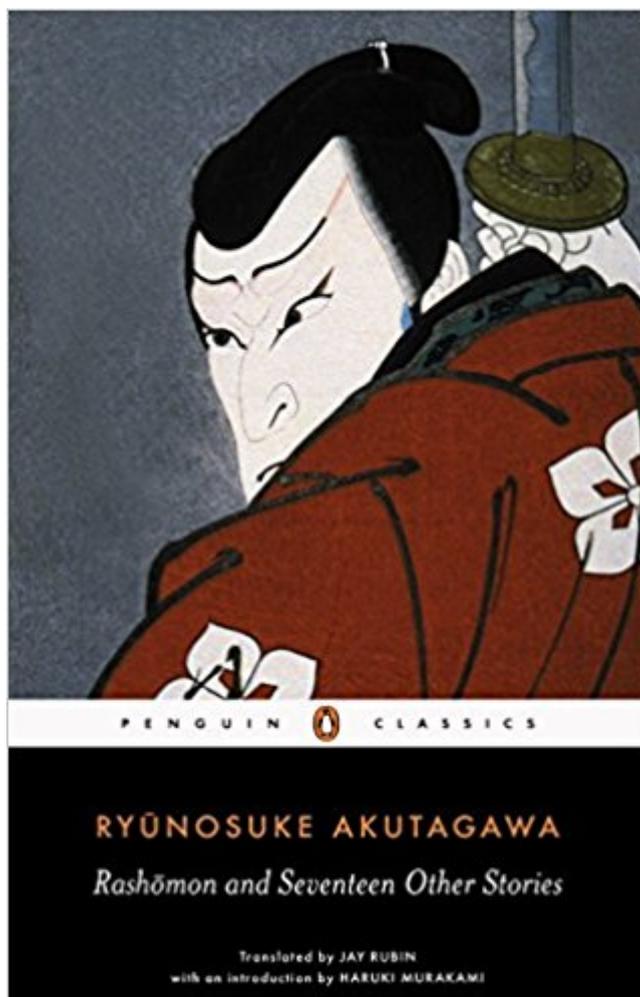


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Rashomon And Seventeen Other Stories (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

One of Penguin Classics' most popular translations is now also in our elegant black spine dress. Ryūnosuke Akutagawa is one of Japan's foremost stylists—a modernist master whose short stories are marked by highly original imagery, cynicism, beauty and wild humour. "Rashōmon" and "In a Bamboo Grove" inspired Kurosawa's magnificent film and depict a past in which morality is turned upside down, while tales such as "The Nose," "O-Gin" and "Loyalty" paint a rich and imaginative picture of a medieval Japan peopled by Shoguns and priests, vagrants and peasants. And in later works such as "Death Register," "The Life of a Stupid Man," and "Spinning Gears," Akutagawa drew from his own life to devastating effect, revealing his intense melancholy and terror of madness in exquisitely moving impressionistic stories. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

This is a review of Rashomon and Seventeen Other Stories, translated by Jay Rubin and published in 2006. Not Rashomon and Other Stories, the name of two other shorter books by other translators that were published years ago. Why groups together the three books despite their different

contents, I don't know; no stars for them. The author, Akutagawa (1892-1927), is even today considered one of Japan's most accomplished short-story writers. As some reviewers say, he's not for everyone. But readers attracted to the dark, pessimistic and atmospheric, or to the introspective and psychological subtleties conveyed with style in his best stories, might find some of his works worthwhile. He published about 150 stories between 1914 and his death; a scholar of his work has written somewhere that about half of them are still readable. There's a big gap between the best and the rest. Before this collection, some 60 of the stories had been translated into English since the 1930s. Here, eight more appear in English for the first time. The translator claimed nine, but a translation by Lawrence Rogers of "The Death Register" appeared earlier, in 2002. Akutagawa's short-story career can be divided roughly into three periods. In the early works, from 1914 to 1922, at his best he drew inspiration from Japanese folktales and history and a range of non-Japanese sources, focusing on the characters' psychology to make them strikingly modern. Of the early works, the best known in English are "The Nose" (1916), "Kesa and Morito" (1918), "H-II Screen" (1918) and "In a Grove" (1921), besides the vignette "Rashomon" (1915).

Considered to be one of the greatest national writers of Japan, Ryunosuke Akutagawa had a short but brilliant career in the early twentieth century. This collection includes some of his best known short stories, such as "Rashomon", "Spinning Gears", "Loyalty", and "The Nose", as well as some of his lesser-known works. The stories range from humorous, to historical, to agonizingly autobiographical. The Penguin Classics edition also includes a wonderfully insightful introduction by Haruki Murakami. For much of Akutagawa's early career, he delved into Japan's literary past. The story "Loyalty" is a complex tale based on a true event that took place during the Tokugawa period, when the young head of a noble family went insane, creating a crisis among his samurai retainers. Samurai were meant to be loyal to the death, but that loyalty also extended to the Shogun. If one's master posed a threat to the Shogun, where should your loyalty lie? This is the problem that faces two very different retainers, each of whom must make an almost impossible decision. The story explores not only loyalty, but the issues of sanity, respect, obligation, and shame. Some of the more humorous stories include "Horse Legs" and "The Story of a Head That Fell Off", both involving dead men who suffer terrible humiliations, one at the hand of some spiritual bureaucrats, and the other because of a medical miracle. But the final section of the book, which includes those selections that tell Akutagawa's own story, is possibly the most moving and compelling. Akutagawa's childhood was difficult, as his mother went insane shortly after his birth.

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