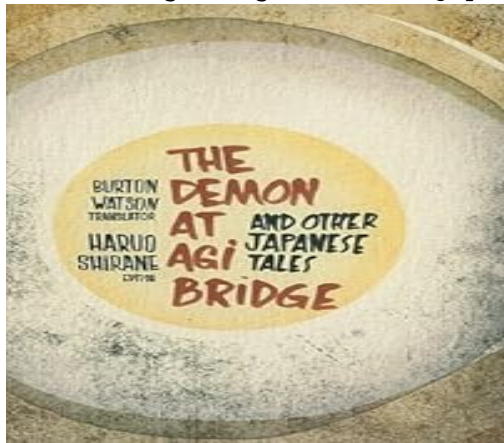


## The Demon at Agi Bridge and Other Japanese Tales (Translations from the Asian Classics) By Haruo Shirane

Burton Watson and Haruo Shirane renowned translators and scholars introduce English-speaking readers to the vivid tradition of early and medieval Japanese anecdotal ( setsuwa ) literature. Taken from seven major anthologies of anecdotal literature compiled between the ninth and thirteenth centuries these dramatic and often amusing stories open a major window onto the foundations of Japanese culture. Recounting the exploits of warriors farmers priests and aristocrats and concerning topics as varied as poetry violence power and sex these tales reveal the creative origins of a range of literary and dramatic genres from court tales and travel accounts to no drama and Kabuki. Watson's impeccable translations relay the wit mystery and Buddhist sensibility of these protean works while Shirane's sophisticated analysis illuminates the meaning and context of their compact stories. The Demon at Agi Bridge and Other Japanese Tales (Translations from the Asian Classics)



The historical details behind the stories were very well researched but the fairy tales themselves were rather uninteresting. The Demon at Agi Bridge and Other Japanese Tales includes thirty-eight moving and entertaining setsuwa from seven major anthologies compiled between the ninth to thirteenth centuries selected by Shirane and translated by Burton Watson. With a brief but informative introductions to the collection and each section this book provides cultural and literary context for the reader unfamiliar with the history of Japanese literature. Of particular interest to me Shirane has included several stories that feature prominent female characters such as the woman in The Woman of Pleasure at Eguchi and the wife in How a Poor Man Left His Wife and She Became the Wife of the Governor of Settsu and several stories revolving around poetry including the strong ending piece The Deep Meaning Underlying the Way of Japanese Poetry. Aside from that my only real complaint would that all the introductions while interesting can be a bit disruptive to the reading experience when some sections only have one or two stories. In The Demon at Agi Bridge the rhythm and style feels familiar to translated Japanese literature I've read before; however I must commend Watson in particular for his ability to make the setsuwa accessible to the English-speaking reader without padding the sentences and stories to fit English grammar. These orally narrated and written tales drew on both local folk tradition and continental sources, Out of thousands of setsuwa Shirane has selected thirty-eight of the most powerful and influential each of which is briefly introduced: Capped by an extensive bibliography this collection fully immerses the reader in the thrilling world of secular and religious tales, As I read the book mostly for the stories I didn't really enjoy it so much. 160 Pretty accurate translations of the widely temporally spaced source material: A lot of emphasis on Buddhist tales and less on the spirits I'd hoped for: 160 When I came across this book on Amazon it had me at : The Demon at Agi Bridge a fantastic story and Haruo Shirane a fantastic scholar: Being familiar with and an admirer of Shirane's writings on Basho and haiku I could think of no better person to guide me through setsuwa Japanese anecdotal literature. The setsuwa in this book cover tales from India China and Japan (from Buddhist and secular veins) and features characters from all social classes and professions, One of my biggest complaints about Royall Tyler's Japanese Tales has been the exclusion of India and China setsuwa. Tyler's intentions

are reasonable but I feel he failed to acknowledge how these tales have influence and are a part of Japan's setsuwa tradition, Each of setsuwa carries its weight and adds to the richness of the collection. With short stories it's easy to read one in-between chores but this book as a whole drags the reader back again and again until the end, While the collection does contain a wide variety of characters there is a heavy emphasis on Buddhist tales, Given the origins of the stories it's not surprising but any reader looking for an abundance of secular stories may be a little disappointed. Watson's crisp and polished translations appeal to the sparse but playful nature of many of the setsuwa. When reading I feel he has stayed true to the original and actually given me the story rather than just a translation. Furthermore not only has Watson taken care with the prose but with the poetry, In the five stories that include waka each poem feels like a poem, A number of translators I've encountered have had a deficiency in one or the other so it was a pleasant surprise when both the poetry and prose read smoothly: The Demon at Agi Bridge is worth the investment for anyone who enjoys Japanese literature: Since it comes from an academic press the price feels a bit steep for a short book but the clean translations and extensive bibliography in the back make it worthwhile. 3.5 stars. 160.