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Historias de la luna pálida de agosto / Cuentos de la luna pálida después de la lluvia



Abstracts

KENJI MIZOGUCHI: THE MAN WHO LOVED GEISHAS

Jesús Angulo

Mizoguchi was born in Tokyo in 1898 and died of leukaemia in Kyoto in 1956. Though not a brilliant student he was an ardent enthusiast of literature, theatre, painting and music. His first contact with the world of film grew out of his desire to become an actor. He soon abandoned the idea and went into script-writing. He later became an assistant director and eventually made his debut as director in 1923 with *Ai ni Yomigaeru Hi*, a made-to-order film by Nikkatsu productions. Mizoguchi started making pictures at a time of change in Japanese cinema. Historical themes were being left by the wayside to make way for films more closely tied to reality. Mizoguchi initiated his directing career breaking away from tradition: he used no *oyamas* (male actors specialising in female roles), choosing instead to work directly with actresses, and did away with *benshi* (live narrators), replacing them with the more Western-style screen text. From the outset of his career Mizoguchi was criticised as a director and looked upon with suspicion. In 1926, with *Kaminingyô Haru no Sasayaki*, Mizoguchi began to reveal his special combination of lyricism and realism, a style which was to remain with him throughout his lifetime. In 1934, Mizoguchi and some friends founded Daiichi, the production company responsible for five pictures decisive to his career -particularly the last two: *Naniwa Hika / Naniwa Ereji* (1936) and *Gion no Shimai / Gion no Kyôdai* (1936)-, films which brought to light some of the most telling characteristics of his filmmaking: long sequence takes; regular out of image field shots and ellipsis; mixing realism with sporadic dreamlike cut-ins; frequent use of circular dramatic structure supported by flashbacks, etc. He began to work with a regular team, the most noteworthy member being Yoshikata Yoda, who from that point on would write virtually all of the screenplays for his later films. Following the dissolution of Daiichi Mizoguchi began to work for Shôchiku, a company he stayed with throughout the 1940s. Among the films he directed in this period were *Zangiku Monogatari* (1939), *Genroku Chûshingura* (1941), *Utamaro o Meguru Gonin no Onna* (1946) and *Joyû Sumako no Koi* (1947). In 1952 his *Saikaku Ichidai Onna* won the Silver Lion at Venice for Best Director, an honour he shared with John Ford and Roberto Rossellini. Now internationally acclaimed, he became involved in Daiei, a production company run by his friend and former partner at Daiichi, Masaichi Nagata. There he made his last eight films, including some of his best-known works, such as *Ugetsu Monogatari* (1953), *Sanshō Dayû* (1954), *Yôkihi* (1954) and *Akasen Chitai* (1956), the film that drew to a close one of the most important contributions in motion picture history.

DOES MIZOGUCHI LIVE ON?

Daniel Aguilar

Are people familiar with Mizoguchi's work in Japan today? Are his films analysed or even discussed? Mizoguchi's filmography is vast albeit anything but uniform, making it difficult to get to know his work. As a matter of fact, only the films he made in the 1950s were popular among audiences in his country and, by extension, in the West. In an effort to clarify just why Mizoguchi does not hold the high place he deserves in the History of Cinema in his country, this article takes a look at three factors: firstly, both Mizoguchi and the people he worked with disappeared a long time ago. So did the production companies that handled his films. Many of his pictures have been lost and things being as they are, getting hold of the ones that do exist, or the rights, is extremely complicated. Secondly, it is worth pointing out that Mizoguchi's work delves into the inhuman conditions endured by Japanese women for a

long time. Women today don't want to relive that period. And lastly, it should be kept in mind that Mizoguchi's films are simply not a part of the global mass consumed motion picture product that has been popular in the last twenty years.

PRETENDING NOT TO SEE IS BETTER THAN NOT SEEING

Carlos Losilla

By exploring four of Mizoguchi's less celebrated films -*Yoru no Onnatachi* (1948), *Gion Bayashi* (1953), *Uwasa no Onna* (1954) and *Akasen Chitai* (1956)- this article sets out to take an in-depth look at scenes in which the eye -the camera or the point of view of one of the characters- allows us to see, while at the same time concealing, violence and horror, laying the watchful audience bare like a peeping Tom who invents his own stories based on what the screen allows him to see. Like the very nature of storytelling, of the hermeneutics of filmmaking. Hence, a frustrated invitation, not unlike an unsatisfied sexual desire, which leaves both author and spectator at the doors of a promised modernity, hinted at but never reached.

THE PAST FROM THE PRESENT. HISTORY IN MIZOGUCHI'S FILMS

Esteve Riambau

Although a quarter of Mizoguchi's films are set in the past, we can't really say that these works are recreations of different historical events, since the relationship between Cinema and History in Mizoguchi's work is most certainly personal and characteristic. Mizoguchi does not tell History in the larger sense but rather narrates small historical moments and situations which paint a society belonging to a specific era or period. When he tackles History in the larger sense, he does so with great dramatic freedom and his projects are always determined by three important factors: the agitated political context in which his work is set, the circumstances surrounding the production of his pictures and, finally, the different filters established by literature and theatre.

A WALK THROUGH THE NARRATIVE FORESTS OF MIZOGUCHI

Ángel Quintana

Japanese theatrical tradition establishes a separation between the figure of the narrator and the elements of the presentation itself. Mizoguchi's films propose unifying what is told with what is shown, but despite this integration for many people the key to his artistry lies in his staging. This article points out the complexity of Mizoguchi's filmmaking as a story, establishing a classification of the main styles that characterise his narrative forms. Amongst the characters explored we find circularity, melodramatic linearity, duality between characters and digression of the story revolving around a central idea.

NOTES ON THE MELODRAMA OF KENJI MIZOGUCHI

Antonio José Navarro

The cultural origins of Japanese motion picture melodrama are varied: literature -particularly *The Tale Of Genji*, an eleventh century novel known the world over-, theatre -the Japanese *kabuki* and *yoruri*- or pictorial drama -the *ukiyo-e* canvases or paintings of the "floating world"-. However, thanks to the openness of its semantics, this art is completely accessible to the West. Mizoguchi handled the

genre masterfully in several of his films, describing a world filled with injustice and irrationality, a world in which happiness is ephemeral and pain long-lasting and where the characters cannot escape the fatality of their destiny. However, melodrama in Mizoguchi's work is overlapped by other genres, in yet another example of Japanese cinema's tendency to combine and blend.

FACELESS DEATH

Enrique Alberich

Although his contemplative capabilities have always been one of the most highlighted essential characteristics in Mizoguchi's work, we should not overlook the fact that aggression is another inherent part. In fact, his films are the result of a painstaking combination of the two elements. There is violence in Mizoguchi's films but not the kind seen in motion pictures nowadays. It is internal rather than external violence, implied and often crude but not openly displayed. Mizoguchi uses spatial ellipsis profusely to leave no one guessing about the violence while at the same time respects the privacy of those who are suffering. The violence in Mizoguchi's films often leads to a face-to-face encounter with death. Here too the filmmaker avoids getting caught up in too many explanations; not because he is afraid of the cruel and inevitable, but because of his desire to overcome the trauma, at times even a desire for freedom.

A LOT LESS THAN HALF THE SKY. WOMEN IN MIZOGUCHI'S FILMS

Mirito Torreiro

Mizoguchi finds the thematic baggage he needs for most of the stories he tells in his work in the sad and cruel role women have had in traditional Japanese society. Some biographers explain his repeated, almost obsessive dedication to this subject as the result, on one hand, of the mark left on him by some of the events of his childhood (the sale of his sister and the abuse his father inflicted on his mother), and on the other, the interest awakened in him by the writings of authors concerned with the issue. With this background Mizoguchi paints diverse portraits and archetypes of women in his films: from woman who are coherent with their feelings up until the very end, fed up with their lover's lack of courage in facing a commitment, to the woman capable of putting everything on hold not so that her own future might be fulfilled but to allow the man she loves to be able to achieve his goals. Mizoguchi's way of portraying the situation of women in Japan is in the end ambiguous and full of contradictions: he seems to denounce their plight, although the women end up serenely resigning themselves to their fate.

THE SPATIAL ETHICS OF FILMMAKING. IN AND OUT OF IMAGE FIELD IN THE WORK OF KENJI MIZOGUCHI

José Enrique Monterde

This article focuses on Kenji Mizoguchi's art of staging, specifically with regards to the concept of in and out of image field: it attempts to take a closer look at the spatial

dimension in the Japanese filmmaker's work. Any film creator, and Mizoguchi is certainly one of the finest, staging is not only a formality but rather a crucial part of the universe of a film creator. Hence a specific use of in/out of image field by the filmmaker is related to his own personality, that is, to a set of ethical, ideological and social principles on which all artistic choice is inevitably based.

EULOGY TO MODULATION. THE POETRY OF MIZOGUCHI KENJI'S SUSTAINED SHOTS

Santos Zunzunegui

Before delving into the importance of sequence takes in Kenji Mizoguchi's work one thing should be pointed out. The aspect most often highlighted in sequence takes is generally the length. However, in reality they are shots that capture an entire sequence in their time frame and hence there may be very short sequences, even one single shot. Therefore, this article centres on Mizoguchi's use of what has been called a sustained sequence take, this meaning a shot that is longer than normal, even though it may not cover (as is common with the Japanese filmmaker) an entire sequence.

MIZOGUCHI'S WOMEN

Carlos Aguilar / Daniel Aguilar

As opposed to Ozu or Kurosawa, with whom specific actors are immediately associated (respectively Chishu Ryu and Toshiro Mifune), in Mizoguchi's work no particular artist stands out. What does characterise Mizoguchi is his expertise in the portrayal of female characters, this being an indisputable hallmark of his filmmaking career. Three magnificent actresses left their mark on the films of Mizoguchi: Takako Irie (1929-1934), Isuzu Yamada (1934-1945) and, most particularly, Kinuyo Tanaka (1940-1954). The three were already well-known actresses in their country when they began working with Mizoguchi, although under his direction all of them improved their acting skills. In the final years of his career, and in harmony with his constant changes from one production company to another, Mizoguchi changed his leading male roles often, but amongst them, Machiko Kyo deserves special mention.

SKIES, GOWNS AND BANNERS. COLOURS AND FORMATS IN THE WORK OF MIZOGUCHI

Quim Casas

The appearance of colour did not bring about as much of a revolution as did the appearance of sound or the emergence of horizontal formats. Nevertheless, it did have a revolutionary effect on the view point of creators who understood that colour was not simply another expressive element but instead very significant one. Mizoguchi directed only two colour films in his career: *Yôkihi* (1954) and *Shin Heike Monogatari* (1955). In both Japanese filmmaker used colour, in the same way as Eisenstein, as an additional staging element, not as a mere decoration. It not only was used to express concrete feelings, but also to suggest a myriad of ideas, to reinforce the decisions of the characters and weave a dramatic and rich web of association.