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An Encounter Group in "The Lower Depths"
(Kurosawa)

The therapist is the "holy pilgrim" or old man who hears out everyone's problem and tries to share his inner peace and faith in eternal life. The encounter takes place between the characters who share the same room - renting out some portion of it; for example, the actor, who occupies an upper berth, draws his curtain dramatically instead of closing the door!

Here the fundamental human problems of jealousy, alcoholism, and thwarted passion unwind before the back-drop of avarice, sadism, murder and suicide. The unremitting greed of the landlord and his wife has created a sadistic living situation for the dwellers who live an increasingly dissatisfied existence while the two owners get a greater and greater return on the rent.

The alcoholism of the actor will eventually lead him to suicide - and Okayo wishes for her own. Acclaimed by the public, the actor admits he has never mastered himself, "You are born, not made" he says. The pilgrim advises him to go to the center to be cured, but first to make up his mind to it.

The young thief loves Okayo and wants to remake his life by taking her away as the pilgrim suggests. But she cannot trust anyone and her jealousy of her sister is such that she would rather believe the thief is allied with her sister against her than the truth. She remains immersed in the past cruelties of her sister and brother-in-law instead of recognizing that the thief has thrown off the domination of her sister.

Various individuals pass before us: The deluded Samurai living off the fiction that he was born great but fortune has been unkind thereby taking no responsibility and the empty piety of the fat, prayerful idiot so easily sucked into drinking with others and a ludicrous ritualistic dance. A young girl recounts her story of thwarted love but no one except the pilgrim believes or respects her. She cannot get into the reality around her. The therapist leaves her in the tavern to meet a new love.

The intensity of the lives becomes almost too much to bear as this delicately balanced work of art rises to a climax. The convict enacts what everyone would like to do: murder the landlord. But first we have a contrasting portrait between him and the pilgrim vis-a-vis death. While his wife is gasping for breath and faith in an after life, he shows his indifference and denial of death by hammering out his craft at her head. The pilgrim opens to her his assurance of an after life and makes her comfortable.

The therapist as usual incurs the hostility of those he has tried to help. At the close, they accuse him of being a "fraud" who told them to go, without telling them where or without curing them.

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