

CHAPTER ONE

HEIAN FANTASIES: NATIONALISM AND NOSTALGIA IN THE READING OF GENJI

In 2000, *The Tale of Genji* was adapted for the stage of the Takarazuka Theater in a production titled “*Myūjīkaru roman Genji monogatari: Asaki yumemishi*” (*The Tale of Genji Lived in a Dream: A Musical Romance*). This modern retelling of *Genji* provides several valuable signposts that will help guide our examination of nativism, a precursor to nationalism, and nostalgia in the transmission of *Genji* over the last thousand years.

Since its establishment in 1913, the Takarazuka Revue has grown to become a major theatrical institution with a nationwide following. Takarazuka has a well-earned reputation for exacting standards in music and choreography. However, the most enduring element of Takarazuka’s success is its all-female cast. Takarazuka’s particular brand of entertainment makes it possible for actresses portraying leading men to depict a romanticized ideal of masculinity while failing to provoke the anxiety some female members of the audience may have toward men. This allows members of the audience who perceive men as the “other” or as sexual predators to participate more fully in the romantic fantasy on stage. Nearly a century after its founding, the revue boasts two large, successful theaters, in Takarazuka and Tokyo, a devoted following nationwide, and an abiding presence in advertising and popular culture in Japan. Women remain the most loyal fans of the theater’s signature style that combines passion, romance, and fantasy.¹

In keeping with the theater’s emphasis on the fantastic, most productions are set in locations deemed exotic and are populated by characters who live tragic lives of legendary proportions. Elaborate musical dance numbers, stunning orchestration, and dazzling costumes are part of every Takarazuka show. Perennial favorites include *The Rose of Versailles* (*Berusaigu no bara*) and *Gone With the Wind* (*Kaze to tomo ni sarinu*). The goal of Takarazuka is to offer entertainment that helps the audience momentarily leave behind the troubles of daily life. For this reason, the stage is rarely set to reflect life in contemporary Japan. However, *The Tale of Genji* is sufficiently remote in time and exotic in reputation to offer a glimpse of reality as different and compelling as revo-

lutionary Paris or a war-torn plantation in Georgia. The theater's first *Genji* production, an operatic interpretation of the "Sakaki" chapter (chapter 10: "The Sacred Tree"), was staged in July 1919, the month after Japan participated in the signing of the Treaty of Versailles following the end of World War I. Since World War II *Genji* has been adapted for the Takarazuka stage four times. The two most recent adaptations followed in close succession during an extended period of economic malaise that plagued the Japanese economy for more than two decades. The coincidence of Takarazuka's retelling of *Genji* with events of broad national significance speaks to the enduring connection *Genji* has with a sense of pride and pain that register on a national level.

The emphasis Takarazuka places on fantasy will be particularly helpful in illuminating the function nostalgia has come to serve in linking *Genji* to idealized notions of nationalism. However, it should be noted that this association is not limited to Takarazuka. The first major adaptation of *Genji* on film was released in 1951 and directed by Yoshimura Kōsaburō.² Heavily promoted by Daiei studios as a feature film commemorating the studio's tenth anniversary, Yoshimura's *Genji* met with enormous popular success and became the top-grossing film in Japan on record at the time.³ When this first *Genji* film was released, Japan had begun to recover from defeat in World War II, and the allied occupation was coming to an end. The success of Yoshimura's *Genji* came in response not only to the film's cinematic merits but also its ability to evoke a romanticized sense of nostalgia for the nation's imperial household in a less-troubled time.

The construction of a scene in Yoshimura's blockbuster corresponding to events in the eighth chapter of the original tale provides a particularly compelling example of how *Genji* has been used to address the concerns of contemporary culture. The eighth chapter, titled "Hana no En" (Under the Cherry Blossoms), has long played a prominent role in the history of *Genji* reception. "Hana no En" depicts the tale's protagonist, Genji, in a way that defines many of the emotional and cultural complexities underlying his character. The opening chapters recount the details of Genji's birth and the formative experiences of his youth. As the tale begins, readers are told of Genji's mother, Kiritsubo. She became the object of intense jealousy among the intimate attendants of the emperor because she inspired the emperor's most intense passion. Kiritsubo did not come from a family that entitled her to high rank and political protection. The other women serving the emperor took advantage of Kiritsubo's social standing to vent their rage against her. In the first chapter, Kiritsubo dies as a result of the overwhelming pressures of life at court. Later in the chapter, her son is passed over for recognition as an heir apparent or prince by his father. Because he lacks the political support on his mother's side to succeed as a potential heir to the throne, the emperor gives him the surname of a child of imperial parentage, but of common rank: Genji. Despite his status as a commoner, Genji comes to be particularly admired at court because of his physical beauty and his ability to win the favor of both men and women by his sophisticated command of etiquette and romance. The

eighth chapter begins with Genji, now twenty years old, exhibiting his cultural prowess in the prime of youth. The emperor has just held a party to celebrate the blossoming of cherry trees in the spring. During the celebration, the heir apparent, Genji's older half-brother, invites Genji to participate in the ceremonial dancing. The elegance of Genji's performance is so overwhelming that it causes one of the most powerful ministers at court to weep. Genji is then called upon to participate in the composition and recitation of poetry. His poems are so extraordinary that everyone hearing them is filled with admiration for his talents. Word seems to have circulated that even the Empress Fujitsubo was inspired by Genji's performance and his physical beauty to express her devotion to him. After the empress has retired for the night, Genji, his confidence emboldened both by the success of his performance and by too much to drink, makes his way secretly to the Fujitsubo chambers. He has been drawn to Fujitsubo since she first came to court as an imperial consort when he was a child. At the age of eighteen, he managed to consummate this enduring romantic interest in Fujitsubo by visiting her while she was away from the imperial court. Fujitsubo became pregnant from this secret union and gave birth to a son. In chapter 7, the emperor named this child a crown prince, designating that he follow the heir apparent in succession to the title of emperor. At the same time, the emperor elevated Fujitsubo to the title of empress. It is an act of unimaginable daring for Genji, now only one chapter later in the tale, to seek the companionship of the woman the emperor has just named his empress. Genji's boldness becomes even more extraordinary when considering, as only Genji, Fujitsubo, and the reader know, that his previous liaison with Fujitsubo resulted in the birth of a son destined to become emperor. In the text, Genji's audacity continues unchecked. He makes his way to the passage leading to Fujitsubo's chambers, only to find it locked. Finding the empress inaccessible, he heads in the direction of the quarters associated with the mother of the heir apparent, Kokiden, the emperor's highest-ranking consort and Genji's greatest antagonist at court. Genji enters Kokiden's chambers to discover a young woman of high rank alone. He immediately forces himself upon her, well aware of the fact that she is probably a younger sister of the Kokiden consort. The rape of this young woman takes place by the light of a misty moon, giving her character the name Oborozukiyo ("Night of a Misty Moon"). In subsequent chapters, this new sexual conquest becomes a particularly blatant offense to his rivals at court. The gravity of Genji's offense is compounded by the fact that Oborozukiyo is to become the consort to the heir apparent. Thus Genji has defiled not only the current emperor's empress but also the woman selected to serve as the principal wife to the next emperor. By the twelfth chapter, the consequences of Genji's hubris become inescapable, and he is forced into exile from the capital. Chapter 8 is short but reveals the tale's hero at his most talented and his most morally corrupt.

In Yoshimura's adaptation of scenes from "Hana no En," Genji dances under the cherry blossoms and captures the attention of everyone in atten-

dance. However, his reckless pursuit of Fujitsubo is not alluded to, and his seduction of Oborozukiyo is omitted altogether.⁴ In its place, Oborozukiyo pursues Genji. She is depicted in the film as being drawn to his dashing figure with such intensity that her desire becomes increasingly difficult for her to control each time she sees him. In the scene where one familiar with the text would expect *Genji* to secretly venture first to the chambers of Fujitsubo and then into the imperial consort's chambers, Oborozukiyo takes Genji by surprise. As Genji lounges innocently under the light of a misty moon, she appears seductively before him. Later she reaches from behind a curtain to catch Genji's robes as he passes through an adjoining corridor. She stops him and urges him to visit her again that evening. This slight change of elements in the story renders Genji, who ultimately ascends to the position of honorary emperor, in a light that implies less culpability and moral corruption than one might infer from the original tale. It is not surprising that such a change would have been welcomed by audiences painfully aware of the discussion concerning both national and imperial responsibility for the horrors associated with World War II. A portrayal of Genji, symbolically associated with the ideals of the Heian period and the imperial line, was far more appealing with the taint of scandal and moral corruption minimized where possible. As we will see in this chapter, Yoshimura's strategy of altering and omitting textual details is surprisingly consistent with the way in which scholars seeking to promote the didactic or ideological value of the tale had sought to overlook the complex portrayal of Genji in this chapter for centuries.

The popularity and critical acclaim associated with Yoshimura's *Genji* led Daiei to place the innovative actor and director Kinugasa Teinosuke in charge of another cinematic version of the tale in 1957. Kinugasa's *Genji* focused on the events of the final chapters of the tale and their tragic heroine, Ukifune. The popular Kabuki actor Hasegawa Kazuo, who had so effectively played the part of Genji in Yoshimura's adaptation, was cast as the lead, Kaoru, in Kinugasa's film. Kaoru is Genji's reputed son and central character of the final chapters in the tale. As in Yoshimura's film, Hasegawa plays a kind, sensitive, and vulnerable hero. The 1950s' versions of Genji and Kaoru on the screen are decidedly lacking in malice or ambition. They are young men of exceptional promise who endure deep pain and turmoil. The commercial success of these films suggests that audiences of the time were drawn to stories that allowed them to connect their own experience of the war with characters associated with cultural ideals.

The production of new versions of *Genji* tapered off as Japan emerged from the atmosphere of post-World War II trauma into the 1960s and 1970s. Major studios in this period lost interest in additional *Genji* adaptations. Takarazuka was not to produce its *Genji* revues until the mid-1980s. At the time, Japan was enjoying a robust economy and a general sense of prosperity and optimism. Additionally, widespread social change associated with the 1960s diverted popular attention away from a sense of national identity to the rights

of individual groups within society. In the 1990s, this sense of optimism was gradually called into question.

Takarazuka's 2000 *Genji* adaptation was inspired by the overwhelming success of the illustrated comic book series of the same title, "*Genji monogatari asaki yumemishi*" (*The Tale of Genji Lived in a Dream*, 1993). The phrase "lived in a dream" refers to the closing lines of chapter 40 (*Minori*: "The Rites") in which Genji must come to terms with the death of the greatest love of his life, Murasaki. At the end of the chapter, Genji sits before a Buddhist altar in prayer:

Genji thought he and Murasaki might have a thousand years together. The realization that their inevitable separation had come left him in a state of shock....He now felt as though he were living in a dream.⁵

Genji is so overwhelmed by Murasaki's death that he is not capable of organizing the rites to be performed in her memory. The following chapter (*Maboroshi*: "The Seer") is the last in which Genji appears before his own death. The Takarazuka production features a character referred to as the "Time Spirit" who appears before Genji when he is in the state of despondent reverie that overwhelms him in these chapters. The Time Spirit permits Genji to revisit memorable scenes of his greatest romantic loves and losses. This review helps Genji see how much Murasaki means to him. The production ends with Genji renouncing all ties to this world so that he can join Murasaki in the next life. This retelling of *Genji* takes even greater liberties with the original text than did the cinematic adaptations of the 1950s. Fifty years later, *Genji* is retold in a way that emphasizes coming to terms with loss. This notion was particularly compelling for audiences at the time. After more than a decade of economic slowdown, accompanied by a series of terrorist acts and national political scandals, there was a sense that the era of growth and prosperity that had been building since the post-World War II era had finally come to an end.

The commercial success inspired by this adaptation suggests that Genji's quest to accept the loss of his greatest love resonated deeply with audiences who perceived that an era of affluence had passed from their own lives and was not soon to return. Building on Takarazuka's sensational retelling of *Genji*, Toei studios released a cinematic adaptation of its own the following year under the title, "*Sen'nen no koi: Hikaru Genji monogatari*" (A Thousand Years' Love: The Tale of Shining Genji). The film was heavily promoted as the capstone of the studio's celebration of fifty years in business. Not wanting to stray too far from the Takarazuka formula, Toei cast an actress famous for her portrayal of romantic heroes on the Takarazuka stage, Amami Yuki, in the title role of the romantic hero.

With Takarazuka and Toei saturating the stage and screen markets with *Genji* transformations one might expect the trend to have peaked. However,

this was not to be the case. The following year, the comic magazine “Ultra Jump” began serialization of its own version of *Genji*, illustrated by the comicbook author Egawa Tatsuya. While previous adaptations catered to the interest of female consumers, Egawa’s version of *Genji* was published in a magazine marketed with the male consumer in mind. Not surprisingly, Egawa’s *Genji* is far more masculine in appearance and behavior. His illustrations stand out from previous adaptations of *Genji* to appear since the 1980s, precisely because they amplify the aggressive, almost predatory, aspects of *Genji*’s character that had been carefully downplayed by his predecessors.⁶

These multiple attempts to market *Genji* all met with commercial and popular success. This is particularly remarkable when one considers that they are all based on a work of classical prose fiction nearly a thousand years old. This unusual phenomenon can be attributed to the powerful link that has been forged between *Genji* and cultural identity in Japan. The power of this connection can be seen more clearly by turning to the program guide for the 2000 Takarazuka production “*The Tale of Genji Lived in a Dream: A Musical Romance*.” Along with photos and interviews with the actors, this guide features a short essay by the author Tanabe Seiko titled *Eien no Genji eien no Takarazuka* (Eternal *Genji*, Eternal Takarazuka). Tanabe, noted for her own adaptation of *Genji* as a modern novel, *Shin Genji monogatari* (A New Tale of *Genji*, 1977–1990), remarks that Takarazuka is a particularly appropriate venue for the staging of *Genji*. By way of explanation she quotes a line in classical Japanese from the tale describing the splendor of *Genji* in his youth, looking so beautiful “one might have wished he were a woman” (*onna ni mo mitate matsuramahoshi*). For this reason she argues that there can be no better place to realize the beauty of *Genji* than the Takarazuka stage, where the hero is in fact played by a woman. Her enthusiastic introduction continues:

They say there’s a “*Genji* boom” going on these days, but I wonder if that’s really the case. It seems to me that many people have acquired a smattering of knowledge about *Genji*. Based on superficial explanations they have formulated biased opinions. I’ve even heard people complaining that: “The government is printing two thousand yen notes with the author of that story about the scandalous playboy *Genji* on them. Can you imagine!” We show no respect at home for this great novel yet it is admired the world over. This lack of esteem comes despite the fact that *Genji* is said to be the first “fictional romance” (*ai no monogatari*) in human history, written some three hundred years before Dante and five hundred years before Shakespeare. . . .

Genji is a tale from the Heian period, yet it speaks directly to our lives. This is because the truth of life and humanity is something that does not change in a thousand years.⁷

The tone of Tanabe's essay is pure Takarazuka. But what is most stunning about this rhetorical *tour de force* is the way she artfully translates issues concerning cultural identity and nostalgia, the hallmarks of the nativist school (*kokugaku*) interpretation of *Genji* more than two centuries earlier, into the language that speaks to the concerns of her audience. The quotation she provides in classical Japanese signals her familiarity with *Genji's* original language. By implication, her engagement with the text on this level gives her the authority to convey to readers the "essence" and the "truths" to be found within the tale.

Having established *Genji's* importance as a cultural icon in terms of its appearance on national currency and its stature as a classic of world literature, she goes on in brief terms to explain how those unfamiliar with *Genji* can grasp its essence as she has.⁸ She argues that *Genji* is a tale of romance and sorrow profound enough to transcend great differences in history and culture in the same way the tenets of Buddhist philosophy address issues of universal concern. Such reasoning does little to improve one's grasp of the tale. In fact, it is based on a selective reading of *Genji* no more precise or comprehensive than the charge that *Genji* himself is but a scandalous playboy. However, it connects Takarazuka's adaptation back to *Genji* and the Heian period in an important way. Tanabe emphasizes that the essence of *Genji* is infinitely profound yet easily perceived and timeless in nature. By implication, audiences who find themselves moved by the beauty, tragedy, and romance of the Takarazuka production can claim a greater familiarity with *The Tale of Genji* and, by association, an understanding of the essence of a better age.

The most influential nativist scholar of *Genji* in the Edo period, Motoori Norinaga, offered a similar rationale to his contemporaries. Norinaga's argument concerning *Genji's* essence began with a careful philological analysis of the text. He believed that his sophisticated understanding of *Genji's* language permitted him to perceive the deeper meaning of the Heian-period author's intentions. Based on his intimate understanding of the text he sought to refute moral criticism of *Genji*. Tanabe's essay suggests that such moral concerns remain alive and well in her own time. Just as Norinaga did in the Edo period, she relies on *Genji's* association with a romanticized view of Heian society to defend the tale from criticism. Taking Norinaga's technique a step further, Tanabe argues that there is a deeper level of authenticity afforded by Takarazuka's all-female cast in its retelling of *Genji*. Norinaga and Tanabe both urge their audiences to accept *Genji's* moral lapses by placing his behavior within the larger cultural and aesthetic framework that only one who truly knows the "essence" of the tale can perceive. This strategy is particularly appealing because it offers the individual a sense of reassurance and belonging. It is reassuring because it reminds the audience that failure, moral or otherwise, does exist, but that those who truly understand the essence of Japanese culture are able to accept or overlook such flaws in the individual. Tanabe implies that those who enjoy Takarazuka's production, as she does, demonstrate their appreciation for the eternal cultural values embodied in *Genji*.

Takarazuka provides a dramatic example of *Genji's* association with the essence, or spirit, of Heian culture. In modern Japan, invoking the Heian period and things associated with it signals one's admiration for a time when aesthetic sophistication dominated all other concerns in the most powerful circles of Japanese society. As such, *Genji* serves as an emblem for shared literary and cultural ideals rooted in a sense of nostalgia. Nostalgia, the longing for a home that has been lost, enables *Genji* to serve as a beacon attracting those in search of both cultural identity and fantasy. In 1796, Motoori Norinaga elevated nostalgia to the level of compelling ideology in his treatise *Genji monogatari tama no ogushi*. The theory he promoted forcefully linked *Genji* and nostalgia with a sense of Japanese identity. As the example of Takarazuka illustrates, Norinaga's legacy continues to thrive.

Norinaga's dogmatic approach to interpreting *Genji* helped refine notions of nostalgia and identity associated with *Genji*, but such notions existed long before his time. His stature looms large because he effectively integrated existing perceptions of *Genji* with nativist concerns particular to the late Edo period that were the precursors to modern-day nationalism. Tracing the roots of cultural identity and nostalgia in the reception of *Genji* to their origins leads us back to the time of the tale's composition and the culture in which it was first read.

The Tale of Genji was composed at a point in the Heian period when the stature of the aristocracy had begun to decline. *Genji* himself embodies a sense of loss that can be associated with the realization that an era is coming to an end. In the opening chapter of the tale, *Genji* experiences profound personal loss. His mother dies when he is three. *Genji* is too young to fully comprehend the loss, but his father, the emperor, deeply mourns the death of *Genji's* mother and his favorite consort, Kiritsubo. Following her death, he comes to see *Genji* as a reminder of his departed lover. *Genji's* grandmother weakens at the shock of losing Kiritsubo and dies when *Genji* is six. From an early age, *Genji* is the embodiment of lost traditions as well as personal loss. He excels in the performance of traditional arts such as music, dance, and poetry. His mastery sets him apart from his contemporaries and makes his elders recall fond memories of a better age.

This sense of loss, as both painful and precious, resonates throughout the tale. *Genji* is drawn to Fujitsubo, the woman who replaces his mother as the emperor's favorite consort, because she closely resembles his mother. Once he comes of age, he continues to pursue Fujitsubo but also seeks other women to replace her as she becomes increasingly inaccessible to him. *Genji's* abiding interest in Fujitsubo, and his pursuit of women to replace her, leads to some of the most intense and emotionally complex relationships in the story. *Genji* initially begins his pursuit of the woman who will become his greatest companion in the tale, Murasaki, because a glimpse of her from a distance reminds him of Fujitsubo. When he learns of the death of Murasaki's mother he is even more powerfully drawn to her, because her experience reminds him of his own loss in childhood. At the close of the forty-first chapter, *Genji* is

overwhelmed by the loss of Murasaki and becomes frail and confused. The sense of loss associated with his death is so profound that it is not even described in the text. The remaining chapters of the tale can be seen as an exploration of Genji's life and his legacy in the generation that succeeds him. In this sense, they can be understood as a reflection on loss as well.

In the Heian period, *Genji's* association was not primarily with such solemn ideas. The accounts still available to us from *Genji's* first readers suggest that they saw the tale as something akin to gossip. Readers were drawn to the engaging way in which the intense emotions and complex relationships in *Genji* lent themselves to evocative poetic exchanges and scandalous behavior.⁹ Serious prose at the time was written in the language acquired through formal education, classical Chinese. A text written in vernacular prose, such as *Genji*, was deemed appropriate for entertainment but not serious reflection. In the tale, characters refer to this style as women's writing (*onnade*) and acknowledge that it was seen as a form of amusement for the idle in general and women in particular.

As good gossip so often does, *Genji* attracted much attention. Accounts of the tale being read and reread with great interest and intensity stretch back to the time when the author was still in service to the imperial court. The author, Murasaki Shikibu, mentions in her diary an incident in which scrolls containing a draft of the tale disappeared from her quarters while she was away at court. She surmises that a minister had the scrolls taken from her quarters and delivered to his fifteen-year-old daughter for her to read—or perhaps have read to her.¹⁰ This incident suggests that *Genji* was highly sought after even before the final chapters were completed.

A slightly later diary provides further evidence of *Genji's* popularity among readers who were contemporaries of the author. The daughter of Sugawara no Takasue, in recounting events less than a decade after the author's death, mentions that she had read parts of the tale and told her aunt how much she longed to read the entire work from beginning to end. Her diary, *The Sarashina Diary* (*Sarashina nikki*, ca. 1059), recounts the joy she felt when her aunt presented her with a copy of *Genji* as a gift.

However pleasurable, closely engaging with *Genji* simply as a work of prose fiction was not to be wholly recommended. Takasue's daughter immediately follows her account of the pleasure she finds in reading *Genji* by noting that this indulgence prevented her from devoting herself to the reading of more serious texts such as Buddhist sutras. As a result, she comes to dream of a Buddhist priest issuing an ominous warning for her to perform pious acts without delay. The illicit pleasure and danger associated with reading *Genji* recounted by Takasue's daughter, which will become a recurring theme of its reception in the centuries that follow, is examined in more detail in chapter 6.

In part, this theme remains so persistent because prose was closely associated with didacticism. Prose fiction, in particular, was looked down upon as a source of entertainment and diversion that could be harshly criticized if it

was perceived as lacking in moral or ethical value. Confucian and Buddhist precepts that pointed to the fabrications and immoral acts depicted in prose fiction were chiefly responsible for this bias. The prevalence of this prejudice at the time of *Genji's* composition can be seen in the way the status of prose fiction is treated in *Genji*. In the "Hotaru" chapter (chapter 25), Genji discusses both the allure and dangers of fictional literature with a young woman named Tamakazura. Honesty and moral conduct are particularly powerful notions in this chapter, because readers are aware of the fact that Genji is raising Tamakazura under the false pretense that she is his long-lost daughter. At the same time, Genji's interest in Tamakazura is threatening to break the bounds of paternal propriety by becoming sexual in nature. In this chapter, Genji initially faults the fictional tales that Tamakazura is reading due to their presentation of falsehoods. He is clearly articulating the dominant view of prose fiction at the time. Tamakazura protests by suggesting that perhaps Genji is too quick to perceive deception in others because he is all too familiar with it himself. In response, Genji changes his position to argue that fictional tales are capable of presenting the realities of life with more depth than historical chronicles and with no greater departure from reality than the parables found in Buddhist scripture. In explaining to Tamakazura why he believes fictional literature is about more than simply the moral concerns of historical chronicles, Genji states:

These works are not based on specific people exactly as they existed. Rather, the feeling that events and people in this world are infinitely interesting compels the author to write. Whether these details are good or bad, the author feels such things should be passed on to later generations. Unable to keep such feelings to himself, the author takes things he knows from experience and uses them as the starting point for his fictional work.¹¹

Genji's brief argument is insightful and well reasoned. It is particularly remarkable to consider such an interpretive stance in this age if we take this as the author's defense of prose fiction against the distortions inherent in an overly didactic reading. However insightful these remarks praising the art of fiction may be, they are promptly undermined by the narrative of the tale. Immediately following the aforementioned passage, Genji shifts from championing the status of fictional prose to pursuing his sexual interest in Tamakazura. Having placated Tamakazura by retracting his earlier critique of fictional literature, he attempts to capitalize on this conciliatory tone by drawing her into an amorous mood. Tamakazura rebuffs Genji's advances, and the scene comes to a close. The narration then moves to a scene in which Genji advises Murasaki not to expose his daughter, the Akashi Princess, to certain types of fictional tales because they might prove damaging to her young mind. Ultimately, Genji's open mistrust of fiction is more prominent than the defense of its merits he articulates privately to Tamakazura.

While prose was viewed as the source of gossip and trouble, poetry was considered worthy of exacting analysis, critical discussion, and interpretive terminology independent of moral or didactic concerns. Buddhist, Confucian, or Taoist terminology might be used to add depth or symbolic imagery to a poem composed in Japanese (*waka*), but moral or didactic meaning was rarely a factor in determining its critical reception. As a result, poetry was associated with a strong critical tradition while at the same time remaining relatively free from moral concerns.¹²

Precisely because of its privileged status over prose fiction, poetry ends up becoming an important factor in the sustained interest in *Genji*. Annotation of *Genji* flourished as generations of scholars continued to mine the tale for poetic topics and compiled increasingly elaborate commentaries to improve their ability to compose and appreciate *waka*.¹³ *Genji* continued to retain the interest of poets because it was associated with such qualities as courtly elegance, nostalgia, and exceptional literary style. The moral and psychological predicaments associated with events in *Genji* may have offended Buddhist and Confucian sensibilities, but to the poet interested in the sincere expression of emotion, this same material proved a valuable source of inspiration. Poetry and poetics thus firmly anchored *Genji* to serious literary scholarship despite its less than secure status as prose fiction.

Fujiwara no Toshinari (also known as Fujiwara Shunzei, 1114–1204) was a leading arbiter of poetry of his age. During his lifetime, he witnessed the marked increase in factional infighting and military upheavals associated with the collapse of the Heian period. By the end of the Heian period, these struggles led to significant changes in the economic and political stature of the aristocracy. These changes culminated in the establishment of a warrior government in Kamakura in 1191. In the Kamakura period (1185–1333), aristocratic culture and its political stature ebbed, but poetry continued to play a significant role in establishing and maintaining political status among the aristocracy. In 1193, when Toshinari's reputation as the leading poet and critic of his time was beyond dispute, he was asked to serve as one of the judges at the poetry competition in 600 rounds (*Roppyakuban utaawase*). In the thirteenth round of the competition, poets from the left and right were given the assignment to compose a poem on the topic "a desolate field" (*kareno*). The poet of the left team composed a poem that relied upon an expression associated with a key moment in the "Hana no En" chapter. As mentioned earlier, this is the chapter in which Genji first seduces Oborozukiyo. Having made love to her against her wishes, he now begins making inquiries as to the young woman's name before departing her chambers in secret. She resists giving her name and replies to his insistent requests with a poem filled with images of desolation and death:

Were I to perish in this unfortunate state without you knowing my name,
I wonder if you would truly come in search of my remains on the
"plains of grass" (*kusa no hara*).¹⁴

Fujiwara no Yoshitsune (1169–1206), the organizer of the competition writing for the team of the left under the pseudonym “A woman of high rank,”¹⁵ built upon this passage to develop a poem in response to the topic of “a desolate field” as follows:

What will remain from the autumn views of the grassy plain (*kusa no hara*)
Is the scene of a burial pyre I saw there

The right team offered the following critique of Yoshitune’s poem:

The expression grassy plain (*kusa no hara*) lacks poetic precedence.

To which Toshinari replied:

The right’s critique that the expression “grassy plain” is flawed is gravely wrong. The expression does indeed have a precedent. Murasaki Shikibu is even more commendable for her written style than she is for her poetry. Her chapter “*Hana no en*” is particularly deserving of praise. It is deplorable for anyone to compose poems without having read *The Tale of Genji*.

The poem composed by the left team was judged superior.¹⁶

Toshinari’s advice was heeded. In the next major imperial poetic anthology, *A New Collection of Poems in Japanese from Ancient and Modern Times* (*Shinkokinshū*, 1205), the number of allusions and critical references to *Genji* markedly increased.¹⁷ His comments also provided poets with a tangible reason to brush up on *Genji*. While Toshinari attests to the merits of Murasaki Shikibu’s written style, what concerns him most is that poets demonstrate a familiarity with the cultural and aesthetic ethos embodied in *Genji* rather than the meaning of the prose itself. His pronouncement that “it is deplorable for anyone to compose poems without having read *The Tale of Genji*” firmly establishes the notion that *Genji* should be read to capture the essence of a world that has been lost.¹⁸

A commentary titled the *Kakaishō*, compiled circa 1363 by Yotsutsuji Yoshinari, is one of the earliest works to move beyond the identification of poetic allusion to bring a broader interpretive perspective to *Genji* through the vehicle of textual commentary.¹⁹ In the *Kakaishō*, Yoshinari theorized that the life of Minamoto no Takaakira (914–982), the son of Emperor Daigo (897–930) and an imperial consort, served as the model for certain details in the description of the fictional Genji. Minamoto no Takaakira and Genji were both born to emperors. Both received the surname of a commoner associated with parentage of royal standing. (The first Chinese character used to write the name *Genji* is read as *Minamoto* in isolation.) After marrying the daughter of a powerful member of the Fujiwara clan, Takaakira’s political fortunes rose steadily until he was appointed Minister of the Left. However, Takaakira’s story took a turn for the worse when he was banished from the capital for taking part in a scandal to compromise the reputation of the crown prince. This incident came to be known as the An’na disturbance (*An’na no hen*) of 969.²⁰

Yoshinari's commentary points to similarities between the historical evidence surrounding the An'na disturbance and the description of *Genji's* life to suggest that Murasaki Shikibu must have based her story of *Genji's* rise and fall on the life of Takaakira. He believed that this use of allegorical narrative (*gūgen*) was similar to the didactic function performed by works from the Chinese classics that combined fiction allegory, and mythology such as the *Zhuangzi*.²¹ Previous commentaries had provided annotation pointing to historical facts underlying the fictional details of the text, but Yoshinari's comments indicate a growing interest in legitimizing *Genji's* place among venerated works of prose literature. This aspect of his commentary reminded readers that beyond the didactic or poetic issues relevant to *Genji*, it was still important to read the text for the story it tells.

Fujiwara no Toshinari's promotion of *Genji* as a memento of Heian culture remained largely unchallenged by subsequent generations and continued to play an important role in the composition and evaluation of poetry. Over the centuries, *Genji's* function as a source of poetic inspiration translated to other areas of artistic creation. In the Muromachi period (1333–1568), *Genji* became one of the richest sources of reference in Noh drama. In a treatise on the composition of Noh drama, the leading Noh actor, playwright, and critic of the premodern era, Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443), observed that plays featuring women must convey the greatest sense of grace and refinement. The examples he cites for models of female characters are all women who appear in *Genji*: Aoi, Yūgao, and Ukifune. He argues that it is the pinnacle of the Noh actor's art to be able to convey the grace and refinement of such women.²² In characterizing the corpus of Noh plays based on *Genji*, Janet Goff has observed the following:

Although the *Genji* has never failed to delight readers, its appeal as a source of inspiration and allusion was perhaps greatest during the middle ages, that is, from the late twelfth to the sixteenth century, when the court was in an advanced state of decline. Writers and critics living in a chaotic world cherished the *Genji* because, to them, it epitomized the ideal, aristocratic way of life for which they yearned.²³

Throughout the medieval period *Genji's* connection to poetry and idealized notions of aristocratic culture continued to evolve. However, a cultural bias against the genre of prose fiction that we observed in the earliest accounts of reading *Genji* saw little change. Scholars continued to search for a didactic message in *Genji*.

THE EDO PERIOD AND THE RISE OF NATIVISM

As neo-Confucian thought came to play a larger role in the cultural and scholarly activity of early Tokugawa Japan emphasis on the didactic nature of *Genji* took on even greater prominence. The exacting analysis and reevaluation

of ancient texts promoted by neo-Confucianists also led to advances in philology that made more reliable and consistent reading of the text possible. The rise of commercial publishing led to a much wider circulation of both text and commentary. In concert, these developments produced a more informed and persuasive analysis of the tale's literary and stylistic qualities.

In the early Edo period, an influential neo-Confucian scholar, Kumazawa Banzan (1619–1691), seized upon the moralistic aspect of medieval commentary to portray *Genji* as a virtual storehouse of Confucian virtue. In his *Genji gaiden* (ca. 1673), Banzan focused on the wealth of court ritual recorded in the text to suggest that *Genji* should be read as a didactic work of literature disguised in the language of a romance.²⁴ He believed that such a reading would provide moral benefits similar to those derived from studying classical Chinese texts that depicted the idealized past of ancient China. Banzan eschewed annotation that touched upon immoral acts depicted in *Genji*, believing that such a reading was contrary to the author's intended goal in composing the work.²⁵ This emphasis on certain passages at the expense of others was justified because Banzan envisioned an overall meaning that transcended individual details of the work. *Genji gaiden* provides us with a clear picture of Banzan's understanding of Confucianism at the time but leaves us with a highly subjective view of *Genji*. However, interpretation of *Genji* ultimately benefited from this biased interpretation because it promoted the notion that commentary could go beyond the identification of poetic allusion and historical detail to approach *Genji* from a much broader perspective.²⁶

At about the same time Banzan was composing *Genji gaiden*, the poet and scholar of classical literature, Kitamura Kigin (1624–1705), was compiling a massive commentary on *Genji* that not only provided extensive annotation but also a reproduction of the entire text. Kigin's *Kogetsushō* (1673) consisted of an introductory section in six fascicles that contained various short entries devoted to fundamental issues concerning *Genji*, such as its authorship, praise for the work and its author, genealogy of characters, and historical sources for characters and events that appear in the work. This was followed by a reproduction of the complete text with introductory material, interlineal glosses, and notes for each chapter. The *Kogetsushō* combined detailed annotation culled from lectures and commentaries with broader comments in keeping with Buddhist thought and Confucian didacticism to provide what must have seemed in its day to be a comprehensive and highly authoritative edition of *Genji*. The *Kogetsushō* contained numerous textual errors and few original insights, yet its combination of annotation and main text made the tale easier to read and comprehend. These factors contributed to an extensive distribution of *Genji* during the second century of the Edo period.²⁷ Kigin's integration of extant scholarship and commentary with the complete text of *Genji* into a widely available edition had an enormous impact on the reception of the tale. Appreciating *Genji* as prose fiction remained beyond the ability of most readers, but the availability of *Genji* in the format of the *Kogetsushō* made the powerful statement, if only symbolically, that *Genji* and its essence could be

owned by anyone with the means necessary for its acquisition. The private or “secret” versions of the text so closely guarded by aristocratic families up to this point were rendered inferior because they relied upon only a limited portion of the commentary and scholarship available in the integrated format of the *Kogetsushō*. Widespread publication of the *Kogetsushō* established it as the edition most often referred to by scholars of *Genji* for the remaining two centuries of the Tokugawa period. Even scholars highly critical of the interpretation promoted by the *Kogetsushō* continued to rely on it as their point of textual reference in composing their own treatises on *Genji*.²⁸

In addition to bringing a broader interpretive approach to *Genji*, a new wave of Confucian ideology brought greater openness to the tradition of scholarly commentary in the Tokugawa period. During the medieval period information contained in commentaries was viewed as a valuable asset to be handed down in secrecy from master to disciple within a specific lineage. As a result, the transmission and preservation of commentary had come to be associated not only with serious scholarship but also with aristocratic prestige. Neo-Confucian thought in the tradition of the Yangming School (J: *Yōmeigaku*) advocated that all men should be engaged in the investigation of the true nature of things to promote an orderly and humane society. In their zeal to apply neo-Confucian principles to all areas of knowledge, scholars were persuaded to break with the tradition of secret transmission of *Genji* commentary. Banzan’s *Genji gaiden* and Kigin’s *Kogetsushō* both reflect this rejection of the esoteric transmission of knowledge. Due to the open exchange of information, the value of commentary as a sacred possession, which could confer aristocratic status on its owners, was lost. In its place, scholars would now be forced to reevaluate commentary in terms of its utility in explaining the text. In this reevaluation they would discover that much of the material, which had been transposed so conscientiously from one commentary to the next for centuries, no longer made sense or contributed to an understanding of *Genji*.

In 1682, Tokugawa Mitsukuni (1628–1700), *daimyō* of the Mito domain, commissioned the Buddhist priest Keichū (1640–1701) to complete an authoritative edition of Japan’s earliest poetry anthology, *A Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves* (*Man’yōshū*, late eighth century). Mitsukuni was interested in realizing the benefits of Confucian ideology more directly by producing great historical documents on Japanese history to rival those imported from China. In 1657, Mitsukuni had undertaken the composition of the *History of Great Japan* (*Dai Nihonshi*) to produce a work equal in stature to the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji*, J: *Shiki*) by Sima Qian (b. 145 B.C.). Mitsukuni hoped an authoritative edition of the *Man’yōshū* would serve as a fitting companion to the *History of Great Japan* and that it might count as Japan’s equivalent of China’s *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*, J: *Shikyō*).²⁹ The compilation of an authoritative edition of the *Man’yōshū* was a daunting task, the success of which relied heavily upon Keichū’s philological training in the reading of Buddhist scripture and an extensive knowledge of ancient Japanese poetry. Despite the fact that scholars previously commissioned by Mitsukuni had already spent nine

years on the project, the process of comparing variant manuscripts and evaluating archaic language took Keichū eight years to complete. Keichū's successful compilation of the *Man'yōshū* and his exacting commentary demonstrated that textual analysis directed toward native Japanese texts could produce scholarship comparable with works produced by Confucian academies that analyzed texts from Chinese antiquity.

Motivated by his interest in the poetry and poetics of ancient Japan, Keichū moved on from the *Man'yōshū* to apply his philological analysis to the *Tales of Ise* (*Ise monogatari*, mid-tenth-century) and *Genji*. He completed a commentary on *Genji*, the *Genchū shūi*, in 1696. The *Genchū shūi* contained seven fascicles of corrections to errors Keichū found in the annotation of the *Kogetsushō*.³⁰ His corrections were based on an extensive reading of ancient and Heian-period texts such as *The Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihongi*, 720), *Man'yōshū*, and *The Pillow Book* (*Makura no sōshi*, ca. 996–1012), as well as on his knowledge of Chinese classics and Buddhist scripture. For Keichū, the correction of previous annotation was both a philological and an ideological exercise. He rejected annotation derived from aristocratic commentary if it neither clarified the meaning of the text nor could be justified in terms of language found in other texts from antiquity. He also rejected didactic interpretation because he believed such an approach was inconsistent with the nature of the text itself. His reading of *Genji* led him to conclude that the text reflected life in Heian Japan and realistically depicted individuals in their capacity to act in both good and bad ways. Confucian ideology dictated that good people act morally, and evil people act immorally, which made for fine didactic prose but not realistic fiction. It made no sense to Keichū to impose moral didacticism on a story, such as *Genji*, that operated beyond such concerns.³¹ Keichū's work marks the beginning of what is considered the era of "new commentary" (*shinchū*) on *Genji*. His philological analysis managed to penetrate centuries of moralistic rationalization and aristocratic tradition to once again focus on the poetry and prose of *Genji*.

Another scholar commissioned by Tokugawa Mitsukuni was Andō Tameakira (1659–1716). Tameakira contributed to Mitsukuni's work on the *History of Great Japan* and served as his envoy in arranging for Keichū to work on the *Man'yōshū*.³² The different texts Tameakira and Keichū worked on under Mitsukuni reflect the different perspectives from which they analyzed *Genji*. Tameakira shared Keichū's interest in the texts from Japan's past and their application to the analysis of *Genji*, but he failed to completely reject what Keichū saw as the Confucian conceit of imposing didactic values on fictional prose. Instead, he pursued an agenda similar to Mitsukuni's in attempting to establish Japanese equivalents for the great works of literature from China. In his *Shikashichiron* (Seven Essays on Murasaki Shikibu, 1703), Tameakira draws on material from Murasaki Shikibu's diary and passages from *Genji* to argue that Murasaki Shikibu is comparable in talent and moral virtue to the authors of great historical works from China. While he does not argue for the medieval practice of evaluating individual details of *Genji* in terms of

Buddhist thought or Confucian morality, he does assert that the author's aim in composing *Genji* was no less virtuous than the intention behind great works from China. Unlike Kumazawa Banzan, Tameakira did not simply ignore details of the text that alluded to any impropriety. Instead, he constructed a comprehensive theory that accounted for depictions of immorality. Moving one step back from the details of the text, Tameakira argued that the author's overall goal was to inspire virtuous behavior by depicting vice and its consequences in the form of an engaging narrative.

Tameakira based his interpretive theory on the assumption that Murasaki Shikibu was a virtuous woman whose intentions in composing *Genji* should only be understood as embodying a search for truth and instructing readers in moral behavior. His reading of *Genji* was more sophisticated than the literal application of Confucian ideology pursued by medieval commentators, but it still maintained Confucianism as its central point of reference. By focusing on Murasaki Shikibu rather than on the text of *Genji*, Tameakira was able to develop a convincing argument in favor of her talent as an author and *Genji*'s place as a great work of literature. However, such an approach held little appeal for readers uninterested in Confucian ideology.

Scholars in the second century of the Tokugawa period who advocated Keichū's emphasis on the poetry and poetics of ancient Japan applied what was to become known as "nativist scholarship" or "national learning" (*kokugaku*) to *Genji*. Rather than following Tameakira in trying to establish Japanese counterparts for great works of Chinese literature, nativist scholars argued that Japanese works of literature were inherently superior and did not need to be judged in terms of non-native ideology. Motoori Norinaga was the most notable nativist scholar to apply such theories to *Genji*. His *Genji monogatari tama no ogushi* is widely regarded as the seminal treatise on the tale to arise from the nativist tradition. In *Tama no ogushi*, as well as earlier works, Norinaga rejects all attempts to evaluate *Genji* in terms of Buddhist or Confucian ideology. Instead, he develops an interpretive approach based on traditional Japanese poetics, which he applies to *Genji* in much the same manner that Tameakira applied his theory of the virtuous intentions of the author. In short, Norinaga equated the artistic intentions and aesthetic sensibilities of the author with the literary qualities of the work. Rather than evaluating the work in terms of the moral or religious message to be found in particular passages, he argued that the entire work should be appreciated in terms of its expression of the "poignancy of things" (*mono no aware*).³³ For Norinaga, it is the author's sensitivity to the poignant nature of things and her expression of this sensitivity through the text that provide a true measure of her genius and the tale's worth.

Norinaga's approach to *Genji* clearly had its advantages. His insights into reading classical Japanese texts, particularly *Genji*, are hailed as some of the most significant interpretive achievements of the premodern era. A talented poet, critic, translator, and author of popular fiction, Hagiwara Hiromichi (1815–1863), was among Norinaga's greatest admirers to publish an interpreta-

tion of *Genji* in the final years of the Edo period. Hiromichi systematically applied Norinaga's scholarship on *Genji* in constructing his own guide to the text. In building the argument for this own treatise, he came to discover significant inconsistencies in Norinaga's central theory of *mono no aware*. Hiromichi went on to develop an interpretive strategy of his own, which he believed would liberate *Genji* commentary and criticism from the didactic interpretive issues that had distracted previous scholars, including Norinaga. Hiromichi's treatise on *Genji* illustrates that despite the relative merits of the *mono no aware* theory, it ultimately fails to provide a means of appraising *Genji* in terms of its merits as a work of prose fiction.

In spite of these interpretive shortcomings, Norinaga's approach continued to have enormous appeal well into the modern era. Nativist scholars found the theory of *mono no aware* particularly compelling because it helped legitimize arguments for the superiority of Japanese culture. The dogmatic nature of the *mono no aware* theory was simple to convey, thus providing a persuasive explanation as to how *Genji* was distinct from, while also being superior to, other works of literature.

As we will see in the following chapters, Hiromichi's greatest challenge would be to transcend many of the cultural assumptions surrounding *Genji* that had accumulated over seven centuries. His goal was to appraise *Genji* in a way that made its cultural relevance clear while also allowing readers to appreciate the original text as much as they delighted in works of popular fiction and drama from the Edo period.