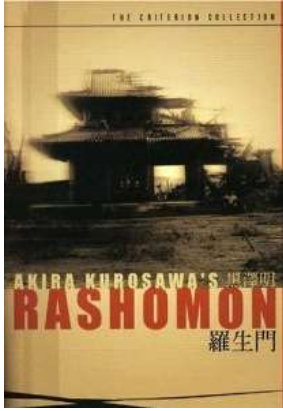


Rashomon

Rashōmon, 1950, Japan

Film Overview



Rashomon is about a court proceeding, recalled in flashback, relating to a mysterious crime. A bandit, Tajōmaru is on trial for murdering a samurai and raping his wife in the remote forest. Each of these three figures addresses the court, with the dead man speaking via a medium – an amazingly, electrifyingly strange conceit, carried off with absolute conviction. A fourth witness offers his own version, again different. But it is not just a matter of the witnesses being slippery: crucially, the bandit, the samurai and the samurai's wife each claim to have committed the murderous act themselves, the samurai by suicide. Truth, history, memory and the past ... are these just fictions? One character is told that lying is natural for all of us, and it is in the discrepancies that the essence of our humanity resides. Kurosawa invests the

unknowability of the event with horror, suggesting that the three of them somehow chanced upon, or created, a black hole in human thought and communication, whose confusion and violence can never be clearly explained or remembered. –Adapted from a review by Peter Bradshaw for *The Guardian*

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 is also well-known for his collaborations with Toshiro Mifune, who plays the bandit Tajomaru in this film.

Kurosawa was introduced to the West when *Rashomon* won a Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival in 1951.



Culture Notes

- **“Rashomon” and “In a Grove”**: The film *Rashomon* is in fact based on two short stories. The short story “Rashomon” provides the setting, while “In a Grove” provides the characters and plot. Both are by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, an author who is sometimes called the father of the Japanese short story. After his death, a friend of his established the Akutagawa Prize for promising new writers.
- **The Rashōmon Gate**: Rashomon, also called Rajōmon in modern Japanese, was the main gate (*mon*) of ancient Heian-kyo, now Kyoto. It was an eight-pillared, two-story gate and had a pair of roofs with eaves below the gables. But as Kyoto declined, Rashōmon fell into ruin, and now only a small stone monument to the once-proud gate remains. (See left.) –Learning about Kyoto, <http://www.kyopro.kufs.ac.jp/English.htm>

