



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Woman of the Dunes

Woman of the Dunes (Suna no onna)

Director: Hiroshi Teshigahara

Production Company: Teshigahara Productions

Producers: Kiichi Ichikawa, Tadashi Ono

Production Manager: Iwao Yoshida

Assistant Director: Masuo Ogawa

Script Supervisor: Eiko Yoshida

Screenplay/Adaptation: Kôbô Abe

Original Novel: Kôbô Abe

Director of Photography: Hiroshi Segawa

Lighting: Mitsuo Kume

Stills Photography: Yasuhiro Yoshiyoka

Editor: Fusako Shuzui

Designer: Kiyoshi Awazu

Art Directors: Totetsu Hirakawa, Masao Yamazaki

Title Designer: Kiyoshi Awazu

Music: Toru Takemitsu

Sound Recording: Ichiro Kato, Jyunosuke Okuyama

Sound Effects Editor: Keiji Mori

Cast:

Eiji Okada (entomologist Junpei Niki, the man)

Kyoko Kishida (the woman)

Hiroko Ito (entomologist's wife – in flashbacks)

Koji Mitsui

Sen Yano

Ginzo Sekiguchi

Kiyohiko Ichihara

Tamotsu Tamora

Hiroyuki Nishimuti

Japan 1964

147 mins

Digital

The screening on Wed 21 Aug will be introduced by Tom Price, BFI Events

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Hiroshi Teshigahara's most famous film follows a hapless entomologist who misses the last bus home and ends up stranded on a beach in the hut of a destitute young widow. Anticipating Oshima Nagisa's *In the Realm of the Senses* in its frank depiction of the destructive and claustrophobic relationship between the two leads, the film also has a strong absurdist undertow. Sand has never been more inventively used by a filmmaker. It is at once a force of nature (the widow's husband is said to have died in a sandstorm), a barrier to the outside world and, in the scene in which the man cleans grains off the woman's body, there to heighten the eroticism. The minimalist score by Takemitsu Toru adds to the growing unease.

Geoffrey Macnab, *Sight & Sound*, November 2006

It is no exaggeration to say that in this work Teshigahara has made one of the most atmospheric and tangibly real films to come out of the astonishing Japanese Cinema. We follow a young entomologist who is inveigled by the local villagers into spending a night in a shack owned by a young widow and situated at the bottom of a large sand-pit. Unsuccessfully trying to leave the next morning, he becomes resigned to his new condition and finds himself sexually attracted to the young woman.

To achieve his effects, Teshigahara, aided by his great cameraman, Hiroshi Segawa, creates a multitude of wonderful textures, constantly emphasizing the ever-shifting sand, sometimes pouring down like a waterfall and at others resembling a solid cliff preventing the man's escape. As the *Monthly Film Bulletin* commented at the time of the film's release 'the oppressive claustrophobia of the cluttered shack is set against the limitless expanses of sand, sea and sky; the gloom of the night scenes gives way to the blinding glare of the day-time sun; human skin suggests the cratered surface of the moon or becomes indistinguishable from the sand itself...'

Equally striking is the way Teshigahara composes his images in such a tightly restricted set up: the framing and viewpoints always seem apt, there is a judicious use of close-up and couple's close proximity seems to pull the characters together, giving the erotic passages a deeply charged intensity.

Much depends on the quality of the two leading players and both admirably serve Teshigahara's purpose, often working under hot, sticky and difficult conditions surrounded by the ever-present walls of sand.

Kyoko Kishida, in particular, brings out the female character's weird obsessiveness and becomes increasingly human as the story progresses. Viewers are given plenty of opportunity to argue over what allegory actually means – how a sense of freedom can be tempered by circumstances or how people can be forced to come to terms with a strange and unexpected environment, almost against their will. Only rarely does the film put a foot wrong (it could be argued that the 'public rape' in front of the villagers lacks real impact and a proper sense of outrage); for the most part, however, Teshigahara's direction is admirably concentrated, the film is of consistent visual interest and there is an early Takemitsu score for admirers to relish.

John Gillett, extract from BFI DVD booklet for *The Woman of the Dunes*, 2006

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Last Year in Marienbad

L'Année dernière à Marienbad
Thu 1 Aug 18:10; Wed 7 Aug 12:00;
Mon 12 Aug 20:30

Persona

Fri 2 Aug 12:20; Sat 10 Aug 20:50; Thu 15 Aug
18:30; Wed 28 Aug 18:20 (+ intro by Lilia Pavin-
Franks, BFI Events)

Sebastiane

Sat 3 Aug 20:45; Sat 10 Aug 18:20;
Tue 13 Aug 14:40

Les Enfants terribles

Sun 4 Aug 18:00; Sat 17 Aug 12:50;
Sat 31 Aug 20:40

The Old Dark House

Mon 5 Aug 12:30; Sat 10 Aug 16:00;
Sun 25 Aug 14:10; Thu 29 Aug 18:30

Archipelago

Mon 5 Aug 18:00; Sun 11 Aug 13:10;
Thu 22 Aug 20:30

Woman of the Dunes

Suna na Onna
Mon 5 Aug 20:30; Wed 21 Aug 18:00 (+ intro by
Tom Price, BFI Events)

The Philadelphia Story

Tue 6 Aug 12:20; Sun 11 Aug 18:30;
Mon 26 Aug 15:00

Charulata

The Lonely Wife
Tue 6 Aug 14:50; Sun 11 Aug 15:50;
Fri 30 Aug 20:40

Bigger Than Life

Wed 7 Aug 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew,
Programmer-at-Large); Sun 18 Aug 13:30;
Tue 27 Aug 14:30

3 Women

Thu 8 Aug 12:10; Fri 16 Aug 20:30;
Sat 24 Aug 17:10

All That Heaven Allows

Fri 9 Aug 12:15; Wed 14 Aug 18:20 (+ intro by
Ruby McGuigan, BFI Programme and Acquisitions);
Wed 28 Aug 20:50

In the Realm of the Senses

Ai no corrida
Fri 9 Aug 18:10; Mon 19 Aug 20:40

The Shining (Extended Cut)

Fri 23 Aug 17:50; Mon 26 Aug 20:00

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A contemporary review

Teasingly opaque, broodingly erotic, with its suspiciously comprehensive symbol in the shape of the ubiquitous sand and its angular, minatory score: nothing could be better calculated to evoke that bland English distaste for the enigmatic and the ambiguous than this bizarre allegory. In fact, thanks to Teshigahara's sureness of touch and generally firm control over his refractory material, and the formidable technical authority displayed by the director, cameraman and editor, the film works perfectly.

The theme might be characterised, very roughly, as a set of sardonic and paradoxical glosses on the Marxist definition of freedom as the recognition of necessity, thought the attempt to reduce the film's complex visual poetry to simple verbal formula is a self-defeating exercise that will attract only the literal-minded. The extraordinary visual appeal of the film lies in the fascinating textures conjured up out of sand, sea and human flesh, and in the pictorially striking and emotionally suggestive pattern of contrasts, and also of weirdly disturbing resemblances, it creates. The oppressive claustrophobia of the cluttered shack is set against the limitless expanses sand, sea and sky; the gloom of the night-scenes and interiors gives way to the blinding glare of the day-time sun; human skin suggests the cratered surface of the moon or becomes indistinguishable from the sand itself. Appearances are both delusive and alarmingly unstable: the sand, at times deceptively solid-looking cliff, at others resembles a river in spate. For the most part, Teshigahara adopts an appropriately tight probing shooting style, with considerable reliance on close-up, but any risk of monotony is avoided not only by the clever set-ups and often striking camerawork but also, and less expectedly, by flashes of dry, oblique humour. Actually, the film succeeds even when judged on the simplest level of character development and human interest, and here much credit is due to the sensitive playing of the two principals. Eiji Okada admirably conveys the transition from brash discontent to tranquil resignation, and Kyoko Kishida gives a haunting portrayal of the woman, with her obsessive attachment to her wretched home and paltry possession, her troubled humility and her sudden moods of fear and gaiety. The feeling of sexual tension too is disturbingly tangible, and the erotic scenes have a charged and compelling intensity.

Above all, Teshigahara strikes a nice balance between the mundane and the portentous; by anchoring his parable in the fascinating details of day-to-day life in this strange environment, and in the man's attempts to escape, he ensures that, like all good allegories, the film works on the primary level of fact and incident. From the remarkable sequence accompanying the credits, with grains of sand magnified to the size of boulders, which casts a menacing shadow over the apparent normality of the opening scene and perfectly prepares us for the peculiar happenings to follow, the director's control falters only once, in the scene of the public rape. In a curious way, this is at once too melodramatic and too reticent: the prancing villagers seem less like an evil nightmare than so much local colour, and the scene lacks genuine horror. The film quickly recovers from this lapse, however, and the moving final scene has an air of wry, unsentimental acceptance that, far-fetched as the comparison might seem, is not so far removed from the spirit that pervades Ozu's elegiac domestic dramas. The fact that it is not annihilated by this comparison is perhaps the best tribute one can pay to this distinguished and absorbing film.

Monthly Film Bulletin, June 1965