



A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE FILMS OF YASUJIRO OZU

An Autumn Afternoon (Sanma no aji)

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Director: Yasujiro Ozu

Production Company: Shochiku Co. Ltd.

Producer: Shizuo Yamanouchi

Assistant Director: Kozo Tashiro

Screenplay: Kogo Noda, Yasujiro Ozu

Director of Photography: Yuharu Atsuta

Lighting: Kenzo Ishiwatari

Camera Assistant: Motoshige Oikawa

Editor: Yoshiyasu Hamamura

Art Directors: Tatsuo Hamada, Shigeo Hagiwara

Colour by: Agfa-Shochikucolor

Music: Kojun Saito

Sound Recording: Yoshisaburo Senoo

Studio: Shochiku Ofuna

Cast:

Shima Iwashita (*Michiko Hirayama*)

Chishu Ryu (*Shuhei Hirayama, Michiko's father*)

Keiji Sada (*Koichi, Hirayama's elder son*)

Mariko Okada (*Akiko Hirayama, Koichi's wife*)

Teruo Yoshida (*Yutaka Miura*)

Noriko Maki (*Fusako Taguchi*)

Shinichiro Mikami

(*Kazuo, Hirayama's younger son*)

Nobuo Nakamura (*Shuzo Kawai*)

Eijirō Tono (*Sakuma, the 'Gourd'*)

Kuniko Miyake (*Nobuko Kawai*)

Kyoko Kishida (*bar hostess*)

Michiyo Tamaki (*Tamako*)

Ryuji Kita (*Professor Susumu Horie*)

Toyo Takahashi

Fujio Suga

Daisuke Katō (*Yoshitaro Sakamoto*)

Haruko Sugimura (*Tomoko, Sakuma's daughter*)

Tsusai Sugawara

Japan 1962

113 mins

Digital

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Critics, especially *auteur* critics, tend to take an artist's last work as a summing up, the goal toward which every other work has moved. The impulse is hard to resist with respect to *An Autumn Afternoon*. Here is Chishu Ryu, front and centre as he has been in no Ozu film since *Tokyo Story*; how can he not be Ozu's alter ego, brought back for a final encompassing statement? Here too are many familiar faces – players from films from *The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family* onward. And here, surely, is Ozu's last meditation on resignation to change, on the inevitable dissolution of the family, on the ultimate loneliness facing every individual.

Actually, all this is not entirely plausible. Ozu was told to avoid borrowing actors from other studios; hence the Shochiku stock company and the centrality of Ryu. Moreover, a close look at the film suggests that while it owes a good deal to prior works, in its characterisation of young people and especially women, it constitutes a departure, not a repetition. Finally, it is significant that the narration observes the protagonist with more detachment than would be expected of the sympathetic study of solitude we get in, say, *Late Autumn*. The English-language title itself perhaps slants too much toward sombreness. The original title is 'The Taste of Sanma'; it does evoke the brief season in late summer when *sanma*, a variety of mackerel, is at its most savoury, but the phrase is also appropriate for a movie that revolves around eating and drinking and that features a scene in which an old man, confessing that he leads a lonely life, discovers the succulence of sea-eel.

In the sections involving Hirayama's son Koichi and his wife Akiko, Ozu is able to present a portrayal of the younger generation and the new salaryman culture. Unlike the anachronistic portrayal of a family business in *The End of Summer*, the scenes in and around Koichi's and Akiko's apartment stress current commodity worship. She wants money for a refrigerator while Koichi, like the little boys who crave balls and mitts in early Ozu, sulks because he can't buy golf clubs. Two shots of a neighbour's apartment emphasise the three electrical treasures of postwar life – refrigerator, vacuum cleaner, and television. It would be wrong, I think, to see Ozu's treatment as more than a satiric jab at contemporary lifestyles; it is no more a denunciation of 'Westernisation' than is his affectionate mockery of movie posters and pipes in his early films. There is satire as well in his characterisation of Koichi, a timid and spoiled husband who at one point dons an apron. Akiko is a tough, no-nonsense wife who orders Koichi to make his bed, criticises him for coming home tired, refuses to let him buy golf clubs, makes fun of his name, and snatches Hirayama's loan from Michiko before he can raise a protest. Yet she is never judged as harshly as, say, the self-centred Shige in *Tokyo Story*.

Just as it would be reassuringly simple to judge the contemporary salaryman's world as mercenary and soulless, so the critic's task would be easier if longing for the past were presented wholly as a warm haze. Like most of Ozu's late works, *An Autumn Afternoon* includes many scenes steeped in nostalgia. The *Gourd's* reunion evokes middle-school memories running back 40 years. Hirayama's meeting with Sakamoto recalls the war and postwar years. In Torys

A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE FILMS OF YASUJIRO OZU

Tokyo Story (Tōkyō monogatari)

From Fri 1 Sep

Equinox Flower (Higanbana)

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

Late Spring (Banshun)

Fri 22 Sep 20:50

A Story of Floating Weeds (Ukigusa monogatari)

Sat 23 Sep 16:00

Record of a Tenement Gentleman (Nagaya Shinshiroku)

Sat 23 Sep 18:30

Early Summer (Bakushu)

Sat 23 Sep 20:35

An Autumn Afternoon (Sanma no aji)

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

Tokyo Twilight (Tōkyō boshoku)

Wed 27 Sep 20:15

There Was a Father (Chichi ariki)

Thu 28 Sep 18:20

Late Autumn (Akibiyori)

Sat 30 Sep 12:30

The Flavour of Green Tea Over Rice

(Ochazuke no aji)

Sat 30 Sep 15:30

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

Sat 30 Sep 18:20

Good Morning (Ohayō)

Sat 30 Sep 20:40

Floating Weeds (Ukigusa)

Sun 1 Oct 11:30 BFI IMAX; Mon 2 Oct 18:00

Early Spring (Sōshun)

Sun 1 Oct 18:00

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

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Bar Hirayama finds a hostess who reminds him of his dead wife. Most concrete is the use of 'Gunkan machi', the 'Warship March', which Sakamoto plays on the jukebox in Torys and to which he marches and salutes. Although composed in 1897, it was one of the biggest hits of the 1930s. (Interestingly, the early 1960s saw a revival of old popular songs. The 'Warship March' became a staple background tune in the sort of *pachinko* parlor shown in *Green Tea*.) As usual the nostalgia is not only for the historical period but for earlier Ozu films. At the reunion, the Gourd reports on the health of 'The Badger' – a reference to the name of a teacher in *Days of Youth* and to the protagonist of *There Was a Father*. The stylistic handling of the two 'Warship March' renditions in Torys Bar, with their cutaways to hanging lamps, recalls inserts of ceilings, fans, and lights in *Where Now Are the Dreams of Youth?*, *Passing Fancy*, and *The Only Son*. The use of 'music-box' renditions of 'Annie Laurie' recalls such popular Western tunes as 'Old Black Joe' in *The Only Son* and 'Home Sweet Home' in *Early Summer*.

But before we see the present as inevitably a corruption of that past for which the old men yearn, we should notice how, as in *Equinox Flower*, nostalgia is qualified and criticised, often by the very characters who indulge in it. The Gourd's drunken pronouncement that 'Human beings have melted away since the war' is 'placed' by the commonsensical comments of the salarymen who entertain him. In a moment of sharp comedy, Sakamoto fantasises Japan's winning the war, with Westerners wearing wigs and playing *samisens* while chewing gum. Hirayama replies: 'It's lucky we lost.' The same note is struck when, as the 'Warship March' booms out, two strangers at the bar imitate officers repeating by radio that the Imperial Forces were wiped out. Ozu manages to make us feel the intensity of nostalgia while maintaining some ironic distance on it.

An Autumn Afternoon is not, then, a testament. Like Ozu's other works, it is a complex reworking of strategies derived from earlier films, as well as an attempt to try new things. It is another manifestation of an aesthetic system whose rigour, breadth of detail, and suppleness of variation give it a simplicity and richness unparalleled in the history of the cinema. His next film, for which he completed only notes, was to have brought back Tadao Ikeda, the scriptwriter of the 1930s, to work with Noda. It was to centre on a man who gets cancer and who has a daughter about to get married. Once more we find a minimal variant on a pre-established pattern. But the film's innovation would have reflected more explicitly than ever before a life steeped in the love of cinema. The film's characters would have been movie performers, and the title was to be 'Radishes and Carrots,' Ozu's favourite slang for poor actors. One might be tempted to consider this unfinished film (a version of which was directed by Ozu's pupil Minoru Shibuya) a summing up, were it not for the fact that when Ozu died there was no evidence of flagging powers: *An Autumn Afternoon*, despite its concern with ageing, is in form and attitude a young man's work.

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