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Genji monogatari and popular literature of the Edo period: a case study of Nise Murasaki inaka Genji by Ryūtei Tanehiko : summary

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SUMMARY

Genji monogatari and popular literature of the Edo period

A case study of *Nise Murasaki inaka Genji* by Ryūtei Tanehiko

The title of this book can be translated as *Genji monogatari and popular literature of the Edo period (A case study of Nise Murasaki inaka Genji by Ryūtei Tanehiko)*. Its main focus is *Genji monogatari (The Tale of Genji)*, a classical work of Japanese literature often cited as the first psychological novel in history, and popular paraphrases or rewritings of it that were produced in the Edo period (1600–1867). As the subtitle suggests, special attention is paid to *Nise Murasaki inaka Genji (The Rustic Genji of a Bogus Murasaki)* by Ryūtei Tanehiko (1783–1842), which was an immensely popular work, perhaps the best selling work of prose in the whole of the Edo period. Nevertheless, it remains relatively unknown today despite its commercial success and contemporary cultural relevance.

One reason why the work does not receive much attention nowadays is very likely its derivative nature. Its borrowings from *Genji monogatari* are evident and even declared in the actual title of the work. Still, the lack of originality of Tanehiko's work did not stop it becoming unprecedentedly popular, as its success derived from mastering a technique and skillfully combining existing elements, not from groundbreaking ideas (as was the case with much contemporary cultural production). The main aim of this study is to compare *Genji monogatari* with *Nise Murasaki inaka Genji* and other Edo period paraphrases in order to describe their relations and determine whether it is appropriate to describe the derivative works as parodies or adaptations, as they were often labeled.

In order to tackle this problem, the book offers a brief theoretical treatment of paraphrasing strategies such as parody, adaptation and translation, as well as the related Japanese concepts of *mitate* and *yatsushi* or *sekai* and *shukō*. In addi-

tion, a short historical overview of Edo period *Genji monogatari* paraphrases is presented to serve as a timeline for the examined works. The essential part of the book is the analysis of passages of selected works. Five significant passages from *Genji monogatari* and corresponding passages from *Nise Murasaki inaka Genji* and other works (such as *Onna Gokyō*, *Fūryū Genji monogatari* and *Wakakusa Genji monogatari*) are presented in the analysis and their events, characters and graphical representation are compared and interpreted, drawing upon elements of narrative analysis. This elucidates the relation of *Nise Murasaki inaka Genji* and other *Genji* paraphrases to their source text and also provides concrete examples that give the reader a clear picture of the general nature of the stories in the works and the way they are told.

Many of the creative strategies applied in the examined paraphrases are identified in the analysis, with most space devoted to the strategies applied by Ryūtei Tanehiko. It becomes evident that the author's creative strategies changed during the 14 year period it took to create the work. In addition to the dominant (and more obvious) strategies of enhancing and adding elements of conflict and moral lessons at the expense of emotional depth, Tanehiko's original and careful combinations and re-combinations of pre-existing and not always prominent elements of source material can be highlighted as one of the most important strategies, the mastery of which undoubtedly contributed to the work's success. Tanehiko's attention to the detail of *Genji monogatari* and his work's obvious lack of critical stance towards the classic also support the argument that it is problematic to label his work parody.

While Tanehiko was not the only author skilled in creative work with existing elements, the comparison of his work with other *Genji* paraphrases from the first half of the Edo period proves that he was not merely mimicking other works, as was claimed by a contemporary literary rival. On the contrary, in the way it transformed a Japanese classic into a popular work, *Nise Murasaki inaka Genji* was a singular phenomenon, which only later spawned other similar literary attempts.