

Friday, March 30, 18
Ubuntu Theater Project
Playwright: Philip Kan Gotanda
Director: Michael Ullyseus Moran

RASHOMON

GATE OF TRUTH AND LIES

Great Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra

KAN JI ZAI BO SA GYO JIN HAN-NYA HA RA
MI TA JI
SHO KEN GO ON KAI KU DO IS-SAI KU YAKU
SHA RI SHI SHIKI FU I KU KU FU I SHIKI
SHIKI SOKU ZE KU KU SOKU ZE SHIKI
JU SO GYO SHIKI YAKU BU NYO ZE

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Characters:

Akutagawa

Double-casting

Priest - Bandit

Woodcutter - Samurai

Wigmaker - Lady

Darkness.

We hear the sound of an old style
typewriter pounding away --

Akutagawa lit standing a pool of light.
His eyes are closed.

Akutagawa: Everyday I wake up but I am afraid
to open my eyes. I am awake you see but I
refuse to open them.

Then I hear the clatter, scraping, clanging of
the world and I must look.

And so I do.

Opens his eyes

Akutagawa: I look, I see.

Looks around at the audience. Then glances down at what he has written, reading. He yanks the paper out of the typewriter carriage, crumples it and throws it aside --

Akutagawa: *Kuso!* [[shit]]

Akutagawa is appointed in the style of the late 1920's Japanese intellectual - glasses with round dark frames, Parisian beret, kimono style top and bottom. Smoking a cigarette.

Seating himself on the floor in front of a low table. A period typewriter and extra papers. A single bare light bulb hangs down, defining his area. Around him are strewn piles of crumpled papers.

Akutagawa: Nietzsche warned, if you look too closely into the abyss, you may see the abyss staring back at you. (considering) I like Nietzsche, don't you?

Puts paper into the carriage --

Akutagawa: I am Akutagawa Ryunosuke. Today's date is July 23rd, 1927. I am 35 years old. Tomorrow I attend to business but we get ahead of ourselves. My mother's name is Fuku Niihara. Soon after I was born she went *mad*.

Pause. Sitting on that last word. Starts typing --

Akutagawa: -- It is a crumbling structure, sections of walls and roof gaping as if struck by God's fist. At the entrance, the remains of Rashomon Gate. A lonely skeleton, weathered by forces of nature and extreme human neglect.

We hear footsteps slogging through the mud. It is the Priest. He enters --

Priest. The faint echoes of a *baby's cries*.

Around the stage the *remains of shrunken bodies with hairless heads* --

Priest: -- into the decaying bowels of this temple. (looking about) Once full of the Buddha's voice. A magnificent theater of compassion and truth.

He moves about placing discarded rags over the bodies. He recites the *nembutsu* [*namu amida butsu*] over them -

Priest: Abandoned. A negation of life. A void-less void...

Moves to center stage and looks around at the Audience.

I have seen. I have heard. Is there not one good human being left among us?

He sits in meditation pose. Akutagawa observes the Priest.

Priest: I sit. I wait.

Sits in silence.

Akutagawa --

Akutagawa: -- as a baby sucking on her teat,
drinking of my mother's unseemly milk, her eyes
black empty pools, look down and watch me --

His attention drawn to the approaching
figure --

Akutagawa: -- the hurried steps, this is the
Woodcutter. He is driven by an unseen urgency,
he breathes hard. The Woodcutter sees the
Priest --

Akutagawa moves to the side to
watch --

Woodcutter: (rushing in) Forgive me, sensei,
forgive me. You left the hearing and refused
to talk to anyone. I couldn't find you at the
temple so I asked around. The fishmonger said
he saw you going this way.

Priest: You were there at the Court. You saw.
You heard the testimony.

Woodcutter: How are we to make sense of it?
You must return to the temple. Sensei?

Priest: The things they accused each other of,
the things they professed to have done to each
other.

Woodcutter: You have to come back and help us
become whole again -

Priest: -- lies upon lies, a cesspool of words and they all choose to gleefully bathe in it.

Woodcutter: (imploring) The Great Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra. I grew up hearing it as a child. When there was only angry noise and the ache of empty bellies, I would listen, listen to the Priest's intoning of the Buddha's words. I would fill with its sounds until I no longer hungered or hurt. No one else can chant it in its fullness as you. Only bits and pieces of the truth. You are the only one who can perform the rite and absolve us.

A dark Figure emerges holding a mane of ratty black hair and a knife --

Akutagawa: Our final player at Rashomon Gate. In my short story, the Wigmaker is not a man but a woman.

Wigmaker: Who's making all this racket? Can't you see I'm trying to work?

Pause.

Woodcutter: What's that in your hand?

Wigmaker holds up the scalp.

Wigmaker: This? Somebody's hair. Babies are the worst. People leave them here but they have no hair. Give me a corpse in her prime with a head fulla thick, black tresses. That's what I'm talking about --

Waves the scalp in front of her --.

Woodcutter: You cut the hair off a dead body?

Wigmaker: A girl's gotta eat. She doesn't mind anymore, (to the scalp) do you?

Woodcutter: That was somebody's wife. Sister. Mother.

Wigmaker: Probably. Maybe. Who gives a fuck.

Woodcutter: You defile the poor woman's body, on the temple grounds no less. What kind of monster are you?

Wigmaker: Disclaimer - not a monster. Just a poor not-as-old-as-I-look woman plying her trade. A Wigmaker!

Wigmaker puts the scalp on top of her head, a model walking the runway --

Priest: Do you not have any respect for the dead?

Wigmaker: Homelessness, starvation, war - they croak. Then their '*loved ones*' toss their shrunken bodies here on the temple grounds like refuse. So much for *respect* of the dead -

Woodcutter: Shut-up with your un-holy words. You are speaking to a Priest from the Temple in town.

Wigmaker studies the Woodcutter --

Wigmaker: Why'd you *rush* all the way over here? You could have *walked* not run? And why

are you seeking the Priest? Why not the *tofu* man, huh? Something big, fat and stanky squatting on your conscience?

Woodcutter: Shut-up, Shut-up. Why listen to you - she steals from corpses/ she's as bad as the three at the court hearing today!

Wigmaker: -- (overlap) I'm a wigmaker. A Wigmaker...

Beat.

Wigmaker: What? As bad as me? The three at the Court? Now that's something I want to hear about. Court testimony? Who were these hell raisers?

Silence. Wigmaker looks over the Woodcutter and Priest --

Wigmaker: I am a citizen, too, I have rights, don't I get to know what current shows are playing in court?

Priest: There was a killing. A man was murdered.

Wigmaker: Good healthy hair? (beat) I'm just saying.

Woodcutter: We both were called to testify.

The Wigmaker begins to transform into the Lady --

Wigmaker-Lady: Why?

Woodcutter: I found the body.

The Woodcutter begins to transform
into the Samurai --

Wigmaker-Lady: (to the Priest) What did you
have to do with it?

Priest: I saw them as they entered the forest
--

Wigmaker-Lady: Them? The man had a companion?
A woman? Good, more female representation.
Continue, continue --

Samurai/Woodcutter walking with the
Lady/Wigmaker --

Priest: This was on the outskirts of town as
you enter the forest. I saw them. They were a
striking couple. Everything about them was...
right.

Akutagawa: Okay, the set-up. There was a
killing. The Priest and Woodcutter were called
to the Court as secondary witnesses. While
there they observe the proceedings --

Priest becomes Tajomaru --

Akutagawa: Tajomaru the Bandit, the accused,
testifying before the Court.

Priest transforms into Tajomaru in
front of us - his physicality becoming
more brutish, his demeanor predatory.
His Buddhist chanting devolves into a
raging curse --

Priest-Tajomaru: Namu Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu. Namu. Amida. Butsu. Namu! Amida! Butsu! NAMU! AMIDA! BUTSU!

-- Becoming enraged and emotionally volatile --

THE COURT --

Tajomaru: My house. You come into my house. Violate my space. Where I sleep, where I eat. Drink, shit, dream, satisfy my needs, what I want, what I need, not you. Me. My hunger, my thirst, my sex, not yours. Always yours, you have, you own, you buy, you sell. No. No, no. No, NO, NO! NO!! NO!!!

The Great Tajomaru answers only to himself.
'Hey! (answering himself) Yes?'

Akutagawa walks through, passing closely to the Bandit --

Akutagawa: Truths are lies. Lies become truths. If you have nothing to anchor you, to hold on to, all is spectacle. Whoever has the biggest voice, whoever lies the loudest, brings the most lights and cameras, wins?

Tajomaru: When I say it, I mean it. I take coin, swords, horses from these arrogant peacocks who call themselves "men". I slit open these shiny looking creatures like I gut a carp - ass to gullet in a single stroke.

Akutagawa: The height of summer, inhumanly hot, the oppressive humidity, *mushi-atsui* [humidly hot].

Tajomaru: Look at this one. He struts like some cock in a hen house.

Tajomaru notices the Lady. At that moment she is turning away, raises her veil to fan herself --

Tajomaru becomes quiet. He reaches out as if in a trance --

Akutagawa mimics the gesture --

Tajomaru: The Lady... The back of her neck. The nape. So. So...

Akutagawa: I do find the nape one of the most erotic parts of the female anatomy. The upper inner arm is pretty hot, too.

Tajomaru recovers, returns to recounting his story --

Tajomaru: I was resting underneath some trees. It's one of my places where I can see my potential clients coming before they see me. I had my fill of some rabbit I had cooked the night before and was falling asleep when I saw a man approaching. He was leading a horse. On the horse sat a woman --

Bandit-priest lying down. Samurai-woodcutter enters with the Lady-wigmaker.

The Samurai watches Tajomaru warily.
Tajomaru approaches --

Tajomaru: Hot, isn't it?

The Samurai watches him.

Tajomaru: Would you like something to drink?
I don't see a water skin. You forgot to bring
one? You don't know this area, do you? The
nearest stream is another three miles.

Holds out the water skin bag. The Samurai
is parched, reluctantly takes it and
drinks. Hands it back --

Tajomaru: In this heat, perhaps the Lady would
like a sip?

Samurai considers for a beat, hands the
water pouch to the woman who sips
delicately. Then returns it to her husband
who hands it back to Tajomaru.

Tajomaru: Where're you going?

Pause.

Samurai: Kiyoto.

Tajomaru: Going home, heh?

Samurai is silent.

Tajomaru: Kiyoto. Ahh, a beautiful city of
temples and high-tone tastes --

Akutagawa overlaps Tajomaru's
italicized internal thoughts --

Akutagawa -

Tajomaru: -- *He watches my hands. I have to be careful with this one.*

Tajomaru: -- Beautiful, Kiyomizu pottery there. All the elite families prize them. Serve their delicate meals on them - all the fish sliced up fancy, sitting on a bed of seaweed and *daikon*, how the chefs cut up those long, fat radishes up so they look like tiny dancing ladies. So cute. Kiyomizu ware.

Gauging their interest -

I heard a rumor that Tajomaru the Bandit had a hidden cache of his ill-gotten treasures around here. I found it. Fulla plates, tea ware - beautiful *Ochawan*. Worth a lotta money I would not know I am just a lowly itinerant worker. You being of such refined tastes would know a fancy piece of Kiyomizu pottery ware. Stamped by some fellow named...what was it... Kotō Rokubei II. Oh, you recognize the name. I hid them up the hill in a grove of trees for safe keeping. Would you like to see them? I can't sell them in town, they'd think I stole them. You can have them for practically nothing.

Lady: (fearful) Husband --

The Samurai is tempted.

Akutagawa --

Tajomaru: *I could not stop myself staring. To see such an enchantress close up. I could smell*

her - a mix of exotic perfume and her body's female scent.

Samurai: (finally) No.

Samurai begins to lead the lady away --

Tajomaru: Okay. Then I shall have to sell them to someone else who comes along. I'm sure someone would want an *Ochawan* by Koto Rokubei II.

Samurai: (tempted) Rokubei II?

Tajomaru: His *hanko* stamp.

Samurai: You sure it is his name?

Akutagawa --

Tajomaru: *The prick doesn't think I can read let alone know what a Rokubei II might be worth.*

When you show them to your high tone friends, they will all envy you. I will throw in a water container for *ochanoyu* for the Lady. Koto Rokubei II.

Samurai: What do his characters look like? On the stamp?

Tajomaru stares at him.

Akutagawa --

Tajomaru: *You pompous...*

Then Tajomaru stands beside the samurai and traces in the air, the characters.

Samurai: Crude. But correct.

Nods to the Lady and looks to Tajomaru --

Samurai: Show me.

Tajomaru looks at the Samurai, then eyes the Lady.

Tajomaru enters the Court light -

The Court.

Tajomaru: He was greedy, they all are. Even with so much, they want more. Why is it that whatever way they do it is the right way. See how he looks down at me? Like I'm some kind of lowly animal he can barely stand to be around.

Samurai turns upstage.

Tajomaru looks back at the Lady.

Tajomaru: This delicate, beautiful, doll. A perfect picture. And why wasn't she sweating? They don't even sweat?

Tajomaru watches the Lady --

Akutagawa --

Lady: *I wait. It is so peaceful. The citizens are muted in this forested area. A bird is chirping. The color of its tail matches a kimono I had made for me to coincide with the floral patterns of last spring.*

Tajomaru: Tajomaru may be a poor, uneducated peasant and maybe not hold the *gyunomi*[sake cup] in some fancy way with my little finger sticking out. But I know how to let the drink fill my mouth, wash over my tongue, swallow it all in one big gulp and still want more.

This face. This delicate, porcelain thing.

The Lady turns away exposing...

Akutagawa --

Bandit: *And the nape.* The hairs like soft feathers...

Akutagawa: Know what else? The back of the ankle. Yeah.

Tajomaru/Akutagawa makes a *bird call*, playing with his victim --

Akutagawa: I'm an amateur birder, too.

Lady: I recognize its call, a forest /wagtail.

Akutagawa: (overlapping) - wagtail.

The Lady looking around innocently for it -

Tajomaru: I would show him. I would show her.

Samurai. His arms are tied behind his back. Seething with anger and shame for having allowed this to happen, his wife to see him like this.

Tajomaru is a jumble of excitement and laughs scornfully at the Samurai's humiliation -

Tajmomaru: Hah-hah! Tell her! Go ahead tell her!

Samurai: He was too strong. He overpowered me. I am sorry.

Lady: Husband?

Tajomaru: It gave me satisfaction for her to see what I had done to her brave, strong husband.

The Lady's disbelief turns to realization of the situation. She appears frightened and backs up -

Tajomaru: I would show him that I could drink of the same cup --

The Lady pulls a short blade from her kimono but she is weak and pitiful in her attempts to defend herself. Tajomaru easily disarms her. Holds her tightly to his body. She struggles weakly, a helpless little bird --

Akutawgawa --

Akutagawa: -- mother in one of her moments was like watching an exquisite picture come apart before my eyes, piece by piece until what remained was a mere fragment of its original splendor.

THE COURT

Tajomaru: I enjoyed taking her. Opening this delicate flower and showing her a real man. It was intoxicating. The way she looked at me.

Lady: Tajomaru?

Tajomaru and the Lady exchange looks -

Tajomaru: I needed to fight him. Kill him in a fair fight of swords. I cut his ropes and gave him his sword --

Samurai gets feeling back into his limbs. Then plants himself and charges the Bandit, yelling.

Samurai: AHHH!

They fight. Tajomaru brutally stabs the Samurai --

THE COURT

Tajomaru still holding the blade impaled on the Samurai --

Tajomaru: I wanted to make him suffer the humiliation of what I had to live everyday. Hating myself because I wasn't like them. Hating myself for wanting to be like them. I despise the bourgeoisie. Did I do it? Yes. I killed him. And I would kill him again.

Pulls out the blade, Samurai's body falling
to the ground --

Tajomaru: If you meet me in a darkened alley.
Run.

RASHOMON GATE

Akutagawa: Back to Rashomon Gate. The Priest.
The Woodcutter. The Wigmaker.

Silence.

Wigmaker is occupied with her own business.

Woodcutter: (confused) What happened there? I
saw. I heard. Then there was blood. Blood
everywhere. I cannot open my eyes. Why can't
I know?

Unconsciously wiping his hands on this
pants.

-- recite the Buddha's truth. Form the sounds,
shape the words, then, then --

Akutagawa --

Akutagawa: I wrote two short stories - In the
Grove and Rashomon. Kurosawa conflated them,
took license to impose his own plot points and
we have 'Rashomon', the movie. Okay, the movie
was not bad, playing with multiple points of
view on a single incident. It worked, very
post modern, everyone has their own version of
the truth. And though not ours, we respect

each other's piece of the truth. The universe is still maintained. But what happens when one person does not play along. Who changes the rules. Only what he says is the truth and everyone else is fake?

Woodcutter: (holding his temples) -- what happened after that? What did I do, what did I do?

Wigmaker: (calling over) The Bandit's lying. That's all you need to know.

Woodcutter: Why are we talking about these monsters? We should be back at your temple. I am the head of my family I feed my children I am a good man, you are the priest you chant the sutras, that's the way it is everything needs to be in its place everything has to be restored to order --

Priest: (interrupts) There is more to hear. We must listen.

The wigmaker enters carrying a *bundled up baby* in her arms.

Wigmaker: Is it only bad people? Or can good people kill, too? Well? We want to know.

Akutagawa: -- she would say, 'Skin holds the body together, the head holds the brain together but what holds the mind together?'

Wigmaker transforms --

The Lady steps forward.

Akutagawa: The Lady. Testifying. In Court.

THE COURT

Lady: (recalling) 'Like opening some delicate flower'? Males. They look you in the eye, appear to be thinking with their minds, then find out it was their penis trying to reach under your kimono. What does that say about the female? Just an object to be manhandled by their lusting hands?

Does she not have her own hunger? Her own desires? And why so genital-centric? Cannot a woman think beyond and through sex? After all it is a bodily function, not some higher state as compassion or faith. Or love?

I am a proud, noble woman. An established, familial lineage dating back to the great Kiyomori Taira. The others of the Taira family would not accept him. They looked down on him, considered him a country bumpkin outlier. Not of the right stock? 1/7th of the wrong stock?

Tajomaru's testimony. The killing.
I could let it go. Why incriminate myself?
Let Tajomaru take all the credit. But I will not. No. Not this time.

This is how it really happened.

Bandit leads the Lady to where Husband is tied up.

Bandit is beside himself with his taking the Samurai.

Bandit: Hah! Look at him! Look at your strong, manly husband! Look at me!

Strips off his shirt, poses, showing off his physique.

He steps back to let the Lady take a good look at the victim of Tajomaru the Bandit.

The Lady approaches Husband. Stares at him.

Silence.

She suddenly *slaps* him hard.

Lady is shocked by her own behavior.

Bandit: (confused) What, what - what you doing?

Lady *strikes* Husband again. She feels as if some force is being released --

Bandit begins to consider this bodes well for him --

Lady *strikes* Samurai hard one final time.

Lady: Combustion. A bolt of naked clarity.

Lady turns her attention to the Bandit. Draws a knife from her kimono sleeve, skillfully handling it.

She moves towards the Bandit.

The Bandit, thoroughly perplexed, begins to
back away --

Akutagawa enters --

Akutagawa: My last poem:

One spot alone.

Left glowing in the dark

My snotty nose.

No really, that was my final poem.

Akutagawa moving to the side --

Akutagawa: At the Grove --

THE GROVE --

The Lady and Bandit fight. The Lady is
good with street fighter tricks. She ends
up disarming him and kicking him in the
crotch.

Tajomaru is rolling on the ground holding
himself in agony

Tajomaru: Ahhhh...

Lady: Never underestimate a woman in a kimono.

The Lady watches Tajomaru writhing.

She walks over to Tajomaru and uses her foot to flip him over.

Lady: It was only your balls. Get over it.
(considering) I need them.

Lady lowers herself and straddles Tajomaru.

Tajomaru: (fighting through the pain) What the --

Lady brings the blade to his neck --

Lady: Shhh! We are having a private moment.

Lady begins to untie the Bandits clothing -

Bandit: What? What is this? What are you doing?

Lady: I do hope all the stories about you and the women are true.

Bandit: In front of your husband? Stop! You freak! I'm not going to do this!

Lady pushes the knife into the Bandit's neck. She notices his erection --

Lady: Oh, my. Just like a man. His words say no but his body says yes.

Akutagawa steps forward to observe them having sex --

Akutagawa: I am left with little appetite for food or women. It's not that I want to die as that I am tired of living.

Lady is finished with the Bandit.

THE COURT

Tajomaru notices no one is paying attention to him. He scurries away.

Lady: Tajomaru was gone. I untied Husband --

THE GROVE

Lady releases Husband.

She steps back and waits for his condemnation --

Lady: Why had I done this? Was it because I knew about my husband and his heinous activity? My actions had surely killed whatever there was between us. He had no hold, no power over me now. There was nothing he could say or do that would get to me.

Silence. Husband stands, dusts himself off, straightens his clothes. She watches him in growing disbelief.

Lady: It was as if nothing had happened. 'Husband'?

Samurai ignores her.

Lady: 'Husband'?

Without looking at her --

Samurai: (dismissively) Wife. Clean up this mess.

Silence.

THE COURT

Lady: He does not know that I know. I know his secret. I know my husband is a monster.

Lady pauses.

Lady: Seeing him bound, unable to move. I began to see myself.

She approaches Husband and slaps him --

Had not I secretly wanted to be as Husband, have his power, his dominance? Yet, here he was, this alpha male, helpless.

She strikes him.

I was living life suppressed - no repressed, it was me doing it to me by believing that this model of male hegemony was what I should strive for. This, I was bound by an internalized sexist belief system more efficient than if my bondage were of real hemp and twine.

She strikes him again.

As If something in my blood, forced into a submissive invisibility was unearthing, my whole body vibrated - 'Look at me!' Me!

Pause.

Lady: Yes, I knew what I wanted. Why should I be ashamed to admit it? I wanted his smells, his rough hands, his sweat, his brutal lack of refinement - I would revel in this sticky, nasty, bodily pleasure. I was not going to be made love to. No, not loving. I was going to be the fucker. Not the fuckee. I was discovering myself and it was good.

Pause.

But this was not it. No. It was something else, something not yet given a name. What was this, this thing, this, this action that would embody the real, the true authentic me?

THE GROVE

Husband: (patronizingly) Wife. Clean up this mess.

Lady is triggered and grabs the knife. In a state of rage she stabs the Samurai over and over -

Lady: Die! Die! Die!

Husband falls to the ground writhing in pain.

THE COURT

Lady: I am not sorry for what I have done. He was a monster. He can do no more harm. I killed him.

RASHOMON GATE

Silence.

Priest.

Akutagawa at his desk.

Priest sees the Wigmaker attending to her baby. Goes to investigate.

Akutagawa: The point of those who lie, is not to have anyone believe you, but to throw into peril the faith that everyone's partial truth will lead to an absolute Truth.

Their insincerity about their perspective of the truth paralyzes the entire system and process in which we believe we can discover any absolute Truth. This is a spiritual, social and political crisis.

Akutagawa watches the Priest playing with the Wigmaker's baby.

Akutagawa: Paradoxically, it requires someone revealing the ugly truth of his or her own immorality to oneself and to the public, to restore our collective faiths in compassion and rightful behavior.

Woodcutter enters.

Akutagawa: Back to Rashomon Gate -

Woodcutter: -- The rain has let up, we can go.
Sensei?

Priest: (playing with the baby) We need to
finish listening.

Woodcutter: Why? The Lady's testimony was as
bad as the Bandit's --

Priest: (sternly) There are more stories.

Woodcutter is upset at the Priest's
admonition. Sees Priest playing with the
Wigmaker's baby.

Woodcutter: How is the baby?

Wigmaker does not respond. Watches the
Wigmaker attend to her baby.

Woodcutter: (suspicious) Can I hold the baby -
-

Wigmaker: Get away --

Woodcutter grabs at the bundle she is
holding. The Wigmaker reacts immediately
with a wild, emotional fury. She grabs and
claws at the Woodcutter.

Wigmaker: GIVE IT BACK! GIVE IT BACK! GIVE IT
BACK!!!

In the struggle, the bundle unravels and is revealed to be only rolled up rags.

Wigmaker, aghast collapses on the floor, sobbing.

Woodcutter is unsure how to respond.

Priest picks up the rags and folds them into the baby bundle again.

Priest brings it over and offers it to the Wigmaker.

Wigmaker receives it immediately holds it tightly. She begins to calm.

Wigmaker: I know she will starve, suffer. Die. Still. How could I not give birth to this life?

My house. Unsanitary, chemicals, human waste. I live in this. My milk is. Unclean. She opens her tiny mouth. So hungry. My baby hungers.

I offer my breast. Knowing she will drink. Long and full of this poison...

And I am happy. Drink, drink...

Now sleep my baby. Sleep. Shhhh... Shhhh...

Akutagawa watches the Wigmaker and her baby. She takes the rolled-up blanket-baby and lays it down lovingly in her corner --

Akutagawa: As an artist I thrive in spaces of contradictory truths, grow roots in those very sites of alternative realities. But as a citizen, you cannot live with the artist's grayness. There must be the anchor of a truth or how can we arrive at justice?

THE COURT

Akutagawa: The Court. In order for the Samurai to testify, a Medium is brought in to allow the spirit of the Lady's dead husband to speak.

Akutagawa becomes the Medium and allows the Samurai's spirit to enter his body --

At first the Medium-Akutagawa makes sounds like someone trying to figure out how to control the larynx - guttural, choking, gasping noises emit from the Medium's mouth. Gradually gains control of his voice.

The Medium and Samurai connect --

Medium-Samurai: Drifting... Drifting.... I. I. I speak from a place where there is no embellishment nor fabrication. I am dead. But my words feel inhabited with all that I was in life...

Medium is still. Silent. Un-breathing. Suddenly it gasps for air and inhales deeply.

Samurai: It was my wife's greed. If only she had not wanted more. That is what caused this all to happen.

IN THE GROVE

Samurai, Lady and Bandit.

Samurai: You have too many things as it is. How much more do you need? What can we do with more pots and plates?

Lady: Tea ware, not pots. Fine Kiyomizu ware, not plates.

Samurai: We cannot afford to buy something anytime something bright and shiny catches your eye. We cannot afford it. We are spending too much. We are way over extended. I cannot keep asking my father for more money. It is just some earthenware --

Lady: Koto Rokubei II does not make *just some earthenware*. Besides, your father does not mind. He likes me.

Samurai: Perhaps a little too much --

Lady: He would love to see me do Tea with a Rokubei *Ochawan*.

Samurai: How do we know we can trust him?

Lady: What? Are you scared? Look at him, just some poor peasant trying to make some extra money.

Samurai: I was not concerned. I knew I could easily defeat him in a fair fight.

Lady: He probably has a family. Many of mouths to feed, yes? We are helping you, right? See? We are doing a good deed.

Samurai: As we started up the hill I was preoccupied arguing with my wife and did not see the Bandit sneaking up behind -

Tajomaru strikes the unsuspecting Samurai who collapses.

Akutagawa: ``Kayfabe'' is the unspoken contract between the wrestlers and spectators: We'll present you something clearly fake under the insistence that it's real, and you will experience genuine emotion. Kayfabe isn't about factual verifiability; it's about emotional fidelity. If you ask a fan whether a match ...was scripted, the question will seem irrelevant. Kayfabe rests on the assumption that feelings are inherently more trustworthy than facts. `I am going to save your jobs''*. Yeah!

THE COURT

Samurai: When I came to I was tied up and my wife was fending off the Bandit's attacks. I was both shamed at being so easily tricked but also proud of the fierceness she displayed defending her honor. The passion she displayed

in fighting off Tajomaru's crude advances was inspiring. And then. Then...

THE GROVE

We SEE, not described -

Tajomaru seizes the Lady's hand and gradually forces the knife's blade directly over his heart. She's seething, this is a fight. He lets her press the point so it cuts his skin --

Lady: Blood.

Bandit: Blood.

She looks at the Bandit. They watch each other. Gradually, he takes his hand away. She holds the blade against him --

Samurai: What was she waiting for? Wife?
Kill him! Kill him!

She seems momentarily confused.
Bandit forces himself on her. She fights him but is over powered.

He begins to kiss her. She struggles and then gradually relents --

THE COURT

Samurai: What was this? I did not recognize my wife anymore. She looked as if. As if. Who was this person?

THE GROVE

Tajomaru is gone. The Lady, disheveled, immediately goes and unties her husband.

Lady: He is gone. We are free. We can go home. I do not need any pots or *Ochawan*. Let us just return home. Husband?

She notices him staring. Accusingly.

Lady: What? Why are you looking at me like that? I had no choice. I did not enjoy it. I pretended so he would let us go. And he has. We can go home.

His look softens --

Samurai: My wife. I understand.

He takes the knife and begins to make preparations to commit hara-kiri.

Lady: What are you doing? Husband?

Then realizing.

Lady: No... NO! You cannot do this. Husband. You do not need to do this. Husband?

COURT

Samurai continues to prep for the ritual.

Samurai: I was forced to confront the truth. I came to a profound understanding of how insensitively I have performed our marriage.

THE GROVE-COURT

Samurai: -- how I have ignored your needs and only selfishly demanded your continual attention to mine --

Akutagawa at his desk. Handles a small folded up *piece of paper* --

Samurai: -- the shame that has befallen all of us. You, my wife. Me, the cuckolded, husband.

Akutagawa unfolds the paper and pours the *powder* into a cup of tea -

Samurai: I must preserve the honor of our house. I must make up for my shame.

Akutagawa: 'All that lay before him was madness or suicide. He walked down the darkening street, determined now to wait for the destiny that would come to annihilate him'.
Mother?

Samurai holds the knife in front of his body. Then plunges it in --

Akutagawa at his desk. Swirling the cup of tea --

Akutagawa: 'Skin holds the body together. The head holds the brain together. But what holds

the mind together?' She would look at me in a panic - 'I am losing myself, Ryunosuke, I am losing myself! Help me? Hold me together!'

Rashomon Gate --

RASHOMON GATE

Woodcutter paces --

Woodcutter: -- as a small boy, sitting in the Temple, inhaling air thick with burning incense, light headed, dizzy. The chanting becomes as a living thing that covers me like a warm new skin and I am again as a baby.

Wigmaker approaches the Woodcutter with another rolled up rag baby --

Wigmaker: She's not real. When I am taking care of her, making sure she is eating properly, I am happy. It is not true but it doesn't matter. You see? I can live with both.

A contrite Woodcutter. He offers to hold the baby.

Wigmaker spits in the Woodcutter's face.

Woodcutter: Enough of this! We have gone over the testimonies, retold every story. There is no more to say! Sensei, you must return with me now. Chant the Heart Sutra. Purify us once again.

Wigmaker places the blanket baby next to the other baby. Two small wrapped bodies.

Priest: There is another story to be heard.

Woodcutter: How can there be another story?

Priest: Because we have yet to uncover the truth. We must open the bowels of this house.

Wigmaker: A dead man said he did it. What more is there? A dead man confessed.

Woodcutter: Dead men can lie.

Wigmaker: Dead men do not lie. It's the truth!

Woodcutter: HE LIES!!!

Akutagawa --

Akutagawa: And the soul, mother? What holds the soul together?

All look at Woodcutter.

Wigmaker: Who? Who lies?

Woodcutter: The Samurai.

Wigmaker: Why would a dead man lie?

Woodcutter: Dead men can lie. They can lie, too.

Wigmaker: How do you know this? You have expertise? Being dead? Or lying?

No response. Wigmaker studies the Woodcutter. The Priest observes.

Wigmaker: That's right, you found the Samurai's body. Were his eyes open like this -

Wigmaker makes a grotesque face --

-- Wigmaker stops, puzzled, begins to shake, overcome. Her eyes roll back and her body contorts --

Her body is being possessed by the spirit of the Samurai.

Woodcutter is terrified. Priest observes, unperturbed.

Wigmaker-Samurai points at the Woodcutter -
-

Wigmaker-Samurai: You! You dare to accuse the dead of lying? Me? A proud, noble, Samurai? I was there. How would even know?

Woodcutter: Because I was there. I saw.

The Wigmaker drops her act. Silence.

Wigmaker: I knew I smelled something rotten about your story.

Priest: Woodcutter? What really happened?

Akutagawa: I feel it coming apart. What holds it together, Mother?

Woodcutter: I was out in the forest.
I heard sounds. Voices. People arguing.

Akutagawa: The Woodcutter's version. His
first telling.

IN THE GROVE

Woodcutter hides and watches --

Lady: -- your father would love to see me do
Tea with a Rokubei II tea bowls.

Samurai: How do we know we can trust him? He
might try something.

Lady: What? My strong warrior husband? Are
you frightened? Look at him, he is just some
poor peasant trying to earn some extra money.
Yes? He probably has a family, a nest of
little creatures with mouths to feed, right?
We are helping you, aren't we? See? We are
doing a good deed. Well, let us go see these
wondrous Rokubei II treasures. The ladies at
my Tea Club will be so envious.

She turns upstage. Samurai studies
Tajomaru.

Samurai: I know, I know. You cannot help but
stare. Poor, uppity, Mr. Peasant: 'If I could
only touch that. Hold it, feel it, taste it.
But I cannot because I am not worthy of having

such pureness lay against my dirty, unwashed body.'

Bandit: (enraged) You snotty-nosed, *bourgie* spoon-fed --

Bandit about to attack --

Samurai: You are Tajomaru the Bandit, aren't you? No, do not even consider it, I would slice off your arm before your sword was halfway out of its scabbard. I have been training with fighting masters since I was a child.

Tajomaru has quite the reputation with the women. Don't you? I have a proposition.

Tajomaru is wary --

Samurai: You cannot beat me with your sword. But can you defeat me with your other sword?

RASHOMON GATE

Woodcutter: The Samurai began tying himself up. With help from Tajomaru.

THE GROVE

Samurai tied up. The Lady and the Bandit stare at him. The Bandit approaches the Samurai.

Tajomaru slaps the Samurai, watching the Samurai's reaction.

Samurai, is surprised, angry. But covers and stares at Tajomaru. Tajomaru moves to Lady.

Tajomaru grabs Lady.

Tajomaru: I always wanted to have one of these peacock's women. All straight-laced and proper.

Lady: I am not.

Lady bites him.

Tajomaru: Ahhh!

Tajomaru snarls and spits.

Lady snarls and spits with equal gusto --

Lady: I am forced to show myself --

Lady charges and fights Tajomaru. She gouges at his eyes --

Tajomaru: Ahh! You fight like some back alley cat. Where did you learn to do that?

Lady: Perhaps in some back alley.

They look at each other and then both attack. Tajomaru bites the Lady and she is aroused. The rush of adrenalin fuels a growing passion to their engagement.

The fighting becomes sexual --

Tajomaru stops.

Lady: What's the matter?

She pulls him to her aggressively but
Tajomaru pulls away.

Lady: You can't stop now. What is wrong with
you?

Tajomaru won't look at her.

Then it begins to dawn on the Lady.
She starts to laugh in disbelief.

Lady: Oh. You mean? The manly bandit cannot
get it up? His *shaku-hachi* is limp as a pile
of *somen* noodles?

The Lady laughs.

Tajomaru is humiliated.

Then the Samurai begins laughing.

Lady is confused by this.

Then the Samurai unties himself and stands
--

Lady: What is going on? What is this?
Husband?

Tajomaru sulks.

Samurai: (to the Bandit) Now you owe me all
the Rokubei II wares. And whatever else you
have hidden away in your cache.

Lady: I do not understand. Somebody tell me.
Tell me!

Samurai: We had a small wager. He could barely contain his lurid imagination so I used it to my advantage. I bet him he could not seduce you. And yes, as I suspected, his imagination was much, much grander than the size of his -male reality.

Yes, that is Tajomaru, the infamous Bandit.

Pause.

Lady: You would serve your wife up like this? Let any man have her? And for what? Some competitive schtupping contest?

Lady *slaps* the Samurai hard.

Lady: (angry) You think so little of me? Husband? I'm talking to you. Hey!

Samurai suddenly grabs Lady by the throat choking her violently. Lady can't breathe and flails desperately --

Husband: (choking her) Where did you learn to slap like that? In some back alley?

Husband lets go and terrified Lady crawls away gasping. She goes to the Bandit for protection. Tajomaru is not sure he wants to be put in this position.

Lady: So you are the great Tajomaru the Bandit, famed highway man. Hero to the poor peasantry, leveler of the system's inequities,

and reputed insatiable lover of women. So you are impotent?

Samurai laughs at the Tajomaru.

Lady whispers in the Bandit's ear --

Lady: Well? You get a second chance to redeem yourself. Makeup for your *performance* anxiety.

I am giving you a free do-over to erase your shame. It will be as if it never happened. Your name restored to its revered status as, 'Hero To The Common People'. All that I ask is that you kill him. Kill him for me. And none will be the wiser.

Nudging the Bandit forward and continuing to talk to him --

Lady: Laughing at you. At your manhood. The humiliation you must feel --

The Bandit is hesitant but is being pushed forward by the Lady.

Samurai prepares to fight. Bandit is scared.

Samurai eggs Bandit on by mocking his impotency with a gesture.

Tajomaru attacks the Samurai and they go into a full blown choreographed fight.

Finally, both exhausted, they pull apart, breathing hard. Winded, they can barely raise their swords.

Lady: Why are you stopping? Keep fighting!
What? Are you tired? This is a matter of life
and death you can't stop because your muscles
are sore. Are you men or worms! What about me?
What about my honor? I need you to fight over
me! I'm worth it god-damn-it! I'm worth it!

Bandit: I'm tired.

Samurai: So am I.

Bandit: I need a break.

Samurai: Time out.

Samurai feigns weariness. Sneaks up behind
the Bandit and clubs him with the sword
handle knocking him out.

Akutagawa: -- 'evil lies deeper in human beings
than our socialist-physicians suppose;...sin
arises from the soul itself.'**

Samurai turns to Lady.

Samurai: I knew it was there. I refused to
believe it. Even when my investigators brought
back the evidence. I could not believe it. So
I ignored it. Because of my love for you, I
turned a blind eye. But I began to notice
things. The lowest rung is the hardest to
climb up from. But you were scrupulous. (beat)
Here was the opportunity to see. You were in a
corner. Who is she really?

Seeing you scratching and hissing when you were fighting Tajomaru like an alley cat, biting him and then getting aroused when he bit you. What kind of Lady does that? What class of a Lady does that?

I knew. I knew then the truth about your family line. The smell of animal dirtiness still clung to your deceptively refined and oh-so skillful hands.

She grabs a knife and is about to strike --

Samurai drops his arms to his side and invites her --

Samurai: Go ahead. Show me where you really come from. Cut me open like you are butchering up a side of beef. Blood always will out.

Lady: It is not true.

Samurai: It does not matter, I just have to say it out loud.

Lady: It is a false rumor planted by my families' enemies. That I am 1/7th of the blood.

Samurai: Then I say it again.

Lady: But it is not true.

Samurai: Then I say it again and again, each time louder and with more media listening.

Lady: It is not true.

Samurai watches her in silence. She breaks down.

Then, as if remembering who she is, collects herself.

Watches Husband, coming to a decision on something.

He turns away in distain --

Lady: Husband?

Husband stops. Turns to face her.

Lady: Something puzzles me. I've been meaning to ask you about it.

Husband: Yes?

Lady: When you were alone in the room with Takamura-san's child. What happened?

Samurai: What do you mean?

Lady: The boy said some odd things to me.

Samurai: What do you mean odd things?

Lady: Of course, I did not mention it to his mother.

Pause

I have also begun hearing funny rumors about you when you go out at night.

Long pause.

Samurai: Okay. I admit I sometimes go to the Quarters. But it is very discreet and standards of cleanliness and health of the girls is quite strict. As you know, it is acceptable behavior among the older men.

Lady: It gives me no pleasure to do this but you force my hand.

Samurai: What are you saying?

Lady: My husband likes to have sex with little boys.

Silence.

Samurai: That is nonsense. That is not true, that is absolutely false.

Lady does not respond.

Samurai: No one's going to believe you, who would believe you?

Lady: 'When I first found out, I didn't know what to do. So I came to you, my husband's father, to you, your mother's family, to you, the Takamuras, and finally to you, Police Constable. What should I do? Help me. You must stop him before he hurts anymore children.'

Samurai: You have no proof, no photos --

Lady: How do I know? I saw him. Yes, with my very own eyes. Little boys. It was sickening. As much as it pains me, I must tell

the truth to stop him. Husband is a pedophile.

Samurai: It's not true.

Lady: And the sad part is what you say does not matter, does it? It is out there now. I have said it. It can never be put back. Lies can become truths if they are said loud and long enough, yes?

Silence.

Lady: Your father, so proud. 'My son did this, my son did that', his chest swelling, his heart so full, a father's proudest and most cherished achievement - a loyal, filial, loving son -- 'What? He what? My son did what?'

Silence.

Samurai: Ahem. (pause) Ahem. (beat) Wife? Dear Wife? Please do not report this.

Lady does not respond.

Samurai: I am begging you. I am begging you please. Okay, what can I do? I will do anything you ask?

Lady: There is no truth to the rumor of me being 1/7th percentage of their blood. I come from an old, well-respected family in the northern islands with impeccable credentials devoid of any taint. And --

Lady hands him the blade.

Lady: You must kill yourself.

Samurai is silent -

Lady: Kill yourself. It does not change what you have done -

Samurai: I have not done anything.

Lady: But you will know no one knows of your secret - (continue)

Samurai: (overlapping) I do not have any secret.

Lady: (continuing over the Husband) --
Do this and you will be seen as an honorable man who maintains the social order. The Bandit got the better of you. Shameful. While you were *indisposed*, he victimized your wife. Shameful. To make up - (continue)

Tajomaru is coming to --

Lady: -- To make up for your inability to protect your wife, to make up for your shameful lack of courage, by this final filial duty of obligatory social responsibility.

Samurai: Shut up! (to the Lady) How can I trust you not to tell anyone later?

Lady: You will just have to trust me --

Samurai: I am not some kind of low class fool, like our friend, you can --

Samurai trips and falls on his blade --

Samurai: Ahhh...

The Lady and Bandit stare in disbelief.
The Bandit approaches, nudges the body to
confirm what they are seeing.

Akutagawa enters and glances at Samurai's
body.

Akutagawa: 'We have art in order not to die of the
truth.' It's a hard one, I know. 'We have art in
order not to die of the truth'. Friedrich
Nietzsche.

Back to Rashomon Gate.

RASHOMON GATE

Wigmaker: (suspicious) Really? Really? He
tripped and fell on his own blade? What
happened then?

Woodcutter: They all just ran away.

Woodcutter enters the scene and looks at
the dead Samurai. He looks around to see if
anyone is watching --

Woodcutter: I ran straight to the Police
Station.

Wigmaker: You didn't tell them what you had
seen?

Woodcutter shakes his head.

Wigmaker: Why did they all come up with these stories. Why would each one say they were the killer?

Priest focusing on the Woodcutter.

Priest: They would rather confess to killing another human being than to have their shames exposed.

Wigmaker: Willing to say I killed just to save face? I would give up the faces of all my ancestors to know I had not killed.

Priest: They each went their own ways. Separately, each came up with his or her individual version. By all admitting to having committed the same murder, unbeknownst to them, they disrupted the system. They can't be all lying, they can't be all telling the truth. There is no way to arrive at justice.

The Wigmaker is rolling up a blanket and setting the rag-baby next to the other two blanket babies. Three pretend baby corpses.

Wigmaker: I came here. Because of her. So she would not be alone. There are others here who she can play with when she gets older. They need me.

Wigmaker lovingly adjusts their wrappings.

Priest: Woodcutter? What brought you here? What really drove you to seek me out?

Woodcutter does not respond. Priest approaches as he speaks.

Priest: Lying, making a lie sound like the truth. Purposefully lying to erode what others claim is true. Lying to win, to take advantage of, to make money, to make you look good, to save face. That is all surface play. The dance of words, roles, masks. I'm not interested in a lie of the mind. I'm talking about one's very own soul. I need someone to come forward and acknowledge nakedly, stripped completely of all guise and guile, that which we are.

Very close to the Woodcutter.

Priest: Someone has to have the guts to reach down into the darkest corners of their psychic bodies and drag out clawing and screaming the angel-beast of truth - 'Look at me! This is what I am!'

It is only then this diseased spell that has been cast can be broken.

The Priest places his hands on the Woodcutter's body, awakening what was buried by Woodcutter's trauma. The Woodcutter shudders --

Akutagawa: The Woodcutter's second and final version --

The Woodcutter begins speaking --

Woodcutter: -- after the Lady told the Samurai to kill himself, the Samurai went crazy and

started swinging wildly at everyone with this sword.

-- becomes the Samurai wildly hacking away. Then, stops. Stands there not moving.

-- Shifts to Woodcutter --

Woodcutter: He was now left alone. For a long time he didn't move. Then he seemed to make a decision. He cleared an area, kneeled and placed the small blade in front of him. Then without warning -

-- the Samurai grabs the knife and attempts to shove the blade into himself. Can't. Tries again and again but does not have the courage --

-- Woodcutter --

Woodcutter: He couldn't push it in. He didn't have the guts to do it --

-- Samurai finally collapses, sobbing --

Samurai: I am sorry. So sorry. I am weak. Please. If there is a god. I beg you. Please. Please --

-- Woodcutter --

Woodcutter: -- this grown man of station, money, reputation, blubbering like a whiny, spoiled brat. I found myself filled with a hatred. A vile revulsion. He was making everything wrong. I am the peasant; you are the

samurai and you have to shove the knife into your stomach!

Getting frantic --

Woodcutter: I had to stop this lie, destroy this untruth, restore things back to the way they were supposed to be --

Woodcutter stops. Unable to continue --

The Priest comes close to the Woodcutter and begins to speak the Heart Sutra into his ear. It is barely audible and sounds like loud whispering.

The Priest's words begin to help the Woodcutter break through his trauma. The Woodcutter speaks haltingly, fighting through it --

Woodcutter: I...I...I came up behind...the Samurai I slid...my arms...around the Samurai's body...helped the Samurai grip the knife and guide...his hands...The Samurai...was unaware of my presence but did not fight it...I helped the...Samurai and together we raised...the knife... Plunged it into the Samurai's belly...across...up...

Woodcutter becomes Samurai

The Samurai dies.

Dead Samurai becomes Woodcutter.

The Woodcutter stares at his bloodied hands. Struggling with himself --

Priest: Paradoxically, it requires someone revealing the grotesque truth of his or her own immorality to oneself and to the public body, to restore our collective faith in compassion and rightful behavior.

The woodcutter opens himself up --

Woodcutter: (announcing) Look at me! This! This is what I am! (to the Priest) I am the monster...

Woodcutter breaks down.

The Priest approaches the Woodcutter. The Priest puts his hands together and says the nembutsu over the prostrate Woodcutter.

Priest: Namu Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu.

Priest bows formally to the Woodcutter.

The Priest helps the Woodcutter up.

Priest: One good human being.

Priest begins to formally chant the Heart Sutra aloud --

Akutagawa: (speaking over the chanting)
The Priest is creating a house of sounds --

The Wigmaker enters --

Akutagawa: The pitch so perfect one cannot tell if it is coming from the Priest, the broken temple walls or the Buddha himself.

The Woodcutter and Wigmaker look around at the Rashomon Temple.

Akutagawa: The tones are rich of flesh, dreams, decay and rebirth.

The Woodcutter and Wigmaker join the Priest in the chanting the Heart Sutra.

Akutagawa: They open their eyes. They open them again.

They look. They see. Rashomon breathes once more. It is alive.

The Chanting picks up tempo and volume.

The cries of a baby emerge. They mix with the sounds of wind, rain and the chanting.

They all freeze. Silence.

Akutagawa steps forward and looks around.

Checks his watch -

Akutagawa: 12:09 am. It is now July 23rd, 1927.

Holds up the cup of tea with the mixed-in white powder. Examines it --

Akutagawa: *One spot alone.*

Left glowing in the dark

My snotty nose.

Fade to darkness.

End of Play

* Nick Rogers, the Times.

** Dostoevsky

HEART SUTRA:

Maka Han Nya Hara Mita Shin Gyo (Heart Sutra in Japanese)

KAN JI ZAI BO SA GYO JIN HAN-NYA HA RA MI TA
JI
SHO KEN GO ON KAI KU DO IS-SAI KU YAKU
SHA RI SHI SHIKI FU I KU KU FU I SHIKI
SHIKI SOKU ZE KU KU SOKU ZE SHIKI
JU SO GYO SHIKI YAKU BU NYO ZE

The Great Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra
(translated by Robert Aitken)

Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, practicing deep Prajna Paramita, clearly saw that all five skandhas are empty, transforming all suffering and distress. Shariputra, form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no other than form;

form is exactly emptiness, emptiness exactly form; sensation, perception, mental reaction, consciousness are also like this.

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