

## The Moral Problematic in Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) & Ritt's *The Outrage* (1964)

"Human beings are unable to be honest with themselves about themselves. They cannot talk about themselves without embellishing. The script portrays such human beings—the kind who cannot survive without lies to make them feel they are better people than they really are. It even shows this sinful need for flattering falsehood going beyond the grave—even the character who dies cannot give up his lies when he speaks to the living through a medium. Egoism is a sin the human being carries with him from birth; it is the most difficult to redeem. This film is like a strange picture scroll that is unrolled and displayed by the ago. You say that you can't understand this script at all, but that is because the human heart itself is impossible to understand. If you focus on the impossibility of truly understanding human psychology and read the script one more time, I think you will grasp the point of it."—*Something Like an Autobiography*

*Rashomon* is based on two short stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1892-1927), "Rashomon," which provides the setting of the gate and the rain, and "In a Grave," which provides the majority of the story and characters. In Akutagawa's story there is also the ravaged woman's mother who testifies, while Kurosawa adds to the film the frame device of the woodcutter and priest recounting the stories with a commoner, as well as the ending with the foundling. The Rashomon gate was the main outer gate to the medieval city of Kyoto and one of the largest gates of its kind. Originally built in 789, by the time of the film (late medieval period, ca. 12<sup>th</sup> century) the city was mostly abandoned and the gate itself was in ruins.

Martin Ritt's *The Outrage* is obviously the western reworking of Kurosawa's film. Michael Kanin's screenplay adds several elements to the original: 1) the motives of the preacher are more in doubt; he intends to actually leave the town and possibly the ministry; 2) the commoner is now a side-show huckster and is given far more developed dialogue, almost as a kind of satanic prosecutor; 3) the motives and characters of the husband and wife are more developed, bringing in elements of the defeated Confederate cause and the divisions between classes of the Anglos; 4) likewise, the elements of race are further highlighted with Carrasco's (ironically played by Paul Newman) defensiveness before white hatred of Mexicans.

### Global Questions

- What is the view of human goodness and evil in the two films? Do they share the same view? Why or why not?
- How should we respond to their view(s)?
- Can we believe any of the testimonies in either film? Why and/or why not?
- Where exactly does justice reside in such a situation?

### *Rashomon* (1950), Akira Kurosawa, Japan [88 min]

1. How important is the rain at the gate to the meaning of the overall film?
2. Likewise, what is the meaning of the Rashomon gate itself?
3. How important is cinematic texture to the meaning and impact of the film?
4. Why do the various partial accounts not add up to a truthful account?
5. Why are there so many tracking shots in this film?
6. Why is it significant that the woodcutter's story is also suspect?

7. Should Kurosawa have added the story of the foundling? What does it add or change about the original short story?

***The Outrage* (1964), Martin Ritt, USA [96 min]**

1. Why does the temptation of the minister to give up his calling add to the film?
2. How does an American (and even vaguely Christian) context change the way we approach this story?
3. How do the differences in the American characters shape the overall film?
4. Why does the film develop the subplot between the wife and husband? Does this alter the moral problematic?
5. Likewise, why does the script include the foul-mouthed and cynical huckster? What does he add to the meaning of the film?

