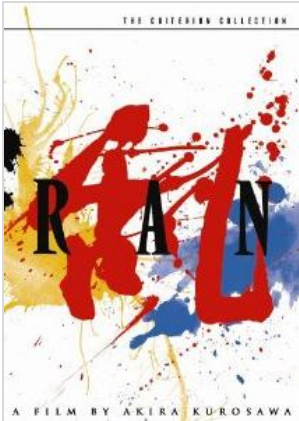


Ran

Ran, 1985, Japan

Film Overview

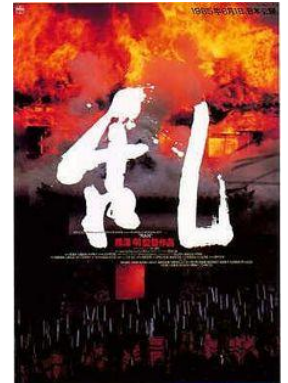


Akira Kurosawa's 1985 film is slightly marred by some too obvious straining toward masterpiece status, yet it's a stunning achievement in epic cinema. Working on a large scale seems to bring out the best in Kurosawa's essentially formal talents; *Kagemusha* seems only a rough draft for the effects he achieves here through a massive deployment of movement and color. Both landscape and weather seem to bend to his will as he constructs an imaginary 16th-century Japan out of various locations throughout the islands, which seems to re-form itself to reflect the characters' surging passions as the violent tale progresses. It's loosely adapted from *King Lear*: an aging warlord (Tatsuya Nakadai, in a performance that approaches a Kabuki stylization) decides to step down as the head of his clan, which unleashes a power struggle among his three sons. As in *Kagemusha*, Kurosawa envisions the only

alternative to rigid oppression as apocalyptic chaos, yet the bleak proposal is put with infinitely more immediacy and personal involvement. In Japanese with subtitles.

—Dave Kehr, *Chicago Reader*

Akira Kurosawa is one of Japan's best-known filmmakers, responsible for such classics as *The Seven Samurai*, *Yojimbo*, and *Rashomon*. Though he is best known for samurai films, he also directed more modern-themed pieces such as *Ikiru* and *Dreams*. He first wrote the script for *Ran* in the 1970s and spent the next ten years "letting it sleep" and painting storyboards for it.



Culture Notes

- **Mōri Motonari:** Despite its clear parallels to *King Lear*, the Shakespeare play was not where Kurosawa first found inspiration; instead, he was inspired by a legend concerning a prominent Sengoku (Warring States Period) warlord, Mōri Motonari. According to that legend, Motonari presented his three sons with one arrow each and asked them to break the arrow, which they were able to do easily. He then bound three arrows together; this time, the sons were unable to snap them. Kurosawa began to wonder what would have happened if, rather than the loyal and courageous sons Motonari actually had, "this fascinating man had bad sons." Thus, though Motonari was able to successfully navigate his sons into influential positions, Hidetora's attempts to split his territory ends in chaos. —<http://www.geraldpeary.com/interviews/jkl/kurosawa.html>
- **Noh influence:** *Ran* was heavily influenced by Noh, a type of classical Japanese dance theatre that seeks to express intense emotion through precise choreography and poetry rather than dialogue. The simplicity of the stage allows the audience to focus only on the emotion being portrayed. *Ran's* use of ostentatious costuming, precisely choreographed movements, and the *fue* flute are all reminiscent of this art form. —*Asia for Educators*, http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/japan_1000ce_noh.htm