

Beyond Narrative Illustration: What *Genji* Paintings Do

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WITHIN ONE HUNDRED FIFTY YEARS of its creation, *The Tale of Genji* had been reproduced in a luxurious set of illustrated handscrolls that afforded privileged readers a synesthetic experience of Murasaki Shikibu's tale. Those twelfth-century scrolls, now designated National Treasures, survive in fragmented form today and continue to offer some of the most evocative interpretations of the story ever imagined. Although the *Genji Scrolls* represent a singular moment in the history of depicting the tale, they provide an important starting point for understanding later illustrations. They are relevant to nearly all later *Genji* paintings because of their shared pictorial language, their synergistic relationship between text and image, and the collaborative artistic process that brought them into being. Starting with these earliest scrolls, this essay serves as an introduction to the paintings in the following catalogue, which span the thirteenth to the twentieth century. It also analyzes in detail one famous pair of sixteenth-century screens, the *Battle of the Carriages*, and examines the treatment of the same theme in two later examples to demonstrate how the conventions of *Genji* paintings were not only perpetuated but also subtly modulated in each era in order to envision the prerogatives and aspirations of their patrons.

Golden Clouds and Blown-Off Roofs

Viewers unfamiliar with the conventions of Japanese narrative painting, and *Genji* paintings in particular, often wonder about the opaque clouds that cover large portions of the surface. The juxtaposition of these opaque, metallic forms—sometimes multilayered and inflected with gold dust and square-cut pieces of gold foil—with narrative scenes painted in mineral pigments may seem puzzling. In fact, the rich materiality and apparent lack of naturalism of these clouds, found in many of the paintings in this catalogue, took centuries to develop. The motifs have their origins in the clouds and wafting mist bands in the paintings of the twelfth-century *Genji Scrolls* and the atmospheric effects expressed in silver and

gold found in the paper decoration of their accompanying calligraphic texts (fig. 12).

In this scene from Chapter 38, “Bell Crickets” (*Suzumushi II*), for example, vaporous clouds in the upper right corner overlap directly with the representation of a building's veranda. A large autumn moon appears in thin outline within this dark haze, its brilliant illumination implied by the silver pigment that covers the ground below. The cloud patch here functions as a vehicle for presenting the moon, and, as clouds and mist bands will continue to do in *Genji* paintings for centuries to come, it suggests a conflation of time and space within a limited pictorial field. The impossibility of the moon's position on the veranda untethers the motif from literal representation, allowing it to refer, for example, to a different temporal moment than the one pictured. This unreal juxtaposition, combined with the moon's exaggerated size, indicates that the image is to be viewed in symbolic terms.

Two poems exchanged by Genji and Retired Emperor Reizei, which are included in the textual excerpt to the right of the painting, make these symbolic terms clear. Reizei, Genji's secret son with Fujitsubo, sends a poem to Genji at his Rokujō mansion, where Genji is celebrating the autumn moon with his son Yūgiri and other courtiers. The poem expresses the emperor's yearning for Genji's company, saying that now, as a retired sovereign, he no longer resides in the imperial palace, the realm “above the clouds”:

<i>Kumo no ue o</i>	Once above the clouds,
<i>Kakehanaretaru</i>	Now my dwelling is far off,
<i>Sumika ni mo</i>	But even this abode
<i>Monowasure senu</i>	Receives unforgotten the splendor
<i>Aki no yo no tsuki</i>	Of the moon on an autumn night. ¹

If only Genji, like the moon, would come to this dwelling, implies the poem. Genji responds by praising Reizei, using the “moon's visage” (*tsukikage*) as a metaphor for the emperor and humbly alluding to his own inferior light:





Fig. 12. “Bell Crickets” (*Suzumushi II*), Chapter 38 from the *Genji Scrolls* (*Genji monogatari emaki*). Heian period (794–1185), early 12th century. Section of a handscroll; painting: ink and colors on paper; calligraphy: ink on paper decorated with gold and silver foil and dust on dyed paper; H. approx. 8 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (21.9 cm). The Gotoh Museum, Tokyo. National Treasure

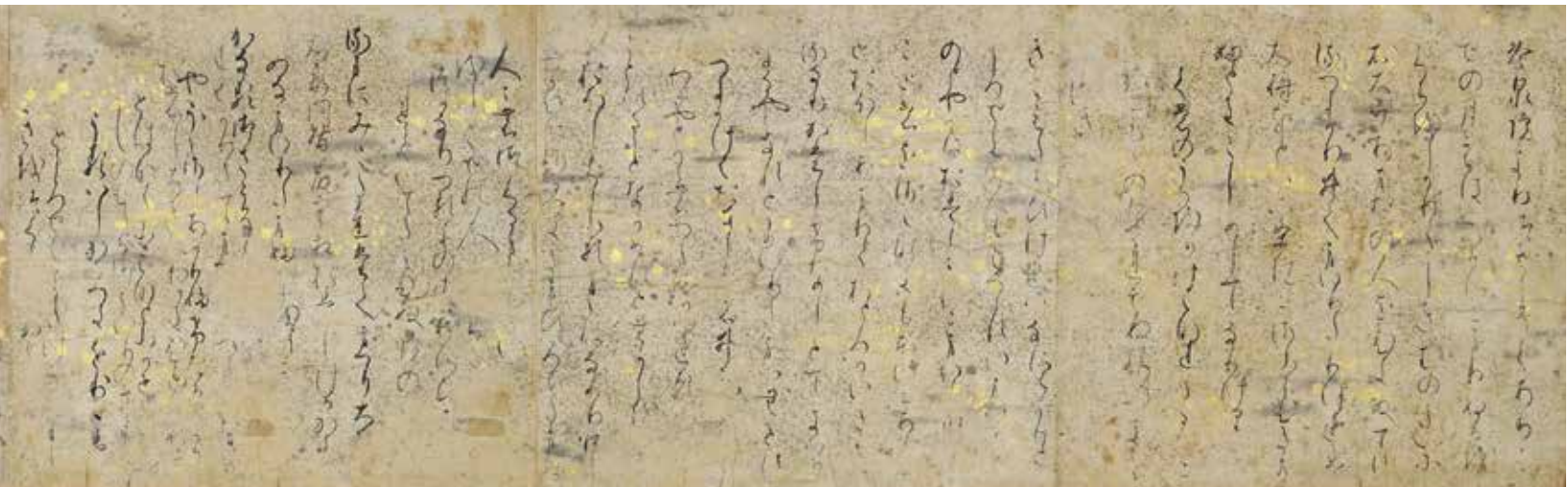
<i>Tsukikage wa</i>	Moonlight as ever
<i>Onaji kumoi ni</i>	In a cloudland not other
<i>Mienagara</i>	Than it was before . . .
<i>Wa ga yado kara no</i>	Yes, the fault lies in my house
<i>[Aki] zo kawareru</i>	That this [autumn] is so changed. ²

After sending this poem, Genji and the men with him at Rokujō make an impromptu visit to Reizei’s residence, which is the scene depicted in the painting. The oversize moon in the clouds functions as a word-image that evokes the specific lines of the related poem and their symbolism of a moment in the narrative outside the temporal frame of the picture. Indeed, the painting might best be considered a “poem-picture,” as Shimizu Fukuko has argued.³ Clouds and mist bands (*suyari gasumi*) were thus used as rhetorical devices in *Genji* paintings, and this function became more pronounced over the ages as their edges hardened when rendered in gold—so much so that they came to be called “*Genji* clouds” (*Genji-gumo*).

Another pictorial device prevalent in *Genji* paintings is the “blown-off roof” (*fukinuki yatai*), an integral means to communicate the poetic and narrative content of a scene.⁴ The term refers to the distinctive architectural framing in Japanese narrative painting that gives viewers access to the interiors of residences from an elevated perspective, allowing them to look down on the interactions taking place within. As historians of Japanese art have long pointed out, the use of strong geometric lines to compartmentalize pictorial space—the strategic placement of tatami mats, columns, and lintels—creates a visual structure that can enhance the emotional and psychological tenor of a scene.⁵ Rather than employ a

framework of illusionistic space, in which characters and motifs decrease in size according to a coherent, if unseen, grid of seemingly quantifiable spatial relationships, as in some familiar forms of Western art, these paintings are organized using different priorities. A figure’s larger size or prominence in any given painted scene often corresponds to an emphasis on their interiority in an accompanying narrative passage or to their centrality in the action of a scene. This visual expression weighted according to narrative content has been described as a system of “psychological perspective,” which emerged from the symbiosis of word and image in Heian-period literature.⁶ Such a pictorial system works in conjunction with the blown-off roofs and provides an appropriate counterpart to the experience of reading *The Tale of Genji*. Like the text, which affords relatively unmediated access to characters’ thoughts, this approach to painting offers a direct view into private interiors. Over the centuries it continued to be the primary mode of *Genji* representation, with modifications in style and format.

Take, for example, the way the composition works in the “Bell Crickets” painting. At this point in the tale, Genji is in middle age, and though he was made a commoner as a boy, he has risen to the unprecedented status of an “honorary” retired emperor (*daijō tennō*). Retired Emperor Reizei knows that his true father is Genji, not the Kiritsubo Emperor, as the world believes. When Reizei first learned the truth of his parentage, he wondered whether the line of succession had ever before gone awry and searched the historical chronicles to find a precedent that might allow him to abdicate the throne to Genji. The complex relationship between Genji and Reizei has a deep secret at its core and is made more complicated by



issues of succession. Pictorial devices proved adept at communicating the nuances of this relationship, beginning with the hierarchical placement of figures within the architecture. Retired Emperor Reizei, the figure of highest status in the scene, is situated in the interior of the room, which because of the orientation of the architecture and the tilted ground plane locates him at the highest point in the composition. He faces out toward the right and casts his gaze downward as he confronts Genji, the figure with his back against a vertical post, bowing his head in deference. Their identical *kanmuri* courtier hats and similar postures, as if reflected in a mirror, recall the final lines of the preceding scroll text that describe Reizei's appearance: "[He] was now thirty-two and, as he matured and grew in dignity, his resemblance to Genji was ever more striking. He had abdicated of his own volition at the very height of a glorious reign, and Genji was deeply touched to see how peaceful he was in retirement."⁷ The original line in the text literally says that there is "no difference" between Genji and Reizei, which may refer to not only their physical resemblance but also their similarity in status, given that both have become retired emperors.⁸ And yet, Genji is not Reizei's equal; he must remain a loyal subject to his own son, as the hierarchy of the painting also makes clear. Therefore, the image is orderly on the surface, with sovereign and subject in the right places, but to the informed reader, aware of the father-son relationship, it presents an inversion of the proper hierarchy. And the blown-off roof serves as a metaphor for this privileged access to the truth.

By way of contrast, a publicly acknowledged father-son relationship appears in the painting through the portrayal of Genji's

son Yūgiri, seated on the veranda and playing a transverse flute. He raises the instrument to his lips and turns his head to the right, as if sending the notes out into the night. When viewing the scroll painting from right to left, as it would have been unrolled, the flute player is the first figure to appear, thus setting the theme and tone for the image before the encounter between Genji and Reizei is glimpsed. Sano Midori sees Genji, flanked by his secret and public sons, as the visual pivot in this diagonal line of three characters, and she proposes that the flute signals the absent presence of yet another son, the newborn Kaoru, to whom Genji's new wife, the Third Princess, has just given birth.⁹ In actual fact, Kaoru is not Genji's son; Kashiwagi, the boy's true father, has cuckolded Genji, echoing the affair between Genji and Fujitsubo that produced Reizei. Kashiwagi has passed away, and he had intended for his beloved flute to be handed down to his son Kaoru, not to Yūgiri (see cat. 39). Suggestive of yet another secret at the heart of the tale, the visually prominent flute in a painting centered on themes of paternity and lineage is as symbolic as the large moon above.

The Meaning of Scene Selection

To understand what a *Genji* image might have meant to its initial viewers, one can begin by considering why a particular scene was selected for illustration. Given the extensive length of *The Tale of Genji*, each of the fifty-four chapters offered countless possibilities. The selection and coordination of text and image in all formats—whether scroll, book, album, or screen—provide insights into how contemporary audiences understood this work of fiction.



Fig. 13. *Battle of the Carriages* (*Kuruma arasoizu byōbu*), episode in Chapter 9, “Leaves of Wild Ginger” (*Aoi*), 1560. Tosa Mitsumochi (active ca. 1517–72). Pair of six-panel screens; colors and gold on paper; each: 64 in. x 12 ft. 2¾ in. (162.6 x 372.6 cm). Ninnaji Temple, Kyoto

The production of a *Genji* painting was almost always a collaborative endeavor, involving a patron, an artist, a calligrapher, and a coordinator overseeing the project. Patrons of *Genji* paintings often made their preferences known, and therefore the inclusion of certain scenes in a set can be indicative of their values, interests, and aspirations. For example, in the case of the “Bell Crickets” scene, the decision to emphasize the face-to-face meeting between Genji and Reizei is telling, perhaps, of the patron’s concern with familial or imperial lineage and social status. Another option might have been to depict Genji at his Rokujō estate, enjoying music and drinking wine beneath the harvest moon, or a more dynamic picture might have shown the men in carriages en route to Reizei’s palace. Instead, the choice was made to highlight a moment of physical stasis; the drama of the scene derives from the unique situation in which these two characters find themselves.

The author of *Genji* began her tale by disenfranchising her protagonist, depriving him of his chance to ever become emperor, and then invented other means to orchestrate his rise. Bolstered by fate and the help of the gods and buddhas, he slowly builds an ersatz imperium at Rokujō and receives the purely fictional status of “honorary” retired emperor while fathering children who become emperor (Reizei), empress (the daughter of the Akashi Lady), and a court minister (Yūgiri), all of which is prognosticated

in the first chapter of the tale. Although Murasaki Shikibu seems to defend her protagonist as someone worthy of rising to the position of retired sovereign, she highlights Genji’s failings and makes him self-reflective and aware of his flaws. The artists and patrons of the twelfth-century painting seem to have understood the multifaceted nature of Murasaki’s characters. The painting not only captures Genji’s odd status as a retired emperor who could never become sovereign but also conveys in subtle ways Reizei’s unease with his own position and his eagerness to connect with his father, as expressed in the poetry exchange. He leans toward Genji, his body extending onto the wood floorboards, and the hems of his robe touch Genji’s mat, as if edging toward the position of subservience. The selection of this scene for the painting, which presents a state of uncanny equilibrium between the two men, may reveal the priorities of its producers, however obliquely.

The analysis of scene selection remains a significant tool for interpreting the works of later periods, even those produced by professionals in great quantities. The 1510 *Genji Album* by Tosa Mitsunobu (active ca. 1462–1525), for example, made for a warrior clan based in Suō province, includes idiosyncratic scenes that seem to reflect the interests of its patrons, including those that emphasize all-male gatherings and one pairing of text and image that embeds within it a homophone for the name of the Sue clan



(cat. 38).¹⁰ Similarly, a *Genji Album* by Tosa Mitsuyoshi (1539–1613) in the Kyoto National Museum includes six additional scenes from chapters already represented in the album with paintings that depict exemplary female characters, leading Inamoto Mariko to argue that the work was intended for a young woman.¹¹ While making albums like these and other medieval and early modern *Genji* works, patrons often had at their disposal manuals and digests that provided menus of text and image options for every chapter in the tale.¹² These manuals, along with troves of sketches and pictorial templates in the possession of the hereditary painting houses, like the Tosa and the Kano, established a readily identifiable iconography of the tale. This iconography also established a set of expectations that artists (and patrons and coordinators) could use as a foil in creating something new. While many works followed convention, examples from every era demonstrate the degree to which *Genji* imagery could be adapted to address contemporary concerns.

Genji Pictures and Imperial Ideology

One pivotal example of *Genji* painting that transformed the conventional iconography of a scene to express the worldview of its patron is a pair of screens commissioned by Emperor Ōgimachi

(1517–1593) and created in 1560. Painted by Tosa Mitsumochi (active ca. 1517–72) and the members of his studio, the screens depict the “Battle of the Carriages” (*Kuruma araso-i-zu*), an episode from Chapter 9, “Leaves of Wild Ginger” (*Aoi*).¹³ Large folding screens and wall-painting programs depicting single subjects had existed for centuries, but never before had a *Genji* scene been represented in this manner, with one narrative episode extending across all twelve panels of a pair of screens. Ōgimachi’s screens are thought to be the pair now in the collection of the Buddhist temple Ninnaji (fig. 13).¹⁴ Subsequently, in the Edo period, two faithful copies were made, including a set in the Kyoto City Library of Historical Documents (cat. 44). The imposing presence of the screens seems to conform to artistic trends of the late sixteenth century, when artists such as Kano Eitoku (1543–1590) executed bold compositions of varied subjects on folding screens and across the walls of temples and castles.¹⁵ And indeed, Mitsumochi’s screens are believed to have been the model for the wall paintings of the same subject by Kano Sanraku (1559–1635) nearly fifty years later (see fig. 20).¹⁶ It would be wrong, however, to attribute the dramatic enlargement of a *Genji* scene by Mitsumochi solely to artistic bravado or pictorial experimentation. Nor was the screen’s primary purpose to delight its audience with an image from the beloved Heian tale. To the members of this court, *The Tale of Genji* resembled a sacred text.

It was approached with the belief that it contained essential truths about spiritual matters, human nature, and righteous government that, if interpreted properly, could be relevant to contemporary life. The screens exemplify a collaborative production process par excellence, one in which the emperor and the men and women of his court dictated the content of the painting and used the visual imagery of *Genji* to instantiate a particular vision of imperial authority.¹⁷

In the *Battle of the Carriages* screens, what might first be perceived as the representation of a fight by proxy between two jealous female rivals reveals itself to be an assertion of the centrality of the imperial institution. The scene takes place in Chapter 9, titled *Aoi*, the word for “wild ginger” or “heartvine,” a plant with heart-shaped leaves that decorated the carriages and courtier caps of participants in the annual Festival of the Kamo Shrine (*Kamo sai*). It is a few days before the festival proper, and the newly appointed Priestess of the Kamo Shrine, escorted by elite courtiers, must perform purification rituals at the Kamo River. People crowd the procession route for a glimpse of the radiant Genji, who is among the entourage of the priestess. The onlookers include Lady Rokujō, a woman of exalted status and Genji’s neglected former lover. It pains her to view him from a distance like a mere stranger, but she cannot resist the chance to see him again. So she travels incognito in an understated carriage, securing a prime spot along the route. All is well until Genji’s official wife, Aoi, suddenly appears. Pregnant with Genji’s child (his son Yūgiri), she hesitates to venture out but decides at the last minute to watch her husband and the retinue. In the crowded street, Aoi’s (somewhat inebriated) drivers shove Rokujō’s carriage aside to make room. An unruly brawl ensues between the men of the two ladies, insults are traded, and someone yells out a comment about Rokujō’s affair with Genji, exposing her identity. Hemmed in by other vehicles and with her view blocked by Aoi’s carriage, Lady Rokujō can only sit and wait, humiliated and seething with resentment.

The screen paintings divide the scene in half, depicting Genji on the right and the altercation between the carriages on the left. Genji figures prominently on the third panel of the right screen, surrounded by attendants and preceded by palace guards (fig. 14). His face bears white makeup, and his trousers are decorated with a colorful floral pattern. His costume is unusual among *Genji* paintings, which commonly portray him wearing a typical courtier’s robe and an *eboshi* or *kanmuri* hat. This painting clearly shows Genji as a high-ranking member of the imperial palace guard, accessorized with a sword, a bow, a quiver of arrows, and a hat with fanlike wings. At this moment in the narrative, he has just been promoted to Major Captain

of the Right (*udaishō*), and the attendant walking beside him, a symbol of youthful allure, further enhances his apparent status. All of these details communicate pictorially the text’s hyperbolic description of Genji’s radiant beauty, which is said to eclipse that of all the other men and to prompt even grasses and trees to stand at attention.

On the left screen, the focus shifts to the procession and the immediate aftermath of the clash. At the center of the composition, in the middle of the third panel, Aoi’s carriage moves leftward, still hitched to its ox, while Rokujō’s, directly above, is being pushed to the right. Two attendants in *eboshi* hats seem to direct the action, as others among Aoi’s men chase figures away with long sticks. In between the two vehicles lies an upside-down carriage stand with one leg destroyed (fig. 15), a symbol of the indignity suffered by Rokujō. Without a pedestal, Rokujō’s men must rest the shafts of her carriage on the wheel hub of a neighbor’s, lest they lower them to the ground and risk their lady tumbling forward from the resulting incline. Aoi’s attendant, carrying his lady’s intact pedestal, pulls at his collar and looks up at Rokujō’s stand, as if nervously regretting the damage that has been done. The whole episode is unbearable for someone of Rokujō’s status as the widow of an imperial prince and the mother of a princess (Akikonomu, the future Umetsubo Empress). She had long worried that her affair with the dashing young Genji, seven years her junior, would destroy her reputation and leave her a laughingstock, and her fears have now come to pass. Soon after the incident, Rokujō’s longing for Genji becomes all-consuming, and her emotions take the form of a wrathful spirit that torments her rival. The spirit attacks when Aoi is most vulnerable—as she goes into labor with Genji’s son—and it displays a ferocity that defies the exorcists and spirit mediums who are summoned to help. Somehow Aoi survives and delivers a healthy child, but days later, just when the family assumes she is in the clear, the evil spirit reappears and deals one final, fatal blow. Heart-wrenching scenes of parental grief and spousal mourning follow.

Given the inauspicious nature of the subject matter, why would Emperor Ōgimachi have selected this particular scene for such an outsize representation? The answer lies in a number of confluences between the details of the episode and the historical context of the court in 1560. Most important is the setting for the clash-of-carriages scene—the Kamo Festival, which took place at the start of a new imperial reign and was part of a system of realm-protecting rituals overseen by the emperor. The newly consecrated imperial princess served as Priestess of the Kamo Shrine and performed ritual prayers and offerings to ensure the protection of the capital by the Kamo deities. The procession depicted on the screen thus



Fig. 14. Detail of fig. 13, right screen, third panel from the right



Fig. 15. Detail of fig. 13, left screen, third panel from the right

evokes a belief system in which the emperor, as a descendant of the *kami* and a conduit to the deities, is integral to maintaining the peace and harmony of the capital and the realm. Emperor Ōgimachi's enthronement ceremony in 1560 had occurred just six months before this screen project began. Ōgimachi reigned at a time when a sovereign still maintained the authority of the *tennō*, a sacred ruler perceived as one in an unbroken line of succession from the time of creation, but the imperial institution in his day was financially and politically diminished compared to the idealized polity of the Heian world of *Genji*. Moreover, the emperor shared power with the military government of the shogunate, which in 1560 was fractured. Although the Ashikaga shoguns were nominally at the helm, regional daimyo and military leaders contested their power and took control of the capital on numerous occasions during this era, known as the Warring States period. Ōgimachi had to wait three years for his enthronement because of a lack of funds, and essential components of his ceremonies, such as the Harvest Festival (*daijōsai*), were curtailed; the Kamo Festival, notably, had been discontinued since the Onin War (1467–77).¹⁸

Nevertheless, the enthronement of 1560 was cause for celebration, and this pair of grand *Genji* screens, which depicts the Kamo Festival at the start of a new reign, might have been intended to commemorate the emperor's ascension and as a substitute for the discontinued festival, as Noda Asami argues.¹⁹ Building on this idea, Takamatsu Yoshiyuki has pointed out that Ōgimachi actively attempted to revive suspended court rituals, including the Kamo Festival, suggesting that the *Genji* screens should be seen as both a commemoration of his enthronement and an embodiment of his vision for a new era of imperial power and authority.²⁰ That vision is conveyed not merely by a conventional illustration of a Kamo Festival scene from *Genji* but also through innovative formal devices that enabled the figures and the setting to reflect contemporary life. An enlarged street scene that highlights specific aristocratic residences provided one way to link past and present. In the sixteenth century, a new genre of screen paintings developed that afforded spectacular panoramic vistas of the streets and avenues of the urban grid (*rakuchū rakugai-zu*, which translates to “scenes in and around the capital”) (fig. 16). The clash-of-carriages screens by Mitsumochi can be seen as a creative hybrid of *Genji* painting and



Fig. 16. *Scenes in and around the Capital (Rakuchū rakugai-zu)*. Muromachi period (1392–1573), 16th century. Left screen of a pair of six-panel screens; ink, colors, and gold on paper; 54 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. x 11 ft. 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (138.2 x 341 cm). National Museum of Japanese History, Sakura, Chiba Prefecture. Important Cultural Property

a zoomed-in view of an identifiable street inspired by these new panoramic cityscapes, as Washizu Katsura has suggested.²¹ The street in question is First Avenue (Ichijō), an east-west thoroughfare adjacent to the palace that was occupied by the residences of the very courtiers involved in making these screens for the emperor.²² Therefore, the screens depict a procession symbolic of the sacred imperative of the emperor to protect the realm—in an era when display of that authority could not be exercised—as imagined on a city street familiar to all. The effort behind the production of these screens in part demonstrates the power such paintings were thought to have, as if their imagery could perform a kind of magic, willing a vision of the emperor's reign into existence.

However, I would argue that the screen paintings do more than link the subject matter of *The Tale of Genji* to a contemporary interest in imperial imagery. In fact, the paintings invoke the origin myth of the writing of the tale, which associates its genesis with the imperial line. Near the top of the second panel of the left screen is an image of a seated court lady leaning slightly forward as she peers out from a window at the spectacle below (fig. 17). Her hair extends to great lengths as it flows behind her, over her white patterned robe, which she wears with red trousers. A screen with green grasses and a red border surrounds her, exposing its dark blue patterned backing paper in the window. It is unusual for a noblewoman to be depicted alone, and for that reason she calls to mind images of the solitary Murasaki Shikibu gazing out from the room at Ishiyamadera where, as legend had it, she composed *The Tale of Genji*. The mysterious figure in the window

bears a striking resemblance to the portrait-icon of Murasaki Shikibu by Tosa Mitsumoto (1530–1569) (see the introduction to Chapter 2, fig. 51). In fact, the diary entries that record the making of Ōgimachi's screens mention how this very painting, commissioned by the courtier Kujō Tanemichi in 1560 for a banquet and offering ceremony of *Genji waka* poems, was brought to the palace precisely while the screens were in production.²³ There is a distinct possibility that after seeing the painting the emperor and his courtiers decided to incorporate an image of Murasaki into their *Genji* screens.²⁴ The denizens of the palace were immersed in the tale at that time and were aided in their reading by a *Genji* character chart (*Genji keizu*), created for them by Sanjōnishi Kin'eda (1487–1563).²⁵ Ōgimachi and the members of the court were certainly familiar with the *Genji* origin legend as well. Just four months before the *Battle of the Carriages* screen project began, Madenokōji Fusako (d. 1580), one of the emperor's highest-ranking court ladies and the mother of future crown prince Sanehito (1552–1586), made a pilgrimage to Ishiyamadera.²⁶ There she would have worshipped the temple's beloved Kannon and seen firsthand the legendary *Genji* Room where Murasaki was said to have started writing her tale. She most certainly would have related her experience upon her return, including to her brother, Madenokōji Korefusa (1513–1573), who oversaw the early stages of the screen design at the family residence near the palace. The painting of Murasaki Shikibu by Tosa Mitsumoto, with its inscription explaining the *Genji* origin myth and its vivid image of the author at the moment of her creative inspiration, must have been a revelation.



Fig. 17. Detail of fig. 13



Fig. 18. Detail of fig. 13



Fig. 19. Detail of fig. 13

The representation of the female author in the screens, however, is not such an explicit reference. She lacks the brush, a symbol of authorship, and the attributes of paper and inkstone that would definitively mark her as Murasaki Shikibu, as in later portraits. And yet, it is precisely the subtlety of the image that allows the figure to blend in with the narrative. Including the author's attributes would break the illusion of the fictional world of the chapter. Instead, she is positioned discreetly in between clouds and looks away from the most exciting action, the carriage confrontation. Her inattention to the event differentiates her from the other spectators and suggests that she possesses a different kind of vision.

Rather than watching one single event unfold, she seems to survey the entire episode in her mind's eye, as would an author or omniscient narrator. The gold clouds that surround her facilitate this sense of remove from the narrative and create a dreamlike space in which to present the figure.

At the same time, Mitsumochi and his patrons inserted an image of Murasaki into the composition in a way that conflates the world of the tale with the story of its creation. She sits within one of the luxurious walled residences that line the south side of the street, a site that, in fact, corresponds to the Heian-period residence of Fujiwara no Michinaga (966–1027), the author's patron.



Figs. 20, 21 (detail, opposite). *Battle of the Carriages* (*Kuruma arasoī-zu byōbu*), episode in Chapter 9, “Leaves of Wild Ginger” (*Aoi*). Kano Sanraku (1559–1635). Momoyama period (1573–1615), Keichō era (1596–1615). Sliding-door (*fusuma*) painting, mounted as a four-panel folding screen; ink, color, and gold on paper; 69½ in. x 12 ft. 1⅞ in. (175.5 x 370 cm). Tokyo National Museum. Important Cultural Property

The elegant courtyard on the far right of the right screen, with rocks, a stream, and a wisteria-wrapped pine that symbolizes the Fujiwara, is especially striking (fig. 18). It also marks the general location of the sixteenth-century residence of the Madenokōji, courtiers emulating Michinaga by marrying their daughters to the emperor with hopes for the birth of crown princes. The producers of the screens thus situate the genesis of the tale amid their own world and families in the heart of a capital centered around the imperial institution. Many versions of the origin legend describe how Murasaki was first asked to write the new tale by Empress Shōshi, Michinaga’s daughter, who was, in fact, relaying the request on behalf of Princess Senshi (964–1035), the Great Priestess of the Kamo Shrine for five reigns. Senshi’s presence looms large in the *Genji* origin myth as the ultimate imperial generator of the tale. Interestingly, the woman in the window appears in the same register of the painting as the Kamo Shrine, rendered evocatively in the upper left corner behind its tall shrine gate near the Tadasu Woods (fig. 19). Like the priestess serving the deity who protects the capital against malevolent forces, Murasaki seems to cast an external calm over the ominous scene of chaos below. As if standing in for the

Kamo Priestesses and the imperial line, the image of the female author, elevated and remote, evokes their putative authority over the temporal world. In this way, the *Battle of the Carriages* screens not only project a restored vision of imperial authority to honor a new reign but also reflect an understanding of *Genji* as an integral component of the capital’s imperial cosmology that determines the peace and prosperity of the realm.

Later Versions of the *Battle of the Carriages* Screens

The capacity of the 1560 *Battle of the Carriages* screens to convey nuances of imperial ideology and frame identity may be the primary reason why they served as a master reference for later versions of the subject. In Kano Sanraku’s rendering on sliding-door paintings, the most notable differences from Ōgimachi’s screens are the degree and intensity of the violence represented (fig. 20). On the 1560 screens, the altercation is depicted as chaotic, but not a single figure is shown engaged in combat. In Sanraku’s version, however, the confrontation has been transformed into a brutal fight. Figures stomp on their adversaries, kick them in the head,





Fig. 22. *Battle of the Carriages* (*Kuruma arasoi-zu byōbu*), episode in Chapter 9, “Leaves of Wild Ginger” (*Aoi*). Studio of Iwasa Matabei (1578–1650). Edo period (1615–1868), mid-17th century. Six-panel folding screen; ink, color, and gold leaf on paper; 60 in. x 11 ft. 10 in. (152.4 x 360.7 cm). John C. Weber Collection

try to gouge out their eyes, and threaten to jab them in the throat (fig. 21). Moreover, several men gang up on others with dark skin and round faces, which are depicted frontally, in contrast to the slender profiles of the aristocrats on the sidelines and others involved in the brawl. This aggression is unusual for *Genji* paintings, which avoid inauspicious or taboo subjects. What could account for such a different approach?

As Kyoko Kinoshita elaborates in her essay in this volume, the sliding-door panels were most likely created in 1604 to adorn the walls of the newly constructed Kyoto residence of the courtier Kujō Yukiie and his new bride, Sadako.²⁷ Sadako was the adopted daughter of Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s secondary wife, Yodo-dono (1567–1615), and the Toyotomi at the time were still vying for political relevance in the face of the newly dominant Tokugawa military leaders (the first shogun, Ieyasu, had been appointed in 1603). This marriage, therefore, provided them with the opportunity to solidify their political standing. Sadako’s biological mother was married to Tokugawa Hidetada and gave birth to the future shogun Iemitsu the same year that Sadako (at the age of twelve) married Yukiie. It might seem odd to depict such a violent scene for the residence of

a newly married couple; however, given that Ōgimachi’s screens employed this theme to suggest the pacification of the capital, it can be assumed that Kano Sanraku’s sliding doors functioned similarly. Amid the violence, cool-headed courtiers are shown attempting to calm the crowd, while Tokugawa elders—including one shown seated in the crowd and marked with a Tokugawa crest on his robe—look on. Takamatsu Yoshiyuki has suggested that the courtier procession may be a stand-in for the Toyotomi, with the Tokugawa depicted in a docile position as onlookers to the Toyotomi’s grand spectacle and show of force.²⁸ Whatever the case may be, in this historical moment, on the eve of the Edo period, the iconic scene of rivalry between the ladies in their carriages is depicted as if it were a procession into battle.

Whereas both Tosa Mitsumochi’s 1560 screens and Kano Sanraku’s 1604 panels resonate with the complex political situations of their patrons, a *Battle of the Carriages* screen by the studio of Iwasa Matabei from the mid-seventeenth century forges a new path (figs. 22, 23). In this composition the horizontal row of residences along First Avenue, which held such meaning for Ōgimachi and his courtiers, has been eliminated. Instead, the action is



Fig. 23. Detail of fig. 22

promulgated along a dramatic downward diagonal from the upper left to the lower right. Here, First Avenue appears to extend into the viewer's space, as if the viewer is among the agitated spectators who await the appearance of the radiant Genji. The confrontation between the carriages takes place in the lower left corner, where Aoi's elegant black carriage, decorated with gold phoenixes, charges leftward, as Rokujō's carriage is forced to back up. Aoi's men threaten Rokujō's with their umbrella poles, and one man has been thrown to the ground near her carriage (fig. 23). And yet, the violence of the scene does not match that in Sanraku's paintings.

In Matabei's screen, the battle is exaggeratedly muscular and stylized. The emphasis seems to be on the tale itself and on bringing its emotions to life as viscerally as possible. This quality aligns the work with other *Genji* paintings by the artist that reimagine

traditional compositions and focus in on a figure's countenance to emphasize the emotional intensity of a scene (see cats. 32–34). With such paintings, as here, the viewer is encouraged to linger over the varied, intriguing facial expressions of the figures in the crowd. Even the women are visible inside their carriages, whereas in previous versions of this scene they remain hidden from view. Matabei's screen makes the ancient *Genji* narrative accessible to contemporary viewers and personalizes the tale, anticipating an artistic approach of the modern era. Indeed, from the twelfth-century scrolls onward, the history of *Genji* pictorialization was far from routinized. These works reflect the sophisticated interpretive abilities of communities steeped in Murasaki's tale, communities who sought inspiration and admonitions from *Genji*, and who blurred the boundaries between the tale and their own lives.

- Lady of the Evening Faces” (*Yūgao*); Washburn 2015, p. 90.
36. For a broader discussion of the relationship between the act of mourning (or dying) and modes of inscription in *Genji*, see the thought-provoking work of Jackson 2018.
 37. For further discussion of *midaregaki*, see Y. Shimizu 1988, p. 61.
 38. Summarized by Keene 1993, p. 304. For the original quotation, see Kamo no Chōmei 1961, p. 89.
 39. Kasashima 2013, pp. 145–87.
 40. Fujiwara no Norinaga in *Ways of Handling the Brush* (*Hippō saiyōshū*)—an expanded version of his calligraphic treatise *Saiyōshō*—notes that *chirashi-gaki* is most appropriate for letters to and from women and young people; see Fujiwara no Norinaga 1914, p. 91. The conventions of *chirashi-gaki* are also discussed in another medieval calligraphic treatise titled the *Unicorn Treatise* (*Kirinshō*), traditionally attributed to the Heian calligrapher Fujiwara no Yukinari but more likely compiled by an anonymous fourteenth-century calligraphy teacher; see *Kirinshō* 1914, pp. 35–37.
 41. *Kokin wakashū* 1989, p. 189, no. 613; translation by John T. Carpenter.
 42. See *Yakaku teikinshō* 1982. Note that this treatise, based on the teachings of Sesonji Yukiyoishi (1179–1251?), the grandson of Fujiwara no Koreyuki, is close in content to the similarly entitled *Yakaku shosatsushō* (Night-nesting crane treatise on letter writing, mid-13th century).
 43. Adapted from the translation in H. C. McCullough 1980, p. 109.
 44. Cited in Haruna 1963, p. 27. The mention of Suke-masa’s daughter is found in the “Neawase” chapter of *Eiga monogatari*, one of the later chapters, which was not included in William H. McCullough and Helen Craig McCullough’s translation (W. H. McCullough and H. C. McCullough 1980).
 45. Morris 1971a, p. 54.
 46. Sugawara no Takasue no Musume 1989, p. 385; Morris 1971a, pp. 54, 131, n. 54.
 47. W. H. McCullough and H. C. McCullough 1980, vol. 2, p. 483.
 48. *Ibid.*, p. 484.
 49. For further discussion of female painters and calligraphers, see Akiyama Terukazu 1979; adapted and translated by Maribeth Graybill in Akiyama Terukazu 1990.
 50. Scholars have proposed that the so-called Masatsune (named for Asukai Masatsune [1170–1221]) or Norinaga style of the *Imaki-gire* also manifests evidence of the influence of the Hosshōji-ryū style; see Carpenter 1994, pp. 72–73. It is true that even while Norinaga and other adherents of the Sesonji-ryū wrote criticisms of Tadamichi, their own brushwork betrayed the trend of the times. Furthermore, by the mid-twelfth century, we have adequate evidence that many calligraphers of the Sesonji-ryū, including some direct descendants of Yukinari, were writing in a style that is nearly identical to that of the Hosshōji-ryū.
 51. The literary critic Konishi Jin’ichi discussed this concept in a seminal essay written some sixty years ago (Konishi 1956), in which he introduced the term “restriction” (*kōsokusei*) to describe the attitude and process that encourage an artist or artisan to create a work of art or craft object according to specifications provided by a preexisting model or a teacher. A concern with individual creativity is dispensed with, or “restricted,” in order to create something that adheres to an established form. From a modern point of view, or at least from one that exalts the new and different, the “restriction” of individual expression may be thought to have negative implications. As Konishi points out, however, this was not the case in Heian and medieval Japan. Quite the opposite: there was a belief that true “freedom” in a traditional artistic vocation, or *Way* (*michi* 道), could only be acquired through restriction of individual, idiosyncratic expression. In a more extended study of artistic vocations of the medieval period published several years later (Konishi 1975; translated by Aileen Gatten in Konishi 1985), Konishi revised his terminology slightly, replacing *kōsokusei* with *kihansai*, which has been aptly translated as “conforming ethic.” The principle remains the same, but the latter term has a less pejorative connotation.
 52. It should be pointed out that, until recently, all of the sections of the *Genji Scrolls* were remounted on plaques to save the works, in frightfully fragile condition, from suffering further from rolling and unrolling. In recent years, it was felt that restoring the works to the original handscroll format and removing the later borders would not only be a safer way to preserve the scrolls for posterity but would also restore the original aesthetic effect. As this manuscript was being prepared, the Tokugawa *Genji Scrolls* were at a conservation studio in Kyoto. The Gotoh sections will undergo conservation in the coming years.
 53. Lippit 2008, pp. 49–60.
 54. For a discussion of the various styles of the sections of the *Genji Scrolls*, see Carpenter 1994; see also Lippit 2008, pp. 56–60. During the mid-Edo period, when connoisseurs of calligraphy gave attributions to a wide array of unsigned specimens of calligraphy from the Heian and medieval periods, the texts of the *Genji Scrolls* acquired attributions to three noted calligraphers of the late Heian–early Kamakura period: the high-ranking courtier Fujiwara no Korefusa; the monk-poet Jakuren (1139?–1202); and the courtier-poet Asukai Masatsune. These traditional attributions, for both stylistic and dating considerations, no longer hold validity.
- Although the hands of five individual calligraphers can be discerned, the division into three broad styles still applies. For convenience, scholars today usually simply use numbers to identify the five handwriting styles displayed in the *Genji Scrolls*. Summarized here, they are: Style I: Korefusa or Sesonji-ryū style; Style II: Jakuren A style; Style III: Jakuren B style; Style IV: Masatsune or Norinaga style; Style V: only fragments survive, resembling the two Jakuren styles.
55. The expressive aspects of the calligraphy of Chapter 40, “Rites of the Sacred Law” (*Minori*), are discussed in detail in Y. Shimizu 1988.
 56. E. A. Cranston 2006, p. 891.
 57. Discussed, for example, in *Kirinshō* (Unicorn treatise); see *Kirinshō* 1914, pp. 35–37.
 58. For more detailed discussion of East Asian calligraphic copying techniques, see Carpenter 2007.
- Beyond Narrative Illustration: What *Genji* Paintings Do**
1. E. A. Cranston 2006, p. 880.
 2. *Ibid.* The brackets here are mine to indicate that the text of the handscrolls differs, using the word *tsuma* (space under the eaves) instead of *aki*.
 3. Shimizu Fukuko 2011, pp. 212–14. The primacy of *waka* (thirty-one-syllable verse) in conceptualizing *Genji* pictures provides a through line from these early twelfth-century scrolls to the vast majority of later *Genji* paintings. Most serious readers of *Genji* in premodern Japan would have been involved in the composition, recitation, and appreciation of *waka*, for which the 795 examples in the tale were an invaluable source.
 4. Masako Watanabe introduces the history of *fukinuki yatai* and its possible Chinese precedents in the context of analyzing the twelfth-century *Genji Scrolls* in Watanabe 1998.
 5. One of the earliest articles to take this approach is Soper 1955; and later Watanabe 1998. Yukio Lippit combines a close reading of the conventions in a number of paintings in the scrolls, along with textual and calligraphic analysis; see Lippit 2008.
 6. Takahashi Tōru 2007.
 7. Washburn 2015, p. 805.
 8. Shimizu Fukuko 2011, p. 214.
 9. Sano 2000, pp. 30–31.
 10. Chino, Kamei, and Ikeda 1997; McCormick 2003; McCormick 2018.
 11. Specifically, Inamoto speculates that the album was intended for the daughter of one of the album’s calligraphers, Konoe Nobutada (1565–1614); Inamoto 1997.
 12. One such manual thought to have been created in the medieval period is translated and discussed in Murase 1983.

13. For important findings on these screens that identified them as by Tosa Mitsumochi and linked them to period diary entries, see Miyajima 1986; Kawamoto Keiko 1989. Another artist likely involved in the project was Tosa Mitsumoto, Mitsumochi's son, who at the time held the title of Tosa Shōgen and was heir to the Tosa school; see McCormick 2015.
14. Noticing that the right and left screens of the pair at Ninnaji show subtle differences in painting approach, Aizawa Masahiko has proposed that while Mitsumochi likely painted the right screen, a later artist must have executed the left, based on either the original or sketches by Mitsumochi; see Aizawa 1995. More recently Takamatsu Yoshiyuki has convincingly argued that the difference in appearance is due to over-painting on damaged areas of the left screen; Takamatsu 2015. Whatever the case may be, it seems most likely that the composition emerged from the Mitsumochi-era Tosa studio, and therefore both extant screens reflect the content of those approved by Emperor Ōgimachi.
15. Aizawa Masahiko, departing from conventional scholarship, has emphasized the importance of integrating the work of Tosa-school artists, alongside Kano masters such as Eitoku, into the history of the development of the Momoyama grand style; see Aizawa 2008; Aizawa 2011; Aizawa 2018.
16. Kawamoto Keiko 1989.
17. The unusually detailed process of how these screens were made appears in the diary of the female attendants to the emperor, the *Daily Records of the Female Palace Attendants* (*Oyudono no ue no nikki*) cited below. The relevant entries are listed in Aizawa 1995, and again with additional entries pertaining to Mitsumoto and his Murasaki Shikibu painting in McCormick 2015.
18. Ōgimachi's two imperial predecessors were forced to wait twenty-one years and ten years, respectively, for their official enthronement ceremonies due to lack of funds.
19. Noda 2009.
20. Takamatsu 2015.
21. Washizu 2009b.
22. Ibid. Especially important is the residence of Madenokōji Korefusa (1513–1537), provisional Major Counselor. He acted as the intermediary between the artist and the court, and his own residence, located directly across from the palace, served as the location where the screens were constructed and sketches from the artist were brought. Interestingly, he also served as the official in charge of the enthronement ceremonies.
23. The painting, described as a “*Genji* picture” (*Genji-e*) hanging scroll by Tosa Shōgen (Mitsumoto), was brought to the palace by the courtier Sanjōnishi Kin'eda. Kin'eda, Tanemichi's maternal uncle, had inscribed Tanemichi's painting and had been advising the court on the iconography of their *Genji* screens. The painting was returned the next day. See *Oyudono no ue no nikki* 1933, p. 147, entry for the twelfth and thirteenth days of the eleventh month of the third year of the Eiroku era (1560); cited in McCormick 2015.
24. The painting was on view several weeks before the final underdrawings for the left-hand screen, in which the court lady in the window appears, were completed.
25. During the third year of the Eiroku era (1560), Kin'eda brought to court manuscripts of Chapters 51–54 (on the sixth and eighteenth days of the tenth month) and Chapter 19 (on the tenth day of the eleventh month), as well as a Kawachi Edition manuscript (on the sixth day of the eleventh month); *Oyudono no ue no nikki* 1933, pp. 141, 143, 146. He supplied his *Genji* character chart on the twelfth day of the eighth month, presumably as they were just starting to read the tale; *Oyudono no ue no nikki* 1933, p. 134. In the following year the court began creating a new *Genji* manuscript, asking various individuals to contribute by writing separate chapters. As soon as the manuscript was completed, *Genji* lectures by Sanjōnishi Kin'eda began on the thirteenth day of the tenth month of the fifth year of the Eiroku era (1562); *Oyudono no ue no nikki* 1933, p. 240.
26. Fusako's pilgrimage is mentioned on the tenth day of the third month of the third year of the Eiroku era (1560); *Oyudono no ue no nikki* 1933, p. 110. The audience at Sanjōnishi Kin'eda's *Genji* lectures (see note 25) included the palace ladies, specifically Fusako, who attended on the twenty-first day of the tenth month of the fifth year of the Eiroku era (1562); *Oyudono no ue no nikki* 1933, p. 242.
27. Kawamoto Keiko drew this conclusion, suggesting that the procession in this painting represents an allusion to the marriage procession of Yukiie and Sadako; see Kawamoto Keiko 1989.
28. Takamatsu points out that at the time Kano Sanraku was an official painter to the Toyotomi and that the Toyotomi paid for construction of the residence, concluding that the painting may reflect the alliance being forged between the Kujō and the Toyotomi, with the Tokugawa represented as subordinate; Takamatsu 2015, pp. xv–xvi, n. 27.
- Evolving Iconographies of *The Tale of Genji*: Early Modern Interpretations of a Yamato-e Theme**
1. Kinoshita 2000.
 2. Kawase 1967, pp. 510–15; Shimizu Fukuko 2003, pp. 6–8; Shimizu Fukuko in Museum of Kyoto 2008a, p. 204, no. 97. Kawase Kazuma observes that while the printing technology is similar, *Saga-bon Genji monogatari* was not published by the same group of individuals as the other *Saga-bon* printed versions of Japanese classics, such as *The Tales of Ise* published by Suminokura Soan, and thus refers to it as *Den Saga-bon Genji monogatari*. Furthermore, there is another version of *The Tale of Genji* printed with wooden movable-type settings during the early seventeenth century, in fifty-three volumes, a set of which is in the library of Jissen Women's University, Tokyo (it is lacking vol. 15, *Yomogiu*).
 3. On Shunshō's illustrations, see Shimizu Fukuko 2003, pp. 58–62.
 4. Takagi 1933, pp. 100–129.
 5. For the most recent research on the artist in English, consult Lippit and Ulak 2015.
 6. For the passage in Japanese, see *Chikusai monogatari* 1970, p. 101; see also Putzar 1960, especially p. 176. On Sōtatsu's fan paintings, see Murase 1973.
 7. Outstanding examples of scattered fan painting screens with the “I'nen” seal are also in the collection of Okura Shukokan Museum of Fine Arts, Tokyo.
 8. For more on Tawaraya fan painting of themes other than *Genji*, and research on new documentation concerning members of Sōtatsu's atelier, see Ōta 2015b.
 9. Pair of six-panel folding screens from the early 1600s in the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (F1906.231–232). Discussed in Lippit and Ulak 2015, pp. 174–77, no. 1.
 10. The location of the Tawaraya studio is given in the above-mentioned fictional tale *Chikusai*, and its proximity to the sixteenth-century Tosa-related artists is pointed out in Honda 2014.
 11. Evidence of Mitsuhiro's connections to Sōtatsu is given in Nakamachi 2015, pp. 93–94.
 12. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2006.570). The set of screens from which these scenes were excised belonged to Dan Takuma (1858–1932), a wealthy businessman and well-known collector. Among identified *Genji* paintings by Sōtatsu and his immediate followers, these ex-Dan collection screens were the only examples that had images of all fifty-four chapters of the tale and became a template for subsequent works by Rinpa-school artists.
 13. See *The Record of Travel through the Provinces* (*Kaikoku michi no ki*); cited in Toda 2016, p. 9. In English, see Kita 1997, p. 329 and n. 50, where the identification of Regent Nijō Akizane is discussed.
 14. For a discussion of the preparations of the bridal dowry for this momentous wedding, see the essay by Monika Bincsik in this volume.
 15. Abiko 2017.
 16. For a discussion of the distinctive quality of Matabei's paintings on *Genji* themes, see, for instance, Hiromi 2017. See also McKelway 2015 on Matabei's more traditional *Genji* paintings and his connections to the Tosa school.

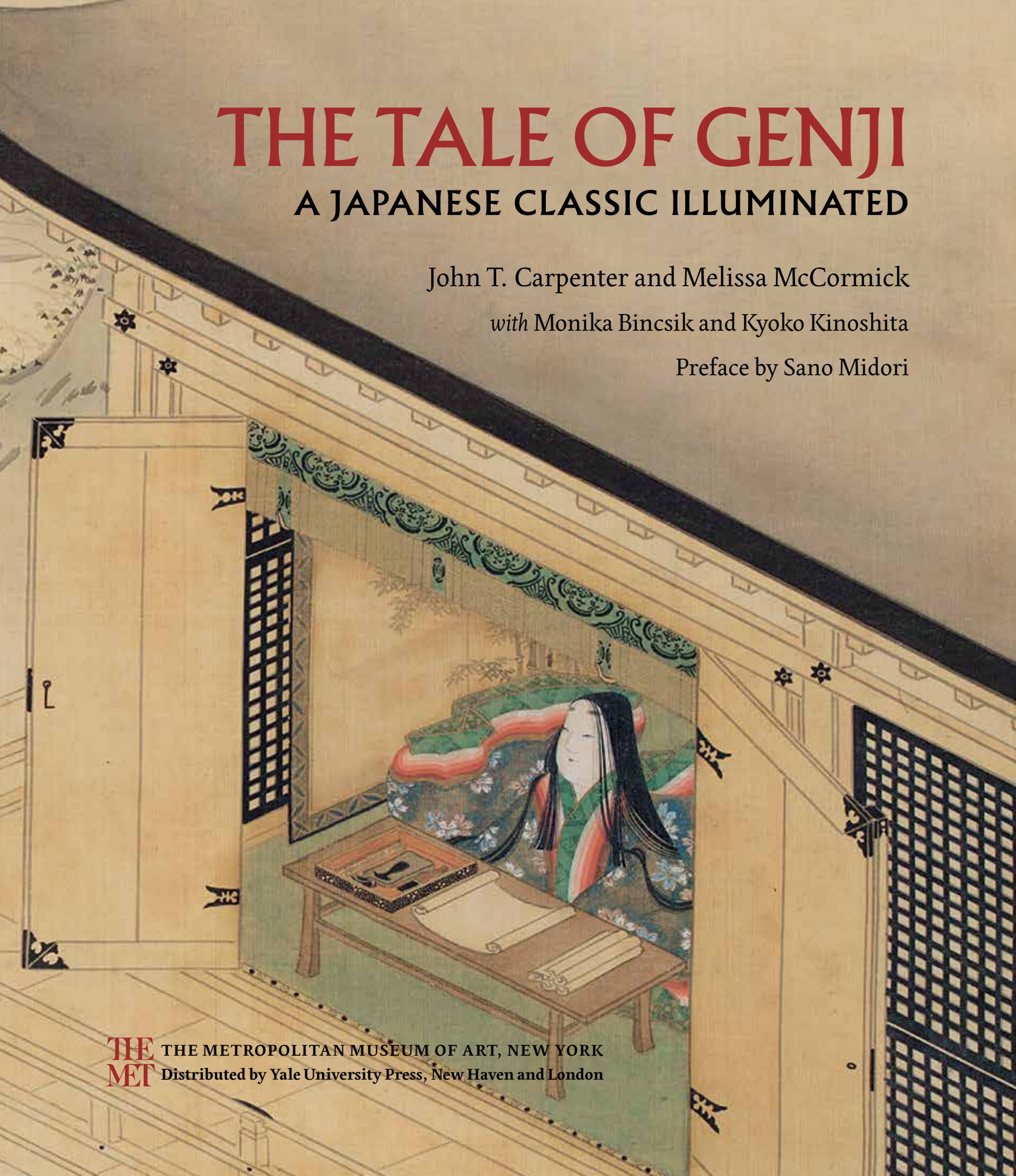
THE TALE OF GENJI

A JAPANESE CLASSIC ILLUMINATED

John T. Carpenter and Melissa McCormick

with Monika Bincsik and Kyoko Kinoshita

Preface by Sano Midori



**THE
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