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Thursday, May 13 Screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda in Person!

A STORY FROM CHIKAMATSU (CHIKAMATSU MONOGATARI) 7:30 & 9:30

"The story of how the scrollmaker, Mohei, in attempting to help his master's wife out of a financial embarrassment, is virtually forced into running away with her, so that he becomes indeed the adulterous lover of the woman he has long worshiped in secret. The couple have no peace, partly because the husband's position will not allow the dishonor, and in time they are returned (with the help of Mohei's father), and, as is the custom with adulterers of a certain rank, they are taken off in ritual procession to be crucified. The husband is ruined anyway, and, as the film ends, his scroll factory, the most prosperous in the imperial city of Kyoto, is confiscated....CHIKAMATSU MONOGATARI is about relationships and responsibilities, and about the absolutely fantastic interdependency of everything upon everything else. Therefore, the film's appearance is moment-by-moment an extension of its theme, and the stultifying closeness of every life with every other above it, and next to it is in fact the metaphysical universe of this particular Mizoguchi drama. That universe is somehow incomplete without its adulterous lovers (We see one pair at the beginning of the film, and then, of course, the hero and heroine at the end) and their sacrificial murders. They stand as if for all the potential of a responsive personal life that is rigorously excluded from the social structure of the public and familial worlds. They are outlaws and yet they are representative (everybody's life in CHIKAMATSU MONOGATARI, just below the surface is, or could be, a mess); they are dangerous and beautiful; they are necessary-- and they are genuinely intolerable."

(Roger Greenspun)

A joruri (puppet play) by Monzaemon Chikamatsu, THE LEGEND OF THE GRAND SCROLL MAKER is the source referred to in the film's title; Chikamatsu (1653-1725) is recognized as Japan's greatest playwright and, in Donald Keene's phrase, as "the author of the first mature tragedies written about the common man." His play was based on an actual event which also served as the basis for a story by Saikaku, author of the source novel for Mizoguchi's THE LIFE OF OHARU. This story, "The Almanac-Maker's Tale" provides many of the film's most important elements, notably its tragic ending, which is not in Chikamatsu.

Nonetheless, Mizoguchi makes significant departures from his sources. The attention he pays to Mohei at work as an artist and a craftsman will come as no surprise to viewers familiar with his emphasis on work and art in UGETSU, and UTAMARO among others. Equally important is the invention by Mizoguchi and his collaborators of the character of Ishun, the husband. This memorably self-involved lout (played, as so often in Mizoguchi's films by Eitaro Shindo) seems to represent for Mizoguchi all of society's greed and self-interest, against which his lovers--in one of the screen's most remarkable depictions of "amour fou"--can only struggle for a moment. For Chikamatsu, the point is fatality--one of his characters says, "What we suffer now was preordained from the beginning of the world."

For Saikaku, it's the violation of the social order, which he condemns despite his sympathy for the outlaws. For Mizoguchi, on the other hand, his lovers are right in the tradition of the romantic outlaw

couple. Indeed Osan and Mohei are only a gun barrel's length from Bowie and Keechie, or Bonnie and Clyde.-- Peter Scarlet

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi, written by Yoshikata Yoda, Matsutaro Kawaguchi. With Kazuo Hasegawa, Eitaro Shindo, Kyoko Kagawa, Sakae Ozawa. (1954, 100 mins, 35mm English titles, Print courtesy of New Line Cinema.)