

## ***Akira Kurosawa: East Meets West***

A Film Education Course for the Bryn Mawr Film Institute (May 2008)

Instructor:

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The spirit of our times is suspicious, and I am glad I have no part of it. I simply want people to be happy—though perhaps you may find a kind of escapism in my attitude.

---Akira Kurosawa, in an interview about *Rashomon*

If I were to write anything at all, it would turn out to be nothing but talk about movies. In other words, take “myself,” subtract “movies” and the result is “zero.” ... I always felt more loneliness at being separated from my crew than I did joy at being reunited with my family.

---Akira Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography*

### Description

Despite his now iconic status as one of the luminaries of world cinema, over the course of his career Kurosawa regularly met with criticism in his native Japan—it was said that he was not “Japanese” enough and was too much a hostage to Western styles and genres. We will try to understand Kurosawa’s films as a skillful and increasingly brave response to this caricature of his work. In *Stray Dog* and *High & Low*, we find Kurosawa shrewdly blending film noir and the harsh realities of post-war Japanese society. In *Throne of Blood*, Kurosawa adapts Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* to the samurai ethos, and in *Yojimbo* (template for Leone’s *Fistful of Dollars*), we see Kurosawa at his most inventive, merging the conventions of the American Western and the samurai film to astonishing effect.

### Schedule of Meetings and Readings

#### **Tuesday, May 6, 6:30-9:45PM**

Topic: The Cauldron of Post-war Japan: Ethics, Politics, and Identity in Kurosawa’s Film Noir

Readings: Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography* (excerpts)  
Kurosawa, “Some Random Notes on Filmmaking”

Screening: *Stray Dog*, dir. Kurosawa (1949), 122 minutes

#### **Tuesday, May 13, 6:30-9:30PM**

Topic: The Opportunism of Adaptation: Kurosawa’s Shakespeare

Reading: Anthony Dawson, “Cross-Cultural Interpretation: Reading Kurosawa Reading Shakespeare”

Screening: *Throne of Blood*, dir. Kurosawa (1957), 105 minutes

#### **Tuesday, May 20, 6:30-9:30PM**

Topic: A Fistful of Doubts: Japanese History, Capitalism, and the Samurai Film

Readings: Stephen Prince, *The Warrior's Camera* (excerpts)  
Keiko McDonald, "Swordsmanship and Gamesmanship: Historical Kurosawa's Milieu in *Yojimbo*"

Screening: *Yojimbo*, dir. Kurosawa (1961), 110 minutes

**Tuesday, May 27, 6:30-10PM**

Topic: Ransoming the Myth of Japanese Prosperity: Social Class in the Kurosawa Film

Reading: Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, "*High and Low*" in *Kurosawa: Film Studies & Japanese Cinema*

Screening: *High and Low*, dir. Kurosawa (1963), 143 minutes