

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Who can say no to a good story? It can be fairy tales, legends, or bedtime stories for children. It may be stories about next-door neighbor for mothers. It can also be headline news about a famous politician who is having affair with his secretary in the morning newspaper for fathers. Whatever form it may take, a good story is simply irresistible, and the closest form of literature that is most similar to those stories is a short story.

Let us imagine a shark saying “Hey, clown! I think I’m different from you” to a clownfish, and the clownfish replied, “Sure, sharkie. You’re much bigger than I am.” Vice versa, there is always the temptation when somebody says, “The short story is different from the novel,” to answer: “Yes, it has fewer words.” This remark, like the clown fish’s is both true and false. Of course the shark is bigger, and of course the novel has more words. Nevertheless, there is something more about a shark, or in this case, about short story that makes it different from a novel, or else the subject would not have come up so often as it has. But, what are the differences, precisely?

According to Miller and Slote (1964), “the most marked traits of short stories are brevity, density, and unity.” (p.510). I will try to explain the three elements mentioned by Miller and Slote. The first difference is the short story’s **density**. In the short story, we have the density of meaning, richness of texture, and compactness in form. That is why in the short story, every line, every word, and even every gesture is suggestive. If a novel has to develop its plot, and therefore becomes more loose and relaxed, a short story goes directly to the point, without having any lacking in applying the theme of the work.

Another difference is its **unity**. It is impossible for a novel or a play, because of its looseness in the longer form, to have the singleness of impact that a short story

can have. That is why short story is better in stressing the unity of a single effect and not confusing the reader to catch the main theme of the work by having to develop its plot as long as a novel.

The short story is also different because of its **brevity**. In fact, the short story is shorter in form than a novel. As a result, we need less time to read a short story. The effect of this fact is that the impact on us of a work we can read at one sitting differs radically from the impact of a work we read at intervals over a long period of time. The strengths and the advantages of this genre have convinced me to take short story for my thesis.

From all the short stories I've read, I am particularly interested in Japanese short stories. This is perhaps due to my belief that Japanese literary works are hidden beauties that are currently still unknown to the literary society. But then, every literature offers a beauty of its own characteristics, so why am I still choosing Japanese literature? Well, if the objection is that every literature is as good as any other, do allow me to put it in another way: if Japanese literature, along with any other, is considered equal to Western literature, then why can't I choose it? I will not deny my position as a student of English Literature. Suggestions do arise that I should take English-written works. But then, shouldn't we also take works that can intrigue, provoke, inspire, and interest us in many ways in order for us to give our best in our final project?

I am also aware that a translated work may miss some elements we can only feel from the original work. However, I believe that it will not prevent us from getting the main theme or moral message proposed by the author that are necessary to make an analysis. In this thesis, I would like to take some of the works of major Japanese classical writers like Ryunosuke Akutagawa and Mori Ogai. Perhaps for most of us, especially students of English Literature, these names are unfamiliar, if not unknown at all. Therefore, I believe I need to give a short background on these two writers, along with my reasons for choosing them.

Janeira (1970) believed that along with Natsume Soseki and Mori Ogai, Ryunosuke Akutagawa is one of the most important and influential Japanese writers in the Taisho era. I also believe that Akutagawa's ability to satirize different subjects ranging from social, political, and religion is amazing. He had a

unique story-telling method, and somehow, he never failed to make his stories alive, capturing, and yet full of moral thoughts at the same time. We can see that in *Rashomon*, where readers would first imagine the woman as a ghost but found out that she is only a poor, hungry lady who took the hair of dead people to make wigs. For him, words should express more than the bare dictionary meanings. “He had a poet’s feeling for their shapes and flavors, as well as their ambiguities, and he combined them with such freshness and economy that his phrasing never lacks distinction” (Hibbet, 1972, p.10).

During his lifetime, Akutagawa had written over 140 pieces of literary works, most of which are short stories. His devotion for reading and writing is huge that “sometimes he even hung a sign at his door which said ‘Sick, compliments to callers’ so that he might be left alone” to continue his activity (Janeira, 1970, p.139). His talent was first acknowledged when he published a short story entitled *Hana* (Nose) in the *Shinshicho* magazine, which won an abundant praise from his teacher, the novelist Natsume Soseki, and launched him on his career as a writer. Since Akutagawa lived in the Taisho era, during which the Western influence on Japanese literature was great, his works were highly influenced by Western thoughts and ideas. Some of his favorite western authors include Anatole France, Baudelaire, Poe, and Strindberg.

Akutagawa was attracted by strong themes and dark scenes of horror. “The power of his genius excels in the gruesome atmosphere of tragedy and melodrama” (Janeira, 1970, p.140). Some of Akutagawa’s major works are *Hana*, *In A Grove*, *Rashomon*, *Yam Gruel*, *The Martyr*, *Kesa and Morito*, *Kappa*, and *The Dragon*. His works touched almost every important subject during the era in which he lived. The silent suffering in the cause of Christ in early Christian Nagasaki is described in *The Martyr*.

Another work, *The Dragon*, touches off the ancient Japanese myths. While in *Kesa and Morito*, Akutagawa brings forward the dilemma of love when Morito is driven to kill a man he doesn’t hate by a lover whom he doesn’t love. However, one of the most important parts of the social and cultural condition at that time concerning samurais, bandits, and police is discussed in Akutagawa’s *Rashomon* and *In A Grove*. In addition, Akutagawa’s writing technique is unique and

original. He was the first Japanese writer to use his characters' testimonies to form his plot. I also admire Akutagawa for his totality in his profession. He was fully committed to his profession as a writer even until the time when he committed suicide when he left a satirizing note to a dear friend.

Today, the Akutagawa Prize has become Japan's most prestigious literary award. Established in 1935, the award is sponsored by the Association for the Promotion of Japanese Literature (Nihon Bungaku Shinko Kai). The prize is awarded every January and July to the best short story of a purely literary nature published in a newspaper or magazine by a new or rising author. The winner receives a pocket watch and a cash award of 1 million yen, along with considerable attention from the media. This award is also a symbol of acknowledgment towards Akutagawa's achievements and contributions.

Mori Rintaro (Ogai was his pen name) was an amazing man of letters as well as medical. He was born in a medical family with an early training in Japanese and Chinese classics, especially in Confucian. His attitudes and perceptions were immeasurably broadened through his long and intimate contact with late nineteenth century European life and literature. As a result, the best of Ogai's works "manifest both the moral power sanctioned in the Confucian tradition and a subtlety and finesse of style derived from the West, both fused into a harmonious whole" (Dilworth and Rimer, 1977, p.8).

Ogai was brilliant at school and held both literary and medical doctorates. He had also occupied a number of important posts in various cultural fields, such as director and curator of the Imperial Household Museum and Library, head of the Imperial Art Academy, and chairman of the Provisional Commission on the Japanese Language, applying his knowledge and energy in many different fields.

Ogai was also an essentially modern mind. His double career as army medical, doctor, teacher, and bureaucrat, on the one hand, and as translator, literary critic, essayist, novelist, poet, short-story writer, and biographer, on the other, "helped shape powerful cultural dynamisms at the crucial juncture of late Meiji when international values were being internalized and integrated with their own indigenous culture by the Japanese people" (Dilworth and Rimer, 1977, p.14).

Mori Ogai was the first major Japanese writer to live in Europe. His intellectual development reflected on the increasing influence of European ideas in Japan. Some of his best translations include that of Andersen's *Improvisator* (1891-1901), *John Gabriel Borkman* (1909) and Goethe's *Faust* (1931). His eventual translations included works of Rilke, von Hofmannsthal, Schiller, Heyse, Pushkin, Gorki, Tolstoi, Turgenev, Rousseau, Aristotle, Shakespeare, Wilde, Shaw, Ibsen, and many others. Ogai's first story, *Maihime* (The Dancing Girl) was based on his own experience: the unhappy love between a Japanese student and a German dancer told in an elegant and romantic way, similar to German fiction. He also wrote other stories such as *Gan* (The Wild Geese), *Utakata no iki* (A Record of Transient Life), *Fumizukai* (The Letter-Bearer), *Saigo no Ikku* (The Last Phrase), *Vita-Sexualis*, and of course, *Takase Bune* (The Boat on the River Takase).

Mori Ogai was considered as innovator in the creation of a modern poetic style in Japan, and his early experiments in writing European-style were invaluable for the modern Japanese theatre. "He was an extremely perceptive critic, and his writings on Japanese and foreign literature are still consulted and considered valuable nowadays" (Dilworth and Rimer, 1977, p.5).

From all the works of these two brilliant men of letters, I chose *Kesa and Morito* and *Rashomon* from Ryunosuke Akutagawa and *Takase Bune* from Mori Ogai. I had several reasons for this choice. My first reason was that from all the works of these two writers that I had read, these three works were the only ones that have a unifying thread on the topic of dilemma. Perhaps then, there will be another question about why I did not just take two works, one from each author, in order to make it more 'balance'. To answer this, I will first explain the intention of my analysis. From this thesis, I wished to show the significance of motives and consequences in a dilemmatic decision making. *Kesa and Morito* gives me a case in which the choice, the motives, and the consequences are all morally wrong. *Rashomon* states it a bit different, because in the story the choice brings a good consequence to the main character. Finally, *Takase Bune* shows how a morally-wrong action can have good motives and produces good consequences to the characters.

Therefore, each of the stories is like a part of a puzzle showing the correlation of the three elements of action, motive, and consequence. To get a good picture of the whole puzzle, I need all three parts. Therefore, I believe that if two of Akutagawa's works and just one from Ogai fulfils my purpose, then the 'balance' wouldn't be so significant any more. In addition to this, I believe that by showing the variety of the dilemmatic cases, readers' point of view of the matter will be enriched. Simply speaking, my reason for choosing the three works is to offer a wider range of analysis by showing different types of cases that may occur in the chosen topic of dilemma.

The first short story that I have chosen for my thesis, *Kesa and Morito*, impresses me because it was written in a unique style, divided in two parts, each containing a monologue of the two characters. This is a story about a man who has to kill another man he doesn't hate for a woman he used to adore. The man, Morito, is a great admirer of Kesa's beauty and charm. His passion for her is suppressed when Kesa decides to marry another man. When they both meet again three years later, Morito, driven by his long-suppressed passion, asks Kesa to make love to him and she agrees. At that time, Morito makes a foolish promise to kill Kesa's husband and Kesa agrees. He only realizes his mistake afterwards, but he is too arrogant to break his own promise to Kesa. Kesa, on the other hand, feels so guilty and decides to make Morito kill her instead. This story brings forth a dilemma that deals with passion and pride.

Rashomon, on the other hand, is a horror and suspense-flavored moral story. It is a story about how a ghost-like woman shocks a would-be thief into something like honesty. The beginning of the story tells us about a samurai servant who has just been discharged by his master due to an economical crisis at that time. He is anxious about his future and about how he is going to eat after he loses his job. In the midst of his confusion, he decides to be a thief in order to stay alive. As he is waiting for the rain to stop in the gate of Rashomon (a ruined gate located in Kyoto which became a hide-out for thieves and robbers and a place for abandoning unclaimed corpses), he hears a sound from inside the old building. He thinks he has seen a ghost but soon realizes that she is only an old lady. He watches as the lady pulls out the hair of dead people to make wigs. His fear fades

away and he becomes very angry. He believes the old lady's action to be immoral and when he hears the old lady's explanation, he uses it as a reason to rob back the old lady and runaway.

This story contains a satirized message upon human moral and states much about the hypocrisy of men. The story is quite intriguing as well, since it suggests how 'right and wrong' is relative. I have also found out that *Rashomon*, along with *In A Grove*, had been made into film under the title of *Rashomon* by the legendary Japanese director, Akira Kurosawa. The movie has won many prestigious International Awards such as the first Best Foreign Movie Award by the Academy Awards (1950), the Golden Lion Award of Venice Film Festival (1951), Lion of St. Mark prize (1951), Best Foreign Film in the New York Times, Board of Governor's Award for the most outstanding foreign-language film from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (1951), and voted one of the Top Ten Films of All Time by the Sight and Sound International Film Directors' Poll (1992).

Takase Bune or 'The Boat on the River Takase' is one of the most widely admired of Ogai's stories and has been translated into English several times (Dilworth and Rimer, 1977). When it first appeared, *Takase Bune* was praised as "a clear reflection of the Japanese spirit" (Suter, 1995, p.8). The simple tale is set in the 18th century, when Japan was under the iron rule of the Shoguns. "The two characters, a humble prisoner and a guard represent centuries of Japanese experience and thought" (Suter, 1995, p.8). The story *Takase Bune* itself is about a man who has to help his brother die in order to spare his brother the pain for remaining alive after trying to commit suicide with a razor still stuck in his throat. Unfortunately, the man, Kisuke, is caught-in-the-act when he pulls the razor out by a woman. So, he is sent to a distant prison. On his way there, he meets a prison guard named Haneda Shobei. He tells the guard what really happened. The guard is amazed at Kisuke's story and starts to reflect it to his own life. From Mori Ogai's note on *Takase Bune* (see appendix), I have learnt that the problem of *euthanasia* is the central problem in Kisuke's dilemma. Therefore, I believe that it is necessary for me to learn more about the matter in order to understand Kisuke's dilemma better.

Precisely what is *euthanasia*? “It suggests an intention to bring about the death of someone and to do so from beneficent motives or concern for the person” (Martin, 1995, p.134). There are two divisions of *euthanasia*. The first one is the *passive* and *active euthanasia*. *Passive euthanasia* is the omission of actions which would prolong life; examples include the withholding of medicine, food, or water with the intention of letting a person die. *Active euthanasia* is the performance of actions which bring about death, such as the administration of lethal injections of morphine (Martin, 1995).

The distinction between *passive* and *active euthanasia* is not crystal clear, because in some cases, both definition may apply. The second division of *euthanasia* is between *voluntary*, *involuntary*, and *non-voluntary euthanasia*. *Non-voluntary euthanasia* occurs without a person’s consent. It usually happens when the person is in a coma or otherwise mentally incapacitated. *Involuntary euthanasia* would be the special case of *euthanasia* that is performed against a person’s wishes. Meanwhile, *voluntary euthanasia* occurs when a mentally competent individual requests *euthanasia* on the basis of free and informed consent (Martin, 1995).

Martin (1995) also included a fact about the legalization of this case in several countries. He stated that,

In some countries, such as the Netherlands, euthanasia has been legalized with the conditions of: (1) the person is competent, (2) he is suffering intolerably and without possible relief (whether or not a terminal illness is involved), (3) the person himself requests euthanasia voluntarily and consistently over a reasonable time, and (4) the case secures the approval of both the attending physician and a second physician not involved in the case (p.135)

Some have categorized *active euthanasia* as murder, and *passive euthanasia* as non-murder. But is it true that the action should be categorized as follow? James Rachels in Martin’s *Everyday Morality* (1995) offers an interesting argument on this matter. He gives the example of Smith and Jones, each of whom will inherit a large amount of money if his six-year-old cousin dies. He told the story as follows:

Smith drowns his cousin while the child is bathing and carefully makes the death look accidental. Jones is about to do the same thing when by chance he sees the child slip, strike his head, and fall unconscious into the water. He watches to make sure the child dies before sneaking away. Smith killed his cousin; and Jones let his cousin die. Both cases are equally blameworthy. There is no moral difference between killing and letting someone die. Both actions are morally immoral and horrifying. No doubt the law would distinguish between the two cases, however. Smith is guilty of first-degree murder, while Jones is not (and perhaps could not be convicted unless he had been in charge of the child's care at the time of accident) (Martin, 1995, p.135)

Euthanasia is a dilemmatic ethical problem. I am suggesting that this matter is dilemmatic, because debates on this matter still go on until today. From the medical point of view, it is justifiable and acceptable to do it if the patient is suffering from great pain and has no hope of surviving. From religious or human rights point of view; however, it is unjustifiable because it equals to murder. In addition, even the law itself hasn't had a fixed standard for this case. I have read in a newspaper recently that a court judge had granted a married couple's request to let their child die painlessly. It was told that the child suffered from several kinds of disease at the same time and was threaten by a sudden heart attack. The parents, unable to see their child's agony, requested the court to allow the doctors to end their child's life painlessly, and the judge at that time granted their request. This case shows us that currently, there is still no fixed standard for the case of *euthanasia*.

I consider adding a brief background upon this matter because it will certainly help me understand the moral problem of *euthanasia* better by learning the types of euthanasia and the dilemma of making moral judgment upon this matter. It may also be a further point of interest that *Takase Bune*, a story so "expressive of the peculiar serenity and aesthetic intention evident in Ogai's final works, was chosen by the author himself as the title for a collection of the historical stories that appeared toward the end of his life" (Dilworth and Rimer, 1977, p.225).

There is a clear linking factor between the three works that I have chosen. All three main characters in the stories: Morito, the samurai servant, and Kisuke experience a dilemma which requires them to make a difficult decision of equally unpleasant options. Morito has to choose between killing a man and breaking his promise to his lover, the samurai servant has to choose between starving to death and robbing a lady, and Kisuke has to choose between letting his brother suffer and committing a crime. The unifying thread of these works is not only because they have the same central conflict on dilemmatic decision making, because in that case this thesis will lose a point since the dilemmas described in the works are different. On the contrary, we will see from the works that all three main characters in the stories choose the ‘evil way’, instead of the ‘good way’. Therefore, my purpose will be to analyze the kinds of factor or situation that may prompt someone to take the ‘evil way’. In other words, I will try to analyze why someone chooses not to take an option which is morally or legally right in different variety of contexts.

Thus, the interesting question here is how they come up with the decision that one option is relatively better than the other and how far it influences themselves and others. In other words, I will try to answer two questions. The first one is “what are their motives?”, and the second one is “what are the impacts of their choices?”. In addition to the revelation of the motives, I am also curious to make inquiries to the origin of the motives or how the motives emerge. Therefore, I resolve to make an analysis concerning the main characters’ dilemmas and choices, their motives, and the consequences of their choices.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Nietzsche once wrote, “What we do is never understood but always only praised or censured” (Nietzsche, 2001, p.264). It is true that most of the time people tend to make moral judgments about others only from the actions. If one murders, for example, people will find his/her action to be ‘wrong’, whatever his/her reasons are. In a dilemmatic situation; however, things get a bit restless. Right and wrong cannot be determined by mere action judgment. There are at least two other factors needed to be put into consideration: motives and

consequences. With these things in mind, I will try to find out what the main characters' dilemmas and choices are, why they choose these particular choices, and how these choices influence their lives and others'.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

This thesis will be my attempt to disclose and analyze the main characters' dilemmatic situations and their choices, the motives behind their choices, and the consequences of their choices toward themselves and others.

1.4. Significance of the Study

Along with the completion of this thesis, I wish to achieve three major goals. The first one will be to suggest the consideration of other factors namely *motives* and *consequences* in making moral judgments, or even further, punishments. If a simple object like painting can produce different sensation and reaction on different people, then I believe that the task of making moral judgments toward other people's action depends much on one's perspective and principles. With this consideration, I choose not to condemn the main characters' actions as 'right' or 'wrong'. Instead, I will leave the final judgment to the readers by providing an analysis on the motives and the consequences of the actions.

I am also eager to introduce some of the most brilliant and influential classical Japanese writers such as Ryunosuke Akutagawa and Mori Ogai, whose works have not been any less brilliant than those of Western literature that are currently more well-known. Last but not least, I would like to encourage the readers of this thesis to take short story as a thesis or research by showing its qualities as well as the advantages of choosing this genre.

1.5. Scope and Limitation

There are several themes to be found in the chosen works, but the scope of my analysis will only be the main characters' dilemmatic choices, the motives behind their choices, and the impacts of their choices toward themselves and other characters. However, I find the necessity to limit my discussion to three major

characters from the chosen works. They are Morito in *Kesa and Morito*, the samurai servant in *Rashomon*, and Kisuke in *Takase Bune*.

1.6. Methodology

The primary data of my analysis will be Ryunosuke Akutagawa's *Kesa and Morito* and *Rashomon* and Mori Ogai's *Takase Bune*. In order to collect more data, criticisms, and other information concerning the authors, the works, and the supporting theories, I also use the Internet facility next to the library research. In my attempt to analyze the works, I choose to make a literary approach by applying two of the literary devices namely characterization and conflict. However, since my discussion also deals with the main characters' motives and consequences that are closely related to their moral principles, I find the need to use some supporting concepts related to the subjects. I will use several concepts on motives such as pride and hatred, due to the existence of these motives in the chosen works. In addition, I will also use some concepts concerning moral consequences of the choices. All the above theories will be explained further in the next chapter.

1.7. Organization of the Study

I will divide the thesis into four main chapters. The first chapter will be the Introduction. This part consists of seven sub-chapters. They are the Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Significance of the Study, Scope and Limitation, Methodology, and the Organization of the Study. The second chapter is Review of Related Literature. This chapter will explain the theories used in the thesis along with their applications in a more detailed way. The third chapter is analysis chapter, which will discuss and analyze the topic of the study in depth. Finally, the last chapter is the Conclusion. This chapter will summarize the analysis result in brief and give a concrete conclusion of the thesis.