



The Life of an Amorous Woman and Other Writings

Saikaku Ihara , Ivan Morris (Translator)

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[From back.]

One of the great writers of Japan, Ihara Saikaku (1623-93) wrote of the lowest class in the Tokugawa world — the townsmen who were rising in wealth and power but not in official status. The title story in this collection of 12 works, told by an aging beauty whose highly erotic nature is her constant undoing, ranges over all of 17th-century Japanese life. The narrator is successively wife, court lady, courtesan, priest's concubine, mistress of a feudal lord and a streetwalker. Ivan Morris, chairman of the Department of East Asian Studies and Cultures of Columbia University has done a brilliant translation, an introduction, extensive notes, bibliography and two essays on social customs of the period. Illustrated.

"The fine style of the writing and the clear outlines of illustrations which are not even remotely 'suggestive' give Saikaku's pornography grace and wit and charity." — James Kirkup

The Life of an Amorous Woman and Other Writings Details

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From Reader Review *The Life of an Amorous Woman* and Other Writings for online ebook

Issendai says

This version is NOT the complete novel. It's a selection of chapters. I don't think the entire novel has been translated and made available in one book.

The Life of an Amorous Woman is a picaresque tour of the seamier side of Japan. The unnamed heroine begins as a daughter of the aristocracy, a palace attendant whose hot blood draws her into an illicit affair with another attendant when she's only 11 or 12 years old. That goes south in the worst way, and the heroine barely escapes with her life. She has a few more adventures until her family's fortunes decline, and her parents sell her to the pleasure quarters as a tayuu, a top-ranked courtesan.

She debuts at 16 (in Japanese years--15 or younger by Western count) and for a little while, her stunning beauty keeps her at the top of the heap. Tayuu were supposed to be willful and haughty, but the heroine is *too* willful and haughty, and eventually she's demoted to the second rank. Then the third. Then the fourth. By the end of her ten-year term she's the lowest level of prostitute a woman can be without being a common streetwalker... and then her term of service ends, she has to shift for herself, and her adventures really begin.

If this were a modern book, it would be sordid and miserable and weepy, but it's actually rather... cheerful. It's more like *Fanny Hill* without the sex. (If you're looking for erotica, move on. Nothing to see here.) "Oh well, THAT was lousy," the heroine seems to say after each misadventure, then she picks herself up and skips on to the next self-made disaster. I found myself rooting for her, even when she knew that what she wanted to do next was a terrible idea. She has too much fun getting into trouble. It would be heartless to want her to stop.

Steebu says

A classic piece of literature by one of the titans--along with Chikamatsu Monzaemon and Matsuo Basho--of the explosion of popular fiction in the Genroku period (1688-1704). Morris's translation is pretty good too.

J. Watson (aka umberto) says

Acknowledged also as moral tales, this 4-part paperback translated by Ivan Morris is interesting and literary-oriented as notified by a line of capital letters above its title, that is, UNESCO COLLECTION OF REPRESENTATIVE LITERARY WORKS. Therefore, I thought this book was not a plain one since we'd read its collection of 12 works (?) written by one of the great fiction writers of Japan on the lowest class in the Tokugawa period (back cover). In fact, this paperback title at the cover came from Part 2 as we can see below:

1. Five Women Who Chose Love (3 stories)
2. The Life of an Amorous Woman (14 stories)
3. The Eternal Storehouse of Japan (3 stories)

4. Reckonings That Carry Men Through the World (5 stories)

As for Part 1, there is another translated version entitled "Five Women Who Loved Love" (de Bary, 1956) in which there are 5 books (chapters) as follows:

1. The Story of Seijuro in Himeji
2. The Barrelnaker Brimful of Love
3. What the Seasons Brought the Almanac Maker
4. The Greengrocer's Daughter with a Bundle of Love
5. Gengobei, the Mountain of Love

Therefore, compared these 5 stories to the 3 stories in Part 1 'Five Women Who Chose Love' above, the book by de Bary reveals Morris has not included Chapters 2 (The Barrelnaker Brimful of Love) and 4 (The Greengrocer's Daughter with a Bundle of Love) in his book.

Impressed by Saikaku's handwriting being the final two pages of the first edition of *THE LIFE* as well as its first-edition cover and painting of himself by his colleague (pp. ii, vi, 16), I thought reading his works could possibly be worthwhile. Moreover, it was copyright in 1963 by Unesco and first published as New Direction Paperback No. 270 in 1969, the present volume denotes its sixteenth printing (p. iv). When I read the translator's preface, I was stunned and amazed because he wrote it in Tokyo in 1958 when I was in Grade 4!

One of the advantages in reading this book is that we readers can read its introduction by, presumably, Ivan Morris in which he's introduced his readers with the following relevant key topics: The Period, The Author, The Work, The Style, The Illustrations, Saikaku's Place In Literature (pp. 3-51), thus, its readers should be happy and contented with his scholarly consideration because we don't have to find out more from other sources such as related references, texts, websites, etc. In other words, we as general readers could have sufficient knowledge and understanding related to Saikaku and some essential backgrounds. As for those aiming at their advanced studies, it is all right for them to pursue more in terms of its original Japanese sources.

Another is that, for those translators who know Japanese, they can read and make comparisons according to the numbering system being on the right (next to the end of words/sentences on that page) or on the left (before the paragraphs or words/sentences on that page). For example, on page 55 there're numbers 1, 2, 3 ... 10 on the right so I think the translator's translated this paragraph based on Saikaku's text from sentences 1-10 respectively. By the way, I think some interested readers might find its 127-page appendices useful and highly-academic as we again can see from its three titles: Sources (4 subtitles based on the four stories), Money in Saikoku's Time, The Hierarchy of Courtesans.

I liked this paragraph:

"Here also was a group of fellow-voyagers, each with the luggage that betokened his business -- a pilgrim bound for the Grand Shrine of Ise, ..., a pedlar of mosquito curtains from Tamba, ..." "Ten men -- ten provinces" is a true saying, and travel by ferryboat is indeed fraught with interest." (p. 68)

Because this part informs me there're mosquitoes rampant in 17 century Japan (and I'm wondering now if in some places there're less or none). I also learned from reading somewhere they had mosquito netting too.

And this part:

"Indeed, the hardships that young ladies have to endure these days are quite beyond our imagination! If only their consorts would forbear and look with indulgence at their flaws, women might reconcile themselves, realizing that in this Floating World we cannot have everything as we wish. ..." (p. 173)

Since it poses a good warning especially in that we live in this 'Floating World' in which everything,

everyone keeps changing eternally as a matter of course, therefore, it's wise to be aware of the ultimate truth, that is, birth, age, pain and death.

I think there're innumerable parts/discourses worth reflecting and adapting in our daily lives, however, we need to keep in mind this book by Saikaku written to share his witticisms, sense of humor, perception of human flaws, etc. as he visualized and wanted his posterity to know and not to repeat such worldly fallacies once again. One of the reasons is that we have relatively limited short periods as human beings living on earth, therefore, it's wise to do our best for the benefits of families, friends, colleagues and humankind.

As for the last two titles, that is, *The Eternal Storehouse of Japan* (3 stories), *Reckonings that Carry Men through the World* (5 stories), I think nearly all of them are non-amorous tales. I don't know why so I'd leave them for my GR friends to read them and share their viewpoints. Finally, when I have time I'd compare this collection of tales to the five-tale paperback translated by Wm. Theodore de Bary (Tuttle, 1956) to see their similarities as well as differences. That could expose some literary constraints to me because I don't know Japanese and I wonder who could be the judge and if he/she would correct my misunderstanding in which of course I'd definitely appreciate and am grateful.

I think this helps my GR friends to try reading Saikaku, find both copies, read any one first and enjoy!

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S. says

barely remember this, but it was good.

the "amorous woman" (or what we scientific moderns would just call a nympho), finds herself degenerating further and further in society due to her insatiable lust. but, if I recall correctly, there were always moments of redemption.

since it was read years ago, I won't goodreads update it.

Piyali Mukherjee says

A greatly entertaining story about the hidden (and not-so-hidden) sexual cultures of Tokugawa Japan. Towards the end, the protagonist becomes a little melancholy. Otherwise, the story is carried through the narrator's rather upbeat and somewhat mischievous tone throughout.

Robert Sheppard says

LIBERTINES AND SEXUAL EXCESS IN WORLD LITERATURE--SAIKAKU'S "LIFE OF A

SENSUOUS WOMAN," "THE LOVE POEMS OF THE SIXTH DALAI LAMA," "DON JUAN," THE
EARL OF ROCHESTER AND THE MARQUIS DE SADE-----FROM THE WORLD LITERATURE
FORUM RECOMMENDED CLASSICS AND MASTERPIECES SERIES VIA GOODREADS—
ROBERT SHEPPARD, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The word 'libertine' entered the English language not as a sexual term but as a by-product of the wars of religion between Protestants and Catholics in Sixteenth Century Europe, being the name of a French Protestant sect that believed individuals should be guided in religious matters "by their own lights"---- meaning reason, direct divine inspiration, spiritual intuition, or personal free interpretation of holy scripture, rather than by the clergy or traditional dogma. Later the word became synonymous with freethinkers whose behaviour, foremost sexual, is unconstrained by social norms or ethical considerations, even to the point of "outraging public morality." Nevertheless the history of the term underlines its concern not simply with sexual deviance or excess, but with the ideal of freedom and self-determination, even against the pressure of public hostility or condemnation. It also raises the deeper question of how absolute personal freedom may be once released from political tyranny, religious dogma or blind social prejudice, and when liberty may degenerate into a license heedless of the needs, benefits or rights of others.

Not only in Europe but across Asia to Japan from the Sixteenth to Eighteenth centuries did sexual and social libertinage flourish, a generalized cultural drive towards breaking out of the bondage of traditional authority of all kinds, driven by the global rise of urban culture and the merchant class. Nevertheless, especially in those early days freedom was more a luxury than a right, and characteristically any true measure of individual freedom was enjoyed almost exclusively by the aristocracy or merchant elite, rather than the majority of the population constituting the lower classes, and the libertine was most likely a freethinking wealthy aristocratic male in an Asian or European city.

THE "FLOATING WORLD" OF IHARA SAIKAKU AND "THE LIFE OF A SENSUOUS WOMAN"

Ihara Saikaku (1642-1693) the author of "The Life of a Sensuous Woman" was a Japanese poet and creator of the "floating world" genre of Japanese prose (*ukiyo-z?shi*). Later in life he began writing racy accounts of the financial, amorous and erotic affairs of the merchant class and the demimonde. These stories catered to the whims of the newly prominent merchant class alongside the declassé aristocracy, whose tastes in entertainment leaned toward the arts and pleasure districts of the rising commercial cities such as his native Osaka.

"The Life of a Sensuous Woman," an atypically female narrative as a sequel to his prior "Life of a Sensuous Man," is an aging woman's extended confession to two young men in which she describes her various experiences, beginning from her early childhood as the daughter of a former aristocrat in the capital Kyoto, her life as an attendant in the Imperial Palace, then through a descending order of fates as a courtesan, geisha, teacher of courtly manners and calligraphy to young ladies, hairdresser, go-between for marital engagements, and finally as a common streetwalker, losing her beauty in aging into an unattractive old woman. It structurally echoes the genre of the Buddhist confessional narrative in which someone who becomes a priest or a nun recounts the sins of their past and their moment of crisis leading to spiritual awakening. However, in this case the old woman in her narrative is implicitly initiating her young visitors into the secrets of the "Way of Love," describing a life of vitality and sexual desire of which she does not essentially repent. En passant, she satirically reveals the underside of the lives of ministers and lords, powerful samurai, wealthy priests, and upper-class merchants. Often compared to Cleland's "Fanny Hill" the

narrative also celebrates the female protagonist's pluck and resourcefulness in adversity, reminiscent of Becky Thatcher in Thackeray's "Vanity Fair." Only at the end of her life's narrative, in sight of the five-hundred statues of bodhisattvas arrayed in a Buddhist temple does she have a vision of the five hundred men with whom she has had sexual relations arrayed in their place, and is moved to commit the end of her life to spiritual enlightenment, not essentially renouncing, however, the fated vitality of her former life's path which had led her there, observing with a cautionary smile of spiritual melancholy to her departing two young initiates:

"A beautiful woman, many ages have agreed, is an axe that cuts down a man's life. No one, of course, escapes death. The invisible blossoms of the mind finally fall and scatter; the soul leaves; and the body is fed like kindling into a crematorium fire in the night. But for the blossoms to fall all too soon in a morning storm---ah, how foolish are the men who die young of overindulgence in the way of sensuous love. Yet there is no end of them."

THE SHORT EROTIC LIFE OF TSANGYANG GYATSO, THE SIXTH DALAI LAMA

In the Sixteenth Century, the Mongol Khan proclaimed the head of the leading Buddhist sect the "Dalai Lama," who enjoyed considerable secular power alongside the spiritual authority of his office. When one Dalai Lama died, a search was undertaken to find his newly reborn reincarnation, who would be raised in the Potala Palace by a Regent until coming of age to reign again as the Dalai Lama. After the the Fifth Dalai Lama died in 1682, Tsangyang Gyatso (1683-1706) was proclaimed the new Dalai Lama, but the unscrupulous Regent schemed to keep him effectively under house arrest in the Palace, retaining all power to himself. In this unfortunate condition, deprived of his destiny, the Sixth Dalai Lama dedicated himself to three passions: the study of Buddhist Scriptures, the erotic worship of beautiful women, and the penning of love poems to his beautiful lovers. As he was a "Living Buddha" it was considered by the girls and their families a great and divine honor to be sexually united with the Dalai Lama, and when a girl residing in the elite Shol district of Lhasa below the Palace became a lover her family painted their house yellow, exalted beyond the common white, celebrating the act of divine favour. Gyatso was so successful in "painting the town red," although in this case yellow, that a scandal ultimately ensued in which the outside power of the Mongol Khan in the north united with the conservative priests to depose, exile and ultimately assassinate him, claiming that the son of the Mongol Khan was the true Sixth Dalai Lama in a coup d'etat. Nonetheless, the Sixth Dalai Lama left behind a rich body of erotic poetry dedicated to his lovers:

Residing at the Potala
I am Rigdzin Tsangyang Gyatso
But in the back alleys of Shol-town
I am rake and stud.

Lover met by chance on the road,
Girl with delicious-smelling body--
Like picking up a small white turquoise
Only to toss it away again.

If I could meditate as deeply
On the sacred texts as I do

On you, I would clearly be
Enlightened in this lifetime!

THE UNPURITAN LIFE AND VERSE OF JOHN WILMOT, EARL OF ROCHESTER

The Earl of Rochester (1647-1680) was unquestionably one of the "bad boys" of English letters. Born during the dour administration of Oliver Cromwell's Puritan Commonwealth, he came of age just in time for the Resotation of monarchy, sexual excess and extravagance, and his attitude in word and deed as to libertine sexuality was "cavalier" in the extreme. As his father had engineered Charles II's escape from England he became a favorite in the Restoration court, yet cavalierly endangered his status with such acts boxing the ears of high lords in the King's presence and delivering caustic diatribes against the king to his face in fits of anger, accusing the king of being more addicted to sexual excess than the good of the kingdom. Nonetheless, Charles II took a protective interest in Rochester, continuously bailing him out of scrapes and predicaments.

As related in Samuel Pepys' famous Diary, Rochester, who was poor, contrived to forcibly abduct the heiress of one of England's wealthiest families, who despite the King's encouragement, refused to consent to her marriage to Rochester because of his poverty and profligacy. The daughter nonetheless chose to elope with him and they were married. He was a notorious rake, had innumerable mistresses, including the finest actresses of London, and shared some mistresses with the king.

After a brawl between his gang of friends and the police in which a man died, Rochester in disgrace was forced into hiding, disguising himself as a "quack doctor" treating women for "barrenness" or infertility and other gynocological complaints, under the name of "Dr. Bendo." Rochester in this reputedly attained great success in inducing pregnancy in infertile wives, largely utilizing his own sperm, introduced willingly or surreptitiously. To overcome occasional hesitancy of the women's mothers or husbands to allow a male doctor to conduct the gynocological examination or treatment, Rochester dressed in drag to impersonate a fictive "Mrs. Bendo," the putative doctor's wife, who would conduct the examination and administer the treatment in lieu of the considerate doctor himself.

Rochester died at the age of 33 from a combination of syphilis, gonorrhea and alcoholic liver failure, reportedly wearing a false nose in lieu of the one lost to the disease. After his death several Puritan religious societies circulated an account of his deathbed repentance of his libertinage, the authenticity of which remains uncertain. Nevertheless, many of his forceful poems remain anthologized classics, such as "The Imperfect Enjoyment:"

Naked she lay, clasped in my longing arms,
I filled with love, and she all over charms;
Both equally inspired with eager fire,
Melting through kindness, flaming in desire.
With arms, legs, lips close clinging to embrace,
She clips me to her breast, and sucks me to her face;
Her nimble tongue, Love's lesser lightning, played
Within my mouth, and to my thoughts conveyed
Swift orders that I should prepare to throw

The all-dissolving thunderbolt below.
My fluttering soul, sprung with the pointed kiss,
Hangs hovering o'er her balmy brinks of bliss,
But whilst her busy hand would guide that part
Which should convey my soul up to her heart,
In liquid raptures I dissolve all o'er.
Melt into sperm, and spend at every pore.
A touch from any part of her had done 't:
Her hand, her foot, her very look's a cunt.
Smiling, she chides in a kind murmuring noise,
And from her body wipes the clammy joys,
When, with a thousand kisses wandering o'er
My panting bosom, "Is there then no more?"
She cries. "All this to love and rapture's due"
Must we not pay a debt to pleasure too?"

LORD BYRON'S IMMORTAL CLASSIC "DON JUAN"

George Gordon, Lord Byron was celebrated in life for aristocratic excesses, including huge debts, numerous love affairs, a scandalous incestuous liaison with his half-sister, and self-imposed exile and European wanderings, culminating with his sponsorship of a military campaign to win Greek freedom from Ottoman oppression in which he fought and died. He was one of the greatest literary celebrities of Europe, and along with Wordsworth, Keats, Leopardi and Shelley one of the founding patriarchs of the Romantic Movement in Europe. He was regarded by his contemporaries as "mad, bad and dangerous to know." He became the exemplar of what came to be known as "The Byronic Hero" presented an idealised, but flawed character whose attributes include: great talent; great passion; a distaste for society and social institutions; a lack of respect for rank and privilege (although possessing both); being thwarted in love by social constraint or death; rebellion; exile; an unsavory secret past; arrogance; overconfidence or lack of foresight; and, ultimately, a self-destructive manner.

His classic epic of erotic love is "Don Juan" which ironically and satirically re-casts the famous serial lover whose name itself has become synonymous in the English language with libertinage, rather as a weak man who cannot resist the uncontrollable sexual aggressions of women, than as a seducer himself. The epic follows the hero Don Juan from scandal-caused exile from his home in Spain through an unending series of amorous adventures including his rescue from shipwreck and seduction by the dark and beautiful island girl Haidée. The love of Haidée and Juan is however ill-fated as her father Lambro, a pirate master, discovers their affair, seizes and sells Juan as a slave to Constantinople, and Haidée dies of a broken heart with their unborn child within her womb. In Constantinople Don Juan is purchased by a black eunuch at the behest of the Sultana, who desires to make love to him. To smuggle him into the Sultan's Palace the eunuch forces Juan to dress as a woman, threatening him with castration if he refuses. Brought to the Sultana, he however refuses to make servile love to her, remembering his love for Haidée. Discovered by the Sultan, the Sultan himself is attracted to Juan dressed as a woman, who regrets the "she" is not a Muslim. Don Juan escapes, however, then joins the Russian armies attacking the Ottomans where he becomes a hero. He adopts a ten-year old Muslim girl orphaned in the war, Leila. Taken to the Russian Imperial Court as a war hero, he is seduced by the Empress, Catherine the Great, who becomes his lover until she sends him to England on a mission. There he is seduced by numerous lecherous Englishwomen until he begins to fall in love with Aurora, who reminds him of his lost love Haidée. We do not know how the epic ends, as Byron died before

completing it.

THE ULTIMATE LIBERTINE BAD BOY, THE MARQUIS DE SADE

The Marquis de Sade, belying his reputation, was too much of a masochist for his own good. Time and again he proved himself too eager to be caught and punished for his sexual outrages, and the French government, whether of the ancien regime or of Revolutionary France was all too happy to oblige him. The errant aristocrat spent most of his life in jail writing furiously, or when at liberty, conceiving escapades of excess that would send him promptly back to incarceration. He served as an officer in the Seven Years' War, then married, then committed outrages in whorehouses or with abducted females and males, including flagellation, sodomy, and poisoning prostitutes that landed him in the Bastille. Liberated by the Revolution, he quickly offended again, at the cost of imprisonment and having all his property confiscated, leaving him penniless at the end of his life.

A philosopher of liberty in addition to a sexual libertine, in his classic "Philosophy in the Boudoir" he advocated the absolute freedom of the individual, even at the expense of the injury of others, claiming that such absolute liberty would strengthen and catalyze the growth of all individuals in creative equilibrium and produce much more good than ethical repression of even deviant expressions of freedom. "Nothing is a crime" he declared defiantly.... "Laws are not made for the individual but for the generality, which is what puts them in perpetual conflict with self-interest, given that personal self-interest is always in conflict with society. Laws that are good for society are bad for the individuals that compose it, because for every time they actually protect or defend an individual, they obstruct or ensnare him for three-quarters of his life." He denied the bonds between children and parents, husband and wife, and advocated the reign of an absolute liberty in their stead. He called on the people to deny and overthrow both the state and the church: "The only gods should be courage and liberty" he declared. He dauntlessly championed the first of the three ideals of the French Revolution---liberty, taken absolutely, while ignoring the second two of the triumverate, equality and fraternity. Ironically, his philosophy is often more entertaining than his pornography. His pornographic classics such as "120 Days of Sodom" often become arid and mechanical exercises in carnal repetition which soon lose interest after the initial prurience and shock value are dissipated.

SPIRITUS MUNDI, SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL LIBERTY

Sexuality and sexual liberty have a strong presence in my own work, the recently published contemporary epic *Spiritus Mundi*. I grew up as a writer very much in the tradition of D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce, both of whom embraced the central importance of sexuality in human consciousness and existence in their works and worldviews. We are all living intellectually in the wake of the Freudian and Darwinian revolutions, as well the "sexual revolution" in popular culture since the Sixties. Our sexuality is the life blood of our lives and of our consciousness, not to mention our unconsciousness, collective or individual. In my view of sexuality, common with D. H. Lawrence and C.G. Jung, sexuality is intimately connected with the spiritual dimension of human existence as well---sexuality can lead to dehumanization and animalization of our beings but alternatively sexuality can also lead just as naturally in the direction of the humanization of our natural and biological impulses, their civilizing, and even to their spiritualization, as Jung observed.

In regard to sexuality I take as a starting point that it is a natural part of our lives and should be positively embraced in all dimensions of our existence---that it is a necessary and wholesome part of our individual and collective mental health. That is not to deny that it has its chaotic, selfish, destructive and socially disruptive side as well, which society has difficulty managing, which it always must, but it is important that it should not be irrationally repressed in the individual or the society at large, as Freud and Jung have taught us.

The sexual lives of the characters in fiction are a vital dimension of their beings, and a vital dimension for judging the viability, mental health and value of the worldviews of their authors. Hollywood and Washington have long judged their projects asking the question “Will it play in Peoria?” and writers similarly have tested their worldviews by asking “Will it play between the sheets?” In *Spiritus Mundi* sexuality is linked to the spiritual lives of the characters, but also to the “life force” which drives human evolution and the collective unconscious of the human race, necessary to its survival. The progressive humanization, civilization and spiritualization of our most primal sexual animal impulses in the forms of love, family, community and communion is the story of the progress of our individual lives in microcosm and of our civilizational lives in macrocosm.

For a fuller discussion of the concept of World Literature you are invited to look into the extended discussion in the new book *Spiritus Mundi*, by Robert Sheppard, one of the principal themes of which is the emergence and evolution of World Literature:

For Discussions on World Literature and n Literary Criticism in *Spiritus Mundi*:
<http://worldliteratureandliterarycrit...>

Robert Sheppard

Editor-in-Chief

World Literature Forum

Author, *Spiritus Mundi* Novel

Author's Blog: <http://robertalexandersheppard.wordpress...>

Spiritus Mundi on Goodreads: <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/17...>

Spiritus Mundi on Amazon, Book I: <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00CIGJFGO>

Spiritus Mundi, Book II: The Romance <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00CGM8BZG>

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James Violand says

This selection of Saikaku's prose consists of six stories, the longest of which is the title of the book. It brutally depicts the life of a woman ruined by a sensuous life and, but for the subject of all consuming lust, offers a counter argument to our youth against the modern world's encouragement of hedonism. Saikaku's

talent does not approach Murasaki Shikibu in her Tale of Genji, but then again, it deals with the merchant class and not heroic nobility. His other stories are well crafted and entertaining.

Julia says

Reading this magnificent (albeit mildly wearisome and befuddling beyond comparison) collection of prose is an adventure in and of itself. A corroboration of the birth of prose writing in Japan, Ihara's nearly four hundred-year-old stories lack structure as defined by today's standards-a facet that brings each chapter to life. In addition, unlike it's non-prose literary counterparts of that time, "The Life of an Amorous Woman..." touches upon social life and that of the individual within it. It is a direct, unbarred threshold to the abstract workings of a more primordial other's mind. Between it's age and preceding nature, a unique understanding ties present to past. It's all very human. Truly wonderful.

Olga says

well, this is not actually "the life of an amorous woman" but rather a compilation of stories by ihara saikaku - something I did not realize when picking up the book. maybe because of being condensed it translation, the stories very quick-paced, all the main ideas are still there though. I would not describe the stories (at least in this edition) as pornographic - sexual scenes occur frequently as part of the plot, but the descriptions are rather short and mild, the writer here is far more concerned with life, society and morals. the introduction and the annotations do a good job at giving some context for understanding, but of course the more knowledge you have on the topic before you start reading, the better. the stories have quite clever plotlines and read well, although personally, I found the characters not always quite believable, especially in the first quarter of the book.

Katya says

Subtle!

Christopher Howard says

I haven't been sleeping much and so various motor- as well as other- skills of mine aren't great right now, so I first read this title as The Life of an Enormous Woman, and now I know what the title of my first novel will be.
