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# The Effect on Existence

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### The Effect on Existence

The Rashomon effect is a sociological term that originated from the 1950 film *Rashomon* directed by Akira Kurosawa. It explains a story being told from multiple vantage points, but never gives an unbiasedly true version of the tale at its conclusion. By telling the story from multiple perspectives, characters who would originally be silenced such as the bride are given a voice. Telling the story in this format allows the audience to consider peoples' perspectives that differ from their own. Without giving the audience the true conclusion of an incident this demands that they consider every aspect of a story and that they analyze what biases they themselves hold. I propose that while the audience must analyze their own biases, they must also recognize the relationship of humanity and validation given through names in the texts to these people who are often silenced.

According to Holly Hendrigan who works as Liaison Librarian for Education and Arts & Social Sciences, the Rashomon effect when applied to librarianship focuses on both the teaching aspect of the school librarian as well as how sharing information research methods amongst other librarians are affected. When they are teaching in a school setting the Rashomon effect is applied to the misunderstanding of how students intake different subjects and information. One student may find a certain topic of information more important or fascinating than their peer. This does not holistically apply to the Rashomon effect, however it has a raw basis in it. These students

have told a story about their classroom experience with the information that suits their interests rather than including information that does not interest them. The librarian as a third party listening to the students explain their experience in the classroom will be provided with conflicting information. When preparing to teach future classes the librarian will be misinformed about what information is more sufficient to teach her students. Therefore, rather than being able to adjust her teaching mechanisms she becomes static because it is hard to decipher which aspect of her teaching needs more emphasis. This situation correlates with the woodcutter and how he saw the entire event of the murder take place but, his story same as the other characters', was different. While, the librarian saw the entire event of teaching her class, she saw it from her own vantage point as being a trained professional in information science. What was simple and accessible information for her to grasp may not have been easy information for her students to grasp. Subsequently, when the students give their version of the story it will automatically differ from hers.

Hendrigan states that librarians who are engaging in exchanged methods of informational research, the misunderstanding comes into play when one librarian explains their methods of research to another with the assumption that the other party had the same academic training. This is not always the case, similar to the situation with teaching the student, the other librarian may not understand the type of methods being taught to them. It is because of this assumption that the other party has this similar knowledge that new information is miscommunicated. Therefore, verifying the other librarian's previous training and working with them to teach new methods should be applied. Adjusting the situation to fit the person and look from their perspective rather than continue in the same miscommunicated fashion. I argue that Hendrigan's librarian approach to the *Rashomon* effect is a little too narrow. It still follows an aspect of the effect, however it

fails to grasp the concept of how one's own existence and humanity can be lost. This version focuses on miscommunication and finding understanding from the other person's point of view. Their humanity is never in question, while the Rashomon effect pushes the audience to question the value of each person purely based on their title and status. These characters were constructed in such a manner to imitate being strangers to the audience who is the designated third party in any given situation.

The Rashomon effect applies to both *The Stranger* by Albert Camus and *The Meursault Investigation* by Kamel Daoud as a joint entity by telling the story of a murder from two opposing perspectives. The perspective in the original text, *The Stranger*, is from the point of view of an Algerian born Frenchman named Meursault who unarguably killed a nameless Arab man. This differs from *Rashomon* where the killer is unknown. However, with Meursault being known as the killer, we only get his perspective of the story in the original text. Camus never explores the perspectives of the ethnic Algerian people. As a response piece Daoud wrote *The Meursault Investigation* and gave the Arab man the name of Musa. I argue that by giving Musa his name gives more humanity and power to his character, which was previously taken away from him. Harun states that the greater injustice put upon Musa was that his humanity was not recognized, not him being murdered: "...he killed him by passing over him, not by shooting him" (Daoud 5). Names are used to shift focus and give dominance to one character over another. Without his name, he was powerless, once given the name Musa he was allowed to tell his side of the story through his brother Harun, "Who was Musa? He was my brother. That what I'm getting at. I want to tell you the story Musa was never able to tell" (Daoud 4). Without his name he would not be allow a proper place in history and any event related to him is told from the perspective of a Frenchman. The investigation about his identity in *The Stranger* was

nonexistent. The last emotion that was described of Musa is “that he was laughing” (Camus 58). Meursault was not sure if Musa was mocking him or laughing at him, but he took it as fact. As a Frenchman this shows Meursault in a justified light and depicts Musa as villainous. Without *The Meursault Investigation* Musa, an Arab man, remains an aggressor against a Frenchman without a cause and with the response piece he is returned his humanity by giving him a family and background.

Tajomaru is the only character given a name in *Rashomon*, every other character is referred to by a title identifying their social status or work. I propose that Kurosawa purposefully did not name the others to make their tales easier to dismiss because it is easy to feel a disconnect with a nameless person. Instead of the characters having depth, they are reduced to their stereotype. The commoner comments that the bride’s story was not worth considering because she cried during her confession, he insists that women are to be inherently distrusted: “...but women use their tears to fool everyone. They even fool themselves” (Dir, Kurosawa). This gives dominance to the other male characters, especially Tajomaru. His rape of the bride is never mentioned in these proceedings, it is glazed over as a minor detail. While, after Tajomaru’s story, instead of commenting on how faulty his claims may be, the commoner added more depth to his profile and made him seem more reputable as a bandit and a killer: “Even amongst the bandits, Tajomaru is famous for being a womanizer. Why, last fall, a young wife went to the temple and she and her maid were found dead in the mountains. That must have been him too” (Dir, Kurosawa). The bride’s humanity was striped from her because she is a woman and by not naming her, this allows the audience a level of disconnect from her character. By being disconnected from her character, her rape seems trivial and unimportant compared to the murder that occurs. Similar to Musa’s murder, this matter is not dwelled on.

In *Rashomon* the first story is told by Tajomaru, who is both male and a person of lower social ranking. I argue that the first telling of a story can affect how a person sees a situation or believes a story. The audience is inclined to believe that he is telling the truest version of the story because of his status as a male, his work as a notorious bandit, and his name. These aspects combined are enough to influence an audience's perception of a character. The bride was dismissed as an unreliable source because of both her gender and her behavior while the three men were not questioned in accordance with their gender or how they presented their story previously. Compared to Meursault's telling of the story in *The Stranger*, the same principle applies with him being of ethnically French. His ethnicity affects how an audience interprets his telling of the story. He is deemed more reputable because of the French colonizing Algeria and being the dominant power within the country. This gives Meursault leverage and puts Musa at a disadvantage when his side is told. Being last to tell a story leaves room for comparison and speculation for third parties listening. Harun talks about how Meursault's story is so influential that his brother will remain an empty shell of himself: "He had a name. But he'll remain the 'Arab' forever. The last on the list, excluded from the inventory that Crusoe of yours made" (Daoud 13). Harun is Arab and therefore his version of the story will be regarded with less seriousness. This also happens to the woodcutter when he tells the full version of his story last. His version was the most deviated from all other tellings and the commoner did not believe his version of the event. He had to compete with three other versions of the incident. His social status, line of work, and lack of name in addition to telling his story last worked against him. The woodcutter is neither powerful nor is his story convincing, because of the order of succession in which he told his story. The only flaw found in his story was what happened to the pearl inlay dagger that belonged to the bride. However, Tajomaru did not mention what happened to the

dagger either. If their order of succession was flipped, then Tajomaru's version of the story would seem overly exaggerated and faulty as well because both of them are men and both of them have lower social status. This puts them both on a similar level making it easy for the succession to affect the audience's perception of the case. This is not the same as Musa and Meursault. They both share a similar social standing, but because Meursault is French he continues to be at an advantage. This does not undermine the importance of the order in which the stories were told. Meursault would still be under speculation if he told his story last, but the audience's perception of him is still higher than Musa's because of his ethnic background.

Characters that would normally be excluded from stories i.e. the poor and women, were included and therefore given validation. The existence of a character is also validated by giving multiple perspectives. Musa not having a name in *The Stranger* stripped him of his existence and validation, he was given this back by his brother Harun. This shows how telling a story is not about acquiring to the truest version of the story, but rather acknowledging people. Harun cared more about people knowing that his brother existed and that he was more than his label: "If he calls my brother 'the Arab,' it'd so he can kill him the way one kills time, by strolling around aimlessly...it was impossible to prove he existed, even though he was killed in public" (Daoud 13). This validation of one's own existence is essential to the effect.

In most cases this situation of telling the story from multiple vantage points would not happen, it would be left with a person of more socially dominant traits to tell the story whilst ignoring other parties that may have been involved. Telling the stories from multiple vantage points gives the validation that is essential for humans to live with each other. As social beings humans want their story to be passed on so that they are not forgotten. This prevents people from being forgotten and allows them to be remembered in the way that they prefer.

## Citation

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