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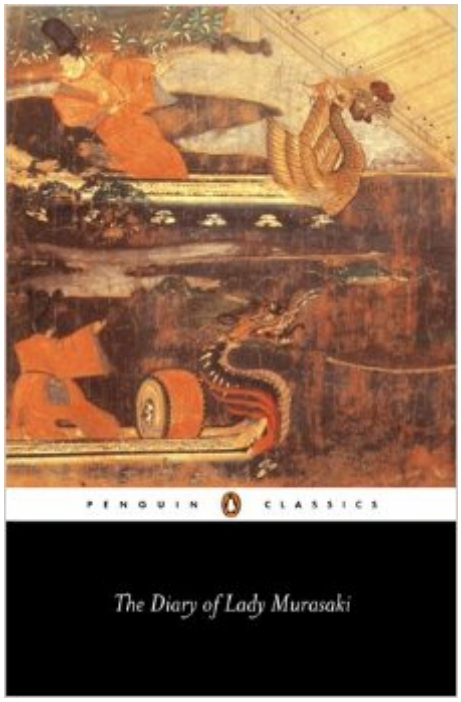
Diary Of Lady Murasaki (Penguin Classics)



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Synopsis

The Diary recorded by Lady Murasaki (c. 973-c. 1020), author of The Tale of Genji, is an intimate picture of her life as tutor and companion to the young Empress Shoshi. Told in a series of vignettes, it offers revealing glimpses of the Japanese imperial palace - the auspicious birth of a prince, rivalries between the Emperor's consorts, with sharp criticism of Murasaki's fellow ladies-in-waiting and drunken courtiers, and telling remarks about the timid Empress and her powerful father, Michinaga. The Diary is also a work of great subtlety and intense personal reflection, as Murasaki makes penetrating insights into human psychology - her pragmatic observations always balanced by an exquisite and pensive melancholy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This penguin volume is the paperback and easily accessed translation of the 'Diary of Murasaki Shikibu', a fragmentary piece written by the author of the much more famous and inspired 'Tale of Genji'. As Genji is probably the best work in all the history of Japanese literature, and as we know so little about its author, this diary (which is a fragented remain of the possible original) has acquired a certain relevance it would otherwise lack from purely literary and quality arguments.The diary as said is a fragmented and patched-up remain of the original one that Murasaki Shikibu might have noted down. It mainly describes the events of 2 years when she was in the service of Empress Shoshi at the Tsuchimikado Palace. The main event in more than half of the book is the birth of Prince Atsunada, son of Shoshi and the reigning Emperor (Go-Ichijo) and grandson of Fujiwara no

Michinaga (the all-powerful regent of that period of Heian Japan). The first 50 or so sections describe in detail the ceremonies held and gives a glimpse of courtier life of the times, so different from the idealized view that Murasaki would forge in the Genji. Here the courtiers tend to be rude, unsubtle and drunk, and the ladies (Murasaki included) bored, insecure and with a high tendency to gossip and critizising everyone else. The second part of the book includes some semblances of fellow-maids and courtiers, some of which were famous poets on their own (Ise no Taifu, Akazome Emon, Sei Shonagon), some ritual Gosechi Dances at the Imperial Palace and Murasaki's absence from the Courtly World. As in all Heian-era diaries, the events described are interspersed with poems written by Murasaki and others for the occasion. Heian courtiers were expected to produce them quite spontaneously as a matter of fact.

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