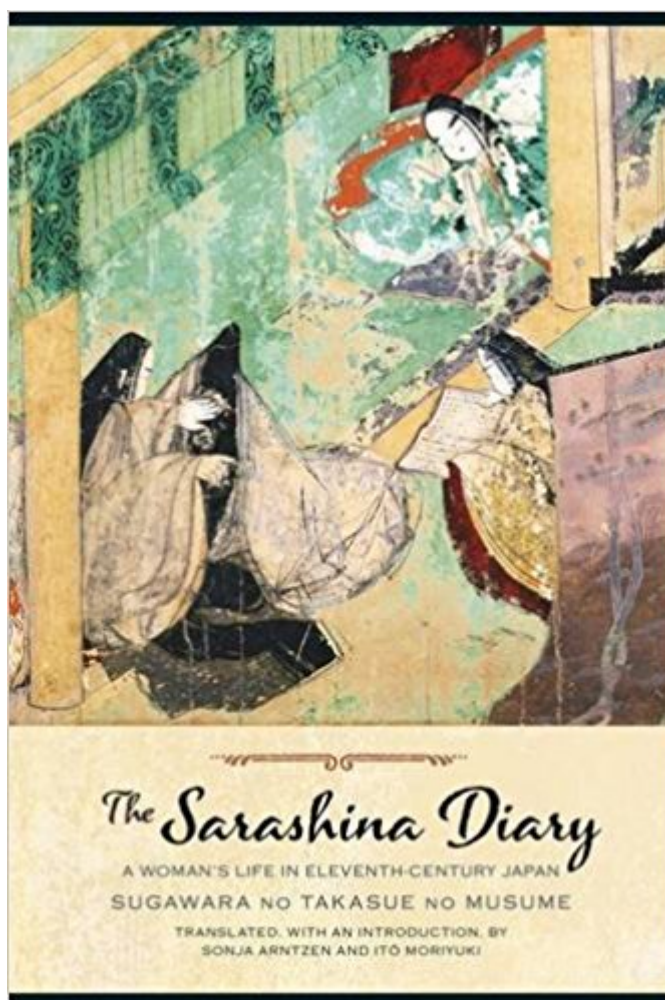


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# The Sarashina Diary: A Woman's Life In Eleventh-Century Japan (Translations From The Asian Classics)



## Synopsis

A thousand years ago, a young Japanese girl embarked on a journey from the wild East Country to the capital. She began a diary that she would continue to write for the next forty years and compile later in life, bringing lasting prestige to her family. Some aspects of the author's life and text seem curiously modern. She married at age thirty-three and identified herself as a reader and writer more than as a wife and mother. Enthralled by romantic fiction, she wrote extensively about the disillusioning blows that reality can deal to fantasy. The Sarashina Diary is a portrait of the writer as reader and an exploration of the power of reading to shape one's expectations and aspirations. As a person and an author, this writer presages the medieval era in Japan with her deep concern for Buddhist belief and practice. Her narrative's main thread follows a trajectory from youthful infatuation with romantic fantasy to the disillusionment of age and concern for the afterlife; yet, at the same time, many passages erase the dichotomy between literary illusion and spiritual truth. This new translation captures the lyrical richness of the original text while revealing its subtle structure and ironic meaning. The introduction highlights the poetry in the Sarashina Diary and the juxtaposition of poetic passages and narrative prose, which brings meta-meanings into play. The translators' commentary offers insight into the author's family and world, as well as the fascinating textual legacy of her work.

## Book Information

Series: Translations from the Asian Classics

Hardcover: 264 pages

Publisher: Columbia University Press (July 22, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0231167180

ISBN-13: 978-0231167185

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #641,813 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #69 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > Asian > Japanese](#) #110 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Asia > Japan](#) #7158 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > Women](#)

## Customer Reviews

As the first translation to do justice to the complexity of the Sarashina Diary, Arntzen and Ito's work offers a fresh perspective on premodern Japanese diary literature as well as an accessible yet scholarly window into Heian culture, the life of one woman, and the transformation of a life into literature. (Christina Laffin, University of British Columbia, author of *Rewriting Medieval Japanese Women: Politics, Personality, and Literary Production in the Life of Nun Abutsu*) This sparkling new version of the Sarashina Diary opens out an eleventh-century classic for twenty-first-century readers. Sonja Arntzen and Ito Moriyuki situate the diary culturally and historically, and their translation conveys both the vivid realism of Takasue no Musume's prose and the haunting melancholy of her poems. As the author herself says of Mount Fuji, this unique work 'looks like nothing else in the world.' (David Damrosch, Harvard University) Arntzen and Ito accept the theory, generally disregarded by twentieth-century scholarship, that the author of the Sarashina Diary was also the author of several court romances (*monogatari*), two of which are extant. Yet her diary makes no mention of these works, showing that the careful reader must pay as much attention to what Takasue no Musume does not say as to what she does. This translation presents a Sarashina unlike that of any previous English translation and is supported by an extensive introduction that thoroughly contextualizes the author and her work. (Joshua Mostow, University of British Columbia) A well-conceived edition of a poignant text that remains of both literary and historical appeal, with very good presentation of useful supporting material to go with the solid translation. (Complete Review) We can be grateful for this new translation... through long, thoughtful immersion, the translators have brought to life a world otherwise unavailable to the modern, non-specialist reader. (Times Literary Supplement) At last Sonja Arntzen, one of our most conscientious translators, has given us a new and weighty version of this beautiful and useful short classic; the lover of Heian letters or of Japanese history, of women's writing from any place or time, of dreams or will find this book exciting. (H-Asia) With its extensive and insightful analysis, this excellent translation supplants the 1971 translation by Ivan Morris. (CHOICE) Sonja Arntzen and Ito Moriyuki have produced a fluid and engaging translation of Sugawara no Takasue no Musume's eleventh-century diary, one worthy in our own time of comfy reading nook and carrel. (Gusts) Arntzen and Ito have provided a useful and provocative book. (Fay Beauchamp Education About Asia)

Sonja Arntzen is professor emerita of literature at the University of Toronto and the University of Alberta. She is the author of *Ikkyu and the Crazy Cloud Anthology: A Zen Poet of Medieval Japan* and *The Kagero Diary: A Woman's Autobiographical Text from Tenth-Century Japan*. Ito Moriyuki is

professor of Japanese literature at Gakushuin Women's College in Tokyo. His book Sarashina nikki kenkyu (Research on the Sarashina Diary) is recognized as a definitive work on the subject, and he has just published Sarashina nikki no enkinho (Perspective in the Sarashina Diary).

I am by no means a scholar of the Heian period in Japanese history - far from it - but I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It is one among a precious handful of women's autobiographical writings from this era that have come down to us as diaries, memoirs, pillow books and poetry. It is simply amazing to reach across a chasm of 1,000 years and participate in a life so distant and foreign in time and place. And, it is surprisingly easy to relate to the thoughts and feelings expressed in these pages. People did a lot of crying and often said how sad they were - perhaps depression is not a particularly modern affliction? My favorite book of the Heian period is the Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon and I recommend that the "casual" reader start there. It's entertaining, informative and almost has a girlfriend feel as if she's sitting in your living room discussing the events of her day. Again, it's very cool to connect like that across a millennium! Forgive me, experts, for not dwelling on the finer points, but any interested person can get a lot out of these wonderful writings.

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