

BOOK REVIEWS

The Japan Journals, 1947–2004

BY DONALD RICHIE,
EDITED BY LEZA LOWITZ

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REVIEWED BY ANDREA KEMPF



Donald Richie, after spending more than fifty years in Japan, interpreting Japanese culture for westerners, publishing more than thirty books and literally hundreds of essays and reviews, is, to Japanese scholars, the “Grand Old Man.” He is the American in Tokyo who has known every cultural figure from the world of film, literature, art, and music. He has entertained illustrious foreigners and introduced them to the

Japan he knows, respects, and loves. Now Richie, in his eightieth year, has released significant portions of the journal he has been keeping since he arrived in Japan in 1946 as a civil service typist for the US Army of Occupation.

The journals explore the inner man; they examine the appeal of being an “other” in Japan, where he feels freer to be himself—because nothing is expected of him—than he would in the United States, where he would be flouting the conventional norms of society. The journals also become increasingly revealing of Richie’s homosexuality. They are, however, notably mute on the subject of his marriage to the writer Mary Evans Richie. There are tantalizing glimpses of his fascination with tattooing that led to his publication, with Ian Buruma, of *The Japanese Tattoo* (New York: Weatherill,

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1980). And throughout the journal are bits and pieces of observation that would be gathered into his most enduring work, *The Inland Sea* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1993).

Donald Richie introduced the Japanese cinema to the rest of the world. His books on Kurosawa and Ozu are the seminal works on these filmmakers. His fifty-year-long desire to see an English-language publication of Kawabata’s *Scarlet Gang of Asakusa* (Berkeley, University of California Press) was only realized in 2005. *The Japan Journals* demonstrate that at eighty years old, Donald Richie remains as intellectually active as he was in 1947. As a work, the volume is most appropriate for scholars and faculty who will be introducing Richie’s individual works to a class. *The Donald Richie Reader: 50 Years of Writing on Japan*, compiled and edited by Arturo Silva (Berkeley: Stonebridge Press, 2001), with its sustained excerpts from various books, is a better student introduction to his work. However, anyone who teaches about twentieth-century Japanese culture will find the *Japan Journals* an invaluable insight into the man whose life work it was to make Japan accessible to the west. ■

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