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Author(s): Donald Richie

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Red Beard

This analysis of Kurosawa's latest film is an abridged chapter from Richie's extraordinarily comprehensive and detailed book, THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA, which will be published in early November.

This volume, which is very likely the best ever written about a film director, presents sensitive and sensible studies of the entire Kurosawa canon; it is luxuriously printed, with duotone offset illustrations, in a 10" by 10" format. (\$11.00.) Orders can be sent to the University of California Press, Berkeley 94720 or placed through any bookstore.

"After finishing *Sanjuro*," Kurosawa has said, "I started looking around for something else to do and quite by accident picked up *Red Beard* by Shugoro Yamamoto [the author of the original of *Sanjuro*.] At first I thought that this would make a good script for Horikawa but as I wrote I got so interested that I knew that I would have to direct it myself.

"I had something special in mind when I made this film because I wanted to make something that my audience would *want* to see it, something so magnificent that people would just have to see it. To do this we all worked harder than ever, tried to overlook no detail, were willing to undergo any hardship. It was really hard work and I got sick twice. Mifune and Kayama each got sick once. . . ."

STORY

At the end of the Tokugawa period a young man, Yuzo Kayama (Yasumoto), returns to Edo after several years study at the Dutch medical schools in Nagasaki. Told to make a formal call at the Koishikawa Public Clinic and pay his respects to its head, Toshiro Mifune (Kyojo Niidé, commonly called Red Beard), he learns that he is to stay there and work as an intern. Since he had hoped to be attached to the court medical staff and had certainly never considered working in a public clinic, the news is a great

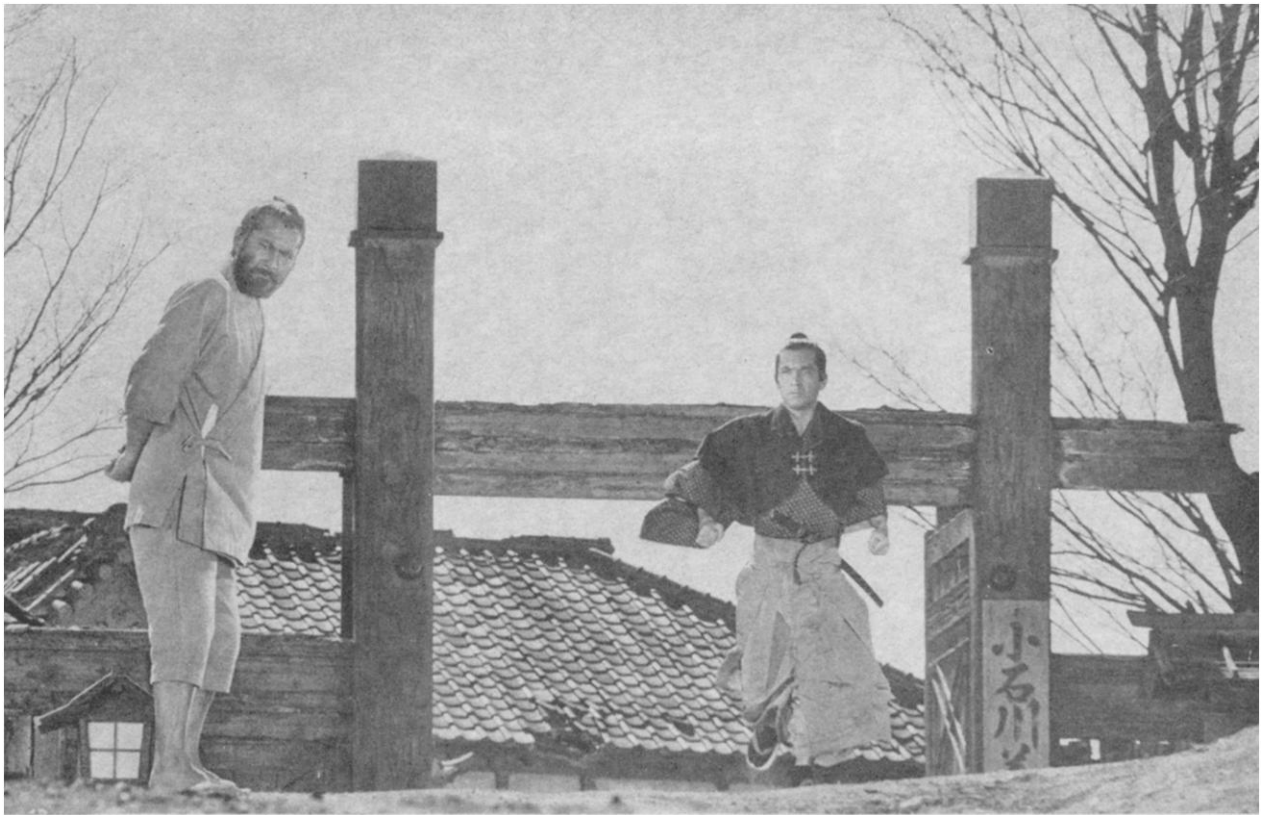
shock. He refuses, purposely breaks the hospital rules, will not wear a uniform, and further trespasses by lounging around the small pavilion where a beautiful but insane patient (Kyoko Kagawa) is kept.

Her servant (Reiko Dan) accuses him of having (like a fellow-intern, Tatsuyoshi Ehara) a less than medical interest in her. Kayama refutes this, saying that he would like to treat such a case, that indeed he knows much more about medicine than Red Beard himself.

Reiko: Then why not help the other patients.
Kayama: Any doctor can help *them*.

Having thus revealed his high opinion of himself, he goes on to imply that, indeed, he is not interested in women as women. "I don't believe in them," he says, referring to his fiancée who ran off with another man while he was in Nagasaki.

Nonetheless, when he is alone drinking in his room and the escaped mad girl appears, he allows himself to be seduced. She tells him her story, that she is not really insane, that she was sexually abused when she was young. And all the time she is skillfully preparing to murder him just as she did three other young men. In the midst of their embraces she has pressed her fingers against an artery in his neck causing him to faint, has already taken out her long, sharp hair-pin, when Red Beard comes in.



Mifune and Kayama at the gate.

Later Red Beard says:

She just grazed your neck, you'll be well in a day or two, but if I'd come in any later, you'd be dead. . . . She was just born that way. I suppose you heard all about her childhood. Well, lots of other girls have had experiences like that. It's nothing.

This singularly hard-boiled observation impresses Kayama, particularly since his own gullibility has ended in what he chooses to see as his humiliation. Impressed, he begins to take an interest in the hospital. It is certainly different from what the court would be. It is overcrowded, under-staffed, and the poor are everywhere. It is just as Ehara described it at the beginning of the film:

It's terrible. . . . The patients are all slum people, they're full of fleas—they even smell bad. Being here makes you wonder why you ever wanted to become a doctor.

Among the poor is one old man (Kamatari Fujiwara) who is dying and Kayama is called in to watch over him. He is familiar with death only from medical books and watching the real

thing is a horrifying experience. Afterwards he complains to another intern (Yoshio Tsuchiya):

Red Beard said I should watch carefully, that a man's last moments are very solemn. Solemn! I call it horrible. Did you think that that awful death was solemn?

Tsuchiya: The pain, the loneliness of death frighten me too, but Dr. Niide, he looks at it differently. He looks into their hearts as well as their bodies. . . . I want to be like him someday.

The implication is that Mifune sees beyond the horror. More (as is seen in a scene following), he negates it. The dead man's daughter (Akemi Negishi) appears. She has had a very hard life, including bearing three children by her mother's lover. She wants, at least, to be assured that her father died peacefully.

Akemi: He wasn't in pain when he died, was he?

Mifune: Oh, no. He died quite peacefully.

Kayama: . . . ! (Startled, surprised at this lie.)

Akemi: It had to be that way, it just had to be! If not. . . if not, then life would be just too unendurable.

But Kayama knows that he did indeed die in pain. Life then is unendurable?

Perhaps it need not be. This is suggested by another death. A very good, almost saintly man Tsutomu Yamazaki (Sahachi) dies and his past is uncovered. He loved a girl (Miyuki Kuwano) but apparently lost her during an earthquake. Later he accidentally meets her again and discovers that she left him because:

We were too happy together. We were so happy, I became afraid. A girl like me didn't deserve it. I felt I'd be punished if it lasted. Then the earthquake came. I was right. It was a punishment; I'd had my whole life's share of happiness.

This very Japanese reasoning (the unendurability of living is called just punishment) and her death convince him that it is only by living for others that one can live at all. He and Red Beard, an unknown wheelwright and a famous doctor, have both discovered the same thing. With a splendid stubbornness, both men act as though good really existed in this world—they create it.

All of this has its effect on Kayama. He puts on his uniform finally and goes around with the doctor on his calls. One of them is at the whorehouse district. There they find a twelve-year-old, Terumi Niki (Otoyo), who is being beaten because she will not “entertain” the callers.

After a spirited fight with the bouncers, Mifune takes her back to the clinic. She is very ill, physically, but—more seriously—she is spiritually near death. He tells Kayama that he is to cure her, that she is his first patient. And here occurs the intermission—after the first two hours of this three-hour-film.

CHARACTERIZATION

Like the hero of *Sanshiro Sugata*, like the detective in *Stray Dog*, and the shoe manufacturer in *High and Low*, the young doctor learns: *Red Beard* too is the story of an education. Kayama learns that medical theory (illusion) is different from a man dying (reality); that—as the picture later reveals—what he had always thought himself (upright, honest, hard-working) must now be reconciled with what he finds himself to also be (arrogant,

selfish, insincere); and, the most important, that evil itself is the most humanly common thing in this world; that *good* is uncommon.

And, indeed, at first it seems very much like the hell that Kurosawa characters (in *Rashomon*, in *The Lower Depths*, in *High and Low*) are always talking about. The hospital stinks, they don't have enough food, they are not given good kimono, they are all sick, they will all die.

Yet, as the film progresses, we (along with Kayama) discover that this is all illusion. It is so horrible that indeed it “makes you wonder why you ever wanted to become a doctor.” But the point is that you *are* a doctor. You are responsible both to and for these people.

Mifune (seen through the eyes and opinions of the fellow-intern) seems a monster and acts like one. When introduced to him, Kayama is met with a fanatical stare and an insulting silence. Good-hearted liberal Kayama hates him on sight.

Yet Kayama is doubly fooled. The arrogant Mifune is revealed as a truly good man and Kayama comes to realize that he himself is, in his own words, “despicable.”

Kayama does not begin to understand that the good need not be apparent until Mifune prevents the mad girl from murdering him. He cries then and his tears are mainly those of self-pity. He really begins to understand what this is all about only when he is put in a position much like that of Mifune himself, when he must save the girl.

The second part of the film begins with a series of very short scenes showing him caring for her and her progressive recovery. At one point she refuses to take her medicine, keeps hitting the spoon with her hand. Mifune comes in and says that he will try. His patience is supernal. She takes her medicine.

Kayama stares at this. He has just learned something: that patience and fortitude are invincible. The girl has learned something too. She speaks for the first time and says:

Girl: Why didn't he slap me?

Kayama: For not taking your medicine? But, there *are* kind people in this world. You've just never met any before.

Girl: You can't fool me. Mother told me . . . she said to watch out for people and never trust anyone. And she was right.

Kayama: No, no. He's not like that. You know he isn't. Isn't that why you took your medicine? He wants to cure you.

Girl: You too?

Kayama: Of course, me too.

Girl: (Suddenly hitting the bowl from which he has been trying to feed her, knocking it across the room, and breaking it.) Even now?

Kayama: (Begins to cry, picking up the pieces of the bowl.) You poor thing. You're really a nice girl. . . .

Like all of the "villains" in Kurosawa's films, she is "bad" only because she is afraid. Kindness, sympathy, understanding really terrify us. Prepared for the worst, armed with mistrust and suspicion, we can do nothing against disinterested good—except to try and belittle or destroy it. She will be so bad that Kayama will have to strike her—and therefore prove that he is not kind at all and that she was right in the first place. Only thus can she keep her world together.

The following morning she has disappeared. He finds her begging. After she had collected enough, she goes and buys something in a shop. He calls her name, she turns and drops it, breaking it—it was a bowl.

Kayama: And that was to replace what you broke? But why? Did I scold you for it? Did I? Did you think I did? If you did, I apologize. I am sorry. I am very sorry.

The bulwarks of pride and fear cannot stand this assault. This further understanding breaks her. She kneels in the dust and, for the first time, cries like the child that she is.

When someone breaks down and weeps in a Kurosawa picture (the girl in *Stray Dog*, Mifune in the uncut version of *The Bad Sleep Well*) recovery is in sight. But here complications enter. Kayama himself becomes ill. One of the reasons was that he sat up so much with her, but the real reason is that he is suddenly told how he happened to be placed in the clinic at all. (This is a plot point: his father was worried about him after he was jilted, talked with Mifune about it, and it was Mifune who suggested that hard work here would help.) Kayama is stunned and then, in light of these new facts,

must look at his own actions.

Kayama: I'm no good at all. I'm selfish . . . I blamed [my fiancée] and yet it was I who almost let that mad girl kill me. I was vain of being a doctor just back from Nagasaki, I was too good for this clinic. I hated you, even despised you. I'm despicable . . . I'm conceited . . . I'm insincere. . . .

Mifune: You're tired.

One can appreciate the parallel. The girl breaks down; Kayama breaks down. Both admit being less than perfect—she in her "evil," he in his "good." Both finally admit to being human.

There is a further parallel. Kayama becomes very ill and it is now the girl who must nurse him. This is shown in a short series of very affecting scenes much like those which opened the second part of the picture. After recovering he goes off to see his mother (Kinuyo Tanaka) and she notices a change at once:

You don't really seem to have been ill . . . you just look a little leaner. You look like a man who's just had a bath.

He has indeed had a bath; he has had a baptism.

Back at the clinic the girl has been distracted from her love for Kayama (and her jealousy of his fiancée's younger sister to whom he will eventually become married) by the sudden appearance of a little boy (Yoshitaka Zushi). He has been stealing from the rice-kettle and she refuses to catch him when she has the chance. This earns her the enmity of the kitchen-help until they and Kayama overhear a scene where the girl tells the little boy to stop stealing, that she will bring him the left-over rice every day. He has brought some candy to reward her for not giving him away and she refuses to take it. He wants to know why—because it was stolen? But then when he stole the rice she didn't say anything. Her answer does credit to Kayama's influence:

Stealing rice and stealing candy are two different things. You must not steal. It is better to be a beggar than a thief.

Much, much better, particularly if stealing is equated with the life of fearing, and begging with the life of trusting. It is very like the philosophy that opens and closes *Yojimbo*—that a long life living on gruel in the country is better than a short life of living it up in the city.

Observing the parallels in this film (from Red Beard to Kayama to the girl to the boy) one sees that Kurosawa is, in effect, constructing a chain of good. The idea is a novel one. All of us believe in a chain of evil and are firmly convinced that bad begets bad. (Indeed, one Kurosawa film, *The Bad Sleep Well*, has shown us just that.) In *Red Beard*, however, the director is offering the proposition (startling, even alarming) that good also begets good.

One can see what Kurosawa has had the bravery to do in this film. He is suggesting that, like the hospital, the world in which we live may indeed be a hell but that good, after all, is just as infectious as evil. To consider such a proposition, in a cynical age (and modern Japan is as cynical as anywhere), seems almost shameful. But this is why Kurosawa has made the movie.

Let us at once invoke the spirit of Dr. Kildare since he persists in hovering over this film. Let us also call upon John Wayne to fill out the Mifune role as "Big Red." This will be useful in demonstrating what the film is *not*. And this is necessary because this picture is the most open to misinterpretation of all Kurosawa's works.

It has already had more than its share. The director has been accused of making the most contrived tear-jerker since *One Wonderful Sunday*; it has been said that Kurosawa's famed humanism has been revealed as a weltering bathos into which even Ben Casey or *The Interns* would think twice before stepping.

Kurosawa's dilemma is rather similar to that of Dickens. Laconic realist though he is, he believes in the good; but the good is very difficult to dramatize. Difficult as it is, however, Dickens manages admirably in at least several novels. So does Griffith, a very Dickensian creator. In their best work, they affirm by refusing to sentimentalize—and that is also what Kurosawa does in this picture.

Mifune is a brother to the doctor in *Drunken Angel*: the one railing against ignorance and the hospital; the other, against poverty and the sump. They are men possessed. The difference from the suave, knowledgeable Dr. Kildare with

his crochety bedside-manner is apparent. The latter cannot afford to hate illness; he makes his living from it. Red Beard's hate of disease is one of the reasons that he is in a public clinic—the lowest of medical positions. He does more than merely devote himself to the good; he devotes himself to a fight against bad.

This is why the picture is not sentimental. To simply feel for, sympathize with, weep over—this is sentimental because it is so ridiculously disproportionate to what is needed. But to gird the loins and go out and do battle, to hate so entirely that good is the result: this is something else.

And this then is the kind of man that Kayama will also become. Like Watanabe in *Ikiru*, the boy is given something to do, something to fling himself into, in which to find personal salvation. This kind of goodness has nothing weak nor even appealing about it. And it is the opposite of "being good," in the sense of obeying, or doing the expected, or even the rational. This is one of the most difficult of all lessons to learn: that the surface "good" is spurious. Kayama finally comes to understand. At the end of the film he is going to be married and has told the girl that he is going to stay on at the clinic. Mifune is furious because this means that the boy will refuse the chance to become the Shogun's doctor at the court. But Kayama has seen what the good really consists of. He is therefore "bad" and refuses to obey Mifune, just as at the beginning he refused to obey. But now he has come full circle and his reasons are entirely different.

This paradox is at the heart of many of Kurosawa's films. Sugata jumps into the pond and deaf to the seductions of the "proper way of behaving," of niceness, he stays there; the detective searching for his pistol is told that he is "crazy," and is upsetting the police department by his unreasonableness; the seven samurai in their efforts to build an army to hold off the bandits are not "nice" at all to the farmers; the hero of *Ikiru* is downright cruel (if you want to look at it that way) to his superiors in the local government. For this reason the Kurosawa hero (as in *The Bad Sleep Well*) must learn to be

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“bad” in order that he can become “good.” He must unlearn what the world considers good in order to learn what he himself knows to be so.

We have travelled far from the world of *The Interns*—we are, in fact, very near that no-man’s land that Camus speaks of so persuasively. In *Red Beard* Kurosawa presents us with a mass of evidence, such a richness, such a complication, and such a challenge, that indeed one’s initial reaction is *not* to believe.

That odd corollary that “good makes good,” for example. It is dazzling only if we allow ourselves a like liberty of thought. But we who live in hell are so conditioned that we would much rather laugh than weep—for that seems the only alternative. If one prefers this, then the film may be called sentimental, but of course to do so is to miss its point—and through what Kurosawa considers moral cowardice. Red Beard rages that his poor are also poor in spirit—they want to die; Kurosawa rages that we are equally poor—that we desperately want to retreat before this vision of the personal “good” because of the responsibilities and hard work that an acceptance would insist upon. In this film he gambles—just as Dickens and Dostoevsky gamble. Using the commonest forms of compassion (that for a sick girl, a dying child, a dedicated doctor), he will force us into recognition that compassion is not enough. The film is both compassionate and hard-boiled—because Kurosawa’s concern, like Red Beard’s, is the opposite of indulgent. The film can carry its extraordinary weight of sentiment (including a happy ending) because it can carry us so far beyond the confines of our daily hells. The stake in Kurosawa’s game is *us*—and he does everything he can to make us accept. One has a fleeting reminiscence of the girl in *One Wonderful Sunday* turning to the audience and pleading for, demanding acceptance. This 1965 picture is much more profound, personal, persuasive than the 1946 one, but the morality is the same. And so is the conclusion—if you accept yourself you are saved. Have courage enough to allow that you are moved, allow yourself respite from cynicism, from hate. Allow yourself to believe in yourself.



Niki and Zushi.

TREATMENT

If you are to believe in yourself you must have the most incisive of insights, the clearest of visions. You must be entirely realistic about yourself and about the world you live in. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that all Kurosawa’s films are strengthened by an abiding interest in the way things are, the way places look, the way people act, and why this film is his most realistic.

Not only is the look of the picture actual—a kind of meticulously detailed Tokugawa-period newsreel—but its structure is purposely amorphous, full of incident and detail, lacking in anything that one would usually call form. Indeed, as the *précis* indicates, the plot is as complicated as anything in Dickens, but there is no over-riding form. The film, to be sure, is vaguely cyclic. The first scene, the last scene before the intermission, and the last scene in the film all take place at the main gate of the hospital. But it would be quite impossible to schematize the plot and find any kind of imposed structure. Rather, as in the novels of Dickens, the film discloses through characterization and parallels of action. We have already discussed some of these. Let us look at a single simple example: the clinic uniform and the girl’s kimono.

All the interns, the head doctor himself, wear a uniform. Kayama refuses. This becomes for him a symbol. Yet this refusal only gets him into trouble. During the operation scene he is advised to wear it lest he dirty his own clothes; he refuses and presumably gets his clothes very

dirty indeed. The real reason that the mad girl picks him is because he does not wear a uniform, and therefore she “trusts” him. That uniform and commitment are the same is indicated by a scene which occurs directly after he has finally decided to wear the uniform. He steps outside the hospital and is at once stopped by a woman with a sick child. She recognizes the uniform and rushes up to him. His reaction is surprise and a rueful aside as he looks at the uniform: “. . . helping people?” It is as though he recognizes that he has now identified himself, has let himself in for frantic mothers and sick children for the rest of his life.

The young girl’s offense in the whore-house is aggravated in that she rips up the kimono put on her to entice customers, and that is the ostensible reason she is being beaten. The sister of Kayama’s fiancée, to reward her for looking after the young doctor when he was ill, remakes one of her kimono (we saw her wearing it herself in an earlier scene) and gives it to the girl. Jealous of her obvious interest in Kayama, the child throws it in the mud. Later, however, when the whore-house madame returns to claim her, the first thing she does is to run and get the now-cleaned kimono and show it to her saying that she is well cared for, look, she even has a nice kimono now, and that she will not return.

The parallel is obvious (much less so on the screen, separated as these uniform and kimono scenes are, and they are more subtle than I am here making them appear): the girl also commits herself. Both she and Kayama agree, in a way, to be what they are. They identify themselves.

This is, of course, what so many Kurosawa pictures are about: self-identification. The crisis occurs when the character finally agrees to define himself in his own eyes. Watanabe is not just a useless civil servant, he is a useful human being; the hero of *The Bad Sleep Well* is not an avenger, he is a good friend and husband; the actor in *The Lower Depths* is not a drunken sot, he is a good man who is going to find peace. He must predicate his present upon his past, upon what he has always been without recog-

nizing it, and he must then act as he chooses.

If this is true, it might explain Kurosawa’s singular interest in the past in this film. For the first time he becomes interested in what his people *were* and, unprecedentedly, he allows scenes which *explain* past actions. Consequently (except for the first one, which is very brief) his flash-backs in this picture are full, conventional looks into the past and not the literal flashes he has used (in all of his films except *Rashomon*) until now.

These are real narrative flash-backs. For example, segments of Tsutomu Yamazaki’s story are conventionally cut into his telling it.

He and the girl meet when she gives him an umbrella to keep off the snow. (They meet on an immense set with full buildings, constructed in three dimensions, with real perspectives—all on the screen for just one minute.) Later, they meet by a field; again, they meet in Asakusa during a fair (hundreds of extras, a double-level set, seen on the screen for one minute); and, for the last time—a full ten-minute flash-back—in his room.

These are all scenes of explanation. If they were cut from the film they would not damage the continuity. What one would miss, however, would be an attitude which is new to Kurosawa—a new nostalgia for the past. Something like it was seen in the flash-backs in *Ikiru* but there the emphasis was upon the pain that remembering can cause. In *Red Beard*, we feel an almost Mizoguchi-like longing for the past.

Take the extraordinary elegiac beauty of the scenes where they part at Asakusa. It is on a bridge, she is carrying a crying child on her back; the situation is painful for both of them. Kurosawa has chosen to shoot from very far away, using a long-distance lens. The result is that the close-ups appear two-dimensional. They are like something from an old romance, some illustrated cautionary tale. The man and woman seem very near each other, and yet, as they move, we see that they are separated. The lovely images comment upon the sweetness of the past, its impossibility of recapture. As the wife turns and begins her descent to the other side of the bridge, the child turns and looks at this man it

has never seen and we suddenly realize that we too will never see these people again. Nostalgia strikes—and it is almost impossible to suggest how Kurosawa creates this pang. It is partly the fantastic beauty of the shot, partly the silence, and partly that these scenes are not necessary to the picture. They do not forward plot, and so we are allowed the exquisite pleasure of a very strong but quite irrelevant sensation.

Sound is one of the senses (along with smell and taste) through which nostalgia is most strongly apprehended, perhaps because it is not often specific. When we see something reminiscent of the past, we “recognize” it; when we hear it, seldom; when we taste it, rarely. Kurosawa uses this fact brilliantly during these flashback scenes.

He and she meet at a fair and he has bought a small basket of herbs to which a wind-bell is attached. At the beginning of the sequence Yamazaki turns and sees her and at the same time a breeze starts up. The hundreds of little bells at the herb-selling pavilion begin shrilling, an unearthly, sweet, and summer sound. Later, when he is leaving them by the bridge, the lonely tinkle of the single bell is heard. Still later, when she comes to see him, the basket is hanging just outside the door. We see its shadow and hear the sound of the bell as the wind teases it. After Yamazaki is dead, Kayama leaves his house. It is early morning. Suddenly he hears the sound of a tiny wind-bell. He turns and there, at the very end, far away, in front of one of the other houses, is a bell—just like the one we saw. He stops, remembering.

This is very like those aural *ostinati* that Kurosawa has long been fond of using in his films. One of the most spectacular is at the end of the picture. The little boy is dying and suddenly we hear the strangest of sounds—it is a long-drawn out, silvery echo; it is the name of the little boy, being called from an enormous distance. Everyone is startled because it sounds so entirely supernatural. Kayama goes to investigate and comes back to explain that the kitchen help are shouting down the well, there being a folk belief that all wells lead to the bottom of the earth and that the departing soul may be

called back. We cut to the well itself and watch the weeping women gathered around it, shouting. There is an irrational beauty about the scene, and a hint of magic which is communicated through this odd, haunting sound, this rising and falling, this *ostinato* which is heard over the close-up of the dying child.

Other *ostinati* are also used. When the old man is dying, his eyes are open, his mouth is moving, and from his throat comes a rasping, straining, recurrent grunt, a blood-curdling sound. Kurosawa has placed the camera rather low so that the moving, gasping mouth of the old man is always down at the corners of the frame. The sound is out of all proportion to the movement and, hence, our eyes—just as unwilling as those of Kayama—are drawn time and again to this moving mouth, which is precisely where we (and Kayama) do not want to look.

Sound, indeed, is perhaps more important in this film than in any of the director's others. For the first time he uses a stereophonic, four-directional system, which is spectacularly heard under the credits. During these the music pauses from time and time and we hear in the background the distant sounds of Edo, the call of a child or the cry of a fish-peddler, the slight rustle of wind in branches. We are presented from the first with this double level of sound. The upper (and louder) carries music and dialogue and effects. The lower (and softer) envelops the images in an extraordinarily complicated web of whispers and distant noises. The second level is, realistic as it sounds, rigorously controlled and contributes enormously to the feel-



ing of realism which this film exudes. When the girl's fever rages and Kayama presses his hand against her forehead, we hear far in the distance the wooden clappers traditionally used to warn against fire.

The dialogue is also punctuated with music, in the secco-recitativ manner used in many of the later pictures. The mad girl's recounting of her childhood is filled with pauses. In these we hear not only the minute sounds of the aged hospital building settling and creaking but also, as a part of this almost silent background, three very low alto flutes which always sound the same obsessive figure between the pauses.

One of the happiest uses of music in all Kurosawa occurs when the girl is tending Kayama. There has been a series of very short scenes (like those in the traveling scenes of *They Who Step on the Tiger's Tail*, Mifune trying to sleep in *Sanjuro*, etc.) showing her taking care of him and the last one of these has the following continuity:

Kayama is delirious, perspiring. Hands place a wet cloth on his forehead. He opens his eyes. The girl bends down. They look at each other. She is afraid and moves away. Wipe to Kayama asleep. Hands take off the cloth. Tenderly she bends down and pushes his wet hair back into place. He opens his eyes. She stops. He closes his eyes. The hands return. Wipe to Kayama asleep, close-up. He opens his eyes, alarmed. Cut back to show him watching her. She is wiping the floor in what seems at first the old, obsessive way that she had. Then he sees that the movement is different. She is really only wiping the floor, she is well. He closes his eyes. She stands up and begins wiping the window sills. He watches but when she turns toward him closes his eyes so that she thinks him asleep. She opens the window. It is snowing. She reaches out and takes a double-handful of snow. Dissolve to her putting the snow into the water-bucket from which she moistens the towel for his forehead. She puts the cool towel on his forehead. He opens his eyes. They look at each other and then, slowly, he smiles. She stands up, half afraid, half pleased. She moves to the window and then, for the first time, she smiles. Cut to him, drowsy, almost asleep. She is sitting by the table, also almost asleep. Propped on one arm she is looking at one of his medical books. But her head drops again and again and he smiles at this. She nods. He smiles but his lids are heavy. Finally, her head slips to the table. With a smile still on his lips Kayama too falls asleep.

The extraordinary beauty of this sequence is not easily described. It is entirely pantomime with only sound (the noise of water, the small sound of snow, the music) to support it. It is also the heart of the film, and what is so lovely

is this growth of mutual feeling which we are witnessing, the dedicated care of the little girl, the loving playfulness of Kayama pretending to be asleep, the innocent trust of both. Again, one thinks of Dickens.

Much of the hushed beauty of this scene is contributed by the music. It begins when she opens the window and sees the snow, and it is a paraphrase of Haydn—the second movement of the *Surprise* Symphony. It is so transmuted that it is not recognizable at once, but the innocence and serenity of the original are quite apparent. It continues and supports the rest of the scene, ending only after both have fallen asleep. It is much more right for this scene than words can make apparent, and even its slightly old-fashioned, four-square air is apposite.

This is also true of the other music in the picture. The Brahms-like (*First Symphony*, last movement) major "theme" of the film is so right that it is almost impossible to imagine any other music. We first hear it during the titles, coming in strong all celli and glowing horns, under the name of the director; it appears again during one of Red Beard's scenes and we come to associate it with him. During the intermission (this five-minute break is a part of the film—the projector is left running, and the sound-track carries a full elaboration of the theme) and at the end (three minutes of music after the end title) the theme again appears, building—after the conclusion of the picture—into a really joyous Brahmsian finale with celli pizzicatti, purling woodwinds, divided strings, and horn calls.

It is quite impossible to think of this picture without thinking of music. To describe the look of it one should speak of something burnished and glowing, like the body of a fine cello. If a single adjective were used I should think it would be: "mellow."

PRODUCTION

This mellowness is contained within the look of the film itself. It has a patina, the way certain of Mizoguchi's films have a patina. This is the result of a like care for realistic detail. Kurosawa's efforts to achieve this are already legend in Japan. The main set was really an entire



town with back alleys and side-streets (some of which were never filmed) which was so large that shots of just the roofs fill the whole wide screen during the credit titles.

All of the material used for the town was about as old as it is supposed to look. The tiled roofs were taken from buildings more than a century old; all of the lumber was from the oldest available farmhouses; costumes and props were all “aged” for months before their appearance; the bedding (made in Tokugawa-period patterns) was really slept in for up to half a year before shooting. Making the main gate, which so figures in the film, occupied almost everyone. The wood was more than a hundred years old and both staff and director kept adding touches to make it look still older.

Kurosawa used this magnificent set in a very telling way. The main street is seen for just one minute and its destruction was incorporated into the earthquake scenes; the scenes with the bridge are likewise short; so are those in the elaborately constructed paddy. By constricting three-fourths of the picture to interiors, and by using this magnificent set only several times, he brought a kind of life to the entire film which a single set—no matter its grandeur—could not. The *Red Beard* set is really real in part because it is so little emphasized.

This town is inhabited as well but we are rarely *shown* the people. Instead, when the characters leave the hospital or look out of the

windows, there they are. When the girl goes to beg on the bridge she does so against a fully realistic background of Tokugawa Japan. Vendors pass, fishermen fold their nets, a samurai stalks, a lady shops, and we sense them but do not *see* them because Kurosawa is focusing all of our attention upon the girl and upon Kayama. This is very much like Mizoguchi.

Another Mizoguchi-like quality is Kurosawa’s showing the impact that time has on his characters. Of all of the many production difficulties of *Red Beard* this demonstration of the effect of time was the most difficult to achieve. Kurosawa insisted that everyone change just half a year’s worth, the time span of the story; but the film was almost two years before the camera. Kayama is a very young actor, very impressionable; he himself was rapidly changing, and not necessarily in the same directions as the hero. Further, due to illness, bad weather, financial problems, only the sections about the young girl were shot in chronological order. Kayama had to keep track of his presumed spiritual development at the same time that he was coping with his own. “It was simply back-breaking and if I had known what it was to be like I don’t think I would have believed in myself enough to undertake it. But . . . it wasn’t I who did it, you know. It was him. He made me do it. Somehow or other, I must have had it in me. At any rate, he got it out. I was astonished when I saw the fine cut of the picture. There I was, grow-

ing and changing, just like life itself.”

The like development of the little girl caused Kurosawa much concern. “Terumi is really a very timid little girl, that’s what she really is,” Kurosawa has said. “I watched her every day on the set turning more and more into the character she was playing. I began to fear that even off the set she would go right on acting like her. Then one day when we were about half done I saw her playing around with some of the stage-hands on the lot. She was playing just like an ordinary little girl and I was quite relieved.”

Many of her scenes caused difficulties. Kurosawa had decided that the character was probably epileptic and that therefore the white of her eyes ought to shine, somehow. When she is first seen, she is kneeling in a darkened room and only her eyes are illuminated. “We tried everything. During these scenes we were doing well if we averaged a shot a day. Finally I had a little hole bored in the wall she was facing and put a light-man on the other side. He was holding a kind of flash-light torch that we invented and finally I got the light in her eyes.”

Other difficulties concerned the dying of Yamazaki. “If he were going to die in a Western bed, that would be different and I could group people around him properly. But he was dying flat on his back on *tatami* and there seemed to be no way to get him lighted as I wanted and at the same time to compose the listeners around him.” Devising the sequence as it appears on the screen took weeks of experiment.

“I finally decided that half of the problem was that he talked too much and that I had apparently conceived something with lots of silence in it. So I took away about two-thirds of his dialogue. That helped some.” What helped the rest was discovering a place from which face, mouth, eyes, and listeners were all visible. In the finished scenes the camera appears to hover over the dying man, almost in full close-up. Actually, the camera was far way, flung onto a girder in the roof of the studio, shooting the scene with a 500 mm. lens.

Most of the picture was made using such extreme long-distance lenses. (The bridge scenes with Yamazaki and his wife were shot with a

750 mm. lens.) “The actors liked this fine, it got the camera far away from them, but that isn’t why I did it this time. I did it because I wanted to get that crowded, two-dimensional, slightly smoky effect that only a long-distance lens can give you.”

In addition to long-distance lenses Kurosawa again used his multiple-camera technique but limited it to only several scenes. During the big scene with Awami Negishi he used five cameras running simultaneously. For the majority of the scenes he used two. And for many crucial scenes he contented himself with one. “Shooting this film was a different kind of experience for me,” he has said. “*Seven Samurai* took a very long time to make too but for this film I wanted something even more dramatic and, well, active. There were lots of times when I had to control my own feelings and where I just sat and waited for something to happen.” This something (in particular, nuances in the acting of Terumi Niki and Kayama) was something which he felt only the single camera could capture.

The single camera equipped with a long-distance lens has certainly contributed to the look of the picture but Kurosawa sees this look as different from what most critics, including myself, have seen. “There is a lot of talk about the look of this film and everyone is always telling me about its *sabi*. [*Sabi* is taken from the verb “to rust,” and it implies what we mean when we say “patina,” except that in Japanese there is an unavoidable connotation of the musty, the slightly old-fashioned.] It doesn’t have *sabi* at all. It has freshness, vitality.” In order to create this Kurosawa used a new highly sensitive film, which was also given special development, and a new kind of light which made his set even more blinding than it usually is.

Like Dr. Mifune with his medicine, Kurosawa behaved with patience and fortitude to get what he wanted. What he wanted is indicated by what he did the first day of shooting. “I gathered everyone, cast and staff together, and I played them the last movement of Beethoven’s *Ninth*—the ‘An die Freude’ part, you know. I told them that this was the way that the audience was supposed to feel when it walked

out of the theater and it was up to them to create this feeling.”

I wonder what would happen at, say, the MGM lot, if a director did this? What happened at the Toho lot was that everyone listened to Beethoven attentively, bought the record—Kurosawa favors the old Weingartner but will listen to the Bruno Walter—and came to work determined to do just what the director wanted.

(About the theme music, incidentally, Kurosawa disagrees: “No, you are wrong. It is not Brahms’ *First*. It isn’t Brahms at all. It is Beethoven—it is probably the *Ninth*. At least that is what I told Sato [the composer] I wanted and so that is probably what he tried to get. When he hears what he is supposed to do he just sighs and shakes his head and goes away and comes back with it after a while. The Haydn was all my idea and I wish we’d used Haydn himself. The reason is that I put the sequence together and decided to start the music right where she opens the window and sees the snow and then continue it all through the scenes with Kayama and end it when they both fall asleep. That part of the score wasn’t finished and so I put on a recording of the Haydn, the second movement, and played it along with the film to see what the effect was. Well, the effect was just fine but what really surprised me was that I had cut the sequence so that it came to an end precisely at the end of the Haydn. I must have heard that recording—it was the old Furtwängler one—so often that somewhere in the back of my head some kind of clock kept count. The Haydn and my sequence were not a second off. Things like that happen to me all the time.”)

After *Red Beard* had opened, was still playing to packed houses (it may well turn out to be the director’s most financially successful film), and was proving to be indeed just the kind of picture that people want to see, something “so magnificent that people would just have to see it,” I told Kurosawa that I sensed that he had come to some sort of conclusion, some sort of resting place. He had pushed his style to what appeared to be its ultimate. At the same time he had continued and, it would

seem, completed the theme which has been his throughout his entire film career. In *Red Beard* he had vindicated his humanism and his compassion, he had shown that only after the negative (evil) has been fully experienced can the positive, the good, joy itself, be seen as the power it still remains; that this wisdom was offered in a film filled with true sentiment, with the fact that in all of our glory, in all of our foolishness, we are—after all—human; further, that evil itself is merely human, after all, and that the good then lies in our realizing this and acting upon it.

Kurosawa listened to all of this patiently but when I was about to launch into examples, gently interrupted me with: “Well, I don’t know much about all of that—there might be something in it. I don’t know. What I do know is that every picture I’ve done has come out of something that has happened to me, has happened to me personally. A friend of mine had a son kidnapped and that kind of barbarism upset me so that I made *High and Low*. Take gangsters, for example. They are stupid and they are dangerous, and I know it. So I make up Sanjuro and he goes around and defends innocent people. Look at our government. I don’t think in any other country there is so thick a wall separating people from government officials and agencies. I go and make a film about it and they say I’m a Communist. But that isn’t the point. The point is that something happens to me and I don’t like it and I make a film. Look at *Red Beard*. I want people to come and see it because I want to show them Yasumoto [the young doctor] and I want them to remember him and I want them to try to be like him.

“But about something having ended . . . some sort of conclusion. Yes, I feel that myself very strongly. A cycle of some kind has concluded. Right now I am very tired and I need a rest badly. From now on I guess I’ll be making a different kind of film. I don’t know what it will be like. But I know the themes will be different and I guess I’ll do it in a different manner. Right now I’m going to rest for half a year and then wait and see.”