



Light and Dark: A Novel (Weatherhead Books on Asia)

By Soseki Natsume

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Light and Dark, Natsume Soseki's longest novel and masterpiece, although unfinished, is a minutely observed study of haute-bourgeois manners on the eve of World War I. It is also a psychological portrait of a new marriage that achieves a depth and exactitude of character revelation that had no precedent in Japan at the time of its publication and has not been equaled since. With *Light and Dark*, Soseki invented the modern Japanese novel.

Recovering in a clinic following surgery, thirty-year-old Tsuda Yoshio receives visits from a procession of intimates: his coquettish young wife, O-Nobu; his unsparing younger sister, O-Hide, who blames O-Nobu's extravagance for her brother's financial difficulties; his self-deprecating friend, Kobayashi, a ne'er-do-well and troublemaker who might have stepped from the pages of a Dostoevsky novel; and his employer's wife, Madam Yoshikawa, a conniving meddler with a connection to Tsuda that is unknown to the others. Divergent interests create friction among this closely interrelated cast of characters that explodes into scenes of jealousy, rancor, and recrimination that will astonish Western readers conditioned to expect Japanese reticence.

Released from the clinic, Tsuda leaves Tokyo to continue his convalescence at a hot-springs resort. For reasons of her own, Madam Yoshikawa informs him that a woman who inhabits his dreams, Kiyoko, is staying alone at the same inn, recovering from a miscarriage. Dissuading O-Nobu from accompanying him, Tsuda travels to the spa, a lengthy journey fraught with real and symbolic obstacles that feels like a passage from one world to another. He encounters Kiyoko, who attempts to avoid him, but finally manages a meeting alone with her in her room. Soseki's final scene is a sublime exercise in indirection that leaves Tsuda to "explain the meaning of her smile."

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Editorial Review

Review

This is Natsume Soseki's longest and most complex work, his most ambitious in terms of social description and psychological analysis, and his most intricately plotted. It is a book for the ages, a modernist masterpiece, masterfully translated.

(Alan Tansman, University of California, Berkeley)

With its dramatic expansion of the use of stream-of-consciousness narration, which Natsume Soseki had experimented with in previous novels, *Light and Dark* is a landmark in world literature. This new rendering by one of the very best translators of Japanese fiction reintroduces this modern masterpiece to a twenty-first-century audience.

(Michael K. Bourdaghs, University of Chicago)

Light and Dark is the greatest novel by modern Japan's greatest novelist. What Natsume Soseki achieved in this, his last, work is a pure miracle: no other word can do justice to the irony and precision of his character delineations and the gripping reality of his portrayal of a Japan in transition. Thanks to John Nathan's fine new translation, literature lovers everywhere can finally share in savoring this treasure, a detailed and unforgiving limning of love and marriage, faith and betrayal.

(Minae Mizumura, author of *A True Novel* and *The Fall of the Japanese Language in the Age of English*)

Natsume Soseki's *Light and Dark* is one of the most gripping novels in modern Japanese literature. It represents a historical turning point in the development of Japanese fiction. John Nathan, a distinguished translator, has produced a masterful rendition that captures the subtle nuances of the original.

(Haruo Shirane, Columbia University, author of *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons*)

An enduring masterpiece.

(*Times Literary Supplement*)

Unusual, in several respects, *Light and Dark* is nevertheless an accomplished work of art and a fascinating example of Japanese fiction of its time.

(M.A. Orthofer *Complete Review*)

Light and Dark is a masterful novel, and Nathan's is a superior translation. For readers of Japanese literature it will be enlightening as it is one of the most important modern Japanese novels that inspired a rich literary

tradition.

(*Asian Review of Books*)

A pitch-perfect new translation by John Nathan.

(*Public Culture*)

About the Author

Natsume Soseki (1867–1916) was the foremost Japanese novelist of the Meiji period, known for his books *Kokoro*, *Botchan*, and *I Am a Cat*. He is also the author of *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings*.

John Nathan is Takashima Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Users Review

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Rex Vogler:

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