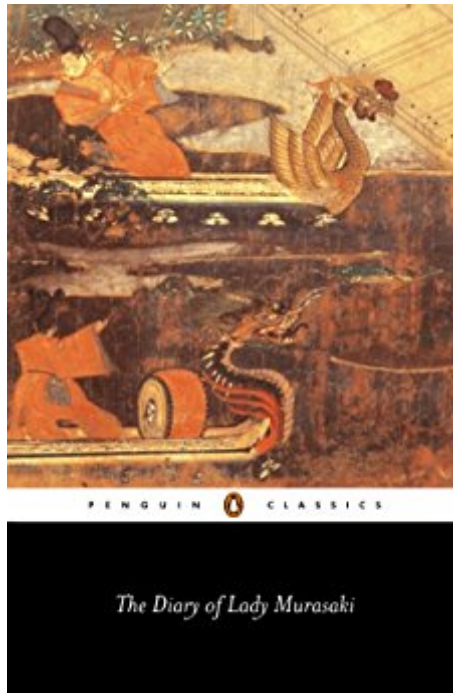


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# The Diary Of Lady Murasaki (Penguin Classics)



## 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

Have you ever felt like you're the only sane person working at your office, surrounded by idiots, leeches, kissups and that gross dude who always leaves the toilet up? You're not alone. At least you hopefully haven't had to lock yourself in a closet to escape your boss's pawing drunkcreep friend. Murasaki Shikibu comes across as really likeable (and less likely to troll you for bad life

decisions than Sei Shonagon, her wonderfully catty rival) and get attention to detail makes this work a delight. Recommend, especially for fans of her work *Genji Monogatari*!

Great insight in court life in the 10th-11th century Japan. The introduction really was helpful. Somehow the characters come to life thru her keen observations. I will re-read *The Tale of Prince Genji* with new eyes.

Lady Murasaki's diary is a treasure. If you're interested in the life and culture of a Heian noble, read this.

Truly magnificent.

Excellent

Though this "diary" is most likely incomplete, it is a marvelous illustration of the time and done by none other than Murasaki Shikibu, the pioneer of the novel. The author does a decent job of editing as well, nothing to complain about. The background seems useful for those who are not well educated in Japanese culture or furnishings, or perhaps culture of the Heian period.

I guess it's a different take on the whole Heian era author of *Genji*. Interesting is all I can say.

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 fragmented 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 criticizing 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. Don't get me wrong: the diary as it is has its interest and its beauties. Some of the poems are very good, and some of the paragraphs have been clearly polished and noted down by a master writer, like the first scene of the book, describing the arrival of late autumn at the Tsuchimikado Palace and the lovely combination of the sight of the waters in the Palace lake with the sound of the chanting of the monks. Nevertheless, it is a work of marginal interest if you aren't extremely interested in Heian Japan, the court life of the eleventh century and/or Murasaki Shikibu. I consider it well worth the read, but definitely a minor, anecdotic text. As for this edition: it is inspired in a previous one, made by Richard Bowring in the 80s and published by Princeton. The old text (it can still be bought second-hand) is more academic (which isn't necessarily a virtue for the lay reader) but has the advantage over the penguin edition in that it also includes the 'poetic memoirs' of Murasaki (that is to say, a collection of a bit over 100 poems by the author, most with explanatory prefaces). It is a pity that the Penguin edition discarded these poems, and being a very small volume, there would have been no space troubles about it.

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