



KUROSAWA

Dodes'ka-den

After five years' absence, Kurosawa returned to the cinema with his first colour feature. It was also his first following the end of his collaboration with Toshiro Mifune and the archetypal superman/hero figure he often portrayed. Instead, we witness life among an ensemble of characters living together in a Tokyo slum. Kurosawa's painterly skills come to the fore as he portrays their lives through striking imagery.

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The least seen film of Kurosawa's last quarter-century is also one of his most eccentric. Returning to the territory of *The Lower Depths* (1957), the film is set in a shantytown growing out of a rubbish tip, whose inhabitants live life as it comes, either through stoic endurance of poverty or sexual abuse, or augmented with vividly realised fantasy.

The film's onomatopoeic title sonically depicts the sound of an imaginary trolley car (an English rendition would be 'Clickety-Clack'), though it's the beggar's increasingly elaborate mental pictures of his dream house that ultimately prove the most affecting.

It was Kurosawa's first colour feature and it shows: his delight in experimenting with outlandish lighting, design and makeup effects recalls Orson Welles' similar glee over the possibilities offered by RKO's studio facilities.

Michael Brooke, *Sight and Sound*, May 2009

A contemporary review

Kurosawa has said in an interview that Rokuchan 'symbolises the artist, the cineaste who creates entirely by the power of his imagination, using as a means of communication the tramway, i.e. the cinema'. Certainly Rokuchan and the omniscient Tamba represent different aspects of the artist's own vision. Tamba directly parallels the mysterious Old Man of *The Lower Depths*; and despite its different origins and Kurosawa's insistence on the basic difference that *Dodes'ka-den* is set in real, contemporary Japan, there is an immediate and evident link between his screen version of Gorki's play, made thirteen years earlier, and this film. For one thing *The Lower Depths* has clearly influenced the structure of the present scenario.

Yamamoto's original work, *Town without Seasons*, was a cycle of quite separate stories, set in different periods. Kurosawa and his scenarists have ingeniously interwoven them into an integrated, contemporary panorama. Rather disconcertingly, Kurosawa said at the time he made the earlier film that he found *The Lower Depths* 'a very comic play', and indeed built up a knockabout farce element in his otherwise very straight treatment of Gorki. Here, too, high comedy mingles easily with the pathos of the derelicts. The scene where Shima brings his office buddies home, only to be painfully humiliated by his wife-but is ready to assault them when they mildly sympathise with him – exactly catches the ambivalence between tragedy and farce.

Kurosawa's reading both of Gorki and of Yamamoto quite evidently arises from his incorrigibly optimistic view of humanity. With all the physical deprivation and cruelty of their lives, each of the little groups in the film represents a different face of loyalty: the sake boy's to the girl who tries to kill him, the child to the father who does, unwittingly, kill him; even the unfaithful wife who seeks reconciliation. This, and the simple fact of survival, is what links the characters and imbues Kurosawa's human comedy with a sense of affirmation.

Even though the film is now 100 minutes shorter than its reputed original length of 224 minutes, the large cast of characters and the variety of action remain entirely coherent, cohesive and symmetrically balanced. It is achieved not so much by the technique of caricature (though Kurosawa has claimed his aim was to create a series of caricatures of different aspects of human character – 'humours' in the old sense – and that the acting style he imposed was directly influenced by the Kyogon vaudeville theatre of Japan) as by the economy and speed of impression, the precision with which a single stroke is made to count, that is associated with traditional Japanese graphic style. Above all, the film is indeed 'graphic'.

It was Kurosawa's first colour film, and he uses colour like a painter. The colours move from realism into fantasy: the faces of the sick beggar and his child become livid blues and greens and their dreams materialise in wild Dayglo colours; the houses of old petrol cans are multihued, and Kurosawa was fascinated by the magical colours that the rain produced from the chemically polluted soil of the dump where he was shooting on location. Even the sky and the sun, when they appear, turn out to be children's drawings like those in Rokuchan's hut; and when the real sun failed to shine for him, Kurosawa simply painted the shadows as he shot. Yet the unique and individual expressionist techniques of both images and acting in *Dodes' ka-den* never compromise the essential human quality and human optimism of the film, any more than they appear incongruous beside the sudden, wholly realistic images of the real riverside locations. The mature assurance and total originality of *Dodes' ka-den* (made on a shoestring for the company 'The Four Musketeers' which Kurosawa had formed with three other major directors) makes only the more tragic the inactivity of the rest of the decade since *Red Beard*.

David Robinson, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, May 1975

DODES'KA-DEN

Director: Akira Kurosawa

Production Companies: Yonki-No-Kai, Toho Co., Ltd.

Executive Producers: Akira Kurosawa, Yoichi Matsue

Producers: Akira Kurosawa, Keisuke Kinoshita, Kon Ichikawa, Masaki Kobayashi

Production Assistants: Shoichi Koga, Shoji Nakayama

Chief Assistant Director: Kenjiro Omori

Assistant Directors: Yoshihiro Kawasaki, Kôji Hashimoto,

Nobumitsu Takizawa

Script Supervisor: Teruyo Nogami

Casting: Etsuo Xyamamoto

Screenplay: Akira Kurosawa, Hideo Oguni, Shinobu Hashimoto

Original Novel: Shugoro Yamamoto

Directors of Photography: Takao Saito, Yasumichi Fukuzawa

Assistant Photographer: Daisaku Omura

Lighting: Hiromitsu Mori

Lighting Assistant: Shinji Kojima

Stills Photography: Naomi Hashiyama

Editor: Akira Kurosawa

Assistant Editor: Reiko Kaneko

Art Directors: Yoshiro Muraki, Shinobu Muraki

Assistant Art Director: Tsuneo Shimura

Properties: Akio Nojima

Costumes: Miyuki Suzuki

Hair: Nakao Sakae, Shozo Takahashi

Music: Toru Takemitsu

Sound: Fumio Yanoguchi

Sound Assistant: Mamoru Yamada

Sound Mixing: Toho Studios

Sound Effects: Ichiro Minawa

Transportation: Isamu Miwano

Cast

Yoshitaka Zushi (*Rokuchan*)

Kin Sugai (*Rokuchan's mother*)

Kazou Kato (*painter*)

Junzaburo Ban (*Yukichi Shima*)

Kiyoko Tange (*Shima's wife*)

Michio Hino (*Ikawa*)

Tatsuhei Shimokawa (*Nomoto*)

Keiji Furuyama (*Matsui*)

Hisashi Igawa (*Masuo Masuda*)

Hideko Okiyama (*Tatsu*)

Kunie Tanaka (*Hatsutarô Kawaguchi*)

Jitsuko Yoshimura (*Kawaguchi's wife*)

Koji Mitsui (*barkeeper*)

Shinsuke Miname (*Ryotaro Sawagami*)

Yuko Kusunoki (*Misao*)

Toshiyuki Tonomura, Satoshi Hasegawa,

Kumiko Ono, Tatsuhiko Yanashisa, Mika Oshida (*women at the fountain*)

Tomoko Yamazaki (*Katsuko*)

Tatsuo Matsumura (*Kyôta Waranaka*)

Imari Tsuji (*Otane*)

Masahiko Kametani (*Okabe*)

Keiji Sakakida (*shop manager*)

Minoru Takashima (*policeman*)

Noboru Mitani (*beggar*)

Hiroyuki Kawase (*beggar's son*)

Michiko Araki (*Japanese restaurant owner*)

Shoichi Kuwayama (*Western restaurant owner*)

Toki Shiozawa (*waitress*)

Hiroshi Akutagawa (*Mr Hei*)

Tomoko Naraoka (*Ocho*)

Atsushi Watanabe (*Mr Tamba*)

Kamatari Fujiwara (*old man*)

Masahiko Tanimura (*vegetable dealer*)

Jerry Fujio (*Yoshi*)

Kayako Sono (*his wife*)

Hideaki Ezumi (*detective*)

Sanji Kojima (*thief*)

Akemi Negishi (*attractive wife*)

Hiroshi Kiyama (*sushi shop proprietor*)

Masahiko Tanimura (*Mr So*)

Yoshiko Maki (*second wife*)

Toshiko Sakurai (*third wife*)

Toriko Takahara (*fifth wife*)

Matsue Ono (*fourth wife*)

Reiko Niimura (*first wife*)

Akira Hitomi (*first man calling out to Misao*)

Kanji Ebata (*second man calling out to Masao*)

Masanari Nihei (*fourth man calling out to Misao*)

Shin Ibuki (*fifth man calling out to Misao*)

Ishii Kiyota (*Kumanbachi's first child*)

Mihoko Kaizuka (*Kumanbachi's second child*)

Tsuji Imura (*Mrs Watanaka*)

Japan 1970

140 mins

KUROSAWA

Dodes'ka-den (Dodesukaden)

Sun 15 Jan 18:05; Mon 16 Jan 17:50

Kurosawa Season Introduction

Wed 18 Jan 18:20

High and Low (Tengoku to Jigoku)

Thu 19 Jan 17:45; Sun 29 Jan 18:00 (+ intro by season co-curator Ian Haydn Smith)

The Lower Depths (Donzoku)

Thu 19 Jan 20:20; Mon 30 Jan 20:20

The Hidden Fortress (Kakushi Toride no San-Akunin)

Fri 20 Jan 20:20; Fri 27 Jan 17:45

The Idiot (Hakuchi)

Sat 21 Jan 16:50

The Bad Sleep Well (Warui Yatsu hoho Yoku Nemuru)

Sun 22 Jan 18:00; Sun 29 Jan 14:30 (+ intro by season co-curator Ian Haydn Smith)

Scandal (Shûbun)

Tue 24 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by season co-curator Ian Haydn Smith)

Sanjuro (Tsubaki Sanjûrô)

Thu 26 Jan 21:00; Tue 31 Jan 17:50

Seven Samurai (Shichinin no Samurai)

Sat 28 Jan 15:30 BFI IMAX

Kagemusha

Tue 31 Jan 19:35

Course: The Kurosawa-Effect

Wed 11 Jan – Wed 22 Feb 18:30

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