



Professor Keene's dinner party, 2017

I mourn the passing of Professor Donald Keene, who did so much to introduce the beauty of Japanese literature and the arts to the world.

I knew Donald Keene, first through his seminal translations, essays and histories, and then as an engaging individual, when I returned to Japan a few years ago.

I had the privilege to host a dinner in his honor in 2017, and had the chance to talk at length with a scholar who is such a transformational figure in our appreciation of Japanese literature and other arts. When I chatted with him, then in his mid-90s, he was still following closely Japanese art and trends. He loved this country and people, and his solidarity with the people of Tohoku after the March 11 tragedy touched all of us.

I reflected on the fact that there was a time when outside of Japan only a very limited number of people knew of the full richness of the Japanese aesthetic. Keene was one of those pioneers who brought this glory to a vast audience around the world.

Japanese art and its aesthetic continue to grow and evolve, and the world remains enchanted by what Japanese artists create. There is a new generation of Japanese artists whose work we are waiting to discover, even as the Japanese traditional arts flourish.

Professor Keene was a devoted teacher, at Columbia University, and through his scholarship. I encourage you to visit the Donald Keene Center Kashiwazaki in Niigata, established by the Bourbon Corporation, to learn more about his amazing life.



Professor Keene wrote in his memoir of how, as a young man, he came upon a used, two-volume translation of "The Tale of Genji" at a New York used-book shop. He bought the books for just 49 cents, a real bargain for a chance encounter so long ago that changed his life, and enriched our lives.

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