



SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022: 4=

Tokyo Story

(Tôkyô Monogatari)

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

Ozu's gently melancholy but hugely moving masterpiece has an elderly country couple visit their grown-up children in post-war Tokyo; their offspring are focused on work and their own families, and only a widowed daughter-in-law comprehends their plight. The film offers a sublimely serene contemplation of changing values in a changing world, profoundly alert to the disappointments almost inevitable in life.

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Ozu described *Tokyo Story* as his 'most melodramatic' movie, an observation taken by most western commentators, dazzled by the director's minimalist style and resolutely quotidian material, as ironic. But irony was never Ozu's preferred tone, and his comment surely reflected the film's uncharacteristic explicitness: this is an almost didactic film about the disintegration of Japanese family values, full of characters and incidents designed to spell out social and psychological points with diagrammatic clarity. In calling the film 'melodramatic', Ozu may also have had in the back of his mind the story's origin in co-writer Kogo Noda's memories of the 1936 Leo McCarey film *Make Way for Tomorrow*, which similarly contrasts the emotional stoicism of an elderly couple financially ruined in the Depression with the brash impatience of their urbanised children, but does so with a directness entirely normal in Hollywood movies.

Although it is not a precise match with any other Ozu film in theme, tone or structure, *Tokyo Story* obviously shares characteristics and concerns with many of them. Its interests in parent-offspring relations, in urban/rural contrasts, and in the evanescence of happiness are all entirely consonant with earlier films, from *The Only Son* (1936) through conservative wartime films like *Brothers and Sisters of the Todo Family* (1941) and *There Was a Father* (1942) to other films of the post-war 'reconstruction' like *Late Spring* (1949) and *Early Summer* (1951). It also uses most of Ozu's well-known visual tropes, from the use of low camera positions for domestic interiors to patterns of cutting based on visual analogies rather than conventional eyeline matches. What's different here is, again, the overall explicitness of the film's aim. The fact that this is a film in which the main characters frequently and directly discuss the issues that confront them (for example, parents' disappointment in their children's levels of assessment, or a young woman's disgust at her elder sister's uncaring meanness) militates against both the psychological nuancing and the structural playfulness that Ozu elsewhere used freely.

In part, the film's overt seriousness springs from its persistent undercurrent of social commentary. This is absolutely a film of its moment: it faithfully records everything from Tokyo's post-war rebuilding boom to the raucous and hedonistic behaviour of young people in a hot-spring hotel, the latter an early sign of the 'Sun Tribe' delinquency that was to become Japan's hottest social topic only three years later. (Since Ozu and Noda habitually retreated to hot-

spring resorts themselves to work on their scripts, it's amusing to speculate that they themselves had experienced the same kind of sleepless night suffered by the Hirayama couple). Equally topical was the core theme of the chasm between traditionalist, rural parents and their city-based sons and daughters: the breakdown in age-old family support structures in the years of American occupation and 'democratisation' was a widely discussed topic in the early 1950s. And the financial plights of Koichi and Shige, one struggling to run a suburban medical practice, the other managing a tawdry hair salon, both in conspicuously unfashionable areas of the city, are observed with the same fastidious eye for social and economic demographics.

The characters are also somewhat less nuanced than in many other Ozu films, even when played by the directors' favourites from the Shochiku 'stock company' of contract actors. Haruko Sugimura's account of Shige, for example, is a nakedly explicit picture of the death of sentiment: the woman is a cypher for selfishness, opportunism and greed. Ozu allows himself one set-piece of comedy (in an otherwise generally sombre movie) at her expense: the scene in which she is embarrassed to have her drunken father and two equally comatose strangers dumped on her late at night by the police. The chief exceptions to this tendency towards caricature are Shukichi, the emotionally repressed patriarch played by Chishu Ryu, and Noriko, the more than dutiful daughter-in-law played by Setsuko Hara, Japanese cinema's 'perennial virgin'. Shukichi's feelings for his wife are expressed only silently, in worldless scenes after her death, while his only avenue for open discussion of his frustrations as a parent is while drinking with long-unseen buddies in a bar. Noriko, shown to be both a hyper-efficient 'office lady' and a model of selfless consideration, is given dialogue scenes (most notably with Kyoko and Shukichi, in quick succession at the film's climax) to admit her inner doubts and insecurities, especially in relation to her fidelity or otherwise to her late husband. Both actors achieve the deepening of their characters with practised ease and supreme conviction.

Aside from Takanobu Saito's lush but sparingly used Hollywood-style score, the film's soundtrack is dominated by three elements: chirping crickets, boats chugging and sounding their sirens, and train noises. The crickets evoke the rural ambience of Onomichi, while the other two sound elements evoke travel and the space between places – and by extension, people. But Ozu is far too subtle and humane an artist to reduce his sound design to a matter of schematic symbols. In a film concerned with constant journeying, it's significant that the only shot of anyone in the act of travelling is the image of Noriko on the train back to Tokyo in the end. In the shot, she pulls out Tom's heirloom, the pocket watch, and examines it with deep emotion. The shot mysteriously clinches the association between the idea (or sound) of travel and the motif of evanescence. This may be the least 'melodramatic' moment in the film. It is also probably the most truly Ozu-esque.

Tony Rayns, *Sight & Sound*, February 1994

TOKYO STORY (TÔKYÔ MONOGATARI)

Director: Yasujiro Ozu
Production Company: Shochiku Co. Ltd.
Producer: Takeshi Yamamoto
Production Manager: Tomiji Shimizu
Assistant Directors: Yamamoto Kôzô, Takahashi Osamu
Second Assistant Director: Shôhei Imamura *
Assistant Directors: Kozo Yamamoto, Osamu Takahashi
Screenplay: Kogo Noda, Yasujiro Ozu
Director of Photography: Yuharu Atsuta
Assistant Cinematographer: Takashi Kawamata
Lighting Technician: Itsuo Takashita
Lighting Assistant: Takeshi Yakuwa
Editor: Yoshiyasu Hamamura
Art Director: Tatsuo Hamada
Set Designer: Toshio Takahashi
Set Decorator: Setsutarô Moriya
Costume Designer: Taizô Saitô
Music: Takanobu Saitô
Sound Engineer: Mitsuru Kaneko
Sound Assistant: Yoshiomi Hori
Sound Recording: Yoshisaburô Senô
Film Development: Ryûji Hayashi

Cast

Chishû Ryû (Shûkichi Hirayama)
Chieko Higashiyama (Tomi, Hirayama’s wife)
Setsuko Hara (Noriko, Hirayama’s daughter-in-law)
Haruko Sugimura (Shige Kaneko, Hirayama’s elder daughter)

Sô Yamamura (Kôichi, Hirayama’s elder son)
Kuniko Miyake (Fumiko, Koichi’s wife)
Kyôko Kagawa (Kyôko, Hirayama’s younger daughter)
Eijirô Tono (Sanpei Numata, Hirayama’s friend)
Nobuo Nakamura (Kurazo Kaneko, Shige’s husband)
Shirô Ôsaka (Keizô Hirayama’s younger son)
Hisao Toake (Osamu Hattori, Hirayama’s friend)
Teruko Nagaoka (Yone Hattori)
Mutsuko Sakura (woman at oden counter)
Toyo Takahashi (Noriko’s neighbour in Onomichi)
Tôru Abe (railway clerk)
Sachiko Mitani (woman at Noriko’s apartment)
Zen Murase (Minoru, Koichi’s elder son)
Mitsuhiro Mori (Isamu, Koichi’s younger son)
Junko Anan (beauty salon assistant)
Ryôko Mizuki, Yoshiko Togawa (beauty salon customers)
Kazuhiro Itokawa (tenant at the Hattori household)
Fumio Toyama (patient)
Keijirô Morozumi (police officer)
Tsutomu Niijima (company section chief at Noriko’s office)
Shôzô Suzuki (clerk at Noriko’s office)
Yoshiko Tashiro, Haruko Chichibu (maids at inn)
Takashi Miki (singer at inn)
Toshinosuke Nagao (doctor)

Japan 1953
136 mins

* Uncredited

SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022

Tokyo Story (Tôkyô monogatari) Sat 4 Mar 20:15; Fri 10 Mar 18:00; Wed 15 Mar 14:30
Man With a Movie Camera (Chelovek s kino-apparatom) Sun 5 Mar 10:30 BFI IMAX; Thu 9 Mar 20:50
Shoah Sun 5 Mar 11:00; Sun 12 Mar 11:00
Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans Sun 5 Mar 11:45; Mon 6 Mar 14:00; Mon 13 Mar 20:35
The Passion of Joan of Arc (La passion de Jeanne d’Arc) Sun 5 Mar 14:00 (with live accompaniment); Wed 15 Mar 20:40 (with score)
Citizen Kane Sun 5 Mar 16:15; Tue 7 Mar 20:30
Cléo from 5 to 7 (Cléo de 5 à 7) Sun 5 Mar 17:45; Wed 8 Mar 21:00
2001: A Space Odyssey Sun 5 Mar 19:00; Thu 9 Mar 18:00
Au hasard Balthazar Mon 6 Mar 18:30
Vertigo Mon 6 Mar 20:30; Thu 9 Mar 14:30; Wed 15 Mar 18:10
In the Mood for Love (Fa yeung nin wah) Mon 6 Mar 20:40; Fri 10 Mar 21:00; Sun 12 Mar 18:30
Late Spring (Banshun) Mon 6 Mar 20:45; Tue 7 Mar 14:30; Sun 12 Mar 18:20
The Night of the Hunter Tue 7 Mar 18:00; Sat 11 Mar 20:45
Mulholland Dr. Tue 7 Mar 20:10; Tue 14 Mar 20:15

The Searchers Tue 7 Mar 20:35
Beau Travail Wed 8 Mar 14:30; Fri 10 Mar 20:45; Mon 13 Mar 18:20 (+ intro by Catherine Wheatley, Reader in Film Studies, King’s College London)
Daisies (Sedmikrásky) + Meshes of the Afternoon Wed 8 Mar 18:20 (+ intro)
Portrait of a Lady on Fire (Portrait de la jeune fille en feu) Wed 8 Mar 20:30
Singin’ in the Rain Thu 9 Mar 18:10
(+ intro by Miles Eady, Film Writer and Curator); Tue 14 Mar 14:30
Persona Thu 9 Mar 21:05
Close-Up (Nema-ye Nazdik) Fri 10 Mar 18:30; Wed 15 Mar 20:50
The Godfather Fri 10 Mar 19:00; Sun 12 Mar 18:15
La Règle du jeu (The Rules of the Game) Sat 11 Mar 18:05
Do the Right Thing Sat 11 Mar 18:10
Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles Sat 11 Mar 18:50
Playtime Sat 11 Mar 20:30
Apocalypse Now: Final Cut Sun 12 Mar 20:00 BFI IMAX
Taxi Driver Mon 13 Mar 20:40
Seven Samurai (Shichinin no samurai) Tue 14 Mar 18:40

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