

Hell of Solitude

*Ryūnosuke
Akutagawa*
trans. *Ryan Choi*

Winner of an English PEN Award

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Author bio:

Ryūnosuke Akutagawa (1892-1927), born in Tokyo, Japan, was the author of more than 350 works of fiction and non-fiction, including *Rashōmon*, *The Spider's Thread*, *Hell Screen*, *Kappa*, and *In a Grove*. Japan's premier literary award for emerging writers, the Akutagawa Prize, is named after him.

Ryan Choi's books include *In Dreams: The Very Short Stories of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa* and *Three Demons: A Study on Sanki Saitō's Haiku*. He is an editor at AGNI. His writings and translations have appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Nation*, *The New Criterion*, *Raritan*, *Times Literary Supplement*, and elsewhere. He lives in Honolulu, Hawaii, where he was

Hell of Solitude

Selected Writings of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa

Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, translated by Ryan Choi, foreword by Polly Barton

A landmark collection from Japan's literary master, newly translated and dazzling in its range.

- This major literary event features first-time English translations of Akutagawa's poetry, prose, and aesthetic writings.
- It showcases the full spectrum of his genius, from fantastical tales to philosophical fragments.
- The book includes 'Art and Other Things', a rare essay revealing Akutagawa's artistic worldview through global literary and visual culture.
- 'One never tires of reading and re-reading his best works' – Haruki Murakami

About the book

Hell of Solitude presents a varied and eclectic selection of writings by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, one of the most important and beloved Japanese writers of the twentieth century. Bringing together fiction, poetry, and philosophical prose – much of it appearing in English for the first time here – this collection showcases the range and intensity of Akutagawa's imagination. Moving from the whimsical and fantastical to the grave and introspective, the pieces reveal a writer of extraordinary clarity and psychological depth. Interwoven throughout are poems from a prolific body of verse, examples of which are sparse in English, alongside 'Art and Other Things', a fragmentary essay in which Akutagawa expounds his aesthetic views while drawing on examples from world literature and art. Translated with sensitivity and precision by Ryan Choi, *Hell of Solitude* offers a vital reintroduction to a writer whose lucidity, irony, and existential unease continue to resonate across cultures and generations.

With a foreword by Polly Barton

Reviews

'One never tires of reading and re-reading his best works... The flow of his language is the best feature of Akutagawa's style. Never stagnant, it moves along like a living thing.' – **Haruki Murakami**

'The quintessential writer of his era.' – **David Peace**

'Extravagance and horror are in his work, but never in the style, which is always crystal-clear.' – **Jorge Luis Borges**

'At long last, a new volume of Akutagawa's writing has been ushered into

born and raised.

English by the consummate translator Ryan Choi. He has rendered the master storyteller's previously unavailable prose pieces and poetry more readable than ever. The exquisite subtlety and inimitable charm of the tales, sketches, and poems in this volume will captivate new readers and scholars alike.' - **L. S. Popovich, author of *The Arden***

'For the past decade, Ryan Choi has quietly been doing the heroic work of bringing Akutagawa's lesser-known writings into English. What we are given in this collection are impressions and observations, anecdotes, philosophical digressions, stories that read like poems that read like dreams remembered the morning after. The writings are restrained, understated, precise and fractured. The surfaces of these texts crackle with the charge of Akutagawa's inimitable mind. Choi's translations are a revelation.' - **Stephen Mortland**

'Choi is Akutagawa's boldest - and best - translator. *Hell of Solitude* restores Akutagawa, the most daring architect of modern Japanese literature, to his rightful state: bewildering beauty, a cascade of shifting rhythms and forms, and the penetrating alertness of a truly aesthetic mind. Akutagawa's soul is here in this book-shaped vessel, waiting to be known.' - **Dreux Richard**



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Yuri Felsen et al.
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