



## Rhapsody on a Film by Kurosawa

*Leonard Ginsberg*

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## **Rhapsody on a Film by Kurosawa** Leonard Ginsberg

One of Akira Kurosawa's most popular films, *Yojimbo* (1961) tells the story of a vagrant samurai who outsmarts two gangs warring to control a small town in mid-19th century Japan. This plot — a lone hero who challenges both potent rivals struggling to control a place — has proved remarkably adaptable. Recent film settings include the American southwest, New York, the coast of Ireland, Viking Iceland, and outer space. The rivals include drug dealers, police, witches, and seals, the hero a hit-man, a psychopath, a senior, an orphan. These films track the basic plot or veer off in unexpected directions. They provide an evening's delight or arouse enduring intellectual engagement with a wide variety of disciplines. *Rhapsody on a Film by Kurosawa* explores this cultural complex. Films discussed include *American Beauty* (1999), *Donnie Darko* (2001), *The King of Masks* (1996), *Memento* (2000), *Ponette* (1996), *Requiem for a Dream* (2000), *Se7en* (1995), and *The Witches* (1990). Other sections discuss possible origins of the plot in the work of Dashiell Hammett and Shakespeare, a *Yojimbo* hero who emerged in the final days of the Tokugawa Shogunate, and the relation of *Yojimbo* to Kurosawa's cinematic career.

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