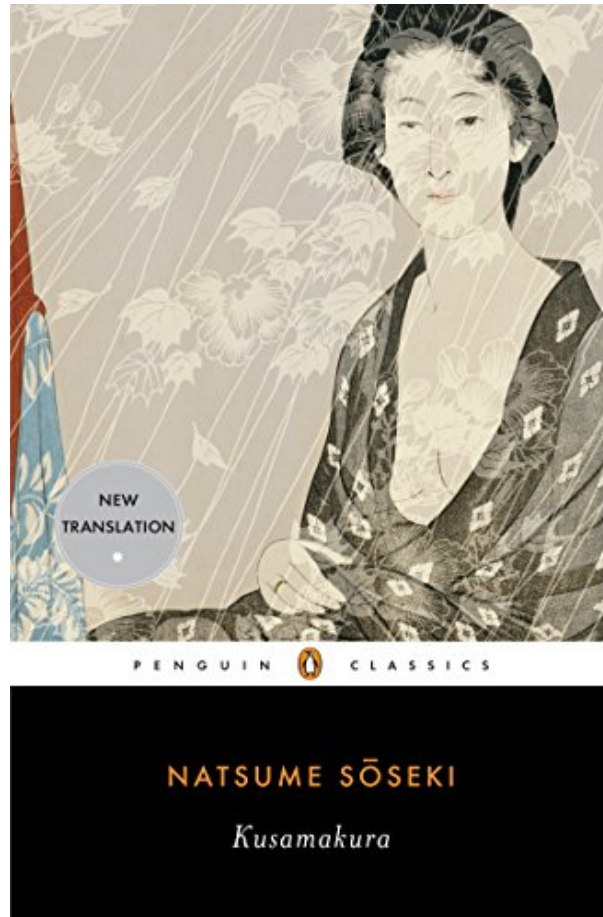


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About the Author

Natsume Soseki (1867-1916) is one of the best-known Japanese authors of the 20th century and considered as the master of psychological fiction. As well as his works of fiction, his essays, haiku, and kanshi have been influential and are popular even today.

Meredith McKinney holds a PhD in medieval Japanese literature from the University in Canberra, where she teaches in the Japan Centre. Her other translations include Ravine and Other Stories, The Tale of Saigyō, and for Penguin Classics, The Pillow Book and Kokoro.

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A stunning new translation—the first in more than forty years—of a major novel by the father of modern Japanese fiction

Natsume Soseki's *Kusamakura* follows its nameless young artist-narrator on a meandering walking tour of the mountains. At the inn at a hot spring resort, he has a series of mysterious encounters with Nami, the lovely young daughter of the establishment. Nami, or "beauty," is the center of this elegant novel, the still point around which the artist moves and the enigmatic subject of Soseki's word painting. In the author's words, *Kusamakura* is "a haiku-style novel, that lives through beauty." Written at a time when Japan was opening its doors to the rest of the world, *Kusamakura* turns inward, to the pristine mountain idyll and the taciturn lyricism of its courtship scenes, enshrining the essence of old Japan in a work of enchanting literary nostalgia.

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Most helpful customer reviews

55 of 58 people found the following review helpful.

A Midspring Night's Dream

By Crazy Fox

"Kusamakura" is surely one of the weirdest novels of the twentieth century. A very early work by Natsume Soseki, who would go on to be one of Japan's foremost novelists, it's a pioneering one-shot experiment with what the author himself called a "Haiku novel" years before Kawabata Yasunari got the credit for such with his Palm-of-the-Hand Stories. A novel without a plot, where nothing of note really happens, and yet it's an endlessly engaging tale. Or is it a philosophical treatise on aesthetics narrated in the form of a story? Breathtakingly ethereal one moment, it's hilariously crass the next. In genre, it's a heady fusion of the Western novel and the Eastern poem equally at home with Percy Shelley and Yosa Buson, John Millais and Katsushika Hokusai, Oscar Wilde and the Tales of Ise, Christ and Bodhidharma. Staunchly nostalgic and even a tad traditionalist in an age when such things were being pell-mell thrown along the wayside, and yet modernist about a decade or so before its time--arguably ever bit as experimental as Joyce's "Ulysses" in many ways and yet a hundred times more readable and, yes, enjoyable. Indeed, everything I've said up to now may make "Kusamakura" seem rather portentous, but as a work of literature it's utterly unpretentious and approachable. It also so happens, as you may have guessed, to be one of my all time personal favorites.

Which is why nobody could be more thrilled to see "Kusamakura" newly translated and published by Penguin--the folks who have been making classics approachable for decades. Meredith McKinney's new translation here is nothing less than excellent. Unpretentious as it is, "Kusamakura" is nowadays something of a hard nut to crack linguistically speaking, filled as it is with deliberate archaisms of an ornate nature on the one hand and cockney-esque colloquialisms on the other (among other slight puzzlers now obscure in contemporary printed Japanese) and yet McKinney handles Soseki's many voices and sometimes elliptical narration with a surefire grasp of the language and manages to convey the same in highly fluent and idiomatic English. It's carefully accurate and true to the original and yet makes itself at home in its new language to a degree that seems natural and easy but must in fact have entailed much hard work and scholarly care. This edition is also judiciously supplemented with unobtrusive but helpful endnotes following up on Soseki's principal references, and the introduction does a fine job of adequately situating this idiosyncratic classic in the context of Soseki's larger opus and of contextualizing both within the larger framework of Japanese literature and history at the turn of the (last) century without unduly overburdening the book.

In short, this is a wonderful edition of a wonderful book--totally flawless. Okay, not totally; when you first open the book and glance at the half-title page, you'll see in the little blurb the dates for the Meiji period incorrectly given as 1868-1914 instead of 1868-1912. That little nitpick aside, though, this fine book is going to be the definitive edition of Natsume Soseki's early masterpiece for decades to come. Even if you've already read this novel in its previous English version (available in a number of printings, including *The Three-Cornered World* (Peter Owen Modern Classic) and *Three Corner World* (Unesco Collection of Representative Works. Japanese Series.)), I highly recommend this new and vastly improved one. And if you've never come across "Kusamakura" before at all, well then, the open road to the deep south awaits you, grass pillow and all!

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Kusamakura

By Margareta Boege

As he turns thirty a man goes to a village in the mountains and thinks about art, tries to find his own identity among the western and the traditional (japanese and chinese) ways of creating art and looking at the world, describes the nature that surrounds him and the few people that live there.

Kusamakura is very poetical. I wish I could read japanese, but even in transation the words flow beautifully

and you can sense the changes in tone, and you find yourself in a magical world. I particularly remember a scene where he is observing the girl, how he describes her and thinks about if beauty is better described as still or in movement. He tries to paint her but something is missing. And then there is the last scene...

Of course not everyone will like it (but this is true of every book) so I tried to tell you why I do (I am sorry if I can not be more eloquent but my english is not very good). If you like books with a lot of action, or if the subjects I mentioned above do not interest you, this book is not for you. But it is not true that you have to know a lot to enjoy this book, I myself do not know much and I loved it.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Five Stars

By Muriel S.McClellan

A wonderful book about the beauty of thinking like an artist.

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