



Kiku's Prayer: A Novel (Weatherhead Books on Asia)

Shusaku Endo

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Endo Shusaku was a renowned twentieth-century Japanese author who wrote from the unusual perspective of being both Japanese and Catholic. His work is often compared to that of Graham Greene, who himself considered Endo one of the century's finest writers. A historical novel set in the turbulent period between the fall of the shogunate and the Meiji Restoration, *Kiku's Prayer* embodies themes central to Endo's work, including religion, modernization, and the endurance of the human spirit. In Japan, the book is considered one of his late masterpieces and has never before been translated into English.

Endo's novel is told through the eyes of Kiku, self-assured young woman from a rural village who falls in love with Seikichi, a devoted Catholic man. Practicing a faith still banned by the government, Seikichi is imprisoned and forced to recant under torture. Kiku's efforts to reconcile her feelings for Seikichi and the sacrifices she makes to free him mirror the painful, conflicting choices Japan faced as a result of exposure to modernity and the West. Endo's nuanced view of history is very much on display in this novel: Seikichi's persecution exemplifies Japan's insecurities toward the West, and Kiku's tortured yet determined spirit represents the nation's resilient soul. Yet *Kiku's Prayer* is much more than a historical allegory. It acutely renders one woman's troubled encounter with passion and spirituality at a transitional time in her life and in the life of her people.

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