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What is truth? This is an age-old question, pondered by millions of people over the centuries. According to the story of *Rashomon*, truth lies in the eye of the beholder. As the wigmaker in the story says, “People see what they want to see, and say what they want to hear.” Unlike many other treatments of the question of truth, *Rashomon* does not expose truth as absolute; it explores truth as a constantly shifting abstract idea, based solely on the perceptions of humans.

The short stories “In a Grove” and “Rashomon” were written in the 1920s by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, a Japanese intellectual. A popular movie combining the two stories was filmed in 1950 by Akira Kurosawa. Fay and Michael Kanin wrote the play in 1959 after the story of the movie, and Augustana now presents a production of *Rashomon* that continues this weekend.

Rashomon is set roughly 1,000 years ago on the outskirts of Kyoto, Japan, at the city’s largest gate, Rashomon. A priest and a woodcutter are discussing a trial they had attended the day before. A wigmaker comes upon them and wants to hear the story of the trial. A bandit was found guilty of killing a samurai and raping his wife, but because of the other testimony, the priest does not feel that the conviction was just, leading him to question his faith. The discussion of the differing views of the truth that ensues makes for fascinating drama.

Jeffrey Coussens’ stage direction was well done, and the actors moved as if choreographed in a dance. Patty Koenigsaecker’s lighting, at times, was a bit dark, as I could not see the actors’ faces well. But I did like the way the darkness mirrored the lack of clarity in the “truth” of the story.

Todd Kempel’s set was wonderful. There was a platform on both sides of the arch, slightly lower than the stage proper. The right platform was the gate area where the priest, woodcutter, and wigmaker were located. The left platform was the courtroom, where the witnesses were testifying. The stage itself served as the grove where the actual story takes place. This play lent itself well to the minimal set.

On the other hand, the costumes by Jill Pearson (a regular contributor to the *River Cities’*

Reader) were far from minimal. The red and blue satin costume of the medium was incredibly gorgeous, as was the lovely kimono of the wife. The costumes of the men were not as colorful but artfully fit each character's station in life.

I was drawn into the action of the play as soon as the lights came up on Michael Carlson as the priest. His pensive pose was riveting, and you could feel his turmoil as he contemplated the matter at hand. Nicholas Padiak as the woodcutter moved well but unfortunately was difficult to hear at times. The wigmaker, Charlie Zamastil, delivered his lines effectively, but his laugh was forced and detracted from his performance. Kempel was a handsome figure as the samurai husband. He spoke clearly as a learned man would, and the broad shoulders of his costume added to his command of the stage. The Kooken, visible stagehands in kabuki theatre, were marvelous. They complemented the action of the play but never intruded. I loved their live sound effects, which ranged from a storm to crows to a crying baby.

But clearly the strongest performers were Lilia Glubisz as the wife and Wilder Anderson as the bandit. As each version of the story was told, their personalities changed to accommodate the differences. Each deftly handled the emotional and physical changes. In Sunday's performance, Glubisz lost her shoe in one scene but didn't miss a beat. They were both very impressive.

My only disappointment was with Venice Averyheart as the medium. She moved effectively as she went from very elegant motions to convulsions, but I did not buy her transformation into the dead man; in her testimony at the trial, she tries to lip-synch to a tape of his voice. I'm not sure how else to handle that scene, but this simply was not the answer.

As I watched the play, I wondered why the actors were not in kabuki makeup. The medium was the only character who was wearing kabuki makeup, and it was incredible. The program describes this performance as a "very theatrical approach to the story, blending presentational Asian theatre conventions with a Western performance style to create a unique event." Still, I missed the makeup.

You still have a chance to see this thought-provoking gem this weekend. Not only will you be treated to a first-rate play, but prior to the performance you will be serenaded by Koto music played by TeAnna Mirfield, an Augustana alumna.

Rashomon *will be performed at 8 p.m. October 30 through November 1 at Augustana College's Potter Hall. For tickets, call (309)794-7306.*