

Adaptation Study and Postmodern Analysis of *Rashomon*

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Abstract

The research article discusses on the postmodern concept of Unreliable narrator by analyzing two of the significant short stories by the renowned Japanese writer Ryunosuke Akutagawa. The unreliable narrator is the one whose narration is seriously compromised owing to certain interests. Such a narrative is characterized by ambiguity, misjudgment manipulations and lies. This is a typical postmodern tool that establishes the deconstructionist view that there is no absolute truth or center. Here, the reliability in narration is highly problematic as there are multiple versions of truth existed in the discourse. Further, the paper attempts a comparative study between the short stories and the film *Rashomon* as an adaptation. The film contributed a new technique to the literary world, called Rashomon effect which is the contradictory interpretations of the same event by different people. This technique encapsulates so beautifully the key problems of the postmodern condition, i.e. the multiplicity and unreliability of different narratives.

Keywords: Unreliable Narrator, Rashomon Effect, Postmodernism, Adaptation, Multiplicity, Ambiguity

Introduction

Film is the most popular art form in this modern era. Since its inception in 1895 when Lumiere Brothers started the first ever screening in the Paris Grand theater, this popular art form is fascinating the masses all around the globe. Right from the beginning, film has been indebted to literature and many other genres of art.

The very relation between a film and a literary work is well evident and stated in the process of adaptation. The history and evolution of film had its inseparable roots in literature. It was this close relation that enabled the growth of the medium in its earlier stages. However, films are not simply an audio-visual medium, as McFarlane observes, “the novel draws on a wholly verbal sign system, the film variously, and sometimes simultaneously, on visual, aural and verbal signifiers.”(21).

There are many theories and criticism regarding the adaptation of literary works. Adaptation has always held an ambiguous position, caught between an original work of art and its subjective reshaping in another, sometimes different, form. Film and literature are two entirely different media. Each of them had their own existence and meaning construction. In other words, literature and film are two different art forms having their own features and specialties. We construct meaning from a literary work by taking in words sequentially as they printed on the paper. On the other hand, in order to understand a scene in a film, a physical setting, we have to follow linear arrangement of arbitrary symbols.

From the very beginning of film history, the new medium tried to get away from the label of light and entertainment by making alliances with the more respectable medium of the written words. One major reason why films are based on books is simply that the best story often is to be found between the covers of the novel. There is the prestige involved in the film’s close relationship to literature, especially literature by popular authors.

Film-makers’ reasons for this continuing phenomenon appear to move between the poles of crass commercialism and high-minded respect for literary works. No doubt there is the lure of a pre-sold title, the expectation that respectability or popularity achieved in one medium might infect the work created in

another. The notion of a potentially lucrative 'property' has clearly been at least one major influence in the filming of novels, and perhaps film-makers. (McFarlane,5)

Rashomon and *In a bamboo grove* are short stories written by Japanese writer Ryunosuke Akutagawa. He was a writer who has never been considered in the main stream of Japanese literature. He was a brilliant and erratic stylist who died, committed suicide at the age of thirty five in 1927.

The first short story, *Rashomon* describes the devastation of Kyoto during the period of civil wars and the atmosphere of complete desolation. The story begins in the rain. A servant and an old woman are the only characters in the story. The story begins with the servant who shelters himself under the gate for the weather to clear. There he finds an old woman who is stealing hair from the corpses left there. When he appeared and questioned her on her task, she pleads that she only steals to make a living by making wigs from the stolen hair. The servant, who has decided to become a thief, knocks down and takes her clothes saying that he had to do it for his own survival.

The other story, *In a bamboo grove* is consisted of seven parts. They are various testimonies before the Magistrate; that of a priest, a police agent, an old woman who turned out to be the mother of the girl the bandit raped, the bandit himself, the girl herself, the murdered man- through a medium. These seven narratives are entirely different versions and are mismatching each other.

The world renowned Japanese director Akira Kurosawa adapted the two short stories into a well acclaimed world classic *Rashomon*(1950). The movie contributed a new technique to the literary world, called Rashomon effect. Rashomon effect is contradictory interpretations of the same event by different people. The phrase derives from the film *Rashomon* where the accounts of the different characters in the film are entirely different. This technique encapsulates so beautifully the key problems of the postmodern condition, i.e. the multiplicity and unreliability of different narratives. It is a perfect piece to illustrate the different strands of postmodern attitudes which can easily be identified by how they would summarize the situation. So the movie or the short story can be used to interpret the postmodern conditions in terms of the technique used- Rashomon effect. Through the analysis of the movie, we can identify the postmodern technique of unreliable narrator. "An unreliable narrator is a narrator in literature, film or theatre whose credibility has been seriously compromised" (Frey, 93). So the postmodern approach of unreliable narrator can be studied and analyzed with respect to the Rashomon effect used in the film.

There are three sections in this paper. The first section discusses on the short stories *Rashomon* and *In a bamboo grove*. In the second section, the film *Rashomon* is analyzed. The last section deals with the comparative study between the short stories and the film as an adaptation as well as the technique of Rashomon effect in terms of postmodernism.

A Study on the Short stories: *Rashomon* and *In a bamboo grove*

Ryunosuke Akutagawa is considered as the first Japanese author popularized in the west. He wrote about 150 stories and novellas that address human dilemmas and struggles of conscience tingled with gothic fiction. He is often regarded as the father of Japanese short stories. Japan's premier literary award, the Akutagawa prize, is named after him.

Akutagawa published his first short story *Rashomon* in the year 1915 when he was a student. The story revolves around a servant and an old woman. The setting of the story is a dilapidated Rashomon, the southern gate of the ruined city of Kyoto, where corpses are dumped. The man, who is a fired servant is contemplating whether to starve to death or to become a thief to survive. Then he encounters with a woman, who is stealing hair from the dead bodies. He is disgusted with the sight. He became furious with the woman. When he approached and questioned her, the old woman tells him that she only steals to make a living, by stealing hairs of the dead to make wigs. In addition, the woman whose body she is currently

robbing cheated people in her life by selling snake meat and claiming it was fish. The old woman argued that there is nothing wrong in her act as it was for her survival. The man's response was: "You won't blame me, then, for taking your clothes. That's what I have to do to keep from starving to death" (Akutagawa, 17). Then he brutally robs the woman and disappeared. The story ends with a striking note that no one knows what happened to the lowly servant.

The story intended to expose the continuous chain of deception existed among people. They are all driven by self-interest. They do things for the sake of their survival. This narcissistic attitude is being presented through the characters of servant, old woman and the woman whose body is robbed. They all do selfish things and thus deceived others. But they all justify their acts on the ground that they want to survive. Thus the story sums up the view that the very existence of mankind itself is guided by selfish motives.

In a bamboo grove is another short story by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, published in the year 1922. *In a bamboo grove* is a disturbing tale that raises questions on the objective truth. The story presents various testimonies of the murder of a samurai, a Japanese warrior whose corpse has been found in a bamboo forest near Kyoto. Each narrative is contradictory with the other and it asks essential questions on the credibility of the humanity and its ability to perceive and transmit objective truth.

The story opens with the testimony of a woodcutter questioned by the magistrate. He was the one who found the body. The woodcutter says that a man died of a single sword stroke to the chest, and that the bamboo leaves around the body were soaked with dark red blood. There were no weapons- only a single piece of rope, a comb and a lot of blood.

The next account was by a travelling priest. He reports that he met the man, who was accompanied by a woman on horseback, on the road, around noon the day before the murder. The man was carrying a sword, a bow and a black quiver.

The next person to testify was a policeman. He has captured an infamous criminal Tajomaru. Tajomaru was injured when thrown from a horse and he was carrying a bow and a black quiver, which did not belong in his usual arsenal. This proves, he says, that Tajomaru was the perpetrator. He was not carrying the dead man's sword, however.

The next testimony is from an old woman, the mother of the missing girl in the encounter. Her daughter is a beautiful, strong-willed 19 years old named Masago, married to Kanazawa no Takehiro, a twenty-six years old kind man. She says, her daughter has never been with a man other than Takehiro.

Next, the bandit Tajomaru confesses. He says that he met them on the road in the forest, and upon first seeing Masago, decided that he was going to rape her. In order to rape Masago unhindered, he separated the couple, taking Takehiro into the woods with the promise of buried treasure. He then stuffed his mouth full of leaves, tied him to a tree and fetched Masago. When Masago saw her husband, she pulled a dagger from her bosom and tried to stab Tajomaru, but he had his way with her. Originally, he had no intention of killing the man. But after the rape, she begged him to either kill her husband or kill himself- she could not live if two men knew her shame. She would leave with the last man standing. Tajomaru did not wish to kill Takehiro in a cowardly manner, so he untied him and they had a sword fight. During the duel, Masago fled. Tajomaru dispatched the man and took the man's sword, bow and quiver as well as the woman's horse. He says that he sold the sword before he was captured by the police.

The next testimony was that of Masago. According to her, after the rape, Tajomaru fled and her husband looked at her with great contempt. She was ashamed that she had been raped, and no longer wished to live, but she wanted him to die with her. He agreed, or so she believed- he couldn't actually say anything because his mouth was still stuffed full of leaves and she plunged her dagger into his chest. She then cut the rope that bound Takehiro and ran into the forest, whereupon she attempted to commit suicide numerous times. But her spirit was too strong to die. At the end of her confession, she weeps.

The final account comes from Takehiro's ghost, through a spirit medium. The ghost says that after the rape, Tajomaru persuaded Masago to leave her husband and become his own wife, which she agreed to do under one condition- he would have to kill Takehiro. Tajomaru became enraged at the suggestion, kicked her to the ground and asked Takehiro if he should kill the dishonorable woman. Hearing this, Masago fled into the forest. Tajomaru then cut Takehiro's bonds and ran away. Takehiro grabbed Masago's fallen dagger and plunged it into his chest. Shortly before he died, he sensed someone creep up to him and steal the dagger from his chest. The story ends with totally conflicting and contradictory account of the same event without any room for conclusion or climax. The situation is presented before the readers without any possible solution. But every account is kind of hint to the objective truth or rather questioning the objective truth through various narratives.

An overview of the story proceed from these premises: Takehiro is dead. Tajomaru raped Masago. Tajomaru stole Takehiro's bow and quiver, as well as the woman's horse. In each of the accounts, Masago wishes Takehiro dead, although the details vary. Masago and Tajomaru did not leave together. The difference between the characters' stories range from the trivial to the fundamental. What follows is a list of discrepancies between the characters' testimonies. The comb mentioned by the woodcutter is not mentioned by any of the other characters. The violent struggle that trampled the leaves, mentioned by the woodcutter, seems to occur only in Tajomaru's version of the story- the sword fight. The woodcutter also claims that the man was killed by a single sword slash across the chest, but in both Masago's and Takehiro's versions of the story, he was killed by a dagger thrust to the chest. The woodcutter claims that Takehiro was wearing a Kyoto-style hat. But Masago's mother says that he was not from Kyoto. The author wanted to emphasize this because he specifically had the police investigator ask her if Takehiro was from Kyoto. The woodcutter says that Takehiro was wearing a blue kimono and the priest says Masago was wearing a lilac kimono. In Masago's account, Takehiro is wearing a lilac kimono. Tajōmaru does not mention how Masago's dagger disappeared from the crime scene. In Tajōmaru's and Takehiro's accounts, Masago and Tajōmaru have a long conversation after the rape, after which, she is willing to leave with Tajōmaru, so long as her husband is dead. Masago's account omits this completely. Masago does not mention how Takehiro's sword disappeared from the crime scene. It seems unlikely that Masago would fail at suicide so many times, particularly considering the first method she supposedly tried: driving her dagger into her neck. Masago says that Takehiro was repulsed by her after the rape. This is not true according to the other accounts. From Takehiro's story, it is clear that he is furious at her, but he claims that this is because she asked Tajōmaru to kill him. In Tajōmaru's version, he still loves her so much that he is willing to fight to the death for her. Takehiro introduces a new and unlikely character: the person who stole the dagger from his chest, conveniently, mere seconds before his death. Masago and Takehiro claim that Tajōmaru violently kicked her after the rape. Tajōmaru says that his desire to make Masago his wife forced him to battle Takehiro instead of kicking the woman off and running away.

In short, every character says at least one thing that is refuted by another. We cannot extract the exact truth from these accounts. There are truths as well as lies. They mixed up together in a well confused manner. There must be something that tends them to conceal the truth. They don't want to admit the truth as they all have involved somehow or other way in the foul play. All accounts being contradictory justifies this selfish motive to cover up the truth. So even after the story, the truth remains as a mysterious thing.

A Study of the Film: *Rashomon*

Rashomon is a Japanese period drama film directed by Akira Kurosawa in 1950. It is an adaptation of two short stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa. *Rashomon* which provides the setting for the film and *In a bamboo grove* which provides the characters and plot. *Rashomon* marked the entrance of Japanese film into the world stage. As Roger Ebert wrote:

The film struck the world of film like a thunderbolt. Directed by Akira Kurosawa in the early years of his career, before he was hailed as a grandmaster, it was made reluctantly by a minor Japanese studio, and the studio head so disliked it that he removed his name from the credits. Then it won the Golden Lion at the

Venice Film Festival, effectively opening the world of Japanese cinema to the west. It won the Academy award as best foreign film. It set box office records for a subtitled film. Its very title has entered the English language, because, like *Catch 22*, it expresses something for which there is no better substitute. (67)

Akira Kurosawa is a world famous film maker who is considered as one of the most influential figure in the history of world cinema. He was born in 1910. He entered the Japanese film industry in 1936, following a brief stint as a painter. *Rashomon*, which premiered in Tokyo in 1950, became a success both critically and commercially. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, Kurosawa directed approximately a film a year, including the famous films such as *Ikiru*(1952), *Seven Samurai*(1954) and *Yojimbo*(1961). In 1990, he won the academy award for life time achievement. Akira Kurosawa has a rich tradition in adaptation. One of his famous and well acclaimed film *Ran* is an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. *Throne of blood* is another Kurosawa movie, which is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

After making the movie *Scanda*, Kurosawa showed Daiei the script which became *Rashomon*. It was a bit too short... but all of my friends liked it very much. Daiei, however, did not understand it and kept asking: But what is it about? I made it longer, put on a beginning and an ending- and they eventually agreed to make it. Thus Daiei joined those- Shochiku for *The Idiot*, Toho for *Record of a living being*- who were brave enough to try something different.”(Kurosawa, 74)

The film opens on a woodcutter and a priest sitting beneath the Rashomon city gate during the rain. A commoner joins them and then tell him that they have witnessed a disturbing story, which they then begin recounting to him. The woodcutter claims he found the body of a murdered samurai three days earlier while looking for wood in the forest; upon discovering the body, he says, he fled in a panic to notify the authorities. The priest says that he saw the samurai with his wife traveling the same day the murder happened. Both men were then summoned to testify in court, where they met the captured bandit Tajōmaru, who claimed responsibility for killing the samurai and raping his wife.

Then comes the narration of the same incident by different people who are either involved or witnessed. These are all mutually conflicting and contradictory stories. Each of them tells a different story so that truth cannot be filtered out. There are contradictory versions by the bandit himself, who committed the murder, the wife, the woodcutter, who witnessed and even the murdered samurai himself told through a medium.

The very first account was that of a Bandit. Tajōmaru, a notorious brigand, claims that he tricked the samurai to step off the mountain trail with him and look at a cache of ancient swords he discovered. In the grove he tied the samurai to a tree, then brought the samurai's wife there. She initially tried to defend herself with a dagger, but was eventually seduced by the bandit. The woman, filled with shame, then begged him to duel to the death with her husband, to save her from the guilt and shame of having two men know her dishonor. Tajōmaru honorably set the samurai free and dueled with him. In Tajōmaru's recollection they fought skillfully and fiercely, but in the end Tajōmaru was the victor and the woman ran away. At the end of the story to the court, he is asked about an expensive dagger owned by the samurai's wife: he says that, in the confusion, he forgot all about it, and that it was foolish of him to leave behind such a valuable object.

The samurai's wife tells a different story to the court. She says that Tajōmaru left after raping her. She begged her husband to forgive her, but he simply looked at her coldly. She then freed him and begged him to kill her so that she would be at peace. He continued to stare at her with a look of loathing. His expression disturbed her so much that she fainted with dagger in hand. She awoke to find her husband dead with the dagger in his chest. She attempted to kill herself, but failed in all her efforts.

The court then hears the story of the dead samurai, told through a medium. The samurai claims that Tajōmaru, after raping his wife, asked her to travel with him. She accepted and asked Tajōmaru to kill her husband so that she would not feel the guilt of belonging to two men. Tajōmaru, shocked by this request, grabbed her, and gave the samurai a choice of letting the woman go or killing her. The dead samurai was ready to pardon his crime for his words. The woman fled, and Tajōmaru, after attempting to recapture her,

gave up and set the samurai free. The samurai then killed himself with his wife's dagger. Later, somebody removed the dagger from his chest.

Back at Rashōmon gate (after the trial), the woodcutter explains to the commoner that all three stories were falsehoods. The woodcutter had actually witnessed the rape and murder, he says, but just did not want to get too involved at the trial. According to the woodcutter's new story, Tajōmaru begged the samurai's wife to marry him, but the woman instead freed her husband. The husband was initially unwilling to fight Tajōmaru, saying he would not risk his life for a spoiled woman, but the woman then criticized both him and Tajōmaru, saying they were not real men and that a real man would fight for a woman's love. She spurred the men to fight one another, but then hid her face in fear once they raised swords; the men, too, were visibly fearful as they began fighting. They began a duel that was much more pitiful than Tajōmaru's account had made it sound, and Tajōmaru ultimately won through a stroke of luck. After some hesitation he killed the samurai, who begged for his life on the ground, and the woman fled in horror. Tajōmaru could not catch her, but took the samurai's sword and left the scene limping.

Towards the end, the woodcutter, priest and commoner are interrupted by the sound of a baby. They found a baby abandoned in a basket, and the commoner takes a kimono and an amulet that have been left for the baby. The woodcutter criticized the commoner for stealing from the abandoned baby. But the commoner chastises him. Having deduced that the reason the woodcutter did not speak up at the trial was because he was the one who stole the dagger from the scene of the murder.

These deceptions and lies shake the priest's faith in humanity. The woodcutter took the baby and explained that he intends to take care of the baby along with his own children. Thus the woodcutter has given him reason to continue having hope in humanity. The film closes on the woodcutter, walking home with the baby.

In the film, all the characters have their own interests and they have to conceal something out of the incident. That's why they all lied. They want to conceal the truth and hence they invent stories. They can't even admit the truth to themselves. In other words, they find excuses for their selfishness and dishonesty. However, the film ends up in a promising note to humanity amidst of all the strange things happened.

Comparative study and Postmodern anticipations of *Rashomon*

The film adaptation of Ryunosuke Akutagawa's stories as *Rashomon* by Akira Kurosawa became a world classic. It was Akira Kurosawa and Shinobu Hashimoto who wrote the screenplay for the film. The name of the film is taken from one short story and the plot and characters is from the other.

Film adaptation is a derivative work which is the transfer of a written work, in whole or in part, to a feature film. However, film and literature are various disciplines having their own language to communicate. Literature communicate through words whereas films through visuals. They have their own limitations and possibilities. Adaptation can be considered as a creation in a different medium. So in film adaptation, the director, who is the creator, have the full authority over the new work. So changes and alterations can be made according to his taste and creativity.

A film can repeat the ideas and characters of a novel, even the settings and events, but a film doesn't have to follow a novel as a script. There is freedom in an adaptation for new interpretations. It is not so much about the preservation of the original media as it is about the process of adaptation go through to become new mediums. (Rushdie, 2)

In the film *Rashomon*, Akira Kurosawa is the director, script writer as well as the editor. A director is the master brain behind a film. So there are significant changes from the original work. There can be four basic questions in a film adaptation. They are: What does the film take from the text? What does the film omit from the text? What does the film add to the text? And what does the film alter significantly ?

The title of the film is taken from the first short story by Akutagawa: *Rashomon*. It was this short story that provides the setting of the film at Rashomon gate. The commoner in the film is loosely based on the servant in the first short story, *Rashomon*. So there is an intermixing of characters between the short stories and the film. After all, the whole idea of the short story *Rashomon* is summarized through the character of commoner in the film. It was the commoner who stole a kimono and an amulet that have been left for the baby. But he justifies his own selfish action using the selfishness of all the storytellers in the film. This is the central theme of the story in which the servant uses the actions and the survival justification of the old woman to justify his stealing of her clothes. So there is this interconnection between the two stories and the film through a different character.

The film directly omits everything from the story *Rashomon* except the setting at Rashomon, the character of the servant and the issue of survival of the selfish. The short story actually goes through a psycho-narration about the mind of the servant as he struggles to make his decision. The film never goes inside the mind of the commoner. This is a notable difference between the two media. Literature can effectively portray the inner conflicts, mental tensions and emotional struggles of the characters. Film is evidently limited in depicting these inside transactions. While the story is narrated through the mind of the servant, the film made use of an alternative way to describe the situation.

The film opens on an additional frame-story. This is the major addition in the film as well as the main theme of the film. The film adds the woodcutter and the priest as the first person narrators who tell the stories of what happened in the grove. The story *In a bamboo grove* is told directly as testimonies of different characters. In the film, the woodcutter's second story is completely new. The short story has seven different testimonies before the magistrate. The film omits one of the seven dramatic monologues- the account of the mother of the wife.

One of the notable deviation from the short story is the conclusive statement that it makes. Akutagawa's short story ends in an utter despair and hopelessness. The different characters provide different stories of the same incident, which means they all lied. People are all selfish and self-centered as they distort truth for their interests and comfort. Even the first short story *Rashomon* ends with a statement that even the servant isn't safe enough as there are other people waiting to deceive him. This is a generalization of humanity with greater despair and pessimism. Akutagawa completely gives up all his trust and expectations in mankind. That is his ultimate statement through the short story.

On the other hand, the film *Rashomon* deviates from the original text in its conclusive statement. Here comes the creative or rather ideological freedom of the film maker. The addition of the frame-story is subjected to emphasize this variation from the source text. The priest's character and the woodcutter's character are greatly expanded to serve this purpose. In the movie, after witnessing all the contradictory stories and the action of the commoner who stole from the abandoned baby, the priest lost the faith in humanity. This was the conclusive statement in the short story. But the film goes beyond this generalization. The woodcutter took the baby and explained that he intends to take care of the baby along with his own children. Thus the woodcutter has given him reason to continue having hope in humanity. The film closes on the woodcutter, walking home with the baby- a frame of restored hope in mankind. Thus the tail end of the movie completely changed the perception. This can be interpreted as a creative interference of the film maker in the process of adaptation. Thus adaptation is not merely a photographic reproduction but a creation.

Akira Kurosawa is so determined to take all those freedom, as far as possible, to interpret the work in terms of his ideological frame work. He doesn't want to follow the writer's ideology at any cost and hence dramatically changed the climax of the source text. The change, however a striking one and it shows the power of creative space within an adaptation. It is this freedom that makes adaptation a creation. (Seger, 48) For conveying a particular idea beyond the source text, Kurosawa expanded the character of priest. He embodies a religious point of view. He wants to believe in the human capacity for goodness as humans are not totally selfish and evil. The character of woodcutter had given more importance in the film. He becomes

the central character in the end because he is the only one who changes. He started out lying about what happened and lies again in his second story in order to protect the fact that he stole the dagger. When confronted by the commoner over the baby, he is humiliated and forced to admit that he had lied. However, just when it appears that the commoner's cynical vision of humans is the truth, the woodcutter confesses his guilt and changes. He finally tells the truth and acts unselfishly by offering to take the baby. This is how the director used his creative freedom to change the whole idea of the short story. The film became a fresh piece of art that reflects the brilliance of a director.

The film *Rashomon* is considered as a world classic which contributed a new term and technique to the literary world. Though the short story was written way before the film, it was the film that propagated the theory of Rashomon effect. Rashomon effect is the contradictory interpretations of the same event by different people. The very term derived from the film *Rashomon*, where the accounts of the witnesses, suspects and victims of a rape and murder are all different. It is impossible to reconcile the whole story. In the film, the different characters narrate the same incident in various ways so that the objective truth cannot be filtered out but only subjective truth. Thus it questions the objective truth.

This technique of disturbing the usual perception of explicit truth is a postmodern phenomenon. Thus the narrative technique of Rashomon effect can be analyzed in terms of postmodernism. The film anticipated the deconstructionist belief that there is no absolute truth or center. According to the postmodern interpretations, the film is a cast full of Unreliable Narrators. An unreliable narrator is a narrator whose credibility has been seriously compromised. The term was coined by Wayne C. Booth in 1961 in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Here, the narrator's unreliability is made evident. Wayne C. Booth writes, "I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work, unreliable when he does not"(159). Here the norms are implied author's norms.

There are unreliable narrators. An unreliable narrator however, is not simply a narrator who does not tell the truth- what fictional narrator ever tells the truth? Rather an unreliable narrator is one who tell lies, conceals information, misjudges with respect to the narrative audience- that is, one whose statements are untrue not by the standards of the real world or of the authorial audience but by the standards of his own narrative audience.[...] In other words, all fictional narrators are false in that they are imitations. But some are imitations who tell the truth, some of people who lie. (Rabinowitz, 133)

In the film, every narrator is an unreliable narrator. An account of one character contradicts with the account of another. Thus there is no credibility in any of the narratives. The film, as well as the short story, is made of a bunch of unreliable narrators. The central event is the murder of a samurai. That murder occurs before the movie opens. Three of the witnesses at the trial are supposedly the only eyewitnesses. They are: a notorious bandit, who confesses to murdering the samurai and raping his wife; the wife of the samurai; and the dead samurai himself, who testifies through a medium. Their stories all have the same basic structure: the bandit kidnapped the samurai, tied him to a tree in the woods, and raped the wife. But each story contradicts the others as to the actual murder and the motivation. And then a fourth witness- the woodcutter who had discovered the dead man in the woods- reveals that he knew more than he testified to at trial. In short, the film gives us four equally plausible versions of the same grisly murder.

The wife claims that she was raped. When her husband demonstrated a sneering contempt for her helpless submission to the bandit, she killed him with a knife in her shock at his betrayal. The bandit claims the sex was consensual and the wife wanted to leave her husband for him. He killed the husband in a spectacular sword fight between highly skilled warriors over possession of the woman. The husband also claims the sex was consensual. In his story the unfaithful wife leaves with the bandit and there is no fight. Overcome with sorrow and shame, he takes his own life. A woodcutter claims to have seen the whole thing. In his story, the sex is consensual. The wife wants to start a new life with the bandit, but urges him to kill her boring husband. This disgusts even the bandit, who releases the husband; neither of them want the woman now. As she's about to be abandoned, the wife taunts the two into fighting for their own honor, if not for hers. The fight is a messy, comic brawl between ill-prepared cowards ending in the husband's death. Even the woodcutter's story is doubtful, however. When his audience asks what happened to the wife's ornate dagger, he's accused of stealing it and looks guilty.

The film doesn't provide any definite answer as to what actually happened. There are only a number of narratives which cannot be connected or generalized. This is the Unreliable narrator experience in postmodern terms. This particular idea is established through the technique of Rashomon effect. According to this literary phenomenon, the narrators in such a work are meant to be known as unreliable narrators. The bandit, the woodcutter, the wife, the samurai are all unreliable narrators. The truth is hidden between their stories and is not evidently seen after all these accounts. The film, or rather the short story puts the viewers or readers in a state of confusion as to who is right and who is wrong. The audience would struggle to comprehend the truth inside and thus the work ends up in a disturbing mode. One thing regarding these movies, which make use of this technique, is that they are well opened before its audience. The movie or story is not finished even after it ends. The confusion became a thought provoking one and hence it served its purpose as a piece of art.

Conclusion

Adaptation is a creative process. It is the transformation of a work in a particular medium to another medium. It help us to understand the fundamental attributes of a medium from which the original work comes as well as that of the other medium towards which it points. Film adaptation is the transfer of a written work, in whole or in part, to a feature film. It is a kind of derivative work. However, there is an identity and independent existence in film adaptation. Adaptation doesn't mean photographic reproduction but a fresh creative work.

Adaptations were often considered as inferior to the adapted texts as secondary or subsidiary products, lacking the symbolic richness of the books and missing their spirit. The impoverishment of the book's content due to necessary omissions in the plot and the inability of the film makers to read out and represent the deeper meanings of the text are regarded as the major fault of adaptation. Another point of criticism is the perception problems related to the visuality of the filmic medium. But film is an artistic space created and controlled by the film maker. So the director is the creator and what he does is to interpret the text in terms of his creativity as well as in tune with the new medium. So a film adaptation became a fresh piece of art created by the director. The film maker's reading of the text and his interpretations matters a lot as far as the film is concerned. The text can be variously interpreted and changed according to his viewpoints and ideology.

The film *Rashomon*, as an adaptation of Ryunosuke Agutagawa's short stories *Rashomon* and *In a bamboo grove*, can stand by itself as a piece of art. The film had its own identity and hence a new creation. The film was not just imitating or copying the text but improvising according to the change of medium. The director, Akira Kurosawa gave a different dimension and meaning to the film. Thus the film became director's art form and a new creation.

The short story as well as the film anticipated the postmodern technique of unreliable narrator through Rashomon effect. Rashomon effect is a technique of giving contradictory narratives by different viewers of the same event. It is named after the film *Rashomon*. The same technique is made use in different movies afterwards like *Gone girl*, *Courage under fire*, *Ghost Dog*, *The Woman in question* and many others. The film anticipated the deconstructionist view that there is no absolute truth or center. The truth is presented as a subjective ever-changing discourse that rejects the notion of objective truth. The short story written in 1922 and the film released in the year 1950 portrayed the crisis in narration which was a postmodern approach. It was later in 1961 that the academic circle discusses on the idea of unreliable narrator. Thus the plot of the text is an anticipated one whose studies and analysis are relevant even today.

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