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Abstracts

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La paz de un día de otoño



# Abstracts

## OZU YASUJIRO, UNIVERSAL FILM-MAKER

*Jean-Pierre Jackson*

In regards to the theories maintaining that Ozu and Ford are the most Japanese and the most American of film-makers, it would be more accurate to say that the two of them are the most universal film-makers there are.

### IN THE ABYSS OF THE UNSPOKEN

*Carlos Losilla*

Recognising the intrinsic difficulty the westerner faces in understanding work like Ozu's, suspended between isolation and universality (first section), this article, after a quick review of his pre-World War II films, concentrates on the film-maker's mature period (1947-1962) and elaborates a brief theory of his style, in close consonance with the subject matter. The linguistic crisis already sensed in his 1930's films leads to total disintegration -coinciding with the disintegration of the family and of traditional values- in which ellipsis, amplification and reiteration create a model more comparable to the mannerisms of Hollywood than to the cleansed balance to which it is usually attributed. It is a "staging of nothingness", not constructed from sobriety but from doubt and suspension (second section), and which ends up being torn between what is actually shown and the apprehension of showing it. The result is an abyss where one can ponder the indelible presence of the unspoken, in other words, that which films suggest, but never completely reveal-such as the characters' emotions. In essence, it is a replica of the question of accessibility to the western spectator (third section).

### BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY: IN SEARCH OF ESSENCE

*Antonio Santamarina*

In the middle of a crossroads between traditional and modern Japan, Ozu's work reflects the contradictions resulting from new lifestyles emerging in a society like Japan, entrenched in almost feudal standards. Following a brief historical sketch, the author of the article analyses the scars left by this clash by looking at several of his silent films, paying special attention to aspects such as the disintegration of the family and the crisis in patriarchal authority. This allows him, on one hand, to recognise a kind of scepticism in Ozu as he contemplates the society of his time and on the other hand, observe the film-maker's hopefulness in the face of a new situation. In the second part of the article, preceded by a look at post-war Japan, the author explores the films made after 1945 and observes that -after the definitive breakdown of the family unit and the impossibility of it being substituted for other collective forms of life, such as company life, neighbourhood or friends- Ozu's work during this period is based on an underlying theme (the concept of loss) while allowing us to perceive a certain amount of individuality in his images. Both aspects are then linked to the awareness the main characters' in these films have of the how fleeting life is (transposition of the subject of loss) and of loneliness (final affirmation of individuality) which threaten them in the final scenes of the film. Finally, the author of the article suggests that the film-maker's work is oriented -in spite of all the changes in Japanese society dictated by modernity and the passing of time-towards a search for essence, which seems to be confined, perhaps due to the influence of Zen philosophy, to simple everyday life.

### DISTANT VOICES

*Santos Zunzunegui*

One of the basic characteristics of Yasujiro Ozu's films is his "recognisability". All of his films, particularly the ones from

the postwar period, have constant themes and styles which make it easy for spectators to recognise an Ozu film from just a glimpse. Situations are repeated in different films (the widower father who wishes to see his daughter married, a reencounter with a lover after several years, marriages of convenience), leading to the more general topics dealt with in all of the films made in Ozu's mature period (family disintegration, the delicate balance between tradition and modernity in contemporary Japanese society, moving from the country to the city...) and infallibly leading to nostalgia and to the inevitability of loneliness and death. A very characteristic and personal style which, among other defining traits, includes: a point of view situated "at tatami level", almost total absence of camera movement, "pillow-shots" (teapots, hanging clothes, trees, the sea...) in all of the films from his mature period, and repetition of frames. All of this, together with Ozu's use of the same technical and artistic team in most of his postwar films (Kogo Noda's screenplays, Yuharu Atsuta's photography and the mythical Chishu Ryu, a figure par excellence in Ozu's work), make him one of the most coherent, pure and recognisable film-makers in the history of film.

### CONSCIENCE AND FLEETINGNESS: LIFE IN THE FACE OF DEATH

*Antonio Santamarina*

Tied to the motifs of family loss and loneliness, the subject of death in Ozu's films appears more and more as his work reaches its final stages. The author analyses how the film-maker has presented this subject (almost always masked over) throughout his film career and highlights the stylistic techniques used in some of his films in relation to death. He then stops to look at the influence that death has on the life of Ozu's characters and the different ways they deal with it. In almost every case there is a connection to the acceptance of the ephemeral nature of existence, the need to go on living despite all odds, and holding on to the memory of those who have passed away. Finally, the author points out what it means to these characters to have seen someone else die and how much more aware they become of their own and other people's existence, as well as of nature itself. The author also reminds us of the equal parts of nostalgia and bitterness that death provokes in these people and, to a large extent, how they combat both sentiments in Ozu's films.

### THE FORCED SMILE

*Carlos Aguilar / Daniel Aguilar*

This piece dealing with the sense of performance in Ozu's film-making describes his concept of directing actors, and takes a deeper look at the identification between Ozu's typical character types and his regular actors. The author touches on the meaning of the father figure, systematically played by the same actor, Chishu Ryu, very much admired by the prestigious German film-maker Wim Wenders.

### THE MAN WHO COULDN'T BE BUSTER KEATON

*Alberto Úbeda Portugués*

Most of Ozu's comedies, his funniest, brightest and most cheerful films, were made during the first part of his film career. One of the reasons for this light-heartedness owes to the important role that children play; Ozu proves to have a good understanding of them, and some became the stars of the best gags in his films. After the Second World War, which Japan lost, leaving the country scattered with corpses and in ruins, Ozu returned from a concentration camp in Singapore and began filming. Starting with *The End of Spring* (1949), he created a long uncompromising testament which shows abundant style, where events "disappear" only to become a higher entity. It speaks to us of the hardships of life and its

infinite journey, and of the inevitability of death, which Ozu's characters wait for indifferently, and at times even long for in order to escape the pain of life.

## OZU AND MELODRAMA

*Javier Hernández Ruiz / Pablo Pérez Rubio*

Either separately or together in the same story, comedy and melodrama are the two genres into which most of the films directed by Yasujiro Ozu could be categorised. In any case, if we had to chose one of them, it would certainly be the latter: all through his film career Ozu was an outstanding chronicler of a constantly changing society. For the entire century, and particularly after losing the war, contemporary Japan has been submitted to constant and traumatic transformations that have brought about numerous fissures in every order of social and family life. Ozu's melodramas, which have their roots in both traditional Japanese theatre and Hollywood melodramas, fundamentally focus on family relationships, which change along with the society they are a part of. Throughout his career, Ozu's melodramas have become purer and more stylised until reaching the point of almost total "dedramatisation", separating him from his western counterparts: there are no dramatic or passionate explosions; the characters do not touch each other nor do they gesticulate; the music does not dramatise the scenes; the camera modestly films people, taking refuge in fixed shots and keeping far enough away to safeguard intimacy... Ozu's eastern way of looking at things has created one of the most surprising of miracles: melodrama without drama -or so it seems-.

## CHILDREN OF SPRING. OZU'S CHILDREN

*Luis Irureta*

The picture Ozu painted of children in his films is strongly influenced by his own memories: mischievous kids who begrudgingly went to school and whose behaviour was based more on the rules of instinct than on any standard of conduct designed in the adult world. Prior to any responsibility and real suffering, Ozu's childhood was a blissful paradise. From this stage in life begins the implacable process of education leading to adulthood by means of institutions such as school, university, work and marriage. Hence, little by little man leaves his animal instincts behind and moulds himself around the rules of society. The result, of course, is that children repeat the rules of conduct that their elders followed in their day, creating a cycle that repeats itself over generations, not unlike the seasons of the year. The gradual abandonment of this animal essence, this purity so closely identified with childhood, the abandonment of this blissful innocence, created nostalgia in Ozu. It affected the way he looked at things throughout his film career to the point of making us ask ourselves if the low-lying camera shots, known as the "dog's eye position" is actually a manifestation of this childlike view, devoid of introspection, projected over reality, and creating a nostalgic portrait of the present.

## INTERTEXTUALITY IN OZU'S SILENT FILMS

*Ángel Quintana*

The films made by Yasujiro Ozu between 1930 and 1935 contradict the platitude that Yasujiro Ozu is the most Japanese of film-makers. They call in question the commonly accepted idea that his work can be categorised as strictly Japanese, since in these films there are constant allusions to representative forms found in classic American movies. Here is the source of one of the most important characteristics of Ozu's film-making: intertextuality. Ozu's silent films show a kind of tension between the traditional system imposed by the genres of American films and a gradually emerging Japanese system of making poetry out of everyday life. In these films we can already see the figures that are key to his style. We can conclude that

Ozu's images do not come only from traditional Japanese culture, but from a process of intertextual blending with American film-making. The tension established between both representative systems is the key to understanding such atypical works as those of Yasujiro Ozu, and helps us to comprehend the cleansing process used by the Japanese film-maker in his later films.

## LOVE, SEX AND ELLIPSIS

*Romain Slocombe*

Master of ellipsis Yasujiro Ozu manages to convey all the love, sincerity, emotion and honesty of a lifetime with a mere gesture, a glance or the intonation of a sentence. Few directors have been able to convey so many things without actually showing them. This love for small details -the everyday affairs in life, the daily routine-, these "big moments" Ozu so prefers-makes up one of the most important characteristics of the Japanese director.

## THE OVERDUE JOURNEY TO AUTUMN IN TOKYO

*Carlos Aguilar / Daniel Aguilar*

An article on the general opinion raised by Ozu's films in contemporary Japan. It points out that he is a respected film-maker although absent in conventional public showings, mainly because the kind of cinema he makes is no longer attractive to the general public due to sociological changes. It also talks about an effort on the part of the industry to preserve Ozu's legacy of his characteristic family melodrama genre.

## MUSIC IN YASUJIRO OZU'S FILMS

*Joan Padrol*

Music plays an extremely important role in Yasujiro Ozu's films. Very much the same -if not practically identical- in all of them, it is absolutely vital to the director. It enhances his poetic universe, the beauty of his images and frames, his characters' feelings and reflections and, above all, it is used as a fundamental element in editing and combining sequences. In all of his films, the music appears towards the end of a sequence and in the "empty shots" (mountains, trees, streets...) which precede the next one. His closest collaborator in this field was Kojun Saito, author of the musical score for his most famous classic western-style films of the fifties.