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Spring Snow: The Sea Of Fertility, 1



Synopsis

Yukio Mishima's Spring Snow is the first novel in his masterful tetralogy, The Sea of Fertility. Here we meet Shigekuni Honda, who narrates this epic tale of what he believes are the successive reincarnations of his friend, Kiyoaki Matsugae. It is 1912 in Tokyo, and the hermetic world of the ancient aristocracy is being breached for the first time by outsiders – rich provincial families unburdened by tradition, whose money and vitality make them formidable contenders for social and political power. Shigekuni Honda, an aspiring lawyer and his childhood friend, Kiyoaki Matsugae, are the sons of two such families. As they come of age amidst the growing tensions between old and new, Kiyoaki is plagued by his simultaneous love for and loathing of the spirited young woman Ayakura Satoko. But Kiyoaki's true feelings only become apparent when her sudden engagement to a royal prince shows him the magnitude of his passion – and leads to a love affair both doomed and inevitable.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've only read two Mishima books so far, am reading a third now, and intend to get through 'em all. Alas, I fear that none will be as good as the first one I read - Spring Snow. I really didn't think people could still write like this in the 20th century. I mean, star-crossed, tragic love was an old subject by the time Shakespeare got to it - what made Mishima think he could write something new about it hundreds of years later? But something did, and I'm glad it did. For while there is a [very interesting] historical context to Spring Snow (tell me, what other book paints such a visceral portrait of early 20th century Japan?), the focus is on the love story. And no one writes love stories like Yukio

Mishima. Somehow, it manages to avoid the gaping pitfalls of sentimentalism and melodrama, creating instead a world of great beauty and fragility that I was loath to leave when the book drew to its close. If you read a biography of Mishima, you will likely find mountains of speculation concerning his various eccentricities (and that word is putting it nicely, methinks). Some will accuse him of right-wingery, others will rant about his "nationalism," etc. etc. etc. But I think that none of that applies. He was in no way a political person, just a hopelessly deluded romantic who still believed that romantic ideals had any place in modern society. This he applied to politics as well as to everything else. *Spring Snow*, fortunately, contains no politics, concentrating instead on romantic ideals as applied to the personal. The result is something that, while being Japanese through and through, is accessible to anyone. This book is worth reading for the marvelously poetic descriptions alone.

Warning: there are some SPOILERS in this review, but I will warn the reader in advance. If you have not read the book yet you should be safe reading my review as long as you heed the warnings when they appear and take appropriate action. I am putting my faith in you, dear reader, do not disappoint me... There is a book on the philosophy of biology, written by Kim Sterelny and Paul E. Griffiths with the interesting title "Sex and Death". (You can find it [here](#)). I have not read the book but I find it interesting that the subject matter of biology can be so succinctly summarized. Biology is the study of life and no one who studies life can ignore the overwhelming realities of sex (all life reproduces itself) and death (for each individual life eventually comes to an end). One of the reasons I find it so interesting that the field of biology can be summarized in two words is because I also happen to think that the themes of literature can also be summarized by the same two words. I feel fairly certain that every novel, poem, or play I have ever read has either been about sex or death (and usually both). That is certainly true of Yukio Mishima's novel, *Spring Snow*, which is the first in his *Sea of Fertility* tetralogy. Sex and death which, in Mishima's novel, appear in the guise of beauty and impermanence, are the dialectical forces that structure the novel. There is heart-breaking beauty in the world but, as seemingly transcendent as the experience of beauty can be, ultimately nothing can escape the reality of impermanence. Mishima skillfully weaves a tragedy out of the intertwining threads of beauty and impermanence.

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