



A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE FILMS OF YASUJIRO OZU

A Story of Floating Weeds (Ukigusa monogatari)

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Director: Yasujiro Ozu

©: Shochiku Co. Ltd.

Production Company: Shochiku Co. Ltd.

Assistant Directors: Kenkichi Hara,

Hamao Negishi, Tokio Tanaka, Kazuo Ishikawa

Screenplay: Tadao Ikeda

Based on an idea by: James Maki

Based on the film 'The Barker' by:

George Fitzmaurice *

Director of Photography: Hideo Mohara

Lighting: Toshimitsu Nakajima

Camera Assistants: Masao Irie, Yuharu Atsuta

Editor: Hideo Mohara

Art Director: Tatsuo Hamada

Set Designers: Yakichi Otani, Tamizo Kadota

Set Decorators: Shintaro Mishima, Yoshio Hino

Costumes: Taizo Saito

Studio: Shochiku Kamata

Cast:

Takeshi Sakamoto (*Kihachi Ichikawa*)

Chôko Iida (*Otsune, café-keeper*)

Hideo Mitsui (*Shinkichi, Ichikawa's son*)

Rieko Yagumo (*Otaka*)

Yoshiko Tsubouchi (*Otoki*)

Tokkan Kozo (*Tomibo*)

Reiko Tani (*Tomibo's father*)

Seiji Nishimura (*Kichan*)

Nagamasa Yamada (*Mako*)

Yoko Taira (*man in cottage*)

Mitsuru Wakamiya (*station employee*)

Mariko Aoyama (*barber's wife*)

Koson Ikebe (*village man*)

Kiyoshi Aono

Munenobu Yui

Shusuke Agata

Japan 1934©

86 mins

35mm

* Uncredited

With live piano accompaniment by

Meg Morley (9 September)

John Sweeney (23 September)

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SPOILER WARNING

 The following notes give away some of the plot.

The main character in *A Story of Floating Weeds*, Kihachi Ichikawa, is an echo of the protagonist of *Passing Fancy*, though he is neither as stupid nor as carefree as his predecessor. The muting of Kihachi's character derives, like other subdued factors in *A Story of Floating Weeds*, from the surrounding material which Ozu has included. The film is played in a remote rural village, a realistic locale for the travelling troupe but an unusual setting for Ozu at this point in his career. The *cinéaste* of urban Tokyo, of *nansensu* [nonsense comedies] and *moga* [modern girls], must now impose his narrational system on a different Japanese iconography: the village street, the landscape, the forlorn café, the decaying theatre. He must film a traditional, if ineptly staged, performance. He can no longer cut away to Lincolns or spinning ventilators or Nipper the RCA dog. Ozu now experiments with treating centuries-old material in his own, recently matured manner.

His attempt is thoroughgoing. Instead of puckish cartoons behind the credits, he uses burlap, as if to assert the rustic purity of his tale. The characters wear *kimono* and play Japanese chess. The very title is a change for Ozu: instead of the vernacular catch-phrase or joke, we have a self-conscious metaphor comparing itinerant players to duckweeds that drift with the tides. Most strikingly, Ozu draws upon the iconography of Japanese religious traditions. Religious motifs are justified by the rural milieu, but Ozu absorbs them into characteristic cutaways. The scene of the troupe's unpacking is prefaced by a close-up of one *kamidana*, or Shinto 'god shelf'. Later Ozu cuts from a second *kamidana* to a third, fully laid out with cut paper, rope, and salt. Here the two *kamidana* are employed as an ambiguous transition moving from a rehearsal to a premiere. Later this traditional sign of good fortune is employed ironically. When the performance is interrupted by rain, Ozu cuts back to the third *kamidana*.

Another religious image, derived more from folk traditions than from shrine Shinto, is the 'god' tree near which Otoki waits to seduce Shinkichi. Otoki's casual intrusion into a sacred space underlines the extent to which the actress is an outsider to the village, and again the religious motif is introduced ironically: a holy spot used to make a date. Significantly, Ozu's characteristically late introduction of a motif is here reserved for the *daruma* at which Otsune looks twice in the film. The *daruma*, the roly-poly doll that always rights itself, is Japan's popular image of Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen Buddhism who is said to have meditated so long that his legs dropped off. As a customary image of good fortune and successful achievement, the *daruma* forms a Buddhist equivalent for the Shinto *kamidana*, and its employment is no less ironic. Otsune first glances up at the *daruma* after Shinichi goes out on a secret visit to Otoki. In the climactic scene, she consoles Kihachi for the loss of his

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Tokyo Story (Tōkyō monogatari)

From Fri 1 Sep

I Flunked, But... (Rakudai wa shitakeredo)

Sat 2 Sep 16:15; Wed 13 Sep 20:35

Tokyo Chorus (Tōkyō no kōrasu)

Sat 2 Sep 18:30; Sun 17 Sep 16:00

I Was Born, But... (Umarete wa mita keredo)

Mon 4 Sep 20:30 (+ intro by Jinhee Choi, King's College London); Fri 15 Sep 18:30

Tokyo Twilight (Tōkyō boshoku)

Thu 7 Sep 18:00; Wed 27 Sep 20:15

The Only Son (Hitori musuko)

Fri 8 Sep 20:40; Sat 16 Sep 18:10 (+ intro by season curator Ian Haydn Smith)

A Story of Floating Weeds (Ukigusa monogatari)

Sat 9 Sep 11:50; Sat 23 Sep 16:00

Good Morning (Ohayō)

Sat 9 Sep 18:10; Sat 30 Sep 20:40

Floating Weeds (Ukigusa)

Sat 9 Sep 20:30; Sun 1 Oct 11:30 BFI IMAX; Mon 2 Oct 18:00

Late Spring (Banshun)

Sun 10 Sep 12:15 (+ intro by season curator, Ian Haydn Smith); Fri 22 Sep 20:50

Early Summer (Bakushu)

Sun 10 Sep 15:00; Wed 13 Sep 14:30; Sat 23 Sep 20:35

Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family (Todake no kyōdai)

Mon 11 Sep 18:00; Sat 30 Sep 18:20

There Was a Father (Chichi ariki)

Mon 11 Sep 20:40; Thu 28 Sep 18:20

City Lit at BFI: Ozu: Cinema of Everyday Life

Tue 12 Sep – 3 Oct 18:30-20:30

Record of a Tenement Gentleman (Nagaya Shinshiroku)

Tue 12 Sep 20:30; Wed 20 Sep 21:00; Sat 23 Sep 18:30

Early Spring (Sōshun)

Thu 14 Sep 20:10; Sun 1 Oct 18:00

The Flavour of Green Tea Over Rice (Ochazuke no aji)

Fri 15 Sep 20:45; Sat 30 Sep 15:30

The Anatomy of Ozu

Sat 16 Sep 12:00-17:00

Late Autumn (Akibiyori)

Sun 17 Sep 18:20; Sat 30 Sep 12:30

Equinox Flower (Higanbana)

Thu 21 Sep 18:00; Sun 1 Oct 15:10

An Autumn Afternoon (Sanma no aji)

Sun 24 Sep 18:25 (+ intro); Tue 3 Oct 20:45

Influence and Inspiration

Make Way for Tomorrow

Sat 2 Sep 12:40; Sun 24 Sep 15:50 (+ intro by season curator Ian Haydn Smith)

Tokyo-Ga

Sun 3 Sep 14:00; Mon 2 Oct 20:45

With thanks to

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troupe ('Even a doll is pitiful if you let it alone for a long time') and Ozu cuts to the *daruma*. Finally, after Kihachi has left for good and his family stands weeping, the narration cuts back to the *daruma* and then to the upstairs room where he had played *shogi* with his son. In the context created by the *daruma*, the steaming teapot in the rear (a motif associated with Otsune's household) cites the poetic cliché of life's evanescence. (Similarly, the earlier fishing scene insists so much on the way that father and son stand in the river that it evokes Shinto's doctrine of purification by water.)

An interpretative critic might go on to see the film as enacting a 'battle' of Japanese religions, with official Shinto and folk religion 'defeated' by a final emergence of Zen Buddhism. But this would miss the obvious and clichéd nature of the imagery which Ozu uses opportunistically, as pretext for asides (are these not the picturesque cutaways of an urban outsider?) and as realistically motivated material for formal patterning. Yet this material, unlike the yoyos and victrolas of *Dragnet Girl*, resists complete assimilation. The toning down of Kihachi's character and the replacement of decentring gaps by a subdued irony are only two symptoms of a general muting of formal work. It is as if the rural subject and the religious iconography could not, at the risk of transgressing one currently powerful definition of Japanese tradition, become completely obedient to Ozu's aesthetic system. The *daruma* cannot be made the butt of visual jokes as Nipper is, and village life cannot be satirised as severely as can the student or salaryman culture.

David Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (BFI/Princeton, 1988) Reproduced by kind permission of Bloomsbury Publishing © David Bordwell

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Out of Sight

Fri 1 Sep 20:30; Thu 7 Sep 20:35; Fri 22 Sep 17:55

Girlhood (Bande des filles)

Sat 2 Sep 16:00; Sun 17 Sep 18:30; Mon 2 Oct 18:10

Il bidone (The Swindle)

Sun 3 Sep 12:20; Thu 14 Sep 20:45; Sat 30 Sep 15:40

Hidden (Caché)

Mon 4 Sep 18:00; Thu 21 Sep 20:40; Wed 27 Sep 17:50 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large)

Notorious

Tue 5 Sep 14:30; Sat 23 Sep 11:45; Sun 1 Oct 15:20; Tue 3 Oct 20:30

The Wind Will Carry Us (Bad mara khahad bourd)

Wed 6 Sep 18:10 (+ intro by Shohini Chaudhuri, Professor of Film Studies, University of Essex); Fri 15 Sep 20:40

Ace in the Hole (aka The Big Carnival)

Fri 8 Sep 14:40; Mon 11 Sep 20:45; Fri 29 Sep 18:00

The Killers

Sat 9 Sep 18:20; Tue 12 Sep 14:30; Mon 18 Sep 20:50

The Maltese Falcon

Sun 10 Sep 11:50; Mon 25 Sep 14:40; Tue 26 Sep 20:55

F for Fake

Wed 13 Sep 18:20 (+ intro by Jason Wood, BFI Executive Director of Public Programmes & Audiences); Thu 21 Sep 18:30

Barry Lyndon

Sat 16 Sep 19:30; Sun 24 Sep 14:30

The Kid with a Bike (Le Gamin au vélo)

Tue 19 Sep 20:45; Tue 26 Sep 18:05

Au revoir les enfants

Wed 20 Sep 18:00 (+ intro by film critic and lecturer Dr Julia Wagner); Thu 28 Sep 20:45