Review of
"The Tale of Genji"
Chapter 5: Lavender

Created by Mytherrus

A few months ago, I had the pleasure of reading and reviewing one of Mytherrus' translations of a Fate: Stay/Night doujinshi. His work was truly splendid, and I had been awaiting more of his translations (or just any work from him, for that matter). To my surprise, he just released a Visual Novel (VN for short) adapting one of Japan's oldest and most famous stories: The Tale of Genji. The Tale of Genji is no stranger to adaptation or translation. It has been made into manga, anime, pornography, modernized, genderbent and nearly every other modification you might be able to think of. Of course, plenty of VN have also been made of the Tale of Genji, so how does Mytherrus' interpretation stand out from the rest?

Voice

In his translation, we couldn't see Mytherrus' writing style or voice come out. He knew he had to do a faithful translation and couldn't change the story to what he might have liked. Luckily, in an adaptation, the story can be twisted and contorted to fit exactly what Mytherrus wants to show.

Genji and the rest of the cast are written very stiffly, reminiscent of some of the popular translations. He cites Seidensticker and it is clear that he takes a lot of influence from the translation. The characters seem almost as flat as the images they are portrayed with. If the sole goal of this VN was to convey the story of Genji (specifically chapter 5 of the story; more on this later) then the VN would be considered a success. Much like his work on translation last year, Mytherrus is nothing if not faithful to the original.

The one place where Mytherrus adds in his own voice is in the narrator. Almost immediately the narrator breaks the fourth wall by referencing that Genji, the main character, does not have a sprite in the VN. This is common practice, as the player character is often never seen in the game.

The narrator seems to intersperse their thoughts throughout, and it is even shown that Genji (the player character) can even listen to and interact with the narrator; so much so that the narrator could be interpreted as Genji's inner voice or conscience. This is a nice addition to what would have been a fairly boring adaptation otherwise.

Visuals

In a visual novel, visuals are half the battle (it's also half the name). The strength of visual novels over other mediums like raw text is the interaction with the story as well as the reactions of the characters. Unfortunately it seems that Mytherrus could not capitalize on the full potential of the medium and settled for simply using static images without utilizing different expressions or effects to better tell the story. This could be explained by an absolute lack of artistic skill. There is no original artwork present in the VN and Mytherrus has gone so far as to cite each and every image used.

The art style of the game is also intentionally jarring. The character sprites are flat, Heian style drawings (although some look like Ukiyo-e instead) and all the backgrounds are real-life stock photos. I'm not sure why Mytherrus chose to have so much visual dissonance, but it fits with the textual dissonance between the narrator/conscience and the rest of the characters.

Final Thoughts

I have been a fairly harsh critic so far, but that is only because of the quality I have come to expect of Mytherrus after his first translation. For a first foray into making a visual novel this is definitely a solid start and a great Project 0 to work up from. One thing that I was confused about was why the VN started from chapter 5 of The Tale of Genji instead of Chapter 1. I would love to see Mytherrus' adaptation of the rest of the story, especially intertwining interactions with the narrator throughout, but we might not see any more, unfortunately.

This work suffered a lot from his unfamiliarity with creating something in this extremely versatile medium. There are many layers of polish that would improve the feel and product a lot more. Too many things seem like consequences of Mytherrus' inability instead of deliberate

artistic choices. The visual dissonance between a realistic background and traditional-art characters is very interesting, but would be made more intentional with more consistent character styles and more varied backgrounds to hammer home that this is not a product of convenience, but a product of choice.

7.8/10

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