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High and Low

1963

THE STORY

The story, with major revisions, is taken from a novel by Edward McBain. Gondo (Toshiro Mifune) is production head of a shoe company who, having trouble with the directors, is planning a coup whereby he will gain control of the stock and thereby the company. He mortgages his home and belongings to get enough money to make the initial payment. Just then he receives word that his son is kidnapped and the criminal asks for an exorbitant amount—very near that which he has just raised. A bit later the boy returns and it is discovered that his playmate, the chauffeur's son, was the one who was kidnapped.

The question becomes: is a chauffeur's son worth as much as an industrialist's? At first Mifune says no, refuses, particularly when the kidnapper calls, admits the mistake, but insists that he be paid anyway. After much thought the industrialist, upon the advice of the police, agrees to pay. The rendezvous is on a speeding express-train. The money is handed over, the boy is returned and the first half of the film is over. Mifune is ruined but now the police start trying to get back the money. This occupies the second half of the film.

One clue leads to another, and eventually a young intern, Takeuchi (Tsutomu Yamazaki), is implicated. He is also guilty of selling heroin to addicts and, eventually, of killing his accomplices in the kidnapping. He is captured, confesses and in the final scene in the prison asks to meet Mifune.

Yamazaki: Ah, Mr. Gondo, thanks for coming. You look very well. What are you doing these days?

Mifune: Making shoes, just as I always have. It's a small company but they've been kind enough to put me in charge of production. I hope someday to be able to build something even better than National Shoes was.

Yamazaki: Why do you keep *looking* at me like that? In a few hours I'm going to die but don't think that frightens me. It doesn't. And don't think I called you here because I wanted your pity . . . why should I spend the last few moments of my life listening to slop like that? You see, I'm concerned with the truth, no matter how ugly . . . But, how about it—now that I'm going to die, are you happy?

Mifune: Why do you talk like that? Why are you so convinced that it is right that we hate each other?

Yamazaki: I don't know about that . . . it is just that . . . from my dirty little room, too cold to sleep in the winter, too hot to breathe in the summer, I could see your house and it was like looking up at heaven. I looked up at your house every day and somehow began to hate you. After a while it was hating you that kept me going.

And you know something? I found out that people like me can have a lot of fun making people like you miserable.

Mifune: Were you that miserable?

Yamazaki: Want the story of my life? Not a chance. Your sympathy doesn't interest me, Mr. Gondo, and I really don't have that much time. . . . It will soon be over and I'm glad of it.

Mifune: If that is the way you feel why did you send for me?

Yamazaki: I didn't want you to think that I died begging for mercy . . .

He suddenly clutches the wire-screen, his hands shaking.

You think my hands are shaking because I'm scared. Look—I've been in solitary for two weeks now—it is a common physical reaction. When a man is taken out of solitary he starts to shake—that's the truth. A death sentence means nothing to me. I've been living in my own private hell for a long time. So I'm not afraid of going to hell.

He stands up, anguished, shouts:

Now, if someone were to tell me I was going to heaven, then I guess I'd really start to shake, wouldn't I?

He begins to cry, to laugh, to shout. The guards rush in and take him away. The iron shutter falls over the glass and wire between them. Mifune is left sitting alone in front of the closed prison shutter, and the film ends.

TREATMENT

The title of the film in Japanese is *Tengoku to Jigoku* (or *Heaven and Hell*) and this suggests an extreme opposite that merely *High and Low* does not. The first half of the picture takes place in heaven—that is, in Mifune's apartment, high on a bluff in Yokohama and visible



from most of that section of the city. Even the background for the credit titles is scenes of Yokohama taken from high up. These include the harbor, Chinatown, the trains and factory chimneys which later become important to the action, and all are seen as Mifune himself sees them—from above. The second half of the film takes place in hell—in Yokohama itself, and eventually descends to the lowest circle: the alleys around Chinatown where in a warren of cheap hotels and bars the heroin pushers are found.

Formally, the film is designed to break into two. At the end of the first, the ostensible story is over—the boy is back, we are consequently no longer emotionally involved. The second half is an elaborate hunt and our interest becomes intellectual. As in *Stray Dog* we are presented with a puzzle and then watch it worked out, step by step.



As in the 1948 film (and oddly, *Un carnet du bal*—a film much admired in Japan) the audience is given evidence bit by bit.

Kurosawa plainly shows what *he* thinks is important. It is not the kidnapping itself (done off screen) nor the fate of the small victim (the return is purposely done in extreme long-shot as though to rob it of all emotion), nor is it Mifune's moral dilemma. It is the search, the capture, and the confrontation. The form would indicate this—or else why have the boy returned half way through the film?—and so does the way in which the two parts are filmed.

If the first half is statement and exposition, then the second half is development and conclusion; if the first is theory, then the second is practice.

The first half—it takes one hour and five minutes—not only takes place entirely in Mifune's apartment, but the action is so static that it is very close to theater. Several cameras are used but the takes are enormously long—some run to ten minutes and would probably have run longer but this was the capacity of the camera's magazines.

I was present during the filming of the early morning scene where the detectives have stayed the night: Mifune comes in, opens the windows, is asked to close them, eventually refuses to pay and goes out. During the rehearsals one of the lights fused. It was an arc simulating early morning sunlight outside the window from which Mifune was to pull the curtain. Even though it was only a rehearsal Kurosawa said: "Let's wait until they fix the light... we might as well do it right."

This is typical of the meticulousness which went into these static-appearing scenes. We know they are static, even feel a mild claustrophobia, but we are never bored, we remain interested. And when things happen, they happen fast: the chauffeur comes in with a sweater for his son, asks for him, the wife goes to look in the garden, the telephone rings, it is the kidnapper, and we get the first close-up: Mifune on the phone.

There are only three indications of passing of time in the first half. They are all wipes. The first is the second phone call, the detectives already there, wipe/the next scene is everyone listening to a taping made by the police some time after. The second leaves the chauffeur pleading with his employer, in full obeisance on the floor, with Mifune walking out of the room, wipe/next morning Mifune coming downstairs. The third is the call, wipe/the family listening to the taped call while in the background the detectives are following the kidnapper's taped instructions, putting the money into briefcases—cause and effect included in the single shot. There are many other short-cuts used in this first half. "Is that the police?" asks the wife. "No," says the chauffeur, "only a department store truck." "Funny time for it to come," says Mifune and instantly the chauffeur is announcing the police, and there is not another word explaining that they came disguised as truckers.

The train sequence, which is the visual center of the film, is given the amount of time it would actually have taken, about four minutes—but four minutes of an action so furious that after the stillness of the first hour, the effect is overwhelming.

The second half begins at once and here the leisurely method of the story-telling chronicle is abruptly changed—using the freely-cut train sequences as link—to an essay-like, analytical narration (a bit like that in *Ikiru*) where past and present are seen at the same time. First, however, Kurosawa makes certain that we understand we are now in hell. Detectives are checking phone boxes. They look up and there is Mifune's house. One says to the other: "Looking up at his place from here it *does* sort of seem he's looking down his nose at everyone." The camera looks at the scummy canal and in a distance the radio is heard playing the theme and variations movement of Schubert's *Forellen* quintet, the camera pans up and follows a new character, a young man. He is followed through alleys until he reaches his room, turns on the radio, starts searching the newspapers. It is the kidnapper.

Here, Kurosawa purposely throws away mystery and suspense. Not only do we know that the boy has been returned, we also know what the kidnapper looks like, which is more than anyone else does. We are forced to become as analytical as the detectives. We can savor their getting nearer and nearer because we now know what the criminal looks like and we discover something about his life.

We are not allowed to look too long, however. At once we are taken on the chase which includes almost every technique in the cinematic repertoire.

First we see the eight millimeter shots taken from the train, then a blow-up of a single frame, there is a man with a cow. It was he who says he saw a man running with two briefcases and driving away. From this they get tire-marks and some paint scrapings. The little victim has in the meantime drawn a picture of what he saw: Mt. Fuji and the sea. At police headquarters they are checking all pay phones from which Mifune's house is visible (since the kidnapper said he could see it, and wondered why—when the police were there—the blinds were drawn)—they find three and we have already seen them do so. The kidnapper said it was hot—the police discover that one of them is in the sun at the hour the call came. It turns out the little boy was given ether to keep him quiet. The car model is identified and there is a glimpse of the police stopping a car. The police discover an abandoned car (seen) and its license number tallies with the number of a stolen car. The attendants on the freeway remember seeing a boy asleep in the back of a car—we see detectives talking with them; in the meantime the police have been trying to find a place where both Fuji and



the sea are visible (and a short scene shows this). A detective in replaying the tapes hears the sound of a cable-train in the background. He starts to investigate: a short scene of his talking with train men, their identifying it. They find the house and the dead accomplices, they also find a note (seen in blow-up in the laboratory) saying they intend to spend the money unless they get more dope. In the meantime we know that the briefcase is still with the kidnapper and that it contains chemicals that color smoke if they are burned. Again a shortcut is used. The criminal sees a picture of the briefcase in the paper. Cut to the child having drawn a picture of the kidnapper. Cut to the children racing into the room to say some funny smoke is coming from a chimney.



This last, as are all other successful clues, is accompanied by a fanfare on the sound track. And, like it, all of these tiny scenes are imbedded in the larger scene of policemen making separate reports to their superiors. While they explain we see them doing what they are talking about. Very often past and present are there at the same time, cause and effect are made practically one, a number of false leads are followed but, through elimination, the cops get warmer and warmer. One detail is piled on top of another, each one significant, some very witty. A cop looking through binoculars from a window is accompanied by a distant record playing a song the lyrics of which are: "I can see your lovely eyes;" when the police move in through the moonlight a radio plays *O sole mio*. This telescoping, and the technical brilliance of the exposition makes this section, about thirty minutes, the shortest half hour in all of Kurosawa's cinema.

Then the detectives decide to arrest, and in this climax of the hunt Kurosawa presents a kaleidoscope which must be compared with the night-town sequences of *Ikiru* for sheer visual exhilaration. One marvelous scene after another: the cops disguised as toughs in a Yokohama dance-hall; the villain walking through Chinatown, has glasses reflecting the lights; the head-cops in a car which is speckled with passing neons; a very exciting scene where the ruined Mifune is walking accidentally in the same neighborhood (looking at shoes in a store window) and the kidnapper, recognizing him, asks for a light and then looks curiously at him for a second. The hunt comes to an abrupt end when they snap the handcuffs on him at the deserted house overlooking the sea where they found the murdered couple. Then comes the coda and the confrontation.

In his depiction of contrasts Kurosawa follows Dante. Heaven is a measured place of muffled crisis where things as they are are insisted upon; hell is a chaos, wildly exciting, quite dangerous. The disguised cops move through this hell like demigods, or angels, always alert, always watching. Mifune moves through this world like Dante himself, oblivious even when confronted with the evil that has wrecked his life. Only the head detective, his brow furrowed, worries, invisible but watching over him, Virgil-like. The parallel need not be labored, there is no doubt that Kurosawa is surely on the side of the angels. In this film there is not the slightest sympathy for the villain nor for the world that is his. The police are true protectors, the villain is truly black. Morally, it would seem to be the most black and white of all of Kurosawa's films because its eventual ambiguity is not one of character.

CHARACTERIZATION

Though there are many characterizations of others in the film (the wife is in kimono throughout except in the final scene at the house where, in Western dress, she faces eviction; each detective

is given his own little quirk; the head detective is obviously and wholly benevolent), there are really only two fully-drawn characters: those of Gondo, the unfortunate; and Takeuchi, the bringer of misfortune.

Gondo is a completely ordinary man—he could be almost anyone. He has gotten where he is in the world through hard work, yet he has never sacrificed his integrity and this integrity is that of a workman who will not produce shoddy goods. This is fully established in the opening scene, a quarrel between him and the other directors of the shoe company based on just this point. Yet, at the same time, he has lived enough in the world to know how to take care of himself. When his son and the chauffeur's boy are playing outlaw and sheriff, Gondo calls out: "Running away from the sheriff won't help. Hide and then let him have it. Don't you run, let him run. It's kill or be killed . . . don't forget." This advice is precisely that which he himself is following in buying out the stock. It will ruin the other directors who are set on getting control themselves. He is therefore no better than they—though he has our sympathy because he has a kind of integrity which they do not. And this he shows, when, in the midst of his misfortunes, he sits down on the floor, calls for his tools—which he obviously has not used for years—and begins taking the leather briefcase apart to put in the smoke capsule. "In my day shoemakers made briefcases too. I never thought my days as an apprentice would be so valuable. Yet here I am, starting from scratch again." And he laughs—in the very face of his troubles. There is a cut to the train (the beginning scene in that sequence) where the head detective reinforces our own impressions with: "You know, I really admire that man."

He is admirable but as the film continues it becomes clear that this admirable quality is mainly that of his being able to tolerate the idea of beginning again, of his being willing to accept a meaningless disaster for which he could in no way be considered responsible, of his finding the strength to continue, his ability to believe in himself.

It is here that *High and Low* reveals itself as having the same ideological basis as the majority of Kurosawa's films. Like Watanabe in *Ikiru*, like the girl in *One Wonderful Sunday*, like the detective in *Stray Dog*, like the young hero of *Red Beard*—Gondo has the ability to believe and the will to continue.

The character of Takeuchi, the kidnapper, seems at first a complete contrast. It would seem that he is plain bad just as Gondo is plain good. Even the looks of the actors suggest this. Mifune is, of course, a good, even noble-looking man. On the other hand, Tsutomu Yamazaki (a stage actor whose first big film part this was) looks, at least in this part, untrustworthy, twisted, faintly repellent. This is the way the characters appear, but here we might remember Sanjuro's advice: You cannot tell what a person is like by how he looks.

Yamazaki certainly *acts* different from Mifune. He is compulsive, he is a man running away, and the police call him a maniac. While not that, he *is* one of life's dissatisfied. Unable to love, he finds pleasure—as he brags at the end of the film—in hating. This man, then, has chosen to be evil—just as the criminal in *Stray Dog* chose. And we remember Detective Shimura's words in that film: "Look, *my* knapsack and money were stolen too. I felt outraged. I knew that this was a dangerous point in my life. But what did I do? I chose this work." Evil, then, is merely the wrong choice at the moment of truth.

His choice of Gondo seems completely gratuitous. He has no motive other than the pleasure of hate, and that Gondo's house is so grand. Evil is non-selective and Gondo's first reaction is an outraged: "Why me?" When the kidnapper calls on the phone (always being careful to call him "Mr. Gondo" with an obsequiousness which cannot hide the joy he is feeling at the irony of his, finally the man in power, calling the other, the fallen, Mr.) Gondo's reaction is not anger so much as incomprehension.

We watch Gondo's attempt to escape from the consequences of the actions of the other. There is no reason why he should pay. It is that he cannot *not* do it. At first he refuses absolutely. Then he attempts to explain why he is refusing. Finally, he agrees to say he will pay. Next he agrees to take the money from the bank, but says he won't hand it over. It is only as he himself pushes it from the train window—in that one dazed second—that he realizes what has happened and says: "It is my life."

Both police and press think well of this action. They think it is socially desirable, civic-minded, even brave. He is a wonderful man, they tell each other. But his being thought a wonderful man will not get back his life for Mr. Gondo.

He, who has always taken full responsibility for his life (and prided himself in it) is suddenly no longer responsible for it. First, the kidnapper takes over his life and, second, the police take it over. These two things are equated in a curious and meaningful way. It is both kidnapper *and* police who make it impossible for him to work. The first has a certain power over him—if Gondo does as he says the boy may be returned; but the second has a like power—if he does what they say the money may be returned. In either event he can no longer do any work—and he apparently takes to wandering (an action which cannot have been habitual to him) and it is on one of these walks that he first, unknowingly, meets the criminal.

The world is indeed a fine place if things like this can happen to such a good-hearted man, such a well-intentioned man as Mr. Gondo. But (as Kurosawa never tires of pointing out) the world is just like this. It is indeed a hell (as we have been told in *Rashomon*, in *Record of a Living Being* in *The Lower Depths*, and now here). But it is not a private hell. We are all in it—so is the kidnapper.

He is a man to whom things have happened all of his life and so just for this once, he decides to make something happen to someone else. He is "oppressed" and so he will oppress an "oppressor." There is something noble in his resolve in that it takes a kind of bravery and considerable courage. At least he is not going to sit back and let himself be battered over the head. The flames of hell will not get him without a struggle. So he makes his plan.

However, the same thing happens to him that happens to Gondo. First, he becomes responsible—he must see his crime through to some kind of conclusion. Second, he too becomes responsible to the police. He might have been caught with the boy; now he might be caught with the money. We are much more familiar with this process in the bad man than we are in the good because so many stories and movies have shown us how one "evil" action leads to the next, and so on. Very rarely, however, have we been shown—and shown so clearly—that by the end the bad man has become thoroughly *subject* to those very actions through which he sought to free himself. He and Gondo have become rather alike—neither can work, both are given to wandering. They can be identified with each other.

CAMERA

Reality is heightened in this film not so much through story, as in *Ikiru*, or form as in *Rashomon*, as through the eye itself. The references to seeing in the film are many and varied. The kidnapper can see into Gondo's house, the policemen, in turn, use binoculars to peep out; many in the cast wear glasses; the kidnapper wears dark glasses at night and their surface reflects what he sees; devices for seeing—still pictures, motion pictures, drawings, are constantly used there are many mirrors in the picture—the wall mirror in the Yokohama dive, rear view mirrors in cars; there are all kinds of reflections from reflections on water to reflections on the shiny surfaces of automobiles; a kind of paranoia is felt—someone is always *watching*—and in the confrontation scene it is reflections on a sheet of glass which give the film its final and profoundly ambiguous meaning.

Kurosawa's camera—never self-effacing—has almost never been so prominent. But, as always, it is completely to the point. Throughout the picture there is an insistence that the camera viewpoint be either high or low. The opening credits are from high above Yokohama; the kidnapper in his room is from below. Scenes in Gondo's house are taken from chest level. Scenes in the dope dens are taken from a lower angle, around hip level. At the same time—particularly in the first half of the picture—there are many rising/falling shots which insist, accompanying risings and sittings of the actors, upon high and low. This kind of movement is particularly important in the first half because the scenes in themselves are static, as they must be if the second half is to have its full impact.

The way in which these static scenes were vivified is interesting. For the main set, Gondo's apartment was created twice—there were two major sets, identical. One was at the Toho studio, the other was overlooking Yokohama; in other words, Gondo's house was, in part, built. Scenes showing the family against daylight Yokohama were actually filmed there. The night scenes from ostensibly the same location were filmed from yet a third set which had a complete miniature set of Yokohama at night (the real one did not photograph well enough) outside the window. The main body of the first half (all scenes with the curtains drawn) was filmed at the Toho studio.

This set was made much like a stage with no proscenium—a room with the fourth wall missing. Kurosawa's cameras were outside this missing wall and tracks were laid in various positions. The camera itself was rarely taken into the set—close-ups being obtained through long-distance lenses.

For the morning scene mentioned above, the tracks were laid in an inverted V-shape with the two free ends meeting the corners of the set. On one track was a dolly with a camera equipped with long-distance lenses. On the other was another dolly with a small elevator attached. The third camera was hidden in the hallway leading from the far end of the room and was likewise equipped with a telescopic lense. The method of filming was something like that used in TV with different cameras using different lenses, changing position from time to time. The entire operation had been thoroughly practiced, the actors' movements had been worked out, the camera's movements (both dolly cameras moving continually, the elevator following the motions of the actors) and the cues for changing lenses—everything had been choreographed. The three cameras were run simultaneously and the take was repeated twice, which meant one hour of film for a ten minute scene. The sequence was then put together in the cutting room.

The effect is one of complete freedom within a very constricted area and the camera work alone is responsible for the fact that this half, though over an hour in length, seems so very much shorter. Yet this very restraint also assists the visual explosion of the train-sequence—one of the most exciting five minutes in Japanese film.

Here the camera is hand-held or it is bolted to the train floor to make it jump, or put into the cab of the engine, or held out of the window. Nine cameras were used for this sequence including the eight-millimeters which took the scenes later projected at the police headquarters. In the edited version the continuity is superb: one is never lost nor do any of the tiny reactions (Mifune's expression when he lets go the money) escape. At the same time the sense of crisis, of excitement is completely captured.

In the latter half of the film so much is happening that one has to look hard. The cops passing notes back and forth (the machinations of the police force would have delighted Dr. Mabuse); the crowded

scenes in the dance-hall with only the flick of an eye to identify the fuzz; the fascinating juxtaposition of seeing what they did while they tell about doing it; the fantastic telephoto shots with people all jammed into a single plane; the bravura of throwing away breathtaking shots with Fuji in the distance. Just as the cops must remain completely alert, forever searching, so must the spectator.

At the same time the camera continuity is so swift that to lapse is to miss. An example of this is the way in which the kidnapper is finally identified. The kidnapper is looking through the newspapers again. The following is all one shot, the camera hand-held but rock-steady, shooting from a relatively short distance with a 75 mm. telescopic lens:

His face, extreme close-up looking at papers, looks startled, pan to paper, picture of briefcase; pan up to him, he drops paper, turns; door opens, extreme close-up, no telling what it is; he pulls things out of closet (it must have been the closet door); finally gets briefcase, holds it open, camera swings to see it just before it disappears into cardboard box; his hands in close-up, they find twine; pan to box, twine, up to enormous close-up of face, pan down to hand to show—for the first time, but only for a second, the cut on his hand which will eventually identify him.

This shot of the most controlled brilliance and the most supernal difficulty lasts about 30 seconds.

Cut to Gondo's house. They are looking at the picture the child drew of the kidnapper and all notice that he has drawn one hand bandaged / cut. The boys run in and say to come look at the smoke / cut. Color shot (very brief) of police, family, Yokohama in distance, red smoke coming out of chimney. Fanfare on sound track.

Cut to the bottom of the chimney, a policeman talking to the man who burns the refuse. Discovers that the briefcase came from an intern. Cut to the waiting room of the hospital. Cops are there. The kidnapper in his intern smock comes by. He stops on the stairway. They see the cut on his hand. They react. Fanfare.

What the picture insists upon is the reality of what is happening but, at the same time, it is so extraordinarily concerned with the ways in which reality is counterfeited—mirrors, cameras, binoculars, even eyes—that it is almost equally concerned with illusion. The police are obviously trying to separate, for their own purposes, illusion from reality—that is what a police hunt is. As in *The Bad Sleep Well*, Kurosawa is here much concerned with illusion-making machines. In the former film there is the magical scene of the man looking at his own funeral service while listening to a tape which shows him how his

death was to have been contrived. In *High and Low*, too, the tape recorder is again used, as are films—ghost machines both.

That the picture is concerned not only with theory and practice but also with illusion and reality is wonderfully brought out—and the two are brought together—in the final scene, the confrontation. Yamazaki is in the death-cell and Mifune comes. Mifune is outside; Yamazaki is inside. They are separated by wire mesh and by a plate of heavy glass. Their conversation begins and the photographic method is, at first, the classic one-two shot: first a close-up of Mifune, then one of Yamazaki. But here we notice something strange. The close-ups of each are taken from the side of the glass opposite that on which he is sitting so that over each close-up is the reflection of the other. As their conversation continues, the set-ups move back further so that, for example, Mifune will be on one side of the screen and Yamazaki on the other but Mifune's reflection will appear in the middle. Over their talk the camera set-ups shift in such a way that the image of the one more and more precisely coincides with the other's reflection.

"If that is the way you feel, why did you send for me?" Mifune asks, and their images coincide. The tears in Mifune's eyes appear to be swimming in the dry eyes of the kidnapper.

In *Stray Dog* the cop and the robber roll fighting in the mud and at the end of the picture they are indistinguishable: cop and robber are one. At the end of *High and Low* something of the sort occurs but much more subtly. We know they are not one—they are good and evil; they are opposite poles. This is what we have been led to believe, this is what we *must* believe. Yet, here, slowly but inexorably, Kurosawa is showing us something entirely different. He is suggesting that, despite everything, good and evil are the same, that all men are equal.

"I am not afraid of going to hell," shouts the kidnapper but it is Mifune's reflection which seems to shout, just as it is the kidnapper's reflection which seems to weep. Good and evil are made to coincide; they are made identical. In *Stray Dog*, the men merely *look* alike. Here they are made to seem to be *giving* each other attributes of themselves. Precisely: they seem to be sharing an identity.

There is no longer any question of a hero or a villain, or heaven or hell, of high or low, of good or of bad. We have already seen that, since the kidnapping, they have come more and more to resemble each other. Having initially hated each other, they are now close to accepting each other.

Mifune, then, has truly had his sense of responsibility tested. He wants to be responsible to himself and make good shoes; his company directors disagree and so he feels right in trying to take over

the company in order to continue making good shoes. When the boy is kidnapped a less central sense of responsibility is tested for he is asked to ruin himself for a reason he cannot accept. This, however, he does—and this already indicates how extraordinary he is. Now, at the very end, his sense of responsibility is given its most severe test—he is asked to take responsibility for the actions of the very man who has wronged him. And the indications are that he will.

Yamazaki is just as much a victim as Mifune is though it is more difficult to assess him because he falls into that convenient and meaningless category of "the victim of society." Actually, however, he falls victim to the actions of Mifune no less than Mifune falls victim to his. If Mifune had not made his grand house on the bluff none of this would have happened. You cannot realize yourself in this world without hurting something. Mifune wants to realize himself and builds the house which hurts the kidnapper; he, in turns, wants to realize himself, and takes the child which hurts Mifune.

There is one great difference, however. Yamazaki is going to die and he knows it. It is with horror, then, that he sees the awful alternative of going to heaven rather than to hell. Awful, because—accepting hell as hell—he has identified himself with it, acted as though he belonged there. If he goes to heaven what will become of *him*. Perhaps that is the reason he asked to see Mifune. He wanted to find hate in those eyes, he wanted this reassurance that he was evil, that he was at least this much, that he was at least something.

And the irony is that Mifune will not, cannot. It is no longer a question of compassion nor forgiveness. It has become interior. Mifune must accept responsibility for the criminal's action. It is easy enough to understand them (the cop in *Stray Dog* completely understood the criminal), it is a bit more difficult to accept them (though the hero of *The Bad Sleep Well* is very near that), but to accept these actions as your own, that is the most difficult of all.

And this—as Dostoevsky has pointed out—is necessary. The free man is he who accepts his own actions and accepts those of others as though they were his own. The reflections of the two men coincide and Yamazaki says: "You see, I'm concerned with the truth, no matter how ugly . . ." Which is just what Mifune is most concerned with at this very moment. He asks, and it is though he is asking himself: "Why are you so convinced that it is right that we hate each other?"

The question hangs, almost palpable, between the two men as one is led away, the iron shutter clangs shut, and one remains behind. After the screen darkens and the film ends, one may imagine Mifune still sitting there, the question before him, the question before us.