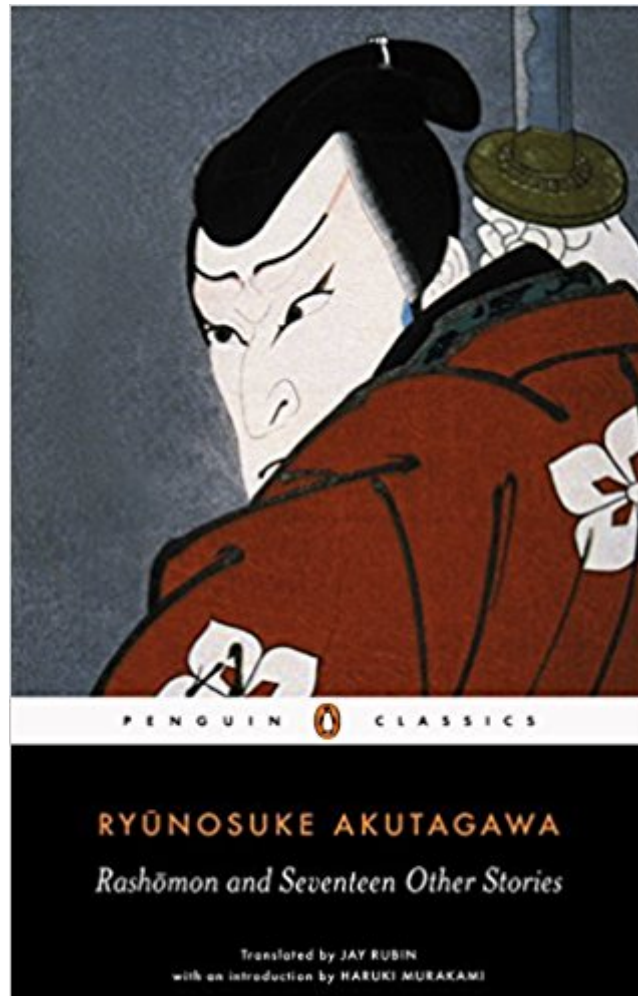




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# Rashomon And Seventeen Other Stories (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

One of Penguin Classics' most popular translations—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

Akutagawa Ryunosuke (1892-1927), a short-story writer, poet, and essayist, one of the first Japanese modernists translated into English. He was born in Tokyo in 1892, and began writing for

student publications at the age of ten. He graduated from Tokyo University in 1916 with an English Literature degree and worked as a teacher before becoming a full time writer in 1919. His mother had gone mad suddenly just months after his birth and he was plagued by fear of inherited insanity all his life. He killed himself in 1927. Haruki Murakami has written eleven novels, eight volumes of short stories and numerous works of non-fiction, as well as translating much American literature into Japanese. His most famous novels are *Norwegian Wood*, *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, and *Kafka on the Shore*. Jay Rubin has translated several of Murakami's works into English and is also the author of *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*. He has been professor of Japanese Literature at the Universities of Washington and Harvard.

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. He was afraid of mental illness for the remainder of his life, and the final story of the book, "Spinning Gears" tells the tale of his last months spent in depression and constant anxiety. He suffered from insomnia, hallucinations, and constantly worried about his own sanity. It is the final passage of the story that conveys Akutagawa's overwhelming despair: "I don't have the strength to keep writing this. To go on living with this feeling is painful beyond description. Isn't there someone kind enough to strangle me in my sleep?" The story was published posthumously in 1927, the year Akutagawa took his own life. The story progresses

toward that inevitable conclusion, and gives us an insight into Akutagawa's tortured mind.

The interpreted stories included in this collection reflect an intelligence that is well-read, perceptive and deeply aware of human foibles. Through the language of ancient Eastern folk tales, half of the short stories are entertaining and revealing. The author writes in the years of 1915 to 1925, in Japan, using Chinese and Japanese literary and cultural themes that not only educate the reader in Eastern literature, but also demonstrate that humanity is the same whether living in the East or West, no matter which century the author writes about and lived. The way people feel about the mysteries of their lives is the same whatever the setting. At the same time, the different, distinctly Eastern cultural prism through which our commonalities present themselves reflect a Japanese view that is a bit mystifying, and very interesting. Fortunately, this collection includes two very famous stories, Rashomon and In a Bamboo Grove which were combined into a famous Japanese movie, from which Hollywood has wisely and not so aptly attempted to imitate in several variations. Later stories included in the book, from 1925 to 1927 are more autobiographical or personal, and while revealing how similar that people feel about fear, stress, anxiety, and how we live within communal society, sadly, these stories show how the author is losing his equilibrium and peace of mind. It is difficult to parse out if it is the fear of going insane or if it is actual instability precipitating his emotional frailty.

Interesting to say the least.

This work takes advantage of Freudian psychoanalysis, mind-struggling, stream of conscious ...,etc mixing with transitional morality to illustrate the real world in modernist's eyes.

I became infatuated with the Spider Thread story and that led to so many other wonderful stories. A must read if you are interested in some good stories you've probably heard or seen referenced in games or anime.

Great book of short stories. A wide variety of story lengths, plots, and characters. Very entertaining while offering a view into the complex mind of the author.

Bought for a literature course and have since recommended to others as an interesting read.

Excellent book of short stories by an Author that isn't heard of much in this country. I'd say give it a shot if you're looking for an interesting read. They're definitely a bit different than your average short story.

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