

# Akira kurosawa" rashomon: the clashing views of different interpretations

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



## **The Conflicting Dilemma of Multiple Interpretations**

A single event witnessed by more than one person can be portrayed in almost countless different ways, making the truth nearly impossible to determine. The conflicting outlooks on an occurrence vary depending on who is recanting the story, what their motives are, and how they perceived the events; in *Rashōmon*, a film by Akira Kurosawa, the viewer is able to analyze how this complex array of concepts impacts four different people, retelling a single event. Before analyzing how one specific scene is different from what actually occurred, a brief summary of what actually happens is necessary. The first of what transpired is offered by the woodcutter, who actually saw the whole event occur; meaning that the accounts given at the trial by the bandit (Tajomaru), the samurai's wife, and the samurai were all false. Even the woodcutter's original story was false, because he didn't want to be part of the trial. Furthermore, each scene has a very specific lighting to represent the overall tone of the scene; the light represents purity and truth, while the dark symbolizes an action of sin and lies. The falsified stories are significant because they reflect the motives of the one describing the event; so, by the end of the movie, the samurai's wife clearly has been lying in order to protect her name, and her mental state is fragile due to the way she perceived the event as a twisted act of fate that has spurned her life forever.

While the rain is pouring down, the woodcutter comes clean about the events that actually occurred. He reports that Tajomaru begged and pleaded the samurai's wife for her hand in marriage, but instead, she freed her husband from his bindings. Next, the samurai's wife berates the two men for

refusing to fight for her love, claiming that real men would fight for her. These criticisms inflated the anger brewing within the two men to the point of explosion, and the two men began to duel. It was by no means a graceful fight, both were clearly nervous throughout it; the samurai's stab into a stump proved fatal when he couldn't remove it, allowing Tajomaru to get the upper hand and kill the samurai, who begs for his life before he meets the cold death of steel. After the samurai is slain, his wife flees into the woods, and is pursued by a limping Tajomaru. It should be made clear that in each of the previous retellings there are differences in how the samurai's wife responds to Tajomaru's marriage request, what causes the men to fight, and the samurai's reaction before death; these differences are critical because the samurai's wife omits two of the three.

This essay will focus on the similarities and differences between the samurai's wife's interpretations of the events, versus what actually happened in the woodcutter's final version. Focus is being placed on this specific sequence of events, because it has the most omissions and changes from what actually took place. As the woodcutter is retelling the wife's statement during the trial, he mentions that she seemed so docile, that it was almost pitiful; this is significant because her enduring remorse after the event would correspond accurately with what actually transpired. Living through a rape just to watch the murder of your husband, would eradicate the emotional foundation of any woman, even if she instigated the whole quarrel.

The samurai's wife begins by explaining that she tried to run to her husband and free him immediately. Next, it cuts to an open forest scene where she runs over to her husband, but is grabbed by the back of her dress and thrown down by Tajomaru, who walks over to the samurai and unties him. After untying the samurai, the shot zooms in to Tajomaru's face, which is covered by shadows, because this event never happened. The portrayal of the bandit's happiness is sadistic in nature, his eyes look wild, and he has a menacing grin across his face. After Tajomaru exclaims a roar of triumph, he scampers off into the forest, which is dark in the distance, again, this the forest and his escape are in the shadows because he never runs off. The camera pans back over to the samurai and his wife. Despite the majority of this image being in the sunlight, the couple is hidden by the shade. When it zooms on to the two, it is clear they are masked by shade, but there is a glimmer of light shining on to each of their bodies. The light represents that the two were actually there, but their surroundings are in darkness because they never have this encounter. Then, the samurai's wife is shown lying down on the forest floor, weeping, surrounded by darkness; she looks up, and begins to crawl towards her husband, she stands up and walks over to him, falling down on him searching for his embrace. After a brief glance at the samurai's face, the scene changes back to the wife as she describes his eyes, "What I saw in them was neither anger, nor sorrow, but a cold light, a look of loathing" (Rashōmon). All of the scenes at the trial are lit very well, because it is an accurate portrayal of what she said. The film switches back to the scene in the grove, and the wife is sliding away gradually from her husband, the sun lights her face, and her facial expression is one of utter

terror. This light on her face represents the terror that she felt before Tajomaru and her husband fought, and the rest of the scene is dark because it is a fabrication of the truth. The look is so excruciatingly painful to her that she pleads for him to, "beat [her], kill [her], but don't look at me like that. Please stop" (Rashōmon). This begging to her husband is significant for her lie to come across as the truth, because this makes it seem like the samurai's disappoint eats her away from the inside, which is how any "proper" Japanese woman should react. The film zooms in on the woman's face, her hands slowly ascend up her cheeks to cover her eyes from this painful gaze, but her fingers remained spread, making it seem as if she is almost drawn to her husband's eyes.

After the gaze is broken, the samurai's wife throws her head to the forest floor, hands clenching her face, sobbing. She briefly glances upward, and immediately puts her head back down. Following a brief pause, she springs to her feet. The camera zooms out, showing her, the samurai, and the dagger, all illuminated by sunlight, but everything else is covered by shade. These three things are lit because they were all a part of the actual event, but everything that occurs in the wife's story is a lie. The wife runs over to the dagger, snatches it out of the ground, and runs back over to her husband; she cuts the rope binding the samurai, steps back and offers the dagger, saying "Now kill me. Kill me at once" (Rashōmon). Again, this makes the audience listening to the wife's fabrication of the story much more sympathetic to her, because she is showing her husband the utmost respect. The samurai remains silent, just staring at her coldly; his wife begins to back

away, unable to endure the pain being inflicted on her by his stare. The samurai's wife raises the dagger, and begins inching forward towards him, covered by shade. The shade that absorbs all light is so slightly darker than all the others, because this is her most prolific lie. Instantly, the scene changes back to her at the trial, where she explains that the painful stare of her husband must have caused her to faint. Next, she explains the shock that overwhelmed her when she woke up and found the dagger in her husband. As the samurai's wife fiddles with the sand around her, she states that she doesn't remember how she left the woods. While quietly sobbing, she begins to explain her several failed attempts at suicide. Then, in her final attempt to gain sympathy, before lying her head down in the sand and crying, she asks, "What is a poor, helpless woman like me supposed to do?" (Rashōmon).

The differences between the wife's story and the woodcutter's are hard to miss due to the several omissions and added pieces of information; in fact, almost nothing the wife said was true. The samurai's wife doesn't mention the bandit's proposal or him asking her to travel with him, rather, she begins with her slightly true information, that she went over to her husband as soon as Tajomaru released her, but he doesn't grab her back or throw her to the ground. After this, everything the wife says is a lie. Tajomaru doesn't run off into the woods, instead he is baited by the woman, and begins fighting her husband. In addition, she never lies by her husband's side crying or endures his painful stare; rather she just hides when the two men begin fighting. The samurai's death is not the result of her fainting on him while she was holding

the dagger; Tajomaru kills the samurai while they are dueling. The wife claims that she had no recollection of leaving the forest grove, but that is also false, the woodcutter saw her flee directly after the demise of her husband. Furthermore, the wife omits the part about her husband begging for his life, because that would besmirch both of their names; she adds the anecdote about her trying to commit suicide as further proof that she was a faithful wife. Thus, the wife's story is an abridged, inaccurate version of what actually transpired because she omits how she started the fight, the duel itself, and adds parts that make her seem like a better wife.