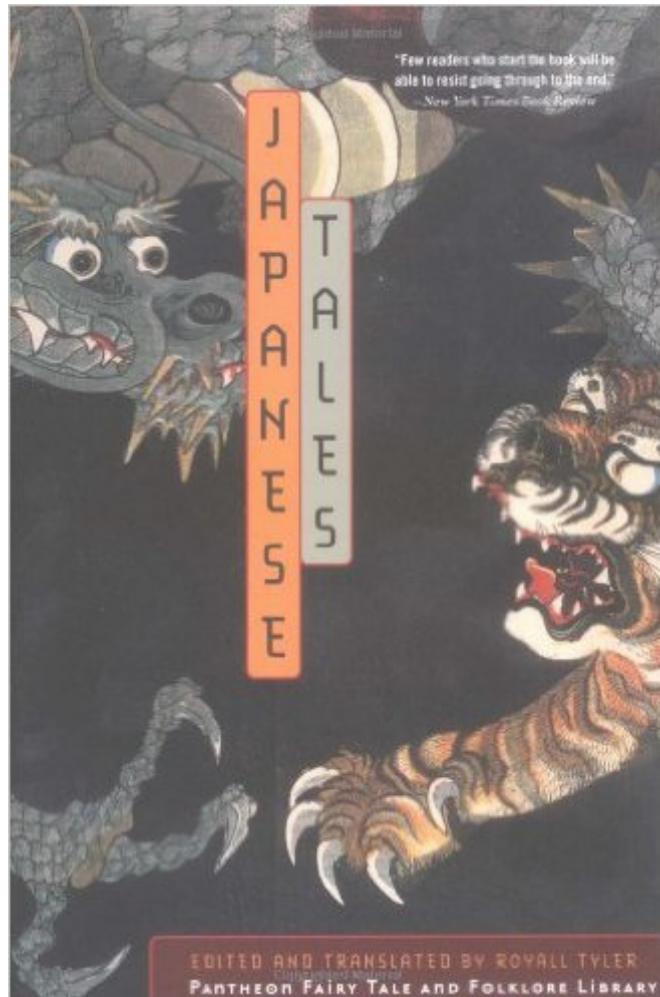


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Japanese Tales (The Pantheon Fairy Tale And Folklore Library)



Synopsis

Here are two hundred and twenty dazzling tales from medieval Japan, tales that welcome us into a fabulous, faraway world populated by saints and scoundrels, ghosts and magical healers, and a vast assortment of deities and demons. Stories of miracles, visions of hell, jokes, fables, and legends, these tales reflect the Japanese worldview during a classic period in Japanese civilization. Masterfully edited and translated by the acclaimed translator of *The Tale of Genji*, these stories ably balance the lyrical and the dramatic, the ribald and the profound, offering a window into a long-vanished though perennially fascinating culture. Part of the Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For my money, everything that Royall Tyler touches turns to gold, and that is as true of "Japanese Tales" as it is of his more recent translation of "The Tale of Genji." In "Japanese Tales," he has assembled and artfully translated 220 stories published between the ninth and fourteenth centuries in Japan, stories that are often difficult if not impossible to find elsewhere in English. For the most part, these are not the extended stories that we tend to call fairy tales in the West, and the book is not designed to provide reading material for children. What it does provide is a very solid sampling of the types of tales the early Japanese used to provide moral guidance, explain how things came to be, and record historical moments. And if that were not enough, Tyler's outstanding introduction, 35 pages in length, provides a lucid understanding of life in Heian-period Japan and beliefs about

everything from serpents and mountains to deities and demons. This is simply a book you cannot afford to miss if your interests in Japan are those of either an enthusiastic amateur or a focused scholar.

Overall, the book a very good general introduction to Japanese folk tales and mythology. The book is aimed at giving just enough information to orient the reader in Japanese culture, and then letting the tales do the rest of the telling. This is both good and bad. It puts the various stories deservedly at the center, but it also leaves the background very undeveloped for use in research. People looking for a good reference book might want to search elsewhere. People looking for some really entertaining stories will find them here.

Royall Tyler is one of the best, if not the best translator working to translate classic works of Japanese literature into English. This collection of short tales provides a wide sampling of many stories told and retold in Japan for many centuries, and range from the humorous to the romantic to the bizarre. Some are very short while others are much longer. Each of the originals had a simple style derived from the oral traditions that preserved them. Some of them constitute the oldest folk tales ever written down, dating to collections made by gentlemen scholars of the 12th century who wrote down tales they heard for their own entertainment. But the collection pulls in tales from many different eras of Japanese history and many different aspects of Japanese culture, providing a truly diverse and entertaining set of stories for the reader who wishes either to enjoy a good tale, or for the serious student of Japan who wants to understand the culture more deeply. Royall Tyler also made the definition translation of The Tale of Genji, the 11th century classic novel that is the crown jewel of Japanese traditional literature and one of the world's great novels. Genji, running approximately one thousand pages in English translation, written in the elegant language of the Imperial Court, is the very opposite of these short, vernacular folktales and stories. That Tyler can do justice to both sorts of work is a rare and admirable quality in a translator. Serious students of classical Japan will find that the tales included in Japanese Tales that date to the same era as Genji offer a valuable alternate perspective to life and society during this time period. Any library that carries The Tale of Genji on its shelves ought to carry Japanese Tales. The two works serve as bookends to the opposite ends of the Japanese traditional literary spectrum.

"Japanese Tales" is probably the best collection of Japanese folk tales available. Every conceivable piece of folk lore is packed in this book, categorized and deftly translated into English. A host of

monsters, ghosts, demons and heroes are packed in tightly, their stories waiting to be discovered. Of course, with 220 stories in one volume, some of the stories are very short indeed, lasting a half-page at best. Many are just the right size for a child's bedtime story. Some of the stories are longer, but I don't think any of them run over 2 or 3 pages. Some stories have a moral, or tell a cautionary tale, while many are merely there to entertain, frighten or amuse. As interesting as the book itself is the author's introduction, a 35 page quick course on Japanese folklore and mythology. In it, he outlines some fundamental themes as well as showing the logic behind his categorizing of the stories. An excellent book, belong on the shelf of anyone with an interest in Japanese folklore.

"Japanese Tales" boasts an incredibly rich assortment of old Japanese stories, most either from or about the Heian period, an early classical golden age of Japanese culture and literature. The stories themselves evoke a great number of moods, and cover topics that run the gamut from vulgar (even the Japanese aristocrats of a thousand years ago enjoyed fart jokes) to austere. Most interesting is the incredible juxtaposition and intertwining of the spirit world with the "real" world. Asking the people of this classical age whether they believed in demons, fox spirits, bodhisattva, and the like would be about as ridiculous as asking people of the modern age whether they believed in puppies and bunnies. It's not a question of belief--these creatures and deities simply "exist". The translations are excellent, and it is an incredible credit to Royall Tyler that these stories--set in a time a millennium removed and half a world away from the reader--are so accessible and easy to read. Tyler effectively groups the stories by topic, giving the reader a bit of structure to the wonderfully diverse range of tales. The introduction is packed full of information, but perhaps my only (small) complaint is that with the large number of place names mentioned it would have been nice if a map had been included. Overall though, this collection of tales is an excellent addition to the canon of English translations of ancient Japanese literature and provides great insight to the mind and world of Heian Japan. "Japanese Tales" should be a must-read for all people interested in the folklore and literature of Japan.

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