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Zuoze Kai Wang
zuoze kai.wang@trincoll.edu

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Zuoze Kai Wang

Exploring Parallel Themes: Comparing Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* with Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's "In A Grove" and "Rashōmon"

ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the similarities between Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's¹ "In A Grove" and "Rashōmon." Through an analysis of the themes of female characters, story design, environment and social background in each work, this paper argues that there are striking parallels between the ways in which the two authors address these issues. By examining the similarities and differences between their works, the paper illuminates how Fyodor Dostoevsky and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke use literary works to show their attitude to their respective contemporary social issues.

INTRODUCTION

The Taisho period__(1912-1926) was a short period of time between the Meiji__(1868-1912) and Showa__(1926-1989) eras in Japan. At that time, Japan had experienced the hard struggle of the Meiji era. The struggle was Meiji Restoration. Japanese people moved from being an isolated feudal society at risk of colonization by Western powers to the new paradigm of a modern, industrialized nation state and emergent great power. Western scientific, technological, philosophical, political, legal, and aesthetic ideas influenced Japanese people a lot. As a result of such wholesale adoption of radically different ideas, the changes to Japan were profound and affected

¹ In Japan, the surname comes before the given name. I use this order when I refer to Japanese names in this thesis.

its social structure, internal politics, economy, military, and foreign relations. The Taisho period, as the successor to the Meiji period, naturally carried on the Meiji social atmosphere. On the one hand, some of the ideas of the liberal civil rights movement began to ferment again and democratic ideas proliferated. At the same time, there was a surge of democratic and socialist ideas in Japan. On the other hand, there was a confluence of Western and Eastern ideas, and progressive publications were springing up. This period is called the "Taisho Democracy" period. During the Meiji and Taisho periods, Japanese literature produced many excellent works. One writer, who was born at the end of the Meiji period, produced many excellent short stories during the Taisho period and had a major impact on Japanese literature. To this day, his name is used in a prestigious literary award to encourage new writers to endeavor their literary experiments. This writer is Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. He expressed many unique understandings, including his attitude to social issues and religion in his short stories.

Normally people would not associate Akutagawa with Russian writers because of the huge gap between the social environments of Japan and Russia. However, translations of Russian literature from the Meiji period to the early Taisho period had a very strong influence on the development of modern Japanese literature. As Senuma Shigeki mentions, "After the Meiji Restoration, Russian literature was perhaps the most important for the development of the 'new' Japanese literature."² In 1927, Akutagawa also wrote in his "Preface to a Collection of Short Stories in Russian

² Senuma, Shigeki. "The Influence of Russian Literature in Japan". *Japan Quarterly*; Jul 1, 1960; 7, 3.

Translation" that "nothing in modern foreign literature has had more influence on Japanese writers - rather, on the Japanese reading class - than Russian literature."³ Fyodor Mikháylovich Dostoyévskiy, one of the most famous Russian writers of the nineteenth century, naturally influenced Akutagawa's writing. Although Akutagawa did not become a follower of Dostoevsky, their works share many similarities. V.A. Kochetova says that "Akutagawa drew materials for his short stories from historical chronicles and collections of ancient legends. However, his works were also influenced by the works of his contemporaries. The main role among them was played by the texts of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky."⁴ Stating this, however, Kochetova fails to mention any particular traits shared by these two authors. Therefore, I will explain how Akutagawa's works were influenced by Dostoevsky by pointing out many specific similarities between their works, especially Akutagawa's "Rashōmon" and "In A Grove" and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

1. Female characters

Before discussing Akutagawa's short stories, it is necessary to talk about *Crime and Punishment* to see the influence on the Akutagawa's short stories. In *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky narrates the murder of Raskolnikov, a poor university student, to show the psychological journey of human beings in suffering, crime and repentance, and to reveal that the moral law of the human world is love and goodness. According to Katherine Briggs, "Dostoevsky attached great importance to the figure

³ 芥川龍之介 1927「露譚短篇集の序」『芥川龍之介全集 第九卷』岩波書店 1978。

⁴ Kochetova, V. A. "The influence of Dostoevsky's creativity on Akutagawa Ryunosuke." (2022): 84-85.

and teachings of Christ."⁵ This is because he grew up in a devout Christian family and his mother set a good example for Dostoevsky. This allowed for the emergence of many distinctive women in *Crime and Punishment*, such as Sonia, a devout believer, and Dunya, an independent and strong woman. Although Sonia had a tragic fate, she still had a strong faith. Dunya made many sacrifices for her brother, but she was also brave enough to fight for herself. Whether it is Dunya or Sonia, they all seem to passively accept their fate for their family: Ursula King explains that Dostoevsky uses these characters who are "circumscribed by their biological function of producing children and the associated tasks of nurturing and caring for the young, the old, and the sick."⁶ were created by Dostoevsky does not seem to give his female characters strong agencies. For example, Dunya, who sacrifices herself for her brother Raskolnikov at the beginning of the novel, suffers in silence and finds a solution alone. As her mother writes in her letter:

Of course, you know Dunya, you know how clever she is and what a firm character she has. Dunya can put up with all sorts of things, and even in the most extreme situations she's able to find enough generosity of spirit within herself so as not to lose her firmness. She even didn't put it all in her letters in order to upset me.⁷

At the end of the story, the landlord Svidrigailov threatens Dunya that he would reveal Raskolnikov's murder of the pawnbroker, even to the point of raping her. Considering Dunya's unconditional self-sacrifice of herself for her brother at the

⁵ Briggs, Katherine Jane. *Dostoevsky, Women, and the Gospel: Mothers and Daughters in the Later Novels*. na, 2009.

⁶ Ursula King, *Women and Spirituality: Voices of Protest and Promise*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992, 156.

⁷ Dostoevsky, Fyodor *Crime and Punishment*. David Campbell Publishers, 2000 Part one Chapter III

beginning of the story, the reader may think that Dunya will also suffer in silence this time. However, Dunya grabs a revolver to defend herself:

Dunya brought the revolver up and, deathly pale, her lower lip ashen and trembling, her large, black eyes glittering like fire, looked at him, her resolve now steady, taking aim and waiting for the first movement on his part.⁸

This act of Dunya contrasts with the silence that represents her usual passive personality, as she defends her rights while defending her brother Raskolnikov. She did not choose to be silent for the sake of her brother, she chose the radical way to resist. This act of hers even influences the landlord Svidrigailov eventually leading to his suicide. It can be said that Dunya as a woman controls the landlord Svidrigailov's fate. In addition, Sonia is also a female character that controls male character Raskolnikov's fate. Sonia is a young woman who is forced into prostitution in order to support her family. She is a complex and sympathetic character who is known for her intense piety and her unwavering commitment to doing what is right. Despite her difficult circumstances, she never loses her faith or her strong sense of morality. Although Sonia sacrificed herself for her family, as most women did at the time, she managed to redeem Raskolnikov with her faith. When Raskolnikov was in the confusion and pain because of his murder, Sonia succeeded in getting Raskolnikov to accept his sin and be willing to seek his own punishment:

He had suddenly recalled Sonya's word: 'Go up to the crossroads, bow to the people, kiss the earth, because you have sinned against it too, and tell the whole world our loud: "I am a murderer!"' In remembering them, he had

⁸ Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*. David Campbell Publishers, 2000 Part six Chapter V

begun to tremble all over. And such a crushing weight did he now carry from the hopeless despair and anxiety of all this recent time, and especially of the last few hours, that he fairly leapt at the chance of this pure, new, complete sensation... He kneeled in the middle of the square, bowed down to the earth and kissed that dirty earth, with pleasure and happiness. He got up and bowed down a second time.⁹

At the time of Raskolnikov's atonement, I argue, he is completely at the mercy of Sonia, who greatly influences the process of Raskolnikov's atonement. This is what makes her different from other women who are molded in predetermined social positions.

The female characters in Akutagawa's short stories, especially “In A Grove,” also did not remain in their established social positions. “In A Grove” tells the story of an unsolved murder case in a bamboo forest and is composed of seven parts: the testimonies of a woodcutter, a monk, a police officer, an old woman, and the confessions of the three parties - the murderer Tajomaru, young woman Masago and the victim samurai Takehiko - involved. Their words both corroborate and contradict each other, making the truth of the case unidentifiable. The short story was based on a tale from the early twelfth-century¹⁰ collection *Konjaku monogatari shū*, written in Akutagawa's style of modernism. While Dostoevsky depicts Sonia and Dunya in *Crime and Punishment* as independent and influential female characters, Akutagawa, on the other hand, uses an unusual female character Masago in his short story “In A Grove” to show his attitude toward the female. As Isabella Anghel suggests, “Masago's character becomes grotesque although she conforms to the Heian

⁹ Dostoevsky, Fyodor *Crime and Punishment*. David Campbell Publishers, 2000 Part six Chapter VIII

¹⁰ Heian period in Japan

standards of femininity.”¹¹ Anghel explains that Masago does not fit the understanding of how women were portrayed in the Heian period(794-1185).

Before analyzing Masago, it is necessary to analyze the status of women in the historical context of the Heian period. Composed in 711, *the Chronicle of Ancient Matters* is one of the earliest surviving works of Japanese literature. It emphasizes the sacredness and orthodoxy of the Emperor's "Divine Mandate" and preserves a large number of myths, legends, stories, poems and the richness of ancient Japanese literature, which has influenced later Japanese history, religion and life. In *the Chronicle of Ancient Matters*, there are many goddesses who occupy leading positions, such as the goddess Izanami, Amaterasu Omikami and Tsukuyomi. Izanami was one of the gods who created the Japanese continent, while Amaterasu Omikami and Tsukuyomi were in charge of the sun and the moon, respectively. It is thus possible to say that Japan was in a matriarchal society at this time. However, there is a chapter of polygamy in *Chronicle of Ancient Matters* that a man is married to more than one wife at the same time, which is a characteristic of patriarchal society. This chapter proves that the social status of women gradually went down. Judged by the marriage pattern. Japanese society has begun to change to a polygamous, male-dominated feudal society, and from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society. During the Heian period, women had a low social status and were deprived of their political rights due to the prevalence of Buddhism and the influence of feudal power. Feudal patriarchy

¹¹ Anghel, Isabella Maria. "GROTESQUE FEMININITY IN RASHŌMON AND IN A GROVE." (2022).

and polygamy influenced women a lot as women did not have the right to choose the family life they wanted. Scholar Rebekah Hunter suggests that “the aesthetic of womanhood is oftentimes related to an ideal of female passivity in romantic relations with men and of selflessness.”¹² In this social context, let me analyze why Masago is different. Masago is unlike other women of the Heian period because she does not accept her fate passively. For a time, she had the lead in the murder case. As Tajomaru, the murderer, says in the short story, “She asked that either her husband or I die. She said it was more trying than death to have her shame known to two men. She gasped out that she wanted to be the wife of whichever survived.”¹³ Masago’s husband, the victim samurai Takehiko, also says, “Kill him! I cannot marry you as long as he lives.”¹⁴ Although Masago was raped and is one of the victims in this story. From the perspectives of the two men, Masago controls their life and death. Moreover, it is Masago who chooses who to marry. Akutagawa does not explicitly state the truth of the testimony at the end, but a character like Masago seems very special and bizarre in a story set in the Heian period. In the context of Akutagawa’s own time, or the Taisho era, women were expected to play the role as a good wife and wise mother (Ryosaikenbo 良妻賢母). This means that women had to be kind enough as wives to solve their husbands' troubles and wise enough as mothers to educate their children. Women were more like tools in the family and did not have much of a voice. Roger J. Davies and Osamu Ikeno mention:

¹² Rebekah Hunter, *Aesthetics of Womanhood in Heian Japan* (University of Oregon, 2014),

¹³ Akutagawa Ryunosuke . “ In A Grove.” *The Oxford Book of Japanese Short Stories*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010 P99

¹⁴ Akutagawa Ryunosuke . “ In A Grove.” *The Oxford Book of Japanese Short Stories*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010 P101

In the Taisho period, women were encouraged to engage in business because it was considered useful for socialization purposes and in deepening their comprehension of their husbands. However, the concept of Ryosaikenbo was preserved, and women were not allowed to be superior to men.¹⁵

Therefore, the image of Masago was still special in the Taisho era, which was centuries away from the Heian period. Akutagawa uses the story of the Heian period to indicate his opinions about the status of women in his contemporary society.

Comparing the female figures of Sonia, Dunya and Masago, they are all female figures different from other women who would be conformed with the social expectations of the time. The only difference is that Akutagawa does not narrate the story in the context of the time in which he lived as Dostoevsky did.

2. Story Design, Environment and Social Background

Crime and Punishment has many settings that are similar to those from Dostoevsky's personal experiences. For example, the main character Raskolnikov's mother and sister, Dunya, correspond to Dostoevsky's own family members. Dostoevsky was sent to Siberia, which greatly influenced his writing, and Raskolnikov is also sent to Siberia at the end of the novel. As Alexander Burry says “*Crime and Punishment* emphasizes one of the novel’s key qualities: its sense of contemporaneity.”¹⁶ Moreover, the setting of *Crime and Punishment* is based on St. Petersburg of the time, and many of the locations that appear in the novel have counterparts in the real St. Petersburg, such as Raskolnikov’s room to St. Isaac’s Cathedral, the pawnbroker’s apartment to the Admiralty Building, Sonya’s room to

¹⁵ Davies, Roger. *The Japanese Mind Understanding Contemporary Japanese Culture*. Tuttle. P180

¹⁶ Katz, Michael R., and Alexander Burry, eds. "Approaches to Teaching Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*." Modern Language Association, 2022. P4-5

The Winter Palace and the Hermitage, locations of Svidrigaylov's suicide to The Academy of Science and so on.¹⁷ Dostoevsky was also very fond of using environmental descriptions to reflect the state of the characters or the social context. He shows the poor state of the main character by describing Raskolnikov's small apartment-- "It was a tiny little cell, about six paces long, and it presented a most pitiful aspect with its grimy, yellow wallpaper that was everywhere coming off the walls."¹⁸ Additionally, Russia in the mid-nineteenth century experienced a very turbulent social situation after the defeat in the Crimean War and the reforms that abolished serfdom. Dostoevsky reflected the situation of the whole country by describing the environment of St. Petersburg, the capital of the time. He writes in the novel, "Outside the heat was terrible, with humidity to make it worse; and crowds people, the slaked lime everywhere, the scaffolding, the bricks, the dust... The unbearable stench from the drinking dens, of which there are in this quarter of the city inordinately many... completed the sad and loathsome colouring of the scene."¹⁹ Furthermore, the crimes in *Crime and Punishment* are based on the reality of social proceedings. In 1865, Dostoevsky wrote to his publisher, M.N. Katkov,

The idea of my story... is a psychological account of a crime. The action is topical, set in the current year. A young student of lower-middle-class origin, who has been expelled from the university, and who lives in dire poverty, succumbs- thoughtlessness and lack of strong convictions -to certain strange, "incomplete" ideas that are floating in the air, and decides to get out of his misery once and for all. He resolves to kill an old woman who ... lends out money for interest.²⁰

¹⁷ Katz, Michael R., and Alexander Burry, eds. "Approaches to Teaching Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*." Modern Language Association, 2022. P14-16

¹⁸ Dostoevsky, Fyodor *Crime and Punishment*. David Campbell Publishers, 2000 Part one Chapter three

¹⁹ Dostoevsky, Fyodor *Crime and Punishment*. David Campbell Publishers, 2000 Part one Chapter One

²⁰ Katz, Michael R., and Alexander Burry, eds. "Approaches to Teaching Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*." Modern Language Association, 2022. P1

Dostoevsky skillfully combines three points: social background, personal experiences and realistic architecture.

Moreover, the protagonist Raskolnikov is a symbol both of Dostoevsky himself and of the nihilistic university students of the time. In his novel, Raskolnikov refers to the "superman theory." This theory means that he is an educated person who is not bound by the traditional social framework and rules. It is his own responsibility to save the society in his own way, and his way is to murder the pawnbroker. Raskolnikov's "superman theory" was also derived from the Russian nihilism of the time. Nihilism advocated an emphasis on the value of the individual and the people. While rejecting Russian aristocratic culture and the value system associated with it, the nihilists believed that the natural man should be fully free and free from all shackles, emphasizing the value of the people as a factor and making it a moral obligation to know them. At the same time, nihilism does not agree with religious beliefs. They consider excess wealth, luxurious living, art and excessive creativity in thought are guilty too. Raskolnikov does the same in his book. The lavish life corresponds to the fraudulent poor pawnbroker, and Raskolnikov justifies his murder by using this correspondence. Meanwhile, Raskolnikov expresses his disdain when Sonia demonstrates her devout religious beliefs. The reader gets a clear sense that Raskolnikov is a true reflection of the nihilistic Russian university students of that time with the addition of these factors of environmental description and social

background. This makes Raskolnikov's character so real that the reader can understand with sympathies rather than criticize him when reading about Raskolnikov's crimes. With such a realistic basis, it makes the *Crime and Punishment* all the more compelling.

Akutagawa's "Rashōmon" has similarities to *Crime and Punishment* also in this aspect. "Rashōmon" is a short story written by Akutagawa in 1915, and just like "In A Grove," it is based on the classic Japanese story *Konjaku Monogatari* (今昔物語集). The story is about a servant of a samurai who is waiting for the rain to stop at dusk under the Rashōmon Gate. When he is at a loss, he comes across an old woman who plucks the hair of dead people for a living. Eventually he robs the old woman and disappears.

First of all, the Rashōmon gate in the short story is the gate that really exists in Kyoto City. In the Heian period, Rashōmon was the main south gate of the capital city of Kyoto. It is now located at 54 Karahashi Rajomoncho, Minami Ward in Kyoto. Secondly, there is a section in "Rashōmon" that reflects the social context by describing the environment. Just as Dostoevsky reflected on the Russian society in the mid-nineteenth century by describing the urban environment of the capital city, St. Petersburg, Akutagawa reflected on the social background during the Heian period by describing the capital city, Kyoto. In this period, there were many wars between various samurai clans. This led to a very turbulent society in late Heian Japan. Akutagawa writes,

For the past few years the city of Kyoto had been visited by a series of calamities, earthquakes, whirlwinds, and fires, and Kyoto had been greatly devastated. Old chronicles say that broken pieces of Buddhist images and other Buddhist objects, with their lacquer, gold, or silver leaf worn off, were heaped up on roadsides to be sold as firewood. Such being the state of affairs in Kyoto, the repair of the Rashomon was out of the question. Taking advantage of the devastation, foxes and other wild animals made their dens in the ruins of the gate, and thieves and robbers found a home there too. Eventually it became customary to bring unclaimed corpses to this gate and abandon them. After dark it was so ghostly that no one dared approach.²¹

In addition, the plot design of “Rashōmon” has a servant as the main character who, just like Raskolnikov, struggles within his own mind prior to committing the crime. The only difference is that Raskolnikov was in great pain after the crime, while the samurai’s servant escapes his pain after rationalizing his crime. The motivation for their crimes is also very similar: Raskolnikov is influenced by nihilism and does not want to do odd-job while poverty is also a factor in his killing of the pawnbroker; the samurai’s servant in “Rashōmon” faces the same situation. Due to the struggle of various samurai families at the end of the Heian period, this servant was dismissed by his master:

But he had no particular idea of what to do after the rain stopped. Ordinarily, of course, he would have returned to his master's house, but he had been discharged just before. The prosperity of the city of Kyoto had been rapidly declining, and he had been dismissed by his master, whom he had served many years, because of the effects of this decline.²²

²¹ Akutagawa, Ryunosuke. *Rashomon and other stories*. Tuttle Publishing, 2011. P8

²² Akutagawa, Ryunosuke. *Rashomon and other stories*. Tuttle Publishing, 2011.p8

In such a time of war, he had nowhere to go and no way to survive, so he chose to rob the old woman. There are also similarities between the depictions of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* and of the servant in “Rashōmon” when they make up their minds to commit crimes. In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov thought “‘Or else turn my back on life altogether!’ He suddenly cried in a frenzy. Obediently accept my fate, such as it is, once and for all, and stifle all my aspirations, renouncing every right to action, life and love!’”²³ In “Rashōmon”, the servant thought:

He had little choice of means, whether fair or foul, because of his helpless circumstances. If he chose honest means, he would undoubtedly starve to death beside the wall or in the Sujaku gutter. He would be brought to this gate and thrown away like a stray dog. If he decided to steal... His mind, after making the same detour time and again, came finally to the conclusion that he would be a thief.²⁴

Both of them decide to commit their crimes with a thought that they cannot continue to live if they do not commit them.

As I mentioned before, Akutagawa reflects Taisho era’s social situation in which he lived by telling the story of the Heian period. The people at the bottom like the servant and old woman in “Rashōmon” could not survive because of the war. In the Taisho era, World War I made Japan pay great attention to the development of heavy industry, which led to a sharp increase in the gap between the rich and the poor, and the life of the lower class was also very difficult. Many workers' and peasants' movements took place during the Taisho era. The economist Takashi Fujii says:

²³ Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*. David Campbell Publishers, 2000 Part One Chapter IV

²⁴ Akutagawa, Ryunosuke. *Rashomon and other stories*. Tuttle Publishing, 2011.p8

The heavy and chemical industrialization that progressed during that period created a (relatively) affluent social class ...as well as a large number of "poor people" such as laborers, peasant farmers, and urban poor. The disparity between the rich and the poor itself exists in any period, but the disparity in the period in question was characteristic of the Taisho era, when the Japanese economy underwent heavy industrialization.²⁵

Rashomon corresponds precisely to the social background of the Taisho era.

3. Victim design

There are also many similarities between “Rashōmon” and *Crime and Punishment* in terms of victim design. The victims in both stories are old women and are considered evil by the protagonists. In “Rashōmon”, when the servant sees the old woman pulling the hair of the dead, he feels:

As the hair came out, fear faded from his heart, and his hatred toward the old woman mounted. It grew beyond hatred, becoming a consuming antipathy against all evil. His hatred toward evil flared up like the piece of pine wood which the old woman had stuck in the floor. He did not know why she pulled out the hair of the dead. Accordingly, he did not know whether her case was to be put down as good or bad. But in his eyes, pulling out the hair of the dead in the Rashomon on this stormy night was an unpardonable crime.²⁶

In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov also considers the pawnbroker, Alyona Ivanovna, as an embodiment of the evil:

²⁵ Fujii, Takashi. "A Survey of Recent Studies on the Economic Thought of the Taisho Period From Policy Ideas to Economic Theory." *Annals of the Society for the History of Economic Thought* 45.45 (2004): P55

Original text: 当該時期に進展した重化学工業化は、新聞の読者となるだけの学力と経済力を有する(相対的に)豊かな社会層を発生させるとともに、労働者や小作農、都市貧民といった大量の「貧しき人々」をもつくりだした。貧富の格差それ自体はいつの時代でも存在するが、当該時期の貧富の格差は、日本経済の重化学工業化という大正期の時代性を帯びていた。

²⁶ Akutagawa, Ryunosuke. *Rashomon and other stories*. Tuttle Publishing, 2011.p10

On the one hand you have a nasty, stupid, worthless, meaningless, sick old woman who's no use to anyone and is, indeed, actually harmful to people. What does the life of a weighed in the common balance? No more than the life of a louse, a cockroach, and it's not even worth that, because the old woman is harmful. She's wearing another person's life out.²⁷

Both old women are portrayed in the story as evil figures who fulfill their own lives by oppressing others. Moreover, both old women were victimized "upstairs". In *Crime and Punishment*:

The young man was most relieved not to run into any of them, and he immediately slipped unnoticed through the front entrance and up a staircase to the right... as he reached the fourth floor.²⁸

There is a similar depiction in "Rashōmon":

As quietly as a lizard, the servant crept up to the top of the steep stairs. Crouching on all fours, and stretching his neck as far as possible, he timidly peeped into the tower. The next moment his hand dropped and he stared. He caught sight of a ghoulish form bent over a corpse. It seemed to be an old woman, gaunt, gray-haired, and nunnish in appearance. With a pine torch in her right hand, she was peeping into the face of a corpse which had long black hair.²⁹

These locations of "upstairs" seem to imply that the old woman in "Rashōmon" and Alyona Ivanovna in *Crime and Punishment* live on their dirty and unjustifiable businesses. The old woman in "Rashōmon" makes her living by collecting the hair of the dead, and Alyona makes money by squeezing the poor through pawnshops. The

²⁷ Dostoyevsky, Fyodor *Crime and Punishment*. David Campbell Publishers, 2000 Part One Chapter VI

²⁸ Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*. David Campbell Publishers, 2000 Part One Chapter I

²⁹ Akutagawa, Ryunosuke. *Rashomon and other stories*. Tuttle Publishing, 2011. p9

"upstairs" is not only their physical place of residence, but also a symbol of their social position to live off the backs of others.

4. Multiple perspectives

Akutagawa and Dostoyevsky also share literary experiments because *Crime and Punishment*, "Rashōmon," and "In A Grove" all make use of multiple perspectives to tell their stories. In *Crime and Punishment*, the perspectives of various characters are used to build a complex and nuanced understanding of the events that unfold. The reader is able to see the story from the point of view of Raskolnikov as well as other characters such as Svidrigailov, Porfiry Petrovich, and Sonya. Similarly, in "In A Grove," the multiple perspectives play the central role of the story. A simple murder case is told from the perspectives of different characters, including a wood cutter, a monk, a police, an old woman, a bandit and two victims. This results in a multifaceted portrayal of the truth, with each perspective offering a different interpretation of the events. In "Rashōmon" the use of servant, old woman and a young woman's perspectives recount their experiences of a crime, with each perspective providing different details and insights into the events. One can say that the multiple perspectives in *Crime and Punishment* are not as important as those in "In A Grove" and "Rashōmon." However, through the multiple perspectives in *Crime and Punishment*, the reader can clearly feel the change in Raskolnikov's attitude. The multiple perspectives serve to show Raskolnikov's gradual acceptance of his crime. Overall, the use of multiple perspectives in these works highlights the subjectivity of

truth and the complexity of human experience, inviting readers to consider the ways in which different perspectives shape our understanding of the world around us.

5. Themes of guilt and redemption:

Each work grapples with the themes of guilt and redemption, as the characters struggle to come to terms with their actions and find some way to make amends for their sins. Raskolnikov has said many things to prove his theory:

I was in a state of extraordinary excitement. I don't know how to explain it. I didn't feel hot, but I didn't feel cold either. I was numb, as though I were suddenly in a state of suspended animation, free from all sensation, as though I had ceased to exist. I thought of nothing. My head was empty, but at the same time I felt that I could do anything I liked.³⁰

Power is only given to those who dare to lower themselves and pick it up. Only one thing matters, one thing; to be able to dare!³¹

This passage emphasizes Raskolnikov's illusory belief that he is capable of transcending ordinary human emotions and sensations, and that he possesses a unique willpower and sense of purpose that allow him to commit the crime without remorse. However, his "Superman Theory" is not his redemption. He still feels suffering from the murder, and he begins to find a new way to his own redemption, as the narrator explains "He was still afraid, but his soul was lit by a new hope, something quite new he had never experienced before - a desire to live."³² This emphasizes the psychological impact of Raskolnikov's actions and suggests that he is experiencing a profound sense of guilt and despair. However, the narrator here also suggests that

³⁰ Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*. David Campbell Publishers, 2000 Part One Chapter VI

³¹ Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*. David Campbell Publishers, 2000 Part three, Chapter VI

³² Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*. David Campbell Publishers, 2000 Part Five Chapter V

Raskolnikov is beginning to recognize the value of human life and the importance of living a moral existence. This reflects Raskolnikov's internal struggle between his belief in the "Superman Theory" and his growing sense of empathy and compassion for others. Finally, under Sonia's guidance, Raskolnikov accepted the fact that he had committed the murder and chose to face it head-on and atone for it: "And do you know what, Sonia," he said suddenly, with conviction, "this one instant, I'll accept, and forgive and love you for it, because one instant is enough, one instant is eternity."³³ They have this conversation when Raskolnikov is in Sonia's room and she is reading to him from the Bible. This conversation emphasizes Raskolnikov's change of heart and his acceptance of Sonia's love and forgiveness. The quote reflects the idea that redemption is possible even for someone who has committed a terrible crime, and that one moment of acceptance and forgiveness can transform a person's life. Their conversation also highlights Raskolnikov's growing sense of empathy and compassion for others, which marks a significant departure from his earlier belief in the "Superman Theory." *Crime and Punishment* shows the reader Raskolnikov's journey from denying his crime to gradually accepting the truth and eventually finding redemption.

Akutagawa's "In A Grove" also shows how people search their own redemption. Since "In A Grove" is a multi-perspective narrative, the murderer Tajomaru, the victim Masago and the dead Takehiko are all portrayed in different ways. The way they find their own redemption also differs. According to Tajomaru's

³³ Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*. David Campbell Publishers, 2000 Part Six Chapter VI

testimony, he does not feel guilty for his murders and rapes, rather these crimes are a symbol of his power. He conquered both a woman and a samurai of a higher social class than himself, and he felt it was a matter of pride, so instead of denying his crime, he stated his crime directly to the police, and finally said that he would please execute himself:

So, robbing him of his sword, and bow and arrows, I ran out to the mountain road. There I found her horse still grazing quietly. It would be a mere waste of words to tell you the later details, but I entered town I had already parted with the sword . That's all my confession. I know that my head will be hung in chains anyway, so put me down for the maximum penalty.(A defiant attitude.)³⁴

His testimony proves that Tajomaru believes his redemption is the maximum penalty, because that will show his power. For Masago, the victim, she testified that she was raped and then abandoned by her husband. She had no choice but to kill her husband. She eventually ran to the temple to confess her crime and hope for redemption:

I stabbed my own throat with the small sword, I threw myself into a pond at the foot of the mountain, and I tried to kill myself in many ways. Unable to end my life, I am still living in dishonor. (A lonely smile.)Worthless as I am, I must have been forsaken even by the most merciful Kwannon. I killed my own husband. I was violated by the robber. Whatever can I do? Whatever can I...I...(Gradually, violent sobbing.)³⁵

Her confession shows that the most important thing for Masago is her innocence and chastity. She can choose to die with her husband but then she has to bear the title of killing her husband and being raped by another man. This is unacceptable for a

³⁴ Akutagawa Ryunosuke . “ In A Grove.” *The Oxford Book of Japanese Short Stories*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010 P99

³⁵ Akutagawa Ryunosuke . “ In A Grove.” *The Oxford Book of Japanese Short Stories*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010 P101

woman, so she chooses to come to the temple, eager to restore her honor through religion. That's how Masago finds her redemption. For the deceased Takehiko, he belonged to the upper class of society at that time as a samurai class. He could not accept that he was robbed by a man of a much lower social class and betrayed by his own wife. In his testimony, he stated that he had committed suicide:

I raised my exhausted body from the foot of the cedar. In front of me there was shining the small sword which my wife had dropped. I took it up and stabbed it into my breast. A bloody lump rose to my mouth, but I didn't feel any pain. When my breast grew cold, everything was as silent as dead in the graves. What profound silence!³⁶

Takehiko believed that suicide was the only means to maintain his honor as a samurai. The fact that his testimony is transmitted through a medium (*miko* in Japanese) suggests that he did not want anyone to misunderstand his death and that he wanted to explain the cause of his death himself. In this multi-perspective short story, Akutagawa presents the crimes of three different characters and their search for redemption. Despite their conflicting testimonies, they all make choices that best fit their social status.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the similarities between Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's "Rashōmon" and "In A Grove" demonstrate the timeless relevance and universal appeal of literature that explores the complexities of human nature. The use of multiple perspectives is another similarity between the two works,

³⁶ Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. "In A Grove." *The Oxford Book of Japanese Short Stories*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010 P102

with both authors employing this technique to challenge the reader's understanding of the truth and the reliability of different narratives. In *Crime and Punishment*, the narrative shifts between Raskolnikov's perspective and those of other characters, while in “Rashōmon” and “In A Grove”, multiple characters provide their own versions of the same event. The female characters in their works also play crucial roles in shaping the story and the characters' experiences. Sonia in *Crime and Punishment* and Masago in “In A Grove” are central figures whose presences add depth and complexity to the male protagonists' struggles. It is clear that both works share a deep concern for the human condition. These similarities point to the enduring significance of these works and suggest that they offer insights into fundamental questions that transcend cultural and temporal boundaries. Indeed, it is through such literary works that we can gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. As such, this thesis offers a starting point for further research and invites readers to continue exploring the rich and complex worlds of *Crime and Punishment*, “Rashōmon”, and “In A Grove.”

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