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 ***The Tale of Genji: Translation, Canonization, and World Literature* by Michael Emmerich (review)**

Paul S. Atkins

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

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In recent years, English-language studies of classical Japanese literature have come to emphasize the reception—as opposed to the production—of texts: how they were read, misread, not read, adapted, plagiarized, alluded to, parodied, translated, canonized, pictorialized, dramatized, and so on. In particular, the publication of *Inventing the Classics: Modernity, National Identity, and Japanese Literature*, edited by Haruo Shirane and Tomi Suzuki, both reflected an important scholarly trend and fueled further efforts along these lines, including the volume under review.¹

Michael Emmerich's monograph addresses several moments in the reception history of the pinnacle of the classical Japanese literary canon, *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物語, ca. 1008). Written by Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部 (ca. 978–ca. 1014/1025), a court lady living in the capital of Kyoto, *Genji* did not become an immediate classic: the low status of prose in Heian Japan relative to poetry meant that critics first treated it as a kind of frivolous entertainment. By the 1190s, however, the court poet Fujiwara no Shunzei 藤原俊成 (1114–1204) had declared *Genji* essential reading for *waka* poets, who mined its fifty-four chapters for allusive effect.² A later boom in the composition of *renga* 連歌 (linked verse) created the demand for digests of the [End Page 179] tale—which runs over a thousand pages in English translation—as its language grew more remote and members of nonelite classes entered the ranks of literary practitioners. *Genji* inspired at least fifteen *noh* plays, including one that simultaneously cast the author Murasaki into Buddhist hell and portrayed her as a manifestation of a bodhisattva.³ Thirsting for a native Japanese “essence” that could withstand comparison with the immense cultural edifice of Chinese civilization, the early modern thinker Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801) elevated *Genji* as a repository of a unique emotional sensitivity and sensibility, *mono no aware* 物のあはれ.⁴

Emmerich picks up the thread of this story in the nineteenth century. In Part I, “Ninety-Nine Years in the Life of an Image,” he discusses *Nise Murasaki inaka Genji* (新世源氏 Genji country-style, by an impostor of Murasaki), a popular reworking of *Genji monogatari* by Ryūtei Tanehiko 龍井 田根比呂 (1783–1842), with illustrations in color woodblock prints by one of the all-time masters of the form, Utagawa Kunisada 歌川 国貞 (1786–1865). Set in the fifteenth century, Tanehiko’s version takes as its protagonist a son of the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa 足利 義満 (1436–1490) by his favored concubine. Mitsuuji 光氏, as the fictional son is called, embarks on a mission to recover a stolen sword whose theft threatens the very survival of the Ashikaga shogunate. He adopts the guise of a reprobate playboy, dutifully seducing one woman after another in order to get closer to the object of his quest. Various characters are clearly meant as equivalents to counterparts in *Genji*, but the setting (*sekai* 世界) is dramatically different, as are the various plot twists, and *Inaka Genji* seems more like an Edo-style riff on *Genji* rather than a studious adaptation or parody. Unfortunately, when the Tokugawa shogunate banned it in 1842, the serial publication of Tanehiko’s work, which had begun in 1829, came to an abrupt end. Tanehiko died soon after, leaving his bestseller unfinished in the middle of his equivalent of the “Fujibakama” chapter, thirtieth in the original text.

Eschewing a literary analysis of *Inaka Genji*—he gives us only [End Page 180] half a page of plot summary forty pages into the discussion (p. 88)—Emmerich instead focuses on the book’s *visuality*.⁵ The *gōkan* 合巻 (combined booklets) genre to which *Inaka Genji* belongs was distinctive for the remarkable prominence of its illustrations and a clever interplay between image and text. With close attention for detail and a clear passion for his subject, Emmerich takes us through several key moments in the work, page by page, showing through his commentary on images and text how the author and artist used the book’s format to great effect. Illustrations burst beyond the borders of their frames; the reader turns the page, and the scene shifts...

The Tale of Genji: Translation, Canonization, and World Literature BY MICHAEL EMMERICH. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. Pp. xv + 494. \$60.00.

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¹ Haruo Shirane and Tomi Suzuki, *Inventing the Classics: Modernity, National Identity, and Japanese Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000). Some earlier and later examples of a similar approach are Richard Bowering, "The *Ise monogatari*: A Short Cultural History," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52.2 (1992): 401–80; Joshua Mostow, *Pictures of the Heart: The 'Hyakunin Isshu' in Word and Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996); *Issues of Canonicity and Canon Formation in Japanese Literary Studies*, ed. Stephen D. Miller (West Lafayette, IN: Association for Japanese Literary Studies, Purdue University, 2000); Anne Commons, *Hitomaro: Poet as God* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); and Fusae Ekida, "A Reception History of the *Man'yōshū*" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2009).

² Poem nos. 505–6, in Kubota Jun 久保田淳 and Yamaguchi Akio 山口明穂, eds., *Roppyakuban utaawase* 六百番歌合, vol. 35 of *Shin Nihon koton bungaku taikai* 新日本国文学大系 (Tokyo: Heianami shoten, 1998), pp. 186–87. For an English translation, see "Withered Fields," round 13 of *Winter* (first part), trans. Gian Piero Persiani and Lewis Cook, in *Traditional Japanese Literature: An Anthology, Beginnings to 1600*, ed. Haruo Shirane (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 602–3.



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