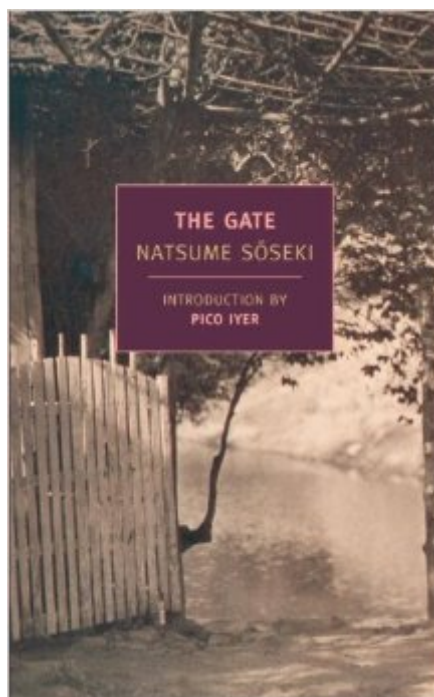


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# The Gate (New York Review Books Classics)



## Synopsis

An NYRB Classics Original A humble clerk and his loving wife scrape out a quiet existence on the margins of Tokyo. Resigned, following years of exile and misfortune, to the bitter consequences of having married without their families' consent, and unable to have children of their own, SÅsuke and Oyone find the delicate equilibrium of their household upset by a new obligation to meet the educational expenses of SÅsuke's brash younger brother. While an unlikely new friendship appears to offer a way out of this bind, it also soon threatens to dredge up a past that could once again force them to flee the capital. Desperate and torn, SÅsuke finally resolves to travel to a remote Zen mountain monastery to see if perhaps there, through meditation, he can find a way out of his predicament. This moving and deceptively simple story, a melancholy tale shot through with glimmers of joy, beauty, and gentle wit, is an understated masterpiece by one of Japan's greatest writers. At the end of his life, Natsume SÅseki declared *The Gate*, originally published in 1910, to be his favorite among all his novels. This new translation captures the oblique grace of the original while correcting numerous errors and omissions that marred the first English version.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Ilya Ilyich Oblomov was lying in bed one morning...He was a man of about thirty-two or thirty-three, of medium height and pleasant appearance, with dark grey eyes, but with a total absence of any

define idea, any concentration, in his features. Thoughts promenaded freely all over his face, fluttered about in his eyes, reposed on his half-parted lips, concealed themselves in the furrows of his brow and then vanished completely - and it was at such moments that an expression of serene unconcern spread all over his face." So begins Ivan Alexandrovich Goncharov's 1859 novel "Oblamov", whose protagonist is overcome with inertia and afflicted with profound lassitude; he is an insignificant hero. "The Gate" might be Japan's analogue. Compare the opening lines: "Sosuke had been relaxing for some time on the veranda, legs comfortably crossed on a cushion he had set down in a warm, sunny spot". "The Gate" is written in a "quaint", warm, subtle, atmospheric and sympathetic style; "as delicate as a breath of a hummingbird's wing", one might say. It is an engrossing novel written in a unique and uniquely Japanese fashion, not to be confused with modern Japanese literature, to which it bears only a tangential relationship. As a young man, Sosuke (the protagonist) frittered away his money, partially due to a spendthrift lifestyle during his student years but largely due to a somewhat credulous character. The remainder of his legacy vanished into the pockets of an uncle, thanks to the generally indifferent attitude Sosuke eventually adopted. As a result of his lassitude, Sosuke and his demure but sharp-eyed wife, Oyone are found muddling along in a mundane fashion hovering between a lower-middle and lower-class existence as the book begins.

The Gate had heard that Natsume Soseki was familiar with Zen of Buddhism. This novel describes their silent and solitary life of Sosuke and his wife Oyone. In their young days, Sosuke usurped Oyone from his close friend. The scene that Sosuke sits in Zen meditation is inserted in the last of this novel. Zen seems to insist that man is Buddha. And if I say without the fear of misunderstanding, man is the lump of the good. But the novel seems to insist the reverse. In the Jodo-Shinshu sect of Buddhism, man is a wicked person. The novel seems to insist such. I introduce such a scene. [Seated now face-to-face with the divinator, it was in all seriousness that she tried to ascertain whether Heaven had decreed that she was to bear a child, and if so, whether the child would survive to maturity. The divinator, who looked no different from other fortune-tellers who peddled their services on the street for a coin or two, lined up his blocks this way and that, shuffled his fifty long sticks, keeping count all the while, then finally, after stroking his goatee portentously and pondering for a moment, studied Oyone's face closely and pronounced with complete equanimity: "You cannot have any children." Oyone remained silent as she digested these words, considering them from every possible angle. Then, raising her head again, she replied with another question: "Why can't I?" She had assumed that the man would deliberate again

before responding, but without hesitating he looked her straight in the eye and replied unequivocally: "You will recall that you behaved unforgivably toward someone in the past. Your sinful behavior has become a curse that will prevent you from ever bringing a child into this world."

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