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Again, like Mizoguchi—and Kurosawa—Yoshimura specializes in that rare genre, the period film which reflects contemporary life. *Ishimatsu at Mori* (Mori no Ishimatsu, 1949) took the famous period hero and showed him as utterly unheroic, and at the same time it was filled with satirical thrusts at the common *jidai-geki* clichés. *A Tale of Genji* (Genji Monogatari, 1952), though not so successful, did justice to the Lady Murasaki, the first “modern” novelist and one whose observations are as psychologically pertinent now as they were in the Middle Ages. The charming *The Beauty and the Dragon* (Bijo to Kairyū, 1955) was a new interpretation of one of the more famous of the Kabuki plays, in which the princess, beautifully played by Nobuko Otowa, was a thoroughly modern, postwar girl. *An Osaka Story* (Osaka Monogatari, 1957), a production originally planned by Mizoguchi and halted by his death, was realized by Yoshimura with a lightness and a grace which would have delighted the elder director.

Yoshimura’s attitude in his pictures—as constructive as it is unusual in the Japanese film world—is in essence completely opposed to that of, say, Ozu, whose virtue as a creator rests precisely on what he does with the materials at hand. Yoshimura, proven foe to the status quo, moves restlessly from theme to theme, from subject to subject. He does not consider himself a specialist in anything and prides himself, rightly, upon his ability to create a style to fit the content of a specific film.

This ability is seen in a film such as *A Woman’s Testament* (Jokyo, 1960), a three-part omnibus film, the

other two sections of which were directed by Yasuzo Masumura and Kon Ichikawa. Yoshimura’s portion is distinguished by a stylistic cohesion missing from the other two. Set in modern Kyoto it shows Machiko Kyo as the cold and wealthy owner of a hotel. Little by little she comes to realize that ambition is not enough and that money is not everything. This very slight story was distinguished by a gradual and graceful revelation of character set in a completely atmospheric rendering of the charm that is peculiarly Kyoto’s. ✓

Masumura, a pupil of both Daisuke Ito and Kenji Mizoguchi, also owes much to Yoshimura. It was from the latter that he learned the cutting method which distinguishes his films. There is a tendency in Japanese films to play every scene out even after it has made its necessary points. This arises from a traditional evaluation of naturalism, most directors believing that everything they do should be “just like life.” Yoshimura, on the other hand, very frequently makes a direct cut right at the high point of one scene, into another scene which is building up. This telescoping of effect, piling one dramatic point quickly on top of another, is a shorthand method of construction which gives his films their unusual pace. Masumura, using precisely the same methods, creates an even livelier film style.

An example is *Warm Current* (Danryū), a picture which Yoshimura made in 1939 and which Masumura remade in 1957. It was about a young doctor, responsible for a small hospital, who must choose between a dedicated nurse and a spoiled rich girl. The Yoshimura



version moved swiftly but was filled with careful revelation of character, sustained by an excellent hospital atmosphere. Masumura's version moved at a breakneck speed completely foreign to most Japanese films. One scene was shoved off by another almost before it was done. It is no wonder that many Japanese critics, long used to the perfectly valid but discursive style of an Ozu or a Mizoguchi, should greet the novelty with praise. One of the results of such a style, however, was that the director had almost no time in which to sketch character, and such fast cutting is certainly not conducive to the creation of atmosphere.

Like Imai, and to some extent, Gosho, Masumura tends to be as good as his scenario. His section of *A Woman's Testament* was about a young working class girl, Ayako Wakao, who uses every one of her charms in an attempt to get ahead. She will do anything—there are some biting and very funny “seduction” scenes—in order to get money to go buy more stocks and bonds. The film was distinguished by a number of quietly lethal interludes in the dance hall, at home, and in the bar, where every one of the more elegant conventions surrounding the Japanese traditional maiden was stripped away.

Just as funny was *The Woman Who Touched Legs* (*Ashi ni Sawatta Onna*, 1960), a remake of the 1926 Yutaka Abe comedy, which had already been remade in 1953 by Kon Ichikawa. Just as scathing was *Love for an Idiot* (*Chijin no Ai*, 1967), well known in Europe under the title *La Chatte japonaise*, where a perfectly awful modern girl is again fully delineated. The tender and

compassionate ending indicates that a literally sadomasochistic marriage has just as much chance of lasting as most. Perhaps Masumura's best in this genre, however, has been *Giants and Toys* (*Kyojin to Gangu*, 1958), shown abroad as *The Build-Up*, a very fast moving and at times trenchant attack on the advertising racket in Japan and, by implication, all of the values of a traditionally based society. A very slick advertising director takes an unknown girl from the slums and turns her into a national celebrity. The sudden fame ruins her as a person and, at the end, she walks out on him when he needs her most. At times, however, the director's search for a completely individual style leads him into superficialities. The people in *The Precipice* (*Hyoheki*, 1958), a mountain-climbing adventure story, never come to cinematic life. *A Man Blown by the Wind* (*Karakaze Yaro*, 1960) was a superficial gangster film which marked the acting debut of the late Yukio Mishima. Nor are the two girls in love with each other (Ayako Wakao and Kyoko Kishida) in *Manji* (1964) fully realized characters.

Unlike Yoshimura, whose concern, first, foremost, and always, is for people, Masumura, like some American directors and many Italians (he studied at the Centro Sperimentale in Rome), is often primarily concerned with action. The action in *Nakano Army School* (*Rikugun Nakano Gakko*, 1966), a beautiful reconstruction of the famous wartime spy school and its fascinating activities, is subdued but powerful, particularly when the hero (the late Raizo Ichikawa) finds that in serving his country he has left himself little to live for. Or the action



may be direct, physical, and overpowering—as in Masumura's finest picture, *The Hoodlum Soldier* (Heitai Yakuza, 1965), a film so popular that it later became a series. This story of two soldiers who, for entirely different reasons, hate the army, is filled with blood and laughter, torture and horseplay, and is so cynical about national ideals that for a time there was talk of its not being released abroad. Japanese humor has never been blacker than in this uproarious and disturbing picture, and action—the celebrated fight in the bathhouse scene, for example—has rarely been shown in so powerful a manner.

At the same time, however, one must admit that Masumura is no better than his script and he will, with little discrimination, bring to a picture which neither needs nor wants such bravura precisely those techniques that distinguish a *Hoodlum Soldier* but ruin a lesser vehicle. At the same time, Masumura is among the last first-rate directors to be bound by a company contract which gives him no control over his material. He is continually saddled with the most unprepossessing scripts and is hedged in with conditions from which other good directors have now largely escaped—by forming their own companies or by becoming independent producers.

With Masaki Kobayashi, the concern for action is tempered by a very real concern for social criticism, one which he shares with such directors as Akira Kurosawa and Hiromichi Horikawa. His *Thick-Walled Room* (Kabe Atsuki Heya, 1953), based on published abstracts from the diaries of "war criminals," had as its theme the idea

that most of those imprisoned were innocent while the real criminals escaped. Though the theme was perhaps debatable, still, this was one of the few Japanese films to raise the question of responsibility for the war. *I'll Buy You* (Anata Kaimasu, 1956) was another exposé, this time of the commercialization of the Japanese baseball world, with rival teams outbidding each other for the services of a high-school star.

Among the most highly critical of Japanese standards was *Black River* (Kuroi Kawa, 1957), which had as its subject the corruption centering on American bases in Japan. A lively exposition which might easily have been a static indictment, the film was studiously just in its conclusions. The villain was not America for the presence of her camps, but the Japanese social system which permitted lawlessness to go unpunished and even officially unnoticed. Particularly brilliant was the final reel of this film. It is a rainy night and the jerry-built bars and pinball parlors, cheap restaurants and souvenir shops which have grown around the camp entrance look like a deserted amusement park. The young gangster, played by Tatsuya Nakadai, now dead drunk, is being taken home by the girl, Ineko Arima, whom he has seduced and who is now his mistress. There is an argument and he races off down the long, rain-slicked highway. Along the road comes a convoy of American trucks. He slips in front of one of these and is killed. The girl drops her open umbrella and rushes toward him; the final shot shows the umbrella on the highway while she, crying, runs toward the now stationary trucks. The entire se-

believe. If they lack anything, it is immediacy; just as the films of Imai and Kobayashi, Oshima and Masumura, lack that interest in character delineation, in the intricate interplay of character with environment, which is so much of film style, since this is just what is sacrificed through exclusive interest in social issues.

These two qualities—an interest in film aesthetics as a medium of emotional communication and an equal interest in social issues which are larger than the single man—are reconciled in the work of Akira Kurosawa, a film director whom the last twenty-five years has revealed as so thoroughly whole and in that sense so completely great that one can compare him only to Yasujiro Ozu—his utter opposite, the director most antithetical, and yet one with whom, oddly, he shares more than any other.

Like Ozu, he is a master stylist. He adds to a given theme, or plot, or incident, all of the circumstances calculated to produce the entire effect that the theme or the plot or the incident ought to produce. He creates an entire world, along with all the laws which govern it. He shows character by presenting what motivates that character. And he suggests the environment, the context, of every action. One of the effects of this is that Kurosawa's world is a private one, one that is uniquely his own. One minute of an Ozu or a Kurosawa film is enough to let you know whose it is.

At the same time the work of Kurosawa represents a departure from the tradition of the Japanese film. He has always refused to make the expected kind of picture. He has consistently confused critics and, sometimes, au-