

## Appendix

### Mori Ogai's Note on Takase Bune

(Taken from The Historical Fiction of Mori Ogai (1977), p.233-235)

#### The Origin of 'Takasebune'

The Takase River in Kyoto is said to have been dug out by Suminokura Ryōi: the part south of Gojō in 1587, and the part between Nijō and Gojō in 1612. The boats that ply it are tugboats. Since *takase* originally was the name of the boat, and any river where these boats ply is called a *takase* river, rivers by that name are to be found in several provinces. But the *takase* is not limited to tugboats. Thus, in the *Wamyōshō*, the character *kyō* is used for a *takase*: 'A craft that is small and deep is called a *kyō*.' I referred to the *Wakan sen'yō shū* in the Chikuhakuen Library and found this description: 'The bow is high, and both the stern and the sides are low and flat.' The illustration shows a boat propelled by pole.

They say that during the Tokugawa period, when a criminal in Kyoto was sentenced to distant banishment, he was transported by *takase* boat to Osaka. The constables of the Kyoto Magistrate's Office who escorted these prisoners had to listen to one sad tale after another. One time, a man was put aboard the boat who had committed fratricide, yet did not look sad at all. When asked the details, he answered that he had had trouble making a living and yet, when sentenced to distant banishment, he received two hundred *mon* in copper - this was the first time he had ever had some money that he did not have to spend. Also, asked why he had committed murder, he answered that he and his brother were hired by the Nishijin textile mill and put to work doing figured cloth, but their wages were so small they could not live on them. One day, his brother attempted to kill himself but was unable to finish the task. There was no hope of his brother's recovering, so his brother pleaded with him to finish him off, and...so he killed him.

This story appears in *Okinagusa*. In the printed version revised by Ikebe Yoshikata, it covers a little over one page. When I read it, I thought that it contained two important issues. One is the concept of property: the joy of having

money experienced by one who never had money before has nothing to do with the amount of money. Man's desires know no bounds, and once a person possesses money, he is never satisfied. The fact that this man rejoiced at having two hundred *mon* as his possession is interesting.

The second issue is the matter of putting to death a man who is about to die anyway but who, still unable to die, is in great pain. To help a man die is to kill him. Under no circumstances must we kill a man. In the *Okinagusa*, too, there was some criticism to the effect that this man ended up committing murder, with no malice on his part, only because he was an uneducated man. But this is by no means a simple matter that can be settled by sticking to rules. Suppose here is a sick person who is on the verge of death and is suffering pain. There is no way to save him. How would a man at his bedside, seeing him in pain, feel? Even an educated person would surely feel that, since the fellow is to die anyway, he would not like to let the man's suffering drag on for a long time but would like to let him die sooner. Here arises the question: Is it good, or bad, to give the man an anesthetic? Even though the amount of drug be less than a fatal dose, it might hasten the patient's death. Therefore we must not give it to him, and we have to leave him in great pain. Traditional morality bids us to let him suffer. But in the medical world there is a view that rejects this position; it holds that, when a man is on the verge of death and is in great pain, it is good for us to let him die painlessly and save him some suffering. This is called *Euthanasia*. It means to let a person die painlessly. It seems that the criminal in the *takase* boat had been placed in just such a situation. To me this is extremely interesting.

With these things in mind, I wrote 'Takasebune'. This is what I published in *Chūō Kōron*.

January 1916

## Biography

### MORI OGAI

*Mori Ogai (1862-1922)* was born in Tsuwano, Shimane, Japan, in a medical family, which had served the Tsuwano clan for many generations. Young Mori was very much interested in science, though he also received Mencius, Confucius, and other Japanese classics tutoring. Considered as a promising student, Ogai was sent to Tokyo, and later to Germany, to take medical school. He was an excellent student with an outstanding proficiency in German language. In 1884, he went back to Germany as an army doctor. He stayed there for four years, doing research on advanced techniques of hygiene and military medicine for the Japanese government, while at the same time, studying and exploring German and other European literature. His first novel, *Maihime (The Dancing Girl)*, which contains the story of an unhappy love between a Japanese student and a German dancer, was based on his own experience.

Ogai also made several brilliant literary translations, including the works of Ibsen, Strindberg, Hofmannsthal, and an excellent one of Goethe's *Faust*. Some of his major works include *Vita Sexualis*, *Mozo*, *Gan*, *Takase-Bune*, and *Saigo No Ikku* were written during his life, along with over 120 other titles, mostly short stories and novellas. As Ogai was both a doctor of literature as well as medical, he was bound to have a more thorough understanding of both worlds, and to combine both these reality and literary experience into his writings. Along with Natsume Soseki and his junior, Ryunosuke Akutagawa, Mori Ogai had been a pioneer and a major influence in Japanese literature, especially during the Meiji and Taisho era.

## Biography

### RYUNOSUKE AKUTAGAWA

*Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1892-1927)* was born in the city of Tokyo, whose spirit and whose traditions he evokes with the magic of Baudelaire's Paris or Kafka's Prague. Along with Natsume Soseki and Mori Ogai, he was the most important and influential writer of the Meiji and Taisho era. His mother died insane when he was a child. His father, toward whom he felt a great resentment, was a failure who gave him up to relatives for adoption. A brilliant student of English Literature at Tokyo Imperial University, he had already published his first stories before graduating. In 1914, Akutagawa published a literary magazine *Shin-Shicho* with other writers and in 1915, he came out in the Japanese literary circle with *HANA* (Nose). Married two years later, he became the father of three sons and taught English to support his family. Later he traveled to China and Russia.

In 1915, he also published his arresting psychological short story *Rashomon*, which was to gain international recognition and eventually become a hugely successful film by Akira Kurosawa. Some of his famous works are, among others, *The Martyr*, *Kesa and Morito*, *The Dragon*, *Yam Gruel*, *In A Grove*, and *Rashomon*. After a period of severe depression, the increasingly unstable Akutagawa took his own life with an overdose of pills in 1927, at the age of thirty-five. Before he committed suicide, he wrote a letter entitled 'a note to a certain old friend'. His nearly ten volumes of literary essays, short stories, and novellas are a masterful reinterpretation of Asian tradition and legend, greatly influenced by Western thought and literary technique. Some of the Western authors that highly influenced him were among others, Anatole France, Baudelaire, Edgar Allan Poe, and Strindberg. Today, the Akutagawa Prize for the new face in Japanese literary circle was given in his remembrance.

## Synopsis

### KESA AND MORITO

*Kesa And Morito* tells us about a married woman named Kesa, who gets herself involved in a sexual relationship with a man named Morito. Morito is a keen admirer of Kesa's beauty and sex appeal before she is married to a man named Wataru. His passion for her is suppressed until they both meet again three years later. When Morito sees Kesa again, he becomes doubtful of his own feeling as he notices that Kesa has apparently lost her charm. Yet, Morito is somehow driven to satisfy his long-suppressed desire for her. After he gets his desire fulfilled; however, Morito feels as if he has made a big mistake. Not knowing what to do, he foolishly suggests that they kill Wataru, Kesa's husband in order that they can be together. Kesa, feeling just as confused as Morito is, agrees the plan.

They both only realize the foolishness of their attitudes after the agreement is made. In Morito's opinion, Kesa looks like a whore, while in Kesa's opinion, Morito seems like a cruel man who only uses her to gain sexual pleasure. The agreement to kill Kesa's husband is nevertheless fixed, and neither Morito nor Kesa seems able to cancel it. Morito, not brave enough to violate his own promise, finds himself in a position of committing a murder. While Kesa, feeling both ashamed and guilty, changes her mind and tries to find a way to make Morito kill her instead. This story tells us about a dilemma faced by a man who is driven to kill another man he doesn't hate for a lover he doesn't love. Lust and ego play a crucial part in this story of a woman who sees the fading of her beauty mirrored in the eyes of her lover.

## Synopsis

### RASHOMON

*Rashomon* is a story about how a ghoul at work shocks a would-be thief into something like honesty. The story takes place during the decadence time in early Kyoto. It tells about a discharged servant of a samurai who waits out a thunderstorm in the shadow of a ruined gate, Rashomon. Rashomon was the largest gate in Kyoto. The place was in a very poor condition, and it had become a hide-out for thieves and robbers, and also a place for abandoning unclaimed corpses. While waiting for the rain to stop, the servant thinks about his future and how he's going to eat after he loses his job. He is torn in the choices of being honest and starves to death or becoming a thief and gets some food to eat. Finally, he decides to be a thief. Just before he leaves the place, he hears mysterious voices from inside the Rashomon.

When he goes up to find out whose voice it is, he becomes so terrified as he sees a wretched, old woman with a long hair pulling out the hair of the unclaimed bodies one by one. He thinks that the woman must be a ghost, and he becomes very pale and weak. However, as he thinks about the immorality of the woman's deed, his courage suddenly appears. He tells the surprised woman to stay away from the dead bodies and finds out that she is only a human. Forgetting about his own decision to be a thief, the servant forces the woman to explain her action. The woman says that she's only trying to get some food by selling wigs, which she makes by collecting the hair of dead people. She insists that her action is justifiable. The servant then asks her that it is also justifiable if he robs the woman in order to survive. Without waiting for her answer, he tears her clothes, kicks her down roughly, and runs away as fast as he can.

## Synopsis

### TAKASE BUNE

*Takase Bune* or 'The Boat on Takase River' is a story about a prisoner who is about to be sent away to a distant prison island and the prison guard who takes him on a boat. The situation in this boat can usually be described as mournful or even pathetic for both the prisoner and the guard. The prisoner would weep for their mistakes and the prison guard would have to listen to his weeping. Until one day, an unusual situation happens. Haneda Shobei, the prison guard at that time, is amazed at the fact that, unlike any other prisoners, this particular prisoner, Kisuke, looks completely happy and peaceful. His curiosity drives him to find out more about his prisoner. Shobei becomes even more amazed when he finds that Kisuke even feels delighted to be sent away, just because the government gives him a small amount of money as compensation. For the condemned man who has never had as much as 200 pennies in his life before, this is a great pleasure.

Still feeling confused why Kisuke doesn't seem in the least regretting his crime of killing his own brother, Shobei asks him why he murdered his brother. Kisuke's story doesn't sound a bit like the police report. It turns out that Kisuke and his brother have been living in a very poor state. One day, they get a job at a weaving factory, but Kisuke's brother falls ill and is not able to work any longer. Feeling ashamed of burdening his brother, Kisuke's brother tries to commit suicide. Unfortunately, his hand slips and he is left half-alive and half-dead with a razor thrust deep in his throat. He begs Kisuke to spare him the pain. Not being able to watch his brother's misery, Kisuke agrees to pull the razor and ends his brother's life just when a woman comes into the room. The judge will not hear Kisuke's story and sends him to the prison. This story questions the definition of murder by using a dilemmatic case.