



# Interrupted Truth: From the Narrative Distortion of in a Grove

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## Abstract

Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's *In a Grove* fuses the “call of the Wild” and the “call of the West” to deconstruct the singularity of truth through seven contradictory testimonies. Departing from the life-or-death dilemma in *Rashōmon*, this work exposes how shame and despair distort humanity. While Akira Kurosawa's film implants a “quasi-truth” to bridge narrative gaps through humanistic hope, Akutagawa's skepticism reveals language's opacity and truth's relativity—an enduring modern predicament.

## Subject Areas

Culture, Literature

## Keywords

*In a Grove*, Truth Interruption, Narrative Strategy, Human Psyche, Reality Distortion

## 1. Introduction

In the form of “Tales of the Present and the Past”—“Bamboo Grove” novel—“Rashomon” movie, the core of “Bamboo Grove” is also deformed. The simple and wild exhortation expressed in the complete story is replaced by the three-dimensional reality of the juxtaposition of many voices, and the question of whose hand the samurai died is left unanswered under the centerless point of view; Akira Kurosawa's film *Rashōmon* reconstructs Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's narrative experiment: while its core plot derives from *In a Grove*, the framing device adopts the setting of Akutagawa's other short story *Rashōmon*. Within the textual lineage spanning the classical *Konjaku Monogatari* → Akutagawa's fiction → Kurosawa's film, Kurosawa achieves a reversal and revision of the original work's pessimistic

tone by implanting a “quasi-truth” narrative and expressing humanitarianism. However, the cold dilemma of the novel’s non-call-out style appears in modern life at every turn, and the interrupted truth may be irreplaceable as eternity.

## 2. Creative Context: Primal Roots and Cross-Cultural Dialogue

“Call of the Wild” represents a distinctive cultural trait deeply rooted in Japanese soil, specifically denoting the primordial vitality in classical Japanese literature that remained unconstrained by Confucian ethics. The artistic life of “Tales of Imago” doesn’t stop at the fresh breath... that should be the beauty of ‘wildness” [1]. Ryunosuke Akutagawa refers to *The Tale of Imago* as a work from the end of the Heian period, reflecting the social landscape of medieval Japanese society and the spiritual world of the people, and “In the Bamboo Grove” is taken from “The Tale of Imago”. The story itself is wildly funny or almost brutal in showing the pain of the people, and by sketching the unity of the mind and the body, the laughter and cries of the people at that time sound as if they were in their ears. But the “ability” does not have multiple perspectives and character death, to “Han always have some conscience, although a robber, but did not rob the women’s clothes” “Men are really useless, even in the mountains, the bow and arrow to an unknown person, it can be regarded as a great folly” of the summary of the closure [2]. Themes such as greed leads to evil consequences, the need to beware of evil-doers, and the need for men to take responsibility, which are strongly related to the idea of “advising good and punishing evil,” provide guidance for people in society, in the harmonious and balanced style of classical literature.

While exploring Japan’s classical world to draw strength for rebuilding both his life and creative practice, he simultaneously heeded the “Call of the West”—referring specifically to Western literary techniques—deepening his understanding of Western literature and art through its visual arts and literary traditions [3]. “It is always incredibly Greek to be rooted in this deep West” [1]. The story of “In the Bamboo Grove,” in which a wife undergoes a sudden psychological change after being humiliated and wants her husband to die in order to purge his shame, has similarities to the story of Candorius, the king of Lydia in ancient Greece. Ryunosuke Akutagawa has absorbed the techniques of Western novels, utilizing historical materials, freely entering and exiting the original canon, using the past for the present, and skillfully crafting the story to convey the dilemma of life and the texture of the soul of modern people.

The point of writing a book is to be like Tolstoy and others, “They lived and fought hard, how can I fold my shield. I am grateful to them for spurring me to write novels” [3], which reflects his passion for “man”. In the process of explaining and revealing pedestrians, he makes an extremely calm, rational and profound analysis of human nature, in which there are hidden secrets in everyone’s heart, and this exploration, in turn, leads to his pessimism, disappointment and skepticism. The inward-looking human nature and the outward-looking world have ir-

reconcilable contradictions but coexist with each other—“If human nature is not changed, there is no way for a perfect utopia to come into being; if human nature is changed, the utopia that was thought to be perfect will be eclipsed” [1].

### 3. Inward Crisis: Shame and Despair as Truth’s Dismantlers

During the Heian period, a woodcutter found the body of a samurai in a bamboo forest. The woodcutter, the traveling monk, the sheriff, and the samurai’s mother-in-law testify in court, and the robber (Tahoumaru), the samurai’s wife (Masa), and the samurai’s dead spirit give their own testimonies. The robber and the samurai’s wife confess to the murder, and the samurai’s spirit claims suicide through a witch. The robbers tricked the samurai and his wife into the bamboo forest and raped her, which is confirmed by the statements of the parties involved, but what happened after the rape and who killed the samurai and for what motive are contradicted by the three parties, leaving the cause of the samurai’s death unanswered.

The samurai couple is a person of a certain social status, and Toshimaru is a famous thief in the capital city. After leaving the extreme choice of “life or death” in Rashomon style, the three of them, with the help of weeds and bushes, create a fog in Yabusame, out of the desire for “life” in the moral sense. The contradictory narratives and multi-faceted characters make it impossible to encompass the case in a larger “complete” story. The rift between the world of speech and the real world is the “truth” in disguise, but also the “truth” that is difficult to reach under the self-protection mechanism of human beings, and for this reason, the three of them are willing to pay the price of “death”.

In Toshimaru’s words, he is a tough man with dignity; in Manasa’s confession, she is a martyr who is humiliated by the two men; and in the samurai’s narration, the spirit of the samurai makes him choose to commit suicide after being humiliated. The reference to death can reinforce Tahoumaru’s “hardness” and Masha’s “martyrdom,” and it can also emphasize the samurai’s “purity”. Both Masa and the samurai can be seen as having been shattered by their socially expected selves, and the sense of self-despair triggered by their shame compels them to go on the path of “paying for their honor” in order to dissolve the morally shaped sins of the society by means of figurative and public punishments, and to attempt to get closer to the realm of “goodness”. Toshimaru, on the other hand, directly mocks and criticizes society: “It’s just that I kill people with a big knife on my belt, while you don’t use a knife, but power, money, and often just your hypocritical mouth” [4], and asks, “Is it you who are bad, or is it me?” [4] the first time Takaichimaru has broken the law, and it seems to follow from his perceptions of society that he counteracts his own sins by making the sins of society explicit, thus counteracting them on the level of self-perception. Though he believes that heeding the woman’s words and moving in on the man is the crueler thing to do, he is persuaded by the sight of the woman’s fiery eyes that this sense of hope outweighs the sense of shame and despair, and is dashed when the woman flees. A renewed sense of shame led to the choice of honor, and a renewed sense of despair led to the choice

of capital punishment.

“We are as unchanging as the grass that sprouts in our different climates and on our different soils” [1]. The climate and soil of the trio’s living area is like a “sleeve” that gives an invisible direction, and the part that the trio chooses to emphasize or conceal can be attributed to their own selfish desires, but also rooted in the fear of deviating from the social precepts, which amplifies their weakness while defending themselves, while at the same time the invisible “sleeve” in the zone of different classes and genders is also illuminated in its original form. At the same time, the invisible “sets” of different classes and gender zones are also illuminated. The separation of different zones leads to mutual incomprehension and difficulty in transcending the subjective, seeing only the grass flourish but not the sharp towering of the trees. The linear logic presented after their judgment based on the already solidified character at that stage and the current situation does not necessarily fit between them, and the three of them are unable to communicate with each other and find it difficult to exchange ideas, but the conflict of *In the Bamboo Grove* emerges as a result, and the tension is maintained.

#### **4. Outward Dilemma: Language’s Opacity and Cinematic Remediation**

Ryunosuke Akutagawa says in *Aphorisms for Gnomes*, “In a nutshell, what reason tells us is the powerlessness of reason” [1]. Based on a skeptical stance, he utilizes the deformation and distortion brought about by the juxtaposition of many voices to reproduce the incompatible broken and pluralistic realities of the world. In “*In the Bamboo Grove*”, questions and rhetorical questions appear constantly. In a real-life situation, it may be that Deng Shi is cross-examining a large number of witnesses and suspects in a public place, but after the event has been moved to the novel, the meaning of time is narrowed down, the concept of space is expanded, and everyone is in a dialogical context that is both equal and co-temporal, and the seven dialogues are seven dialogues between “me” and “you”. The seven dialogues are seven private conversations between “I” and “you” in the textual space. The reader takes the role of the adjudicator in listening, narrating, judging and speculating, and taking the role of “searching for the truth” means recognizing the existence of the truth - after the confusing case, there is a truth that exists outside of the narrative and does not shift with the narrative. When all available information has been provided, the questions of “who is lying” and “who is the murderer” hang over the heads of the judge and the reader. But without the multi-voiced narration, private memory can never restore the truth; at the same time, the narrator is inclined, and the more narratives he obtains, the less he is able to grasp the truth. That is to say, when the truth of the objective world seen comes from the language of others, once these linguistic information is hard to distinguish between truth and falsehood, the “truth” believed in will collapse at any time, and the readers will still not be able to complete the task of refereeing in the end [5].

Akira Kurosawa’s film borrows the setting of *Rashomon*, with the key plot and

narrative structure from *In the Bamboo Grove*. The woodcutter, the monk and the servant, under the Rashomon in the pouring rain, recount the marvelous things they saw and heard when they testified at the government office, and together they restore the eerie things that happened in a Grove between a robber and a couple. This setting also seems to show Kurosawa's control over the kernel of the life and death dilemma inherited from the novels *Rashomon* and *In the Bamboo Grove*, but Kurosawa implants a narrative closer to the "truth" through the servant's rebuttal of the woodcutter's words, and expresses his hope for humanity through humanitarianism, which weakens the uneasiness and emptiness expressed by Akutagawa, making the film similar to the novels. The movie and the novel present different themes and worlds. Also a movie from the 1950s, *Twelve Angry Men*, when faced with the question of "what role does the rational component of human nature play in independent judgment," demonstrated its confidence in the social system, i.e., independent and rational judgment does not necessarily lead to correct judgment, but rational judgment cannot be denied because of this.

However, the transcendental issues raised by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, such as the opacity, instability, and obscurity of language, as well as the perspectivity, relativity, and rupture of truth, have not been rationally explained, and have become new subjects that cross people's minds at every turn.

## 5. Conclusion

When language functions as a barrier rather than a conduit to truth, the narrative fragmentation in *In a Grove* becomes a metaphor for modernity. Akutagawa Ryunosuke deconstructs the unity of truth through polyphonic testimonies, while Kurosawa Akira attempts to bridge this fissure with a humanistic 'quasi-truth'—their divergence fundamentally reflects the opposition between literary skepticism and cinematic redemptive narrative. This offers contemporary narrative theory a crucial insight: any claim to "objective truth" must confront the abyss of narrative subjectivity.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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