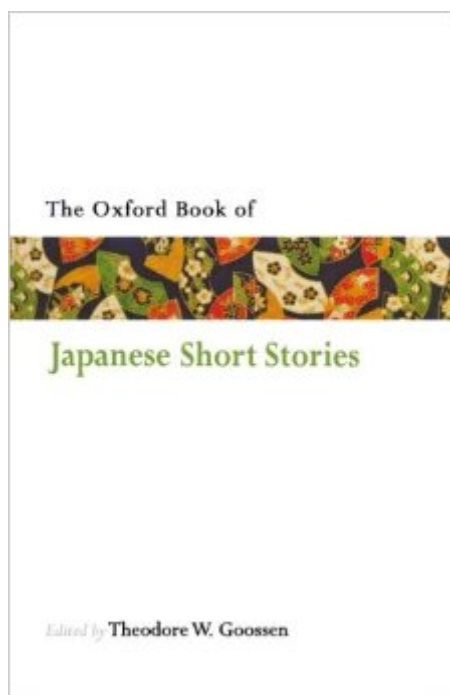


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The Oxford Book Of Japanese Short Stories (Oxford Books Of Prose & Verse)



Synopsis

This collection of short stories, including many new translations, is the first to span the whole of Japan's modern era from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day. Beginning with the first writings to assimilate and rework Western literary traditions, through the flourishing of the short story genre in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Taisho era, to the new breed of writers produced under the constraints of literary censorship, and the current writings reflecting the pitfalls and paradoxes of modern life, this anthology offers a stimulating survey of the development of the Japanese short story. Various indigenous traditions, in addition to those drawn from the West, recur throughout the stories: stories of the self, of the Water Trade (Tokyo's nightlife of geishas and prostitutes), of social comment, love and obsession, legends and fairytales. This collection includes the work of two Nobel prize-winners: Kawabata and Oe, the talented women writers Hirabayashi, Euchi, Okamoto, and Hayashi, together with the acclaimed Tanizaki, Mishima, and Murakami. The introduction by Theodore Goossen gives insight into these exotic and enigmatic, sometimes disturbing stories, derived from the lyrical roots of Japanese literature with its distinctive stress on atmosphere and beauty.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The Oxford Book of Japanese Short Stories," edited by Theodore Goossen, brings together 35 stories in a volume of 452 plus xxxi pages. The stories are arranged chronologically by the author's

birth year. The authors chosen span the generations; the collection starts out with Ogai Mori (1862-1922) and concludes with Banana Yoshimoto (b. 1964), and the rest are pretty evenly spaced out between them. The book also includes brief biographical notes on the story writers. This is a richly diverse collection of tales. Many different settings, subjects, and types of characters are to be found here. The stories range in length from three to forty pages, although the overall average is fairly short (editor Goossen, in the introduction, admits his childhood preference for stories that are short enough to be enjoyed in a single sitting). Marriage, sex, war, slavery, crime, friendship, animals, illness, and military discipline are among the many different topics explored in an anthology that is full of horror, humor, and beauty, as well as the fantastic and the absurd. I would like to mention some of the stories in this superb collection. "Night Fires," by Naoya Shiga, is a beautifully written story that offers the reader a taste of life in a rural mountain area. "Portrait of a Geisha," by Kanoko Okamoto, presents a compelling view of the geisha world through the title character and her household. "The Accordion and the Fish Town," by Fumiko Hayashi, is about a peddler's family eking out a living in a seaside town; this story is rich in evocative details about food, clothes, family life, and economic activity in Japan.

The Oxford book of Japanese short stories edited by Theodore W. Goossen. Publisher: Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1997. (2002 printing) ISBN: 0192833049 For all you Kurosawa film buffs, here's a chance to read "In a Grove"...the story that helped launch the ideas for "Rashomon". For those who love Mizoguchi, here's your read for "Sansho the Steward". For those who just love good stories, they're here-in one handy volume. This excellent collection includes about a hundred years' worth of superior Japanese writers, organized by the author's birthdate...and concludes with contemporary stories. Kawabata's here, and his "The Izu Dancer" is one of the gentlest of stories in his disturbing, aesthetic oeuvre. I loved "Passage in Fudaraku" by Inoue Yasushi, and "Portrait of an old Geisha" by Okamoto Kanoko, and there's a good Mishima one, too, about a Kabuki actor who plays women. And, if you are geeky like me, you will appreciate the information in the frontispiece. However, if you want to get straight to the riveting stories, that's cool too! Incredibly readable book, and gets my highest recommendation.

If you want stories that can actually transport you to their setting (as opposed to most of what passes for fiction today), then this is your anthology. The other reviews go into great detail so I'll mention only 4 stories I thought were particularly well done, in the understated style that is so emblematic of what is best about Japan. (1) Sansho the Steward (feudal period). A moving story

which will make you want to hug your mother and apologize for anything unkind or inconsiderate you've ever done to her. See the 1954 film, "Sansho the Bailiff" (it's on DVD; diverges in some details from the story but remains true to the story's tenor; I saw the movie 25 years ago but only now have read the underlying short story).(2) Lemon (late 1920s/early 1930s after the Stock Market Crash). "I was utterly destitute." The short story is a thinly fictionalized day in the life of its author who was dying of (and did die from) TB.(3) The Three Policemen. 3 beat cops do figure in this (very) short story, but the title did not give away what the story was really about. Or maybe the story was about nothing. Suffice it to say that, short though it was, it gave off the scent of whiskey and tobacco in a disreputable part of Tokyo round about 1969 or 1970, maybe Kabuki-cho in Shinjuku Ward.(4) A Very Strange Enchanted Boy (modern times, 1990s.). Though there's so much written about how Japanese women are subservient, this story features a woman who made choices: the choice to try to steal another woman's husband, the choice to be an unwed mother, the choice to allow the father in her life only so much and no more. But unlike strident Western assertions of womanhood, this story is very...Japanese.

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