

# Visual Character Analysis of Akutagawa Ryuunosuke In Bungou to Alchemist Using Manga Matrix Theory

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**Abstract**— *In recent years, games have become one of the most prominent forms of entertainment, appealing to players from diverse backgrounds and age groups. As the gaming industry continues to expand, the variety of genres and artistic styles grows as well, offering players increasingly rich and multifaceted experiences. One major factor shaping these experiences is visual design, particularly the creation and presentation of characters. Character design goes beyond mere aesthetics, it functions as a visual language that conveys narrative depth, emotional nuance, and meaning. In Bungou to Alchemist, character visuals play a central role in expressing each character’s personality and literary origins. Designers meticulously craft every aspect of the characters from their clothing and accessories to reflect their backgrounds and narrative roles. Akutagawa Ryuunosuke exemplifies this thoughtful approach. His design incorporates elements closely tied to the themes of his writing, such as sharp facial features, muted color palettes, and an overall atmosphere of intensity and restraint. This study utilizes the Manga Matrix method to analyze these visual elements, aiming to uncover the deeper significance embedded in each artistic choice. Through this analysis, the research demonstrates how deliberate design decisions shape player perception, deepen emotional involvement, and ultimately contribute to a more immersive and engaging gameplay experience.*

**Keywords**— *Game, Anime, Visual, Character Design, Manga matrix, Akutagawa Ryuunosuke*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Games have become a widely popular form of entertainment today, available on both PCs and smartphones. Digital Collectible Card Games (DCCG) are card-based games played alternately by players and their opponents, relying on strategy, such as “Bungou to Alchemist” [1]. Bungou to Alchemist is a DCCG released by the website DMM GAMES (EXNOA LLC) in Japan on November 1, 2016, with Android and iOS versions launched on June 14, 2017. The game features a battle system based on Random Number Generator (RNG) mechanics and focuses on collecting characters categorized by element type, class, and costume. The game has a fantasy theme with characters inspired by famous literary figures. The anime series began airing on April 4, 2020. Bungou to Alchemist features a variety of characters with unique designs, each with its own distinct characteristics.

This game tells the story of the player who takes on the role of an alchemist with the title “Special Duty Librarian” (特務司書, *Tokumu Shisho*). The player’s task is to guide the “Writers” (文豪, *Bungou*), who have been revived, to save their literary works from a mysterious force called “the Taints” (侵蝕者, *Shinshokusha*) that seeks to erase both the works and their authors from history. Each “Writer” (文豪, *Bungou*) possesses a book they have written, which, during missions, can transform into a type of weapon depending on the literary genre represented by that writer. The gameplay concept is similar to most Digital Collectible Card Games (DCCG), but what sets it apart is that each turn is controlled by a Random Number Generator (RNG). Like other games of this type, it features a deep story and character visuals with unique designs. The game also has a fantasy theme and draws on famous literary figures, with the inclusion of their works helping players delve into and appreciate the literature and culture referenced in the game.

Several previous character studies have used this method as a guide for analysis in this research [2-8]. The character to be analyzed in this study is Akutagawa Ryuunosuke. Akutagawa Ryuunosuke was introduced with the release of the game Bungou to Alchemist on November 1, 2016, as one of the characters with the highest rarity level, the rainbow rarity. This character is inspired by the famous Japanese writer Akutagawa Ryuunosuke himself. The character also features an intriguing visual design, wearing traditional Japanese clothing and possessing a complex personality, making him an interesting subject for analysis.

This research investigates the character Akutagawa Ryuunosuke in comparison to his real-life historical figure by analyzing the visual concepts used for his character. Through the application of the manga matrix method and comparative analysis, the study breaks down various components of the character to gain a clearer understanding of the design choices involved. The aim is to explore the factors that influence character creation and to provide insights that can benefit the creative industry. Specifically, this research is intended to support the development of visually appealing and compelling characters within the game industry.

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## II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive and comparative qualitative research method by collecting data through observation based on the experience of playing the game and conducting a case study. The analysis used for the research object is the manga matrix theory approach. This method was introduced by Hiroyoshi Tsukamoto in 2006 [9]. It applies the concept of a character's initial design by detailing its various components.

In Hiroyoshi Tsukamoto's manga matrix method, there are three stages in character creation. The first stage is the form matrix, which focuses on the character's body structure and shape. In this stage, the character's body can be combined with elements from the world to create a new living being. The second stage is the costume matrix, which focuses on the character's ability to wear various types of clothing and carry specific items. The costume category includes clothing, ornaments, makeup, and items the character carries to enrich their appearance and identity. The third stage is the personality matrix, which has six categories as parameters to describe the character's personality in greater depth. These categories include behavior, position, profession, status, special attributes, weaknesses, desires, and biological environment [3].

The primary data is based on the historical figure Akutagawa Ryuunosuke and the character Akutagawa Ryuunosuke from Bungou to Alchemist. Character analysis of Ryuunosuke Akutagawa is conducted using the Manga Matrix method to identify the form matrix and costume matrix. Meanwhile, the personality matrix is derived from biographical and narrative sources related to the character. Using the data obtained through these methods, this research aims to illustrate the extent of similarity and adaptation made from the historical figure to the character Akutagawa Ryuunosuke in Bungou to Alchemist.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. Biography of Akutagawa Ryuunosuke

Akutagawa Ryuunosuke (March 1, 1892 – July 24, 1927) was a renowned Japanese literary figure, especially known for his short stories and novellas. Many of his works received wide recognition both in Japanese and international literary circles. However, Akutagawa only wrote for about ten years before ending his career by taking his own life at the age of 35. In honor of his legacy, his close friend Kikuchi Kan established the "Akutagawa Prize," which has become the most prestigious literary award in Japan [10][18].

When Ryuunosuke was nine months old, his mother suffered from a severe mental illness, making it impossible for his father, Niihara Toshizo, to care for him. As a result, he was raised by his maternal aunt's family, from whom he later adopted the surname Akutagawa. During his time studying English literature at the Imperial University of Tokyo, Akutagawa, along with his classmates Kikuchi Kan, Kume Masao, and others, revived the literary magazine "Neo-Thought" (Shinshicho) for the third time in February 1914 [11].

One of Akutagawa Ryuunosuke's most notable works, Rashomon (羅生門), was written in 1915. It was during this time that he began using his real name as his pen name. His

friend, Suzuki Miekichi, introduced him to the renowned author Natsume Souseki, who accepted Akutagawa as his student [12-13]. By 1921, Akutagawa's physical and mental health had begun to deteriorate. This affected the nature of his writing, which grew more introspective and took on the style of *shishosetsu*, or autobiographical fiction. This style continued in his later works, including his final pieces such as Cogwheels (齒車, *Haguruma*, 1927) and Kappa (1927) [14].

From April to August 1927, he published a series of essays titled "Literary, All Too Literary" (文芸的な、あまりに文芸的な, *Bungei teki na, amari ni Bungei teki na*), which included his debates with Tanizaki Junichirou. Akutagawa, drawing on the works of Shiga Naoya, upheld poetic lyricism as the primary value in novels and downplayed the importance of structure. This marked a complete shift from his earlier attitude toward literature, revealing how much his approach to writing had evolved [15].

Akutagawa Ryuunosuke died by suicide at the age of 35 in July 1927. He took a dose of Veronal before going to bed and left a final will addressed to his family and friends. He was declared dead the following morning at 7 a.m. In his suicide note (addressed to Kume Masao), Akutagawa linked his decision to several factors, including "a vague sense of anxiety" about the future. His death shocked the literary world of the time and marked the end of an era for bourgeois intellectuals like himself. In 1935, his close friend Kikuchi Kan established the Akutagawa Prize, one of Japan's most prestigious literary awards, in his honor [12].

### B. Form Matrix

The visual analysis of the character in this study is based on the Manga Matrix method, which is divided into three components, namely: form matrix, costume matrix and personality matrix.

The Form Matrix in the matrix method can be used in character design to determine shape parameters. These parameters can be obtained by combining several shapes into one unified design. For example, the character Mermaid is created by merging the shapes of a human and a fish. Meanwhile, the design of Akutagawa Ryuunosuke's character uses only one shape, which is human [7].

TABLE I. RESULT OF FIXED FORM AKUTAGAWA RYUUNOSUKE

Form Table	Human	Paper	Ink	Etc.
Fixed Form	Human			
Non-fixed Form	Paper			
Mechanical Form	Ink			
	Etc.			

Akutagawa Ryuunosuke has a basic human form with a tall body, without any combination with other shapes. The visual design adopts a *manga* style, where the character is depicted similarly to the original, but with an emphasis on more prominent physical features, such as large eyes, long legs, and other distinctive elements in Table III.

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TABLE II. RESULT OF FORM MATRIX AKUTAGAWA RYUUNOSUKE




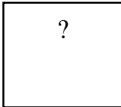




	Head :	
	Arm, Waist and Leg :	
	Skin Color :	



TABLE III. RESULT OF FORM MATRIX AKUTAGAWA RYUUNOSUKE FROM BUNGO TO ALCHEMIST

	Head :	
	Body :	

	appearance and presence.	
	Arm, Waist and Leg :	
	Skin Color :	



C. Costume Matrix

TABLE IV. RESULT OF COSTUME MATRIX AKUTAGAWA RYUUNOSUKE

	Outfit :	
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TABLE V. RESULT OF COSTUME MATRIX AKUTAGAWA RYUUNOSUKE

	<p>Outfit :</p> <p>Akutagawa Ryuunosuke is seen wearing a white shirt with a formal vest and a cravat tie mostly from western outfit, layered with a kimono which is an iconic traditional Japanese outfit. He also wears a long Western-style coat with a pin shaped like a gear is symbolize of literature works written by Akutagawa Ryunosuke titled Cogwheels (齒車, <i>Haguruma</i>). Akutagawa Ryuunosuke's Outfit takes reference from the Taisho era (1912-1926). At that time, Japan was experiencing westernization, and it was during that period that Akutagawa Ryuunosuke lived [12][14]. He has a belt that resembles a spider web, referencing one of the literary works written by Akutagawa Ryuunosuke titled The Spider's Thread. (蜘蛛の糸, <i>Kumo no Ito</i>).</p>	   		<p>Glove :</p> <p>Akutagawa Ryuunosuke wears gloves commonly associated with artists, enhancing his refined and intellectual image. The gloves worn by Akutagawa Ryuunosuke symbolize that he is an artist, especially considering that the historical figure he is based on was a writer. This accessory highlights his attention to detail and contributes to his distinctive, creative character design in the game.</p>	 
	<p>Kawa pattern:</p> <p>Akutagawa Ryuunosuke's coat features a Kawa pattern on the inside. The word Kawa means river and symbolizes continuity and the future. Rivers and tributaries can have varying styles. If the pattern consists of wavy lines, it is most likely a representation of a river [19].</p>		<p>Footwear :</p> <p>Akutagawa Ryuunosuke wears <i>geta</i>, traditional Japanese sandals, which reflect his cultural background. This footwear choice adds a layer of authenticity to his character, emphasizing his connection to Japanese traditions and enhancing his overall design.</p>	<p>Weapon :</p> <p>Akutagawa Ryuunosuke's weapon is a katana with a hilt wrapped in maroon-colored cloth, and it also features an ornament resembling a gear with a knuckle guard. The design merges the iconic Japanese katana with the protective knuckle guard commonly seen on Western sword.</p>	    

D. Personality Matrix

- 1) **Behavior:** In the game Bungou to Alchemist, the character Akutagawa Ryuunosuke is introduced with a

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personality that differs somewhat from his original literary reference in Japanese literature. The character description in the game states, "Akutagawa Ryuunosuke usually has a dry and cool expression on his face, but he also has a rather air-headed side, as evidenced by his disconcertedness when he falls for a lie. Due to his elegant mannerisms which give you the impression that he had a good upbringing, he tends to give a first impression of being uptight. On the other hand, his charming humanity and charisma make him prone to unconsciously attracting troublesome people. A heavy smoker who is always accompanied by smoke."

Akutagawa Ryuunosuke also possesses traits of self-confidence and being reserved. Although he is a famous "writer," he still feels an emptiness that has yet to be fulfilled, which makes him feel isolated and drives him to find ways to prove himself to others. Although initially appearing cold and distant, as the story progresses, Akutagawa begins to show a more open side towards his peers. He learns to interact better with others and reveals more of his hidden softer side.

- 2) **Profession, Position and Status:** In Bungou to Alchemist, it is explained that the characters are souls reincarnated by alchemists from the imagination of past authors. As a result, Akutagawa Ryuunosuke holds the status of a "Writers" (文豪, *Bungou*) and is part of an organization focused on restoring lost or damaged literary works caused by attacks from "the Taints" (侵蝕者, *Shinshokusha*). As a "Writers", his main task is to use his abilities to restore and preserve literary works that are at risk of being lost or destroyed, while interacting with the supernatural forces contained within those writings.

He is also part of the "Neo Thought" (新思潮, *Shinshichou*) faction, which consists of third and fourth-generation pure literature writers of the literary journal "Neo-Thought" from the late Taisho era. The term "Neo-Thought School" (新思潮派, *shinshichouha*) is sometimes used to refer to this group. The magazine, established in 1907 at the University of Tokyo, played a significant role in shaping the literary landscape. Early contributors like Tanizaki Junichirou were part of the first generation of writers involved with the publication. Later, other notable authors such as Akutagawa Ryuunosuke, Kikuchi Kan, Kume Masao, and others also used the magazine as a platform to launch their careers and gain entry into the literary world [11].

- 3) **Special Attributes:** In Bungou to Alchemist, Akutagawa Ryuunosuke possesses powers inspired by the literary works he wrote. For example, he can create a thread resembling a spider's web, which is inspired by his literary work titled *The Spider's Thread*. (蜘蛛の糸, *Kumo no Ito*).



Fig 1. Akutagawa Ryuunosuke using thread skill  
Source: Bungou to Alchemist: Shinpan no Haguruma episode 1, 06:55

In Bungou to Alchemist, Akutagawa Ryuunosuke is a Blade user. What's interesting is that each weapon they carry represents the literary work they created. The Blade type represents the genre of pure literature. Pure literature is regarded as a more serious and artistic genre that emerged in Japan in the late 19th century [11][16]. Naturalism is considered one of its subgenres, which shares many similarities. As a Blade user, he has the most balanced statistics among other types in terms of attack and defense. With one of the highest defense stats in the game, he takes the least damage from "the Taints" (侵蝕者, *Shinshokusha*) attacks. Blade users also have a chance to attack twice consecutively in a single battle turn.

- 4) **Weakness:** Akutagawa Ryuunosuke has several weaknesses that reflect his personality and internal conflicts. He often feels isolated and trapped in his solitude. This sense of alienation leaves him with little emotional support, which exacerbates his feelings of being unable to truly connect with others. Despite his confident demeanor, Akutagawa is often haunted by self-doubt. While he tries to appear strong, he feels unappreciated and questions his place in the literary world or even in life. This doubt can interfere with his ability to pursue his goals decisively and make him feel trapped in the darkness of his inner turmoil. Akutagawa frequently contemplates with uncertainty about his purpose in life. Although he is ambitious and desires recognition, he sometimes feels confused about his larger life goals and his role in the literary world.

As a Blade user, although their statistics are balanced in attack and defense, they are weak in evasion, making this type of user more likely to receive attacks from "the Taints" (侵蝕者, *Shinshokusha*).

- 5) **Desire:** Akutagawa Ryuunosuke has a desire that greatly influences his actions and life goals, closely tied to his personality and background. One of Akutagawa's desires is to gain recognition. In the literary world, he wants his works to reflect his essence and be appreciated. This desire arises from the feelings of being undervalued and isolated that he often experiences, which drive him to strive for the recognition he feels he deserves.

Akutagawa often feels trapped in darkness and self-doubt. His desire to find a greater purpose in life is one of the main driving forces in his journey. He wants to find clearer meaning and direction in his life, which

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often leads him to question his role in the literary world and in life in general.

Akutagawa's past, filled with hardships and trauma, is also a part of his desires. He struggles to overcome the shadows of his past and deal with the loneliness and self-doubt that have haunted him. His desire to free himself from his past and find a better path forward becomes one of the motivations that drives him to move ahead.

- 6) **Biological Environment** : In Bungou to Alchemist, it is explained that the "writers" (文豪, *Bungou*) are souls reincarnated by alchemists from the imagination of past authors. Akutagawa Ryuunosuke resides in a library created by the alchemists because it is the only place that can preserve his soul.

#### E. The Similarity and The Differences

Comparing the manga matrix above with both the historical Akutagawa Ryuunosuke and his portrayal in Bungou to Alchemist reveals key similarities and differences.

##### 1) The Similarity:

- The historical figure Akutagawa Ryunosuke and his version in Bungou to Alchemist have dark hair.
- Akutagawa Ryuunosuke both historical figure and Bungou to Alchemist wearing kimono.
- They have a similar past, however Akutagawa Ryuunosuke from Bungou to Alchemist took inspiration from this historical figure. Especially in the narrative describing how his anxiety about writing intensified to the point where he no longer took pleasure in his work and felt uncertain about how to move forward and the tragic story of his death, where he had hallucinations about another himself and despaired, until he decided to commit suicide by taking drugs until he overdosed.
- They are heavy smokers. Akutagawa Ryuunosuke from Bungou to Alchemist drawn as heavy smoker. That last summer of 1927, Akutagawa took part in a short publicity film at his home in Tabata, north Tokyo. There is a point in the film where he stops playing with his children to light a cigarette. From under a broad-brimmed sun hat, he puffs on his cigarette and stares into the camera. Half hidden in shadow and smoke, it is the face of defeat, the face of death [17].

##### 2) The Differences:

- The Akutagawa Ryuunosuke character from Bungou to Alchemist is drawn in a manga style.
- Although both the historical Akutagawa Ryuunosuke and his version in Bungou to Alchemist have dark hair, they are not the same color. The historical figure one has black hair while the character in Bungou to Alchemist is drawn with long hair with navy color.

- In terms of clothing, the historical figure Akutagawa Ryuunosuke wears a simple kimono and haori that were commonly worn in that era. Meanwhile, Akutagawa Ryunosuke from Bungou to Alchemist has more complex and layered clothing. Like how he combines Western and Japanese clothing that symbolizes that at that time Japan was experiencing westernization. And additional accessories such as belts, gloves and gear pins, some of which are taken from references to the titles of literary works from Akutagawa Ryunosuke himself, give a fantasy impression.
- Although Akutagawa Ryūnosuke is depicted as a writer in Bungou to Alchemist, he and the other authors must protect their books from attacks by the Taints, who seek to damage or erase their creations.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Creating character designs based on historical figures requires careful examination of their background and cultural significance. Based on the analysis above, the character Akutagawa Ryuunosuke from the game Bungou to Alchemist is inspired by the historical literary figure of the same name. The character is constructed using the author's life and historical background as a foundation. By studying the life and literary achievements of these figures, designers can construct characters that authentically reflect their origins while adapting them to fit the game's storyline and aesthetic. The game effectively visualizes Akutagawa Ryuunosuke through distinctive elements such as clothing and accessories, making the character design both meaningful and visually appealing. For Akutagawa Ryuunosuke in Bungou to Alchemist, the design process was rooted in thorough research of the author's biography and works, which provided a strong foundation for the character's development. Although Akutagawa's story in the game is adapted from his original literary works, certain modifications have been made to align with the game's narrative structure, particularly in relation to the missions involving the purification of distorted books. Importantly, this method contributes to the dissemination and renewed interest in classical literature, as players intrigued by the character may be motivated to seek out the original texts through physical or digital bookstores.

This research was then combined with the game's creative concept to produce a distinctive and memorable character. Such a process not only enriches the gameplay experience but also encourages players to explore and appreciate the original literature. This game has also collaborated with museums in Japan. It holds the potential to be further explored as other forms of entertainment media, such as comics, anime, and games with different gameplay styles. Unfortunately, information related to the original historical figure is difficult to find. Moreover, the game has a relatively small player base, making it challenging to obtain the desired data. Since the game is only available in Japanese, there is a possibility of inaccuracies during translation. For future research, it is recommended to conduct interviews with players who enjoy the game and local people to carry out direct observation within the game itself in order to gather more accurate data.

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