



KUROSAWA

Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams* (Yume)

A portmanteau work comprising eight tales inspired by recurring dreams the director had, Kurosawa's penultimate film – the first solely written by him since 1945's *The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail* – is one of his most personal and playful. His on-screen alter ego, identifiable by the trademark hat he wore in public, journeys through a variety of scenarios, focussing primarily on humanity's relationship with nature. It features Ozu favourite Chishu Ryu as a wise old man and Martin Scorsese as Vincent van Gogh.

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A contemporary review

Apparently Kurosawa has signed on to make another film and we must wish him luck with this venture, yet in the nature of things-the director is over 80-it is possible that *Dreams* will be his swansong. The film does seem to be a summation of sorts, not least because of its simplicity of theme and its personal directness – attributes of the work of aged artists from Titian and Rembrandt to Renoir and Matisse. Is it as great as the late work of these artists? Is it a great work at all? Criticism, so far, has been divided.

The press handout was unusually austere, a sequence of stills and the cast-list. Yet even without reading a production blurb, I would imagine that the title is to be taken literally: these are dreams (and nightmares) which Kurosawa has actually experienced and which stayed in the memory in the way that certain iconic dreams do, to haunt or console. One deduces this from the oddly private and even arbitrary quality of several episodes. They have been tidied up, of course, to be changed into cinematic spectacle; yet the details and transitions of emotion remain unpredictable and quirky: you feel that such touches could not or would not be invented.

The film opens with a summer downpour. 'Rain in bright sunshine: it's when foxes go courting in the forest,' mother says to little Akira, aged five or so, who promptly goes off to explore. In the forest, beautifully shot (no one shoots rain like Kurosawa), the foxes, actually human dancers, are in stealthy procession. Passing a tree, they spy the child, who hurries back home in fright. But his dream-mother is severe and presents the little boy with a dagger in a sheath. 'They have seen you, haven't they? You must commit suicide!'

The second and third episodes have a strange dark melancholy. In the former, a party of climbers is struggling in a blizzard; the leader encourages his men, urging them above all not to fall asleep. An angel appears and, pressing a magic blanket over the leader's shoulders, lulls him to the verge of unconsciousness. He shakes her off (obviously she is a demon, not an angel), but finds that his followers are dead.

Immediate transition to episode three. Now we are in the war, or near the end of it. Twilight: a fierce dog, wearing a body vest that seems to contain bombs, barks at a lonely officer. From the end of a tunnel a ghost platoon in full

marching gear emerges and halts. The officer addresses the soldiers, urging them in hectoring tones to turn back, which they eventually do. Fiercer than ever, the dog continues to bark at the officer... (The underlying emotion of this fantasy is cowardice, sadness, fear.)

The next episode is altogether brighter, though it too has sinister elements, notably in its crow-haunted ending. This is the celebrated Van Gogh sequence-celebrated because the painter is impersonated by none other than Martin Scorsese. Some critics, alas, have found this risible, perhaps because Scorsese does so little to play down the accents of Little Italy. Yet after all, there are not many lines of dialogue at issue: the sequence is predominantly visual, consisting mainly of Akira as a young man wandering in splendid Van Gogh landscapes, photographed now naturalistically (with 'real' fields, bridges, buildings), now by reference to the paintings themselves which, thanks to the skill of matte processes, have been 'three-dimensionalised', allowing the actor to enter the compositions in most literal detail.

Two further episodes introduce violent, apocalyptic anxieties. In the first, there is general panic as Mount Fuji sheds its skin in multiple explosions caused, we hear, not by natural eruption but by the meltdown of six nearby nuclear reactors. (Why six? A typical and, one hopes, dream-invented detail.) Japan, anyhow, is an island, and there is not enough room for Akira and his companions, who include a mother and her two children, to escape from the different radioactive gases-gases which have been thoughtfully individualised: you can tell what is killing you by its distinctive colouring. Where to go? Where to fly to? At the edge of a cliff, the only option seems suicide.

Yet in the second apocalyptic episode our hero, now alone, has survived into a post-nuclear landscape of dark volcanic ash. He meets a groaning demon with horns and sees dandelions that have mutated into giant sunflowers. In the valley beneath them he spies other horned humans beside a lake, engaged in what looks like a hopeless lament, a choral ballet of despair.

Switch, with relief, to the final episode, a complete contrast in tone and sensibility. Instead of anguish, peace and serenity; instead of consuming fire, solacing winter. A village on a river, served by stately waterwheels: flowers and children wherever you look. An old man (played by Ozu's favourite alter ego, Chishu Ryu, now aged 86) gives our hero cogent reasons for death to be 'happy'. And indeed that procession coming towards us with its merry sound of drums and cymbals, could it be?-yes, it is-a funeral. Evidently, joy is the right note to go out on.

In the reviews of the film from Cannes, there was a repeated disappointed reference to the director's rhetorical preachiness, with an implication of humanist coat-trailing. Yet I think this is to misunderstand how individual and unanswerable dreams really are. Kurosawa was himself present at the great earthquake of Tokyo in 1923 (there is a powerful description of the event in his autobiography) and one feels that, whatever has happened subsequently, the anticipation of disaster was from that time etched into his deepest character. Hiroshima and Nagasaki confirmed the phobia, as how should they not? I do not agree that the film is too literal, or even that it 'preaches' a humanist message. It seems to me to arise not 'out of rational discourse but from the subconscious, where art originates. For all its expensive production values, simplicity of emotion seems to be the keynote-as it was in Shakespeare's last plays.

Mark Le Fanu, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1990

AKIRA KUROSAWA'S DREAMS (YUME)

Director: Akira Kurosawa
Production Company: Akira Kurosawa USA Inc
Producers: Hisao Kurosawa, Mike Y. Inoue
Associate Producers: Allan H. Liebert, Seikichi Iizumi
Production Co-ordinator: Izuhiko Suehiro
Production Manager: Teruyo Nogami
Unit Managers: Kunio Niwa, Masahiko Kumada
Assistant Directors: Takashi Koizumi, Okihiro Yoneda, Naohito Sakai, Tsuyoshi Sugino, Kiyoharu Hayano, Toru Tanaka, Vittorio Dalle Ore
Screenplay: Akira Kurosawa
Directors of Photography: Takao Saito, Masaharu Ueda
Special Visual Effects: Industrial Light & Magic
Visual Effects Producer In Charge of Location Site: Peter Takeuchi
Effects Supervisors: Ken Ralston, Mark Sullivan
Optical Supervisor: Bruce Vecchitto
Effects Co-ordinator: Jil Sheree Bergin
Effects Editor: Michael Gleason
Effects Camera Operators: Terry Chostner, Selwyn Eddy III
Matte Camera Operators: Jo Carson, Wade Childress, Paul Huston, Charles Canfield
Optical Camera Operators: Jon Alexander, Jeff Doran
Effects Art Director: Claudia Mullaly
Model Supervisor: Barbara Affonso
Chief Pyrotechnician: Charles Ray
Pyrotechnician: Reuben Goldberg
Cloud Tank: Craig Mohegan
Hi-definition TV Technology: Sony PLC
Photo Composite Process: Akio Suzuki, Mikio Inoue, Mutsuhiro Harad, Yoshiya Takahashi
EBR Process: Tomio Omata, Takaya Takizawa
HDTV Co-ordinator: Tetsuji Maezawa
Composite Technology: Den Film Effect
Optical Photography: Takashi Kobayashi, Takashi Kawabata
Optical Camera Operators: Makoto Negishi, Takabumi Hirata
Visual Effects: Minoru Nakano
Matte Painting: Takeaki Tsukada
Music Production: Tokyo Concert Orchestra
Wardrobe: Tokyo Isho
Sound Effects: Toyo Onkyo Kamome
Explosives: Ohira Special Effects
Titles: Katsuhiro Miyaguchi
Editor: Tome Minami
Art Directors: Yoshiro Muraki, Akira Sakuragi
Set Decorator: Koichi Hamamura
Costume Designer: Emi Wada
Wardrobe: Kazuko Kurosawa, Akira Fukuda, Yoko Nagano, Mitsuru Otsuka
Make-up Artists: Shohichiro Ueda, Tameyuki Aimi, Norio Sano
Music: Shinichiro Ikebe
Piano Performed by: Ikuko Endo
Choreography: Michiyo Hata
Dance Instructor: Tokiko Mochizuki
Sound Recording: Senichi Benitani
Sound Effects: Ichiro Minawa, Masatoshi Saito
Creative Consultant: Inoshiro Honda
Mountain Climbing Adviser: Tadao Kanzaki

Cast

Sunshine through the Rain
Mitsuko Baisho (*Mother of ‘I’*)
Toshihiko Nakano (*‘I’ as a young child*)

The Peach Orchard
Mitsunori Isaki (*‘I’ as a boy*)
Mie Suzuki (*‘I’s young sister*)

The Blizzard
Akira Terao (*‘I’*)
Mieko Harada (*The Snow Fairy*)
Masayuki Yui, Shu Nakajima, Sakae Kimura (*members of the climbing team*)

The Tunnel
Akira Terao (*‘I’*)
Yoshitaka Zushi (*Private Noguchi*)

Crows
Akira Terao (*‘I’*)
Martin Scorsese (*Vincent van Gogh*)

Mount Fuji in Red
Akira Terao (*‘I’*)
Toshie Negishi (*child-carrying mother*)
Hisashi Igawa (*power station worke*)

The Weeping Demon
Akira Terao (*‘I’*)
Chosuke Ikariya (*The Demon*)

Village of the Watermills
Akira Terao (*‘I’*)
Chishu Ryu (*103-year old man*)
Tessho Yamashita, Misato Tate, Catherine Cadou, Mugita Endo, Ryujiro Oki, Masaru Sakurai, Masaaki Sasaki, Keiki Takenouchi, Kento Toriki, Tokuju Masuda, Masuo Amada, Shogo Tomomori, Ryo Nagasawa, Akisato Yamada, Tetsu Watanabe, Ken Takemura, Tetsuya Ito, Shoichiro Sakata, Naoto Shigemizu, Hiroshi Miyasaka, Yasuhiro Kajimoto, Makoto Hasegawa, Nagamitsu Satake, Satoshi Hara, Yasushige Turuoka, Shigeru Edaki, Hideharu Takeda, Katsumi Naito, Masaaki Enomoto, Nori Takei, Eiji Iida, Koji Kanda, Hideto Aota, Kazue Nakanishi, Rika Miyazawa, Mika Edaki, Mayumi Kamimura, Sayuri Yoshioka, Teruko Nakayama, Toshiya Ito, Takashi Ito, Motoyuki Higashimura, Yasuhito Yamanaka, Haruka Sugata, Noriko Hayami, Ayaka Takahashi, Yuko Ishiwa, Sachiko Oguri, Masayo Mochida, Miki Kado, Mika Ikeya, Sakiko Yamamoto, Mayumi Ono, Yumiko Miyata, Aya Ikaida, Megumi Hata, Asako Hirano, Chika Nishio, Yuko Harada, Tomomi Yoshizawa, Kumiko Ishizuka, Masumi Yoda, Hatsue Nishi, Michiko Kawada, Machiko Ichihashi, Yumi Ezaki, Chika Yamabe, Mayuko Akashi, Fujio Tsuneta, Michio Kida, Ayako Honma, Haruko Togo, Reiko Nanao, Shin Tonomura, Junpei Natsuki, Shigeo Kato, Saburo Kadowaki, Goichi Nagatani, Shizuko Azuma, Yoshie Kihira, Yukie Shimura, Setsuko Kawaguchi, Kumeko Otowa, Machiko Terada, Umiko Takahashi, Harumi Fujii, Hiroko Okuno, Mon Ota, Akitoku Inaba, Kou Ishikawa, Tatsunori Tokuhashi, Yoshiko Maki, Hiroko Maki, Ryoko Kawai, Miyako Kawana, Miyuki Egawa, Megumi Sakai, Yoko Hayashi, Yuko Matsumura, Takashi Odajima, Mitsuru Shibuya, Koichi Imamura, Wasuke Izumi, Sachio Sakai, Torauemon Utazawa, Yukimasa Natori, Tadashi Okumura, Kenzo Shirahama, Masato Goto, Sumimaro Yochimi, Junichi Kubozono, Masam Ozeki, Yasuyuki Iwanaga, Akira Tashiro, Koichi Kase, Kenji Fujita, Hiroto Tamura, Osamu Yayama, Yuji Sawayama, Mitsuji Tsuwako, Masatoshi Miya, Maiko Okamoto, Nana Yamakawa, Yuka Kojima, Shizuka Isami, Mai Watanabe, Sayuri Kobayashi, Hayakawa Productions, Himawari Theatre Group, Motoko Inagawa Office, Tanba Dojo, Kokugakuin Uni, Mizutamakai (*villagers*)

USA 1990
119 mins

KUROSAWA

Stray Dog (Nora Inu)

Wed 1 Feb 20:35; Mon 13 Feb 18:10

Drunken Angel (Yoidore Tenshi)

Thu 2 Feb 18:20; Fri 10 Feb 20:40

The Silent Duel (Shizukanaru Kettô)

Thu 2 Feb 20:40; Sat 11 Feb 18:40

Sanshiro Sugata (Sugata Sanshirô)

Fri 3 Feb 18:20 (+ intro by Ian Haydn Smith, season co-curator); Sun 12 Feb 15:50

Sanshiro Sugata Part Two (Zoku Sugata Sanshirô)

Fri 3 Feb 20:45; Sun 12 Feb 18:20

The Gathering Storm: Kurosawa Study Day

Sat 4 Feb 12:00

Living (Ikiru)

Sat 4 Feb 17:50; Wed 15 Feb 20:15

Kurosawa and Shakespeare, Adaptation and Reinvention: An illustrated talk by Adrian Wootton

Sun 5 Feb 15:15

Ran

Sun 5 Feb 17:30 (+ intro by Adrian Wootton, CEO of Film London and film curator); Sat 11 Feb 11:50; Sat 25 Feb 17:20

I Live in Fear (Ikimono no Kiroku)

Mon 6 Feb 18:10; Mon 13 Feb 20:40

Dreams (Yume)

Wed 8 Feb 20:30; Sun 26 Feb 15:30

Red Beard (Akahige)

Sat 11 Feb 15:20 (+ intro by Ian Haydn Smith, season co-curator); Sun 26 Feb 17:25

Throne of Blood (Kumonosu-jô)

Sun 12 Feb 13:00; Fri 17 Feb 20:40; Tue 21 Feb 18:10

Dersu Uzala

Thu 16 Feb 18:10 (+ intro by Ian Haydn Smith, season co-curator); Mon 27 Feb 20:10 (+ intro by Doug Weir, BFI Technical Delivery Manager)

Yojimbo (Yôjinbô)

Sat 18 Feb 20:45; Thu 23 Feb 20:15 (+ intro by Asif Kapadia, season co-curator)

Rhapsody in August (Hachigatsu no Kyoshikoku)

Sun 19 Feb 18:30; Sat 25 Feb 12:40

Mâdadayo

Mon 20 Feb 20:20; Tue 28 Feb 18:00

Philosophical Screens: Throne of Blood

Tue 21 Feb 20:10

A.K.

Wed 22 Feb 20:50; Sat 25 Feb 20:45

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