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One Hundred Leaves: A New Annotated Translation Of The Hyakunin Isshu



Synopsis

The Hyakunin Isshu is a poetry anthology beloved by generations of Japanese since it was compiled in the 13th century. Many Japanese know the poems by heart as a result of playing the popular card game version of the anthology. Collecting one poem each from one hundred poets living from the 7th century to the 13th century, the book covers a wide array of themes and personal styles. One Hundred Leaves is a new translation, complete with extensive notes, the original Japanese in calligraphic font, the pronunciation, and side-by-side art work beautifully illustrating each poem's theme. ** This is a black-and-white version of the book.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Blue Flute aka Frank Watson is committed to finding ties between cultures around the globe, always seeking those gentle and at times frail but durable connections that bind humankind. He is an expert translator (Chinese, Japanese, Latin French, Spanish) but he goes far more deeply than most translators. Blue Flute is concerned with the idiosyncrasies of the works he elects to approach, looking for the origins of those works as they related to the time in which they were written and bringing his readers into the realm of meaning or experience that make the translated poems timeless. Blue Flute opens his book - Hyakunin Isshu - with a guide to appreciating Japanese poetry in which he addresses the timeframe of the poets he has elected to translate - 100 Japanese poets from the period of the 7th century to the 13th century. He informs the reader as to the visual images that accompany the poems, the 'pivot and pillow words' that explain the manner in which the poems were constructed to have several levels of meanings, the references and importance of Nature as a

major element of the imagery (as well as the season and the time of day) and ends by sharing the effect of the overall experience of visiting these ancient poems. The translations are laid out in a unique fashion: the title of each poem is given in both Japanese and English, the poet is identified as to time frame, the poem is placed in English first followed by the original poem offered in Japanese characters along side a pronunciation guide, followed by literal notes and at the base of some of the pages he offers a sentence or two about the specific significance of wither the subject or the poet. Across from each of these pages is a magnificent Japanese woodblock print, complete with Japanese characters, that illustrates the poem. The poems themselves are sweet morsels: If I'm to sleep alone
On a mountain slope
The copper pheasant's tail
Just flows and flows -
So long, like this night
If I'm to sleep alone.
This is an exquisite addition to any poet's library and a gentle introduction to everyone to appreciate the poems of ancient Japanese poets. Grady Harp, May 12

Frank Watson's "One Hundred Leaves: A New Annotated Translation of the Hyakunin Isshu" offers both the Japan specialist and the general lover of poetry a most attractive and lyrical introduction to the famed 13th century anthology that gathered together one poem each from one hundred of Japan's most acclaimed poets of the preceding seven centuries. Per strict Japanese poetic conventions, each poem had 31 syllables of five lines arranged in a sequence of five, seven, five, seven, and seven syllables. Although the composition of the more modern "haiku" has gained greater popularity, the 31-syllable verse is still considered the finest flowering ever of Japanese poetry. Indeed, the Japanese terms for this poetic form are both "tanka" (meaning a short-form poem in contrast to the longer form earlier adopted from China) and "waka" (meaning "our native poetry"). To best appreciate the strengths and shortcomings of Watson's treatment of the "Hyakunin Isshu" a comparison with William Porter's much earlier translation of the same anthology is worthwhile. Take, for example, poem #47. Watson has translated the Monk Ego's verse as follows: "The vines and weeds
Entangle this cottage
Alone
And no one saw
The coming
autumn"
Porter's translation is: "My little temple stands alone,
No other hut is near;
No one will pass to
stop and praise
Its vine-grown roof, I fear,
Now that autumn's here."
Both translations assume that the reader will recognize the embedded symbolism of a decrepit, deserted country house in autumn as a trope for loneliness, especially that caused by the departure of a lover or close friend. Watson's literal notes at the foot of the page do make that clearer, while Porter does not provide such context for the English-language reader. On the other hand, the simple ink illustration provided by Porter appropriately shows a lone monk standing outside his country hut, while Watson has employed a more complex Edo period (1600-1868) woodblock print. At the top of the woodblock print is the text

of poem #47, but the illustration is less evocative of the poem's mood as it shows a man, likely a samurai in indoor dress, with two geisha or serving girls within a town inn.

I won this book through Goodreads and I must say I quite enjoy it. Blue Flute's One Hundred Leaves starts with a brief introduction to Japanese poetry and explains how this volume came to be. This introduction, though sparse, is informative and prepares you to better understand Japanese poetry. Next come the actual poems. Each one is presented first in English, then we get the Japanese Kanji and a transliteration. It is interesting to see where the poems came from and I find the characters beautiful as well. Lastly, there are literary notes that help with the interpretation of the poem. These literary notes come in very handy. They provide better understanding of the circumstances surrounding the poem really help in appreciating them. Each poem has an accompanying piece of artwork that depicts its theme. They are wonderfully matched, some combinations seeming as though one was made for the other. Unfortunately, the artwork is also where we hit the first real drawback: the art is not named, the artist is not mentioned. The book is not in color, and I would like to look up full color versions. That's made very hard, though, when I don't have a name to search with. The fact that the book is in black and white in the first place is unfortunate, but I knew that it would be and I can forgive that. As for the actual poetry, I can flip to any page and find an interesting poem. Some I contemplate more than others. There are those that I like instantly, and those that take a bit longer to appeal to me. Others never really leave much of an impression. There's bound to be something for everyone though. Recommended for anyone interested in Japanese culture and fans of poetry in general.

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