only have the original 1983 edition. Still, even in conjunction with Tyler's Genji, Tuttle's book is a fantastic resource for readers, be their intentions academic or otherwise.

This is a less than ideal companion to the Tale of Genji, because it contains many factual errors and outdated claims that would not pass muster today. As far as I can tell Dr. Puette is a venerable doctor of law, labor history, and parliamentary procedure at the University of Hawai'i, but not a classical Japan scholar. Some of the errors in this book are of such a simple nature that it makes me question whether Dr. Puette has the necessary expertise to write a guide like this. To take a rather simple example, on page 18 it is claimed that "the very language spoken by Japanese of the Heian period had sounds no longer contained in modern speech. Today the Japanese themselves must, therefore, read modern renderings of the work." This calls into question whether Puette could read Japanese. The Nara period had seven vowels expressed in ineffable man'yōgana, but in the late Heian period when Genji was written, there were only five vowels and hiragana had already been adopted, not in its modern form, but in a form that corresponds precisely to the modern forms. Therefore, all six year old Japanese children should be able to sound out the original Tale of Genji, and indeed some of them do so. What makes the text so difficult is its 11th century grammar, literary allusions, and highly affected post-classical style. So, I cannot recommend this book as a guide. However, if you are going to be writing about or talking about the Tale of Genji at length, the chapter summaries which make up about half of the book are quite useful, because one more frequently remembers the mood of the characters than what was actually going on in any given chapter. For details on Heian life I recommend instead *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan*.

*The Tale of Genji: A Reader's Guide* gives an excellent introduction and chapter by chapter guide to the often overwhelming details of characters and basic plot chronology in *The Tale of Genji*. The guide is helpful to read BEFORE starting *The Tale of Genji* and essential to keep within reach while reading the novel itself. The only downside to this concise volume is that it accentuates the need for

a detailed, annotated, modern English edition of The Tale of Genji to better understand the sophisticated, archaic language and ancient Japanese culture it depicts.

Essential Supplement to the Tale of Genji! Provides critical info regarding Japanese culture during the Heian period. Deeply enriches understanding of the novel.

Wow: so much to wade through but of course the ultimate in Japanese literary history.

This is another gift which was appreciated by the recipient, our grandson. We bought it to accompany The Tale of Genji.

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