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RYUNOSUKE AKUTAGAWA'S *IN A GROVE* AS A POSTMODERN TEXT

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ABSTRACT

Ryunosuke Akutagawa was a Japanese writer, born on March 1st 1892 in Tokyo. His actual name is Nihara Akutagawa and he committed suicide at the age of thirty five. He was a prolific writer and famous for his stylistic techniques. He is regarded as the 'father of the Japanese short story' and Japan's coveted literary award Akutagawa prize is named after him. Akutagawa has experimented in his stylistics with a unique writing style of his own which is marked by originality and beauty. His famous stories like *Roshomon* and *In a Grove*, inspired famous Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa to make movies on them. Akutagawa drew a lot from his own life revealing its intense sadness and terror of madness. He continues to be read and admired as one of Japanese foremost writers and his stylistics are considered his forte for being unrivaled in depiction of human psyche. His works correspond with the present times where people are not sure about future and he himself believed in vagueness of future. Akutagawa wrote on themes of truth, love, death etc. His works involve unreliability, uncertainty and illogical representation.

Keywords: narrator, truth, technique, multiple

INTRODUCTION

In a Grove is considered one of the best short stories in terms of world literature and has been translated into number of languages. In Japanese literary tradition he is considered greatest writer of Taisho period. Taisho period was period of great progress and democracy in Japan. Akutagawa's works have a contemporariness to them with a universal appeal. *In a Grove* is written in 1922 during modernist period and in it we find use of deliberate ambiguity in it, with a distortion of truth. The story is in form of collection of testimonies by different characters in the story. The story is divided into seven sections, each section is a varying testimony or the account of the murder of the samurai in a grove. In this story we have different view-points through which the story gets narrated. Akutagawa subverts the traditional or the conventional narrative techniques. In the story there are seven sections regarding the account of murder of samurai which are in form of testimonies: Testimony of woodcutter, testimony of high priest, testimony of policeman, testimony of an old man all questioned by high police commissioner, followed by confessions of woman who succumbed near temple, of murdered man and of bandit, Tajomaro.

DISCUSSION

The important thing in the story is the mode of narration. There are multiple narrators which are a part of investigation process. All these narrations are reported in the first person narrative. These all are unreliable narrators as we don't have an omniscient narrator who knows everything. The term 'unreliable narrator' was coined by theorist Wayne C. Booth, it means "a narrator who cannot be relied on either to tell the truth or in the case of self-reflexive narrators to know the truth." (pp 156-158). In story, *In a Grove*, there are number of inherent contradictions and the story leaves the murder of the samurai open ended. Each person refutes what the other has narrated. This entire episode doesn't allow us to conclude on any point. Also there is no interaction between the characters, the only interaction is with the police high commissioner. These narratives are termed as solo narrations where they are not testifying anything. The characters are mostly one-dimensional and flat. Akutagawa's focus is not more on characterization but on stylistics and techniques.

While analyzing the narrative technique in this story, we find that there are many unanswered questions and many distorted viewpoints in narrations of the characters. These narrations reveal that either the narrators lie because of their self-interests and blown egos. All these narrators claim to have killed the samurai even the samurai himself. Therefore we see there are inconsistencies in the narrations of these narrators. Some important details are missing and the details provided by the narrators make the readers to suspect these narrations. These narrations appear unbelievable narrations. Therefore we don't have enough details to resolve the murder mystery of samurai. There is no answer to the question as to who killed the husband? All the versions are equally believable and equally unbelievable and under suspect. The readers are not able to recreate the story fully. Each version seems accurate, believable and contradictory.

Akutagawa's stories are famous for 'roshomon effect'. Roshomon is a Japanese word meaning dispute. It originates from legend of Roshomon, told by Akutagawa in his story Roshomon and then later adapted into film version by Akira Kurosawa. Roshomon effect is a term used in psychology to describe phenomenon of different people having different perceptions or memories of a same event. Akutagawa portrays in his stories that truth is not absolute. There is an inherent contradiction in truth which is proven by the nature of the testimony of the eyewitnesses where we have conflicting accounts of the same event by different narrators.

CONCLUSION

In Akutagawa's stories there is no way of knowing the absolute truth or perhaps there is no truth at all. In a Grove celebrates post-modernist essence where there can be multiple interpretations of a single event. The story can be read in a reverse order also. The story gives an active role to reader, and also focuses on the process of reading and not arriving on a destination.

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