



## The Makioka Sisters

*Jun'ichirō Tanizaki , Edward G. Seidensticker (Translator)*

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In Osaka in the years immediately before World War II, four aristocratic women try to preserve a way of life that is vanishing. As told by Junichiro Tanizaki, the story of the Makioka sisters forms what is arguably the greatest Japanese novel of the twentieth century, a poignant yet unsparing portrait of a family—and an entire society—sliding into the abyss of modernity.

Tsuruko, the eldest sister, clings obstinately to the prestige of her family name even as her husband prepares to move their household to Tokyo, where that name means nothing. Sachiko compromises valiantly to secure the future of her younger sisters. The unmarried Yukiko is a hostage to her family's exacting standards, while the spirited Taeko rebels by flinging herself into scandalous romantic alliances. Filled with vignettes of upper-class Japanese life and capturing both the decorum and the heartache of its protagonist, *The Makioka Sisters* is a classic of international literature.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

## The Makioka Sisters Details

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## From Reader Review The Makioka Sisters for online ebook

### Eve says

“The cherries in the Heian Shrine...of all the cherries in Kyoto, were the most beautiful. Now that the great weeping cherry in Gion was dying and its blossoms were growing paler each year, what was left to stand for the Kyoto spring if not the cherries in the Heian Shrine?”

I really enjoyed this Japanese classic. In it, four Kyoto sisters attempt to navigate the waves of change that are rapidly engulfing Japan prior to WWII. The Makiokas are an old, wealthy Osaka family, that soon find themselves backpedaling in a changing society where self-made fortunes and worldliness are the new norms. With two unmarried sisters on their hands, the two oldest and most traditional sisters struggle to find a suitable husband for Yukiko, while simultaneously trying to quash the independent streak in Taeko, the youngest.

A gentle paced book, Tanizaki slowly unveils the comings and going of the two households. The minute details reminded me of an Ozu film, and when I finally finished the book, I honestly had forgotten that I was reading a work of fiction. It seemed so real! My only issue was the last paragraph; it's the reason why I struggled for almost two weeks to sit down and write a review! The ending was a bit abrupt to say the least. Tanizaki probably had more to write, and I feel strongly about that because what author would end a novel on this note:

**“Yukiko’s diarrhea persisted through the twenty-sixth, and was a problem on the train to Tokyo.”**

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### Ilse says

*Let me hide at least a petal  
In the sleeve of my flower-viewing robe,  
That I may remember the spring.*

Five years ago, we planted two trees in our enclosed garden, a gingko biloba, which bright yellow unique fan-shaped leaves beguile in autumn , and a cherry tree, for its refined and daintily colored blossoms in spring.

Although some of our relatives at first criticized the choice of the Gingko, skeptical and worried about its stature in our miniature garden, the mighty Gingko is now firmly established without further contestation. The poor cherry tree is still looked upon as an unfortunate choice, and now and then some of our relatives try to impel me to cut it down and replace it by another tree, mostly ‘because the period of blossoming is so short’.

**Junichiro Tanizaki** (1886-1965), one of Japan's major 20th century writers, probably wouldn't have agreed with my relatives. I'd like to think that he might have understood our aspiration to bring together these highly symbolic trees adjacently on one spot, introducing aesthetical and philosophical contrast in the garden. As Tanizaki profusely elucidates in **The Makioka Sisters**, contrasts mirror the complexity of reality, at times even render reality tolerable, or at least fascinating.

The gingko tree, venerated in the East as a sacred tree, figures as a symbol of changelessness and is associated with longevity. Some trees even survived the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The tree is an ancient 'living fossil', nearly indestructible, and has inspired Goethe and the Art Nouveau architecture in Nancy and Prague – two cities we both loved and visited a few times. The cherry blossoms in turn symbolize the fragility of beauty and the brevity of life. The transient nature of the soft white-pink petals intensifies the delicate beauty, bringing sadness too, reminding of mortality.

With **The Makioka Sisters** Tanizaki wrote an eulogy to impermanence, soaked in the Japanese cultural and aesthetical concept and Zen mood of Mono no aware, a sense of melancholic resignation and sorrow for loss.

Called Tanizaki's magnum opus, the novel chronicles the lives of four sisters belonging to a wealthy Osaka merchant family in decline, set in the years preceding WWII, 1936-1941. The two oldest sisters, Tsuruko and Sachiko, are married and settled, while the two youngest sisters, Yukiko and Taeko, have still to be taken care of by arranging a suitable marriage for them.

Utterly picky and snobbish at first, the family gradually realizes that there aren't that many fish in the sea left, and a catch has to be done, quickly – before the prevalent asset of the aging Yukiko [she is approaching 30 in the beginning of the novel!], her traditional Kyotian beauty, fades away. As an utterly timid and incommunicative person, stubborn and silent, never showing her feelings, she becomes a nuisance to the family, an embarrassing obstacle for the chances of the youngest sister Taeko to get properly married. The sense of urgency is even increasing now the westernized and non-conformist Taeko disregards the traditional family values and concerns by her blatant promiscuity, having various scandalous love affairs and persistently damaging the reputation of her family. Rebellious by principle, artistic and clever Taeko represents social change in Japan, a shift to individualism and personal choice. She is a proto-feminist modern woman, determined to take control of her own destiny by working.

However most of the events revolve around the numerous attempts to marry off Yukiko, the novel's most highlighted protagonist is the second sister, Sachiko. Tender-hearted, gullible and overly sensitive, she has practically taken the full responsibility for her two younger sisters after the death of their parents, while according to the mores, this task, including marrying both women off to a suitable spouse, is in fact the one of the oldest sister, Tsuruko and her husband Tatsuo, who is now head of the family. As much as the novel illustrates the function of and roles in the family within this privileged class, it also paints the 'portrait of a marriage', showing the benefits of the traditional arranged marriage like the one of Sachiko and Teinosuke, which is a prosperous alliance of warmth, support, understanding and sympathy. Perhaps it is even an affectionate one, even if romantic love is not a theme in the traditional marriage business (basically fixed on risk analysis) or in this novel. No sight into the inner thought processes of the characters is granted to the reader however, as Tanizaki focusses on the larger scale changes in the traditional Japanese society, describing the experiences and tribulations of his characters in a detached narrative style.

While on the surface an engrossing family saga with a touch of soapy plot features, the novel left me with the nagging feeling there are multiple layers to this novel barely fathomable to a western eye only by a whisker acquainted with Japanese culture, history and literature. Looking for familiar ground, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* unsurprisingly came to mind – the marriage issues – but none of the four sisters is endowed

with Elisabeth's Bennet's wit and charm – and Thomas Mann's Buddenbrooks – the decline of a merchant family – but in The Makioka Sisters, only a few years of the lives of one generation are at stake. Various intriguing analyses of manifold facets of the novel, of which the list seems endless, have been made, so one could spend hours in the lasting legacy of Tanizaki's novel. Call me weird, but I fancy how a detail plucked from a conversation triggers a delightful comparison of middle class women's education in Japan and Russia through the lens of Western piano music like Chopin.

Written partly during WWII, the military censors soon halted the on-going serialized publication of the novel – the declined state of the too feminine world it reflected was considered unpatriotic at a time ultra-nationalism, imperialist expansion and military optimism were paramount. In 1943 a military censorship board dismissed the novel as a work about 'the soft, effeminate and grossly individualistic lives of women' – which pretty much is undeniably the case. The novel evocates a hyper-feminine, elegant world of leisure, traditional dancing, calligraphy, sewing of clothes, making of dolls, the meticulous and intricate descriptions of clothing, (kimono's, obi's...), visits to the beauty parlor, hairstyle and make-up, music making on traditional instruments like the toko and the shamisen, visits to the Kabuki theatre....It depicts a comfortable, overly protected, almost decadently elegant life on a moment the authorities demanded austerity.

Tanizaki, at first infatuated by modernity and the West and influenced by writers like Poe, Wilde and Baudelaire, turned to more traditional Japanese aesthetics and traditional culture when he moved to the Kansai region in 1923, the cultural and historical heart of Japan, resulting in three translations of the 11th century The Tale of Genji he wrote in modern Japanese.

The gracefulness of the sisters' way of life reflects Tanizaki's renewed admiration for the traditional aesthetical way of life and culture of the Kansai region (in the south-central region of Japan's main island Honshu). Except from the oldest sister Tsuruko, who moves with her husband and six children to Tokyo for work, The Makioka's lives mainly happen in the triangle amongst the cities of Osaka, Kobe and Kyoto.

Some exquisitely depicted scenes, like the yearly excursion of Sachiko's household to the cherry blossoms of Kyoto and a night devoted to a firefly hunt, are of a breathtaking beauty. The smooth and elegant prose seduces effortlessly, even more when overlooking the proverbial cultural barbs. (view spoiler)

*Down into the grasses on the bank, and there, in the delicate moment before the last light goes, were fireflies, gliding out over the water, in low arcs like the sweep of grasses. On down the river, on and on, were fireflies, lines of them wavering out from this bank and the other and back again, sketching their uncertain tracks of light down close to the surface of the water, hidden from outside by the grasses. In the last moment of light, with darkness creeping up from the water and the moving plumes of grass still faintly outlined, there, far as the river stretched – an infinite number of little lines in two long rows on either side, quiet, unearthly. Sachiko could see it all even now, here inside with her eyes closed. Surely that was the impressive moment of the evening, the moment that made the firefly hunt worth-while.*

*And when Sachiko was asked what flower she liked best, there was no hesitation in her answer: the cherry blossom. All these hundreds of years, from the days of the oldest poetry collections, there have been poems about cherry blossoms. The ancients waited for cherry blossoms,*

*grieved when they were gone, and lamented their passing in countless poems. How very ordinary the poems had seemed to Sachiko when she read them as a girl, but now she knew, as well as one could know, that grieving over fallen cherry blossoms was more than a fad or a convention. the family – Sachiko, her husband and daughter, her two younger sisters – had for some years now been going to Kyoto in the spring to see the cherry blossoms. The excursion had become a fixed annual observance. (...) For Sachiko there was, besides pleasant sorrow for the cherry blossoms, sorrow for her sisters and the passing of their youth. (...) As the season approached, there would be reports on when the cherries were likely to be in full bloom. With each breeze and each shower their concern for the cherries would grow. (...) The cherries of the Heian Shrine were left to the last because they, of all the cherries in Kyoto, were the most beautiful. Now that the great weeping cherry in Gion was dying and its blossoms were growing paler each year, what was left to stand for the Kyoto spring if not the cherries in the Heian Shrine? And so, coming back from the western suburbs on the afternoon of the second day, and picking that moment of regret when the spring sun was about to set, they would pause, a little tired, under the trailing branches, and look fondly at each tree – on around the lake, by the approach to a bridge, by a bend in the path, under the caves of the gallery. And until the cherries came the following year, they could close their eyes and see again the color and line of a trailing branch. (...) Sachiko and Etsuko, turned away from the camera, were looking out over the rippled surface of the lake from under this same cherry tree, and the two rapt figures, mother and daughter, with cherry petals falling on the gay kimono of the little girl, seemed the very incarnation of regret for the passing of spring. Ever since, they had made it a point to stand under the same tree and look out over the pond, have their picture taken.*

Representing the fragility and brevity of life, both the cherry blossoms and the fireflies are poignant symbols for the fleeting of time, the transience of beauty, the predominant awareness of Panta Rei and of inevitable social, economic and cultural change this novel exudes in every sentence – change which is undesirable and regrettable in some ways.

Although this novel is often called an epic elegy mourning the waning and loss of traditional Japanese values and mores, Tanizaki most of the time uses a subtle brush to paint the vanishing world as known by the sisters. He questions their desperate clinging to the old rituals by means of hyperbolic description in a slightly ironic tone, observing the gauche behaviour of the family when they put out all the stops to market Yukiko. There is no unequivocal idealization of the traditions or cultural practices, nor are they represented as superior to the more modernized and westernized way of life in Japan. Tanizaki is aware that the formality of ancient traditions can rigidly restrain and suffocate - in particular women's – individual lives. However Tanizaki bequeaths the youngest sister Taeko - representing the Japanese moga or modern working girl - with a less harsh predicament than late 19th century literary heroines like Emma Bovary or Anna Karenina suffered for their social and sexual transgressions, one could discuss Taeko's fate and wonder if her misfortune has to be considered a punishment for ill behavior, morally or socially.

To my ears, Tanizaki's voice sounded more prosaic and less melancholic than Yasunari Kawabata's. The Makioka's decline is predominantly economic and subsequently social, as the impoverishment of the family means they have to rethink their way of life –even have to work!- and cannot uphold all the duties of their social class, like organizing a memorial ceremony of the parents with the grandeur which is expected of them.

There is some ambivalence in Tanizaki's pessimistic view on his society. On the one hand he is lamenting

the past, glorifying the successful arranged marriages of Tsuruko and Sachiko, contrasting this harmonious bliss with the bleak ending of the progressive path Taeko – and by extension Japan, by modernization and westernization – chose. On the other hand he is suggesting that the old ways do not avail anymore, and that Japan has to outgrow its oppressive traditions, hinting at the unhappiness of Yukiko, albeit her obedience to the traditions. Neither Yukiko or Taeko are happy or rewarded. By highlighting these frictions between the individual's quest for freedom and civilization's contrary demand for conformity, self-repression and self-effacement, Tanizaki acknowledges a certain *Unbehagen in der Kultur* and divulges the modernity of his insights.

Pondering about this novel, which fascinatingly contrasts and blends past and present, modernity and tradition, East and West, I visited the Japanese garden in Hasselt last Sunday. Listening to the guide talking about the ancient tradition of Hanami, the picnicking under the blooming cherry trees, richly flooded with sake, it occurred that the cherry blossoms have been affected with less innocent connotations in the past; during WWII the cherry blossoms took on a new, grim meaning, as kamikaze pilots used to paint cherry blossoms on their aircrafts, identifying themselves with the short-lived petals when they departed on their suicide missions.

*Tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse.*

Images: Botanical garden Meise/Catching Fireflies by Chikanobu (1890)/toko instrument/Japanese garden, Hasselt

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### **Sharlene says**

Originally posted at <https://olduvaireads.wordpress.com/20...>

The Makioka Sisters is one of the most lovely things I've read in a long time. That is, if one can put it out of one's mind that life in Japan in the late 1930s and early 1940s was not a fantastic time for women. This was my first Junichiro Tanizaki book and I was rather surprised at how well he wrote these women. It is odd especially as Tanizaki has a reputation for writing about characters with erotic obsessions and desires.

I may have read this book sooner if anyone had told me that it was a sort of Japanese version of Pride and Prejudice. Well it is, sort of, and it also isn't.

"The Makiokas were an old family, of course, and probably everyone in Osaka had heard of them at one time or another. But still – Sachiko would have to forgive her for saying so – they could not live on their old glory forever."

There are four Makioka sisters. The older two, Tsuruko and Sachiko, are married and have their own families. Yukiko and Taeko (also known as Koi-San or 'small daughter', a common endearment in Osaka).

Yukiko is to be married off, if anyone will have her. The family has already scared off several suitors, for a variety of reasons. The Makioka family's wealth is a mere shadow of what it used to be, but still they hold their heads high and hold out for the best. Until matchmakers begin to avoid making matches. It doesn't help

that her younger sister was involved in a bit of a scandal and a minor tabloid printed this affair (must have been a slow news day), but mistook Yukiko for Taeko.

Unfortunately Yukiko is extremely soft-spoken and rather pale and frail-looking, to such a point that one potential suitor even asks for medical tests to be done, to prove that she is of good health.

“It was reasonable enough for such a well-behaved man to insist on an elegant, refined girl, but for some reason – maybe as a reaction from his visit to Paris – he insisted further that he would only have a pure Japanese beauty – gentle, quiet, graceful, able to wear Japanese clothes.”

Poor Yukiko. She’s quiet among strangers so although she’s actually a really interesting person and quite modern in her tastes, liking for instance, Western music, she is overshadowed by her more colourful older sister Sachiko and her vivacious younger sister Taeko. It’s so bad that Sachiko is often asked to tone down her dress, dress older, or perhaps not show up at all, to meetings with prospective husbands. As an introvert, I feel for Yukiko. I so want her to be happy. I want her to be less meek and speak up but she never really does. She is quite a traditional, conservative Japanese woman, letting her older sisters and their husbands determine who her future husband is to be, never seeking the independent life that her younger sister has.

It was fascinating to learn just how traditional Osaka society at the time was. Taeko, being the youngest, could not marry until Yukiko was married. As the youngest, she also wasn’t supposed to eat before her older siblings did, had to sit at a certain place at the table and so on. And to learn that Tokyo life and culture is so different and even a bit strange to the three younger Makiokas, whose society remains largely confined to Osaka, although they venture to nearby Kobe for meals and shows.

The Makioka Sisters was serialized from 1943 to 1948 and was originally titled *Sasameyuki* (??) in Japanese, which means lightly falling snow. The “yuki” character or “snow” being the same character in Yukiko’s name, showing her central importance in the story. As suitor after suitor is no longer, well, suitable, one cannot help but feel worried for her, as she is certainly not the kind of woman who can survive on her own.

Oh how I loved this quiet, regal story. It is gentle in its depiction of Japanese traditions vs the inevitable creeping modernization and westernization of society, the Makioka sisters representative of the old families, struggling to hold on to the last vestiges of their good name. It is a beautiful story, one that has taken me far too long to read and write about, as I couldn’t bear to leave the Makiokas’ world.

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## Sue says

A quiet book that portrays Japan at a time of great change, the late 1930s to early 1941, through the story of one family and their interactions with provincial and larger Japanese world. The Makioka sisters represent a culture on the brink, struggling to retain its traditional identity in the face of change both internal and international. The modern world is coming whether this family wants it or not.

This is not a novel for those looking for adventure or action. It’s for those who want character, good writing, a picture of a society on the cusp of change and a family coping with old traditions in this world. I continue to be surprised by the wonderful Asian writing I’m discovering this year.

Highly recommended.

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## Phillip Kay says

The Makioka Sisters (*Sasame Yuki, Light Snow*), first published in 1948, was written by Junichiro Tanizaki (1886-1965). Tanizaki wrote The Makioka Sisters after translating the Tale of Genji into modern Japanese and the Murasaki novel is said to have influenced his own. It tells of the declining years of the once powerful Makioka family and their last descendants, four sisters. It has been translated by Edward G. Seidensticker in 1957. Powerfully realistic, it mourns the passing of greatness while celebrating in wonderfully evocative detail the beauty of a particular time and place, Osaka in the 1930s. In its creation of beauty out of sadness it can be compared to another family saga, *The Maias* (1888), by the Portuguese master Eça de Queiroz (1845-1900).

Why is this long book, largely concerned with trivial family procedures, one of the finest novels written? It is not concerned with great events, causes or philosophies. It has little concern with the war Japan was fighting with China, and then the USA, when the book was first published. Indeed its characters don't think about the war, and in a positive way, which doesn't trivialise their concerns at all (most people in fact don't think about the reasons for a war: perhaps it's better that way). This doesn't mean the book is escapist or superficial, just as the concern with women's lifestyle, dress, makeup, etiquette or social vanity make it something written just for women (books and films were once made - by men - to capitalise on what were considered women's 'little' concerns). Tanizaki does that wonderful thing a great artist can do, he finds the universal in the most exact examination of the particular, and makes a work of relevance to us all. Read another family saga, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) and my candidate for the greatest novel yet written (though I'm more than cynical about the word 'great') and marvel at the many routes artists find to the universal.

My review is impossibly partial: The Makioka Sisters is the most beautiful novel I've ever read. The language (translation) is so smooth and flowing, the characters and situations so gentle and muted, yet precise and meaningful, that reading the book is like seeing the universe in a drop of water - you see, which is moving, and awareness of where and how you see brings amazement and then a real pleasure.

In this beautiful book the characters have a greater degree of reality than many real people - Tanizaki is a great master of characterisation. I know more about them than I do about most of the people I know. It is done by the accumulation of enormous amounts of detail, but detail which, trivial though it may appear, is just right. The result is the creation of a most ethereal and delicate beauty, a lovely world crumbling to extinction yet all the more precious because of its inevitable passing away.

Sachiko, the second sister and her husband Teinosuke are that rare achievement, a convincing depiction of really good and admirable people, though in no way heroic. They are very ordinary people, but their goodness, their little troubles and worries, their faults, even weaknesses, all serve to charm and captivate. Of all the characters in the book these two are the loveliest. It is a real affirmation of humanity to have created two such kind and gentle and sensitive people, and to have made them so real and convincing.

The careworn life of Tsuruko (first sister), the hesitations of Yukiko (third sister), the unhappiness of Taeko (Koi-san, fourth sister) all gain from contrast with the stability and happiness of Sachiko and Teinosuke. And what an evocation of the old ways of Japan. Changing rapidly even as Tanizaki writes of them.

Detail by detail - Etsuko's games with the German girl Rosemarie, Itakura's leather coat, the 'old one', Koi-san's mimicry and mingled love and resentment of Yukiko...there are literally thousands of details.

Teinosuke's love of Spring in his garden, the vitamin injections the sisters take, the forthrightness of Itani - all, everyone, is so precise, not random at all, chosen to evoke mood, reveal character, show milieu.

So powerful and evocative has the book been - yet nothing really happens, except to Koi-san. The war approaches, the old Japan changes, Yukiko gets married - unforgettable!

I've seen advertised a TV serialisation of The Makioka Sisters, but can't imagine how it could succeed. So much of the book's effect is through language. Visually, certain scenes stand out, such as the cherry blossom viewing or the flood. The narrative though is largely uneventful, small actions that dramatically and convincingly reveal a character's state of mind, early history or personality.

Written with love, a strong love of people and place, the book creates love in the reader. Because of Tanizaki I have loved Osaka in the late 1930s and have learned to treasure and respect its people. For those hesitating to undertake reading such a 'Japanese' work as The Makioka Sisters there is the perfect bridging novel The Wind-up Bird Chronicle (Nejimaki-dori kuronikuru, 1995) by Haruki Murakami, which does mention the war - and Charlie Parker and 'hard-boiled' detective stories and Jungian archetypes and the surreal: a roller coaster of a novel and one of the best as well.

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### **Nehirin~ says**

Jun'ichir? Tanizaki... Genelde Japon edebiyat?, yazarlar? pek tan?nm?yor. Ki çok büyük bir kay?p. Jun'ichir? Tanizaki muhte?em bir yazar.

Nazl? Kar ya da orijinal ad?yla "Sasameyuki" geleneksel dünyadan ç?a?da? dünyaya geçi?i yans?tan ve döneminin tutan gerçek bir ba?yap?t. Tanizaki 1930'lar?n Japonyas?n?, ç?a?da? dünyaya ayak uydurmaya çal??rken geleneklerinden de kopamayan Japon insan?n? çok güzel yans?tm??. Makioka kardeşlerin bir erke?in gözünden yans?yan ve hayat?n ta kendisi olan hikâyesini sevece?inize inan?yorum. Çok severek okudum. Her kelimesinde, her sat?r?nda, her sayfas?nda hikâyede kayboldum ve çok büyük keyif ald?m.

Makioka kardeşlerden Sachiko'nun evlendi?i gün yazd??? ?iir...

"Bugün yine esvaplar?m? seçenekten

Bitip gitti gün

Evlenip giderken nedense hüzünlüyüüm"

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### **Kimley says**

I really wanted (and fully expected) to love this book. I loved Tanizaki's Naomi but for reasons that I can't properly express I never found myself engrossed in this as I'd hoped to be. I'd get into for a bit, get bored, put it down for a few weeks and then pick it up again.

I can however understand why this book is so well regarded and I really keep vacillating on how to rate it. Set in Japan, it's an intimate look at a family of four sisters, their husbands, lovers or lack thereof and immediate family and friends. It's a book that deals primarily with the mundane. The last sentence of the book (and this isn't revealing anything) is about one of the character's diarrhea.

I have only read one other Tanizaki book but I gather that he frequently deals with obsession and this book is obsessively mundane. In small doses, it's truly stunning but after awhile I just didn't care that one of the sisters couldn't get a husband to save her life or that the youngest one was tramping around.

And admittedly this is my own problem, not a fault of the book's but I also had a hard time ignoring the fact that the book was published (in parts I believe) in the years immediately following WWII and takes place in the years immediately preceding the war and yet there is very little talk of the war in the book. I kept waiting for the war to rear its ugly head. Their neighbors were German and I rather foolishly thought oh, ho, that's got to mean something but it didn't. And then I started thinking about how I live in a country at war and yet it doesn't affect my life in any tangible way as far as my daily activities go. And that's I suspect precisely Tanizaki's point. Life goes on. Diarrhea happens...

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### **Laura says**

A bit long but still interesting story of four aristocratic Japanese sisters in the late 1930's, which I thought would be fun as that's one of my favorite periods in English literature. However, these ladies might as well be living in a different century as well as a different hemisphere — their daily rituals and cultural traditions were out of another world. While the various relationships among the sisters seem familiar (probably everyone with sisters has to negotiate the bossy, the overly sensitive, the indecisive), some of the cultural aspects are decidedly foreign. For instance, it's a disgrace to the brothers-in-law that their sister-in-law is still unmarried, because it's their responsibility to find a suitable husband for her. The selection process, interviews, and initial meetings with the prospective husbands are arranged by an old matchmaker and overseen by the brothers-in-law. The elaborateness of this enterprise and the delicate (and desperate) balance between what is due The Makioka Family Honor, and what kind of single men are actually available, borders on tragicomedy.

I found the rituals and minutiae that fill the sisters' relatively empty days to be quite interesting, but even more interesting is the contrast between their lives and the modern world that seems to exist completely outside them. They refer in passing to the Japanese invasion of China as the "China Incident", and are mildly pleased that in the early days of 1940 the war seems to be going well for their German friends. Other than that, they could be drifting through the 18th century instead of mid-20th century. The exception is the youngest of the four sisters, who has a foot in both the modern world (she has a job and a boyfriend) and the old world (she can't get married until her older sister does). Each sister is drawn with subtlety and detail, and their interwoven relationships are especially compelling.

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### **RK-isme says**

My 'better late than never' review.

Several weeks ago, I put out a request for a recommendation of a good Japanese book to read. My good friend Marita immediately popped up with The Makioka Sisters. This recommendation was seconded by friend Silvia Cachia. I read their reviews and ordered the book, then forgot about it.

Then I became frustrated with the slowness of my current reading choices and complained on GR that I felt

like I was stuck in a bog. Friend Travelin piped in with, "Go random." On my way out the door, I ran into the mailman who handed me a package from The Book Depository (no endorsement intended). That struck me as pretty "random". I had several books on order.

So here I am. An excellent novel. Extremely well written and translated. The story moves along well and at times is positively captivating.

I got my thoughts together and sat down to write what I hoped would be a pretty good review based on the fact that I loved the book and had written a few notes while reading the book. But then I read my friend Ilse's review. It looked a little familiar. Of course, there was the review I wanted to write. But it was better than anything that I could have written. It had all of my ideas but so much more, much, much more. And the writing was wonderful. And she had added beautiful pictures (I would love to have Fireflies up on my wall in my reading room.). She even had what I thought were brilliant references to Jane Austin and Thomas Mann which I had planned to use as an opener to my review. So if you want to read what I think of The Makioka Sisters, read Ilse's brilliant review and think that somewhere in that glowing brilliance are a few embers that would have been my review.

BUT WAIT, I would like to tell you a little about what this book brought to mind while I was reading it (if you're not already reading Ilse's review).

Yes the book is about that favourite subject of earlier Japanese writers, cultural change and its efforts on individuals. I love the theme and will continue to read these books. What struck me about The Makioka Sisters was that the story was strongly centred on an extended family and its struggles with that change. And, despite the fact that it was about a Japanese family in the mid 1940s, a few years before my appearance on this planet, I empathized, I understood and I related what I read to my own experiences.

Today, with our ever changing technology and constant pressures, financial, political and consumer, we see our young often floundering off in directions that deeply offend us. And yet, speaking for myself at least, we are, like Sachiko, who finds herself in the role of guardian of the values, weak and ineffective. Finally, again like Sachiko, we accept a hollow spectre of what we once held to be sacred.

Those values that we have tried to defend in families as parents, and even as children, have so little basis. They are nothing but conventions of our society and, for all of the Sturm und Drang we experience, in the final analysis, we are left worn and torn but still intact no matter what is left of our values.

Perhaps, as in the Makioka Sisters, we are best off to let those family values go in the name of maintaining the family.

I have recently gone through yet another family crisis with yet another deeply held value going the way of the passenger pigeon. In the final analysis, the family is magically still firmly together held that way by mutual love and caring. I cannot really expect more in our ever changing world. The option of fighting for the value and splintering the family is unacceptable.

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### **Michael Finocchiaro says**

This is one of Junichiro Tanizaki's major novels covering a family of women in early 20th C Japan. It is beautifully written with extremely well fleshed out characters and an entrancing plot. It is probably my

favourite Tanizaki book.

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## Dolors says

The yearly peregrination to the natural spectacle of the cherry blossoming in Kyoto is a millenary tradition in Japan. The symbolism attached to that ritual renders the transience of beauty. The constant collision between the explosion of exuberant vitality and the withering that precedes the inevitable defoliation marks the unrelenting passage of time and the virtuous circle of life rekindled from the ashes.

It's through the annual expeditions that *The Makioka Sisters* take to witness such a natural display that the history of a generation, that the end of an era and the beginning of borrowed, almost imposed, modernity is presented in detailed scenes of domestic life in a traditional Japanese family.

Evoking the naturalistic undertone of the European nineteenth century literature, the Makioka Sisters emerge as aristocratic female protagonists with a family name in steadfast decline that compose a novel of manners in a canon of four voices. The younger sisters, subservient Yukiko and free-spirited Taeko, see the seasons go by but still remain unmarried branded by an unfortunate scandal that took place ten years ago. A delicate and precise narration of the intricate obstacles the Makioka family endures to find suitable partners for the unwed sisters following a strict morality that equals the status of law becomes the main plotline and sets the action for the background tragedy that is about to unfold.

Like in the pointillism technique, words color this story like a fresco painting with small dots of color through the nuanced description of everyday life scenes: the choice of the right kimono for each occasion and its appropriate complements, the recurrent *miais* where suitors are introduced to the reluctant sisters, the outings to the Kabuki theatre or the trips to Tokyo and its hostile urbanity, the apparently casual dialogues between the members of the Makioka households; every scene acquires the steady rhythm of a repetitive routine, which sometimes verges the tedious, but emulates the circular pattern of the changing seasons and eludes linear storytelling along with the patience of readers more used to action packed books.

The characters, even though unscathed on the surface, show the cracks on the walls of their sophisticated poises in small trivialities that can easily go unnoticed by the westernized eye, which in turn augurs the gradual fading of the ancestral heritage of the Japanese empire. The world as the Makiokas know it, the world of rigid social protocols where the family is the central axis that keeps the wheel of society running smoothly, is about to collapse due to the tragic events of WWII, which Tanizaki only refers to by passing as the "China Incidents".

The Nazi alliance is represented by the friendship between the Makiokas and the Stlotz, their German neighbors, but Tanizaki avoids issuing direct value judgments on history or glorifying an objectionable social system that severely limited the free will of women and remains a dignified paradigm of discretion, infusing the required tone in the story to allow the reader to reach his own conclusions.

Nothing is explicit, awareness is reached in semidarkness and in the end, the inner turbulences that shake the Makioka family echo the outward disruption of an era on the verge of disappearing, something that can be envisioned in the prosaic and rather abrupt ending that Tanizaki uses to close this nostalgic ode to a world that no longer exists in reality, only in words.

The petals of the cherry blossoms might fall like tiny butterflies settling to earth, the morning dew on weeping branches might remind us of unshed tears, and with the senses scrambled, the reader won't know whether he is mourning the loss of the old or welcoming the new that keeps the sense of loneliness suspended in time, running much deeper than mere nostalgia, for there is a certain amount of unknowable

depth in Japanese literature that will always remain half in the shadows, making it unfathomable, and pure, at once.

*Cherry trees in the Philosopher's Path (Kyoto) during summertime.*

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### **Maria Thomarey says**

Το δι?βασα σε 5 μ?ρες . Αυτ? .

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### **Sinem A. says**

1930 lar?n Japonyas? nas?ld?, Japonya o y?llarda dünyaya nas?l bakard?, Japonyada insanlar nas?l ya?ar ,hem gelenekçi hem yenilikçi nas?l oluyorlar gibi sorulara cevap bulduran, bu sitede bir arkada??n yorumunda gördü?üm tavsiyeye uyarak bir harita ve not defteri ile japon müzikleri e?li?inde okurken orada ya??yormu? gibi hissetti?im ama birtak?m sorunlar nedeniyleuzuunn vadede okudu?um güzel japon kitab?

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### **Deniz Balc? says**

Çok, çok güzeldi!

Ancak bir yan?mda buruldu. Sebebi elbette Tanizaki'nin Türkçe'ye çevrilmi? eserlerinin hepsini okudu?um için. Umut ediyorum ki, H. Murakami'nin tüm dünyada yaratt??? zelzele biraz daha sürer ve insanlar?n Japon Edebiyat?'na ilgileri artar. Ayr?ca Japon gelenekselli?ine s?rt?n? dönümü? bir yazarla bu istihdam?n sa?lanmas? ise ironik ve dü?ündürücü.

"Nazl? Kar" gelecek olursam öncelikle Esin Esen taraf?ndan yap?lan çeviri mükemmel ötesi. Kitab?n kapak tasarı?m?ndan tutunda, düzeltmelerine kadar, bask? kalitesine kadar her ?ey çok büyük özenle gerçekle?tirilmi?.. ?lk bask?s?n? 2000 adet yapan bu büyük kitab?n ümit ediyorum ki tekrar bask?lar?n? görebiliriz.

Kitab?n orijinal ad? Sasemeyuki, Japonca'da 'çisildeyerek ya?an kar' anlam?na geliyormu?. Ancak bu sözcük ayn? zamanda Japon söz sanatlar?nda; kiraz çiçeklerinin baharda dökülmüşini karla kar??t?rm?? gibi alg?lamaya verilen bir isimde. Bu isim çok bilinçli ve lirik bir tercih. Tek ba??na metaforik olarak kitab?n anlatt???, aile hikayesini; baharda dökülen ve karla kar??t?r?lan kiraz çiçeklerine benzetmi? hem de her ?eyin gelip geçici oldu?unu anlatan bir mant??a oturtmu?. Zira geleneksel japon hayat?nda büyük yeri olan kiraz çiçeklerini izleme seromonilerinin, asl?nda sadece estetiksel bir durumu yoktur. Ayn? zamanda hayat? ve ölümü sorgulamaya götüren derin manalar? vard?r. Bu anlamda e?siz bir tercih. Kitab?n ?ngilizce ad? "The Makioka Sisters". Daha önce Türkçe'ye çevrilmeyece?ini dü?ündü?ümden, ?ngilizce versiyonunu okumak için birkaç giri?imde bulunmu?um. Ancak ?ngilizce çok sistematik, lego gibi bir dil. ?ngilizce'nin matemati?i belki H.Murakami, Kobo Abe gibi yazarlar? birebir kar??l?yor olabilir; fakat dili sade ve lirik olan Tanizaki, Kawabata gibi yazarlar? kar??layam?yor bence. O yüzden bu bask?n?n çevirisinin çok fazlas?yla tatmin edici oldu?unu söyleyebilirim.

Tanizaki'nin eserlerinde a??rl?kl? e?ilim, insan?n cinsel olarak do?al olarak sahip oldu?u saplant?lar?n incelemesidir. Bunu Naomi, Ç?lg?n Bir ?htiyar?n Güncesi, Anahtar gibi romanlar?nda görebiliriz. Ancak Türkçe'ye henüz kazand?r?lmam?? baz? eserlerinde de Japon Kültürü'nün de?i?imi, sava? öncesi ve sonrası? insan?n hali, bat? ile do?u sentezindeki bocalamalar? üzerine kuruludur. "Nazl? Kar"da bu ikinci kategorideki en yetkin örne?idir. Hatta yazar?n ba?yap?t? denmektedir. Çünkü Tanizaki bu eseri, dünyan?n ilk roman? say?lan "Genji'nin Hikayesi" adl? dev yap?t? ça?da? Japonca'ya kazand?rd?ktan sonra yazm??t?r. Hali ile o eserin zengin yap?s?n? ta??d??? söyleniyor. Genji'nin Hikayesi halen Türkçe'ye kazand?r?lmad??? için çok isabetli görü?ler öne süremeyece?im. Kitab? bu çevirisinden sonra 1939'da yazmaya ba?lam?? yazar; 1943'de de ilk olarak yay?nlanmaya ba?lam??. Uzun bir roman oldu?u için 3 cilt halinde yay?nlam?? ve son cildi de 1948'de yay?nlam??.

Tanizaki, modern Japon romanc?lar?n?n ço?unda oldu?u gibi, karamsar bir yazar de?ildir. Bunu okudu?unuz eserlerinden net bir ?ekilde anlayabilirsiniz. Ne Mi?ima kadar saplant?l?, ne Dazai kadar umutsuz, ne Kawabata kadar melankolik, ne Akutagava kadar problemlidir. Ne de Kenzaburo Oe gibi zor bir hayat? olmu?tur. Tanizaki'nin diline de yans?r bu sa?l?kl?l??. Ölümünün yak?n oldu?u zamanlarda, hastanede yatarken dahi romanlar?n? yazmaya ve hayata umutla bakmaya devam etmi?tir. ??te "Nazl? Kar" bu noktada yazar?n en gerçekçi yakla??ma sahip, sava? y?llar?nda da yaz?ld??? için içten içe bir ele?tiri ta??yan roman?d?r. Bir kad?n roman? olmas? ve onlar?n hallerine bürünmesine ra?men, baz? ?eylerden korkmas? ve uzak durmas? aç?kça gözükmektedir. Elbette bunun yazard??? y?llardaki Japonya'n?n içinde bulundu?u durumlar?nda etkisi olmu?tur ama biraz sözü sak?nan ve fazla iyimser bir romanc? oldu?unu dü?ünebilirsiniz. Ben içimi katranla y?kan Japon edebiyat?nda, bu iyimser sesin tek ba??na farkl? ve özelli?ini korudu?unu dü?ünüyorum.

Temelde Makioka ailesinin 4 k?z? ve hayatlar? üzerinden bir Japon geleneksel?i senfonisi bu kitap. Tokyo'nun geli?ti?i, bat?l?la?t??? halbuki Kyoto, Osaka, Kobo gibi yerlerin safl??n? korudu?u zamanlarda yaz?lm?? ve öyküde böyle bir zaman mekan çizgisine oturtulmu?. Tanizaki, bu dev öyküyü yazarken ilham ald??? ?eyin e?inin ailesi oldu?unu söylemi?. O yüzden bütün donelerini bu e?inin ailesinden direkt alm??. Sözlü bir tarih çal??mas? yap?yorcas?na kar?s?ndan dinledi?i bütün aile geleneklerini kitab?na yedirmi?. Fakat güzel olan bir ?ey var ki o da bu ailenin Japonya'da özellikle k?rsal bölgelerde yüzlerce örne?inin olmas?. Yani benzerlerinin ya?and??? bir sürü hikayeyi ta??m?? Tanizaki. Japon kad?nlar?n?n evlenme süreçleri, davranış?? özellikleri, erkeklerle kad?nlar?n toplumdaki konumu, bat?l?la?man?n Tokyo d??ndaki cereyan?, kad?n olman?n ikinci dünya sava?? öncesi nas?l de?i?ti?inin, geleneksellikten kopu?un nas?l gerçekle?ti?inin vb. hepsinin hakk?nda bilgi sahibi olabilecek kadar ayr?nt?l? sunumlar? var.

Yazar?n bat?l?la?ma ile ilgili dü?üncelerine de sahip oluyoruz. Zira kendiside bat?l??maktan kaç?nmam?? olsa da özellikle ilk romanlar?ndan Naomi ve sonrası?nda da buradaki Taeko karakteri ile sonuçlar?n? göstermek istemi?tir. Elbette kendi grotesk kültürünün içinde bir anda farklı? bir bireysellik girince bocalayan Japonya'da bat?l?la?ma ile ilgili görü?ler öne sürülmü?tü. Japon sosyal hayat?n?n tarihine bak?ld???nda en anlay??l? ve do?ru ele?tirileri Tanizaki'nin getirdi?ini söyleyebiliriz.

Ayr?ca kitab?n kiraz çiçekleri ve ate?böceklerini izleme k?s?mlar?nda Kawabata'y? and?rd???n? söyleyebilirim. O i?in mahareti Kawabata'n?n elinde oldu?undan s?k s?k ona gitti akl?m.

Son olarak kitapta beni en etkileyen bölüm. MAkioka ilesi ile Rus ailesinin yak?nla?t?klar? ve Rus ailesinin evinde bir ak?am yeme?i yedikleri bölümdür. Burada o yeme?e sanki bende kat?lm?? ve iki kültürünün birbirine z?t giden bir çok ayr?nt?s?n? kendi gözlerim ile gözleme?i gibi oldum.

Japon Edebiyat?'n?n en önemli eserlerinden biri olan Nazl? Kar'? ?iddetle öneriyorum.

Not: Japon hayat? ve kültürü ne kadar, Türk okuyucusuna oray? hissedebilmesi aç?ş?ndan özenle aktar?lm?? ve çevirilmi? olsa bile, birazc?k onlar hakk?nda bilgi sahibi olmak için gey?al?k, kimono kullan?m?n?n kültürel önemi, II.Dünya Sava?? s?ras? japonya gibi konular? kitaptan önce ya da kitapla beraber biraz daha ayr?nt?l? bilgi sahibi olmak ve kitab? daha iyi hissedebilmek için bak?lmas?n? öneririm. Bilmeyenler için elbette.

Herkese iyi okumalar.

5/5

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### **Magrat Ajostiernos says**

Una novela maravillosa, que me ha recordado en su estilo a otras grandes historias como 'La edad de la inocencia', 'La saga de los Forsyte' o a las de Jane Austen. Eso sí, al más puro estilo oriental, pausado y extremadamente bello, poniendo atención a cada sentimiento.

De las novelas japonesas que he leído, sin duda se encuentra ya entre mis preferidas.

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### **Aubrey says**

It's been such a long time since I've read a translation of the Japanese language. I had completely forgotten how calm and subtle the prose is, how patient you have to be in probing it. It's true that enough happens on the surface to make for a lengthy story, but it is the hidden depths that make the story engaging.

Most of the story is occupied with the lives of the Makioka sisters, focusing on the third sister who even at her advanced age has not yet been married. The book starts with discussion of yet another possible husband, (view spoiler) but it is so much more than a drawn out soap opera. The main thing to remember is that no matter what trivial events are being described, they are all happening at the cusp of World War II. This event, at first only briefly referred to as the 'China Incident', grows increasingly important as more and more characters feel the effects.

All of the sisters are slow to act at the beginning, analyzing the latest events for weeks on end, spending months on decisions that in this era would barely last a day. Even the youngest sibling, who is seemingly very adventurous and self sufficient compared to her sisters, is shown to be just as stuck in the past as the rest of them. She is quickest to act in realization of the changing times, and as such is the quickest to fall victim to disaster. The story doesn't continue very far after her specific troubles are over, but all signs suggest that the other sisters will not be able to avoid the dangers of the coming war. They do not know it yet, but the world is changing into a place with no time for their old methodical approach to life, and their survival will be completely dependent on their ability to adapt.

The book is a prime example of characters not appreciating in the slightest what they have until it is gone. They move around their social spheres, content in using all their time to carefully ruminate on the smallest problems from all angles, while making apologies for the slightest supposed missteps. Any hint of the dirty facts of reality is met with immovable contempt and disapproval, and in this day and age, the intrusions of reality are usually small enough that this stubbornness is enough to make them disappear. As time continues,

the characters find it increasingly difficult to continue their way of life without acknowledgement of the current wartime conditions, but they still manage to succeed till the very end of this story.

The book ends with discussion of the latest banal details of life, but sprinkled throughout are the hopes that each character has for the future. As the reader knows, soon after the end of the novel Japan would descend into chaos and misery as the war made itself known, something that the author himself was completely aware of. Writing this story in Japan from 1943-1948, he would've known full well what kind of journey he was sending his characters on. He would've experienced the worsening way of life that culminated in a final blow when Japan was bombed into surrender, and watched as even the Emperor surrendered to the demands of the outside world. His intimate descriptions of pre-WWII Japan are not only highly accurate, they clearly emphasize how traumatic the war will be to a country so slow and stubborn in its ways of life.

If he had gone on to write more, it is obvious that not even the isolated Makioka family would have been able to remain unscathed. There is little chance that any of their hopes for the future that continued beyond the novel would have been realized. What is certain is that their petty feuds and selfish desires would pale in comparison to the rampant death and destruction, and the war would trigger a mental crisis of the entire population. The days where the family of these sisters could afford to be surprised at 'hasty' actions, something commented on throughout the novel, would be at an end. Whether they survived this abrupt shove into modern times is anyone's guess.

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### **Libros Prestados says**

Poco a poco me ha ido convenciendo este libro. Durante mucho tiempo pensé en darle tres estrellas, pero ya hacia el final me había encariñado con los personajes y sus anécdotas, y ha terminado por ganarme. Las tres hermanas Makioka son extrañas y peculiares, con sus raras manías y su forma de ser a veces extravagante, pero al final no puedes evitar sentir cariño por todas ellas.

Es de desarrollo *muy* lento, incluso para ser una novela japonesa. Algo parecido a una ceremonia del té: largo y en apariencia tedioso, llevado a cabo con meticulosidad, cuidado y mucho cariño, pero lleno de un sentido más profundo. Al final, este libro intenta contar cómo fue una época y una clase social en decadencia. Un mundo que se iba a acabar. Los detalles en apariencia irrelevantes, las pequeñas anécdotas una tras otra, las relaciones entre familias y clases sociales, la forma de socializar y la forma de formar una familia... Todo ello va creando una atmósfera que casi podría decirse te transporta al Japón de ese periodo (justo anterior y coetáneo a la Segunda Guerra Mundial). Contarte los diversos intentos de la familia para casar a Yukiko no sólo crea cierta trama cómica, sino que es un medio para reflejar los complicados tejemanejes en los que la persona era sólo un engranaje en la maquinaria familiar y social.

Esta novela es una forma de entender el espíritu y las tradiciones niponas, que si bien han evolucionado con el tiempo, siguen manteniendo un núcleo imperturbable. Y como todo lo japonés, esconde mucho más de lo que parece en la superficie, y es trabajo del lector ir descubriendolo poco a poco.

Una novela delicada y costumbrista que guarda cierto toque de humor sutil y nos habla de un mundo que, en su mayor parte, ya no existe. Por cierto, la última frase, con la que termina el libro, creo que es sorprendente y desternillante. Nunca pensé que la terminaría así.

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## **Al Bità says**

I read this masterpiece many years ago, and still retain a great fondness for it. Set in Japan in the early 20th century in the period before World War II, its concern is the 'fate' of the Makioka sisters who still cling to the old aristocratic attention to detail and the minutiae of life while trying to survive the period they are living in. The pace is leisurely, meditative, and beautifully written. Its overall impact, however, belies the quiet exterior: the internal emotional drama builds up almost inexorably, and becomes more compelling as one reads...

In a sense, there is a feeling of loss; almost an elegy on the fading aristocratic way — yet life goes on, and it does so precisely in the attention to the little details, sometimes exquisite, sometimes irritating, but which all have the appropriate rituals and rationalisations to deal with them, no matter what. In a sense it is similar to two other great novels of the loss of a way of life: Lampedusa's 'The Leopard' (Sicily's aristocratic past) and of course Proust's 'Remembrance of Things Past' (France's 'belle époque'). Even so, this one deals more with a way of thinking and acting that pays intense attention to what might for others appear minuscule elements. Despite (or perhaps because of) this the deep psychological realisation of the sisters is astonishingly clear and precise. There is an overwhelming sense of the frailty of humanity, yet its stoic resolve to find life meaningful and worthwhile even in small things is ultimately intensely moving.

When one considers what is soon going to happen to Japan in the coming War, the final short, disturbing sentence, almost embarrassing in its detail, becomes something quite heartbreaking.

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## **Hadrian says**

Review to come later. Lots to think about this one. Loving observations of social life, perhaps lurid details of the lives of women, a society caught in the middle of a transition, the slow decline of a family as seen through its finances and health. All this written in the mid-1940s! It's astonishing that the heavy-handed government of the time would even let the book be serialized.

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## **Marie Saville says**

Simplemente maravilloso. No olvidaré nunca estas semanas pasadas en compañía de la familia Makioka. El tiempo parecía suspendido durante la lectura y solo existía para mi la vida entre las paredes de la casa familiar de Ashiya, los vagones de tren conectando Osaka y Tokio y, por supuesto, la cita anual para ver la floración de los cerezos en los jardines de Kioto. Cinco estrellas más que merecidas.

Gracias, gracias y gracias por descubrirmelo mi querida Magrat <3

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