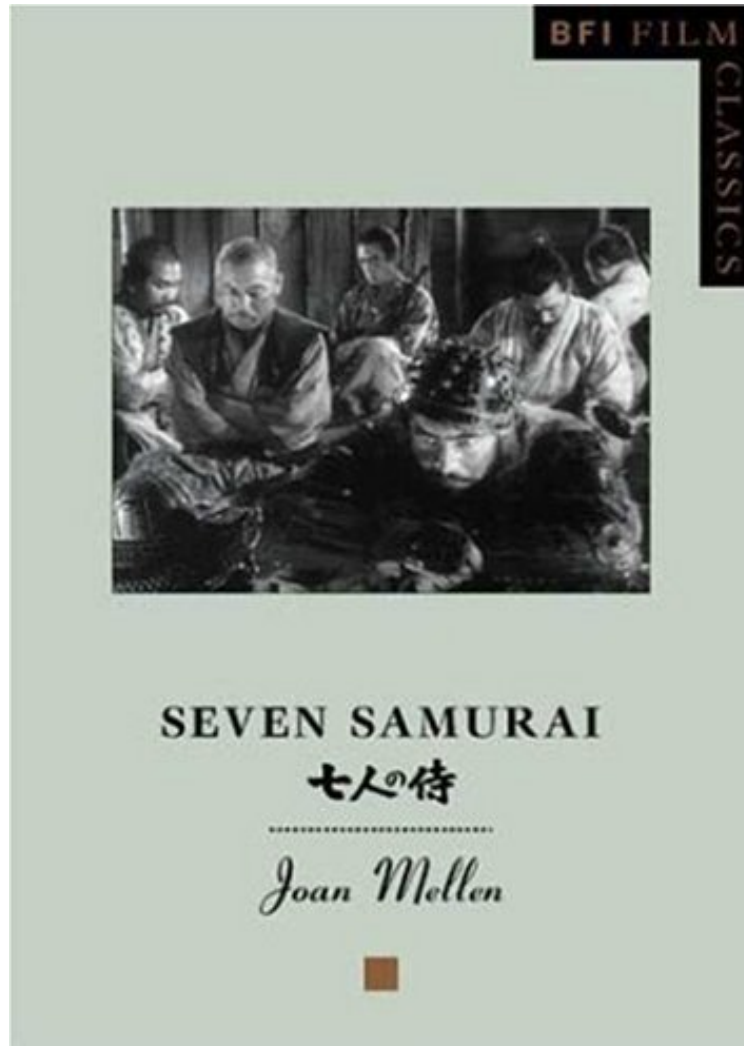


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Seven Samurai (BFI Film Classics)

Joan Mellen

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Joan Mellen : Seven Samurai (BFI Film Classics) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Seven Samurai (BFI Film Classics):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. appreciative analysis expressed in spirited argument and prose.By Randolph SeversonEvery great work of art invites constant re-assessment and reinterpretation. Kurosawa's masterpiece, Seven Samurai, is no exception. Even so, the best of these interpretations is this wonderful small book by Joan Mellen. Subtle in observation, incisive and illuminating in grasp of historical context and psychological nuance, comprehensive in its understanding of the whole, while also remaining free of familiar Occidental presumption and prejudice, Mellen finds in Seven Samurai a grave and sombre elegy for the nobility of Bushido, the Samurai ethic. Just

as Kurosawa recognizes that men and history make ethics -- hence, any ethic, notwithstanding its intrinsic nobility, can be, and, often is, betrayed or disgraced -- so an ethic makes men, raising them through its embodiments, rituals, call to duty and self transcendence to a higher existential plane. An appreciative and in the end, combative, analysis of the film expressed in spirited prose.² of 2 people found the following review helpful. Three for Seven

By Dash Manchette Arguably the best movie in the history of Japanese cinema, *Seven Samurai* displays film maker Akira Kurosawa at his height. At least according to some. According to others, the movie was a minor film in his catalogue. According to others still, Kurosawa just wasn't so great to begin with. What's going on? Joan Mellen provides a bit of the answer in this contribution to the BFI library, in which she, among other things, examines both *Seven Samurai* and its noted creator against the backdrop of Japanese cinema and sometimes through the lens of Kurosawa's (inferior) critics. One comes away with a better appreciation of the movie. Also, Mellen examines the themes present, subtly or not so subtly, throughout the movie. This particular section of the monograph is especially interesting. Such themes, not surprisingly given the subject matter of *Seven Samurai*, include class and cultural distinctions between the samurai and the peasants that hire them, male friendship, and sacrifice versus selfishness. But Mellen spends far too much time analyzing Kurosawa through the lens of Soviet film maker Sergei Eisenstein. Without knowing much at all of Eisenstein, I will take Mellen at her word at the debt owed. But that is the problem. Mellen spends so much time with the comparison that, if one is unfamiliar with Eisenstein to begin with, one's appreciation of this particular book is diminished considerably. Ok, tell me that I should know what I am talking about to begin with. Tell me that I should view this as an opportunity to educate myself more about an important film maker. Fine. Maybe those are good points. But they do not detract from my position that, without such familiarity to begin with, one's appreciation of this book is lessened. And there is the counter-argument that a BFI book on a particular movie should stand on its own, without detailed knowledge of someone else's work. Mellen also strikes out when she compares *Seven Samurai* with American Westerns, especially *The Magnificent Seven*. Mellen simply uses Japanese culture and the themes in *Seven Samurai* as the template and thereby deems the American Westerns inferior by comparison. Well of course they are, if you load the deck with pre-set standards tilted to a particular conclusion to begin with. This book adds something to the understanding of *Seven Samurai* and is worthwhile on those grounds. Just be aware you will be getting a mixed bag of goods.³ of 3 people found the following review helpful. An interesting pickup for the *Seven Samurai* enthusiast

By Jonathan In this book, Joan Mellen takes a look at the epic Japanese film "*Seven Samurai*," devoting most of the 75-ish pages to discussing several subliminal (and sometimes more overt) themes presented in Kurosawa's definitive film though both a quick background in Japanese history, from the time the movie is set in as well as from when the movie was made, which sets up an interesting parallel she discusses very well. There are also many instances where she discusses how the set-up of particular shots serve to reinforce the themes. Most of this will sound familiar to owners of Criterion Collection's three-DVD set of "*Seven Samurai*," as Mellen was one of the commentators in the "Editor's Roundtable" commentary, with roughly one-quarter of the movie under her purview. She expands on that commentary here, also referencing other films of Kurosawa's as well as other filmmakers. Like one of the previous reviewers, occasionally these references threw me for a loop, because outside of "*Seven Samurai*" I have very little no knowledge of Japanese or classic (i.e. pre-WWII) films. At times like this, the uneducated reader will have to take the comparison at face value, but I suspect readers more learned in cinema than I will appreciate them. The major problem I had with the book was a 15-page section (doesn't sound like much until you realize that's 20% of the book) that discussed Kurosawa's critics and his films as compared to the Western genre. Mellen rails against several people who were/are critical of Kurosawa, occasionally turning into a first-person narrative. This totally caught me off-guard and represented a dramatic change in tone from insightful/educational to angry/preachy. The mood continues with a lopsided discussion of the Western genre that seems to dismiss it as viable cinema (though I'm sure that was not Mellen's intent) without pointing out any of the good qualities of the genre. This section left me with a sour taste in my mouth, because it occurs at the end of the book, with three pages afterward devoted to the ending of "*Seven Samurai*" returning to the style of the first 55 or so pages. All in all, this book is an insightful read for the movie buff or the fan of "*Seven Samurai*," but beware of the random rant near the end that passes on little insight.

In the film "*Seven Samurai*" (1954) a whole society is on the verge of irrevocable change. Many people consider this film a major achievement in Japanese cinema, an epic that evokes the cultural upheaval brought on by the collapse of Japanese militarism in the 16th century, echoing the sweeping changes occurring in the aftermath of the American occupation. The plot is deceptively simple. A village of farmers is beset by a horde of bandits, and in desperation the village hire itinerant samurai to protect their crops and their village. In the end the samurai see off the bandits. Together the samurai reflect the ideals and values of a noble class near the point of extinction. The film may be a technical masterpiece, and despite its movement and violence it appears to be a lament for a lost nobility. In this book Mellen contextualizes "*Seven Samurai*," marking its place in Japanese cinema, and in director, Akira Kurosawa's career. Mellen explores the film's roots in mediaeval history and the film's visual language.

"One of the invaluable British Film Institute series about the world's most significant films."--"Los Angeles Times

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