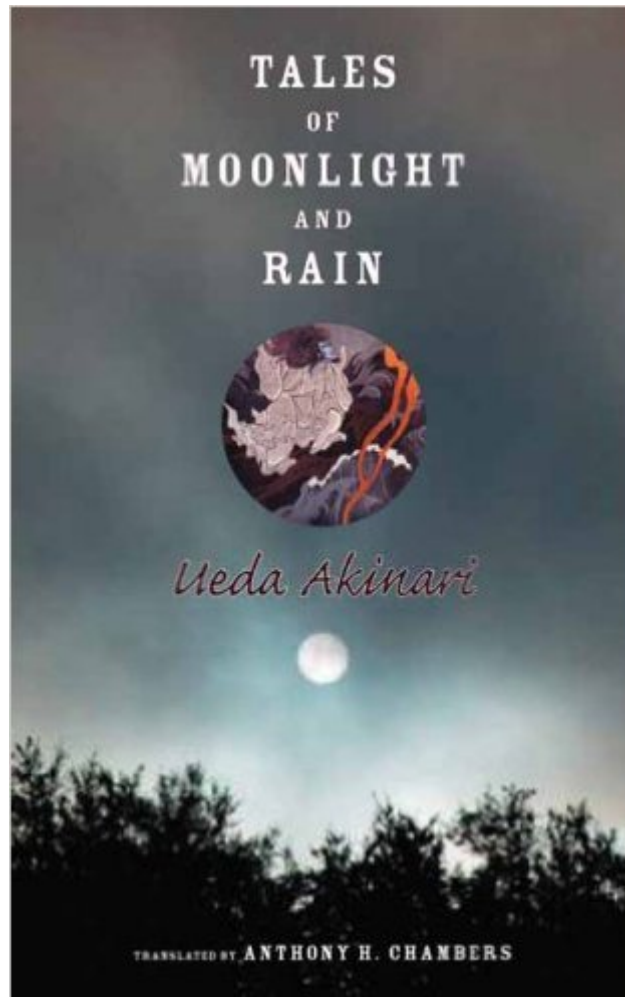


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# Tales Of Moonlight And Rain (Translations From The Asian Classics (Paperback))



## Synopsis

First published in 1776, the nine gothic tales in this collection are Japan's finest and most celebrated examples of the literature of the occult. They subtly merge the world of reason with the realm of the uncanny and exemplify the period's fascination with the strange and the grotesque. They were also the inspiration for Mizoguchi Kenji's brilliant 1953 film *Ugetsu*. The title *Ugetsu monogatari* (literally "rain-moon tales") alludes to the belief that mysterious beings appear on cloudy, rainy nights and in mornings with a lingering moon. In "Shiramine," the vengeful ghost of the former emperor Sutoku reassumes the role of king; in "The Chrysanthemum Vow," a faithful revenant fulfills a promise; "The Kibitsu Cauldron" tells a tale of spirit possession; and in "The Carp of My Dreams," a man straddles the boundaries between human and animal and between the waking world and the world of dreams. The remaining stories feature demons, fiends, goblins, strange dreams, and other manifestations beyond all logic and common sense. The eerie beauty of this masterpiece owes to Akinari's masterful combination of words and phrases from Japanese classics with creatures from Chinese and Japanese fiction and lore. Along with *The Tale of Genji* and *The Tales of the Heike*, *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* has become a timeless work of great significance. This new translation, by a noted translator and scholar, skillfully maintains the allure and complexity of Akinari's original prose.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ueda Akinari's classic work of eerie fiction has been translated before quite a few times and always

with obvious dedication and care, but when it comes right down to it this version by Anthony Chambers outdoes the others and will doubtlessly remain the definitive English "Tales of Moonlight and Rain" for some time. Of course, it's hard to go wrong with such a fine series of stories, each of which is really a masterpiece of storytelling; they may be strange, haunting, macabre, mysterious, or whimsical, but they're never dull, and it's no mystery why this Tokugawa classic still grips readers centuries later in Japan and abroad. Still, Chambers' rendition stands out in faithfully capturing Ueda's densely allusive, rich prose style with meticulous care, and indeed this is a key factor in elevating "Ugetsu Monogatari" above a host of other, similar works of the time. In so doing, Chambers has deliberately avoided overtranslating Ueda to sound English or twentieth-century, allowing the 18th-century Japanese flavor of the original to come to the fore. Paradoxically as it may seem at first blush, this makes the stories much more compelling actually. Just compare this passage as rendered by Leon Zolbrod (whose translation I've read and treasured for many years, so please no offense) with Chambers' more accurate rendition: [No sooner did he open the door of the sleeping chamber, than a demon thrust its head out at the priest. The projecting extremity was so huge that it filled the doorway, gleaming even whiter than newly fallen snow, with eyes like mirrors and horns like the bare boughs of a tree. The creature opened its mouth more than three feet wide; its crimson tongue darted, as if to swallow the priest in a single gulp. 'Horror!

"Tales of Moonlight and Rain" ("Ugetsu Monogatari") is such an incredible book. On the one hand, it is a fantastic and macabre collection of ghost and monsters, creepy tales of flesh-eating demons and honorable spirits. On the other hand, it is one of the great classics of Japanese literature, a book that only the literati of its time would be able to fully appreciate due to its dense prose and literary allusions that only an educated person would be able to easily identify. It is a title that has seen print in English, in whole and in parts, several times, but it has always remained slightly out of grasp due to the difficulty in translating it. Author Akinari Ueda specifically set out to create a book that made use of the unique nature of the Japanese language while building on literary and historical sources from both Japan and China. Some translators emphasize the horror nature of the book, some the literary, but it remains a tough nut to crack. Translator Anthony H. Chambers has taken a shot at it, in a form designed to capture the feel of Ueda's writing while annotating the edition enough so that modern readers will be able to understand the allusions. In an interesting tact, he has used both footnotes and end notes, with the footnotes being the information immediately necessary to understand the story, and the end notes being the "behind the scenes" information that adds depth and understanding but doesn't advance the tale. Each story is also

preceded by historical and political context, so that one can understand the general mood of the times in which the stories are set. This scholarly approach might put off some readers who are just looking for some enjoyable ghost stories, but I found it to be an elegant and successful solution.

Ueda Akinari's universe is populated with 'human' specters, good ones and bad ones, obsessed ones and vengeful ones. But, his stories also reveal his vision on human beings (men and women) and human life, as well as on Buddhism and art. Human life on earth For Akinari, life is like mist floating in the morning; but, will the mist still be there in the evening? (The Chrysanthemum Vow); and, a human heart can't rest on anything (The Reed Choked House). He recognizes the power of reason: a bird has a voice, man has a mind; the nature of an animal, the spirit, clouds, water can they can all be explained (The Owl of the Three Jewels). For him, gold is more powerful than guns. In other words, politics and economics prevail over force. Man must observe the spirit of economy, but not fall into sordid avarice (On Poverty and Wealth). Buddhism Akinari accepts the importance of 'karma' (past lives determine the human destiny in future lives), but not in its vulgar form. Explaining riches and honors in a present life only by the good deeds of past lives, and misery only by misdeeds in former lives is a very crude Buddhism only for nuns and simple wives (On Poverty and Wealth). The only way to escape the effects of bad deeds during previous lives is 'illumination'. This illumination can come from a new passion by fixing one's mind on a theme imposed by a master, by a Zen meditation (The Blue Hood) or even by a poem, which can 'illuminate the guilty' that nothing distinguishes the noble from the common man in the face of death (Shiramine). He refutes the vulgar belief that madness is a demonic possession and adopts the more rational conception that moral blindness is due to passions (The Blue Hood).

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