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Wednesday December 18

JapanScope

The Adventures of Kyoshiro Nemuri 7:30

Kenji Misumi (Japan, 1964)

(Nemuri Kyoshiro shobu). Even more than the blind Zatoichi, Kyoshiro Nemuri, the lone-wolf full-moon swordsman, is darkly estranged from the mainstream of Tokugawa society. As portrayed by Raizo Ichikawa throughout the sixties, this auburn-haired Eurasian casts himself as the anti-hero, a brooding existentialist haunted by his rootlessness. Nemuri resists any attempt to glorify the swordsmanship for which he is renowned; nevertheless, the films are a swordplay buff's delight. The question, "What's your style?" precedes any duel. Nemuri's style is the Engetsu or "full moon cut"; no one has survived the completion of the arc, which has as much to do with the "fatal inward draw" of his obsession as with anything else. Here he is shadowed by five enemies, each with his own style, in a delightfully detailed Edo period setting. Stylized, gorgeous color cinematography does more than bring out Nemuri's red highlights; the emergence of the five foes against a blue-green misty night, and the climactic battle captured in long-shot amidst the slim trees of a forest, help distance us, like Nemuri, from any stray emotions.

• Written by Seiji Hoshikawa, based on a novel by Renzaburo Shibata. Photographed by Jishi Makiura. With Raizo Ichikawa, Miwa Takada, Yoshi Kato, Shiho Fujimura. (82 mins, In Japanese with English subtitles, Color, 'Scope, 35mm, Print from PFA Collection)