



KINUYO TANAKA: A LIFE IN FILM

A Hen in the Wind

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Little circulated and rarely shown, *A Hen in the Wind* is one of Ozu's least-discussed postwar films. This may also be traceable to a sense that it is not typical. It also seems an 'Occupation' film, dealing explicitly with the social problems of a conquered country and projecting an optimism for future rebuilding. In this respect, it echoes the moralistic endings of many works of its time, such as Kinoshita's *Morning for the Osono Family* (1947) and Kurosawa's *One Wonderful Sunday* (1947). Yet Ozu's film deserves to be better known – partly for its unusual treatment of its conventional material, and partly for the ways in which it lays out many stylistic choices that would become common in subsequent works.

Derived from a story by Shiga Naoya, Ozu's and Saito's script was criticised as an attempt, like *Morning for the Osono Family*, Kozaburo Yoshimura's *Ball at the Anjo House* (1947), and Kurosawa's *No Regrets for Our Youth* (1946), to reject the past unproblematically. But Japanese critic Tadao Sato has suggested that *A Hen in the Wind* asked a genuinely difficult question: What did Japan lose in losing the war? The answer, he says, is the vaunted 'purity' that was central to wartime definitions of the Japanese spirit. Tokiko's becoming a prostitute symbolises a loss of national purity. Shuichi's violence toward her becomes emblematic of the ingrained brutality of the war years, demonstrating that he has lost the noble purpose that had been used to justify the war. The film's lesson, Sato concludes, cuts deeper than those contemporary films that sloughed blame off onto villainous militarists and weak-willed collaborators. Ozu's film urges the ordinary viewer to forget the loss of national and personal purity. Instead of patriotic speeches, the film ends with a quiet resolve to ignore past mistakes and to face the future with an 'impure' but realistic hope. Sato's account is persuasive. It explains a striking difference in tone between Ozu's film and those like Kinoshita's, Kurosawa's and Yoshimura's, and it is consistent with that refusal of transcendental solutions and that justification of human-scale compromise that one finds so often in Ozu. Yet we need also to consider how this thematic effect is achieved through narrative structure and narrational process.

Ozu builds his plot around a female/male split. The first half of the film centres on Tokiko, depicting her son's illness, her one night of prostitution, and the reaction of her friend Akiko. The last of these scenes shows Hiroshi, her son and Akiko on a picnic. During this idyll, the two women recall the past, citing the turbulence of the war years and their 1930s dreams of Westernisation. (Tokiko had wanted a house, an airedale, and a Max Factor compact). As in *Record of a Tenement Gentleman*, Ozu's typical nostalgia for childhood gets superimposed upon the memory of prewar life. The postwar equivalents of such American references are the tawdry posters in the room of the woman who lures Tokiko into prostitution: *Love Letters* (1945), *Kiss and Tell* (1945), and *The Green Years* (1946). (As in *A Mother Should Be Loved*, Ozu seems to be using his beloved American cinema in a moralising spirit, letting the films' titles suggest One's frivolity and anticipate Tokiko's fall.) The aim of this first half is to make us wholly aware of Tokiko's motives and feelings. As if the

purpose of curing her son were not sufficient grounds for her taking up One's offer, the narration absolves her by showing only her customer, not Tokiko herself, after the sexual act, and by having him remark that she 'was no good, couldn't make it.'

When the women and Hiroshi return from the picnic, they find that at last Shuichi has returned from the war. The film now 'starts over', recycling elements from the first half but putting Shuichi at the centre of events. After a celebration that night, Tokiko tells him she has prostituted herself. Thereafter, the plot alternates brief scenes of Tokiko with much longer scenes depicting Shuichi's anguished reaction. These create sombre parallels with Tokiko's half of the film: he visits the brothel she had worked in, and he has his own picnic by the river with one of the brothel's girls. In addition, there are parallels within the second part: two scenes showing Shuichi and his boss Satake in their office, and two crucial scenes of violence in the couple's apartment. Most important is the shift in the film's 'centre of consciousness'. If the first half put Tokiko's financial and moral problem at its centre, this half constitutes a psychological study of the male's response. Melodrama tends to create an omniscient range of knowledge so as to maximise our awareness of errors of understanding and judgement. In the second half, we watch Shuichi misjudging Tokiko and gradually learning what we already know. But, as in melodrama generally, characters' knowledge does not automatically govern their emotions. Shuichi cannot forgive his wife. By the waterside, he offers to help Fusako find a job, but such kindness cannot be extended to Tokiko.

Stylistically, *A Hen in the Wind* picks up devices already latent in *What Did the Lady Forget?* and crystallises them into fixed patterns that will dominate Ozu's postwar work. Music is now constantly present, both rising up within scenes and linking them. (Only three of 22 scenes lack nondiegetic music, and one of those contains diegetic music.) The twanging Hawaiian guitar of *What Did the Lady Forget?* returns to create a wrenching change of tone, when it underscores Tokiko's sob in her mirror and leads into shots of the bed she has shared at the brothel. The photographic quality of the film has a crispness of definition that is absent from Ozu's previous talkies. (Perhaps he started to use arc lighting and the improved Eastman black-and-white stocks.) The new sharpness of detail permits him to create unprecedented nuances of gesture and framing. For example, in the harrowing confrontation between Shuichi and Tokiko after she has told him about her prostitution. In the course of the scene, he throws a can at her, and it rolls down the staircase, prefiguring what will happen to her in the parallel sequence. He rapes her, then sits brooding angrily before stalking outside. This intensely emotional action is presented with an astounding stylistic rigour, forming a compendium of Ozu's characteristic tactics.

David Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (BFI/Princeton, 1988)

A HEN IN THE WIND (KAZE NO NAKA NO MENDORI)

Director: Yasujiro Ozu

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Production Company: Shochiku Co. Ltd.

Assistant Directors: Kozo Yamamoto, Tsukamoto Shokichi,

Kozo Tashiro, Yoshinobu Nakagawa

Screenplay: Ryosuke Saito, Yasujiro Ozu

Director of Photography: Yuharu Atsuta

Lighting: Haruo Isono

Camera Assistants: Seiji Inoue, Koji Akamatsu, Takashi Kawamata,

Motoshige Oikawa, Yoshitsugu Tonegawa

Editor: Yoshiyasu Hamamura

Art Director: Tatsuo Hamada

Music: Senji Ito

Sound Recording: Yoshisaburo Senoo

Studio: Shochiku Ofuna

Cast

Shuji Sano (*Shuichi Amamiya*)

Kinuyo Tanaka (*Tokiko*)

Chieko Murata (*Akiko Ida*)

Chishu Ryu (*Kazuichiro Satake*)

Takeshi Sakamoto (*Hikoza Sakai*)

Eiko Takamatsu (*Tsune*)

Chiyoko Fumitani (*Fusako Onoda*)

Toshinosuke Nagao

Fumiko Okamura

Jiro Shimizu

Koji Mitsui

Yoshiko Tani

Fujiyo Nagafune

Hohi Aoki

Japan 1948©

84 mins

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A Hen in the Wind (Kaze no naka no mendori)

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The Life of Oharu (Saikaku ichidai onna)

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