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Film as Lit

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Kurosawa's Algorithm: Analysis of the Roshomon Structure in Roshomon

Akira Kurosawa's crime drama, *Rashomon* (1951), retells the singular tragedy of murder and rape from the perspective of 4 different characters; each version manipulated, tainted by storyteller bias and self-preservation and ultimately clouding any semblance of truth. After establishing an air of mystery around the story, Kurosawa introduces a crazed and notorious bandit, Tajomara, who admits to his lust driven rape of the wife and honorable killing of the husband in fight, defending himself as a seductive warrior instead of the lunatic criminal he's accused of being. Kurosawa then introduces the wife whose retelling of the rape and murder pit her as the wronged propriety of man's contempt, a victim of both an insidious attacker and a loathing husband who only discovered his death upon reviving from a faint spell. Next Kurosawa introduces a Shinto medium, a narrative voice for the dead samurai, who suggests the wife offers herself fully to the demented thief if he kills her husband for her, an act so dishonorable the samurai kills himself. Finally, Kurosawa returns to the woodcutter who, after initially admitting to only discovering the body, now reveals he witnessed Tajomara's offering of marriage, the samurai's rejection of his ruined wife, and the fight she instigated between the two men resulting in murder. Rather than the more traditional and straightforward development of the 3-Act structure, Kurosawa's created the Rashomon structure of telling the same story from multiple perspectives in order to both fully engage the audience in the process of storytelling but also to reinforce developing themes of subjective truth, self-preserving ego, and the consequence of deceit. With each angled retelling the audience becomes freshly confounded, caught up in the lie and actively weighing details to make sense. The audience is forced to juxtapose characters and see them as kaleidoscopic complexities all struggling to define reality. Ultimately, the Rashomon structure forces

audiences to question the accuracy of truth and the nature of objectivity. It acts as a narrative algorithm that allows characters to construct versions of truth just as social media does for modern users.