



Awesome Nightfall: The Life, Times, and Poetry of Saigyō

By Saigyō, William R LaFleur

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Awesome Nightfall: The Life, Times, and Poetry of Saigyō captures the power of Saigyō's poetry and this previously overlooked poet's keen insight into the social and political world of medieval Japan. It also offers a fascinating look into the world of Japanese Buddhism prior to the wholesale influence of Zen.

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Editorial Review

Review

"On anyone's list, Saigyō ranks among Japan's best poets. With Hitomaro and Bashō, he has long been one of the poets most loved by the Japanese. (Bashō viewed Saigyō as a model for his life as a recluse, a monk, and a poet traveler.) A master of many styles of poetry, Saigyō was [also] a pioneer in a new style, presenting a rich, darkly imagistic field with symbolic overtones. [. . .] This new volume by LaFleur adds 43 new translations to the almost 200 previously published in his earlier *Mirror for the Moon* and provides a greatly expanded 70-page introduction to Saigyō's life and times that provides an invaluable framework for interpretation. [. . .] LaFleur's appealing contemporary English versions convey Saigyō's relatively informal voice and diction, and his long involvement with the poems is evident both in his translations and his commentary. This attractive new volume presents a more substantial overview of Saigyō's life and times than has been undertaken in any of the earlier English-language translations. Decades of scholarly and personal engagement with Saigyō's writings make LaFleur a reliable guide to the literary modes, techniques, and values that inform Saigyō's poetry. Many of the translations here are not only immediately appealing but reward reflection and re-reading." (*Journal of Japanese Studies*)

"One of the most extraordinary new books currently in release is William R. LaFleur's *Awesome Nightfall: The Life, Times, and Poetry of Saigyō*. This fascinating work is equal parts biography. History, poetry, and even mystery as it traces the life and mind of an elusive and complex figure in Japanese culture...This book is one of the rare works that leaves the reader overflowing with satisfaction in knowing something important and wonderful was achieved in the trip through its pages." (*New York Resident*)

"In 1140, Saigyō cast off his warrior past and entered his poetic and priestly vocation. Attached to no monastery, he roamed Japan, engaging in religious austerities and honing his skills. William R. LaFleur's *Awesome Nightfall* offers us a more complex, more human Saigyō--reclusive, yes, but still a very close observer of his times, viewing the enveloping darkness from the heights 'where none can view me / but I can review all things.'" (*The Asahi Shimbun (Japan's Leading National Newspaper)*)

"This remarkable life and poetry of Saigyō is essential reading: essential to understanding Japanese literary tradition, and essential to understanding the role of Japan's most influential poet in the history of its Buddhism. Saigyō found beauty in the temporality of things and identified with ordinary villagers throughout his famous journeys, writing poems that remain as elegant, perceptive and moving today as they were a thousand years ago. William R. LaFleur presents a striking portrait of the man and his work. His scholarship and artistry are commendable. *Awesome Nightfall* is a classic." (Sam Hamill)

"Saigyō's poems are masterful mind-language challenges. Bill LaFleur's deeply understanding translations present us with the snake-like energy of the syntax, and the illuminated world that was called out by one man's lifetime of walking and meditation is again right here."-- (Gary Snyder)

"The twelfth-century Japanese Buddhist poet Saigyō is a revered figure in Japanese literature, and was a guiding figure, centuries later, for Bashō. Until his mid-twenties Saigyō was a samurai; the remainder of his life was devoted to the relation between the secular world and Buddhist practice, between Buddhist ideals and poetry and the love of nature. Professor LaFleur has spent decades on his study of Saigyō and what is known of his world and his work. *Awesome Nightfall* is a welcome presentation of Saigyō's poetry and his life as they reflect each other." (W.S. Merwin)

"A beautifully proportioned work of lucid scholarship and superb literary translation. This fruit of LaFleur's long and inspired labor not only honors the great Buddhist poet Saigyō, but the intelligence and heart of readers as well." (Mike O'Connor, translator of *The Clouds Should Know Me By Now and Where the World Does Not Follow*)

"William LaFleur's account of Saigyō's life kept me spellbound, and his translations made me ache to hit the road with Saigyō, surely the most lucid & bittersweet poet of Buddhist Japan. On the surface these poems are bright with full moons, falling sakura blossoms, mossy peaks. You can see withered autumn fields & hear geese in the mist. But the depths of Saigyō's poetry? Think of a solemn temple bell sounding across the mountains at twilight. 'Although all things in this world undergo change, the way of poetry extends unaltered even to the last age.' A volume of poetry should be a trusted comrade, even to the last age. This superb collection will be." (Andrew Schelling, Naropa University, author of *The Cane Groves of Narmada River: Erotic Poems from Old India*)

"Saigyō lived in twelfth-century Japan, but from reading his poetry, it doesn't feel like it. The first half of *Awesome Nightfall* is an account of his life in the turbulent Japanese culture amid which he was raised. Dotted with his poems, it provides a good ground from which to read the second half, which consists of about 150 waka (five-line traditional verse poem-form). His poems are alive to the vivid transformations of inner and outer worlds. This is an inspiring volume, both poetically and spiritually." (*Dharma Life*)

"A quarter of a century ago, LaFleur published his book on Saigyō, *Mirror for the Moon*, which *Awesome Nightfall* thoughtfully and masterfully supersedes. LaFleur sketches Saigyō's life in bold strokes and introduces new findings for the English-reading audience. The book opens up fascinating and important questions, and as such this volume will be an interesting choice for seminars on Japanese medieval literature, history, or religion." (*Philosophy East & West*)

Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

Original Language: English

About the Author

William R. LaFleur received his PhD from the University of Chicago, where he studied with Joseph Kitagawa and Mircea Eliade. Over the course of his career, LaFleur taught at Princeton University, UCLA, Sophia University, Tokyo, and at the University of Pennsylvania, where he was the E. Dale Saunders Professor of Japanese Studies. In addition to his work on Buddhist cosmology and the "mind" of medieval Japan, he was a gifted translator and interpreter of poetry and published two volumes on the medieval monk-poet Saigyō. He was deeply interested in Zen, especially as a resource for contemporary thought. He wrote and edited several books and essays, introducing to Western readers the work of the thirteenth-century Zen master Dogen, the Kyoto-school figure Masao Abe, and the twentieth-century philosopher and cultural historian Watsuji Tetsuro. In 1989, he became the first non-Japanese to win the Watsuji Tetsuro Cultural Prize. In his later career, while continuing to study medieval Japanese religion and literature, he produced pioneering studies of Japanese bioethics, highlighting contrasts with Western approaches to such issues as abortion, organ transplants, and medical definitions of death. Altogether, he wrote or edited nine books. He passed away in 2010.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Geneva Orta:

Why don't make it to be your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite guide and reading a book. Beside you can solve your long lasting problem; you can add your knowledge by the guide entitled *Awesome Nightfall: The Life, Times, and Poetry of Saigyo*. Try to stumble through book *Awesome Nightfall: The Life, Times, and Poetry of Saigyo* as your buddy. It means that it can for being your friend when you really feel alone and beside that course make you smarter than previously. Yeah, it is very fortunated in your case. The book makes you a lot more confidence because you can know anything by the book. So , let us make new experience as well as knowledge with this book.

Athena Thornton:

As people who live in the actual modest era should be up-date about what going on or data even knowledge to make these individuals keep up with the era and that is always change and make progress. Some of you maybe will probably update themselves by examining books. It is a good choice in your case but the problems coming to you is you don't know which one you should start with. This *Awesome Nightfall: The Life, Times, and Poetry of Saigyo* is our recommendation to make you keep up with the world. Why, because this book serves what you want and want in this era.

Leticia Bennet:

Within this era which is the greater man or who has ability to do something more are more treasured than other. Do you want to become among it? It is just simple way to have that. What you have to do is just spending your time not very much but quite enough to have a look at some books. On the list of books in the top checklist in your reading list is actually *Awesome Nightfall: The Life, Times, and Poetry of Saigyo*. This book that is certainly qualified as *The Hungry Mountains* can get you closer in growing to be precious person. By looking upwards and review this publication you can get many advantages.

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