



Acts of Worship: Seven Stories

Yukio Mishima , John Bester (Translator)

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When Mishima committed ritual suicide in November 1970, he was only forty-five. He had written over thirty novels, eighteen plays, and twenty volumes of short stories. During his lifetime, he was nominated for the Nobel Prize three times and had seen almost all of his major novels appear in English. While the flamboyance of his life and the apparent fanaticism of his death have dominated the public's perception of his achievement, Japanese and Western critics alike are in agreement that his literary gifts were prodigious.

Mishima is arguably at his best in the shorter forms, and it is the flower of these that appears here for the first time in English. Each story has its own distinctive atmosphere and each is brilliantly organized, yielding deeper layers of meaning with repeated readings. The psychological observation, particularly in what it reveals of the turmoil of adolescence, is meticulous.

The style, with its skillful blending of colors and surfaces, shows Mishima in top form, and no further proof is needed to remind us that he was a consummate writer whose work is an irreplaceable part of world literature.

Acts of Worship: Seven Stories Details

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From Reader Review Acts of Worship: Seven Stories for online ebook

Prudence and the Crow says

I deeply enjoyed reading these stories, and found myself wishing I'd spent more time revisiting this favourite of mine over the years. It's strange, to take a break of a decade and return to someone whose writing has meant so very much to you - stranger still to come to something new; whilst I'd read 'Cigarette' elsewhere, the rest of the stories were new to me.

Each is so different, in itself unexpected, and Mishima is never light with theme where he can be brutal, thus tales like 'Sword' and 'Raisin Bread' were particularly jarring - unpleasantly so, given that, particularly 'Raisin Bread', deals with women in such a detached and objective fashion as to leave me feeling rather more repulsed than I might have been as a teenager, when I was immersed in a lot more such writing. For that, though, something like the opener, 'Fountains in the Rain', which begins with the jaw-dropping (and yet, completely on-genre) tale of a boy who has dated a girl purely for the pleasure of dumping her and making her cry, and winds up a wonderful tale of humiliation - itself, a key Mishima theme.

I greatly enjoyed 'Sea and Sunset', the shortest of the stories, concerning the life story of a Frenchman in 12th Century Japan, for something so clear, and quiet, and absolutely itself - and also an unusual character perspective, here.

I think my favourite was the titular story, though - 'Acts of Worship' is a masterclass in the art of the overthinking central character, beautifully written throughout, concerning a Professor and his widower assistant, and a pilgrimage of sorts. I can't recall Mishima writing through a woman (and that isn't to say he didn't, I'm scratching my brain trying to remember the Sea of Fertility books, which I picked up late last year and put down again because I loved them too much to read...this is a ridiculous trait I have resolved to rid myself of this year) - and it comes out particularly well here, for me. The mental acrobatics undertaken by the central character in an effort to understand her employer are wonderfully written, and, above all, it is still, despite being a longer short story, a sparing read.

Overall, this is a great selection of stories, encompassing both Mishima's brute force and way with the visceral horror and beauty of the human form, of the best and worst of, as we might now describe it, "toxic masculinity", and also, crucially, of his softer, landscape style of writing, which takes you and places you most convincingly in places you've never known or seen. If I were to give this to a friend, I might suggest, if the stories were ordered as in my edition, starting with the last and working backwards, however - 'Acts of Worship' first, and so on, finishing with 'Fountains in the Rain', which would be preferable as a palate cleanser, for me.

Sluggish Neko says

What struck me the most about this collection of stories— with the exception of the title story “Act of Worship”— is their focus on masculinity. The most obviously manly story is “Sword”, which focuses on an ideal of honorable behavior, a warped form of modern bushido. It’s hard not to see the connection between the main character and Yukio Mishima’s own life story. In “Fountains in the Rain”, the young man is disconnected from his girlfriend, dwelling on his own feelings of superiority instead of on her and his

relationship to her, while in “Raisin Bread”, the young man is disconnected from everyone else. Both “Cigarette” and “Martyrdom” involve unequal relationships between boys. “Sea and Sunset” is more a contemplation on religion and yet, it still involves an older man telling his story to a boy.

While these short stories are interesting as a peek into the mentality of these men, young and old, the best story is “Act of Worship”— not because it’s told from a woman’s point of view, but because it punctures the romance of these masculine ideals. It’s a refreshing change after reading all those previous stories.

Javonne says

7 Stories by Yukio Mishima, with the last being almost novella length, and bearing the same title as the book. As great as his novels are, the short story format truly showcases Mishima's mastery. If you're new to Mishima's work this one is a good place to start, as the themes of death, sensuality and purity that are often a thematic forefront in his novels are all in these works in a way that isn't as overwhelming as they are in his long form works. Each piece is economical without being cheap, opulent without being tawdry and as well balanced as a blade hewn by a master.

Próndr says

One thing that struck me while reading this book is Mishima's unique ability to use words to sketch vivid images that will continue to stay etched in your memory long after you’ve finished the story. The seven stories in this collection spans a large part of Mishima's career as a writer. It was first published in 1965. The title, *Acts of Worship*, suggests that there is a kind of *leitmotif* to these stories – and it sure makes it more interesting to view this collection as a whole that way. The first two stories, *Fountains in the Rain* and *Raisin Bread*, were both written in 1963, and the protagonists here are frustrated young men. There is a hint of surrealism in both of these stories, especially the latter where Mishima also very cleverly paraphrases de Lautréamont’s *Les Chants de Maldoror*. Here, we are introduced to a group of restless westernized youth; the protagonist is called Jack, "with a past that included an attempted suicide", he is described as "twenty-two and made of a clear crystalline substance, [he] had as his sole aim to become quite invisible."

Sword (also 1963) is set in a college kendo club; the main protagonist being the club’s captain, Jiro. It is one of the most lengthy of these stories, and the one I liked the best. It’s easy to see *Sword* as one of the key stories among Mishima’s work. (Another is undoubtedly *Patriotism*, which was published in 1966.) Again Mishima’s evocative and poignant images are as important as the storyline:

"To be strong and true had been the most important task he had set himself since early childhood. Once, as a boy, he had tried to outstare the sun. But before he could tell whether he had really looked at it or not, changes had occurred: the blazing red ball that had been there at first began to whirl, then suddenly dimmed, till it became a cold, bluish-black, flattened disk of iron. He felt he had seen the very essence of the sun...."

For a while, wherever he looked he saw the sun's pale afterimage: in the undergrowth; in the shade beneath the trees; even, when he gazed up, in every part of the sky.

The truth was something too dazzling to be looked at directly. And yet, once it had come into one's field of vision, one saw patches of light in all kinds of places: the afterimages of virtue."

The next story, *Sea and Sunset* (1955), as well as the last in this collection, *Act of Worship* (1965), deals with

more elderly people, and the whole tone is set in a lower, more melancholy pitch. The first of these is set in the thirteenth century; the main character is a reminiscing old Frenchman who had taken part in the Children's Crusade, then being sold into slavery and eventually ending up as a handyman at a Buddhist temple after being freed by a Zen Master. Well, that's at least the 'skeleton' of the story, which isn't to say that this is what the story is really about. Mishima is mostly more subtle than that. It is the only story in this collection that I didn't care much for, while the last is among the best – with its distant echo of Thomas Mann: an aging eccentric professor of literature goes on a pilgrimage to three shrines in his birth district, bringing along his middle-aged house-keeper, both portrayed as unattractive in different ways – he with a walleye, dyed hair, soprano voice, vain... she with hollow cheeks, protruding teeth, "a face devoid of sexual appeal", self-effacing... Slowly the real reason for the pilgrimage comes to light. It rounds up this book perfectly, and it's no coincidence that this entire collection of stories has gotten its title from this particular story.

In *Cigarette* (1946), which is a reminiscence of Mishima's school days - one of the first stories that won him attention in the literary world, and *Martyrdom* (1948), we return to youthful protagonists; both of these stories are succinctly rendered, and in the sublime cruelty depicted in *Martyrdom* there is a foreshadowing of his 1963 novel *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*. These two stories may not be among his best, but still fascinating reading - and on the whole, Mishima's portrayals of youth are in a class by itself.

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Joseph M says

Mishima is like a Japanese Rimbaud or a homosexual Hemingway - a writer who endows us with the essences of his subjects and paints the wounds of a Romantic's heart through delicate, yet elaborate, verse. Profound in his sensualism, thought-provoking in his eroticism, he deserves to be taught in every World Literature class in America.

Andrew says

This is clearly a work done in Mishima's early years, when he was more obsessed with the idea of vague supermen devoid of feelings of compassion, and fixated on the typical male adolescent fantasies of an existential rage like heroes from Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. So, you know, that gets irritating. The vicious lack of empathy with no reward gets frustrating because many of these stories don't have a real antagonism - the hero is unfeeling and capable, and does what he wants, because nothing gets in the way. He is a spectacle of something you're supposed to find repulsive. And you do.

Still, there is a lot of irresistible beauty here, and there are a lot of well structured stories. I think you're better off reading "The Sailor who Fell from Grace with the Sea" than these stories, though. That's where Mishima really let himself tell a story rather than grousing.

yengyeng says

Cigarette and Martyrdom probably activated many BL plot bunnies.

rob says

When I first found Mishima, I wondered why I'd never heard of him before. I quickly fell in love with his style of writing tight, consistent, entertaining, and vexing novels. "The Temple of the Golden Pavilion" is one of my all time favorite novels, and with reading it I found Mishima to be my favorite author.

But I had never read a short story (or play) from him until I found this collection.

Now I feel even more strongly about Mishima, and even more solidly convinced that his detractors have no validity. These seven stories are all radically different; characters, time period, length--but they all hold something very poignant about them. Like the Professor recommending to his maid in "Act of Worship" the beautifully written prose of vast scenery and metaphoric imagery -- I too recommend this collection for those reasons.

"Fountains in the Rain" is a simple and short narrative between two lovers, with Mishima juxtaposing the female's tears' with the fountains they (the couple) stumble upon while in rain. Wonderful layering here, but this is the one "throw-away" story (if you could even call it that). The following, "Raisin Bread", is where the stories take an almost psychologically horrific turn; the subject matter is dark from here on out, but Mishima wields this territory like a blade.

"Sword" is next, one of this collection's two largest stories (the other one being the self-titled) concerning, yes, a kendo/swordplay training school. Characters are introduced quickly and tension is held high as we see guilt and honor flowing together until the final line reveals the story's conclusion. You can feel the sweat on the students' faces and can nearly see the golden hue of the dojo floor.

"Sea and Sunset" takes a very different story (which is itself told inside of another story) about a French farm hand sold into slavery, landing in a Buddhist shrine in Japan. The two items in the title seem to suggest a waning of life for the protagonist. Wonderful little story.

Now, the two most brilliant pieces come next. They express, alone, why I think Mishima is head and shoulders above most any Japanese literature -- and also why his detractors (who claim he falls from being able to create the metaphysical dreamscapes of Haruki Murakami, or the Japanesque erotic footsy of Tanizaki) should reconsider his worth.

"Cigarette" is a personal diatribe from an adolescent that would otherwise be boring if not for being so acutely written. In a few pages, I felt that Mishima and I had had the same childhood. He crossed into territory that many do (think the typical "teen experience" movie) but the end result is something entirely believable and fascinating. The grinding of adolescence on culture; feeling the need to "fit in"; feeling unwelcomed anywhere -- Mishima captures it all with clarity that I have never seen anywhere else. I'll be re-reading this one many times.

When I first started "Martyrdom", I didn't expect it to hold much. Demon King? I wondered. But by the end, I was shocked. This piece holds such poetry and metaphor in every line, and crosses paths between Christian mythology and Japanese idealism. The tortured protagonist (making the last story's main character to look brave in comparison) and his story are probably predictable with the story's title, but there is more than expected, and when I finished this story I could only be reminded of what Murakami had said of Mishima, and I wondered if he had had a chance to read this! It truly moved me like not many of his novels have.

Mishima changed the landscape of Japanese literature. He wrote around 20 volumes of short stories, these being but a few. He also, unlike many of his influences, was able to see many of them translated into English and made popular among his current generation (also a rare thing among Japanese authors).

His untimely death is what people most remember about him. Let them, then. In my own life, I'll only remember that he changed the way I felt about everything.

Andrew Fairweather says

Acts of Worship is an excellent short story collection by Yukio Mishima, who committed ritual suicide in 1970 (obviously, one can't help but draw parallels between certain characters and Mishima himself).

"Sword," "Cigarette," and "Act of Worship" stand out among the seven, there were really no time-wasters here. Something I noticed to be quite prevalent in this collection is his characters' betrayal of themselves or others close to them. This betrayal usually results in a greater peace, even if it involves a complete upheaval in the social ecosystem the characters find themselves in at the story's open. Take Mibu, the dedicated fencing disciple of Jiro, whom he worships with the intensity surely only capable of a young lad. During a coastal fencing retreat, Jiro demands a large degree of self denial from his students, with emphasis on not swimming in the water. When the second in command urges the lads to go swimming behind Jiro's back, Mibu is the only one who stays behind in deference to Jiro's orders... that is, until himself Jiro turns up! All of a sudden...

"His sitting there would look like an empty form, a kind of placard.... It would seem to be the thing he most despised: showy hypocrisy. Even if he had originally decided to behave as he had for Jiro's sake, he would rather die than have Jiro see him do it.

[...]

Driven by an odd eagerness to be punished just as soon as possible, he made straight for the approaching, sea drenched figures."

To go into the consequences of this betrayal may do more to ruin the story than anything. But for now I'll say I was struck by the interesting questions posed by Mishima concerning duty and ideological distance—that is, when confronted with the possible event of Jiro's observation of Mibu's duty, it seemed a duty to betray rather than respect. How can an act of betrayal remain an act of faith while destroying the very ideological framework in which this faith is based? Anyway, I was constantly going "here" with Mishima's stories which, by the way, were much more than intellectual exercises, being very engaging as stories themselves.

I've got another Mishima on the holds list... I look forward to it!

Conner says

Writing a review for this collection of stories is an intimidating prospect. Prose as exquisite as this seems like it deserves a more lucid write-up than I feel capable of giving. The usual spewing of adjectives: "thought-provoking", "delicate", "sublime", "tragic", "illuminating", and other words, while apt, fail to fully encompass the experience of reading Mishima and the wonderment one feels at his mastery of capturing subtle emotion and psychology through language.

This collection contains seven nicely varied stories. The surprisingly humorous and ironic opening story (Fountains in the Rain) quickly gives way to a darker tone, from the murky Raisin Bread (reminiscent of the modern Ry? Murakami) to the out-and-out tragic Sword. Mishima travels to different time periods as well, with the mythical Sea and Sunset taking place in the 12th century. Two of the stories take place in modern all-male boarding schools, and while these stories are both similar, the first and probably my favorite, is an extremely fragile tale about the desperate search for acceptance and unspoken desire for love that's very hard to summarize without diminishing its poignancy (Cigarette) while the other is almost a western christ parable (Martyrdom). The title story closing the collection has a discussion about medieval Japanese poetry. It is telling about Mishima's skills as a writer that his prose is just as poetic as any of the ancient verses sampled here.

The translation by John Bester is very well done, however I have one small gripe. He gives us this disclaimer in the preface: "there are a few short passages that I have cut because they would have been impossible to translate, or would have been puzzling to the non-Japanese reader." This is perfectly understandable and a common thing to do in translation, but it would have been nice if instead of extracting them completely, he'd have left these passages untranslated, even if he set them aside from the main text. Mishima is one of those writers where each sentence is constructed so precisely that you feel every word is important. This is absolutely gorgeous prose that demands that you slow down to read. I spent quite a lot of time with this book re-reading passages just to fully soak in their beauty.

I was thoroughly impressed by my introduction to Mishima and I already feel confident saying that he is one of the greatest authors I've had the honor of reading. I hear his novels are even better.

Vitani Days says

Questa raccolta contiene tre fra i miei racconti preferiti di Mishima: "La spada", "Martirio" e "La sigaretta". Quest'ultimo non lo conoscevo, ma l'ho subito apprezzato per motivi che poi andrò a spiegare. I racconti sono molto diversi fra loro per contenuti, essendo tra l'altro stati scritti in un lasso di tempo che copre quasi tutta la vita di Mishima. Hanno un tratto in comune, però: come da titolo del volume, ogni racconto è incentrato su un atto di adorazione verso qualcosa o qualcuno. Per fare un esempio nel primo racconto, intitolato appunto "Atto di adorazione", ad essere oggetto d'amore è il vecchio studioso col quale la protagonista vive, servendolo in tutto ma mai osando superare i limiti di quello che è, in effetti, un rapporto di lavoro (da lei vissuto quale ragione di vita). In "La sigaretta", invece, adorata è appunto la sigaretta: non in sé e per sé ma in quanto oggetto-feticcio che porta verso il ragazzo amato; in "La spada" è un giovane spadaccino, quasi incarnazione del kendo nella sua quintessenza, e via discorrendo. Si tratta, come sempre

per Mishima, di racconti belli, scritti con grazia e padronanza estrema e in qualche caso - "La spada" - pregni di soffuso erotismo e di una vitalità insopprimibile anche laddove lo spettro della morte incombe. Proprio parlando di "La spada", è forse il racconto di Mishima più bello che io abbia letto, e uno dei più belli che io abbia letto in generale. La prosa è quella del Mishima maturo, la potenza anche, idem la morte che intreccia una danza con l'eros. E' un racconto felicissimo per vivacità e corporeità, un inno all'azione come Mishima la intendeva, azione che qui si fonde magnificamente con il lato letterario dell'anima. A fare da contraltare è in un certo senso "La sigaretta", racconto molto più acerbo - Mishima lo scrisse a vent'anni circa - ma di grandissima delicatezza. Ho apprezzato in particolare il modo naturalissimo in cui viene declinata l'attrazione del protagonista verso un altro ragazzo. La sigaretta, che il ragazzo gli offre, diventa come ho già detto un oggetto-feticcio. Nel caso del protagonista si tratta certamente di un'attrazione potenzialmente di tipo amoroso, che però non viene mai riconosciuta e classificata come tale ma resta indefinita e vaga. E questo, se ci si pensa, è normalissimo in un ragazzo di quattordici anni timido com'era il Mishima di allora, e questa incapacità di dare il suo nome all'amore è proprio il tratto che più di tutto mi ha fatto amare il racconto. L'attenzione dello scrittore è sulla luce del sole fra gli alberi, sui riflessi dell'acqua, su tutta una componente paesaggistica quasi romantica con cui il ragazzo oggetto d'adorazione si fonde pittoricamente. Poi, tutto a un tratto, Mishima infila il particolare di due braccia che escono dalle maniche bianche e arrotolate di una camicia. Un particolare che più definito e carnale davvero non si può e che è la ciliegina sulla torta di un racconto aggraziatissimo e delicato, e che gli dona profondità e spessore. Su "Martirio" mi sono già spesa parlando del volume singolo in cui è uscito qualche anno fa. Brevemente: è un racconto in cui l'adorazione è quella che due ragazzi, un demonio e un santo, provano l'uno per l'altro. Un racconto in cui l'adorazione si fonde con la morte. Un racconto in cui l'amore è più che mai fuso con la morte. Vi sono numerose letture possibili, in realtà, a partire da quella wildiana e passando per una sovranaturale. Sono tutte indubbiamente valide. La mia personale impressione, però, rimane quella di un demonio che fa un favore al santo, aiutandolo a tornare là dove desiderava. Per quanto riguarda gli altri racconti della raccolta, non ne parlerò per esteso perché, ammetto, mi hanno lasciato di meno. Sono sempre piacevolissimi, comunque, perché Mishima era quel che si suol dire "un grande scrittore". Scriveva bene, avrebbe scritto bene anche una lista della spesa. Ragion per cui, chi ama i bei racconti va sul sicuro recuperando questa raccolta e "Morte di mezza estate", sempre di Yukio Mishima. E buona lettura.

Ensiform says

1. "Fountains In the Rain." An arrogant youth dumps his girlfriend; when she won't stop crying, he takes her to fountains in the rain, hoping her tears will find their match in them. Instead, he himself becomes fascinated with the sight of the cascading waters. Good descriptions, and a humorous account of youth coming to terms with its own unimportance.
2. "Raisin Bread." Jack, an alienated young man, "made of some clear crystalline substance, had as his sole aim to become quite invisible." A failed suicide, he remains morbidly detached, even in his social and sexual relations. Beautiful, powerful with quite subtle prose, but as a whole it lacks the drama that makes a story moving: there is no conflict or change in Jack. It's a slice of life scene, but an alien life.
3. "Sword." 53 pages. Jiro, an excessively upright aloof fencing student, the captain of the team, distances himself from what he sees as the shame of the world. Eventually his disappointment with society, including a young student who hero-worships him, leads him to suicide. It's an interesting story as a demonstration of notions of Eastern honor and the pressures of interaction among social unequals, as well as the craft of fencing. But like the other Mishima stories, there's something detached about the whole, much as Jiro

detaches himself from society. I never really understood the characters' actions. This could also be a cultural or language barrier.

4. "Sea And Sunset." An old man in Japan, Anri, climbs to the top of a mountain to watch the sunset and tell the story of how he saw a vision as a young boy in France, took part in the children's crusade, and was sold into slavery. Now settled in Japan, he has rejected his old Western life, "and never indulged in foolish fantasies of an afterlife or hankered after unseen lands." And yet sadness overshadows his view of the sunset and the waves. It's a subtle, deep psychological portrait, as well as a nice example of the emphasis on the immediate and acceptance of the East.

5. "Cigarette." A very delicate tale of a delicate, bookish boy with homoerotic leanings, who shares a cigarette with some boys at school in hopes of being accepted as one of them. The prose is very poetic, the descriptions of nature clear and elegant, the conflicts raging within the boy subtly understated. It's good writing, but I don't identify with it much.

6. "Martyrdom." An enigmatic tale of an overdeveloped 14-year-old who develops a homoerotic love-hate thing for another student. Poetic and strange, ugly and childish, and yet sweet somehow.

7. "Act Of Worship." 60 pages. A very proper, slightly eccentric bachelor professor of Japanese literature goes on a pilgrimage to the shrines of his birth district. Unexpectedly, he asks his female living assistant to accompany him, and with an odd ritual, very subtly reveals something to her of himself, as well as what their relationship has become over ten years. This is a delicate, poetic story, using lyrical descriptions as well as brief lessons in Japanese literature and history to outline the rather sad yet somehow hopeful tale of two alienated people, bound by dictates of society and place. It's a beautiful piece, powerful and rich.

King Shabalaba says

Power in true reading

David says

"Fountains in the rain" – boy's joy in the dumping of first girlfriend. Girl manages to ruin it.

"Raisin Bread" – Yukio Mishima meets Haruki Murakami! I didn't quite understand if they were foreigners, or cool-cat, jazz-loving J-boys who'd adopted funky names.

"Sword" – Sexy young man takes his kendo very seriously. As all young men should. Other members of the team want to be him, destroy him, shag him, or a little bit of all three. Mishima by numbers.

"Sea and Sunset" – Weird.

"Cigarette" – Public school boys 1: Fragile, unattractive boy crashes a fag from the captain of the rugby team.

"Martyrdom" – Public school boys 2: Fragile, unattractive boy steals porn from the ruler of the dormitory.

"Act of Worship" – repellent poet and his boring maid travel to some Shinto sights.

Tim says

This is a group of Mishima's stories, written between 1946 and 1965, and collected in 1989. He primarily wrote novels, but these stories demonstrate that he could write great short pieces too. I once loved his writing, but I now find a lot of it disturbing. Perhaps this is due to me finding his life and death disturbing - his intense narcissism, his political extremism, and his closeted bi or homosexuality. In his writing he seemed to be after some sort of purity and beauty, but he associated these things with violence and suicide. He lived a life of great success and achievement, but was never satisfied, and began to come unglued toward the end. Still, there is no denying his power - he could write lines of perfect, radiant prose. He portrayed the subtle inner lives of repressed characters with great power and feeling.

A couple of these are early stories and not especially interesting, altho they do show the young writer beginning to exercise his talent. "Sword" is well written, and it showcases Mishima's fascination with kendo and youthful masculinity. "Sea and Sunset" is proof that Mishima had a great sense of humor, one that he did not show often enough. "Act of Worship" is the real masterpiece of the book, and shows the author at the height of his powers, doing what he does best - describing an uptight, repressed woman with the hots for a man who is out of her reach. In this case, an old maid becomes the housekeeper for a brilliant, wall-eyed old poetry professor, a man who commands great respect, but is deeply lonely. Mishima describes their subtle communications and interactions brilliantly. This is worthwhile reading for fans, and a good place to start if you have never Mishima's stuff before.

Le Chapelier Lettré says

#En 3 points

*Mishima-style : lorsqu'on parle de littérature japonaise, Yukio Mishima revient constamment, tant pour son destin tragique que pour ses œuvres au style inimitable - avec ce recueil de nouvelles, il confirme sa réputation, véritable virtuose des descriptions qui, quoique poétiques, ne sont jamais monotones et rendent le récit plus tangible et vivant que jamais

*Des portraits séduisants de sombres personnalités : faibles, tyranniques, atypiques, durs, indifférents, rêveurs, passionnés, laids, sublimes, les personnages de Mishima cachent une forme d'obscurité qu'il est toujours fascinant d'explorer - une force qui atteint son paroxysme dans "Martyr" ou "Ken"

*Des nouvelles inégales : certaines sont des chefs-d'œuvre ("Martyr" et "Ken" en tête, bien sûr, mais aussi "La cigarette" ou "Pains aux raisins"), d'autres quelque peu décevantes ("Pèlerinage aux Trois Montagnes" et "La mer et le couchant") ou laissent un goût d'inachevé ("Jets d'eau sous la pluie") - s'il en va bien sûr de la sensibilité du lecteur, chacun devrait néanmoins y trouver son compte

Alor Deng says

What is there to say about Mishima that I haven't already stated? The man was the apotheosis of genius. A prose writer who wrote with the observational skills of a poet. The mundane to him is given a poetic lift and

under the magnifying glass that was his pen, everything he describes turns beautiful. I shudder to think that there might be a better writer that I'll encounter in the future. Yukio Mishima (I say this with all the conviction of my heart) is the greatest writer to have lived. He has genuinely changed my perspective on the world with his words. Is it possible to give higher praise to a writer? I wish he was alive so that I could thank him personally. Instead, I'll pass on his books to anyone and everyone.

This is a collection that hints at Mishima's greatness. No doubt written before he reached the peak of his powers. Still, it's impressive. My two favorites are "Sword" and "Cigarette." "Sword" is wonderfully crafted, but if you must read one short story read "Cigarette." "Cigarette" is tight and controlled and is worth several re-reads.

Guillermo Galvan says

I think Yukio Mishima is one the greatest modern writers. His works are refined and brutal as a Japanese sword. Unfortunately, after several years, I can finally say, "This Mishima book wasn't good." Out of the seven stories only three are worth a read, and even then just barely. My rating would be lower if I were to rate this book in its entirety, and not just the three worthwhile stories.

If you want some solid Mishima stories read *Death in Midsummer and Other Stories*. This book doesn't tarnish my image of Mishima. I'm going to treat *Acts of Worship* like a transsexual and just "pretend it's not there."

Tosh says

I am not sure where the subtitle came from ("Japanese for Busy People") but it's wrong! But to the subject of Yukio Mishima's short stories, they're really good. I have been told that in Japanese Mishima is a great stylist - his sentence structures are superb and he's greatly admired for the literal shading and brightness of his prose work. I am hoping that more of his work will get translated into English.

But meanwhile we have this (and another short story collection) and a lot of his novels in print. Read and enjoy - and of course his own life is quite.... interesting. Of course.

Matt says

Before the world had Murakami, we had Mishima. He writes haunting stories that reveal a paradoxical combination of tenderness and brutality. Narratives often linger on elements of the landscape, but not in ways that seem hammy or overdone. And his characters are strong-willed and introspective. This collection of stories focuses on scenes from the lives of school-children, but also includes stories that focus on religious pilgrimages. The topics: love, devotion, insecurities, and the struggle to find one's place in life. I'll avoid describing all of the stories, since other reviewers have already done that. There are some universal truths here that transcend the time and place of their composition. I found much of my own past in the story "Cigarette," in which a young man takes up smoking to impress some older boys. Often the stories end with a twist that makes them resonate even more, although a couple of times I found this twist ending unsatisfying. Still, if you like Mishima, you'll enjoy these stories and if you aren't familiar with Mishima, this

collection may be a good place to start.
