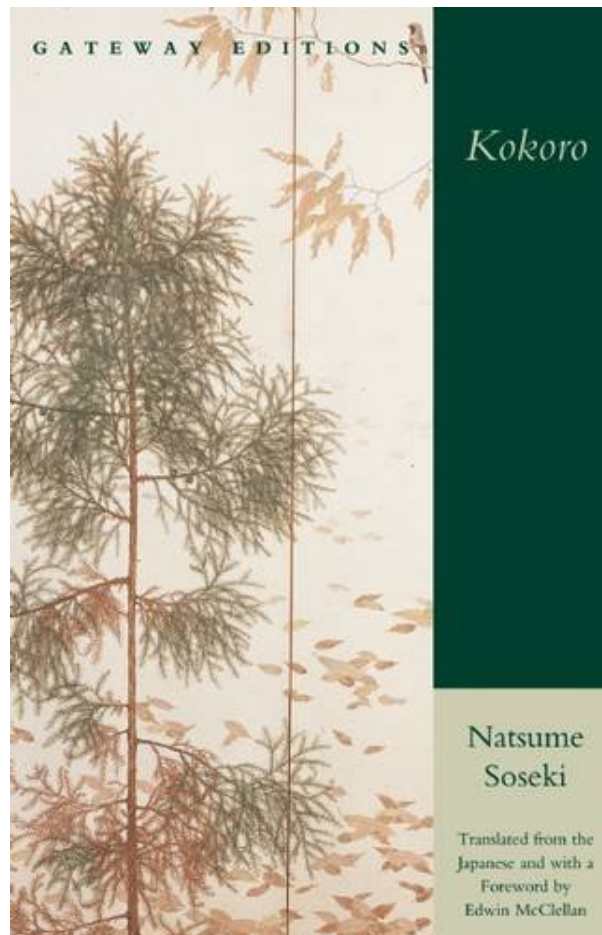
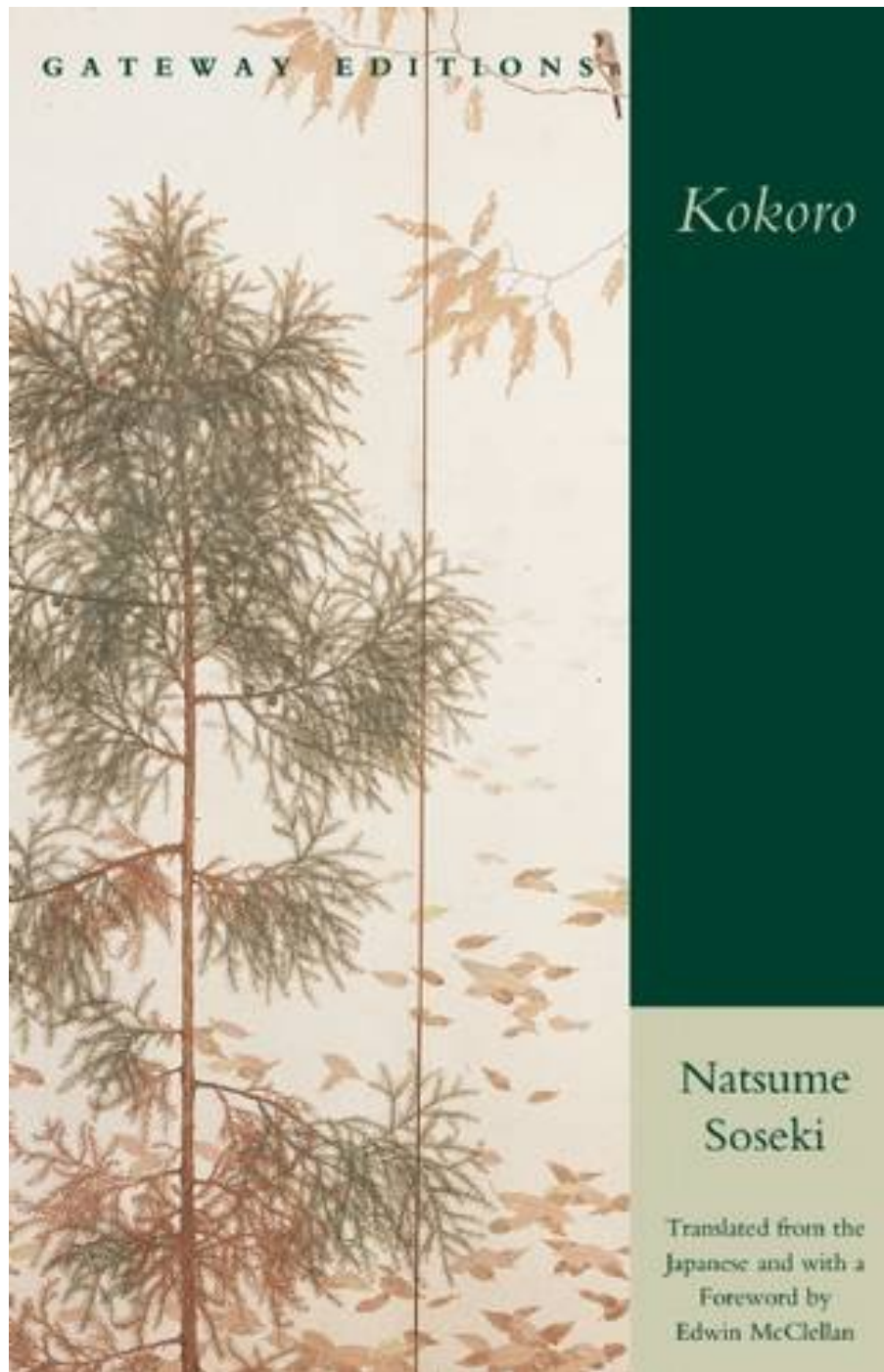


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"The subject of 'Kokoro,' which can be translated as 'the heart of things' or as 'feeling,' is the delicate matter of the contrast between the meanings the various parties of a relationship attach to it. In the course of this exploration, Soseki brilliantly describes different levels of friendship, family relationships, and the devices by which men attempt to escape from their fundamental loneliness. The novel sustains throughout its length something approaching poetry, and it is rich in understanding and insight. The translation, by Edwin McClellan, is extremely good."

—Anthony West, *The New Yorker*

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Most helpful customer reviews

165 of 174 people found the following review helpful.

Shades of Friendship, Shadows of Sacrifice

By Bob Newman

Classic Western novels usually concentrate on plot and some action which delineates it, though there are many exceptions to the rule. Japanese novels, however, often focus on human feelings first of all, with plot taking a distant second place. Natsume Soseki's novels fit very well into this framework and KOKORO is a strong example. ['Kokoro' means "heart" or "feelings".] The book is divided into three parts. The first explores the relationship between the narrator and Sensei, a lonely intellectual who maintains few contacts with the world, but explains life to the innocent narrator, a student, who bears a passing relationship to Carlos Castaneda in "The Teachings of Don Juan" because he steadfastly fails "to get it". The second part portrays the relationship of the narrator to his parents, while the third and longest part is a testament by Sensei explaining to the young narrator why he became the type of man he is, i.e. he tells his life story. Though the relationships between narrator, Sensei, a young girl, and a fellow-student named only K are explored in depth, there is little of what might be termed plot. Despite there being a love triangle and two suicides, the author prefers to concentrate on the characters' thoughts instead of details of action. Soseki's skill is such that he fascinates the reader with the exploration of personality. There is no florid psychoanalysis, no sex, no wall-banging despair and certain aspects are never explained---for example, why the narrator liked Sensei to begin with. Yet, by the end of the novel, the reader has a strong picture of the narrator, Sensei, and the unfortunate K. You understand their motivations and feel, as in so much great literature of all countries, the helplessness of Man, the vanity of Life.

We may say that in KOKORO, Soseki wrote about the different shades of friendship that exist between people and asks if it is really possible to have a true friend. The corollary is then, are we not all alone ? Are not friendship and love cosmetics to cover basic loneliness ? People speak of sacrifice, but more often than not, they sacrifice not themselves, but others, at the shrine of their own desolation. These are universal themes and so KOKORO is an interesting novel which I recently re-read. If you are looking for a good introduction into modern Japanese literature, this is definitely an excellent choice---mature, thought-provoking, and well-written.

74 of 78 people found the following review helpful.

Japanese ambiguous heart.

By Dajillo

Most of us Japanese people read this novel called "Kokoro"(Kokoro means Heart.) when we are high school students in a Japanese class. Our Japanese text books always include this Kokoro. So most of students read and study how our greatest writer was worried in those days. Add to it, this writer, Sohseki is one of the most greatest writer in Japan at the Meiji era. He turned from an English professor to a novelist. At the Meiji era, we Japanese decided to accept European culture with changing our own unique life style. So the elite professor like Sohseki was very annoyed between European culture that suddenly come enter to our life and our traditional culture. Yes, most of Sohseki's works are "unfinished" as novel. Kokoro wasn't finished, either. We can call it this novel is very ambiguous, vague, obscure. Sohseki just presents us complicated, unfathomable, but delicate, deliberate, deep and serious themes in this novel. Presumably this Kokoro was unsuccessful work as novel, however, all sides of our life are not always completely "finished", are they? Sohseki's works are really our precious fortune.

59 of 64 people found the following review helpful.

Love and Loyalty and Loss

By Zack Davisson

All of these are themes found in Japanese art, and all have a home in "Kokoro." Kokoro translates to heart or soul or spirit, and this book does justice to its title. Inside this slim volume is a testament of spirit, of youth and age, of man and woman, of ancient and modern juxtapositions of kokoro. What is love? What is friendship? What is responsibility?

The writing style is slow and delicate, with a precise economy of ideas and words. The translation is excellent, lending credible authenticity to the language. The Ideas, of course, need little interpretation as they are human in nature, and can be understood by all. Small cultural notes, such as the important suicide of General Nogi, are wisely footnoted and explained to deepen understanding of the narrative.

The simple story of Sensei, his wife, the young man and his family lay a basic framework upon which to weave the emotions that are the true focus.

Overall, while a book with an extremely Japanese flavor, it does transcend the barriers and gets at the inner life, the kokoro.

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