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The Japanese Film
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Yukinojo Hengei (The Revenge of Yukinojo) - ACTOR'S REVENGE

A Daiei Production, 1963. Directed by Kon Ichikawa. Written by Natto Wada after the original story by Otokichi Mikami and based on a former script by Ito Daisuke and Tennenosuke Kinugasa. Photographed by Setsuo Kobayashi. Art direction by Yoshio Nishioka. Music by Yasushi Akutagawa. With Kazuo Hasegawa in the double role of Yukinojo and Yamitaro; Fujiko Yamamoto as Ohatsu; Ayako Wakao as Namiji; Raizo Ichikawa as Hirutaro; Shintaro Katsu as Hoin. 114 minutes. Courtesy of the Japan Film Library Council.

True or not, the story goes that Ichikawa, never on very good terms with his producing company, was particularly in bad with them after the the 1962 Hakai, which had cost a lot of money and brought in little. More, it would seem, as punishment than anything else, the company decided to make him next do a new version of Yukinojo. This tired melodrama, old-fashioned when it originally appeared back in the 'twenties, was, of course, just the film not for Ichikawa to do -- it was like asking Bunuel to remake Stella Dallas. Nonetheless, he saw possibilities in it. He and his wife, Natto Wada, examined the creaking scenario and found it so bad as to be good. In casting he insisted upon Kazuo Hasegawa, in films almost from their inception, an aging, but still popular matinee idol, and a very talented if occasionally over emotional actor. Then he set out, as he said, to see what the movies could do.

He produced among other things a tour-de-force, willfully scrambled stage and screen, tried every color experiment he could think of, and created one of the most visually entertaining films ever to come from Japan. At the same time, however, he made a very disturbing film. The love scenes are astonishing with the aging but dignified Hasegawa playing a man playing a woman to the young Ayako Wakao. The innuendo, always to be inferred, gives all of these scenes an ambivalent edge which, intended or not, makes them fairly unforgettable. Finally, with the spirit of "camp" never far away, never being certain whether Hasegawa is being made a fool of or is giving a great performance, one begins to feel little by little the pathos and terror which must have always lurked in this hackneyed little story.

Ichikawa would, it must be said, deny all of the above. He maintains that he loved making Yukinojo and such slyness as this was none of his intent. One might add that Japanese audiences disliked the picture and that, under the title, An Actor's Revenge, it is very popular in Europe, if relatively unknown in America.

D.R.