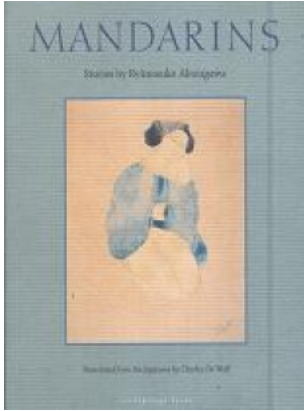


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There's a lot more to Akutagawa (1892-1927) than his short story "Rashomon," made famous by the Kurosawa film, and not among these 13 tales, delicately balanced worlds in miniature. Newly translated, they evoke the lost splendor and conflicts of Rashomon's Meiji Era. "The Garden" depicts a crumbling inn belonging to the once-great family Nakamura; presciently, the last surviving relative, Ren'ichi, has abandoned the land to attend art school in Tokyo. Titled after a line from Basho, "O'er a Withered Moor" re-creates, in a quiet Osaka residence, the mournful last moments of a great man's life, surrounded by his grieving, anxious disciples. The exquisite "Kesa and Morito" is made up of soliloquies by two lovers who contemplate murdering Kesa's husband in order to consummate their conflicted longing for each other. Modern tales include the vignette "Mandarins," the account of an ennuï-laden train traveler who looks on in delighted astonishment as his young peasant co-passenger throws oranges to her brothers, waving as they pass.