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The Mise-en-scene in the Final Scenes of Kurosawa Akira’s *Rashomon*

Auteur Kurosawa Akira demonstrates his creativity and mastery of the many elements included in mise-en-scene throughout his movie *Rashomon*, including the lighting and direction of the actors. One of the film’s main physical settings was at the Rashomon Gate, which was predominantly gloomy and offered a non-stop ambience of rainfall, contributing to – or rather, causing – the depressing and evil-ridden mood in the story. In the very first scene, we are compelled to watch the rain fall as the aerial shot takes us from the roofs of the ruins of the Rashomon Gate to the characters, as they are taking shelter from the cold and wet weather. This sets the mood as Kurosawa unfolds his version of the story of *Rashomon*. However, this greatly contrasts with the ending scene of the movie, as the woodcutter takes the baby away from the Rashomon Gate, where the sun now shines, and the rain no longer falls heavily.

This scene is the beautiful ending that defines the classical narrative style of film, since we are led to have a sense of closure. The differing projected outcomes are made possible with the different elements of the mise-en-scene, including lighting, direction of the actors, and weather. Prior to this scene, the film climaxes as the three men discuss how everyone is subject to selfishness and dishonesty – leaving the audience to believe that Kurosawa is conveying that no one can escape the inherent evil nature of mankind’s heart. We enter the final scene with this in mind.

It can be argued that the scene starts with a series of lap-dissolves of the remaining characters standing in place with silence between them, allowing us to listen to the gradual quieting of the rain until the baby starts crying, and the woodcutter offers to take the child home as his own. In this part of the scene, both the characters and the audience have had their faith in humanity restored after a display that humans are dishonest even to themselves – one of the important themes that Kurosawa pushes onto us (*Something like an Autobiography* 183). It is during this time that the rain begins to stop and the sun returns, symbolically expressing and confirming that there is light in Rashomon, which was established as one of the most evil and calamitous places in the world.

Through the graceful direction of Kurosawa and the emotional acting, we can connect to the characters’ pure and good intentions. Additionally, the positioning of the cameras in this scene is important as well. In the take when the priest says, “Thanks to you, I think I can keep my faith in man” and hands the woodcutter the baby, the camera’s angle is low. The symbolic value of most low-angle shots are that the subjects are powerful, as Professor Wang included in lecture and her glossary for general film terms. However, it can be argued that it shows that the woodcutter stands above the rest of the characters through his morals.

In the next few shots, we can see that the rain has lessened to a gentle fall, possibly indicating that evil is not totally gone, but it is not dominantly prominent in the world anymore. Additionally, we can now see shadows in the Rashomon Gate, a sign that the sun now shines. It should be mentioned that at the same time, the soundtrack also helps define the hopeful turn of the scene.

These last shots are mostly long shots and extreme long shots. In the last take (not including the last frames of the movie that indicates that the movie has ended), as the woodcutter walks down the steps of the Rashomon Gate, sunlight shines on his smiling face with the towering Gate and the priest in the background. This take is a follow shot, as the camera follows the woodcutter and the baby, slowly putting the priest out of focus as he gets smaller and smaller, hinting that the story places more importance in the woodcutter and the baby (who may symbolize the future). Again, here the camera’s angle is relatively low, reinforcing the idea that the woodcutter is in a position of power or highness – since he took the high road by taking the baby into his home to raise as his own.

To conclude, Kurosawa Akira deserves the respect that he is given due to his masterful and genius techniques that characterize and enable the intended themes of his film. Through the direction of his actors and the usage of lighting and weather, he directs his audience to feel the emotions and atmosphere of different scenes, notably in the last two scenes.

Works Cited:

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