Remarks on Akutagawa’s Works

—“In a Grove”—

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[Introduction]

“In a Grove” (1922) is a well-known story as the main part of the movie, “Rashomon” by a famous director Kurosawa Akira, which won the grand prize at the 12th International Film Festival at Venice. The movie influenced Hollywood to make a western.

“In a Grove” consists of seven short narratives, four testimonies and three confessions before a High Police Commissioner. Three confessions seem to be contradicted each other, and so, almost scholars have considered this story a mystery and looked for the truth in it. Their tries, however, hardly succeeded unfortunately. Here, I will try to find another truth on beauty in this story. This paper is based on my lecture at Dickinson College in 1987.

I wish to express my great thanks to Professor Roselee Bundy for her kindly correcting my poor English and Secretary Elaine Mellen for her kindly typing my lecture note.

The text I use here is “Rashom and other stories” (Translated by Takashi Kojima. Introduction by Howard Hibbet. Published in Japan
Testimony of a Woodcutter before a High Police Commissioner.

Yes, sir. Certainly, it was I who found the body. This morning, as usual, I went to cut my daily quota of cedars, when I found the body in a grove in a hollow in the mountains. The exact location? About 150 meters off the Yamashina stage road. It’s an out-of-the-way grove of bamboo and cedars.

The body was lying flat on its back dressed in a bluish silk kimono and a wrinkled head-dress of the Kyoto style. A single sword-stroke had pierced the breast. The fallen bamboo-blades around it were stained with bloody blossoms. No, the blood was no longer running. The wound had dried up, I believe. And also, a gad-fly was stuck fast there, hardly noticing my footsteps.

You ask me if I saw a sword or any such thing?

No, nothing, sir. I found only a rope at the root of a cedar near by. And...well, in addition to a rope, I found a comb. That was all. Apparently he must have made a battle of it before he was murdered, because the grass and fallen bamboo-blades had been trampled down all around.

“A horse was near by?”

No, sir. It’s hard enough for a man to enter, let alone a horse.

(Remark 1)

“The presentation of the murder (the case).”—The story begins when a woodcutter found the body. Generally speaking, there are three elements in a story. They are a case, a location (scene) and time. There are three elements in his testimony, too.

(1) The case (the murder—a body was found.)

(2) The location—In a grove, out-of-the-way of the Yamashina stage road. Yamashina was the next station from Kyoto to the northern district facing to the Japan Sea.
(3) The time—In Heian period (784-1192). The same age as "Rashomon."

The body—Stabbed in the chest by a single sword-stroke. He was not murdered this morning because his wound had already dried up when the body was discovered.

(Remark 2)

"What the woodcutter found besides the body."—They were a rope and a comb, which means that the body had been fastened with the rope, and a woman had committed the crime.

(Remark 3)

"Why did the police ask the woodcutter about a horse?"—Because the police considered the murdered a samurai as he must have fought a battle before he was murdered. Samurais (almost, high-class) travel on horseback. According to this examination by the police, we can easily understand the location was in the isolated grove where a man can’t enter on horseback.

Remark 4)

"A gad-fly"—We can also see a cricket in "Rashomon" or a dragonfly in Mori Ogai’s "Abe Family." "A gad-fly was stuck fast there, hardly noticing my footsteps" means that no one is there, besides, how cruel the sight a gad-fly stuck on the wound is.

According to the first testimony, we can see the case, the location and the time in "In a Grove." Akutagawa starts this story with its three elements cautiously. We can believe that the woodcutter’s testimony is true, because he doesn’t need to lie.


The time? Certainly, it was about noon yesterday, sir. The unfortunate man was on the road from Sekiyama to Yamashina. He was walking toward Sekiyama with a woman accompanying him on horseback, who I have since learned was his wife. A scarf hanging from her head hid her from view. All I saw was the color of her clothes,
a lilac-colored suit. Her horse was a sorrel with a fine mane. The lady's height? Oh, about four feet five inches. Since I am a Buddhist priest, I took little notice about her details. Well, the man was armed with a sword as well as a bow and arrows. And I remember that he carried some twenty odd arrows in his quiver.

Little did I expect that he would meet such a fate. Truly human life is as evanescent as the morning dew or a flash of lightning. My words are inadequate to express my sympathy for him.

(Remark 1)

"The spot where the priest met the couple."—Can you find any contradiction in the description of the spot? Which is right in the following?

(1) The unfortunate man was on the road from Sekiyama to Yamashina.

(2) He was walking toward Sekiyama.

In the original, the priest was on the road from Sekiyama to Yamashina, and the couple was going to Sekiyama from Yamashina. And so, they encountered. (1) is the mistranslation. The subject in (1) is "I" (the priest), not "the unfortunate man."

Subjects are often omitted in Japanese sentences. In this case, "the priest" or "I" is omitted in the original. "Sekiyama" is also called "Osakayama," which means the pass-through or the border-line between Kyoto (contains Yamashina, the vicinity of Kyoto) and Shiga outside Kyoto.

(Remark 2)

"The horse and lady"—we can also find a couple of mistranslations here.

(1) Her horse was not a sorrel but a white one (Tsukige in the original), and not with a fine mane but maneless. Akutagawa writes "hoshigami," which means the hair of Buddhist priests. The hair of their head are always shaved.

(2) The lady's height is translated as "about four feet five inches." The police asked the height of the horse, not the lady's in the original.
The height of the horse was four feet and five inches, measured from hoof to back. In those days, Japanese horses were not very tall. If this means the lady’s height, she is as small as a little girl. Even if Japanese women were not very tall in those days, such a little woman might be unusual. This problem is important because it concerns the character and charm of the lady named Masago.

(3) “Since I am a Buddhist priest, I took little notice about her details” is not right. “Her” should be omitted in this translation, because these are the details of the horse. He took little notice about the horse’s details since he was a priest, not a samurai or a horseman. (Remark 3)

“What the priest testified.”—There are three points in it.

(1) He saw the couple. But he didn’t see the lady’s face because of a scarf hanging from her hat.

(2) He noticed the horse which was white and maneless.

(3) He remembered more precisely about the husband who was armed with a sword as well as a bow and arrows.

I would like to pay attention to his conclusion. He concluded his testimony by remarking on the sorry and the evanescent fate of human beings. This is certainly suitable for a Buddhist priest. But the role of the priest in this story is introducing this couple before the case of the murder, except the lady’s face, which would be seen by a lustful brigand afterward.

We can see this testimony is also true.

[Text 3] Testimony of a Policeman before the High Police Commissioner

The man that I arrested? He is a notorious brigand called Tajo-maru. When I arrested him, he had fallen off his horse. He was groaning on the bridge at Awataguchi. The time? It was in the early hours of last night. For the record, I might say that the other day I tried to arrest him, but unfortunately he escaped. He was wearing a dark blue silk kimono and a large plain sword. And, as you see, he
got a bow and arrows somewhere. You say that this bow and these arrows look like the ones owned by the dead man? Then Tajomaru must be the murderer. The bow wound with leather strips, the black lacquered quiver, the seventeen arrows with hawk feathers—these were all in his possession I believe. Yes, sir, the horse is, as you say, a sorrel with a fine mane. A little beyond the stone bridge I found the horse grazing by the roadside, with his long rein dangling. Surely there is some providence in his having been thrown by the horse.

Of all the robbers prowling around Kyoto, this Tajomaru has given the most grief to the women in town. Last autumn a wife who came to the mountain back of the Pindora of the Toribe Temple, presumably to pay a visit, was murdered, along with a girl. It has been suspected that it was his doing. If this criminal murdered the man, you cannot tell what he may have done with the man’s wife. May it please your honor to look into this problem as well.

(Remark 1)

“Tajomaru, a brigand”—There are three points in the testimony of a policeman.

(1) He had a bow and arrows when the policeman arrested him, besides the dark blue kimono and the large plain sword, which he was also wearing when this policeman tried to arrest him on the other day. (These are not so clear in the translation.)

The bow and arrows looked like the ones owned by the dead man. And so, the policeman believed that those in the Tajomaru’ possession belonged to the deadman. The details of the bow and the arrows had been given by the priest.

(2) Tajomaru had fallen off his horse and was groaning on the stone bridge at Awataguchi where there was an entrance to Kyoto. The horse (grazing by the roadside) was also the same as that described by the priest. (Although the translation is different from the original, as I pointed before.)

According to these evidences, the policeman concluded that Tajomaru murdered the man.
Remarks on Akutagawa’s Works

(Remark 2)

“What the policeman added”—Tajomaru had given great grief to the women in Kyoto. It had been suspected that he had murdered a lady and her maid (not a wife and a girl) at the mountain behind the Pindora of the Toribe Temple. The woman presumably had come to worship at the temple. If he murdered the man, we can imagine what he might have done with the man’s wife.

Can we consider that the testimony of the policeman is true? It contains guesses. Can we call Tajomaru the murderer of the man because he had the same bow and arrows as the man had? To steal these doesn’t always mean to murder the carrier of them. (cf.) This policeman is “Homen” in the original, which means a released criminal to help the police.

[Text 4] Testimony of an Old Woman Before the High Police Commissioner

Yes, sir, that corpse is the man who married my daughter. He does not come from Kyoto. He was a samurai in the town of Kokufu in the province of Wakasa. His name was Kanazawa no Takehiko, and his age was twenty-six. He was of a gentle disposition, so I am sure he did nothing to provoke the anger of others.

My daughter? Her name is Masago, and her age is nineteen. She is a spirited, fun-loving girl, but I am sure she has never known any man except Takehiko. She has a small, oval, dark-completed face with a mole at the corner of her left eye.

Yesterday Takehiko left for Wakasa with my daughter. What bad luck it is that things should have come to such a sad end! What has become of my daughter? I am resigned to giving up my son-in-law as lost, but the fate of my daughter worries me sick. For heaven’s sake leave no stone unturned to find her. I hate that robber Tajomaru, or whatever his name is. Not only my son-in-law, but my daughter… (Her later words were drowned in tears.)

(Remark 1)
“The man, the husband”—In this chapter, the dead man and his wife were cleared by the testimony of the wife’s mother. I will notice several things about the husband.

1. He was a samurai, named Kanazawa-no-Takehiro (not Takehiko) from Kokubu (a provincial capital) of Wakasa (the northern district to Kyoto, facing the Japan Sea) and on the way to this home town.

2. He was of a gentle disposition and he had not provoked the anger of others.

3. He might be a simple person who was apt to be deceived (because he was raised in the countryside).

4. He might be skillful in using a sword, but not so high-spirited because of his gentle disposition.

These points will be connected with the following chapters.

(Remark 2)

“The lady, the wife”—She is one of the most impressive woman whom Akutagawa writes about. Here, we see her at three points.

1. She is nineteen, and named Masago. In the original, Akutagawa writes, “She is no less spirited than men,” and doesn’t write “fun-loving girl.” Masago is not a “fun-loving girl” at any rate. On the contrary, she might have dark and mysterious emotions in the depth of her mind.

2. She has never known any man except Takehiro. This testimony is very important in the following two points. One learns that the murder is not caused by a triple love affair. The other concerns the mind of Masago when Tajomaru forces her to yield to him.

3. She has a small, oval, dark-completed face with a mole at the corner of her left eye. A mole adds something strangely charming to her face.

According to the above three points, we can see she is a very impressive and charming girl, that’s to say, “the beauty of the wild or of brutality” that Akutagawa loves and writes about in the other stories and essays.

We will be interested in the encounter between such a couple and
Tajomaru.

(Remark 3)

"An old woman, the mother"—She worries about her daughter more deeply than mourning for her son-in-law. This might be natural for such an old mother. And so she is convinced that Tajomaru murdered her son-in-law and did something bad to her daughter, we can believe that her testimony about the couple is true.

[Text 5] Tajomaru's Confession

[Text 5-1]

I killed him, but not her. Where's she gone? I can't tell. Oh, wait a minute. No torture can make me confess what I don't know. Now things have come to such a head, I won't keep anything from you.

Yesterday a little past noon I met that couple. Just then a puff of wind blew, and raised her hanging scarf, so that I caught a glimpse of her face. Instantly it was again covered from my view. That may have been one reason; she looked like a Bodhisattva. At that moment I made up my mind to capture her even if I had to kill her man.

Why? To me killing isn't a matter of such great consequence as you might think. When a woman is captured, her man has to be killed anyway. In killing, I use the sword I wear at my side. Am I the only one who kills people? You, you don't use your swords. You kill people with your power, with your money. Sometimes you kill them on the pretext of working for their good. It's true they don't bleed. They are in the best of health, but all the same you've killed them. It's hard to say who is a greater sinner, you or me. (An ironical smile.)

But it would be good if I could capture a woman without killing her man. So, I made up my mind to capture her, and do my best not to kill him. But it's out of the question on the Yamashina stage road. So I managed to lure the couple into the mountains.

It was quite easy. I became their traveling companion, and I told them there was an old mound in the mountain over there, and that I
had dug it open and found many mirrors and swords. I went on to
tell them I'd buried the things in a grove behind the mountain, and
that I'd like to sell them at a low price to anyone who would care to
have them. Then...you see, isn't greed terrible? He was beginning to
be moved by my talk before he knew it. In less than half an hour
they were driving their horse toward the mountain with me.

When he came in front of the grove, I told them that the treasures
were buried in it, and I asked them to come and see. The man had
no objection—he was blinded by greed. The woman said she would
wait on horseback. It was natural for her to say so, at the sight of a
thick grove. To tell you the truth, my plan worked just as I wished,
so I went into the grove with him, leaving her behind alone.

(Remark 1)

"The scene Tajomaru saw the woman"—"Just then a puff of wind
blew, and raised her hanging scarf, so that I caught a glimpse of her
face. Instantly it was again covered from my view." There are two
points in this confession.

(1) In the case of the priest, he couldn't see her face because of
the scarf hanging from her hat. That's suitable for a priest who should
obey the Buddhist commandment of asceticism. But, in the case of
Tajomaru who is lustful, a puff of wind blew and raised her hanging
scarf. This happening is of course, made by Akutagawa in order to
make the motive for the case.

(2) Tajomaru saw her face at a glance. Her face looked very
beautiful when he caught a glimpse of it. Tajomaru said that she
looked like a Buddhist saint (who is merciful and beautiful). And so,
Tajomaru might sense something noble, beautiful and merciful about
her. When we compare this with her mother's testimony about her
face, we can understand that her face becomes more charming.

(Remark 2)

"Tajomaru's irony"—"Am I the only one who kills people? You,
you don't use your swords. You kill people with your power, with
your money. Sometimes you kill them on the pretext of working for
their good...It's hard to say who is a greater sinner, you or me. (An ironical smile.)"

This is a kind of protest of Tajomaru against the power in those days as showing his ironical smile and also is Akutagawa's irony to the power in these days. This concerns the character of Tajomaru. **(Remark 3)**

"You see, isn't greed terrible?—This is one of Tajomaru's philosophies. The irony we noted is also out of his philosophies. Tajomaru, the brigand, has an interesting character trait such as uttering his irony even if it is common in the world. Certainly, most people might be led by a terrible greed to perish at times.

**[Text 5-2]**

The grove is only bamboo for some distance. About fifty yards ahead there's rather open clump of cedars. It was a convenient spot for my purpose. Pushing my way through the grove, I told him a plausible lie that the treasures were buried under the cedars. When I told him this, he pushed his laborious way toward the slender cedar visible through the grove. After a while the bamboo thinned out, and we came to where a number of cedars grew in a row. As soon as we got there, I seized him from behind. Because he was a trained, sword-bearing warrior, he was quite strong, but he was taken by surprise, so there was no help for him. I soon tied him up to the root of a cedar. Where did I get a rope? Thank heaven, being a robber, I had a rope with me, since I might have to scale a wall at any moment. Of course it was easy to stop him from calling out by gagging his mouth with fallen bamboo leaves.

When I disposed of him, I went to his woman and asked her to come and see him, because he seemed to have been suddenly taken sick. It's needless to say that this plan also worked well. The woman, her sedge hat off, came into the depths of the grove, where I led her by the hand. The instant she caught sight of her husband, she drew a small sword. I've never seen a woman of such violent temper. If I'd
been off guard, I’d have got a thrust in my side. I dodged, but she kept on slashing at me. She might have wounded me deeply or killed me. But I’m Tajomaru. I managed to strike down her small sword without drawing my own. The most spirited woman is defenseless without a weapon. At last I could satisfy my desire for her without taking her husband’s life.

Yes, ...without taking his life. I had no wish to kill him. I was about to run away from the grove, leaving the woman behind in tears, when she frantically clung to my arm. In broken fragments of words, she asked that either her husband or I die. She said it was more trying than death to have her shame known to two men. She gasped out that she wanted to be the wife of whichever survived. Then a furious desire to kill him seized me. (Gloomy excitement.)

(Remark 1)

“The woman named Masago”—“The instant she caught sight of her husband, she drew a small sword.” Tajomaru confessed that he had never seen a woman of such violent temper, just as her mother mentioned that Masago was no less spirited than men.

(Remark 2)

“The violent scene is not depicted”—Tajomaru told only the fact, as “At last I could satisfy my desire for her...” It is very important that Akutagawa doesn’t depict such a scene. Although we can think that Tajomaru wouldn’t confess it precisely because of the presence of the High Police Commissioner and of his character. Consequently we should think that the scene is not depicted because Akutagama was not interested in such a scene, but in the mental condition of the woman in such a terrible case. Here is a great difference between pornography and this story.

(Remark 3)

“What did Masago ask Tajomaru?—She asked that either her husband or Tajomaru die. She said it was more trying than death to have her shame known to two men. And she wanted to be the wife of whichever survived. Can you think that her asking is very strange?
It is strange indeed. Because, now her husband was tied. Tajomaru was free to kill him or not, and to untie and fight with him or not. And so, her asking under this circumstance, means to ask Tajomaru to kill her husband. Here, we might be able to find a peculiar psychology of the woman in such a terrible case. It might be natural for Masago who has a violent temper and had never known any man except her husband.

Consequently Tajomaru wanted to kill her husband. Despite the fact that he could run away from the grove without killing the husband, why was he seized by the furious desire to kill the man? Because the intense charm of Masago seized him. "(Gloomy excitement)" explains Tajomaru's feeling at this time very well.

[Text 5-3]

Telling you in this way, no doubt I seem a crueler man than you. But that's because you didn't see her face. Especially her burning eyes at that moment. As I saw her eye to eye, I wanted to make her my wife even if I were to be struck by lightning. I wanted to make her my wife...this single desire filled my mind. This was not only lust, as you might think. At that time if I'd had no other desire than lust, I'd surely not have minded knocking her down and running away. Then I wouldn't have stained my sword with his blood. But the moment I gazed at her face in the dark grove, I decided not to leave there without killing him.

But I didn't like to resort to unfair means to kill him. I untied him and told him to cross swords with me. (The rope that was found at the root of the cedar is the rope I dropped at the time.) Furious with anger, he drew his thick sword. And quick as thought, he sprang at me ferociously, without speaking a word. I needn't tell you how our fight turned out. The twenty-third stroke...please remember this. I'm impressed with this fact still. Nobody under the sun has ever clashed swords with me twenty strokes. (A cheerful smile.)

When he fell, I turned toward her, lowering my blood-tained sword.
But to my great astonishment she was gone. I wondered to where she had run a way. I looked for her in the clump of cedars. I listened, but heard only a groaning sound from the throat of the dying man.

As soon as we started to cross swords, she may have run away through the grove to call for help. When I thought of that, I decided it was a matter of life and death to me. So, robbing him of his sword, and bow and arrows, I ran out to the mountain road. There I found her horse still grazing quietly. It would be a mere waste of words to tell you the later details, but before I entered town I had already parted with the sword. That's all my confession. I know that my head will be hung in chains anyway, so put me down for the maximum penalty. (A defiant attitude.)

(Remark 1)

"The expression of her face"—Her face, especially its burning eyes, at that moment seized Tajomaru. He confessed that he wanted to make her his wife even if he were to be struck by lightning. He emphasized that this was not only lust. If he had no other desire than lust, he would surely not have minded knocking her down and running away.

Consequently Tajomaru was not a man who had only lust to capture women, but was a man who was impressed by the burning eyes or mysterious charms of women.

(Remark 2)

"How Tajomaru confessed the fighting between him and the man."
—He confessed that nobody under the sun had ever clashed swords with him twenty strokes. What does his confession about the fighting mean?

1) It means not only that two men were very strong, but also that Tajomaru praised the honor of the dead.

3) And so, it means that he emphasized that he was a strong and an honorable man to untie and fight with the man and to praise him. We can understand that this confession involves Tajomaru's self-dramatization. But it is very interesting that it sounds true. "(A cheerful
Remarks on Akutagawa's Works

smile)" shows that Tajomaru has also a charming character. Here is a kind of heroism in Tajomaru.

By the way, there is an opinion that Tajomaru and Masago resemble like Don-Jose and Carmen, written by P. Mérimee whom Akutagawa liked very much.

There is a great difference between "In a Grove" and "Carmen," but we can see that a man might be seized by the mysterious charms of such women as Masago or Carmen and then perish.

(Remark 3)

"The running away of Masago"—Why didn't she wait until the fighting ended? Did she tell Tajomaru a lie? Did she come to hate both men? Would she like to put only herself in a safe place? We can't understand why she ran away.

Tajomaru thought that she had run away to call for help. But Akutagawa doesn't write that she came back to the location with the police.

(Remark 4)

"Her horse was still grazing quietly."—Why did she run away on horseback when earlier she had ridden on the horse? Couldn't she do this because she was only accompanying her bushand on a horse before? We can't believe that she can't ride horseback by herself. She should know such martial art as how to use a small sword and how to ride horseback. At any rate, her running away on foot is strange. Afterward we will learn that Masago might have run away into the depth of the grove. If so, it is also strange.

(Remark 5)

"Tajomaru had already parted with the sword of the dead man before he entered town."—We can understand that he sold or exchanged the sword for money or food. But we must notice that the sword will be an important evidence for the murder. Tajomaru doesn't however, have it. And so, it will be difficult to find who killed the man.

(Remark 6)

"The last sentence and (a defiant attitude)."—The note "defiant" is
not suitable here. It should be “proud” according to the original. He believed by himself to be a strong and honorable man. He had defeated his enemy in a fair fight, and confessed all he did “truthfully.” Besides, he wanted the maximum penalty.

Even if his confession and attitude are called self-dramatized, they make him a nice guy. We can’t decide whether his confession is true or not. Did he in fact kill the man? Who killed the man? This is a crucial problem.

[Text 6] Confession of a Woman Who Has Come to the Simizu Temple

[Text 6-1]

That man in the blue silk kimono, after forcing me to yield to him, laughed mockingly as he looked at my bound husband. How horrified my husband must have been! But no matter how hard he struggled in agony, the rope cut into him all the more tightly. In spite of myself I ran stumblingly toward his side. Or rather I tried to run toward him, but the man instantly knocked me down. Just at that moment I saw an indescribable light in my husband’s eyes. Something beyond expression...his eyes make me shudder even now. That instantaneous look of my husband, who couldn’t speak a word, told me all his heart. The flash in his eyes was neither anger nor sorrow...only a cold light, a look of loathing. More struck by the look in his eyes than by the blow of the thief, I called out in spite of myself and fell unconscious.

In the course of time I came to, and found that the man in blue silk was gone. I saw only my husband still bound to the root of the cedar. I raised myself from the bamboo-blades with difficulty, and looked into his face; but the expression in his eyes was just the same as before.

Beneath the cold contempt in his eyes, there was hatred. Shame, grief, and anger...I don’t know how to express my heart at that time. Reeling to my feet, I went up to my husband.

(Remark 1)

“Simizu Temple”—“Simizu Temple” is not right but “Kiyomizu.”
Kiyomizu is one of the most famous temples in Kyoto since the Heian period.

(Remark 2)

"The most impressive description on this page."—It is "the flash in his eyes was neither anger nor sorrow...only a cold, light look of loathing," which makes her fall unconscious. The italic part should be "only a cold light of contempt for me" according to the original.

(Remark 3)

"The cold light in the eyes of the husband"—What is this? Why was she struck by the light so strongly?

Some say that it is an expression of her husband’s jealousy. It might be true. But I think that this cold light is something beyond expression, neither anger nor sorrow, not even jealousy. In the cold light in his eyes, there is a complex, strong feeling, containing jealousy, contempt and hatred.

We remember that Masago also had such impressive eyes. Akutagawa calls them “burning eyes.” We can think that “the cold light” in his eyes contrasts with “the burning eyes” of Masago. They are both polar eyes and equivalent. One strikes Tajomaru and the other strikes Masago. Even if their confessions are not based on facts, such the burning and cold light in their eyes definitely attract readers, because of literary truth. We can see that the light in their eyes makes the characters so vivid.

[Text 6-2]

"Takehiro," I said to him, "since things have come to this pass, I cannot live with you. I’m determined to die,...but you must die, too. You saw my shame. I can’t leave you alive as you are."

This was all I could say. Still he went on gazing at me with loathing and contempt. My heart breaking, I looked for his sword. It must have been taken by the robber. Neither his sword nor his bow and arrows were to be seen in the grove. But fortunately my small sword was lying at my feet. Raising it over head, once more I said,
“Now give me your life. I’ll follow you right away.”

When he heard these words, he moved his lips with difficulty. Since his mouth was stuffed with leaves, of course his voice could not be heard at all. But at a glance I understood his words. Despising me, his look said only, “Kill me.” Neither conscious nor unconscious, I stabbed the small sword through the lilac-colored kimono into his breast.

Again at this time I must have fainted. By the time I managed to look up, he had already breathed his last—still in bonds. A streak of sinking sunlight streamed through the clump of cedars and bamboos, and shone on his pale face. Gulping down my sobs, I untied the rope from his dead body. And...and what has become of me since I have no more strength to tell you. Anyway I hadn’t the strength to die. I stabbed my own throat with the small sword, I threw myself into a pond at the foot of the mountain, and I tried to kill myself in many ways. Unable to end my life, I am still living in dishonor. (A lonely smile.) Worthless as I am, I must have been forsaken even by the most merciful Kwannon. I killed my own husband. I was violated by the robber. Whatever can I do? Whatever can I...I...(Gradually, violent sobbing.)

(Remark 1)

What did Masago do for her husband?”—After she came to herself, she noticed the same expression in his eyes as before. She asked him to die. When he heard these words, he moved his lips with difficulty. Since his mouth was stuffed with leaves, of course, his voice could not be heard at all.

Here I would like to ask why she didn’t rid his mouth of leaves and untie as soon as she could? Until the last, she didn’t so. It is quite a strange attitude. I think that there are two points in the reason why she did not release him.

(1) Because of being still stuffed with leaves, he couldn’t help presenting his feeling by means of the light in his eyes. That’s to say that Akutagawa wanted to depict the light in his eyes, not his words.

(2) If he could speak, what sort of the words would we hear from
him? In “The Konjaku-Monogatari” on which “In a Grove” is also based, like “Rashomon,” the wife, after being violated, told her husband that he was unreliable, and she couldn’t expect with him if he should be more cautious since such a terrible accident had occurred. The husband couldn’t object to the blame of his wife. And he went to Tanba (his hometown, not Wakasa) with his wife. This story, the source of “In a Grove” has didactic ending (“Be careful in traveling”) like other many stories of “The Konjaku-monogatari” Akutagawa disliked a didactic story, and so, he decided not to have the husband speak. His silence with the cold light in his eyes was far from the objection to the didactic blame of the wife and made her fall unconscious.

(Remark 2)

“Masago’s feelings”—There are three points to them.

(1) There are two notes in parenthesis, “A lonely smile” and suddenly (not “gradually” in the original) violent sobbing.” The former changed to the latter suddenly. The description stresses Masago’s passionate and violent temper. If she did it “gradually,” she would seem a mere common woman.

(2) She fell unconscious twice. It is said that very passionate women often fall unconscious. In these cases, there are two reasons for Masago to do so. One is to depict her strong shock by the light in her husband’s eyes. The other is to depict her passionate character strongly.

(3) But, did she truly fall unconscious twice? She might claim to have fallen unconsciousness twice in order to conceal the truth of the accident.

(Remark 3)

“The last scene of the dead husband”—“A streak of sinking sunlight streamed through the clump of cedars and bamboos, and shone on his pale face.” This description is so delicate and beautiful that we can say each word and phrase is perfect. Here, we can find Japanese lyricism in which most of Akutagawa’s works have. The sun is sinking and its light streams through fine leaved cedars and bamboo.
Here are quietness, loneliness and delicacy.

[Text 7] Story of the Murdered Man, as Told Through a Medium

[Text 7-1]

After violating my wife, the robber, sitting there, began to speak comforting to her. Of course I couldn’t speak. My whole body was tied fast to the root of a cedar. But meanwhile I winked at her many times, as much as to say “Don’t believe the robber”. I wanted to convey some such meaning to her. But my wife, sitting dejectedly on the bamboo leaves, was looking hard at her lap. To all appearance, she was listening to his words. I was agonized by jealousy. In the meantime the robber went on with his clever talk, from one subject to another. The robber finally made his hold, brazen proposal. “Once your virtue is stained, you won’t get along well with your husband, so won’t you be my wife instead? It’s my love for you that made me be violent toward you.”

While the criminal talked, my wife raised her face as if in a trance. She had never looked so beautiful as at that moment. What did my beautiful wife say in answer to him while I was sitting bound there? I am lost in space, but I have never thought of her answer without burning with anger and jealousy. Truly she said,...“Then take me away with you wherever you go.”

This is not the whole of her sin. If that were all, I would not be tormented so much in the dark. When she was going out of the grove as if in a dream, her hand in the robber’s, she suddenly turned pale, and pointed at me tied to the root of the cedar, and said, “Kill him! I cannot marry you as long as he lives.” “Kill him!” she cried many times, as if she had gone crazy. Even now these words threaten to blow me headlong into the bottomless abyss of darkness. Has such a hateful thing come out of a human mouth ever before? Have such cursed words ever struck a human ear, even once? Even once such a... (A sudden cry of scorn.) At these words the robber himself turned pale. “Kill him,” she cried, clinging to his arms. Looking hard at her’
he answered neither yes nor no...but hardly had I thought about his answer before she had been knocked down into the bamboo leaves. (Again a cry of scorn.) Quietly folding his arms, he looked at me and said, "What will you do with her? Kill her or save her? You have only to nod. Kill her?" For these words alone I would like to pardon his crime.

(Remark 1)

"She had never looked so beautiful as at that moment."—The husband discovered the beauty he had never known when she raised her face as if in a trance. Why did she look so beautiful? In brief, because she possessed what might be called the beauty of unchastity. In such a terrible case, woman may show such incredible beauty. As her mother had said, Masago had never known any men except her husband.

Tajomaru was the first man for her except her husband.

Besides, Tajomaru talked to her very sweetly and put her in a trance.

(Remark 2)

"Te feelings of the murdered."—He says, "I am lost in space." In the original, "I am wandering in Chuu." "Chuu" is a Buddhist word. It means the dark space between this world and the other world in which dead people wonder for forty-nine days.

The dead husband couldn't go to the other world because he couldn't forget his feeling from the world. This is an ambivalent feeling, anger, jealousy and even the feeling to admire her beauty, and especially because he had heard her voice, "Then take me away with you wherever you go" and "kill him! I cannot marry you as long as he lives."

(Remark 3)

"She cried 'kill him!' many times."—She and Tajomaru didn't confess that she had spoken such words. We don't know whether Masago did so or not in fact. But it is important to notice that her husband claimed he had heard such cries. And we realize that he believes he truly heard such cries. This is a question not of fact but of truth or
of literary reality.

Takehiro said, "Even now these words threaten to blow me headlong into the bottomless abyss of darkness. Has such a hateful thing come out of a human mouth ever before? Have such cursed words ever struck a human ear, even once?"

His words have a strong and pressing tone and make us believe Masago had indeed demanded her husband be killed. Such cries move us to feel that there is something mysterious, terrible and beautiful in the depth of her mind. I called it the beauty of unchastity in which her beauty and sin exist together.

[Text 7-2]

While I hesitated, she shrieked and ran into the depths of the grove. The robber instantly snatched at her, but he failed even to grasp her sleeve.

After she ran away, he took up my sword, and my bow and arrows. With a single stroke he cut one of my bonds. I remember his mumbling, "My fate is next." Then he disappeared from the grove. All was silent after that. No, I heard someone crying. Untying the rest of my bonds, I listened carefully, and I noticed that it was my own crying. (Long silence.)

I raised my exhausted body from the root of the cedar. In front of me there was shining the small sword which my wife had dropped. I took it up and stabbed it into my breast. A bloody lump rose to my mouth, but I didn’t feel any pain. When my breast grew cold, everything was as silent as the dead in their graves. What profound silence! Not a single bird-note was heard in the sky over this grave in the hollow of the mountains. Only a lonely light lingered on the cedars and mountain. By and by the light gradually grew fainter, till the cedars and bamboo were lost to view. Lying there I was enveloped in deep silence.

Then someone crept up to me. I tried to see who it was. But darkness had already been gathering round me. Someone...that some-
one drew the small sword softly out of my breast in its invisible hand. At the same time once more blood flowed into my mouth. And once and for all I sank down into the darkness of space.

(Remark 1)

"She ran into the depths of the grove."—Why did she run into the depths of the grove, instead of running out to the road? In Tajomaru's confession, Akutagawa writes, "The woman, her sedge hat off, came into the depths of the grove." But in the case of Tajomaru and Takehiro, he writes, "So I want into the grove with him" and "I ran out to the mountain road."

The depths of the grove might be a symbol of something enigmatic and mysterious in the depths of Masago's mind.

(Remark 2)

"What profound silence!"—"Not a single bird-note was heard in the sky over this grove in the hollow of the mountain. Only a lonely light lingered on the cedars and bamboos. By and by the light gradually grew fainter, till the cedars and bamboo were lost to view. Lying there, I was enveloped in deep silence."

Here, we can also find Japanese lyricism, especially in such an image as, "Only a lonely light lingered on the twigs of the cedars and bamboo. The only light—it grew fainter by and by." (my translation). This is the sight of nature which was caught by the eyes of the dying man.

Akutagawa writes in the last essay, "The Life of a Fool" that the reason why nature looked beautiful is because it is caught by the eyes of a dying man. Such is the nature that dying Takehiro sees before him. Such nature includes the profound silence.

(Remark 3)

"Who drew the small sword out of his chest?"—It might be Masago, but Akutagawa writes only "someone." When the body was discovered, no such small sword as Masago had carried was found on the body. And she confessed that she had stabbed her husband in the chest. But the dead man said that he had stabbed himself.

Which is true? Someone drew the sword out of his chest and so,
the sword as the evidence for the murder is lost, and truth becomes obscure. "Someone" might be Masago or another person.

[Conclusion]

Now, we reach the conclusion. We have read the four testimonies, two confessions and a story. Are all true or not? In particular, did Tajomaru, Masago and the dead tell the truth?

(1) Some find Akutagawa’s skepticism in this story, because here is nothing true, just as the original title of the story shows. The original title, “Yabu-no-naka” means primarily, “In a grove of bamboo” and sometimes symbolizes losing one’s way or being unable to discover the truth. We can’t deny Akutagawa’s skepticism, and his distrust of women as well.

Many scholars and readers have been looking for the truth in this story. But unfortunately no one has a definitive answer. One insists that the dead man’s story is true, and the other denies it. It might be too laborious and useless to look for the truth in this story.

(2) Consequently we will reach the following conclusion. We should think about what we are attracted by and what the most impressive thing is in this story.

This story begins when Tajomaru caught a glimpse of Masago’s impressive face and ends when Masago ran into the depths of the grove. We can’t forget her burning eyes, her beautiful face as if in a trance, especially her cry “kill him!” Her sin and her beauty can’t be separated. It is certainly unfortunate to be involved in such a terrible incident and for a man to have such a wife. However, the husband discovered an unknown beauty in his wife. In consequence, he wanders, the dark space between the world and the other world. He can’t reach paradise or hell. Because he was seized with not only anger and jealousy but also her beauty. Here is the ambivalent feeling, hatred and love, unfaithfulness and faithfulness, or sin and beauty.

And so, we can remember the enigmatic and mysterious charms of the woman that raises such ambivalent feelings in the mind of the man.
(3) We noticed Japanese lyricism in such a description of nature as “the streak of sinking sunlight streamed through the clump of cedars and bamboo and shone on his pale face,” or “only a lonely light lingered on the twigs of the cedars and bamboo. The only light—it grew fainter by and by, till the cedars and bamboo were lose to view.” (my translation).

As we know, Akutagawa writes many stories beginning at dusk or nightfall. He liked traditional Japanese waka or tanka (31 syllables poem) and haiku (17 syllables poem) which contain Japanese lyricism, especially through the images of nightfall. This lyricism of Akutagawa gives beauty and truth to “In a Grove” as well. (cf.) There are three old famous waka which are together known as the “Three Nightfalls in Autumn.” I’ll try to translate them into English.

I. Even I, who have no literary sense,
   Can feel pathos when a snipe has just left.
   A swamp at the nightfall in autumn.

II. There is nothing particular of loneliness.
    But I feel lonesome.
    Mountain’s black-pine-trees at the nightfall in autumn.

III. Looking over the sight,
    I can’t find any flowers, any maples.
    Only a fisherman’s hut by the beach at the nightfall in autumn.

[Students’ opinions and My comments]

(1) ‘Akutagawa’s use of eyes: Mirrors of the mind’—

Elizabeth Schwartz. (Quoted in full)

In portraying his characters, Akutagawa often used vivid physical descriptions. Two such descriptions are found in his story “In A Grove.” These descriptions refer to two different characters—Masago, the wife of the murdered man, and the murdered man himself—yet they pertain to the same physical aspect—the eyes. Akutagawa uses the eyes of these two characters to reflect their inner emotions.

It is the robber, Tajomaru, who mentions Masago’s “burning eyes.” In his confession to the murder, Tajomaru speaks of his sudden desire
to kill the husband of Masago—his motive: the “burning eyes” of Masago.

“Telling you in this way, no doubt I seem a crueler man than you. But that’s because you didn’t see her face. Especially her burning eyes at that moment.”

According to Tajomaru, the eyes of Masago were giving him a message. They were telling of her desire for him as her next husband. Her burning eyes caused him to react the way he had.

The eyes of the husband (in the Confession of a Woman Who Has Come to the Kiyomizu Temple), however, were sending off the opposite message to Masago. As she tells her version of the murder, she begins with her approaching her husband after she had yielded herself to Tajomaru. She ran to her husband’s side and she was met with an “indescribable light” in his eyes.

“Something beyond expression...his eyes make me shudder even now. That instantaneous look of my husband, who couldn’t speak a word, told me all his heart. The flash in his eyes was neither anger nor sorrow...only a cold light, a look of loathing.”

Masago also reacts to his continuous “gazing with contempt and loathing” (p. 22). The message she infers from her husband’s eyes is to put them both out of their misery and shame by death.

The messages found in the eyes in both situations led the interpreters (Tajomaru and Masago) to their alleged murders. The eyes in the story served as passages through which one could look into the minds of the possessor, therefore triggering reactions in the observers. Akutagawa’s descriptive detail and emphasis on the “burning eyes” of Masago and the “cold contempt in the eyes” of the murdered man lead the reader to believe that the eyes represent mirrors of the mind.

(My comment on Liz’s)

You have exactly caught the core of this story, I believe. The eyes of Masago were giving Tajomaru a message and the eyes of the husband were sending off the opposite message to Masago. As you say, surely the eyes represent mirrors of the mind.
Remarks on Akutagawa’s Works

(2) ‘The power Masago’s beauty holds’—Kimberly A. Harrison.
(Quoted in full)

“In A Grove” by Ryunosuke Akutagawa is a story of the murder of a man told through a collection of testimonies and confessions. Tajomaru’s confession of killing the man is by far the most intriguing testimony because one can not blame him alone for the murder. Tajomaru seems to be a victim of circumstance; the circumstance being his infatuation with Masago, the murdered man’s wife. By Tajomaru’s confession, it is easy to see how he falls victim to Masago by his description of their first encounter, his reaction to Masago’s request, and his description of Masago’s burning eyes.

Tajomaru, in the beginning of his confession, describes his first encounter with Masago in a very romantic way. The romanticism of the description alone indicates how memorized he becomes by her beauty and how “in love” he falls with her at first sight. He explains that a “puff of wind blew and raised her hanging scarf, so that I caught a glimpse of her face.” He continues to say that “she looked like a Bodhisattva” or a Buddhist saint. This encounter is very natural in that the wind allowed him to observe Masago’s beauty. In addition, Tajomaru seems to indicate that Masago’s beauty is “god-like” in its perfection by his comparison between her and that of a Bodhisattava. Furthermore, the fact that Masago’s face was instantly covered from Tajomaru’s view by her veil infers a sense of seduction on the part of Masago. Finally, the wind blowing the scarf and revealing Masago’s true beauty seems to symbolize the motive for the crime Tajomaru ultimately commits. Tajomaru even admits that it was “at that moment I made up my mind to capture her even if I had to kill her man.”

Tajomaru’s helpless infatuation with Masago is evident in the scene where Masago requests that the two men fight to save her honor. Tajomaru explains that he was ready to leave Masago and her husband in the grove without taking his life until Masago asked “that either her husband or Tajomaru die.” Masago also makes the promise that the survivor will win her as a wife. The thought of having Masago
as a wife instantly changes Tajomaru; he begins to think of killing her husband with a “gloomy” sort of excitement. This again shows the power Masago’s beauty holds over Tajomaru. By her request, Tajomaru changes his mind from sparing her husband to murdering him.

When Tajomaru defends himself for the murder of Masago’s husband, he admits that it was the fault of his lust. But more than his lust, Tajomaru acknowledges that it was Masago’s expression at that moment which enticed him to kill her husband. Tajomaru explains that it was “her burning eyes at that moment” as he “saw her eye to eye” which made up his mind that he wanted her as his wife no matter what the cost. Again, it is Masago’s beauty and Tajomaru’s desire to have her which causes a change in his character.

By these three examples in Tajomaru’s confession it is obvious that Tajomaru does not act on his own reason in deciding to kill Masago’s husband. The murder of Masago’s husband can be blamed in part on Tajomaru’s lust but also on Masago’s control that she has over him. It is because of Masago’s power that one can view Tajomaru as a victim of consequences because he is not able to act on his own accord.

(My comment on Kimberly’s)

Your opinion is unique and very persuasive. Nobody has noticed such Masago’s power. I have called it “The beauty of the wild or brutality” and “The beauty of unchastity”. Your remark on Akutagawa’s romantic way is also very interesting for me and I agree with you.

(3) ‘Beauty as a Sin’—Tamara Baker.

(Quoted in full)

"In a Grove" was an intriguing short story that had no conclusive ending. The absence of a resolution elicited confusion in the reader which was probably the author’s goal, as suggested by the original title “Yabu-no-naka” which symbolizes “losing the way” or “not being clear.” Despite the lack of an ending, the story was a beautiful example of Japanese lyricism. Some of the most captivating sections of the story were those regarding the beauty of the character Masago
which could drive men to do things they normally wouldn’t.

From the beginning of the story Masago’s beauty was emphasized. It was when Tajomaru saw her face at a glance as her veil was lifted that he was seized with a desire strong enough to compel him to commit a crime. Even at such a brief glance she looked so beautiful that she appeared to be saint-like. Such beauty that can move men at merely a glance is rare and mysterious.

Later, Tajomaru was again struck by her beauty after he had violated her. When he saw the expression on her face and her burning eyes it was no longer lust for him and he had to possess her. Her eyes were burning with the ambivalent feelings of shame, hatred, confusion, and her own passionate spirit. Due to these ambivalent feelings, her beauty seemed to hold some mysterious charm that affected Tajomaru’s mind.

Masago’s beauty also affected her husband as he looked at her after the crime was committed. He thought she had never looked so beautiful as at that moment. This was probably the result of the “beauty of unchastity.” Dark things were going on in Masago’s mind and her beauty was now a sin which gave her a deeper, more mysterious beauty. These changes in Masago from first being described as a high-spirited beauty, then saint-like, and finally tainted with the “beauty of unchastity” made her one of the most impressive female characters of Akutagawa’s stories.

This story may have been an outlet for Akutagawa’s depression and disillusionment with the world. He gave no conclusive ending, perhaps to show that there are no real truths or answers, and he displayed his distrust of women by developing the character of Masago whose beauty could not be separated from sin. Regardless of these negative associations, the actual story is full of beautiful descriptions and in-depth character development so that it is an impressive example of Japanese lyricism.

(My comment on Tamara’s)

This is one of the best examples to appreciate “In a Grove”. You
understand this story very well. In the class, I called Masago’s beauty “Beauty of unchastity”. As you write, Masago’s beauty can not be separated from sin. I also happy to know that you remember about “Japanese lyricism”.

(4) ‘Japanese lyricism’—Anne G. Walsh.

Akutagawa gives beauty and truth to this short story by his use of Japanese lyricism. The lyricism is used in depicting a scene which involves the setting of the sun, dusk. Akutagawa is known for his short stories which involve nightfall.

One first sees the lyricism in the sentence of, “A streak of sinking sunlight streamed through the clump of cedars and bamboos, and shone on his pale face.” This description of the dead man is delicate and beautiful. It makes the reader feel a sense of calm, in this scene. The sun must be setting because of the streaming and narrow streaks, which are produced by the fine leaves of the cedar and bamboo trees. The description provokes quietness and loneliness which is a type of beauty.

The second description which uses lyricism is, “Only a lonely light lingered on the cedars and mountain. By and by the light gradually grew fainter, till the cedars and bamboo were lost to view.” (p. 25). This translation is not correct. It should be translated as, “Only a lonely light lingered in the twigs of the cedar and bamboo. The lonely light—it grew fainter by and by.” One realizes that the time of day is dusk, nightfall. The lyricism depicts the beauty of the moment. All is calm and lonely. The loneliness is created by a type of literary description, lyricism, and this creates a sense of beauty. The beauty is created, by Akutagawa, through the sentiment of nightfall, as seen in the examples of lyricism found in “In a Grove”.

(My comment on Anne’s)

Truely speaking, what Japanese lyricism means is not so easy to explain. But I believe that two examples of lyricism you excerpt are true and you surely catch and feel Japanese lyricism, which gives beauty and truth to “In a Grove”.
(5) ‘Tajomaru is guilty’—Steven Weber.

The key to solving this mystery seems to be the testimony of the woodcutter. He claims to have been blossoms of blood on the bamboo scattered around the dead man. These blossoms could only have been the result of a fight like the one described by Tajomaru. Since he never met Tajomaru, Masago, or Takejiro while they were alive, he had no reason to protect any of them. This means that his testimony should be unbiased and accurate. Therefore the reader must conclude that Tajomaru is the guilty party.

(My comment on Steven’s)

You are only one person in my class to challenge the question who the murder is. Almost Japanese scholars couldn’t have answered this question.

The testimony of the woodcutter is reliable as you write. But, be cautious! He doesn’t testify that the blossoms of the blood were the result of a fight. And we can’t find any blood on the grass and fallen bamboo-blades which had been trampled down all around.

(6) ‘The beauty in a moment and the beauty of unchastity’—David Silverberg.

(Quoted in full)

In A Grove have two scenes which are, for me, the most important. They show two major themes of the story in each scene, those being “the beauty in a moment” and “the beauty of unchastity”. These themes form the basis of Akutagawa’s story.

The first scene is the one in which the bandit Tajomaru describes when he first saw the woman Masago. “Yesterday a little past noon I met that couple. Just then a puff of wind blew and raised her hanging scarf, so that I caught a glimpse of her face. Instantly it was again covered from my view. That may have been one reason; she looked like a Bodhisattva (Buddhist saint). At that moment I made up my mind to capture her, even if I had to kill her man.” Just from this glimpse, Tajomaru makes the decision to have this woman at all
costs, from one glimpse! Akutagawa uses this scene to set the entire story in motion.

The second scene I will discuss, which is equally or more important, is the one in which Takehiro, Masago's husband, describes his feelings as Tajomaru talks to his wife after the rape. "But my wife, sitting dejectedly on the bamboo leaves, was looking hard at her lap. To all appearances, she was listening to his words. I was agonized by jealousy. In the meantime the robber went on with his clever talk, from one subject to another. The robber finally made his bold, brazen proposal. 'Once your virtue is stained, you won't get along well with your husband, so won't you be my wife instead? It's my love for you which made me be so violent towards you.' While the criminal talked, my wife raised her face as it in a trance. She had never looked so beautiful as at that moment." This passage again illustrates "the beauty of the moment", supporting the idea that is one of Akutagawa's major themes. It also shows "the beauty of unchastity" Takehiro is "agonized by jealousy", but at the same time, his wife is more beautiful than he has ever seen her. She has just been taken by the robber, but she is beautiful. Takehiro is spellbound by this scene, at seeing part of his wife that he never knew.

So what do these two scenes tell the reader? That the mystery of who actually killed Takehiro is not of importance. Akutagawa leaves the mystery unsolvable for just that purpose. He does not want us to figure out who killed Takehiro. He wants us to see "the beauty of the moment" and "the beauty of unchastity", and how they affected Tajomaru, Masago, and her husband Takehiro.

(My comment on David's)

You have exactly caught part and parcel of "In a Grove". In particular, it is very good that you catch the moment in "the beauty of unchastity". Of course, I also believe that the mystery of who actually killed Takehiro is not of importance.
Remarks on Akutagawa’s Works

Two important elements of Akutagawa’s writing are mood and setting. Each help to clarify the context in which the story is taking place and such a defined context makes it easier for the reader to understand the story. When a particular setting arises within a story Akutagawa may use any number of ways to convey the exact mood and setting that he is looking for. Take, for example, the beginning of *In a Grove*. In the second paragraph we listen in on the testimony of a woodcutter before a high police commissioner. He is explaining the circumstances surrounding his discovery of a dead man. The woodcutter states “a gad-fly was struck fast there, hardly noticing my footsteps.” Akutagawa writes this particular sentence with the idea of defining the mood and setting of the story around the discovery of the dead man. The gad-fly symbolizes the mood. Its presence means that at this time there was great silence. Any noise present would otherwise scare the gad-fly into leaving the area. The mood of this scene, indeed, of the beginning of the story, is one of quietness, and silence—something unusual for within a grove. The gad-fly symbolizes the setting as well. There was no one around the body at the time of its discovery. No person present, but the dead man. Again, if there had been any other near by, the gad-fly would have flown away. The gad-fly, then, was a tool used by the author to explain the mood and setting of the scene exactly as he saw fit. It is interesting to note that a cricket was used by Akutagawa in his story, *Rashomon*, for the same purposes. Further, it was introduced in the second paragraph as well.

(7) ‘Mood and setting’—Nick Bates.

The mood in the beginning of this story is one of quietness and silence, especially through setting a gad-fly.—Your description, even noting the cricket in “The Rashomon” is very good. Although I do not quote your another remark on “glimpse”, I of course agree with your opinion that “Without the glimps, there would have been no desire, on Tajomaru part, to capture the woman, and indeed, no story for Akutagawa to tell.”
By the way, after I talked of “The beauty of unchastity” in the class, you came to me and told that you couldn’t accept such ‘Beauty’ because there were many unchaste students in the campus and could we called them ‘Beauty’? I have known your happiness to embrace your baby and your chastity since we had read “The Martyr”. I’d like to tell you again that unchastity is not always beauty, and we should recognize that Beauty sometimes contradicts Morality in the world. I, however, believe you already know about that, and you only wanted to talk of “The beauty of unchastity” with me.

(“In a Grove”—The end.)