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Seeds In The Heart: Japanese Literature From Earliest Times To The Late Sixteenth Century



Synopsis

Donald Keene employs his prodigious wealth of knowledge, critical insight, and narrative aplomb to guide readers through the first nine hundred years of Japanese literature—a period that not only defined the unique properties of Japanese prosody and prose but also produced some of its greatest works. Covering courtly fiction, Buddhist writings, war tales, diaries, poems, and more, *Seeds in the Heart* explores a vast and variegated treasury of writings. Detailed textual examinations of classic texts—from the *Kojiki* to *The Tale of Genji*, from *The Pillow Book* of Sei Shōnagon to Zeami's *Nō* plays—allow students, lay readers, and scholars a new understanding and enjoyment of this great literature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Even if we make allowance for the impressive multi-volume literary histories of Konishi Jin'ichi and Kato Shuichi (as the first reader [1997] has noted), Professor Keene's four-volume opus is surely now the standard English general survey of Japanese literature. *Seeds in the Heart*, the last volume to be published, covers the very earliest period -- from the *Record of Ancient Matters* (712) to the "Late Sixteenth Century," spanning some 9 centuries. That leaves 3 volumes for the next four centuries, an indication of the author's personal leanings. Of course, we all have our own preferences. Since I happen to be interested in Tale Literature (*setsuwa*), I feel that out of the book's 1265 pages devoted to the early period, *setsuwa* might have been given a bit more space

than the 41 pages between p. 568 and p. 609 (see below). Others will doubtless have a different take; so I think it will be useful to the potential buyer/reader to see what is offered in the table of contents, along with the pagination.

Preface xiii, Introduction 1

EARLY AND HEIAN LITERATURE: 1. The Kojiki 33; 2. Writings in Chinese of the Nara Period 62; 3. The Man'yōshū 85; 4. Poetry and Prose in Chinese of the Early Heian Period 181; 5. The Transition from the Man'yōshū to the Kokinshū 218; 6. The Kokinshū 245; 7. Late Heian Collections of Waka Poetry 277; 8. Late Heian Poetry and Prose in Chinese 341; 9. Heian Diaries 358; 10. The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon 412; 11. The Beginnings of Fiction 433; 12. The Tale of Genji 477; 13. Courtly Fiction After The Tale of Genji 515; 14. Mirrors of History 551; 15. Tale Literature 568.

THE MIDDLE AGES: Introduction 609; 16. Tales of Warfare 613; 17. The Age of the Shin Kokinshū 643; 18. Waka Poetry of the Kamakura and Muromachi Periods 699; 19. Buddhist Writings of the Kamakura Period 749; 20. Courtly Fiction of the Kamakura Period 789; 21. Diaries of the Kamakura Period 825; 22. Essays In Idleness 852; 23. Medieval War Tales 868; 24. Renga 921; 25. Diaries and Other Prose of the Muromachi Period 971; 26. No and Kyōgen as Literature 999; 27. Literature of the Five Mountains 1062; 28. Muromachi Fiction: Otogi-Zōshi 1092; 29. The Late Sixteenth Century; Glossary 1176; Selected List of Translations into English 1184; Index 1189.

... in short, a highly informative, useful resource which I recommend to anyone curious about early Japanese literature.

Keene has written a book that, though using an immense range of Japanese scholarly sources, is easily accessible to the interested reader. His narrative style is clear and appealing. He not only describes the Japanese classical literary canon, and quotes large chunks of it, but also evaluates the poetry and prose he treats with a careful and cultivated aesthetic sensibility. The book is a delight to read. Nothing like it exists on Japanese literature in the English language.

Konishi Jin'ichi's literary history is designed for specialists, and Kato Shuichi's similar 3-volume history does not have the depth and breadth of Keene's book with its characteristic attention to detail as Kato wrote his study mainly with Japanese readers in mind. In short, 'Seeds in The Heart' is the culmination of a lifetime's scholarship, and provides an extraordinarily moving feast for readers

Donald Keene's "Seeds in the Heart" is the first of his 4 volume History of Japanese Literature. This one covers the works from the beginnings of the said literature till the late sixteenth century (Momoyama Period). The other 3 are about literature of the Edo period ("World within walls") and the post-Meiji restoration pieces, with 1 volume for prose, another one for the rest ("Dawn to the West"). Keene's book is an authentic Tour de Force, and arguably, the best History of the Japanese

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