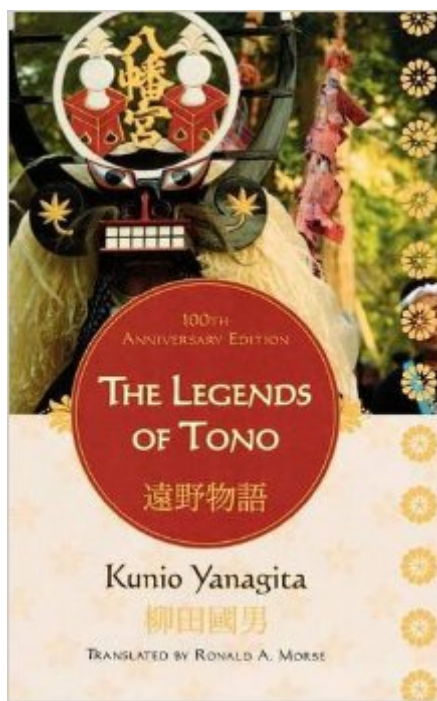


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# The Legends Of Tono



## Synopsis

In 1910, when Kunio Yanagita (1875-1962) wrote and published *The Legends of Tono* in Japanese, he had no idea that 100 years later, his book would become a Japanese literary and folklore classic. Yanagita is best remembered as the founder of Japanese folklore studies, and Ronald Morse transcends time to bring the reader a marvelous guide to Tono, Yanagita, and his enthralling tales. In this 100th Anniversary edition, Morse has completely revised his original translation, now out of print for over three decades. Retaining the original's great understanding of Japanese language, history, and lore, this new edition will make the classic collection available to new generations of readers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Much of what we know of Japanese folklore might have been lost forever if it were not for two authors, Lafcadio Hearn and Kunio Yanagita. Both were avid collectors of the mysterious tales of weird and imaginative creatures that were passed down as oral folklore but never written down. Both did their work at the start of the Meiji era, a time when, in the name of modernization, the government and scholars of Japan were actively attempting to wipe out the beliefs and superstitions of previous eras which were thought to be embarrassing to a country entering the modern age. "The Legends of Tono" (Japanese title "Tono Monogatari") is the most famous of Yanagita's works, collecting the narratives of the small town of Tono in Iwate prefecture, as told to him by local resident and storyteller Kizen Sasaki. The stories collected in "The Legends of Tono" include some

of Japan's most famous monsters like the kappa and the child-ghosts zashiki-warashi. Along with Hearn's *Kwaidan: Stories And Studies Of Strange Things* and Ueda Akinari's *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*, "The Legends of Tono" is one of the most classic and important books on Japanese folklore. A surprisingly small book for one that carries so much weight, there are exactly one hundred and nineteen legends spread out over fifty-eight pages. Many of these legends are only a sentence in length, and often there are three to four different legends on a page.

This is one of the earliest books by the great folklorist Yanagita Kunio, and consists of 119 short pieces of folklore from the Tono district of Iwate prefecture, northern Japan. Anyone hoping for quaint, amusing yarns will be disappointed. The atmosphere is deeply alien and the cultural attitudes revealed are often cruel, even shocking. Consider this extract from legend No. 100 for example: "A certain fisherman at Funakoshi was on his way back from Kirikiri with his companions one day. Late at night, as they were passing by the area of the Forty-Eight Hills, they came across a woman alone by a stream. The fisherman looked and realized that it was his wife. He figured that there was no reason for her coming to this area alone in the middle of the night and decided that it had to be a ghost creature of some kind. At once, he took out the knife that he used to clean fish and stabbed her from behind. She gave out a sorrowful cry and died." Later, it turns out that the dead woman does indeed transform back into a fox, while the fisherman's wife is alive and well. Still, the fisherman's unhesitating decision to stab his own wife in the back on the assumption that she was a disguised demon is chilling, and makes one wonder what on earth really happened that night. Or consider this extract from legend No. 55: "Many kappa (mischievous water spirits) live in rivers. There are large numbers of kappa in the Saru-ga-ishi River. In a house by the river in Matsuzaki village, women have become pregnant with a kappa's children for two generations. When the kappa-children are born, they are hacked into pieces, put into small wine casks, and buried in the ground. They are grotesque.

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