

Research Article

Akutagawa Ryunosuke's Repertoire in the Short Story “Rashomon”

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Abstract

An author's creative process cannot be separated from the storehouse of knowledge obtained from different results of reading, hearing, or observing of the events around him. This store of knowledge, when juxtaposed with the concept introduced by Wolfgang Iser in his book *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1987), can be called a *Repertoire*. Shortly, repertoire can be understood as the basis for creating a work, as the background to make the foreground the author aims at through his work. This process also applies to Akutagawa Ryunosuke's short story entitled “Rashomon” as the foreground of *Konjaku Monogatari*, the 29th volume of the 18th story. This research aims to describe how the social, historical, and cultural writings by Akutagawa Ryunosuke in the “Rashomon” and compared with *Konjaku Monogatari*, using the Aesthetic Repertoire theory proposed by Wolfgang Iser. The process through which, among others, grouping the data to be analyzed is related to social, historical, and cultural norms of Japanese society. Next, compare the data to see the relationship between “Rashomon” and *Konjaku Monogatari*. The results showed (1) There are similarities between social, historical, and cultural similarities between literature and reality, (2) Social norms indicate the life of the Japanese lower class in the Heian period called *Genin*, (3) Historical norms show the dark conditions that Japanese people went through in the Heian era, because of the many problems that occurred at that time, and (4) Cultural Norms show the efforts made by Japanese people in the Heian period to survive despite hurting others.

Keywords: “Rashomon”; *Konjaku Monogatari*; Repertoire

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1. Introduction

Various ways can inspire an author to write a literary work in novels, short stories, or other formats. There are times when the inspiration is obtained through personal experience that the author directly feels, or the inspiration to write arises after reading literary works from other authors and feeling that they can develop or perfect the ideas that the previous author wants to convey. This is where the significant role of an active reader can be seen when they can provide comments or some response to the literary works of other authors he reads.

The response given could be that the first is only a form of criticism or the second is publishing an article that develops the idea of the previous author's writing. There are many examples of developing the concept of the last author by issuing a counterwork in the world of literature. Like PD James with his work *Death Comes to Pemberly*, a form of developing ideas from writer Jane Austen with his work *Pride and Prejudice*. There is Buya Hamka with his work *The Sinking of the Van Der Wijck Ship* as a form of response from readers to the novel *Magdalena* written by Egyptian writer

Mustafa Luthfi Al-Manfaluthi, which is also an adaptation of the novel *Sous Les Tilleuls* by the French author, Alphonse Karr (Syafrina, 2014: 1). The same thing also happened in the writing of literary works in Japan. One of the authors who contributed to the reader's response by creating a literary work to develop the ideas of the previous author was Akutagawa Ryunosuke, a Japanese writer in the Taisho era (1912-1926). Akutagawa's creative process in writing literary works is inspired by previous literature he has read. The literature he wrote was a short story entitled "Rashomon".

"Rashomon" is one of Akutagawa's works after he read the collection of stories in *Konjaku Monogatari*, the 29th volume of the 18th story, entitled *Rajomon nite Uwakoshi ni Nobori Shijin Wo Miru Nusubito no Monogatari* (The Story of a Thief Who Saw a Corpse Above Rajomon). At the end of Rashomon's short story collection, Nakamura Shinichiro, the editor who compiled Akutagawa's story, wrote about the origin of "Rashomon"'s story.

[Rashoumon] wa
[konjyakumonogatari] maki ni jyu
kyuu (Rajomon nite Uwakoshi ni
nobori shijin wo miru nusubito no
Monogatari dai jyu hachi) kara
shuppatsu shite irushi,...

(Nakamura, 1982:172)

"Rashomon" is a story based on the story of a Thief Who Saw a Corpse above Rajomon in the 29th volume of the 18th story in *Konjaku Monogatari*

Meanwhile, *Konjaku Monogatari* is one of the most important collections of ancient storybooks in Japanese history collected from the Heian Period, more precisely around the early 12th century to the middle. Altogether there are 31 volumes (currently, there are 28 volumes) consisting of more than 1000 different types of stories,

but it is not known who the author is. (Atsuyoshi: 1984). Theoretically, the manuscript editors are Minamoto Takashikoku and Satoru Yuu (Toba Shoujo), but many also speculate that this is not true because there is no historical empirical record of the actual editor of the manuscript (Wibawarta, 2004: 183).

What is realized from Rashomon's short story is a form of knowledge store owned by Akutagawa. This store of knowledge, when juxtaposed with Iser's concept, can be called a repertoire. In short, repertoire can be understood as something that the author uses as the basis for the creation of a work, as the background to create the foreground that the author aims at through his work. In the book, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1987), Iser reveals that repertoire can be identified through references to previous literary works or to the norms that form the basis of creation, namely social norms, historical norms, and cultural norms that appear in a text.

Based on the aesthetic theory of reception proposed by Iser, the most important thing is to explore the effects of the text to seek an understanding of the meaning of the text obtained through communication between the text and the reader. It can be understood that fiction is not reality, but in fiction, there is a reality. Fiction is only a means to convey truth. The two are neither contradictory nor in opposition but form the building blocks of communication. The main focus is the recipient of the message, namely the reader who wants to establish communication (Iser, 1987: 53). Based on the explanation above, the conventions and allusions (figurations) that appear in the "Rashomon" short story are exciting things to study.

This research discusses the embodiment of the repertoire in Rashomon's short story used as the background for creation so that the foreground that Akutagawa is aiming for can be expressed "How is the embodiment

of social, historical, and cultural norms in Akutagawa Ryunosuke's short story "Rashomon" as a repertoire of *Konjaku Monogatari*?"

2. Methods

This research is conducted by applying qualitative research methods, research analysis is described or described through written words (Teeuw, 1984). As the object of research, Akutagawa Ryunosuke's short story "Rashomon" is examined using the repertoire theory of Wolfgang Iser. Explanations and analysis in this study are explained in verbal words, through detailed descriptions and explanations. Since "Rashomon" is the object of research material written in Japanese, the researcher will do the translation into Indonesia/English himself. It's the same with *Konjaku Monogatari*, the 29th volume of the 18th story entitled *Rajomon nite Uwakoshi ni Nobori Shijin wo Miru Nusubito no Monogatari* (The Story of a Thief Who Sees a Corpse Above Rajomon).

In this research, the data used as a source of knowledge to perform the analysis is divided into primary and secondary data. The primary data in this study is "Rashomon", written by Akutagawa Ryunosuke, which is collected in a collection of short stories with the title "Rashomon", "Hana", "Imogayu", and "Chuutou". This work was first published on November 25, 1960, but the publication used in this study is the 22nd printed edition, published on August 10, 2008. This work consists of 173 pages, 15 cm long, in the form of an ancient Japanese book printed on yellow paper, published by Iwanami Shoten Tokyo. The secondary data that serves to support the analysis essentially comes from written data relating to social, historical, and cultural norms and references to previous works, which are part of the knowledge repository.

In this research, the theory used to analyze literary works is the Repertoire theory of Wolfgang Iser. This theory looks

at the interaction relationship between the reader and the literary text that will be investigated. This is based on Iser's view as in his quote which states, "literary text can only produce a response when it is read" (1987: ix), which implies that literary works will only be meaningful when the literary work is read so that the reading process becomes an essential factor in the research. Therefore, the relationship between literary works and readers cannot be separated. According to Iser, literary works and readers have a dynamic communication or interaction relationship. With the process of reading the literary work, the reader can realize the meaning contained in the literary work.

The first step in this research is to read literary works, in this case, "Rashomon" and *Konjaku Monogatari*, volume 29 of the 18th story entitled *Rajomon nite Uwakoshi ni Nobori Shijin Wo Miru Nusubito no Monogatari* (The Story of a Thief Who Sees a Corpse on Rajomon). Through the reading process, the researcher will interact and communicate with the literary work. The reading of *Konjaku Monogatari*, the 29th volume of the 18th story entitled *Rajomon nite Uwakoshi ni Nobori Shijin Wo Miru Nusubito no Monogatari* (The Story of a Thief Who Sees a Corpse Above Rajomon), was conducted to see how it relates to Rashomon's work. According to Iser, the repertoire does not only revolve around social, historical, and cultural norms but also his previous works. So that in the reading process, the reader will recall (recall) previous literary works that were part of his repertoire. In the process of reading a literary work, a strategy will be found that will set the background and foreground of the reader so that the realization of the text is formed.

The second step is categorization. This process is needed to classify the data to be analyzed, while the data to be grouped related to the norms of Japanese society in the Heian era about social, historical, and

cultural. The third step is comparison. The comparison intended here is helpful to see the relationship between "Rashomon" and *Konjaku Monogatari*, volume 29 of the 18th story entitled *Rajomon nite Uwakoshi ni Nobori Shijin Wo Miru Nusubito no Monogatari* (The Story of a Thief Who Saw a Corpse Above Rajomon).

The comparisons made in this study revolve around how "Rashomon" modifies, transforms, and responds to norms that are also present in *Konjaku Monogatari*, volume 29 of the 18th story entitled *Rajomon nite Uwakoshi ni Nobori Shijin Wo Miru Nusubito no Monogatari* (The Story of a Thief who Seeing the Corpse Above Rajomon). In the reading process, by considering the relationship between the two literary works, the reader continuously modifies or is also called Iser with the term play. Therefore, this comparison is used by readers as a bridge to understand literary works. In the fourth step, the researcher concludes the research's results based on what has been described in the analysis. The results of this study are presented in the form of a translation of words in order to describe the research in detail (Munawwar: 2007)

3. Result and Discussion

Several studies have been conducted to analyze "Rashomon"'s short story and the use of repertoire theory by Wolfgang Iser.

Ningrum Anik Setiyo researched "Social Background Affecting *Genin* Characters in Akutagawa Ryunosuke's "Rashomon" Short Story"(2014). This study explains how the social background during the Heian period in Akutagawa Ryunosuke's short story "Rashomon", with the results of the research showing the condition of Kyoto city, which is experiencing an economic downturn due to a series of natural disasters and due to the relocation of the capital city from Nara to Heian (Kyoto) causing economic conditions unstable. In addition, the city of Kyoto's condition deteriorated with the

existence of a land ownership structure in the Heian period centered on private agricultural land (*Shoen*). The nobility has owned the farmland since the opening of new lands in the Heian period.

Celvin Antony also researched Rashomon's short story entitled "Psychological analysis of the main character in Akutagawa Ryunosuke's short story "Rashomon"" (2017) using Sigmund Freud's theory of the structure of the human personality which consists of the Id, Ego, and Super Ego. From this research, it can be concluded that the *Genin* Ego significantly influences his actions because he has to survive in the city of Kyoto, which was hit by a prolonged disaster.

Departing from several literature reviews above, the author sees all the conditions that experienced by the main character, *Genin* already disclosed. However, in the interest of this analysis will reveal the repertoire in the form of social, historical, and cultural conditions in the intra textual area and connect it with the region extra textual with the hope of the text can give effect to the reader who then brings up aesthetic response. This process will emphasize the obtaining securities evoked by the text to the reader and will be different from previous studies. Therefore, by referring to the perspective of the repertoire theory that exists in the book *The Act of Reading; An Aesthetic Response of Wolfgang Iser* (1978).

3.1 Social Norm in "Rashomon"

Genin is one of the levels of social status that existed in Japan during the Heian period, which became the main character in the story of Akutagawa in the short story "Rashomon", as the following quote.

Hitori no Genin ga, "Rashomon" no shita de ameyami wo matte ita. Hiroi mon no shita ni wa, kono otoko no hokani daremo inai.

(Akutagawa, 2008: 8)

There was a *Genin* waiting for the rain to stop under “Rashomon”. Apart from this man, no one else was in sight under this colossal gate.

After the middle of the Heian period, *Genin* became a term for subordinates employed within the residences of their superiors, such as nobles, temples, shrines, and cultivators. It was frequently ranked alongside *shoju* (retainers) and was often referred to as “*Genin* and *shoju*.” Generally, *Genin* were more subservient to their master's household than *shoju*, whose appellation was more prevalent among samurai families. *Genin* was also known as *dohi zonin* (servants) and were subject to trade, inheritance, and transfer. The descendants of a *Genin* served the same master's residence in succession. Their responsibilities included cultivation, routine tasks, and *umahiki* (a job title in which servants used horses to transport people or trade products), and they were also utilized in battle. Samurai families also employed servants; the highest stratum was *roju* (vassal) or *roto* (retainer), while the lower stratum was *Genin*. Even if the latter killed an enemy on the battlefield, they received no credit because they lacked samurai status. (Japanese wiki, n.d)

Since the time of the Northern and Southern Courts (in Japan), their social statuses began to change, with some *Genin* becoming independent due to the lands they were granted. The traditional form of service for *Genin* was *fudai* (a *daimyo* in hereditary vassalage to the Tokugawa family), but services were now based on apprenticeship contracts. In this manner, they became less subservient to their superiors' homes than they had been previously. *Genin* who do not have a job are also described in the short story as quoted below.

*Fudan nara, mochiron, shujin no ie
he kaeru baeki hazu de aru.
Tokoroga sono shujin kara wa, shi
go nichu mae ni hima wo dasareta.*
(Akutagawa, 2008: 9)

Usually, he had to return to his employer's place. However, his employer dismissed him four or five days ago.

As evidenced by Sword hunt's rejection of the *Nanushi* (village headman) hierarchy in the early modern period, stratified control over agricultural land was abolished (to confiscate the weapons of the enemies of the new regime in order to secure the position of a new ruler). Instead, a policy was adopted to facilitate small-scale, independent management of agricultural land. *Fudai Genin*, the *Genin* from hereditary succession, progressively disappeared as a result. Instead, the *Genin*'s responsibilities shifted to those based on apprenticeship, and the new names '*genan*' (manservant) and '*gejo*' (maidservant) began to gain hold. During the Edo period, they continued to serve in the households of *nanushi*, *shoya*, merchants, and samurai families. The majority did so under the guise of a rotating basis, but many of them were actually inherited. (Japanesewiki, n.d)

3.2 Historical Norm in “Rashomon”

The events of the short narrative occur during the Heian Period (the government moved to the capital city of Heiankyo or Kyoto). It should come as no surprise that the Heian period got its name from the fact that the capital was situated in the Heian region at the time. However, it is important to note that this circumstance did not fundamentally alter for the remainder of premodern Japanese history, even if the political epicenter moved around. Yoritomo established Kamakura as the political center of the newly risen warrior class, and this marked the beginning of the succeeding period, which is distinguished by the newly rising warrior class's assumption of increased political power. As a result, the Heian period is primarily a political divide that reflects an age in which power was exercised from the city of Heian, which

served as the capital. It is considered as an age that was governed by a tiny cluster of aristocrats who reigned under the umbrella of the emperor by mastery of the civil rather than the military arts. This is in contrast to the later eras of warrior power, which are seen as being dominated by warriors. Therefore, the title "Heian," whose characters imply "peace" and "tranquility," emphasizes not just political but also cultural issues, specifically literature, art, Chinese learning, and Buddhist ideas. (Cameron, 2007: 30)

During his reign, the emperor and his consort resided in the fortified Heian or Dairi Palace. The dairi is the palace where the emperor lives, performs ceremonies, and performs other duties. The Heian Palace was built during the Enryaku era (782-806). The courtyard was surrounded by government offices such as Chodo-in, Buraku-in, and two ministries and eight ministries (Citykyoto, n.d). All activities are centered in Dairi, so the exterior of the palace receives little attention. As activity shifted to Dairi, the exterior of the palace complex became increasingly hazardous, particularly at night. Among the reasons for this is the prevalence of superstition in our culture. Empty structures are avoided out of fear of ghosts and spirits. People are avoiding the capital out of fear for the condition of the numerous corpses dispersed throughout Kyoto, as in the following quote:

Karasu wa mochiron, mon no ue ni aru shinin no niku wo tsuibami ni kuru de aru

(Akutagawa, 2008: 9)

There was a crow that, of course, came to skin the flesh of the corpses in the gate tower.

Efforts to secure the palace in the 11th century also began to decrease because only one palace gate was guarded, namely the east gate. This situation has resulted in

cases of theft and crime becoming an inevitable problem.

Kori ga sumu. Nusubito ga sumu.
(Akutagawa, 2008: 8)

Weasel and wolf dwelling. The place where thieves live.

In addition, cases of fire continue to haunt the palace complex, which is built entirely of wood. In 960 AD, Dairi caught fire and was rebuilt. Then another catastrophic fire occurred in 1177, and the emperor was forced to live in a smaller palace. In 1227, a great fire finally destroyed the remaining palace buildings, and the palace could no longer be used (Hiraoka: 1989). The tragedies and disasters mentioned above can be seen in Akutagawa's description in his short story, as follows.

Naze ka to iu to, kono ni san nen, kyouto ni wa, jishin toka tsujikaze toka kaji toka kikin toka iu wazawa ga tsuzuite okotta.

(Akutagawa, 2008: 8)

Why can't we find a decent life here at all? Because the past 2.3 years in Kyoto have had frequent earthquakes, whirlwinds, fires, and prolonged famine.

Based on the data above, it can be concluded that the history of the community described in Rashomon's short story is that of the lower class of society, who still believe in mystical things. The number of corpses in Kyoto makes people move further away from the capital. In addition, the emptiness that occurs in the capital city increases the number of crimes. This situation happened because a disaster hit the country, but the government did not pay attention to its people, so there was no other way for the community to survive other than stealing and robbery.

3.3 Cultural Norm in “Rashomon”

The population in the early days of Heian was governed by two Capital Offices (Kyoshiki), the Left and Right, which were responsible respectively for the city's left and Right halves (the eastern and western halves). Classified with the provincial administrations as regional organs, each office communicated directly with the Council of State and the central ministries under a chief official of the Fourth Rank, who directed an administrative staff of 7 and an armed force of 240 men. Like their provincial counterparts, the offices were responsible for the entire range of government in their jurisdictions, including the compilation and maintenance of household registers; the collection of taxes; police and judicial matters; the repair and maintenance of canals, ditches, bridges, and quarter walls; the cleaning of streets; the dispatch of the abandoned sick and orphaned to governmental institutions (it seems to have been the practice to eject ailing menials from the houses where they were employed, perhaps to avoid the ritual pollution of death); the removal and disposal of corpses (an onerous duty in times of epidemic disease, when as many as 5,000 bodies might be collected from the streets and riverbeds of Heian); and the distribution of aid to the indigent. (McChullough, 2008:170-171). Akutagawa writes the number of corpses scattered in the city of Kyoto in short stories like the following.

Genin no me wa sono toki, hajimete sono shigai no naka ni uzukumatte iru ningen wo mita. Hiwada iro no kimono wo kita, se no hikui, yaseta, shiraga atama no, saru no you na rouba de aru.

(Akutagawa, 2008: 13)

At that time, for the first time, *Genin* saw another human sitting among the scattered corpses. A grandmother who wears a dark blue

kimono, her body is short and thin, her hair has all turned gray, and she has a face like a monkey.

The emergence of the latter as the chief administrative organ for the capital probably also reflected the increasing insecurity of the city from the tenth century on, when arson, robbery, and murder were epidemic and the exercise of police power became perhaps the first concern in city government. But even that office was unable to control the growing criminality of Heian, especially since its own agents were sometimes themselves involved in the crime they were supposed to suppress (McChullough, 2008: 171). Being a thief or being killed was the only option for the people at that time because there was no longer any assistance from the government. Even being a creature that is cruel to corpses must be done to survive, as did the grandmother the *Genin* found.

Kono kami wo nuite, kono kami wo nuite na, kazura ni shiyō to omou ta no jya.

Naruhodo, shinin no kami no ke wo nuku to iu koto wa, warui koto kamo shirune. Shikashi, kou iu shinin no ooku wa, minna, sono kurai no koto wo, saretemo ii ningen bakari de aru.... dakara, mata ima, jibun no shite ita koto wa mo warui koto to wa omowanai. Kore mo yahari shinakereba, shigai wo suru node, shikatanaku suru koto dakara de aru. Shoushite, shikatanai koto wo, yoku shite ita kono onna wo, jibun no suru koto wo yurushite kureruno ni chigainai to omou kara de aru.

(Akutagawa, 2008: 16-17)

I will pull this hair out, and I will make a wig.

Of course for you the act of pulling out the corpse's hair is a heinous act,

but all the corpses here deserve this treatment. Therefore, what I'm doing right now can't be blamed. I was forced to do this. If I don't, I will starve to death. Then this woman (corpse) will understand what I'm doing.

Even though *Genin* doesn't like what the grandmother did to the corpse, he can't hide that at this time, both of them (*Genin* and grandmother) have to survive by doing whatever it takes. The choice for *Genin* is either to die in vain like scattered corpses or to survive by becoming a thief. While waiting for the rain to stop under "Rashomon", *Genin* are already contemplating whether to become corpses or thieves. But because he saw what the grandmother had done to the corpse and listened to the grandmother's reason for survival, the *Genin*'s desire to survive was also getting stronger until he finally decided to steal the kimono clothes used by the grandmother.

*Genin wa hajime rouba no okonai
wo yurusenakattanoni, saigo ni
jibun mo rouba no kimono wo
nugitori, nigete itta.*

(Akutagawa 2008: 20)

Although the *Genin* did not initially forgive the grandmother's actions, in the end, the *Genin* took the grandmother's kimono and ran away.

4. Conclusion

As stated by Wolfgang Iser, the store of knowledge of literary writers can come in various ways. It is the same with the store of knowledge that Akutagawa had when he wrote *Rashomon*'s short story. The storehouse of knowledge, among others, is *Konjaku Monogatari* which became the initial basis for Akutagawa to produce "Rashomon". Then the next step is to categorize the data and compare it with the

existing reality. Based on the research that has been done, it can be concluded that (1) there is a similarity in the storyline between "Rashomon" and *Konjaku Monogatari*, which is the background of the writing. The characters and situations are the same. The difference is that the *Konjaku Monogatari* only consists of one page and 17 lines. Meanwhile, "Rashomon", written by Akutagawa, was developed into a short story. (2) *Genin* figures become the social norm depicted in both stories, even in reality, *Genin* is the lowest social class in the Heian era. (3) The bad events that hit the capital city of Kyoto are a historical norm described in "Rashomon" and *Konjaku Monogatari*. This situation, of course, cannot be separated from the reality that hit the city of Kyoto during the Heian era. And (4) Trying to survive is one of the most challenging endeavors for the Heian people due to the unfavorable conditions in the country. The culture of stealing or killing is part of people's daily life so as not to become one of the corpses lying on the streets. The community's struggle is illustrated through the *Genin* and grandmother characters in "Rashomon" and *Konjaku Monogatari*.

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