



The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon: The Diary of a Courtesan in Tenth Century Japan

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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.

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.

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