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Hojoki: Visions Of A Torn World (Rock Spring Collection Of Japanese Literature)



Synopsis

Japan's capital city of Kyoto was devastated by earthquake, storm, and fire in the late 12th century. Retreating from "this unkind world," the poet and Buddhist priest Kamo-no-Chomei left the capital for the forested mountains, where he eventually constructed his famous "ten-foot-square" hut. From this solitary vantage point Chomei produced *Hojoki*, an extraordinary literary work that describes all he has seen of human misery and his new life of simple chores, walks, and acts of kindness. Yet at the end he questions his own sanity and the integrity of his purpose. Has he perhaps grown too attached to his detachment?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is the most poetic book of prose I have ever seen. Kamo-no-Chomei starts the book with recollections of a series of disasters that struck Kyoto in the late twelfth century: fire, plague, famine, and more. The descriptions are personal and vivid. The near-poetic form of the writing puts intense feeling behind the words. Although Chomei wrote many years after the events, his grief and horror came through as very fresh. The second part of the book describes Chomei's gradual withdrawal into solitary monasticism. The string of successively less grand homes ends in his famous 'ten square foot hut.' He was not strictly a hermit, but seemed mostly content with a small and simple kind of life. I was especially moved by his descriptions of time spent with a small boy. It brought to mind the end of Hesse's *Glass Bead Game*. It would be easy to write a review longer than the work

itself, so let me finish with a few words about the translation. The text is readable, elegant, and unaffected, quite an achievement for a book of this sort. The historical footnotes add real insight to the text, they are not just academic filler. It won't take long to read this book, but I promise time well spent to the thinking reader.

This short book has survived for nearly 800 years, and it is easy to see why. I cannot recall ever having seen the timeless pathos of the human condition portrayed more vividly, and the translation is fabulous. I also recommend the audio version narrated by Togo Igawa (available on audible.com). It isn't the best recording in the world, but I think Igawa's performance is wonderful. The Japan of 8 centuries ago seems like yesterday - or maybe tomorrow.

I came across this small gem of a book while browsing 's Japanese history section. In exquisite prose poetry, a 12th century gentleman turned monk chronicles a series of disasters that befell Kyoto in quick succession, including earthquakes, fire, famine and more. Each time, he rebuilds a smaller house until he ultimately chooses life as a hermit in a tiny, rude hut in the mountains. His stark and plaintive voice reaches us clearly and with great immediacy, remarkable given the divide of many centuries and a very different time and place. SO glad this treasure has been preserved and that this wonderful translation is available today!

The writing, story, and poetry are great! The translation appears to be very good with alternate interpretations where appropriate. Unfortunately, this is a true paperback, unlike many of the Japanese good quality paperbacks I am used to in this genre of literature. Poor paper stock and printing means it will not last! Also, the illustrations, while good and authentic, suffer from the same problem. I will read it again sometime and then put it away and watch for a really good edition. The seller is excellent and sent it earlier than anticipated. I would buy from them again.

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