

"In a Grove" and "Rashomon" by Akutagawa

Summaries:

"In a Grove"

Seven people are questioned about the rape of a woman and the death of her samurai husband. The last three accounts of what happened "in the grove" are contradictory and the reader is never offered a definitive version of the events.

"Rashomon"

A thief, who has taken shelter from the rain in the ruins of the Rashomon gate, encounters an old woman stealing the hair from an abandoned corpse. He decides to follow her example and, thus, he robs her of her clothes and disappears into the darkness.

Activities:

Pre-reading for "In a Grove": Define or discuss the ideal samurai warrior. Show a ten minute segment from Walter Cronkite's special on war in which he draws parallels between the chivalric code of the English knight and the *bushido* code of the samurai warrior. Distribute handout with definitions of "modernism."

Pre-reading for "Rashomon": Discuss the decline of the samurai during the Edo period, especially the Confucianism of the elite warriors vs. the popular culture of the Yoshiwara, and the numerous natural disasters of the period. Show the opening minutes of Kurosawa's *Rashomon* in order to give the students an idea of what the Rashed gate may have looked like.

Post-reading for "In a Grove"

1. Begin with a reading quiz. See attached.
2. Because I begin a unit in Japanese literature with this story, I guide the students through a whole-group discussion. This process may be initiated by supplying the students with post-it notes and asking them each to write one question. The notes are then collected, grouped by similarity of topic, and addressed accordingly. Of course, the most frequently asked question is "Who actually killed the samurai?", and so we begin there.
3. The following is a listing of the issues we discuss:
 - A. "Who did it?" or "What does each person gain by taking responsibility?"
Akutagawa never makes this clear. We refer to the fourth definition of modernism for one explanation. We then spend time discussing the motives of the three who confess to the killing. Using their texts, students offer a variety of theories. Tajomaru claims to have murdered the samurai. The opening lines of his testimony make it clear that the police commissioner will have him tortured if he does not speak, so Tajomaru prepares to tell him a "good" story. Further, he seems evasive when it comes to the whereabouts of the girl, so he may be attempting to mask his reluctance to discuss her with the embellished story of the murder. Finally, he seems certain that he will be executed, so he wishes "the maximum penalty" which will, no doubt, add to his legendary status as the "notorious brigand called Tajomaru." Killing a highly-trained samurai warrior in a fair fight in a contest for the hand of a beautiful

woman would certainly be a path to a reputation that would endure even after his execution. The woman confesses that she murdered her husband, but perhaps she does so to add believability to her claim that she also attempted to commit suicide. The warrior confesses that he committed suicide with his wife's small sword. This is certainly a better story than being murdered with a single sword stroke while being tied to a tree.

B. All seven of the testimonies seem to be filled with inconsistencies:

The woodcutter testifies that he was cutting his "daily quota of cedars" in an "out-of-the-way grove." Students find this highly suspicious, even evidence for a conspiracy theory—they often believe that he is an accomplice to Tajomaru. As it turns out, this is not at all unusual given the Japanese reliance on wood and the deforestation that was occurring during the time, necessitating severe cutting restrictions.

The Buddhist priest testifies that he "took little notice about [the woman's] details", but is able to recollect the color of her clothing and the kind of horse she was riding, and he is even able to estimate her height, though she was astride a horse. Perhaps he, too, is not what he seems.

The policeman seems more than a little inept. His first attempt to apprehend Tajomaru fails, even though this is before the thief has stolen a horse. Then, it seems that the only reason the policeman is finally successful is that Tajomaru falls off of his newly acquired horse. Furthermore, when the High Police Commissioner mentions that the bow and arrows found on Tajomaru "look like the ones owned by the dead man," the policeman simplistically concludes that "Tajomaru must be the murderer." Furthermore, he arrogantly suggests that "providence" is on his side, and that Tajomaru was thrown from his horse as part of some divine plan.

The old woman seems to protest too much when she claims that her daughter "has never known any man any man except Takehiko." Why would such an assertion be necessary?

Tajomaru's confession, too, contains some interesting statements. He claims that surprise is the only advantage he had in subduing the samurai, but male students often argue that the only way Tajomaru could have tied a "sword-bearing warrior" to a tree is by knocking him unconscious first. This detail is, of course, omitted. Furthermore, it seems a bit unbelievable that he would simply trust the woman to stand by meekly while he crossed swords with her husband. Also, why does he claim that it is "a mere waste of words to tell [the police commissioner] the later details, especially with regard to the sword?"

The incredible aspect of the woman's confession is that she failed, apparently, to remove the bamboo leaves from her husband's mouth before she allegedly stabbed him. Further, why would she go to the trouble of removing the ropes after she stabbed him? Students also question the believability of her numerous failed suicide attempts.

The samurai's confession, too, contains some troubling aspects. He seems to elevate a rapist to a position of nobility and to denigrate his newly raped wife. Why? Most unbelievable, however, is his contention that his wife is able to outrun Tajomaru in the dense forest, even though the criminal "instantly snatched at her." How could an agile robber fail to defeat a diminutive lady with flowing robes and hair? Finally,

his story requires an outside party to come along and remove the sword from his chest.

C. Why is the narrative a collection of testimonies? The omniscient narrator is abandoned in favor of a more distant and objective style. Review the definitions of modernism that refer to experiments in form and the modernist reaction against positive knowledge. Perhaps, too, the form is a reflection of the Buddhist theme of "the uncertainty of the world." At this point, it is often helpful to view the woodcutter's version of events as depicted in the Kurosawa film. Students generally prefer Akutagawa's ambiguity to Kurosawa's rendering of a definitive version of events; further, students feel that the baby adoption by the end is forced and contrary to Akutagawa's dark vision.

D. How is the image of the great samurai tarnished? See the second definition of modernism. Then, students can point to the ways in which the tradition of the samurai has fallen. He is referred to as a "body," a "corpse," and an "unfortunate man" before the third testimony, that of his mother-in-law, finally refers to his rank of samurai. His symbols of power are gone (sword and arrows), and he is left only with a robber's rope and a lady's comb. We are told by the woodcutter that on the dried wound "a gad-fly [is] stuck fast." The image created is that of a domesticated animal pestered by stinging insects. His costume does not even stand out: the woodcutter claims that the slain warrior was wearing a "bluish silk kimono," but his wife mentions that his garb was "lilac-colored." There is also testimony about the wife's "lilac-colored suit" and Tajomaru's "dark blue silk kimono." The blurring seems to be intentional, a way to characterize the samurai as common. Further, the *bushido* code is meaningless as the samurai is "blinded by greed" for the buried treasure; he allows himself to be tricked and put into a position where he is unable to protect his wife. Finally, his testimony is suspect, and it appears he is lying in order to salvage his reputation.

E. How is the tradition of religion tarnished? First there is the merest suggestion that the Buddhist priest is a bit more observant of the things and inhabitants of this world than he claims to be. Second, Tajomaru describes the lady as a "Bodhisattva," one who has achieved enlightenment but who postpones nirvana to help enlighten others. The spirituality that such a term implies is thoroughly undercut, for the woman's heavenly beauty only inspires the brutal act of rape.

F. Relate the setting of the forest or grove to other works you have read. Some students respond that they associate Akutagawa's story with the Garden of Eden: Adam, Eve, and the snake of temptation all seem to be present. Many other students are quick to mention the hanky panky in Hester Prynne's forest and its symbolic value as a place of sin. Still others recall that Dante strayed from the true path into "the Dark wood of Error," necessitating a quick trip into the inferno. And as the samurai sinks into a "bottomless abyss of darkness" by the end, one thinks of nothing so much as Kurz in *Heart of Darkness*. When describing Kurz, Marlow (in his "pose of a Buddah ...without a lotus flower") notes that "His was an impenetrable darkness...like a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines." Of himself, Kurz says, "I am lying here in the dark waiting for death." But while Kurz is able to recognize his own life of "horror," the samurai continues to obscure the truth, perhaps even from himself, after death. Thus, one critic says that

"the innocuous grove becomes a symbol of life itself which is dark with human ambiguities," for in Akutagawa's "infernal vision of life," hell is no longer a place reserved exclusively for the physically dead.

G. What is the role of women in Akutagawa's vision? In the same way that there is a disparity between the ideal and the actual with respect to the samurai, there seems to be a similar ambiguity surrounding the woman. On the one hand, she is as lovely as a "Bodhisattva," but there is also the suggestion that she is a sword-wielding manipulator. What is clear, however, is that the brutal violation of the woman is at the center of this dark tale. Are women, as Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* suggests, "out of touch with truth" and "in a world of their own" and in need of protection from "some confounded fact [that] men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation." After all, if the women were to learn the truth, it "would start up and knock the whole thing (civilization?) over." Marlow lies to the Intended to keep the "horror" from her, but Akutagawa's lady is vulnerable, pushed violently into the depths of the darkness. Kurosawa's film seems to capture some of this; in particular, one scene depicts the woman on the ground with her cursing husband towering over her on one side and Tajomaru on the other, his legs bestraddled. The camera view is through the legs of Tajomaru, making the woman's denigration painfully apparent.

H. In what ways does Akutagawa invert medieval themes or motifs? The courtly love motif of *kaimami* or "view through a fence" seems to be alluded to when a providential "puff of wind" allows Tajomaru to catch "a glimpse of [the lady's] face." Rather than initiating a highly stylized courtly love story, however, the view is the catalyst for rape. Further, the Buddhist theme of reincarnation that prompts a rash of love suicides in both literature and life during the Edo period is inverted by Akutagawa as well. As the woman tells it, she is willing to commit murder-suicide, not so that she will be reborn in another life with her husband, but so that she can turn her back on shame and self-loathing; it is an end rather than a beginning.

I. Discuss the growing uselessness of language. The story is filled with half-truths and evasions designed to enhance each speaker's reputation. Tajomaru claims that he "won't keep anything from [us]," but it is a certainty that he has. He does describe how the samurai was "moved by [his] talk" and the samurai describes how his wife is entranced by the "comforting words" and "clever talk" of the criminal. Apparently, the criminal has no need of the forged steel of a sword, for his weapon is language; hence, he disposes of the fine blade and argues that it would be a "waste of words" to elaborate about how he did so. And if the power of language has shifted from the nobility to the peasants, the crumbling is evident in the rhetoric of the man and wife. The woman claims to "have no more strength to tell" what became of her after her failed suicide attempts, and her testimony ends with unanswered questions and fragments of thought that are lost in "violent sobbing." Further, during her brutal trial in the forest, she seems to expect no communication, for she relies on what she *believes* her husband's eyes reflect, rather than removing the leaves from his mouth to be certain. In fact, some students see her assessment of her husband's emotional state as simply a mirroring of her own feelings: the "cold light" and "look of loathing" are really *her* feelings reflected in his eyes. (This interpretation, of course, matches the original.) The husband, too, fails miserably in the realm of communication. He speaks of wanting to pardon Tajomaru "for these words alone," words in which the

criminal offers to slay the samurai's wife. And finally, the tale ends in silence, a "deep silence" like that of "the dead in their graves."

J. In review, compare Akutagawa's modern version to its medieval counterpart. What changes did Akutagawa make to "How a Man who was Accompanying his Wife to Tanba Province Got Trussed Up at Oeyama" and to what effect? Discuss the psychological complexity of the modern version.

Post-reading for "Rashomon"

1. Begin with the reading quiz. See attached.
2. As a result of the thorough approach to "In a Grove," students are better able to handle a more independent discussion of "Rashomon." Divide the class into two groups and ask them to form two concentric circles facing inward. The inner circle is the only group allowed to speak. They are to ask questions and offer insights about the story; the teacher tallies meaningful contributions, but does not take part in the discussion. The outer circle listens and makes notes about items that they wish to refute or extend when it becomes their turn to be in the inner circle. I shift the circles every ten minutes.
3. The following is a list of ideas that are discussed in the inner circle-outer circle forum:
 - A. What is the significance of the weather? In what way is it emblematic of the ills of society? Why are the servant's footsteps at the end described as being like "thunder"?
 - B. What is the function of the preponderance of animal images? How do they connect to the servant, the hag, and to society?
 - C. What tension exists between fate and free will in the story? The servant protests that he has no choice but to steal for a living, but a dilemma is at the story's center. What choice is he making? What indications are there that his choice is not his own, that fate or the environment has predetermined his fall?
 - D. Discuss the collapse of religious tradition in relation to the goal of Buddhism to ease the pain of this world by focusing on the promise of the next?
 - E. Discuss the function of the light and dark references.
 - F. Discuss the function of the images of ascent and descent.
 - G. What is a ghou? In what sense is such a horrible and mythical beast similar to the image of the dragon in merry old England. In this form, is evil an internal or external concept? Odysseus also battles monstrous creatures, but he claims that it is man's "belly" that gets him into his worst troubles. What does this mean and how does it connect to the servant's situation?
 - H. Discuss the old woman's explanation as it influences the servant.
 - I. In what way is the servant's sword symbolic of his desire to fight for the good of the world and slay its dragons?
 - J. How does the image of the pimple contrast with the nobility inspired by the sword?
 - K. Discuss the purpose of a wig and how it relates to the nature of evil, to appearance vs. reality. Who will purchase the wig once it is completed?

- L. Discuss the snake flesh in terms of the archetypal images of evil. What does the appreciation of the guards for this "delicacy" reveal about the ruling class?
- M. Discuss clothing and its role in defining humanity, in distinguishing men from beasts. As the old woman watches the servant descend into the darkness, we are left watching them both. How have we, too, been stripped?
- N. Explain the meaning of the last line—what synonyms would you use to explain the terms "unknowing" and "unknown"?
- O. Discuss paradigm shift and stages of cultural transformation (vestigial, dominant, and emergent aspects of culture) in relation to the story. What symbols do we have of each stage?
- P. Compare Akutagawa's version to "The Rasha Gate" to "About the Old Woman who Sold Fish at the Headquarters of the Crown Prince's Guard."
- Q. Compare "Rashomon" to "In a Grove" to review any of the previous issues.

Related Readings and Activities: In addition to the comparisons made previously, these two stories work extremely well with two other stories about similar paradigm shifts—Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" and Joyce's "Araby." The first story contains an experimental form that serves to obscure the truth and a central act of violence that is an emblem for a fallen tradition. "Araby" deals with the mythical, magical, and innocent view of love and religion that is consumed in the end by a society that is dominated by money, meaningless small talk, and darkness.

Writing Assignments:

- A. How far and in what ways do these stories support the idea that communication between human beings is impossible?
- B. An English author wrote: "It is the habit of my imagination to strive after as full a vision of the medium in which a character moves as of the character itself." Discuss the use made of the relationship between character and setting for character in these stories.
- C. Akutagawa frequently uses the devices of simile and metaphor to further his descriptions. Using the list provided, discuss the effect of Akutagawa's figurative language. See attachment.

"In a Grove"
Reading Check Quiz (A)

Quiz # _____
Boyce / E41B

DIRECTIONS: Place the letter of the best response on your answer sheet.

1. When questioned about his discovery of a dead body, the woodcutter testifies that there is no
 - a. evidence of a struggle.
 - b. horse near the body.
 - c. satchel or trunk nearby.
 - d. clue as to when the man died.

2. The body is found a little beyond a remote grove of
 - a. bamboo.
 - b. oak.
 - c. pine.
 - d. eucalyptus.

3. According to the Buddhist Priest, the slain man was carrying a
 - a. perfumed handkerchief
 - b. canteen of water.
 - c. document pouch.
 - d. quiver of 20 arrows.

4. The Buddhist Priest is able to describe the slain man's wife as
 - a. having a peculiar accent.
 - b. wearing a lilac-colored suit.
 - c. riding a limping stallion.
 - d. being strikingly beautiful.

5. The policeman recommends that the High Commissioner further investigate the slain man's
 - a. absent wife.
 - b. source of income.
 - c. business associates.
 - d. missing baggage.

6. The mother of the slain man's wife testifies that her daughter
 - a. was spirited and fun-loving.
 - b. was too young to get married.
 - c. had a jealous disposition.
 - d. had once loved Tajomaru.

7. Tajomaru confesses to luring the man and the woman into the grove with a story of
 - a. buried treasure.
 - b. injured orphans.
 - c. a scenic overlook.
 - d. a skilled sorcerer.

8. Tajomaru confesses that he targets the man and the woman as his next victims when he notices
 - a. the man's military rank.
 - b. the woman's beauty.
 - c. their apparent wealth.
 - d. their obvious exhaustion.

9. Tajomaru surprises the man and
 - a. fells him by slashing his legs and back.
 - b. pushes him into the prepared pit.
 - c. bashes him in the head with a rock.
 - d. ties him to a tree.

10. According to Tajomaru, after he violates her, the woman urges him to
 - a. kill her.
 - b. help her to commit ritual suicide.
 - c. marry her.
 - d. take her to the Shimizu Temple.

11. According to Tajomaru, before the husband dies, they
 - a. cross swords in a fair fight.
 - b. agree to hide the woman's shame.
 - c. could have been friends under different circumstances.
 - d. are both sickened by the woman's desperate cunning.

12. During his confession, Tajomaru accuses the High Commissioner of
 - a. covering up the woman's true identity.
 - b. killing people with his power and money.
 - c. profiting from the sale of stolen goods.
 - d. failing to keep the Stage Road safe.

13. The woman confesses that she
 - a. loved Tajomaru.
 - b. killed her husband.
 - c. fled with the bridal contract.
 - d. wanted to become a priestess.

14. According to the slain man, his wife
 - a. had planned the attack in advance.
 - b. urges Tajomaru to kill him.
 - c. exhibits dignity during the encounter.
 - d. attempts to protect him from harm.

15. According to the slain man, he died from
 - a. his own hand.
 - b. Tajomaru's sword thrusts.
 - c. exposure to the elements.
 - d. his wife's poison vial.

"Rashomon" Reading Quiz

DIRECTIONS: Place the letter of the correct response on your answer sheet.

1. A servant seeks shelter in the Rashomon because
 - a. thieves are chasing him.
 - b. a snow storm is approaching.
 - c. he has just lost his job and home.
 - d. the authorities want to question him.

2. The Rashomon is a
 - a. bazaar.
 - b. debtors' prison.
 - c. gate.
 - d. crumbling castle.

3. To enter the Rashomon, the servant must
 - a. tap out the secret code.
 - b. climb a flight of stairs.
 - c. wrench open the iron door.
 - d. crawl under the fallen beams.

4. The servant's most notable facial feature is a
 - a. missing left eyebrow.
 - b. jagged, puckered scar.
 - c. red, festering pimple.
 - d. sake-blossom nose.

5. The servant's only possession appears to be a
 - a. Sujaku tea bowl.
 - b. stolen loaf of bread.
 - c. tattered letter.
 - d. sword in a scabbard..

6. As he had expected, the servant finds inside the Rashomon
 - a. contraband goods.
 - b. abandoned corpses.
 - c. ancient artifacts worth salvaging.
 - d. the daimyo's retainers.

7. The servant also finds an old woman who is
 - a. burning incense.
 - b. ranting wildly.
 - c. making a wig.
 - d. weaving sedge mats.

8. When the old woman attempts to leave, the servant
 - a. offers her some of his food.
 - b. threatens to call the guards.
 - c. wrestles her to the ground.
 - d. reveals his family tattoo.

9. The old woman tells the servant about a young woman who had once
 - a. broken two teeth on a peach stone.
 - b. stolen a samurai's kimono obi.
 - c. forged a shimizu scroll.
 - d. sold snake flesh as fish.

10. The servant takes the old woman's
 - a. pine torch.
 - b. amulet.
 - c. wedding ring.
 - d. clothes.

Modernism

1

Modernism is a comprehensive but vague term for a movement that began to get under way in the closing years of the 19th c. and which has had a wide influence internationally during much of the 20th c. Some theorists suggest that the movement was at its height during the 1920s while others contend that it is not actually over.

As far as literature is concerned, modernism reveals a breaking away from established rules, traditions and conventions, fresh ways of looking at man's position and function in the universe and many (in some cases remarkable) experiments in form and style. It is particularly concerned with language and how to use it—representationally or otherwise.

(from *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*)

2

Modernism was the period that began when World War I blasted the past and history into apparent oblivion. Mathew Arnold wrote that "the darkling plain is here, in mud and barbed wire, with no joy, love, light, certitude, peace, nor help for pain, where ignorant armies clash by night. Only a bleak solipsism survives, each sole self projecting its own reality, unsure of its match with any other. The past is dead. God is dead." Writers portrayed these assumptions as well as the reality of characters alienated from all community, characters who could only create themselves by existing, by moving their existential reality up from the black wall of terror and nothing, acting and choosing. Individual consciousness reigned, though the unconsciousness, as Freud and Jung suggested, outweighed the conscious. Emotion and self-will superseded reason and virtue.

(from *The Harper Handbook to Literature*)

3

Modernism was a revolutionary movement encompassing all of the creative arts that had its roots in the 1890s; it was a transitional period during which artists and writers sought to liberate themselves from the constraints and polite conventions we associate with Victorianism. Modernism exploded onto the international scene in the aftermath of World War I, a traumatic transcontinental event that physically devastated and psychologically disillusioned the West in an entirely unprecedented way. A wide variety of new and experimental forms arose in architecture, dance, literature, music, painting, and sculpture.

As a literary movement, modernism gained prominence during and, especially, just after the First World War; it subsequently flourished in America and Europe throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Modernist authors sought to break away from conventions and traditions through experimentation with new literary forms, devices, and styles. They incorporated new psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung into their works and paid particular attention to language—both how it is used and how they believed it could or ought to be used. Their works reflected the pervasive sense of loss, disillusionment, and even despair in the wake of the Great War, hence their emphasis on historical discontinuity and the alienation of humanity. Although modernist

authors tended to perceive the world as fragmented, many—such as T.S. Eliot and James Joyce—believed they could help counter that disintegration through their works. Such writers viewed art as a potentially integrating, restorative force, a remedy for the uncertainty of the modern world. To this end, even while depicting disorder in their works, modernists also injected order by creating patterns of illusion, symbol, and myth. This rather exalted view of art fostered a certain elitism among modernists.

Modernism encompassed a number of literary endeavors and styles, many of which became known as movements in their own right, including Dadaism, expressionism, formalism, and surrealism. Modernist works are often called *avant-garde*, an appellation that has also been applied to more radically experimental postmodernist works written in the devastating wake of World War II.

(from *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*)

4

Modernism has been called the "tradition of the new," or an attempt to reject old habits of thought while expressing contemporary history in all its chaos, anxiety, technological development, and rapid change. It has also been called the "dehumanization of art," an overtly conscious style that prizes technical brilliance while ignoring traditional human values. Whether their style is elaborate or spare, wordy or elliptical, abstract or concrete, they display a highly self-conscious use of language and aim literally to transform the way we see the world.

The twentieth century's idea of modernity consists of a remarkable emphasis on *ways of knowing* rather than on objects of knowledge: briefly, on *how* we know *what* we know. This emphasis is accompanied by criticism of the preceding century's "positivism," seen as an excessive faith in the power of science and rational inquiry to discover unambiguous answers for all problems. Twentieth-century writers point out that positivism's belief in the scientific "rightness" of certain ideas made it blind to its own limits and bias. They suggest that a belief in infallible solutions only created inflexible attitudes which, transposed into politics, ultimately brought on the bloody conflict of World Wars I and II. Further, the industrial revolution of the nineteenth-century transformed social, political, and economic life—faster it seemed, than changes could peacefully be absorbed. To some it was a time of decadence and the loss of stable values. Others saw it more optimistically, as an era in which a progressive Europe would lead the rest of the world to its own pinnacle of achievement (a point of view obviously not shared by the colonized countries). In science, philosophy, social theory, and the arts, the nineteenth-century prepared both the evolution and the rebellion of the twentieth.

(from *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces, Vol. II*)

Similes and Metaphors

Rashomon and Other Stories

DEFINITION: The word metaphor comes from the Greek for “transfer” (*meta* and *trans* meaning “across”; *phor* and *fer* meaning “carry”): to carry something across. Hence a metaphor treats something as if it were something else. Money becomes a *nest egg*; a person who fails, a *washout*; a sandwich, a *submarine*. I.A. Richards describes this metaphorical transfer as *tenor* and *vehicle*, the general idea and its pictorial image. Shakespeare wrote:

That time of year thou mayest in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon these boughs which shake against the cold...

The *tenor* is the loss and the loneliness of age. The *vehicle* is a tree (or trees) in autumn. A metaphor implies a comparison. If Shakespeare had written “I am like a tree losing its leaves,” he would have stated the comparison and used a simile.

Metaphor seems to work at four levels, each with a different force. Suppose we write, “He swelled and displayed his finery.” We have cast a man in the image of a peacock to make his appearance and personality vivid. We have chosen one of four ways to make our metaphor:

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| 1. Simile: | He was <i>like</i> a peacock.
He displayed himself <i>like</i> a peacock.
He strutted <i>as if</i> he were a peacock. |
| 2. Plain Metaphor: | He was a peacock. |
| 3. Implied Metaphor: | He swelled and displayed his finery.
He swelled and ruffled his plumage. |
| 4. Dead Metaphor: | He strutted. |

Metaphor is how we picture things. Language is a tissue of dead metaphors. Language seems to have moved from specific names for things, like *lion*, to “he is a lion.” Consequently, all languages express many general ideas in dead metaphors. *Transfer* is a dead metaphor, in which the ferrying across on a haphazard raft resolves into the idea of carrying-across-ness. The writer’s gift is to revive the dead metaphor, to reveal the pictorial image sleeping like a seed in the living word.

Thus then in brief, metaphor and simile are both means of comparing things that are essentially unlike. In simile the comparison is expressed by the use of some word or phrase, such as “like,” “as,” “seems,” “than,” “similar to,” or “resembles;” in metaphor the comparison is implied—that is, the figurative term is substituted for or identified with the literal term.

(from *The Harper Handbook to Literature*)

Similes and Metaphors

Rashomon and Other Stories

DIRECTIONS: The similes and metaphorical language in "Rashomon" and "In a Grove" are listed below. Working together in groups determine how to compare and contrast the metaphoric language in these tales. Devise an outline for a comparative paper on this topic. Consider how you want to organize the paper, that is, block style or point-by-point. Be prepared to present your argument and main ideas.

"In a Grove"

- "The fallen bamboo-blades around it were stained with bloody blossoms." (19)
 "Truly human life is as evanescent as the morning dew or a flash of lightning." (20)
 "...she looked like a Bodhisattva" (23)
 "You kill people with your power, with your money." (23)
 "...he was blinded by greed." (24)
 "She said it was more trying than death to have her shame known to two men." (26)
 "...her burning eyes..." (26)
 "...I have never thought of her answer without burning with anger and jealousy." (31)

"Rashomon"

- "When the sky overhead turned red in the afterglow of the departed sun, they (birds) looked like so many grains of sesame flung across the gate." (36)
 "He would be brought to this gate and thrown away like a stray dog." (37)
 "The wind in the evening dusk howled through the columns of the gate." (38)
 "...huddling cat-like...he watched and waited." (38)
 "As quietly as a lizard, the servant crept up to the top of the stairs. Crouching on all fours, and stretching his neck as far as possible..." (39)
 The corpses showed "no more signs of life than so many clay dolls." (39)
 The ghoulish hag "began to pull out the long hairs one by one, as a monkey kills the lice of her young." (40)
 "His hatred of evil flared up like the piece of pine wood which the old woman had stuck in the floor." (40)
 "...there was no more flesh on [her arms] than on the shanks of a chicken." (41)
 "She trembled as if in a fit..."
 "This thought cooled his boiling anger..." (41)
 "...with the sharp red eyes of a bird of prey." (42)
 "She moved her lips, which were wrinkled into her nose, as though she were chewing something." (42)
 "...a panting sound like the cawing of a crow came from her throat..." (42)
 "The thunder of his descending steps pounded..." (43)