

Hell of Solitude

*Ryūnosuke
Akutagawa*
trans. *Ryan Choi*

Winner of an English PEN Award

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Selected Writings of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa

trans. *Ryan Choi*

With a foreword by Polly Barton

An essential selection of fiction, poetry, and philosophical prose that illuminates the restless brilliance of one of modern literature's most influential voices.

Winner of an English PEN Translates Award

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.



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*, *The New Criterion*, *Poetry*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, and elsewhere. He lives in Honolulu, Hawaii, where he was born and raised.

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PRAISE FOR AKUTAGAWA

‘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 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

ABOUT PROTOTYPE

Founded in 2019, Prototype is a publisher of fiction, poetry, anthologies and interdisciplinary projects. With an emphasis on producing unique and beautiful books, we are committed to creating new possibilities in publishing and championing the work of new and established voices in contemporary literature.

Recent prose titles include *Girlbeast* by Cecilie Lind (tr. Hazel Evans), *Fair: The life-Art of Translation* and *Vehicle* by Jen Calleja, *The Seers* by Sulaiman Addonia, longlisted for the RSL Ondaatje Prize and Republic of Consciousness Prize, *Prairie, Dresses, Art, Other* by Danielle Dutton, longlisted for the Gordon Burn Prize, and *Lori & Joe* by Amy Arnold, shortlisted for the Goldsmiths Prize. Recent titles from House Sparrow Press, an imprint of Prototype, include a facsimile edition of Derek Jarman’s only poetry collection, *A Finger in the Fishes Mouth*, which has long been unavailable.

Other recent poetry collections include *rock flight* by Hasib Hourani, a Poetry Book Society Recommendation, Imogen Cassels’ acclaimed debut collection *Silk Work*, and Bhanu Kapil’s *Incubation: a space for monsters*, in its first UK edition. Previously, we published *Journeys Across Breath*, the first volume of collected poems by Stephen Watts, and Lucy Mercer’s debut collection *Emblem*, which was the Poetry Book Society’s Summer Choice for 2022, and Lavinia Singer’s collection *Artifice*.