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# “DEATH IS THE MOTHER OF BEAUTY”: SUBLIME AESTHETICS IN *THE TALE OF GENJI*

Professor Dennis Washburn  
Dartmouth College

Aesthetic and ethical values in *The Tale of Genji* are grounded on the paradox that accepting the impermanence and emptiness of all things is a necessary condition for appreciating the good and the beautiful. The recognition that loss, absence, and death are sources of beauty produces unsettling moments in the narrative that, because they are depicted as ultimately beyond representation in language, exhibit a sublime aesthetic charge. By virtue of its very excess, the sublime experience is disruptive, a form of trauma that, in Murasaki Shikibu's text, is a source of both pain and pleasure.

Friday, April 21 | 5:00–6:30 PM | FAB 249



**Dennis Washburn** is Burlington Northern Foundation Professor in Asian Studies at Dartmouth College, where he teaches Japanese literature and culture, Japanese film, translation, and comparative literature. He is the author of two monographs—*Translating Mount Fuji: Modern Japanese Fiction and the Ethics of Identity* (Columbia University Press, 2006), *The Dilemma of the Modern in Japanese Fiction* (Yale University Press, 1995)—and many articles, edited volumes, and translations. He is the most recent translator of the eleventh-century masterpiece *The Tale of Genji* (W.W. Norton, 2015).



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