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Borrowed elements of Russian literature in Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's works

Master's Thesis

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Table of contents

Introduction	3
1.1 Borrowings and borrowed elements	5
1.2 Japanese literature at the beginning of the 20 th century	8
1.3 Ryūnosuke Akutagawa and the specificity of his works	13
2.1 Comparative analysis of borrowed elements from Russian literature in Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's works	19
2.1.1 Nikolai Gogol's elements	20
2.1.2 Anton Chekhov's elements	29
2.1.3 Fyodor Dostoevsky's elements	34
2.1.4 Leo Tolstoy's elements	39
Conclusion	45
References	47

Introduction

The transition between Eastern and Western literary worlds is the theme that has been sparking researchers' interest for many years. Divided by different social and cultural backgrounds, common people and authors of the East and West have frequently been turning to each other for inspiration, new points of view, mysterious traditions and religious and philosophical ideas which have enriched their own inner worlds. The peak of this interaction occurred at the end of the 19th century, happening for the first time with such intensity.

Out of all the authors trying to investigate and use this interaction in the 20th century, Japanese writer Ryūnosuke Akutagawa is one of the brightest figures (both personally and in terms of historical context), which is why his work is beneficial for analysis. This particular work will consider the formation of modernist Japanese literature (through the fusion of Eastern and Western influences) and make an analysis of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's works and the specifics of his style from the point of view of the use of borrowings from Russian literature. The direct influence of Russian literature (due to its close proximity to the author of this work) and the specifics of borrowing through auxiliary languages (Akutagawa reads the works of Russian writers in translations) will also be considered, which allows us to speak more about the specifics of the depth of literary influence on Akutagawa's work and analysis methods and techniques that were used by the famous Japanese writer.

Akutagawa has not been forgotten and new editions and translations are being published occasionally. Penguins Classics' "*Rashomon and Seventeen Other Stories*" (2007) and "*The Life of a Stupid Man*" (2015) could be named as the most well-known and well-made publications. Recently published "*Murder in the Age of Enlightenment: Essential Stories*" (2021) by Pushkin Press is also worth mentioning. There is a big amount of different Spanish-language editions (e.g. "*Caja de marionetas*" (2019) from SATORI) and in 2021 Chinese "*Rashomon*" (2021) from People's Literature Publishing House and Taiwanese "*The Words of Dwarf*" from Da Pai Chu Ban have been released. Thus, we can assume that Akutagawa's novels and other works are still inviting the attention of publishers and readers.

This topic has already been touched upon both in the Russian-speaking and the Japanese-speaking researcher's environment. The Soviet japanologist Vladimir Grivnin could be named as one of the most prominent figure in the process of research on Akutagawa's works in the Russian literary community. Grivnin spent a lot of time on the analysis of Akutagawa's personality and literary world. In his major monograph "*Akutagawa Ryunosuke. Zhizn'. Tvorchestvo. Idei.*" (*Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. Life. Oeuvre. Ideas*) (1980) he mentions and describes many interesting and important facts and theories about this famous Japanese author. This information has influenced this thesis (especially, one specific chapter concerning the topic of Russian literary influence on Akutagawa) and immensely sparked my interest. However, the aforementioned chapter only has about ten pages and gives only some examples (which will be more elaborately examined in this thesis, as well as many others which have been found in other sources by Akutagawa and

Akutagawa researchers). Another important figure is the soviet researcher on oriental studies Kim Reho who has created many articles and papers on the topic of Russian-Eastern literary interactions. Unfortunately, there are not that many investigations with analysis of Akutagawa's works. However, his book "*Russkaya klassika i yaponskaya literatura.*" (*Russian classics and Japanese literature*) (1987) provides a good picture of the historical and social context of the Akutagawa period. Tsuguo Satō is a Japanese researcher who can be mentioned as an example of the study of Akutagawa's works. Similarly to Grivnin and Reho, as well as some other Japanese authors, Satō takes a closer look at the specific themes and specific author-author transition. However, his paper on the topic of the Akutagawa-Chekhov literary connection creates an interesting overlook on the topic of the thesis and adds some observations from the Japanese side. And, naturally, this is not the full list of such names and we have only taken a look at the most significant ones for this thesis. It is important to notice, however, that sometimes the topic has both an ideological and a political inclination (associated with the specifics of the production of research in the USSR which, in many ways, influenced Grivnin's works) and insufficient development of the humanities for analysis of this topic at the current level. Besides, this topic is rarely taken up by the English-speaking community and many of the works stay in their own Russian or Japanese literary fields. However, new papers are still being written (e.g. the article of Valeria Kuryanova from 2021 about Leo Tolstoy's figure in Akutagawa's text). Unfortunately, there is quite a small amount of such publications. Thus, this work will combine the experience of previous works with a more updated and neutral analysis in the context of the contemporary development of the humanities.

However, at the same time, this topic of cultural transfer does not lose its actuality in the light of the still-developing process of globalization and/or the active mutual influence of cultures, especially in the East-West connection.

1.1 Borrowings and borrowed elements

Many literary researchers¹ agree on the opinion that one of the most crucial moments for the development of the concept of literary borrowing is inextricably linked to the figure of Theodor Benfey and his *theory of borrowings*. Since 1859, when the introduction to Benfey's translation of "*Panchatantra*" was published, this theory has obtained many loyal supporters and has evolved throughout time, with new encounters being made (Surkov 1962-1978: 542-543). According to Benfey, borrowing as a consequence of international literary contacts is the engine of literary development², and the task of researchers is to identify borrowings and contacts. (Amineva 2001: 7-18).

The next stage of the development of this theory can be found in the works of Alexander Veselovsky, which incorporated elements of mythological and historical theories into Benfey's. In the work "Poetics of plots", Veselovsky points out that in the ancient works of different peoples, the similarity of motifs arises not because these peoples borrowed them from each other in the process of their cultural communication, but because different peoples went through similar stages in their social development. As a result, they have similar social relations, and therefore similar interests and views on life, which give rise to the similarity of its motifs expressed in verbal creativity. Veselovsky writes that motifs are not borrowings and that they spontaneously arise in certain conditions of the social life of ancient clans, tribes, and nationalities.³ (Veselovsky 1989: 300-307)

The development of theoretical thoughts continues in the works of another literary researcher and one of the creators of the comparative historical approach in studies of world literature, Viktor Zhirmunsky, who starts to be especially concerned with the conception of *typological continuity*. His typological continuity is based on the phenomenon of uneven social development and the parallel non-synchronicity of literary processes in different countries. Zhirmunsky thinks about *international literary movements* as a synchronous regular sequence of literary trends dependent on historically similar conditions for the development of peoples, giving a reason to talk about an "*Eastern Renaissance*"⁴ or Japanese chivalric romances. "However, in a certain comparative analysis of historically similar phenomena in the literature of various peoples, the question of the stage-typological analogies of the literary process inevitably intersects with the equally important question of international literary interactions. The impossibility of completely turning off the latter is quite obvious. The history of human society does not know examples of absolutely isolated cultural (and consequently literary) development without direct or more distant interaction and mutual influence between individual areas" (Zhirmunsky 1979: 20)

¹ Especially from the Russian literary field (e.g. A.Veselovsky, S.Savchenko, V. Amineva)

² However, contacts are not always possible to spot. That is why analysis of the borrowings seems more appropriate for the usage of the paper.

³ Nevertheless, there is still the possibility of a unique experience, which is why the term "borrowing motif" seems more appropriate for the paper.

⁴ A term by Nikolai Konrad, which he especially elaborated in his work "East and West" (1966)

Nikolai Konrad, the Russian philologist of German origin from Latvia, expands on these statements and elaborates the problem of contact interactions creating a *typology of literary contacts*. Most importantly, a third type should be noted where the reproduction of content and motifs of one work take place in works of an author of a different nation being encountered especially often in Asian literary history. Konrad also mentions the *mediator* figure, who can be from various backgrounds but frequently is quite important in the fulfillment of real contact between people. (Amineva 2001: 7-18)

These ideas parallel develop in many other theories; for example, in the comparative theory of French researcher Paul Van Tieghem with many different elements of the research which should be analyzed separately and complex differentiation between “*borrowing*” and “*influence*” that can be quite useful and beneficial for the enrichment of a recipient-literature. He considered that the subject of comparative studies “is the study of the relationship of different literatures.” Thus, if we look at the research area of the comparative literature of that time, it covers “the connections between Greek and Latin literatures, the contribution of these ancient literatures starting from the Middle Ages to modern ones, and finally, the relationship of modern literatures” (Van Tieghem 1951: 51). However, the term “*influence*” is considered as more feeling and emotion-oriented, even though comparative literature deals with this term in its early stages. However, today the term seems not to be the best option for Akutagawa’s works, which is why the work will be concentrated on the “*borrowings*”.

Similar ideas can be found in the theory of a prominent semiotician Yuri Lotman, who mostly agrees with his predecessors, taking, however, a big step forward broadening the horizons of comparisons of the structures and schemes to all types of creative thinking, from acts of individual consciousness to textual interactions. Lotman paid more attention to differences as other factors of borrowing (as a continuation of the figure of The Other in his theory of dialogism). In his works, the role of language also increases through deeper analyses of the problems connected with linguistic and translation difficulties. He also insists on the possibility of imminent development of culture and text as a part, only in the presence of a momentum “from the outside”. When an object with its inner uncertainty penetrates a system with its inner uncertainty, it increases the inner uncertainty of the system and its potential at the same time, since elements demand constant struggle. (Lotman 1992: 90-120)

These conclude the idea of intertextuality, coming from M. Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism, where the text can be considered a dialogue between an author with a preceding and a contemporary culture. However, the term “intertextuality” itself was coined in J. Kristeva’s critical work “*Word, Dialogue and Novel*” (1966) “defining literary text as ‘mosaic of quotations’ and an ‘absorption and transformation of another text’”. (Kristeva 1967: 97-124) Intertextuality can be named as a common literary device for the works of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa (which will be shown further in the paper) and solidifies a great example of a quite modernistic approach to intended and unintended borrowings from different elements of other texts.

Thus, for a cultural evolution, contact with other cultures is essential, not only in stagnant periods. Dialogue with other cultures is the engine of cultural development.

“Creative consciousness is impossible in conditions of a completely isolated, single-structured (devoid of a reserve of internal exchange) and static system. /---/ The imminent development of culture cannot be carried out without a constant influx of texts from outside.”

(Lotman 1992: 116)

In this thesis we will define the term “*borrowed elements*” as a complex of elements of the plot, stylistic features, ideas and mood, of which the traces of transition can be found in the influenced literary works.

And in the next chapter, a difficult period of the revival of Japanese literary traditions of the beginning of the 20th century will be focused on.

1.2 Japanese literature at the beginning of the 20th century

It is impossible to skip all the experience and legacy which has been accumulated by the country's literary and cultural spheres throughout the long history of Japan; however, exactly such an event occurred when the Meiji restoration took place in 1868. The country abandoned more than 200 years of isolationism and started its drastic cultural, political, and technological alterations.

In a small amount of time – especially in comparison with the typical development of a country – the dissonance between old and new could be seen in every little aspect of everyday life. Like the first Japanese locomotive rushing from Tokyo to Yokohama, new ideas and thoughts flew across the country in new Western-style suits speaking clumsy English or French. Like the first electric lamp on the arc of the Institute of Technology in Toranomon, Tokyo, new ideals and aspirations fired up in the eyes of young and ambitious Japanese students who could no longer find the truth or the beauty of the world (concepts which are essential to Shintoism) in old beliefs. Feudalism discarded almost yesterday was disappearing among the Telegraph wires and romantic and naturalistic dreams of the newborn intelligentsia.

There was no rest for the people of those years from the tidal waves of the history of Western civilization. Novel names and movements in art, philosophy, and politics were overflowing. Ryūnosuke Akutagawa described this flux at the beginning of his late autobiographical novel “The Life of a Stupid Man” in such a manner:

“It has happened on the second floor of a bookstore. He was twenty years old standing on a European-style ladder in front of bookshelves. He was examining the new books. Maupassant, Baudelaire, Strindberg, Ibsen, Shaw, Tolstoy... Meanwhile, the twilight has come. However, he kept reading titles on the spines with enthusiasm. In front of his eyes were not just the books but “fin de siècle” itself. Nietzsche, Verlaine, the Goncourt brothers, Dostoevsky, Hauptmann, Flaubert...”

(Akutagawa 2007: 677.)⁵

Even though Akutagawa experienced this already in more structuralized and partially translated ways, this massive amount of information and emotions could not be taken

⁵ All translations from Russian into English are made by the author of the work.

easily by any person or any nation. As a result, as soon as Japanese society started to more or less realize and rationalize all the new things it had borrowed, it started to be filled with one ideological school and movement after another, rapidly overlapping each other. The inspiration and childish enthusiasm of the Japanese romanticism during the first decade of the 20th century were substituted by the bitter irony of the next decade culminating in a great disillusion and disenchantment with the society and people. However, it was a consistent process that was crystallizing into great debates and long artistic quests.

It is important to mention one more significant change inside the Japanese literary world before jumping into the vortex of Western-Japanese literary relationships. Before the novel “*The Drifting Clouds*”, written by Futabatei Shimei in 1887, Japanese literature had been written in Classical Japanese. By the end of the 19th century, Classical Japanese quite differed from real vernacular Japanese. That led to diglossia in Japanese society which obstructed the readability and distanced literature from real-life themes and people. However, during the late Meiji and Taishō eras⁶, literature and newspapers ceased to use the classical language.

Japanese readers started to get acquainted with Western literature already in the 1880s⁷. And relatively soon after, the first attempts to structuralize its specificity and differences with Japanese classical genres and forms were made. The first and most significant (yet still superficial and in some manner of guessing) of them was the book “*The Essence of the Novel*” (*Shōsetsu Shinzui*) (1885) by a translator of Shakespeare’s plays into Japanese, Shōyō Tsubouchi. In this book, the author was trying to create an understanding of contemporary world literature and to outline development paths for contemporary Japanese literature. Dividing the nature of writing on the dichotomies similar to Yin and Yang, Shōyō was seeking answers in the juxtapositions of high versus low styles of writing (in the late Edo period preceding Meiji restoration, prose was usually considered as a low genre vs. poetry as a high one) and in creator versus contemplator (in the Japanese tradition the principle of non-interference was important for an artist, without adding anything from oneself). (Tsubouchi, 1983: part 2 chapter 2, part 1 chapter 3) It is of no less interest to notice that for traditional Japanese, literature was not typical to revolt against destiny (which can be seen often in Western literature). That is why even the

⁶ Meiji era (1868-1912) and Taishō era (1912-1926).

⁷ Many translations of famous and important Western literature into Japanese started to appear in this decade e.g. Schiller’s “*Wilhelm Tell*” (translated in 1882), Goethe’s “*The story of Reynard the Fox*” (translated in 1884), and Shakespeare’s “*Julius Caesar*” (translated in 1884), Tolstoy’s “*War and Peace*” (The first part) (translated in 1886), Lessing’s “*Emilia Galotti*” (translated in 1889), etc.

concept of truth (*makoto*) was changing and the old ways of writing were impossible to satisfy readers' demands in the glow of a brave new world. Therefore, with the old conceptions of Zen-Buddhism and Shintoism, old genres (such as *monogatari*⁸, *nikki*⁹, *zuihitsu*¹⁰) were giving way to a new, modern European-like *shōsetsu* ("novel"; initially only translations from Chinese but later Tsubouchi's book was adopted as an equivalent of the English concept of a novel) and later *shishōsetsu* ("I-novel"; wherein the center of the novel is the personality with its complex inner world and tensions with reality). With these genres, Japanese authors were trying not only to adopt contemporary world literary genres but the Western concept of literature in general. The spread of spoken language for literary writing catalyzed this process and led to the creation of the Japanese naturalist movement (*shizenshugi*) which after only a couple of years turned toward the depiction of a writer-character's inner reality rather than the socially engaged fictional forms imported under the influence of French writers.

Ivan Morris, in the introduction of "Modern Japanese Stories" (1961), considered some historical premises:

"The late collapse of Japanese feudalism and the fact that important changes have always come from above rather than as a result of popular effort resulted in a peculiarly wide gulf between individual and social life and made the Japanese far less interested in political and social life questions than peoples in most Western countries. Strong authoritarian traditions gave rise to a widespread feeling of indifference or resignation toward outside problems and official censorship discouraged Meiji writers from voicing any criticism of current conditions. Writers who wished to present life strictly on the basis of facts concentrated on their direct personal experiences tending to neglect the wider subjects that had been treated by Zola and other naturalists of the West."

(Morris 1961: 15.)

The chaos existing inside the heads of the educated Japanese was hard to fully understand and transfer, even in light of all the aforementioned.¹¹ However, a strong and

⁸ "Tales about Things": works of fiction, especially those written in the 8-16th centuries. This genre has many subgenres from initial courtly romances to military, historic, and didactic tales.

⁹ "diaries": an old Japanese literary genre in the form of personal or travel diaries.

¹⁰ "notes": a genre consisting of personal essays and scattered ideas that are usually consistent with the author's environment.

¹¹ A researcher of the Meiji period, Masanobu Oda, mentions good structuralizing works for "bewildering chaos of these [Meiji] decades" in his article "Remarks on the Study of Meiji Literature" also citing the editor

colourful picture of this can be found in the works of one of the most outstanding Japanese writers of the 20th century, Natsume Sōseki. Thus, in his novel “*Sorekara*” (“*And Then*” (1909)), the main protagonist Daisuke is a typical example of the Japanese intelligentsia of those times. He sees sharp internal decline contrasting with a swiftly changing society around him and slowly retires into himself. Many educated people chose this type of revolt in Japan at that time (the principle of “*nil admirari*” (“*to be surprised by nothing*”) was popular). And despite the accordance of such behaviour with traditional Japanese norms, most of the people around him feel resentment - the vivid sign of change in society. (Sōseki 1973: 191-351)

Sosuke, the protagonist of the next Natsume Sōseki novel “*Mon*” (“*The Gate*” (1910)), which is the last book of his trilogy¹², feels even more alienated and uncertain. Old ideals became forgotten, however new ones could not start to be strengthened. The hero can find neither the feeling of beauty in the world nor himself. (Sōseki 1973: 355-478)

And the apprehension of this fearsome situation can be found even earlier in the letter of a celebrated Japanese journalist and anarchist Kōtoku Shūsui written in 1900:

“The nation devoted to principles and ideals has a soul that grew old and is not capable of action anymore. The new generation has no idea about sublime ideals /---/ Japan – that 50 years ago made a step to freedom, equality, and humanity – is now turning back to absolutism, class delimitation, egocentrism... I am terrified of thinking about the future of the state where ideals have given way to practicality.”

(Shūsui as cited in Ivanova 1972: 183-185)

This came at a great cost, however; Japan had become a great Asian power and was one of the leaders in world politics despite all the uncertainties and objections. In 1912, after the death of the previous emperor, the Taishō era began. A new, more liberal course and a more clear understanding of the balance between old and new was set. Japanese readers were gradually getting tired of the existing forms and genres and Japanese society was becoming more versed in Western literature. Besides, new foreign readers were starting to look more and more into Japanese literature with interest. That was a good time

of “*Kokumin no Tomo*” magazine Tokutomi Sohō in 1881 addressing the youth: “We are living in the age of doubt”. (Oda, 1942)

¹² This trilogy consists of “*Sanshiro*” (1908), “*Sorekara*” (1909) and “*Mon*” (1910)

for a new great figure to take the stage, and Ryūnosuke Akutagawa succeeded in becoming this figure.

1.3 Ryūnosuke Akutagawa and the specificity of his works

Even though, in the world, modern Japanese literature is still not as popular among common readers as, for example, English literature¹³, it is nevertheless famous and known worldwide. In many ways, it has gained popularity and come into the view of many readers outside the Japanese islands, thanks to Ryūnosuke Akutagawa¹⁴. His works are one of the most complicated yet interesting and unique events in the history of 20th century Japanese literature. His articles and short stories are probably one the most successful examples of the fusion of Japanese national traditions and contemporary world ideas. These and other topics are tightly connected with his life.

“He was born in Tokyo in the morning of March 1, 1892, or, according to the old-time, at the hour of the Dragon of the Day of the Dragon of the Month of the Dragon, and therefore he was named Ryūnosuke, for the hieroglyph of this name, “*Ryū*” means “*dragon*”. When he was nine months old, his mother lost her mind, and the baby, according to law and custom, was handed over for adoption and upbringing to the childless family of his mother's older brother Michiaki Akutagawa, head of the construction department of Tokyo prefecture. Thus, little Ryūnosuke lost his surname Niihara and got the surname Akutagawa ...”

(Strugatsky 1974)

These are the words about the beginning of the Japanese author's life written by the famous Russian science-fiction writer and translator of some of Akutagawa's short stories, Arkady Strugatsky. And like many other tiny facts of Akutagawa's life, they are important for understanding the hard path for the Japanese author, which ended in his tragic suicide on July 24, 1927.

¹³ According to e.g. Penguin Random House and Forbes (Russian version) statistics in the range of the most read and sold books of 2020 and 2021, there are no Japanese books except for Kazuo Ishiguro's who is considered to be a British writer.

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/the-read-down/the-best-books-of-2020/> (15.02.2022)

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/the-read-down/the-best-books-of-2021/> (15.02.2022)

<https://www.forbes.ru/forbeslife/450363-triumf-detektivov-i-nemnogo-hajpa-samye-prodavaemye-hudozestvennye-knigi-v-2021-godu> (22.02.2022)

https://www.forbes.ru/forbeslife-photogallery/416765-sem-detektivov-pelevin-rubina-i-ulickaya-samye-prodavaemye?fbclid=IwAR3JUreLhLgP_dPFidQranbEoDt9BkQh6Kc0jrsrv66fVAu2t_qllmUcL10 (22.02.2022)

Also this tendency can be seen on database sources (e.g. American GoodReads and Russian ReadRate)

https://www.goodreads.com/book/popular_by_date/2021 (top 100 at 15.02.2022)

<https://readrate.com/rus/news/top-50-luchshikh-knig-goda> (22.02.2022)

¹⁴ And of course film “Rashōmon” (1950) by Akira Kurosawa

From early childhood, Akutagawa was familiar with and quite interested in literature. He was from a family of intellectuals (as some of his ancestors were reputed writers and scholars of the Edo period (1603-1867) and grew up around Chinese classical literature. Which is why it was not surprising that his literary attempts went hand in hand with his life.

Different researchers distinguish various distinctive periods of his literary works. However, for this thesis, a categorization by V.S. Grivnin will be taken, as it is probably one of the most elaborate and interesting one:

1) *1912-1914*

A period when Akutagawa made his first serious attempts on the path of writing literature. The period of interest in decadent and symbolic literature (especially Charles Baudelaire and Maurice Maeterlinck). “Life is not worth a single line of Baudelaire” (Akutagawa 1971: 336) he will write afterward about those times.

2) *1915-1917*

A period of early short stories and search for a theme. The period of the shaping of a plot as means of maximum expressive disclosure of the psychology of human actions.

3) *1917-1921*

A period of critique and detailed analysis of human nature and human imperfection. The period of creation of many short stories, raising issues of egocentrism, spiritual search, art, and the relationship between a person and a society.

4) *1921-1927*

A period of analysis of many autobiographical and semi-autobiographical works. The period of a critique towards militarizing Japanese society and an impression and pressure of this society on a person in general and Akutagawa himself. (Grivnin 1980: 10-11)

The future author nurtured interest in Western literature for many years and, eventually, Akutagawa went to the First High School to study English literature in 1910 and started his education at Tokyo Imperial University at the English Department in the Faculty of Philology in 1913. His first published work is a translation of Anatole France's short story "*Balthasar*" (1889) where philosophical rethinking and reinterpretation of biblical legend happened on the pages of France's work. A similar type of rethinking and occasional changing of points of view will often be used in Akutagawa's works in the future.

His first short stories were met with quite a warm reaction and made a good impression on some famous authors of those times, especially on Natsume Sōseki. However, they were sometimes criticized for their borrowed plots and dependence on the legends and stories on which they were based, thus another Japanese writer Tatsuo Hori judged early works of Akutagawa by stating: "[Akutagawa] does not have a single masterpiece of his own. On any of them lies the shadow of a masterpiece of past centuries". (Hori, as cited in Grivnin 1980: 38) It is true, as most of Akutagawa's early short stories are constructed on the basis of "*Konjaku Monogatari*" and "*Uji Shūi Monogatari*", written around the 9th-13th centuries¹⁵. However, Akutagawa also was not afraid to use contemporary stories as well as stories and plots of other authors to rethink or replay them differently. That is why Akutagawa's short stories can be divided into two branches: 1) historical (based on mostly Chinese and Japanese legends and anecdotes till the Meiji restoration) and 2) modern (based on contemporary stories and historical events). However, what is of much more importance is why Akutagawa was using such a method instead of creating something new and why the words of Tatsuo Hori and many others critics should be taken with a rational grain of salt.

Akutagawa never set a goal of transferring a borrowed plot or story. Sometimes these borrowings were not even discovered, since, for example, before Akutagawa not many people knew the plots of "*Konjaku Monogatari*" and even Natsume Sōseki's stories based on "*Konjaku Monogatari*" were unfamiliar. (Grivnin 1980: 39). However, more significant is his approach to the plot which is never as important to the author as the theme he observes. Thus, transfer to the past is utilized to a greater extent in order to abstract from a background and accentuate the psychology and depth of humans and to focus even more

¹⁵ "*Konjaku Monogatari*" is a collection of different Asian tales (from India, China, Japan) written in the Heian period (794–1185) and drawn from Buddhism and popular folklore.

"*Uji Shūi Monogatari*" is another collection of tales. Many of these tales containing common elements and adopting many elements from "*Konjaku Monogatari*" written in about the 13th century. Themes are also drawn from Buddhism as well as social and private life. Both collections are partially lost.

on an analysis of a person's soul. The same could be said about stories set in modern days. Time was of no great importance for Akutagawa.

“I take a theme and try to transform it into a story. To give this theme the strongest artistic expression. I need some unusual event /---/ to relate the event to the past, to tell about it as of the past a long time ago, in the old days, or not in Japan, or somewhere not in Japan and in the old days /---/ Thus, although I am writing about antiquity, I have no predilection for antiquity as such.”

(Akutagawa 1971: 8)

After all, antiquity is connected with a myth and it was not rare for modern literature to refer to a myth. Especially in Japan, both writers and readers wanted to see some exotic and dreamlike notes in books. However, some researchers still consider that “... the creation of short stories based on material dating back to the Middle Ages, the use of fairy-tale plots inevitably led to a certain narrowing of the modern sound, to a certain monotony” as written by Vladimir Grivnin in the preface of Akutagawa's collection (Akutagawa 2007: 9-29).

This perception of the writing of literature was eventually formed into a discussion in 1927 with another outstanding Japanese writer of the 20th century, Jun'ichirō Tanizaki. Both of whom were supporters of anti-naturalism (*hanshizenshugi*) which was a logical reaction to the abundance of I-novels in the Japanese literary world of those times. However, Akutagawa considered that the wisest option was to neglect forms and formality in order to see the true depth of reality. Akutagawa was outlining a concept of “plotless prose” where the poetic spirit should be dominant. Lyrical sentiment should be dominant over plot lines while an interesting plot belittles the advantages of a literary work, bringing it closer to exoteric and entertainment literature. Thus completing the formation of a strong argument between pure literature (*junbungaku*) and mass literature (*taishū bungaku*), which will be quite relevant for Japanese literary discourse for many years; however, afterward it would become darkened by the death of such an important defender of pure literature as Ryūnosuke Akutagawa. (Akutagawa, Tanizaki 2017)

However, Akutagawa, as it was mentioned before, was always more concentrated not on the lingering lines of themes or plots but a central spot of his dotted structure – human soul and human psychology. Human psychology is taken as an object of knowledge and not a simple explanation of human actions. This approach meets many similarities with another prominent writer of human psychology and complex social and spiritual life,

Fyodor Dostoevsky. And this approach was brought into Japanese literature by Akutagawa.

Akutagawa was analyzing human nature in different situations and under different angles, attempting to see the balance between opposite forces trapped inside his characters and human beings in general. His good friend and another Japanese author, Kan Kikuchi, even wrote about it in Akutagawa's early works "too much mental coldness, as if he was looking at human life, turning it with silver tweezers" (Kikuchi, as cited in Grigor'yeva 1983:85). The concepts of good and evil were playing with the reader. This duality is relative: "Only by loving goodness, I think, is it possible to love evil. When I read Baudelaire's poems what I liked most about them was not the praise of evil but the thirst for good. Honestly, I regard good and evil as homogeneous concepts." (Akutagawa, 1914, as cited in Grivnin 1980:29)

Notwithstanding that it could be a little bit different if looking at this worldview from a Confucian angle, where the concept *Ren* (*jin* in Japanese)¹⁶ can be found. As aforementioned, Akutagawa was very familiar with Chinese literature and philosophy. And many aspects of Confucianism were in general quite well-known among Japanese people. The concept of *Ren* is the concept that makes man distinctively human and is the most important virtue of the Five constant virtues in Confucianism. This concept is about love for humans, the love towards everything in the world but it is not love in its usual connotation. *Ren* is a bond that connects everything in the world and does not let it fall apart. *Ren* can be understood as a cosmic force that keeps a balance. Thus the deviation from the course of this force is evil. Thereby, a human life is not of as high a value as the inner something that makes us humans. That does not change the complexity of Akutagawa's constant search for combining incompatible elements while attempting to maintain their differences, which was a big torment during Akutagawa's life, yet it helps to understand this complexity and premises better. (Grigor'yeva 1983: 85-87)

Akutagawa was also invested in the complexity of two worlds: the world of art and the real world. Even though, because of the specificity of forms and tendencies to analyze works of Akutagawa, these are sometimes taken as an example of "*art for art's sake*". This concept finds its realization, for example, in his famous short story "*Hell Screen*" (*Jigokuhen* (1918)) where the court painter watches as his daughter is being devoured by spurts of flame in order to finish his picture of Hell's fire. However, in Akutagawa's notes,

¹⁶ *Ren* can be translated as *benevolence* or *humanness*

we can find a different opinion: “art for art's sake – at least, art for art's sake, when it comes to artistic creation – can only cause a yawn.” (Akutagawa, as cited in Grivnin 1980: 8). For Ryūnosuke Akutagawa art and life mostly seemed united and similar by its nature: “There is a vulgar point of view that literature is not connected with politics. This is not true. Rather, we can say that the peculiarity of literature lies precisely in the fact that it exists due to the possibility of being associated with politics.” (Akutagawa, as cited in Grivnin 1980: 7-8)

And that is probably why, until late at night, the light was shining in his cabinet in his last evening before he committed suicide. He was working hard and, until the very end, he was trying to find a final answer to a question of the strange phenomenon of human beings. However, throughout his life, he already found many of them and in the next part of the thesis, a look at some of these answers in connection with Russian literature will be taken.

2.1 Comparative analysis of borrowed elements from Russian literature in Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's works

At the beginning of the 20th century, the influence of Russian literature was great and impressive. People all over the world were reading new books from the Russian Empire with genuine interest. And for Japan, which had all of a sudden opened its doors to a new world, this was as prominent as any other fashion of the time. Many Japanese authors were under the influence of Dostoevsky's ways of writing¹⁷ or tried to follow Tolstoy's social movement¹⁸. For the Russian anthology of his short stories, Ryūnosuke Akutagawa wrote:

“Among all modern foreign literature, there is no one that would have had the same influence on Japanese writers, and even more likely on Japanese readership, as Russian. Even young people not familiar with Japanese classics know the works of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Chekhov. This alone is enough to make it clear how close Russia is to us, the Japanese ... The fact that modern Japanese literature has experienced the enormous influence of modern Russian literature is undoubtedly explained by the fact that all world literature as a whole has been influenced by Russian literature ... My preface is brief, but it was written by a Japanese man who considers your Natasha and Sonya to be our sisters”

(Akutagawa 1998, IV: 312)

These heartfelt words cannot be a simple exaggeration to flatter Russian readers of his short stories. Russian literature was admired by many Japanese authors of that time.¹⁹ This influence can be traced in many of Akutagawa's works and this will be unfolded in the next chapters of the thesis. In order to somehow categorize different works that influenced Akutagawa's short stories, this analysis will be divided by different Russian authors of the biggest influence on Akutagawa and his works.

¹⁷ For example, aforementioned Futabatei Shimei was heavily influenced by Dostoevsky's works “He [Futabatei] was especially interested in Dostoevsky's psychological approach and in what Futabatei referred to as his ‘religious’ message” (Ryan, 31).

¹⁸ The most famous are a novelist Saneatsu Mushanokōji and a writer Roka Tokutomi who met Tolstoy personally and were inspired by Tolstoy's ideas to move to the countryside.

¹⁹ Can be found in Akutagawa's correspondence (which will be shown later on), already mentioned Futabatei Shimei, Roka Tokutomi, Ōgai Mori and many others.

2.1.1 Nikolai Gogol's elements

As mentioned earlier, Akutagawa was adopting different stories and plots for his short stories. However, it was not a simple epigonism or eclecticism, it was always a creative and deep rethinking of the original because in every short story at least one new angle, one new invisible or absent aspect can be found. Nevertheless, in some way, we can presume that Akutagawa was adopting methods of writing as well. The method of putting characters in a situation where they would not usually be in order to see what would happen. Exploring how the inner, psychological machine would work under different mental pressures and events in Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's short novels resembles a similar method of another famous author, Nikolai Gogol.

Akutagawa was familiar with Gogol's works already during studentship, as can be traced in one of his letters to a friend from September 1, 1910:

“The birth of "*A Sportsman's Sketches*" is generally owed to the birch forest of Russia - this masterpiece of Turgenev, and the beautiful landscape in Gogol's "*Taras Bulba*" is permeated by the smell of steppe cornflowers”

(Akutagawa as cited in Reho 1987: 293)

One of Akutagawa's early stories, "*Yam Gruel*", which was written in 1916 is an excellent example of not only the usage of such a method, but also a heavy influence of one of Gogol's prominent short stories "*The Overcoat*" which was published in 1842.

First of all, the story of a lower-class official who had a dream to eat his fill of yam gruel is a story from "*Uji Shūi Monogatari*"²⁰ (first volume, eighteenth story) and Akutagawa follows it quite authentically. However, it is interesting how he transforms the description of some elements, the details he makes the reader aware of, and the thoughts which are provoked when the words of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa start to retell this old story.

Here, the motifs of "*The Overcoat*" start to be seen more vividly. It is important to notice that Goi is not the real name of a character, it is a fifth-class court rank. He is depicted as a very miserable and poor man with “a cold-looking red nose” and “a stupid smile” on his face; similar to Gogol's main character, Akaky Akakievitch Bashmachkin (*Bashmak* is a shoe and figuratively can mean a man who obeys somebody in everything),

²⁰ This story also can be found in “*Konjaku Monogatari*” (XXVI, 17). It happens with some other stories as well.

where this name underlines the unremarkable nature of the character. Even though the name was taken from “*Uji Shūi Monogatari*” itself, this mutual feature could be decisive for Akutagawa to seek further similarities and get inspired to disclose Goi’s character in the same manner as the character of Bashmachkin.

The description of both main characters is given in the form of banter and the figure of the author can be seen between the lines of the character’s appearance but with a sense of humor and a little bit of grotesque:

“Goi was a very plain-looking man. His hollow cheeks made his chin seem unusually long. His lips... if we mentioned his every striking feature, there would be no end. He was extremely homely and sloppy in appearance.”

(Akutagawa 2016: 11)

A similar manner of description can be seen in Gogol’s short story:

“So, in a certain department there was a certain official -- not a very high one, it must be allowed -- short of stature, somewhat pock-marked, red-haired, and short-sighted, with a bald forehead, wrinkled cheeks, and a complexion of the kind known as sanguine.”

(Gogol 2014: 1)

Thereon, a depiction of the mocking by samurais around Goi almost identically repeats a depiction of the mocking of Gogol’s bureaucrats. Here is Akutagawa’s passage:

“In [Goi’s] presence they would never tire of making critical comments about his nose, mustache, headgear, and silk robe. Moreover, they would often talk of his hare-lipped wife from whom he had separated five or six years ago, and of a drunken Buddhist priest who was said to have been intimate with his wife. And not only that. Now and again without reason.”

(Akutagawa 2016: 11)

And here is a similar passage in Gogol’s “*The Overcoat*”:

“The young officials laughed at and made fun of him, so far as their official wit permitted; told in his presence various stories concocted about him, and about his

landlady, an old woman of seventy; declared that she beat him; asked when the wedding was to be; and strewed bits of paper over his head, calling them snow. But Akakiy Akakievitch answered not a word, any more than if there had been no one there besides himself. It even had no effect upon his work: amid all these annoyances he never made a single mistake in a letter.”

(Gogol 2014: 1)

A picture of a so-called “little man” is drawn. Despite the difference in time, both groups of mockers concentrate on the appearance of a plain man and some marks of aging. Both groups distance themselves from the main characters and cling to stereotypical gossip about relationships with women. And similarly, in both groups there is a person who understands the wrongness of such behavior.

“But one day [one of the samurais] happened to hear Goi's question, "Why did you do that?" and the words stuck in his mind. From that time on he saw Goi in a different light, because he saw a blubberer, persecuted by a hard life, peeping from the pale and stupid face of the undernourished Goi. This samurai could never think of Goi without being impressed by his accusing protest against the hard and heartless realities of life.”

(Akutagawa 2016: 12)

Both characters are seen as special and even admirable in the eyes of one of the hostile groups. Here is Gogol’s description:

“But if the joking became wholly unbearable, as when they jugged his hand and prevented him from attending to his work, he would exclaim, “Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?” And there was something strange in the words and the voice in which they were uttered. There was in it something which moved to pity; so much that one young man, a new-comer, who, taking the pattern of the others, had permitted himself to make sport of Akakiy, suddenly stopped short, as though all about him had undergone a transformation, and presented itself in a different aspect. Some unseen force repelled him from the comrades whose acquaintance he had made, on the supposition that they were well-bred and polite men. /---/ and many a time afterwards, in the course of his life, shuddered at seeing how much inhumanity there is in man, how much savage coarseness is concealed beneath delicate, refined

worldliness, and even, O God! in that man whom the world acknowledges as honourable and noble.”

(Gogol 2014: 2)

This idea of a “little man” who, despite all the obstacles, has its own significance which will be echoed in Akutagawa’s works many times. And in his discussion with Tanizaki, he will note “that a highly artistic novel is one in which an ordinary person is described poetically, and a publicly available novel describes in a public form a person with a poetic character.” (Akutagawa, Tanizaki 2017)

Then in both main characters, a glimpse of hope sparkles when they encounter a small thought becoming a desire, which helps them bear the hardships of life. In the next passages, the authors show the blossoming of a flower called a dream.

“For the past five or six years he had had an extraordinary craving for yam gruel. Yam gruel is a gruel made by boiling slices of yam in a soup of sweet arrow-root. In those days it was regarded as the supreme delicacy, even at the dining table of the sovereign of the realm. /---/ He himself might not have been clearly aware that it had been his life-long wish. But as a matter of fact, it would hardly be too much to say that he lived for this purpose. A man sometimes devotes his life to a desire which he is not sure will ever be fulfilled. Those who laugh at this folly are, after all, no more than mere spectators of life.”

(Akutagawa 2016: 12-13)

And Gogol’s version, showing Bashmachkin striving for a goal. Again with the author’s masked commentaries.

“To tell the truth, it was a little hard for him at first to accustom himself to these deprivations; but he got used to them at length, after a fashion, and all went smoothly. He even got used to being hungry in the evening, but he made up for it by treating himself, so to say, in spirit, by bearing ever in mind the idea of his future cloak. From that time forth his existence seemed to become, in some way, fuller, as if he were married, or as if some other man lived in him, as if, in fact, he were not alone, and some pleasant friend had consented to traveling along life's path with him, the friend being no other than the cloak, with thick wadding and a strong lining incapable of wearing out. He became more lively, and even his character grew firmer, like that of a man who has made up his mind, and set himself a goal.”

However, after this plot analogy comes to different turns and Akutagawa starts his experiment, Bashmachkin dies in an accident and his dream, that is not fulfilled, becomes the true tragedy of a simple man. Goi meets another obstacle; Toshihito, the son of the Finance Minister, who gives Goi an opportunity to make his dream come true, but with that, he takes this dream away. Goi's guiding star turned out to be a mere dot in the endless night sky and Goi bitterly realizes it. Throughout the journey to Toshihito's palace, he loses the illusion of Toshihito's unworthiness, as the son of the Finance Minister shows himself as a great and honourable man who can be kind and cheerful and keeps his word. Goi admires Toshihito but at the same time clearly sees how miserable Goi himself really is and how he cannot do anything about it.

Goi, as previously mentioned, has "a cold-looking red nose" and an unshaped mustache. It is a common technique for Akutagawa to make such small details in the description of a character. This nose and mustache grab the reader's attention, characterize their possessor, and show Goi's delusion. When he licks the rice wine off his mustache and his nose – as if it was a different character – and sneezes, he releases all the complications of the confused soul. A simple man loses irritations (his nose was irritating throughout the whole short story) and can more easily live a simple life without strong desires and big dreams.

Thus Gogol's comic spirit revived with Gogol's tragic spirit on a larger scale and Gogol's manner and methods of writing returned over five decades later in the works of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa.

Another example of inspiration by Nikolai Gogol can be found in his short stories named "*The Nose*". This is the short story that brought Akutagawa his first moments of glory and praise from Natsume Sōseki, who sent him a letter in order to express his delight: "I found your piece ("The Nose") very interesting. Sober and serious without trying to be funny. It exudes humor, a sure sign of refined taste. Furthermore, the material is fresh and eye-catching. Your style is well-published, admirably fitting." (Murakami 1996)

This story can also be traced back to "*Uji Shūi Monogatari*"²¹ (second volume, seventh story) and in a lesser degree copying the plot of Gogol's short story from

²¹ The story also can be found in "Konjaku monogatari" (XXVIII, 20)

“Peterburg Tales”, as had happened in “Yam Gruel”. However, there are still many mutual elements that will be described below. It is quite possible that, similarly to “*The Overcoat*”, the short story “*The Nose*” made Akutagawa recollect a fantastic tale about the priest Zenchi (Naigu Zenchi or simply Nose in Akutagawa’s version) who had such a big nose, which hindered him in every possible way, together with events that happened after one of his students tried to hold it up so the priest could eat. But Akutagawa extends it by adding episodes about nose correction (using a Chinese method of boiling, stomping on it and removing the fat) and the priest’s excitement turning into anxiety with the magical return to its original form.

The short story, which was written in 1916, has many specific elements of Gogol’s manner of writing (grotesque elements, specific sense of humor, sometimes the facetious and caustic depiction of a “little man” figure). Similar to “Yam Gruel”, it keeps a taste of grotesque and bitter irony yet is still comical and satirical.

Both of the main characters are people with a high level of narcissism and vanity in their heads. Thus Zenchi constantly thinks about his nose and is more concerned about his appearance than about his duties and service to God:

“From the time he was an apprentice in the inner hall, climbing the ranks, even until the present day, he was constantly worried about his nose. Of course, during all this time, he continued to pretend that he didn’t care about it in the least. It wasn’t just that as a monk he should’ve been completely focused on the Pure Land awaiting him in the afterlife, it was that he didn’t want other people to know he was so concerned about his nose. Nothing terrified him more than the idea that someone would bring up his nose in conversation.”

(Akutagawa 2009: 54)

And

“When nobody was around, he’d sit in front of the mirror, experimenting with various lighting schemes, zealously laboring to hold different poses. No matter how he tried positioning his face, he was never satisfied, sitting there with his head propped on his hands and his fingers on his chin, spending hours peering diligently into the mirror.

However, he never once found a way to make his nose appear shorter. At times, it worried him to the point where he thought his nose actually looked longer.”

(Akutagawa 2009: 55)

The main character of Gogol's short story, Collegiate Assessor Kovalyov, makes his career in the Caucasus (which was easier than the bureaucratic way) and is extremely proud about himself and even uses his position in everyday life:

“He had been a collegiate assessor for only two years and therefore could not forget it for a single minute. To make himself sound more important and to give more weight to his status he never called himself collegiate assessor, but ‘Major’. If he met a woman in the street selling shirt fronts he would say: ‘Listen dear, come and see me at home. My flat’s Sadovaya Street. All you have to do is ask if Major Kovalyov lives there and anyone will show you the way.’ And if the woman was at all pretty he would whisper some secret instructions and then say: ‘Just ask for Major Kovalyov, my dear.’”

(Gogol 2013: 46-47)

All of the abovementioned is closely connected with another important theme of both short stories, namely: conformity. Both characters are trying to be as less individual and as normal as possible. It is caused by their dependency on public opinion and it seems even more ludicrous in a situation with a religious figure as it should concern him less than anything else.

Thus, Zenchi notices the disapproving reaction of the people around him after getting rid of the nose so openly:

“It started with a bureaucrat visiting Ikenō temple, who, even more than before, made a strange face upon seeing the Nose. He was rendered speechless, his eyes transfixed on the Nose's face. Outside the lecture hall, the Nose walked past some temple pageboys familiar with the rice gruel incident. As he walked by them, they looked down and restrained themselves, but finally, a laugh escaped. The second-rate teachers called for order, talking to the Nose respectfully, but as soon as he turned away, they also burst into laughter. This happened more than just once or twice.”

(Akutagawa 2009: 57)

People around Kovalyov also treat the main character with disregard after changes in his appearance when his nose ran away from him:

“The Inspector gave Kovalyov a rather cold welcome and said that after dinner wasn’t at all the time to start investigations, that nature herself had decreed a rest after meals (from this our collegiate assessor concluded that Inspector was well versed in the wisdom of antiquity), that respectable men do not get their noses ripped off, and that there was no end of majors knocking around who were not too fussy about their underwear and who were in the habit of visiting the most disreputable places.”

(Gogol 2013: 58)

However, the main difference deals exactly with the characters’ voluntariness, which leads them into such situations, since Kovalyov loses his nose by chance and is confused because of sudden changes in his life; while Zenchi undergoes this operation voluntarily, and the unpleasant reaction of the people around him is not simple disapproval of his appearance but the disapproval of his decision. Thus, the focal point is moved and the tragedy of Zenchi’s vain attempt to follow a public opinion in Akutagawa’s short story seems different yet not without comic tone. And in the end, like in Gogol’s work, the nose returns to the old condition and the story comes full circle.

Last but not least is the role of the narrator in short stories. The narrator in both works keeps a bit of distance, yet is sympathetic by trying to summarize, in some way, the characters’ motivations in the story and narrowing the gap between the bizarre unreality of the events with the real world in a didactic manner:

“In the hearts of people, there are two conflicting interests. Of course, anybody can sympathize with the misfortune of another. However, when another person can somehow overcome his misfortune, we feel unsatisfied. To exaggerate just a little, we wish for that person to regain his misfortune once more. We usually feel ambiguous about this, but, on occasion, they embrace a certain animosity towards that person.”

(Akutagawa 2009: 57)

And here is the ending of Gogol’s story:

“I simply don’t know what one can make of it...However, when all is said and done, one can concede this point or the other and perhaps you can even find...well then you won’t find much that isn’t on the absurd side, will you?”

And yet, if you stop to think for a moment, there's a grain of truth in it. Whatever you may say, these things do happen - rarely, I admit, but they do happen."

(Gogol 2013: 70)

Undoubtedly, Akutagawa does this more discreetly and his short story, in general, resembles more of a parable with a didactic moral than the somewhat journalistic style of the main parts of Gogol's "Nose" which ends in a mysterious fog, as if it were told in front of a bonfire. At the same time, it does not belittle the power of either of these great pieces of literature. Either way, both endings come to the possibility of looking upon the other aspects of these stories by means of the grotesque.

Thus, we can conclude that Akutagawa adopts Gogol's elements of plot (especially for setting up of a story) as well as uses Gogol's method of character disclosure through situations and specific stylistic narrative tools. On the functional level we could assume that Akutagawa takes the Japanese basis for the short stories but presents it in modern form taken from Gogol's works with a similar plot parts.

2.1.2 Anton Chekhov's elements

Ryūnosuke Akutagawa is a master of short works. His talent was to convey many things in a small number of words. He wrote his stories modestly and tersely. As an artist paints a picture, he created his works in a vivid and picturesque manner. This can be rooted in the Japanese literary traditions: *haiku* and *tanka* (short genres of Japanese poetry), as well as tales from the aforementioned “*Monogatari*” (which are even smaller than Akutagawa's stories), etc. That is why the laconicism of Chekhov's stories, with their soft tones, subtlest nuances, Chekhov's tendency to leave the works unsaid, as well as attention to detail, were organic to the Japanese people and especially to Akutagawa.

Chekhov, in general, had a significant impact on Akutagawa's works, as Chekhov's manner of writing was close to Akutagawa's creativity. After rediscovering the works of Chekhov in 1919, when the play “Uncle Vanya” was performed in Japan, Akutagawa was influenced by this Russian author. Akutagawa used a figure of the so-called “little man” in Chekhov's manner (e.g. the character of a teacher in “*Mr. Mori*” (1919)). This character is ridiculous and charming at the same time. His toil is unseen and unnoticeable, yet he is noble inside, despite his appearance which “reminds one of a spider-man in a freak-show” (Tsuruta 1970).

Akutagawa's approach in his short stories is to take a “fair” position and come to appropriate conclusions. Thus, Akutagawa was not judging characters for their actions and impartially describing stories, the characters in it, and all the complications around it. The ultimate and only judge is a reader. (Grigor'yeva 1983)

It is especially seen in one of Akutagawa's most famous short stories “*In a Grove*” (1922), which was adapted for the silver screen by Akira Kurosawa in the film “*Rashōmon*” in 1950. In this work, the story of a mysterious homicide is presented from several points of view and the real truth remains undiscovered. And it should not be discovered as every person has their own “truth” which is equally real. Researcher Tsuguo Satō in his work “Akutagawa and Chekhov” (1990) compared this story with Chekhov's short story “*The Grasshopper*” (1892), where the couple Osip Dymov and Olga Dymova has its own “truth” and the world perception, which appears only near the end and is revealed to Olga only when it is too late. (Satō 1990)

However, the most obvious borrowing from all of Chekhov's works would be Akutagawa's short story “*The Garden*” (“*Niwa*” (1922) and Chekhov's play “*The Cherry*

Orchard” (1904)). The main theme of both of the works is the dying out of the past, giving way to modernity and progress. And this process is vividly presented through the image of a garden/orchard that grows wild in the first case and is being sold and cut down in the other.

In his letter dated March 6, 1927, Akutagawa writes:

“... I wanted to hint at the fact that a new era has come in the world. As you know, Chekhov drew a student of the new era in “The Cherry Orchard” and made him slide down the stairs from the second floor. I cannot hopelessly mock the new era like Chekhov. But at the same time, I am not eager to welcome the new era with open arms...”

(Akutagawa 1992 : 542–543)

These lines not only vividly show Akutagawa’s knowledge about Chekhov’s play, but also disclose the main theme which is close to Akutagawa and his disagreement with some of Chekhov’s ideas. It is interesting to notice that the researcher and author of the work “*Ryūnosuke and Chekhov*”, Okano Yokichi, in 1919 draws a bit of a different picture of the authors’ manner of writing:

“Ultimately, Ryūnosuke and Chekhov understand a person as he is. This is an indisputable fact. However, this understanding is accompanied by motives of loneliness and sadness in Chekhov’s works while in Akutagawa’s - the author’s mockery clearly appears. Chekhov is crying then smiling. Akutagawa only smiles derisively. Thus, in the works of each there is its own style, each has its own charm.”

(Yokichi, 1919, as cited in Tomiko 2005)

The composition of the short story is made up of three parts: 1) “Beginning”, where a story of the garden and its owners, the Nakamura family, are introduced. A once beautiful garden with clean water, small waterfalls, two pavilions, and strictly planted and cut trees of a noble family slowly falls into disrepair. The head of the family is dying and the elder son plants fruit trees (which was not typical for a traditional Japanese garden), succumbing to a persuasion of the director of a local school. 2) “Continuation”, where the troublesome middle son returns home and tries to return the garden to its former greatness yet dies because of an illness and hard work on the garden. 3) “Ending”, the family passes away and in the place of the garden a railroad station is built. The structure of Chekhov’s play, on the other hand, runs by the rules of a theatre play. The play is tightly unified and

maintains the units of time, place and character revolving around landlady Lyubov and the sale of the Cherry orchard. The plot of the short story is different from the one of the play, however the ideas are mutual, especially the idea of the inability to return to the past and the hopeless attempts to stop time, which stands still for no one.

Characters can be divided by those living in the “past”: Lyubov Ranevskaya, Leonid Gaev, Fierce (in Chekhov’s play) and Father, Mother and Elder son (in Akutagawa’s short story) – they have hope that everything can remain the same; characters living in the present: Ermolai Lopakhin (in Chekhov’s work) and Youngest son (in Akutagawa’s story) and characters of the future Peter Trofimov, Anya (in Chekhov’s work) and Middle son and Ren’ichi (in Akutagawa’s short story). The characters living in the “past” in both works are dreamers, but everyone lives it in their own manner.

The mother in the short story is the calmest character and slowly living out her days. She worries, yet does so silently, for example when Middle son was toiling in the garden says, “Mother ... mother was afraid that this digging would not damage his health”; “I shouldn’t have been zealous! - I thought about it over and over again my mother, sitting at the head of the bed” (Akutagawa 1985).

The elder son is trying to write poetry, however does not achieve anything important until the very end of his life:

“The elder son, to whom the domination of the family passed, with his young wife - his cousin - lived in a cramped outbuilding, communicated with the main house through a gallery. The son who took the pseudonym Bunshitsu for haiku writings was a hot-tempered, unrestrained human. Not only a sick wife and younger brothers, it goes without saying, even the old head of the family was afraid of him.”

(Akutagawa 1985)

The youngest son is an enterprising man “/---/ possessed by the spirit of speculation, and was preoccupied with the price of rice and silk-cocoons.” (Akutagawa 1985). And similarly, Lopakhin sees the world as a place of business benefits. They lack a taste of beauty and try to make even marriage profitable:

“After celebrating the anniversary of the death of the elder son, the youngest married the daughter of his master. And, taking advantage of the fact that the director of the local school who rented the outbuilding was transferred to another place, he and his young wife started to live there”

These people of the present, similarly to the people living in the “past”, cannot become any good in the future.

In both works, characters meet the necessity to stop admiring the beauty of the old days in order to save their lives. However, instead of overcoming that, they tend to cling to the memories. The middle son in “*The Garden*” is working his fingers to the bone, as if he were trying to realize the words of a character of “*The Cherry Orchard*”, student Trofimov, who said that “for it's so clear that in order to begin to live in the present we must first redeem the past, and that can only be done by suffering, by strenuous, uninterrupted labour.” (Tchekoff 1917) In Chekhov's play, only Anya (a young daughter of the landlady) overpowers deeply rooted nostalgic feelings in an attempt to experience a new life, convincing her mother, “we will plant a new garden, more luxurious than this, you will see it, you will understand, and joy, quiet, deep joy will descend on your soul.” (Tchekoff 1917)

The garden/orchard has a significant meaning not only for characters of the works but also for authors as a device for special purposes. Chekhov uses a cherry orchard for the disclosure of his characters. This can be seen through the attitude to the garden characters' natures and motivations, but the orchard itself calmly stays in the background. Akutagawa's garden is changing throughout the story and metaphorically reflects the decline of feudal society, the gradual destruction of the old way. In the beginning of the story the garden is well-maintained: “... the gourd-shaped pond remained transparent, and pine branches hung from artificial hills. The pavilions were intact [...] from the mountain ledges [...] the waterfalls were still whitening and sparkling” (Akutagawa 1985). The garden changes after a couple of years: “... algae began to sway on the surface of the pond. Dry trees appeared among green spaces” (Akutagawa 1985). Time is going on and the garden is becoming overrun: “The director ... constantly persuaded the eldest son to plant fruit trees in the garden. Since then, in the spring in the garden flowers of plums, peaches and apricots dazzled among the usual willows and pines... But because of its artificial hills, the pond, gazebos took an even more miserable view” (Akutagawa 1985). Further in the short story, “In the autumn, on the mountains beyond the pond, a fire happened. Since then, the waterfalls that were falling into the pond have completely dried up ...” (Akutagawa 1985). And later on the former greatness is almost gone: “... from a heavy snowfall collapsed the "Hut of a migratory heron" standing at the mountain. And when

spring came again the whole garden turned into greenery where only one thing could be seen near the muddy pond, the reed roof of the pavilion.” (Akutagawa 1985).

The garden and the orchard are dying with old feudal rules, classes, and way of life. New times are coming. The railroad as an image of inevitable progress resembles the sounds of an ax in the end of “*The Cherry orchard*” and dramatically concludes the tragedy of the inability to stop time, no matter how hard people try to do so.

It is important to notice that Akutagawa is not simply copying themes, ideas, and images as it would seem, he rethinks and converts images; thus, a cherry orchard becomes a traditional Japanese garden, characters transform into more Japanese types with their specificities which underlines that Akutagawa is conducting a deep image analysis. (Grivnin 1980)

Thus, we can assume that Akutagawa borrows Chekov’s figure form of a “little man” as well and uses it in a picturing a story from an interesting angles. Also we can also say that Akutagawa uses symbolic images of Chekov’s plays and short stories adopting them to the Japanese reality. All these borrowed elements work for modernized way of presenting contemporary themes and topic for the contemporary audience of the modernizing world.

2.1.3 Fyodor Dostoevsky's elements

As mentioned above, it is hard to imagine Akutagawa's works without meticulously written psychological experiments on the characters of his short stories. This manner of writing and complex approach to creating characters and settings could be adopted from different authors. And Fyodor Dostoevsky was obviously one of them.

Akutagawa was quite amazed by the works of the famous Russian writer. Thus in 1913, he wrote a letter to Fujioka Dzoroku: "...After returning to Tokyo I do not know how I have been living. I have read "Crime and Punishment". All 450 pages of the novel are full of soulful descriptions of the characters. However, the development of action is not connected with their state of mind, their internal relationships. Therefore, the novel lacks "plastic". (It seems to me that this is a shortcoming of the novel.) But on the other hand, the inner world of the protagonist Raskolnikov arises with even more terrible force /---/ This is the first time I read Dostoevsky, and he captured me /---/" (Grivnin 1980: 160-161).

The deep impression has been left on Akutagawa by Dostoevsky's "The House of the Dead" (1861). One particular scene from the sketches of a convict Aleksandr Goryanchikov was referred to twice in Akutagawa's short story "Saru" ("The Monkey", 1916) and in his work "Daidoji Shinsuke no Hansei" ("Daidōji Shinsuke: The Early Years", 1925).

"I remember that in Dostoevsky's 'House of the Dead' which you once gave me to read, it is said that if you force a prisoner to pour water from a tub into a tub many times, he will certainly commit suicide from this useless work. And since the prisoners there are really busy with such work, it remains only to be surprised that there are no suicides among them."

(Akutagawa 1998, I : 104-105)

And here is a part from "Daidoji Shinsuke no Hansei"

"Shinsuke hated school. Especially high school, in which he was so oppressed ... There he had to memorize a lot of unnecessary information /---/ But on the other hand, it was difficult to forget that this knowledge is not needed by anyone. In 'The House of the Dead', Dostoevsky says that prisoners are ready to strangle themselves when they are forced to do aimless labor, such as pouring water from one tub into

another, and from another into the first. In a gray school building lined with tall poplars, Shinsuke experienced the same mental anguish as those prisoners.”

(Akutagawa as cited in Grivnin 1980 : 16-17)

It seems that the main characters of “*Crime and Punishment*”(1866) have got under Akutagawa’s skin. The theme of crime and the moral aspects of the person who commits it – in one way or another – often appeared in Akutagawa’s short stories of different periods, changing the angles of viewing and the degree of the permissiveness of the characters.

And the most obvious example of such influence can be found in one of the earliest short stories named “*Rashōmon*” (1915). The plot for the story is again borrowed from the old collection of tales “*Konjaku Monogatari*” (XXVIII, 18). It tells about a thief who, out of despair, robs a poor old woman. Many puns and meanings are hidden in the name of the story and many readers were trying to decipher them. However, this is not the strongest part of Akutagawa’s short story. The strongest part is the realization of the lowly servant’s (who does not even have a name) motives in a cruel environment, an inner struggle where hunger defeats ideals and forces the main character to commit his crime. And this psychological struggle in many ways calls back to Dostoevsky’s famous novel.

The servant, similar to Raskolnikov, remains poor. Hunger forces the stream of thoughts to come to a logical conclusion:

“If he chose honest means, he would undoubtedly starve to death beside the wall or in the Sujaku gutter. He would be brought to this gate and thrown away like a stray dog. If he decided to steal... His mind, after making the same detour time and again, came finally to the conclusion that he would be a thief.

But doubts returned many times. Though determined that he had no choice, he was still unable to muster enough courage to justify the conclusion that he must become a thief.”

(Akutagawa 2016)

He is a simple servant and cannot come up with the sophisticated exculpatory theory of Rodion Raskolnikov (who has a university background and napoleonic ambitions) of justified crime:

“Kill her, take her money and with the help of it devote oneself to the service of humanity and the good of all. What do you think, would not one tiny crime be

wiped out by thousands of good deeds? /---/ Of course she does not deserve to live /---/”

(Dostoevsky: 1, VI)

“I wanted to find out then and quickly whether I was a louse like everybody else or a man. Whether I can step over barriers or not, whether I dare stoop to pick up or not, whether I am a trembling creature or whether I have the right...”

(Dostoevsky: 5, IV)

The idea of a crime is growing inside of both characters and in both cases an old woman becomes the victim of this idea. And when the servant sees an old woman cutting the hair off the corpses he finds a “righteous” excuse for his actions, he – like Raskolnikov – in a deceitful egocentric desire (masked as a desire to achieve happiness for the world) – commits his crime.

Near the end of the novel, Raskolnikov thinks: “‘I am wicked, I see that,’ he thought to himself, feeling ashamed a moment later of his angry gesture to Dounia. ‘But why are they so fond of me if I don’t deserve it? Oh, if only I were alone and no one loved me and I too had never loved anyone! Nothing of all this would have happened.’” (Dostoevsky: 6, VII)

And here lies probably the most important difference between characters or what is more accurate to say between the circumstances in which both of the main characters are situated and consequently the outcomes of their crimes. The idea does not exist without a character both in Akutagawa’s and Dostoevsky’s works and this idea usually possesses fateful strength. And this strong idea takes a different turn in different circumstances.

Unlike Raskolnikov, who is living in a big city full of different people he meets, the servant and old woman in “*Rashōmon*” are all alone in a dead area hidden by heavy rain. Unlike Raskolnikov, whose crime is being investigated by the police, no one will look for another thief in ruined Kyoto. Unlike Raskolnikov who has relatives and neighbors, the servant has no one and no place to go. Raskolnikov thinks to himself: “Oh, if only I were alone and no one loved me...” and the servant is this exact realization of the “dream”. And as a result, he disappears in the night with no punishment, no repentance, no blood on his hands and with only the ragged clothes of the woman.

Nevertheless, the theme is explored further in the aforementioned short story “*Hell Screen*” where a court painter Yoshihide once finds out that he cannot draw a picture of Buddhist hell. He asks his lord to torture apprentices and later to burn a beautiful woman to be inspired by witnessing it. However, his Lord sets Yoshihide’s daughter on fire. Yoshihide watches it, then in a frenzy finishes his piece of art and subsequently commits suicide. In the story, not only a tyrannical whim of the Lord Horikawa (who commands to set the painter’s daughter on fire) leads to such a tragic ending, but the permissiveness of the court and the painter himself unavoidably hastens the crime and death. The idea of being above the crime (in this case by the possession of artistic talent) is ruinous for characters.

One of the reasons for such behavior can be found in selfishness and egocentrism. These characters concentrate on their own problems and concerns and mostly look for noble excuses to commit a crime of a different kind, similarly to Raskolnikov. But they cannot deceive literary fate. Thus in another of Dostoevsky’s novels “*The Brothers Karamazov*”(1880), there is a fable told by Grushenka about an old woman who, because of one good deed (she gives a little onion to a beggar), gets a chance to escape the hellfire; however, not capable of defeating her egoistical nature, falls down into the Inferno. The same story happens in Akutagawa’s “*The Spider’s Thread*” (1918) (Nakamura 2011); however, the main character becomes male and a thief, the salvatory onion becomes a spider’s thread and instead of a Christian angel, readers see Buddha Shakyamuni. Buddha gives a chance by sending a spider’s thread from the skies for a sinner to escape hell (as the thief once spared a spiders’ life). He starts to climb up, but when other sinners are trying to do the same, he fears that the thread will break and starts to throw off the others. But exactly this action makes the thread broken and the robber returns to the eternal flames of hell for his selfishness. Yet, even after death, even when the unprecedented opportunity is given to the characters, they cannot get rid of their obstinate vices and they want salvation only for themselves.

In both stories, religious moral is misinterpreted by the characters. The difference is in the narrator. For Grushenka, this parable becomes a confession in an allegorical form. She sees herself in the figure of an old woman and tries to redeem her sins. In Akutagawa’s story, the narrator is an author and the characters become more abstract and also more universal, but thus also more doomed in their ill nature (Saraskina 1990). Yet it is not so simple. Akutagawa pictures the Heavens as quite a silent place; Buddha is quite indifferent to people (unlike the angel in Dostoevsky’s story) and in a didactic tale of the wrongness

of egocentrism, we can find more complicated and even grim notes of Akutagawa's disbelief in human redemption and questioning of Heavens' righteousness.

Nevertheless, there are other theories about the source of inspiration as a similar story was published by Paul Carus in 1894 with the name "Karma. A Tale with a Moral" as a Buddhist parable told by a monk. In the same year, prominent Russian author Leo Tolstoy made a translation of that story and for some time was mistakenly taken as its author. (Yuko 2007) Thus, the possible influence from Tolstoy may have happened; however, it is not as clear as many other examples which will be discussed in the next part of the thesis.

However, we can take Dostoevsky's way of psychological depiction of a character and author's analysis of specificity of human nature as a main point of inspiration and borrowing for Akutagawa. As previously, modern form of psychological revealing of a human nature successfully layering with old Japanese social and moral parables and unveiling from new angles for contemporary readers.

2.1.4 Leo Tolstoy's elements

Leo Tolstoy is an important figure not only in Russian but also in world literature. His literary and ideological legacy was sometimes a topic for many debates, including in Japan, which is quite eloquent evidence of his significant impact. For example, another famous Japanese writer of the 20th century, Takeo Arishima (the author of the novel “*A Certain Woman*” (1919)), wrote in a letter of 1907:

“With the deepest satisfaction I have read ‘*Anna Karenina*’. This is a masterpiece that has a powerful impact on the reader. I think that ‘*Anna Karenina*’ can be compared with Dante’s ‘*Divine Comedy*’ in its harmony and nobility of ideas, in the severity of criticism of reality and a sense of compassion.”

(Arishima, 1907, as cited in Reho 1987)

However, the style and grandiosity of the scale of the novel has not always been taken positively. For many it quite contradicted the ego-belletristic specificity of *shishōsetsu* and Japanese literary traditions, even after all the transformations that were made in the Meiji and Taishō periods²². Thus, Akutagawa was very familiar with Tolstoy’s works, yet he had a complex attitude toward Russian author and his oeuvre.

Akutagawa considered that it is impossible to fully understand Tolstoy (Grivnin 1980) and despite Akutagawa’s disagreement with Tolstoy’s ideas and point of view, he admitted Tolstoy’s unachievable greatness: “I laugh at Tolstoy. But what I see is that the crawling Tolstoy is moving faster than the walking me. I’m rushing, Tolstoy is crawling. And nevertheless, I cannot keep up with him.” (Akutagawa, as cited in Grivnin 1980: 163)

Akutagawa was admiring Tolstoy’s talent. Here is one of his impressions from a letter to a friend:

“At the moment I am reading ‘*War and Peace*’. This is a huge work, and therefore I have not yet been able to cover it as a whole. But the part that I read (although it is quite large) captured me as much as a part of the work can capture generally.”

(Akutagawa, 1915, as cited in Grivnin 1980 : 161)

²² This conflict is well covered in the chapter “Leo Tolstoy and the problems of the modern Japanese novel” in Reho’s book (Reho 1987)

Tolstoy's novel and its characters and some scenes were quite impactful for Akutagawa:

"I especially love Prince Andrew from the characters. Andrew's father and sister are well discharged. Andrei returns when everyone already considers him dead. And at this moment of return, his wife dies. This place is truly beautiful. It is just as beautiful as the scene where Andrei looks into the sky at Austerlitz."

(Akutagawa, 1915, as cited in Grivnin 1980 : 161)

Thus these episodes highly inspired Akutagawa's short story "*The Story of a Head That Fell Off*" (1918). This story tells about Chinese soldier He Xiao-er who was almost beheaded during the Sino-Japanese war from 1894-95. However, due to a fabulous miracle and a surrealistic intention of Akutagawa, Xiao-er survives and continues his life remembering the moment on the verge of life and death.

Even though the plot of the story is similar to the American short story "*An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*" written by Ambrose Bierce in 1890, the endings are different. In Bierce's story, the main character's escape is just a pre-death delusion, while in Akutagawa's work the story is read in a newspaper and, according to this, Xiao-er's life after "death" is taking place.

However, it lies on the surface. What is more important for Akutagawa is the exact moment when Xiao-er lies under the endless sky feeling how death is coming and his life is being rethought and reviewed. The moment when remorse and regret filled Xiao-er's heart to the brim.

"Was Xiao-er entirely unconscious after he fell from his horse? True, the pain of his wound was almost gone, but he knew he was lying on the deserted riverbank, smeared in mud and blood, and looking up through the willow leaves caressing the deep blue dome of the sky. This sky was deeper and bluer than any he had ever seen before. Lying on his back, he felt as if he were looking up into a gigantic inverted indigo vase. In the bottom of the vase, clouds like massed foam would appear out of nowhere and then slowly fade as if scattered by the ever-moving willow leaves."

(Akutagawa 2009)

This key moment of revelation when the sky opens the unnoticed beauty of life is retail of the famous scene from "*War and Peace*":

“What’s this? Am I falling? My legs are giving way,” thought he, and fell on his back. He opened his eyes, hoping to see how the struggle of the Frenchmen with the gunners ended, whether the red-haired gunner had been killed or not and whether the cannon had been captured or saved. But he saw nothing. Above him there was now nothing but the sky—the lofty sky, not clear yet still immeasurably lofty, with gray clouds gliding slowly across it. “How quiet, peaceful, and solemn; not at all as I ran,” thought Prince Andrew—“not as we ran, shouting and fighting, not at all as the gunner and the Frenchman with frightened and angry faces struggled for the mop: how differently do those clouds glide across that lofty infinite sky! How was it I did not see that lofty sky before? And how happy I am to have found it at last! Yes! All is vanity, all falsehood, except that infinite sky. There is nothing, nothing, but that. But even it does not exist, there is nothing but quiet and peace. Thank God!...”

(Tolstoy 2001 : Chapter XVI)

The similarities of symbolic images are obvious. However, once again Akutagawa changes the outcomes. Life tragically meets Prince Andrew after his “resurrection” while Xiao-er does not fulfill the promises that he made during his dying delirium. Xiao-er definitely changes his life but to hedonistic debauchery.

The story is taken with suspicion by the characters discussing it: “Can’t trust anybody? You mean, you think he was faking it?” and the other answered, “Of course he was.” The question is not only about believing newspapers, but as the character concludes: “It is important - even necessary - for us to become acutely aware of the fact that we can’t trust ourselves.” (Akutagawa 2009)

That is why Tolstoy’s path to belief in God was especially complicated for Akutagawa. This long and difficult path was described in Biryukov’s “Biography of Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy”; however, Akutagawa, till the end of his life, continued to believe that it was not true that Tolstoy wanted to believe, yet never could achieve it. Thus, his later works “*A Pygmy’s Proverbs*” (1923-1925), “*A Confession*” and “*What is my faith*” are a lie. No one suffered the way Tolstoy suffered, he who was telling this lie” (Akutagawa 1971 : 253) and in his novella “*Kappa*” (1927) Akutagawa writes: “This saint [Tolstoy] all tried to believe in Christ, in whom, of course, it is impossible to believe /---/ But he did not become a suicide - this is evident at least from the fact that he was made a saint.” (Akutagawa 1971 : 331). Once again, Akutagawa tried to compound two different things that do not quite match: a myth about a figure and a real person. Akutagawa did not

find a perfect balance for himself. However, in these attempts, he created a very interesting short story “*Yamashigi*” (“*Woodcock*” (1921) that now will be analyzed.

The plot of this story is taken from the memoirs of Ilya Tolstoy about his father Leo Tolstoy and particularly one episode of Leo’s hunting with another famous writer Ivan Turgenev after their reunion. Leo Tolstoy and Ivan Turgenev go hunting for woodcocks. Turgenev shoots one after a series of failures. However, when the authors and a dog tried to find a fallen bird it was nowhere to be seen. This case leads to suspicion, as Turgenev is sure that he shot a bird and Tolstoy is not less sure that if there is no bird found no bird has been shot. They spent a long stressful and tense evening and night in distrust. However, in the morning they found out that the bird had gotten tangled in some branches and everyone was right and truthful all along. They laughed, and the endangered friendship was strengthened. Thus, the story is biographically accurate. Moreover, it is enlarged by the facts not included in the memoir and obtained from Leo Tolstoy’s correspondence and other sources (for example, the name of Tolstoy’s dog). However, this short story is not devoid of the artistic intent and individual style of Akutagawa. The episode is not taken by coincidence.

These layers of different confrontations can be discovered in this story. Firstly, there is the previously mentioned problem of believing and blurred boundaries of the truth. Secondly, there is the more narrow yet still wide conflict of the philosophies of both authors. Tolstoy, as noted, was a big figure for Japanese intelligentsia with his motion to a simple life and search for belief. Thirdly, there is the conflict of Tolstoy himself. A conflict between his image, aspirations, and real life. Tolstoy who is looking for the truth is suspected to be lying, even to a friend.

In order to better reveal the image of Tolstoy’s character, Akutagawa uses the landscape of Russia. The myth, as contemporaries got used to seeing him. Tolstoy calmly tells about his teaching of peasant children and calm life in a village. Akutagawa describes “The fields of rye” and “scent of the earth” preparing the reader for a meeting with a more real person.

The character of Ivan Turgenev also plays a role in helping to look into the “soul” of the author of “*War and Peace*”. However, the motif of hunting is largely inspired by Turgenev’s “*A Sportsman's Sketches*”. Starting from a direct reference: “In Turgenev's imagination, a picture of a story flashed like a chapter from ‘*A Sportsman's Sketches*’”

(Akutagawa 1971 : 383). Later on, when the hunting starts, Akutagawa's short story recalls more and more the second chapter "Yermolai and the Miller's wife" of Turgenev's book:

"The branches of the trees, twisting the sky, smoked misty - this, of course, was crowded with fragrant young foliage. From time to time a slight rustle of a barely noticeable breeze could be heard from the gloomy depths of the forest.

From the gloomy depths of the forest, the spring scent of young foliage and the scent of damp earth poured. Meanwhile, the sky became like water. Only here and there were the trunks of birches white."

(Akutagawa 1971 : 383-384)

And here is the time when the darkness falls upon the forest by Turgenev:

"A quarter of an hour passes; the sun has set, but it is still light in the forest; the sky is clear and transparent; the birds are chattering and twittering; the young grass shines with the brilliance of emerald.... You wait. Gradually the recesses of the forest grow dark; the blood-red glow of the evening sky creeps slowly on to the roots and the trunks of the trees, and keeps rising higher and higher, passes from the lower, still almost leafless branches, to the motionless, slumbering tree-tops.... And now even the topmost branches are darkened; the purple sky fades to dark-blue. The forest fragrance grows stronger; there is a scent of warmth and damp earth; the fluttering breeze dies away at your side."

(Turgenev 2014)

Using Turgenev's sketches, Akutagawa creates his own quite real picture of the Russian forest and animals living in it:

"'Warblers and siskins are singing,' Tolstaya seemed to say to herself tilting her head to the side. Instead of warblers and siskins singing only a cry of a nuthatch came from time to time now ... In the depths of the forest everything was already plunged into the evening twilight. The finch suddenly fell silent. And for some time in the evening darkness of the forest not a sound was heard. The sky ... the slightest breeze died down, the sky gradually enveloped the lifeless forest with its blueness. And an oriole suddenly flew overhead with a sad cry."

(Akutagawa 1971 : 383-384)

And here is the coming of the silence in Turgenev's cycle:

“The birds go to sleep—not all at once—but after their kinds; first the finches are hushed, a few minutes later the warblers, and after them the yellow buntings. In the forest it grows darker and darker. The trees melt together into great masses of blackness; in the dark-blue sky the first stars come timidly out. All the birds are asleep. Only the redstarts and the nuthatches are still chirping drowsily.... And now they too are still. The last echoing call of the pee-wit rings over our heads; the oriole's melancholy cry sounds somewhere in the distance; then the nightingale's first note.”

(Turgenev 2014)

And finally a woodcock with a cry flying up in this silence. At this moment Akutagawa even cites Turgenev: “When suddenly, - using the words of Turgenev himself, - ‘when suddenly—but only sportsmen can understand me’” (Akutagawa 1971: 385). The shot is made by the sportsman Turgenev. And after this intense moment the conflicts start to fire up.

In realistic settings drawn by the memoirs and Turgenev's own work, Akutagawa can finally set a more or less proper Russian environment to start looking into Tolstoy's inner world. And it is important for Akutagawa, as can be seen in the following quote: “Being born not in Russia, we are not able to fully penetrate the fabric of Tolstoy's work. This is our inevitable fate...” (Akutagawa, as cited in Grivnin 1980). However, even inside, Akutagawa does not find the faith he was most likely looking for.

Nevertheless, we can notice that Akutagawa borrows some symbolic imagery yet again adopts it to the Eastern realness. Besides, Akutagawa's polemic with a figure of Tolstoy and Tolstoy's ideas is also of a big influence for Akutagawa's works. The figure of a Russian author helps Akutagawa to show the trustful modern and real (as he sees it) example of a character with a specific nature that Akutagawa could hardly find in other individuals.

Conclusion

Using scientific approaches, we disperse the darkness and fog as if with the light from a lighthouse. However, the rays are limited and the misty daze is still too dense to see the edge. As seen in this paper, the boundaries between the West and East are tightly woven into fabrics of all-human problems and searches. On the examples of the borrowed elements from Gogol, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Turgenev in Akutagawa's short stories, we can observe how these elements have a complex inspirational nature, sometimes with a positive tone and sometimes with a negative tone. However, in many cases they add new elements in both plot variety and visual or stylistic diversity; and indeed form a complex of elements of the plot, stylistic features, ideas or even mood. Thus, Akutagawa uses Gogol's scenes for enriching short and psychologically-moderate anecdotes from Japanese medieval times with similar elements in nature. He can change the possible old moral message for a more complex and modern perception of the world. Akutagawa takes the figure of a "little man" from both Gogol's and Chekhov's literary examples and he borrows the image of a garden as a great poetic metaphor for how times change. Dostoevsky's psychologism intensifies characters' depth and interest for readers and for researchers; and Leo Tolstoy the great person, no less inspiring than Leo Tolstoy the great writer, helps Akutagawa blur the boundaries between myth and realness, person and character in order to answer questions which were so bothersome for the Japanese author. So, if we can make a small generalization, Akutagawa uses stylistic tools, symbolic images and plot elements of the aforementioned authors incorporating them into the Japanese (Eastern) literary and social contemporary traditions which could be taken as his main creative method. The influence of Russian authors (mentioned in the thesis) adds modernity and up-to-date forms which resonates with contemporary audience and Akutagawa himself. The experiments taken by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa are close to the equilibrium which can counterbalance differences and disputes, however, this was not followed through to perfection (if it is even possible to do so for a person in this world). Akutagawa wisely enriches Japanese literature with Russian literary elements, as well as with traditional Japanese ones. Thus, we can see that themes and motifs traverse Akutagawa's works from old Japanese tales and Russian classics (which is especially true for Gogol's examples) and play a big part in forming modern Japanese literature starting with Akutagawa's works.

This work has analyzed different examples of the complex nature of borrowed elements on certain examples, forming a picture of Russian literary influence on

Akutagawa's works and creating a basis for future works in the theme as some elements may remain untranslated and some undiscovered. However, this is not the end of studies about Akutagawa's literary world, Russian literary influence and the successful unification of the Eastern and Western traditions to achieve the bright future we desire.

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Kokkuvõte

Selles töös vaadeldakse vene kirjanduse mõju 20. sajandi alguse tuntud Jaapani kirjaniku Ryūnosuke Akutagawa loomingule jaapani kirjanduse kujunemise ja muutumise kontekstis kaasaegse Jaapani arengu ühe võtmeetapi ajal. Käesoleva töö autor analüüsib võrdleva kirjandusteaduse meetodeid kasutades laene selliste kuulsate vene klassikute nagu Nikolai Gogoli, Anton Tšehhovi, Fjodor Dostojevski ja Lev Tolstoi teostest novellides "Imogayu" ("Bataadipuder"), "Hana" ("Nina"), "Niwa" ("Aed"), "Rashōmon", "Yamashigi" ("Metskurvits") ja mõnes teises Akutagawa teoses. Seega, võime nende näidete põhjal näha Akutagawa ja Jaapani kirjandusmaailma rikastamise ja arenemise protsessi vene kirjanduse mõjul. Selles artiklis on toodud mõned näited erinevat tüüpi laenelementidest, et näidata Akutagawa südamlikke tundeid vene kirjanduse vastu ja selle lisamist tema novellidesse vormi ja vaimu tasanditel stiilivahendite ja konkreetsete motiivide abil moderniseerida kaasaegset kirjandustraditsiooni. See teos jätkab ida ja lääne dialoogi kajastamise traditsiooni ning heidab valgust mõnele jaapani kirjaniku loomingulise maailma aspektile, mis ingliskeelses keskkonnas vähe kajastatud.

Summary.

This paper examines the influence of Russian literature on the works of a prominent Japanese writer of the early 20th century, Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, in the context of the formation and transformation of Japanese literature during one of the key stages in the development of modern Japan. Using the methods of comparative literary studies, the author of this work analyzes borrowings from the works of such famous Russian classics as Nikolai Gogol, Anton Chekhov, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy in the short stories "Yam Gruel", "The Nose", "The Garden", "Rashōmon", "Woodcock" and some other works of Akutagawa. Thus, on the basis of these examples we can see a process of enrichment and development of Akutagawa's and Japanese literary worlds under the influence of Russian literature. In the paper some examples of different types of borrowing elements are given to show Akutagawa's heartfelt feelings for Russian literature and their incorporations into his short stories on the levels of form and spirit through stylistic tools and concrete motifs to modernize contemporary literary tradition. This work continues the tradition of covering the dialogue between East and West and breaks off some aspects of the creative world of the Japanese writer that do not have much coverage in the English-speaking environment.

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