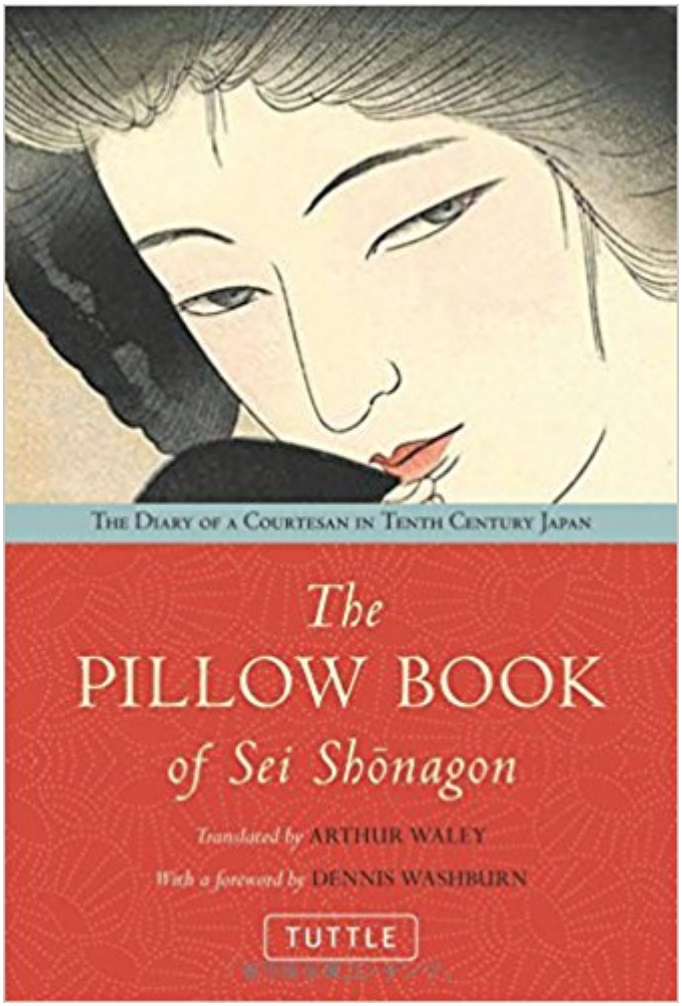
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The Pillow Book Of Sei Shonagon: The Diary Of A Courtesan In Tenth Century Japan



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Synopsis

Japan in the 10th century stood physically and culturally isolated from the rest of the world. Inside this bubble, a subtle and beautiful world was in operation, and its inhabitants were tied to the moment, having no interest in the future and disdain for the past.The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon was a product of a tenth century courtier’s experiences in the palace of Empress Teishi. A common custom of the time period, courtiers used to keep notes or a diary in a wooden pillow with a drawer. This "pillow book" reflects the confident aesthetic judgments of Shonagon and her ability to create prose that crossed into the realm of the poetic. The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon is one of the earliest examples of diary literature whose passages chronicle the events of the court calendar, the ceremonies and celebrations specific to Teishi’s court, and the vignettes that provide brilliantly drawn glimpses into the manners and foibles of the aristocracy.A contemporary of Murasaki Shikibu, the author of The Tale of Genji, this small diary brings an added dimension to Murasaki’s timeless and seminal work.Arthur Waley’s elegant translation of The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon captures the beauty of its prose and the vitality of Shonagon’s narrative voice, as well as her quirky personality traits. In a place and time where poetry was as important as knowledge and beauty was highly revered, Sei Shonagon’s private writings give the reader a charming and intimate glimpse into a time of isolated innocence and pale beauty.

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Customer Reviews

"His [Waley] is the most appealing version for the general reader." Ã¢â ¬â •Michael Dirda,

Pulitzer-prize winning columnist"In a small diary, a young courtesan of the Heian period gives her account of the Japanese courts of the day, providing perspective on a unique time in Japanese history. A contemporary of Murasaki Shikibu, the author of The Tale of Genji, Sei Sho-nagon's commentary brings an added dimension to that timeless and seminal work." Ã¢â ¬â •Svetlana's Reads and Views blog

Arthur Waley (1889-1966) taught himself Chinese and Japanese after being appointed Assistant Keeper of Oriental Prints and Manuscripts at the British Museum. He was one of the most respected translators of Asian classics into English of his time, with his translated works including The Tale of Genji, Monkey (The Journey to the West) , The Noh Plays of Japan and The Analects of Confucius.

Arthur Waley is undoubtedly a very important figure in the translation of Asian literature into English. But, as far as Sei Shonagon's Pillow Book is concerned, he should not have undertaken this translation. He has only translated a quarter of the work and has omitted all the passages he felt were dull or required too many citations to explain.This undoubtedly may be the case, but as a fan of Japanese literature and the Zuihitsu genre, and having already read Kenko's Tsurezuregusa, I think I would rather be the judge of what is dull.Had I researched this well beforehand, I would definitely have avoided this purchase. For readers who want a shortened version of the original, to just capture the essence of this book, this purchase would be excellent. For those seeking the full text, this will disappoint.

This is not the greatest selection or translation, but it does focus on the parts of the diaries that are more immediately accessible to our contemporaries and avoid copious scholarly notes. A suitable introduction to that floating world, that may give the reader an appetite for a more comprehensive, in-depth foray.

This is a bit of an odd book as it's a mashup of Shonagon's diary and translator Arthur Waley's opinions. Less Waley more Shonagon would have been better, but as an introduction of court life around this time, it has some merit. But it's quite short. "The Tale of Genji" is far better and of course far longer. Even old Japan hands struggle to get through Waley's excellent 1,000-page translation. "Genji" is worth the effort and far more valuable than Shonagon.

NOT the full diary.

I really felt robbed. This edition only covers one quarter of the original book but doesn't tell you. I was really dissaponted

Sei Shonagon's Pillow Book is one of the greatest Japanese literary works. It is a challenging work. Wrote during Heian era Japan over a 1000 years ago its author Sei Shonagon, as she was known at the imperial court, wrote numerous musings about her life, recorded events that happened at the palace and documented the everyday. While the subject matter may seem stuffy the reality is quite different. Sei Shonagon is funny and her musings transcend time. Her ideas on fashion, irritation with others at court and aspirations of romantic love are similar to the same topics found in contemporary literature.The difficult part of The pillow book is that it is not really in any order. depending on the publisher the book is usually divided in sections: Essays, journals and lists. the essays are usually her thoughts on life, her feelings and her ideas about things. The Journals recollect events at the palace and life in the Heian court. And lastly are lists. Sei Shonagon made near endless lists about numerous things. The most beautiful bridges. Noises that irritate. Considering this was wrote so long ago its a nice reminder that people, despite changes in our environment really haven't changed that much.This version is only a portion of the pillow book and as such is incomplete. While I found the cover attractive compared to other versions offered on as well as other retailers this is quite an inferior offering. To truly enjoy you should purchase another version.

I purchased a different edition of the Waley "translation" from (see my ,full review there). I passed over this version because of the idiotic subtitle that someone at the publishing house tacked onto it: "Diary of a tenth-century Courtesan" First, it is NOT a diary, although the limited selections Waley chose to translate are mostly narrative reminiscences and not representative of the entire work at all, so it may seem like a diary.But most importantly, SHONAGON WAS NOT A COURTESAN. She was lady-in-waiting for the Empress Sadaka, a member of the royal court. She most emphatically was NOT a high-priced call girl.With that title, this book should never have seen the light of day.

This is a really wonderful book. It was written by a contemporary of Murakami Shikibu [the author of the Tale of Genji], whom she actually mentions once or twice. She was a well educated lady, who could outdo male courtiers of the time in her ability to quote Chinese poetry.I want to mention what I consider a gross error in the title. She was certainly not a courtesan: she was at the Imperial court,

an entirely different situation. An upper class woman, she knew many ladies and gentlemen of the court. She is witty and her stories are often amusing.

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