



The Counterfeiter and Other Stories

Yasushi Inoue

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These three short stories, The Counterfeiter, Obasute, and The Full Moon, explore the roles of loneliness, compassion, beauty, and forgiveness in day-to-day life in Japan, all within the context of the Buddhist-influenced notion of inescapable predestination.

The Counterfeiter and Other Stories Details

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Nafiza says

This was my first Yasushi Inoue title but it will definitely not be my last. *Life of a Counterfeiter* is a collection of three short stories including the titular story, “Reeds,” and “Mr. Goodall’s Gloves.” All three stories are excellent and go a long way in establishing the kind of storyteller Mr. Inoue is. There is a certain stream of consciousness-esque element to these stories that I really liked. In *Life of a Counterfeiter* the main character is supposed to be a biographer of a famous painter Onuki Keigaku but while researching Keigaku, the narrator comes across Keigaku’s former friend Hara Hosen who he discovers is a counterfeiter of Keigaku’s works. The narrator is unwillingly fascinated by this counterfeiter and exerts considerable effort to find out more about him, driven perhaps by more than just curiosity about this counterfeiter. He feels an empathy for Hosen, the counterfeiter, inferring that Hosen’s brush with Keigaku’s genius may be what propelled the man down such a dark lane and then to his tragic end. The story is told in anecdotal bursts and the narrator relays his findings while he goes around living his life and surviving the war that Japan is in the middle of losing at the time. I could well imagine myself seated in a cafe or some such place listening to the story. The tone is welcoming, a bit self-deprecatory, and entirely wonderful. The other two stories continue much in the same vein.

In “Reeds” the same narrator talks about fragments of memories a person has that is usually matched with the fragment of memory someone else has and illustrates his point by elaborating in some detail his memories about his grandmother, and a couple he remembers from when he was very young but whom he can’t identify. “Mr. Goodall’s Gloves” concerns the same narrator’s grandmother, who was a mistress of his grandfather and not his true wife, and her interaction with a foreigner, Mr. Goodall, who gave her his gloves when she was left outside in the cold to wait for his grandfather. The stories concern the human condition and are characterized by the gentleness that I have come to associate with Japanese literature. Michael Emmerich’s translation is superlative and there is never an instance where I felt that anything was lost in translation.

If you enjoy Murakami, you will enjoy Yasushi Inoue. Though Inoue’s work does not have elements of magical realism that Murakami’s is famous for, it has the same vibrancy and earnestness that make Murakami’s work so fantastic. Strongly recommended.

Nawfal says

I really like Inoue's slow and easy style. He writes the daily life of his characters without angst or fits of emotion. There are moments that Inoue uses to show that the characters are not cardboard. These moments are key ones for the characters, but the reader is left to decipher them on their own.

This is really the skill of Inoue. He takes the everyday moments of characters and makes the reader invest in a story that has depth and meaning, but perhaps has no connection to the reader whatsoever.

Erika Schoeps says

3.5 stars. This little book of short stories is elegant and sweet. The stories aren't very captivating in themselves, but the way they are written is what keeps you captivated. The focus is introspective, mostly on thoughts, feelings, symbols, and themes. The beauty of the writing is shown in the intelligent juxtaposition of images, symbols, and themes. These stories didn't create intense feelings of drama and passion, but they relaxed me and made me think. This is a very good little book for summer.

Cleopatra says

Ιαπωνικ? λογοτεχν?α στα καλ?τερ? της, οι ιστορ?ες ε?ναι αρκετ? αργ?ς, εσωτερικ?ς και γεμ?τες αντικρου?μενα συναισθ?ματα και σκ?ψεις. Η πλοκ? στους Ι?πωνες πα?ζει δευτερε?οντα ρ?λο (ιδ?ως στους κλασικο?ς) ωστ?σο προσωπικ? με κεντρ?ζει η εσωτερικ?τητα της γραφ?ς τους, η ακινησ?α και η διακριτικ?τητ? τους, ακ?μα κι αν περιγρ?φουν τη φαυλ?τητα της ανθρ?πινης φ?σης.

Jim says

I had read the main story, "Life of a Counterfeiter," in another edition and remember loving it. A man is commissioned to write the biography of a beloved painter named Onuki Keigaku, but over the year gets sidetracked by the life of his onetime friend, Hara Hosen, who was caught counterfeiting Onuki's work. The narrator follows the threads that remain to Hara's life, and discovers that he ended his life making illegal fireworks. He blew off three of his fingers in an accident with gunpowder, and his wife separated from him around this time. The narrator concludes:

I have set down what I know of the counterfeiter Hara Hosen. Nothing but fragmentary stories heard from others. And yet, somewhere along the way, as I strung these pieces together, I had come to hold in my mind an image of this counterfeiter's sixty-seven-year life as a sort of flow -- a dark and frigid stream. There was no rhyme or rhythm to that painful surging, the dark and turbid motion of some essence the man known as Hara Hosen carried within him from the moment of his birth that rendered it impossible for him to live otherwise than he did. Painful, yes, but the pain was matched by the peculiar sadness of our karma, so that whenever I found myself reflecting upon the sorrows of human life I would remember that thin, swarthy man with his weak and gloomy air -- this is how I imagined Hara Hosen now -- softly drawing his counterfeiter's brush across a sheet of paper, hiding what he was doing from his wife, or slipping out so she wouldn't find him twisting gunpowder up in pieces of paper and setting them on fire.

This little collection by the Pushkin Press of three of Yasushi Inoue's stories concentrate on the author's great interlocking themes of memory, history, and nostalgia. The other stories -- "Reeds" and "Mr. Goodall's Gloves" -- are both searches in the narrator's past of names and events which are only partially remembered.

Life of a Counterfeiter is a good place to start reading Inoue. But remember, other great works are also worth trying: **Shirobamba**, **Lou-Lan**, and **The Samurai Banner of Furin Kazan**. There is a particular sympathetic sadness, a *mono no aware*, of reading Inoue's work. It is not an unpleasant feeling.

EY says

3.5 stars. Short and sweet.

Ethan Zeidenberg says

Minimalist and emotion-filled prose, depicting the importance of unimportant individuals

Jim Galford says

Rather fascinating read. Normally I find Japanese writers to be too involved in the fantasy elements of their stories, but Inoue sets out to discuss through his stories the difference between fact and fiction .

Lisa says

Late last year, I found myself unable to resist the tantalising reviews at Winston's Dad and JacquiWine's Journal, and so I lashed out and bought myself a subscription to Pushkin Press. The first title arrived today...

It's a selection of three short stories by Japanese author Yasushi Inoue (1907-1991) but the story that gives the selection its name is at 82 pages by far the longest. *Life of a Counterfeiter* is ostensibly about a journalist's failure to fulfil a commission to write a biography of a famous painter called Keigaku, but it becomes a quest to find out more about Keigaku's forger, a man called Hösen. The lives of both men are difficult to trace, but the narrator finds the forger a more captivating subject. Through his research he learns that Hösen was very clever at avoiding detection, and that he had wasted his genuine talent as an artist even though he probably made more money selling famous poor quality fakes than he would have selling his own good quality artworks. Hösen was also a keen hobbyist in the art of making fireworks, and yearned to create one that is a perfect semblance of a bell flower.

The prose is spare and simple, and the narrator's voice is self-aware and introspective. Occasionally he is quite hard on himself.

To read the rest of my review please visit <http://anzlitlovers.com/2016/02/01/li...>

J. Watson (aka umberto) says

I first read his novel **The Samurai Banner of Furin Kazan** (Tuttle, 2006) in 2013 [<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>] and later I read and found his short story *Passage to Fudaraku* in **The Oxford Book of Japanese Short Stories** (Oxford University Press, 2010) and novella **The Hunting Gun** (Tuttle, 1961) arguably readable since I rarely heard of him but he has written something stylish and

humane that inspired me to look forward to reading his other works, e.g. *The Bullfight* (1950). This made me wonder why any of his works was not selected and included in Donald Keene's **Modern Japanese Literature: From 1868 to Present Day** (Grove Press, 1994). However, reading and enjoying this three-story book finely translated by Michael Emmerich made me, again, to rethink on his literary stature since he was so outstandingly creative and recognized that he won five prizes as well as his wide readership as we can see various novel and short story titles in his biography (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yasushi...>), we simply can't help doubting if his fame has been honorably justified.

Life of a Counterfeiter is the first story in this copy; the other two being *Reeds* and *Mr. Goodall's Gloves*. Seemingly revealed from the titles, each one has been meant to portray human life in different contexts and hardships as seen in contemporary Japan sometime before and within the narrator's lifetime. Saying something brief and moral related to some key characters from each story, I think, should be inspiringly informative in some sense to posterity.

As for the first one, it deals with a counterfeiter, a fraud, named Hara Hosen whose painting expertise is so excellent that he can deceive most viewers of famously outstanding paintings by eminent artists as the genuine ones. In the end, the narrator traces and finds his latest whereabouts and content means of living as a notable maker of fireworks. Whereas the second one deals with a young child (baby boy) with his dimly flashback-like reminiscence as recalled by the innocent narrator himself, in another episode and context, probably as a toddler in a boat who vaguely recalls seeing his aunt and her mate do something seemingly romantic but curiously inexplicable on the canal bank with the green reeds as the lush background.

The third story *Mr. Goodall's Gloves* nostalgically traces back with the narrator's fond memories of his Grandma Kano, great-grandfather's mistress, who has raised him as a young boy with tender loving care. Before Meiji 22 (1887), she once attended a grand event with Matsumoto Jun and the boy's great-grandfather named Kiyoshi; however, she was unable to enter and had to wait outside in the snow. Mr. Goodall happened to pass by and out of pity lent her two large white gloves. For some reason, the gloves have still been kept in Grandma Kano's house and found after Mr. Goodall's death in 1889. They remind her of various stories kindly told to the boy on such close, intimate and friendly relationships in that his great-grandfather respected Matsumoto Jun as his mentor.

In conclusion, this book is highly recommended since the author has revealed a variety of human characters out of his deep understanding on Japanese people and culture, that is, we can sense something inexplicably unique, impressive and inspiring. We can't help admiring his writing expertise that allows us to read and enjoy his novels and short stories; many still being not translated into English, French, German, etc. for his readers worldwide.

Dd says

Even translated the emotion still manages to seep through these 3 beautiful stories.
Insightful and thought provoking.

David Stewart says

I read *The Counterfeiter* over the better part of a day. It's a short read at a mere 128 pages, and it's a book of

short stories. It's divided up into three sections, with the title story, *The Counterfeiter*, taking up most of the book's real estate. *Obasute* and *The Full Moon* are shorter, and constitute the back half of the book. I'll take this story by story, but it's not a huge book, nor an intense read, so this review may run a little short.

The Counterfeiter is far and away the strongest and most interesting of the three tales. It takes place in post Meiji-era Japan, so I found comparisons to *The Master of Go* almost immediately. Both hearken to a lost age and struggle with modernism and the efforts to maintain tradition. *The Counterfeiter* follows a biographer as he travels around Japan during and after World War II, chronicling the life of Keigaku, a famous artist. As he struggles to find information about his subject, he becomes more interested in a man named Hosen Hara, accused by many in the art world of copying the paintings of Keigaku. As the story progresses, it becomes Hosen Hara's biography, and Keigaku, while still remaining the subject of the narrator's eventual work, becomes a background character who serves as contrast.

Hosen Hara is the more interesting man, for the obvious reason that he is flawed. Keigaku is the consummate perfect artist. He has never made a mistake, has won all the awards, and is distinguished in his field. Hosen Hara, who befriends Keigaku at a young age, lives forever in his friend's shadow. He is the Salieri to Keigaku's Mozart, never matching and always chasing the genius of his rival. His efforts to counterfeit the paintings of Keigaku are Hosen Hara's attempt to prove to everyone that he is just as good as his friend. In many cases the forgeries are good enough that they fool almost anyone not trained to spot a fake.

By his life's end, Hosen Hara has mostly given up painting and instead makes fireworks at small villages in the countryside. This doesn't possess the prestige of painting, but Hara finds in it something he can attempt perfection in. I thought this theme of chasing perfection was relevant, especially in our own time when the slightest mistakes can ostracize a person from everything society views as vital to a good life.

Obasute is shorter, and slightly less fleshed out, but I really enjoyed its themes of isolation and myth. Mount *Obasute* is a real spot in Japan, and there is mythology of it being a place where people would drop off the elderly, instituting a banishment for the crime of being old (the term *obasute* literally means to abandon a parent). Whether or not this ever happened is not made clear in the story, but the very thought of it is possibly the most depressing thing I can imagine. We have an entire system of social security in the U.S. that is counter to the very idea of this, and abandoning people who most need us seems to me inhuman.

The story wraps around this mythology. Central to the narrative is a family, and as the story progresses, each family member seems to desire being taken to a place like Mount *Obasute* and dropped off so that they can finally be alone. I'm reading *Precarious Japan* right now, and much of it deals with a very real problem called *hikikomori*. *Hikikomori* are young people who willingly cut themselves off from society, often not leaving their room or dwelling for long stretches of time. They are social outcasts, willingly, and possess a social anxiety that seems crippling. I thought of this problem, these *hikikomori*, while reading *Obasute*. It takes place after World War II, a time in Japan where everything, social, political, and moral, was breaking down. The booming Japan of post-Meiji times had been shattered, and while it would rise again economically, for a long stretch Japan had no center. The family members in *Obasute* could think of nothing better than abandoning the world and living alone on a mountain, much like some young folks in Japan today can think of nothing better, in an era where capitalism rules the world, than locking themselves in a room and ostracizing themselves from the madness.

The Full Moon is the story I found less captivating than the others, though it still dealt with interesting themes and carried in it that post-war tragedy felt throughout the entire collection of stories. *The Full Moon* chronicles the rise and fall of the president of a corporation, a relatively new phenomenon in Japan at this point. This story actually reminded me a little of *The Wolf of Wall Street*, both for the corporate narrative

and because it manages to detail the life outside the office, one that is often secretive and full of scandal. It's not as strong as the other two stories, but is still an interesting window into the life of a 1950s corporate man of post-war Japan.

This collection of stories was, I think, a decent introduction to Inoue. Nothing in it made me want to read his entire lexicon right away, but I do want to explore some of his longer works, particularly in light of *The Counterfeiter* story being the strongest of the three.

Original review at - <https://goldnotglittering.wordpress.c...>

Ioana Fotache says

Reading the abstract was more interesting than the story itself

Cippi says

Ada 3 cerita pendek di dalam kompilasi karya penulis legendaris Jepang ini; *The Counterfeiter*, *Obasute*, dan *Full Moon*. Boleh dikatakan bahwa gaya bercerita Yasushi Inoue sangat detil, deskriptif habis, dan melibatkan emosi yang mendalam terhadap segala unsur yang terkait dengan cerita. Gaya serupa ini dapat ditemukan pada karya-karya penulis kaliber, seperti Ernest Hemingway dan O'Henry. Bedanya, karya Yasushi Inoue lebih mudah dibaca daripada punya Ernest Hemingway (tolong! Susah bgt). Pengalaman pribadi Yasushi sebagai anak yang terbuang dari keluarga inti begitu berpengaruh pada cita-rasa yang diciptakannya di ketiga esai ini.

Cerita favorit saya adalah *Obasute*, sebuah legenda Jepang tentang sebuah gunung dimana orang-orang lanjut usia dicampakkan. Emosi ceritanya begitu lekat, mengiris perasaan. Yasushi berhasil memodifikasi dan mengemas sebuah legenda sarat nilai menjadi kisah apik tentang bagaimana nilai dan prinsip masyarakat Jepang pasca PD II bergeser menuju ke pemikiran moderat-progresif..

Connor says

The Counterfeiter was one of the better stories I've read recently. Amazing control of narrative/theme, touching on authenticity/fame and the pursuit of perfection (both within the paintings and the fireworks).
