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Ukigusa monogatari (A story of floating weeds), Ozu, Yasujiro,
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THE MAJOR WORKS OF YASUJIRO OZU

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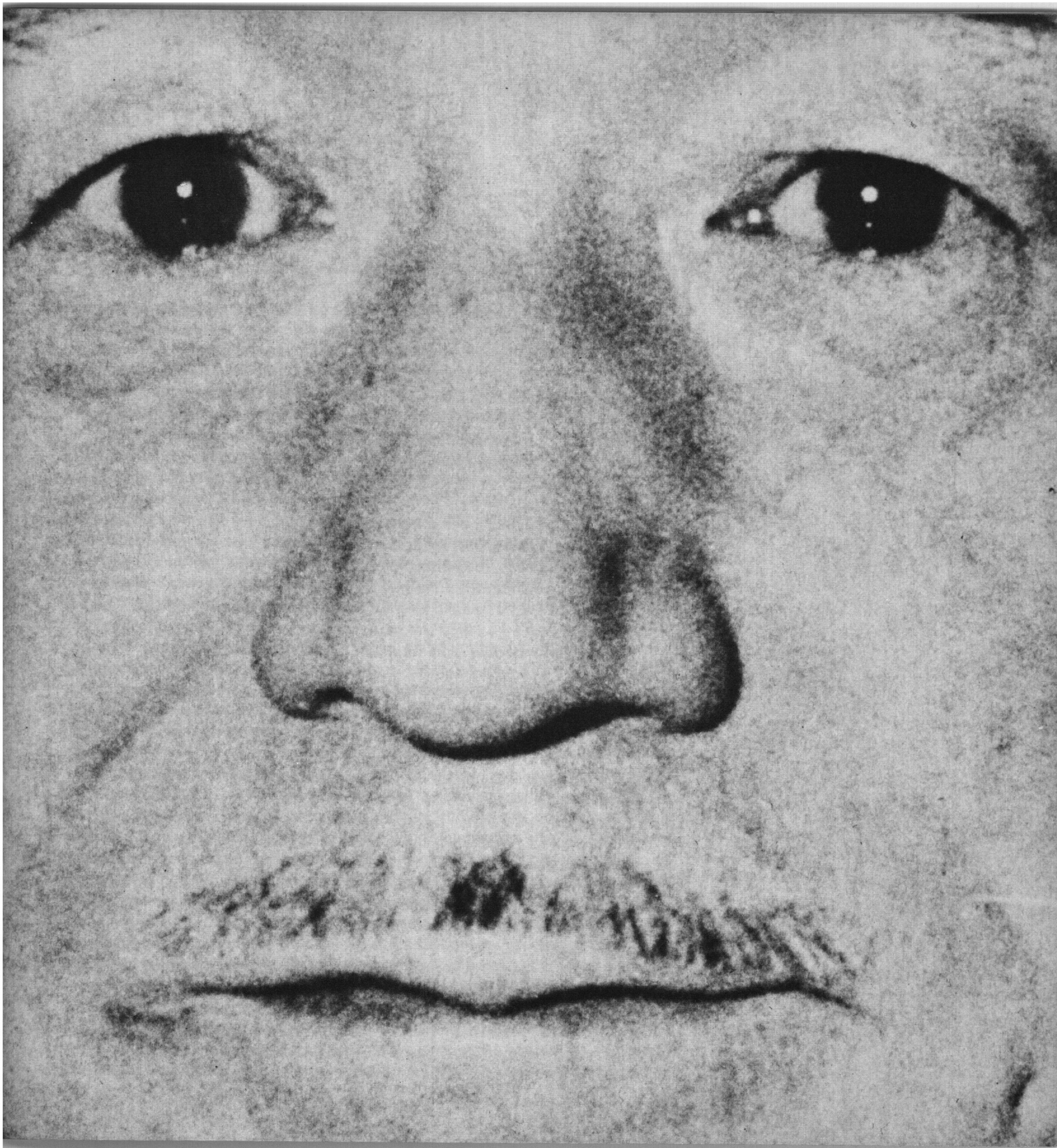
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Yasujiro Ozu, the man whom his kinsmen consider the most Japanese of all film directors, had but one major subject, the Japanese family, and but one major theme, its dissolution. The Japanese family in dissolution figures in every one of his fifty-three feature films. In his later pictures, the whole world exists in one family, the characters are family members rather than members of a society, and the ends of the earth seem no more distant than the outside of the house. Ozu's films are a kind of home-drama. In Asia, where the family remains the social unit, the home-drama has been refined far beyond the examples found, say on American radio or television. Ozu's home-drama, however, is of a special sort. He neither affirms the family . . . nor condemns it . . . Rather, though Ozu creates a world that is the family in one or another of its varied aspects, his focus is on its dissolution. There are few happy families in Ozu's films. Though the earlier pictures sometimes show difficulties overcome, almost all the mature films show the family members moving apart. Most of Ozu's characters are noticeably content with their lives, but there are always indications that the family will shortly cease to be what it has been. The daughter gets married and leaves the father or mother alone; the parents go off to live with one of the children; a mother or father dies, etc.

The father or mother sitting alone in the now-empty house is an image common enough in Ozu's films to serve as an epitome. These people are no longer themselves. We know they will somehow survive, but we also know at what cost. They are not bitter, they know this is the way of their world, but they are bereft. The reason they impel our sympathy is that they are neither victims of their own flaws, nor the prey of a badly organized society; they are the casualties of things as they are, the way that life is. And here we are, all of us, similar casualties.

Many of Ozu's titles are similar (*Early Spring*, *Late Spring*, *Late Autumn*, *An Autumn Afternoon*, etc.) and the general structure is, in the later films at any rate, invariable . . . Ozu was obviously not the kind of director who said all he wanted on one subject and then turned to another. He never said all he had to say about the Japanese family . . . As Ozu himself said, during the publicity campaign for his last film, *An Autumn Afternoon*, 'I always tell people that I don't make anything besides *tofu* (white bean curd, a common and essential ingredient in Japanese food), and that is because I am strictly a *tofu*-dealer.' Not only did Ozu often use the same actor in the same kind of role, playing, generally, the same kind of character (Setsuko Hara and Chishu Ryu are notable examples), he also used the same story line in various films. *A Story of Floating Weeds* is the same as *Floating Weeds*, *Late Spring* is very similar to *Late Autumn*, which in turn resembles *An Autumn Afternoon* . . . Character, too, is recurrent. The daughters in *Late Spring*, *Equinox Flower*, *Late Autumn*, and *An Autumn Afternoon* are,

though played by different actresses, essentially the same character involved with the same problem—whether or not to get married and leave home . . . There is often (*Late Spring*, *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*, *Tokyo Story*, *Early Spring*) an old salaried man due to retire who, drunk, thinks back over his life and questions it . . . Also, almost all his films include scenes with trains. *A Story of Floating Weeds*, *Equinox Flower*, and others all end in trains; *Tokyo Story*, *Early Spring* and others all have trains in their final scenes. One reason for all the trains is simply Ozu's liking for them. Another is that for the Japanese, if no longer for us, the train remains a vehicle of mystery and change. The mournful sound of a train in the distance, the idea of all these people being carried away to begin life anew elsewhere, the longing or nostalgia for travel—all these are still emotionally potent for the Japanese.

Similarities, then, are many, and differences few in the extraordinary limited world of the Ozu film. It is a small world, closed, governed by rules apparently inflexible, controlled by laws that are only to be deduced . . . Take, for example, the quality of restraint. Ozu's films are among the most restrained, the most limited, controlled, and restricted. From early in his career, for example, Ozu used only one kind of shot: a shot taken from the level of a person seated in traditional fashion on the *tatami* (a floormat). Whether indoors or out, the Ozu camera is always about three feet above the ground, and is rarely moved. In the early films, though there were numerous dolly shots, there were few pan shots. Likewise there were some fades in and out, but dissolves were rare. In the later films the camera is almost invariably immobile, and the only punctuation is the straight cut.

This traditional view is the view in repose . . . it is the attitude for listening, for watching. It is the same as the position from which one watches the Noh or the rising moon, from which one partakes of the tea ceremony or a cup of hot sake. It is the aesthetic attitude; it is the passive attitude . . . Ozu's method, like all poetic methods, is oblique. He does not confront emotion, he surprises it. Precisely, he restricts his vision in order to see more; he limits his world in order to transcend these limitations. His cinema is formal and the formality is that of poetry, the creation of an ordered context that destroys habit and familiarity, returning to each word, to each image, its original freshness and urgency. In all of this Ozu is close to the *sumi-e* ink drawing masters of Japan, to the masters of the haiku, and the *waka*. It is this quality to which the Japanese refer when they speak of Ozu as being 'most Japanese,' when they speak of his 'real Japanese flavor.'

More is implied in this description, however, than restraint in the service of art. The unique art of Ozu is very evident, but so is his common humanity. The Ozu character is among the most lifelike in cinema. Since character for its own sake

is always a major subject in the Ozu film and since it is but rarely that a character must work to forward the ends of the story the director is determined to tell us, we are often given that rare spectacle of a character existing for himself alone. This we observe with the delight that precise versimilitude always brings, and with a heightened awareness of the beauty and fragility of human beings.

The unexpected humanity of the Ozu film is made possible by the rigor of its construction. In an Ozu film, as in Japanese architecture, one sees all the supports, and all of them are equally essential. Like the carpenter, the director uses neither paint nor wallpaper; he uses, as it were, natural wood. The finished object one may measure, one may inspect, one may compare. But within this object, this film, as within the house, lives the human, the immeasurable, the non-functional. It is this combination of the static and the living, of the expected and the surprising, that makes the films of Ozu the memorable emotional experiences they are. Without the rigorous frame that is the director's technique, the intense humanity of the character could not be so completely revealed. Without the useless and loveable humanity of the Ozu character, the film's structure would degenerate into mere formalism. A similar duality occurs with respect to the sense of time in an Ozu film. His pictures are longer than most and at the same time have less 'story' than most . . . Yet Ozu's films are not slow. They create their own time and for the audience, drawn into Ozu's world, into a realm of purely psychological time, clock time ceases to exist. And what at first seems a world of stillness, of total inaction, is revealed as appearance. Beneath this seeming stillness one finds the potential violence present in any Japanese family, and also the quiet heroism of the Japanese faced with his own family. . . .

Thus, just as technique restricted comes to make us see more, so tempo slowed comes to make us feel more. The effect of both is the same: characters come alive in a manner rare in film. And both means are the same: the spectator is led into the film, is invited to infer and to deduce. He gives of himself and of his time, and in so doing he learns to appreciate. What remains after an Ozu film is the feeling that, if only an hour or two, you have seen the goodness and beauty of everyday things and everyday people; you have had experiences you cannot describe because only film, not words, can describe them; you have seen a few small, unforgettable actions, beautiful because real. You are left with a feeling of sadness, too, because you will see them no more. They are already gone. In the feeling of transience, of the mutability and beauty of a life, Ozu joins the greatest Japanese artists. It is here that we taste, undiluted and authentic, the Japanese flavor.

Donald Richie

A Note on Ozu

Yasujiro Ozu (1903-1963) was one of Japan's greatest and most prolific filmmakers. His early years, spent shuttling between parents and homes, led him to what would become the creative focus of his best work: family life. A poor student, Ozu received his true education in the dark, watching American movies. He greatly admired the films of John Ford, and said of Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*: "If you give Chaplin 62, then this film gets about 85."

Ozu began in the Japanese film industry as a camera operator, and soon became an assistant director. It was during this period that he met Kogo Noda, who was to be his lifelong collaborator. Almost from the start Ozu worked in a way unusual for the novice director. His subject was not the heroic Japanese past, but rather everyday Japanese life. Several of these early films were light and silly, cranked out to meet a demand for product. But it was not long before the Ozu style—the spare, seemingly casual style that would result in his reputation as “the most Japanese of Japanese directors”—began to take shape. Ozu made some 53 films. The characteristic Ozu film was of the *shomin-geki* or “home drama” genre, a film that had as its focus the vast lower middle class that was Japan's backbone. Ozu burst the confines of his form to produce in films like *Tokyo Story*, *Late Spring*, and *An Autumn Afternoon*, classics of both the Japanese and world cinema.



Tokyo Story

In *Tokyo Story*, an elderly couple, living in Shimonoseki in the south of Japan, decide to go to Tokyo to visit their two married children. They are somewhat disappointed at their reception there. Both the son and the daughter are busy with their own lives and send their parents off to a hot-springs resort, ostensibly as a treat, actually to get them out of the way. The only one at all nice to them is the widow of the son who was killed in the war. No sooner has the old couple returned home, however, than the children receive a telegram that the mother is sick. When they arrive back in Shimonoseki the mother is so ill that she can no longer recognize them. After the funeral the children rush back to Tokyo but the daughter-in-law stays on. She confesses that it is difficult for her to live as a widow, and the father advises her to get married again. Then—now alone—he sits in the empty house.

From this simple anecdote unfolds one of the greatest of all Japanese motion pictures. Ozu's style, now completely refined, utterly economical, creates a film which is unforgettable because it is so right, so true, and because it demands so much from its audience. Evasions of any sort are rare in an Ozu picture, but here there are none at all. Two generations, a simple story which allows all the characters to change places (and hence to show themselves), a pervading delineation of high summer, and the deceptively simple-appearing technique of the director combine to create a picture so Japanese and at the same time so personal—and hence so universal in its

appeal—that it becomes a masterpiece. Ozu, who was himself very fond of this picture, had little to say about it. After it won second prize at the Kinema Jumbo polls he said that “through the growth of both parents and children I described how the Japanese family system has begun to come apart.” Then he added, surprisingly, but in a very Ozu-like fashion: “Also, this is one of my most melodramatic pictures.”

Donald Richie

Yasujiro Ozu is often called a miniaturist, maybe because he didn't move the camera and because he dealt with domestic detail, but he was no more a miniaturist than Chekhov was. The observer who keeps quiet is the one who picks up the big storms, perhaps. *Tokyo Story* is a calm-surfaced tale of an aging provincial couple visiting their mildly ingrate children in Tokyo. By shunning plot, as usual, Ozu gives dense energy to story. The picture is *Lear* with the sting of rage drawn but without any feeling or extremity lost. The couple sense that the course of their past is being put to the test, and they find it wanting. Ozu always catches his characters at moments when they are driven to their limits. Life is difficult for most people, he says, and most people make a fair job of it. Ozu is obsessed with film's possibility of reporting the poetic truth of the actual. He is reality's artisan, and its connoisseur. Romantic love was never Ozu's interest; intimates' love, always. The impulses in his films are tender and complex. The firmness, pith, and humor of his films' smiling regard for his characters are together one of the manifest miracles of cinema.”

Penelope Gilliatt
The New Yorker

Tokyo Story
(*Tokyo Monogatari*)
Screenplay by Kogo Noda and
Yasujiro Ozu
With Chishu Ryu, Chieko Higashiyama,
and Setsuko Hara
1953, Black and White
134 minutes



Late Spring

Ozu's *Late Spring* . . . is the most beautiful Ozu movie I know . . . Ozu is a realist . . . with, as Donald Richie has accurately put it, a "flawless dedication to things as they are." *Late Spring* is contemporary domestic drama, domestic comedy in fact, about the problems of marrying off a dutiful daughter.

Ozu deals with the sadness that unavoidably attends a happy life . . . That Ozu doesn't move his camera, that he tends to shoot from one position (fairly close to the floor; the point of view of someone sitting on a tatami mat) and that he sharply cuts but never smoothly dissolves or fades from one shot to the next—all these are the peculiarities of a style that has received rather more attention than the purpose of the style itself. The peculiarities don't really matter as much for *Late Spring* as they do for some of Ozu's last films, in which he had chastened his technique to the point of self-abnegation. In *Late Spring* he still does move his camera when the action calls for it. And the lovely progressions of precisely cut shots have the effect of opening up a world full of everyday graces, as if through the pages of some incredibly privileged family snapshot album.

The names of many Ozu films, *The End of Summer*, *Good Morning, Tokyo*, *Twilight*, *An Autumn Afternoon* use the time of day or a season to indicate a time of life. But those names also do indicate a time of day, or a season; and a very special feeling for the natural season, contained in parks or gardens or, most wonderfully, felt from inside through an open window, is one of the things—unexpressed, almost unex-

pressible—that *Late Spring* is all about.

More immediately, *Late Spring* is about an aging professor, a widower, who lives outside Tokyo with his unmarried daughter, in a perfect harmony and contentment that he knows cannot last. He therefore persuades the girl to marry—an apparently suitable young man (whom we never see)—by convincing her that he means to remarry himself, that he doesn't need her any longer. But after the wedding (which we also never see) he admits to a classmate of his daughter that he has no intention of remarrying, that he has given up some of his happiness so that his daughter may earn a tougher kind of happiness in tune with the inescapable nature of things. And in tune with the inescapable nature of things, he is left alone at the end, the peelings of an apple, the remnants of his life, in his hand. The whole mood of *Late Spring* tends toward a deep and subtle appreciation of loss. But this is not a tearful movie. There is room for sadness, but not for tragedy or even much pity in the spirit of acceptance that pervades the work of Ozu . . . I have in mind such things as the patient, self-sufficient graciousness that surrounds his seated women, which you can see in almost any still taken from almost any Ozu movie; or a moment just before dusk in *Late Spring* when the old professor, perfectly at peace with himself and his surroundings, draws up his kimono, sits down on the floor, and serenely begins to clip his toenails.

Roger Greenspun
The New York Times

Late Spring
(*Banshun*)

Written by Kogo Noda and
Yasujiro Ozu
With Setsuko Hara and Chishu Ryu
1949, Black and White
107 minutes



The End of Summer

Of the films by Yasujiro Ozu that I have seen, *The End of Summer* is the best, the most subtle, the most ambitious and the most successful in achieving the blend of comic insight and tragic vision that informs this director's cinema. It is a late work (Ozu died in 1963, at the age of 60) and it tells several stories at once, touching upon a broad range of experience. It has a quality of luminous intelligence exceptional even in a career for which such intelligence was generally the controlling point of view.

The End of Summer deals with a Tokyo family that owns and operates a small brewery. The head of the family, Manbei, has pretty much retired, leaving the operation of the business to the husband of his second daughter, Fumiko. His eldest daughter, Akiko, and his youngest, Noriko, are on the verge of marriage. Akiko, the middle-aged widow of a professor, must decide whether to accept the steel-mill owner to whom her brother in law has introduced her. Noriko must choose between an acceptable young man whom her family would like her to marry and a poor instructor with whom she is in love.

Because old Manbei is devoting all his time to his rediscovered former mistress and her illegitimate daughter, whom he thinks is his, *The End of Summer* may be said to use the theme of love to tie together its story of three generations. In practical terms, each member of the family proves foolish, and yet each, in choosing for himself, is wise. It is easy to accept the romantic selfishness of the young girl and the romantic selflessness of the older

woman, who is so happy in the memory of her dead husband that she has no need to marry again. But the infatuation of the old man is an altogether tougher and more beautiful matter—allowing him to peer blissfully into the sagging face of his ancient mistress while she fondly lies: “You changed me from a girl into a woman.”

Although he rushes to embrace death, Manbei's story is happy, as is the story of almost everybody in *The End of Summer* who can choose to be in love. Such happiness, which seems to derive from an assurance as to one's destiny rather than from one's good fortune, suffuses *The End of Summer* and makes the experience of seeing it feel like a privileged introduction to the fullness of life.

Ozu's method, his stationary camera, his picturesque, almost pretty, compositions, his sharp cuts between shots, perfectly sustain this sense of fullness in terms of a brightly-colored, hard-edged lyricism that can by turn rise to moments of great brilliance or rest within the limits of domestic comedy. Ozu's brilliance, which is like nobody else's, can make use of domestic comedy—as when Manbei recovers from a near-fatal heart attack, and waddles off to the bathroom in one of the oddest and most satisfying crises of joy I have ever seen in a movie.

There is no sequence in *The End of Summer* more beautiful than that in which Akiko and Noriko, crouching by the water's edge, open to each other their commitments to an ideal of love. The women, the quiet lake, the playful conversation—crystallize into one of

those glorious and not so uncommon Ozu images, the steady contemplation of which is ecstasy.

Roger Greenspun
The New York Times

The End of Summer
(*Kohayagawa-ke no Aki*)
1961, Color
103 Minutes



An Autumn Afternoon

Oriental art in general and Zen art in particular aspire to the transcendent. Like primitive art, traditional Oriental art makes no distinction between the sacred and the secular . . . The films of Ozu exemplify the transcendental style in the East. In his films this style is natural, indigenous, and commercially successful, largely because of the Japanese culture itself. The concept of transcendental experience is so intrinsic to Japanese (and Oriental) culture, that Ozu was able both to develop the transcendental style, and to stay within the popular conventions of Japanese art. Ozu, often described as “the most Japanese of all directors”, gained respect as a genre director and critical and financial success—rewards which no director interested in transcendental style could expect to reap in the West.

Paul Schrader
Transcendental Style in Film

With *An Autumn Afternoon* Ozu completed his fifty-third and final film. It is the last panel in that great fresco which so completely captures Japan as it is . . . the simplicity of the picture is the result of a style brought to perfection. Nothing is wanting, nothing is extraneous. At the same time there is an extraordinary intensification in the film—it is autumn again, but now it is deep autumn. Winter was always near, but now it will be tomorrow. At the same time Ozu’s regard was never kinder, never wiser. There is a mellowness about this picture which is stronger than nostalgia.

Donald Richie

In a characteristically gentle story about a widower’s decision to marry off his only daughter, he turns a lovingly malicious eye on ultra-modern Japan, where golf on the rooftops is the thing; where women are still bartered in marriage, yet rule their men with tongues of fire; where the American way of life gives rise to rueful barroom speculation as to what might have been had *they* lost the war. Shot in lovely colors, *An Autumn Afternoon* is Ozu at his most breathtakingly assured. Not a single camera movement, a minimum of action within the frame, all our attention concentrated on a banked-up emotion in a tiny gesture—a puzzled glance, a hand putting a stray lock of hair into place; and every shot, reduced to its bare essentials—even a corridor empty but for a tin of polish—becomes a dazzling painter’s composition. The film closes on a strangely moving,

almost cathartic note of mingled grief, resignation, and tranquility, when Hirayama, alone at home after his self-sufficient younger son has gone to bed, breaks down and weeps quietly. Apart from one deeply poignant moment when the daughter realizes she cannot marry the man she loves, the tone of the film has hitherto been mainly light, often humorous, occasionally ribald. Nothing, apparently, has prepared us for the emotional depth of the last scene, yet it is a perfectly natural climax toward which the whole film has been imperceptibly moving through a mosaic of characters and incidents which interlock, sometimes obviously and sometimes obliquely to illuminate the underlying theme of loneliness.

Tom Milne
Sight and Sound

An Autumn Afternoon
(*Samma no Aji*)
Written by Kogo Noda and Ozu
With Chishu Ryu and Setsuko Hara
1962, Color
112 Minutes



A Story of Floating Weeds

Although the great Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu is admired here predominantly for his later sound films, *Tokyo Story*, *Late Spring*, etc., some critics prefer his pre-war period for its rough edges, more freewheeling style, and raucous humor. But one need not be a partisan either way to appreciate the beauties of this 1934 masterpiece, probably the pinnacle of Ozu's silent period. Japanese film authority Donald Richie considers it a milestone in the director's career, "the first of those eight-reel universes in which everything takes on a consistency somewhat greater than life."

The plot of *A Story of Floating Weeds* concerns a down-at-the-heels acting troupe that reaches the end of the line in a remote mountain town. There Kihahi, the leading actor, encounters his former mistress, mother of his illegitimate son, from whom his father's identity is concealed. It rains for days; the actors are stranded, idle. Kihahi's jealous wife enlists a young actress to seduce and corrupt her rival's son. But the designing girl ends up falling in love with her intended victim.

Ozu liked the story (which is loosely based on an American silent film called *The Barker*) so much that he remade it as a color film in 1959. The earlier version is sparer, shorter, simpler, and boasts a more vigorous performance by Takeshi Sakamoto in the lead. Both versions represent the most explicit lyricism in Ozu's career, the 1959 film with its somnolent, summer-struck harbor, and the 1934 film with its breezier vistas of forest and mountain. A lovely scene of father and son fishing

in a mountain stream, their poles swinging lazily in unison, expresses the bond between them more subtly and concisely than any amount of explicit exposition. Later the two young lovers meet in a nighttime ramble through a forest enchanted by moonlight.

But by no means is *A Story of Floating Weeds* all poetry and preciousness; in fact, it contains some of Ozu's most highly-charged dramatic confrontations. A bitter argument between husband and wife on a rainy street, the farewell dinner of the acting troupe, the violent showdown between father and son, and the final, grudging reconciliation in a deserted train station—these are all measures of the dramatic bite of one of the gentlest yet emotionally toughest of the world's great directors.

Martin Rubin
Film Curator
The N.Y. Cultural Center

A Story of Floating Weeds
(*Ukigusa Monogatari*)
1934, Black and White, Silent
89 Minutes



Equinox Flower

Mother: I heard you say you wouldn't worry so much if Setsuko had a boy friend, and now that she has one you disapprove. Your attitude is inconsistent.

Father: This is a father's love and you call it inconsistent.

Mother: I certainly do. If you love her, you'd take full responsibility, one way or the other. But you don't. You're inconsistent.

Father: Everyone is inconsistent now and then, except God. Life is full of inconsistencies . . . the sum total of all the inconsistencies of life is life itself.

The extract above, from the script of *Equinox Flower*, tells us something about the film and about Ozu's approach to life in general. Both parents, of course, are right. In Ozu's films as in life itself the seemingly antithetical live happily side by side. It is inconsistency which creates irony, and which also makes the father seem so human. Perhaps then, as Ozu so often indicates, it behooves us to regard humanity with irony; perhaps that is the only way to live in the world.

In *Equinox Flower*, made in 1958, Ozu showed an unusual sympathy for the younger generation, or at least those members of it who were in rebellion. The traditional daughter in *Late Spring* is quite different from the modern girls in these later films, yet, as Ozu said: "In this film I am, I suppose, more sympathetic with the parents. All the recent movies seem to deny their values and to approve the behavior of the young. . . . In this film the daughters seem modern enough, but really they are traditional. The father seems to be sensible enough and he gives good advice to other people, but when it comes to his own problems he says one thing and means another . . . he has raised his daughter and he worries about her marriage. She went and got engaged without telling him. He knows that her choice was good, but because he was neglected he feels somewhat injured and yet cannot totally oppose the marriage. It is this tension in the father that I wanted to show in the film."

The film consequently contains some implicit criticism of the Japanese family system, but no denigration of it.

Ozu never subjected the family system to the ironic treatment he gave, say, the social system. The completed film is so far from taking sides that it is impossible to call older or younger generations good or bad. It is a balanced picture of Japanese family life, made with loving irony.

Donald Richie

Equinox Flower
(*Higanbana*)
1958, Color
118 Minutes



I Was Born, But . . .

I started to make a film about children and ended with a film about grown-ups. While I had originally planned to make a fairly bright little story, it changed while I was working on it, and came out very dark. The company hadn't thought it would turn out this way. They were so unsure of it they delayed its release for two months.

Yasujiro Ozu on
I Was Born, But . . .

I Was Born, But . . . went on after that to win the Kinema Jumbo first prize for that year. Ozu's technique is of the simplest yet the most rigorous. He still considered sound something of a nuisance and was the last Japanese film director to enter into sound production, just as he was among the last to embrace color. His 1932 masterpiece, *I Was Born, But . . .*, a silent film with titles, is typical of his finest work, and at the same time shows the forming of his style. The theme or 'anecdote' is very strong. This comedy contrasts the world of the adult with the world of the child and finds the former lacking—yet, at the same time, recognizes that innocence must have an end. The theme is in the title: one is born . . . then the trouble begins.

A typical Japanese salaried-man steps one rung up the social ladder when he moves to the suburbs. His two little boys do not adapt so well. They fight with the neighborhood children, one of whom is the son of their father's boss. They want to know why their father has to curry favor with his boss. When he tells them that if he doesn't they won't eat, the two make the heroic decision to eat no more. . . . The elder, voicing a truth apparent only to the innocent, says that he makes better grades and is stronger than the boss' son, that if he has to work for him when he grows up, he might as well not go to school any more. But the boys are only children. Seduced by empty stomachs, their moment of truth over, they forget—life goes on: they are not yet ready for the problem awaiting them.

In this film Ozu brought together in almost perfect form the various elements which made up his style, his personal way of looking at the world. The picture is a *shomin-geki*, and the rigidity of Japanese society is well implied. It is about a family unit, whose members interest Ozu more than the unit. It is about children, who innocently reflect the falseness of an adult society. Ozu goes further, suggesting that such innocence cannot continue. Though the film is a comedy, it is a serious one; the two little boys will never again be the same. Later, Ozu would realize that innocence returns, and he would celebrate the somewhat battered simplicity of his older men who in this cold world have kept, though at great cost, a kind of purity. In *I Was Born, But . . .*, so bright, so funny, he had not yet found it necessary to realize that innocence can, in a way, be retained. . . .

Donald Richie

I Was Born, But . . .
(*Umarete wa Mita Keredo*)
1932, Black and White, Silent
89 Minutes



Late Autumn

People sometimes complicate the simplest things. Life, which seems complex, suddenly reveals itself as very simple—and I wanted to show that in this film. There was something else, too. It is easy to show drama on film; the actors laugh or cry, but this is only explanation. A director can really show what he wants without resorting to an appeal to the emotions. I want to make people feel without resorting to drama . . . it is very difficult. Here, in *Late Autumn*, I think I was fairly successful, but still the results are far from perfect.

Yasujiro Ozu on
Late Autumn

“I’m happy as I am”: you might not think that a radical sentence, but it’s the challenge hurled in Yasujiro Ozu’s marvelous *Late Autumn* by a young woman who’s just cheerfully announcing that she’s not ready for marriage. Her seniors respond with shocked determination and commit themselves to selecting a husband at once. This is a creature caught between the past and the present. Her modern self rejects the conception of marriage as a mere exercise in forbearance. She also devastates older listeners when she remarks that love and marriage don’t always go together. Yet, when facing the fact that her mother might embrace a new life, she’s horribly upset by the rift with old conventions.

Since Ozu concentrates so much on the interior consciousness, *Late Autumn* is closer to fiction than to film. As usual, Ozu uses a fairly stationary camera, which rests on the faces of those who are talking.

Love is hardly mentioned when the subject of marriage arises. But enormous affection between parents and children, and among old friends, is revealed as it rarely is on screen; often, it’s shown through the small jokes that intimates make at one another’s expense.

Finally, the daughter marries. The mother, asserting that she “can’t start from scratch all over again”, eludes the pressures from her well-wishers, and smiles at the solitude ahead of her. Beautifully acted throughout, especially by Setsuko Hara as the mother, and Yoko Tsukasa as the daughter, *Late Autumn* stresses that people can’t

forcibly control the lives of others, not even in the name of fond intentions.

Nora Sayre
The New York Times

Late Autumn
(*Akibiyori*)
Written by Kogo Noda and
Yasujiro Ozu
With Setsuko Hara and Chishu Ryu
1960, Color
127 Minutes



The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice

The *Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* was made in 1952 by the great Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu, who died in 1963. Ozu's 54 films were considered "too Japanese" to be appreciated in the West, but as his masterwork, *Tokyo Story*, revealed when it was shown here, Ozu was the most poetic and most universal of Japanese filmmakers. *Green Tea* is an exquisite, lovely movie, nearly as masterful as *Tokyo Story*. A middle-aged husband and wife are drifting apart: he is a solid, taciturn, country-born businessman while she is a kind of Japanese Marjorie Morningstar who is driven bitchy by boredom. She ridicules him to friends and scolds him for such benighted peasantries as eating rice flavored with green tea. Ozu's artistry in showing the slow, subtle decay of a marriage is beautifully realized. A wife's single tear contains all of sorrow, a young girl's impatiently tapping foot carries the force of a tantrum. Like John Ford in America, Ozu celebrates traditional values. When the couple's nubile niece rejects what she calls the "feudalism" of the *o-miai* (arranged marriage) in favor of choosing her own marriage, Ozu implies that the course of "romantic love" will be equally rocky. And it is Ozu himself speaking when the owner of a pinball parlor announces he will sell his business because the pinball machines—and the technological society they symbolize—reflect "decay of the national morale." One comes away from an Ozu film with a sense of nostalgia, of resigned sadness—and of serenity. The film's couple reaches a tentative reconciliation over a midnight bowl of

green tea over rice, and the husband remarks that the flavor is "simple and unpretentious; that's how marriage should be." That is also the recipe for Ozu's enduring art.

Arthur Cooper
Newsweek

All of the Ozu films we have seen in this country . . . have been social comedies, but they have been told entirely in terms of character. More than any of these other films, *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* looks as much like a social history as it does a classic Ozu work.

The movie is essentially a comedy, what the Japanese call a *tsuma-mono*, or wife film, about an upper-middle class marriage, one that has been arranged in the old-fashioned way and now is falling gently apart as the childless couple approach middle age.

She gives every indication of being a rather mean-spirited snob. Among other things, she sleeps apart from her husband in an awful American-style bedroom that seems to be constructed entirely of chintz. However, he gives every indication of being as thick-headed and boring as she says he is.

That is, at the beginning. The revelation—the surprise—of the film is *not* that they are eventually reconciled, but that they become such appealing characters, touched by a kind of nobility.

Vincent Canby
The New York Times

The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice
(*Ochazuke no Aji*)
1952, Black and White
115 Minutes



Early Spring

Although I hadn't made a white-collar story for a long time, I wanted to show the life of a man with such a job—his happiness over graduation and finally becoming a member of society, his hopes for the future gradually dissolving, his realizing that, even though he has worked for years, he has accomplished nothing. By showing his life over a period of time I wanted to bring out what you might call the pathos of such a life. It is the longest of my postwar films, but I tried to avoid anything that would be dramatic and to collect only casual scenes of everyday life, hoping in doing so that the audience would feel the sadness of this kind of life.

Yasujiro Ozu on *Early Spring*

He feels stifled: by his marriage, his dreary white-collar job—above all, by the fact that his life is unlikely ever to change. The scenario would be appropriate for an American or European movie of the seventies, but it happens to be set in Tokyo in 1956. Despite the Western clothes of that period—the women's long flaring skirts, high heels, pony tails, and abundant lipstick, the men's trim slacks and t-shirts—the late Yasujiro Ozu's magnificent *Early Spring* seems utterly fresh and contemporary. This modest classic also conveys the claustrophobia of office life better than any other film I've seen.

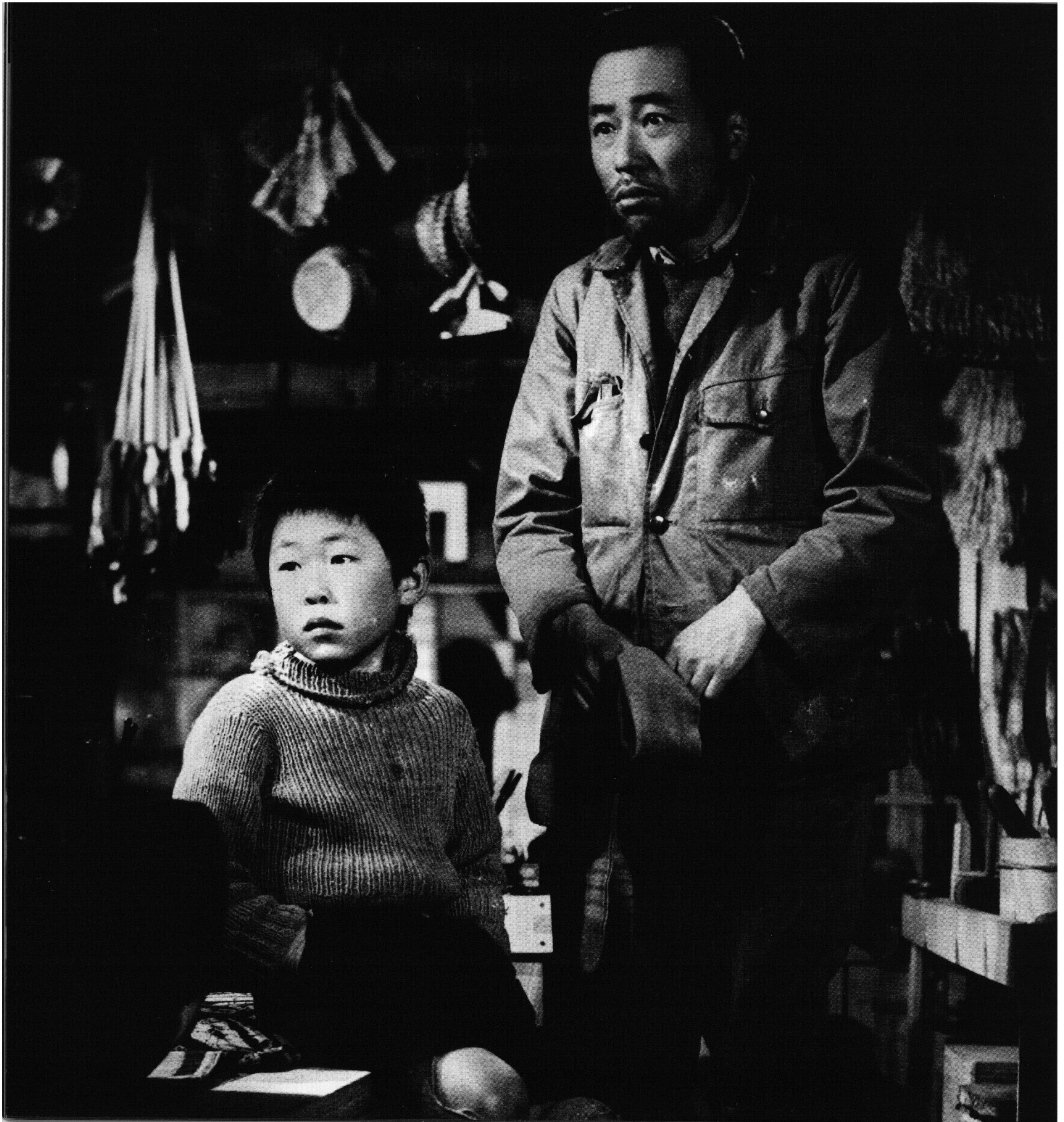
The quiet disgust with daily life is rapidly established as the young clerical worker lights a bleak pre-breakfast cigarette before facing the commuters' train. He's an austere, intensely reserved person; his wife is neat, practical, efficient—and almost as stoical as he is. Theirs was a love match, but now they seem quite indifferent to each other—talking across an empty space that widens steadily.

Throughout, Ozu finds dramatic depths in quiet, ordinary lives. And during the time that you spend with these people—the span of the movie—you really feel that you've come to know them well, to understand why their relationships do or don't develop. Their emotions or hidden instincts are brilliantly revealed through small details: embraced by his girl friend, the husband secretly rings a bell for a waitress in order to break the clinch; later, the wife's suppressed anger is distilled in the gesture with which she switches off a light.

Despite the self control that most of these individuals strive for, several repeat that they're very confused—a condition that appears to accompany the relentless economic worries of even the employed during the mid-fifties in Japan, when the war still seemed recent, and the boom was yet to come. With subtle precision, Ozu shows how personal and national anxieties seep through infinite lives. Yet this impeccably acted movie is far from depressing, since the filmmaker stresses that mistakes aren't irreversible. . . .

Nora Sayre
The New York Times

Early Spring
(*Soshun*)
1956, Black and White
145 Minutes



The Record of A Tenement Gentleman

“Even the moon is shadowed easily, let alone small beings.”

The Record of a Tenement Gentleman, Yasujiro Ozu's first postwar film, has been one of his most neglected, mainly because it has been unseeable, but also because whatever small reputation it enjoyed has been, atypically for Ozu, that of a socially-conscious thesis-film. But—unless one counts the final, ambiguous image—this simple, fable-like tale turns out to be as timeless and undidactic as any of the director's better-known films. One expects heavy, graphic descriptions of postwar Japan, and instead finds an austere, almost weightless vista of deserted streets, windblown newspapers, pagodas nearly transparent in the pale sunlight, and endless, desolate beaches.

One of Ozu's shortest films, it is also one of his most intense. The deep, detailed interiors—unusual for Ozu—and the pared-down narrative reflect an emotional concentration remarkable even for a director usually noted for his purity of style. The story deals with the relationship between an aging woman and an abandoned child she has dumped on her hands. The difficulties of their life together—the hostility of the woman and the exasperating gracelessness of the child—eliminate the obvious sentimentality inherent in the plot. But the bittersweet resolution is all the more moving for it, as parent-figure and child-figure go their separate ways without ever quite becoming parent and child. Whatever real social dimension the film achieves at the end results from the characters' painstaking realization—and loss—of these universal roles, and the final plea for war

orphans becomes as much a cry for childless women as one for motherless children.

Largely responsible for the film's success is the remarkable central performance of Choko Iida, one of the cinema's few deep excursions into that period of a woman's life too old for romance and motherhood but still too early to be included in the stock gallery of old lady character-acting. One should also mention Chishu Ryu, Ozu's actor of actors, who appears here in one of his drollest roles as an ex-peep-show-operator-turned-astrologer, and some of the funniest and most elaborate examples of Ozu's bathroom humor, a particular fascination of the director throughout his career.

Martin Rubin

The Record of a Tenement Gentleman
(*Nagaya Shinshi Roku*)
With Chishu Ryu
1947, Black and White
72 Minutes