

## Document Citation

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Cinema, the newest and most powerful of all the arts, has an unsurpassed capacity for realistic description on the one hand, and on the other (when in the hands of an individual artist rather than controlled by the industrial multitude), it can be an instrument of astonishing expressive power.

DRUNKEN ANGEL, a film by the Japanese master, Akira Kurosawa, represents both dimensions in cinema-- the realistic and the poetic. On the surface, the film is delightfully old-fashioned, reminding us of the host of gangster movies which poured out of Hollywood during the 1930's. Matsunaga is an underworld figure to compare with those played by Jimmy Cagney, George Raft and Humphry Bogart... a good guy who somehow went wrong. The style is realistic, with a de-romanticizing of Japan such as one may never again see in a Japanese film. There are no Samurai, no picture post-card views of mountains or exquisite interiors, no lovely girls playing the Koto. We see instead, disease, filth, rubbish and slums... a Japanese city as it actually was following the end of World War II. We are given to understand that parts of the city photographed have recovered ~~xxxxxx~~ and are thriving, but the doctor around whom the plot centers has chosen to work where he is needed most... in a metropolitan "dead end," poisoned by bacilli and infested by human vermin.

How can poetry emerge from such an atmosphere?

Kurosawa had been given a routine assignment by the Toho Studios, but he had already won enough independence to take part in preparation of the scenario. So, instead of a romantic interest (touched on briefly in two scenes between Chieko Nakakita and Toshiro Mifune), Kurosawa substituted a struggle between the dissolute but stubborn doctor and the self-destructiveness of the gangster.

More exciting, however, is the poetic tension which Kurosawa has created between the rapid-moving story and the highly suggestive character of his images. DRUNKEN ANGEL has often been cited as a near-allegory of post-war Japan and it is not difficult to see in the return of Okada, in such western influences as the music and mannerism of Matsunaga's "territory" and in the convalescing school girl, strong suggestions of the plight of post-war Japanese society. There is considerable temptation to interpret these symbols, especially in the light of the highly suggestive dialogue, but to do so would be to rob the film of its first intention...to tell a story in a dramatically compelling way. It is much easier and more relevant to point out the specific images which support the more general expressive intention of the film-maker. A broken doll floating on an oil-covered pond, according to Anderson and Richie (The Japanese Film), "suggests the corruption of innocence, which is one of the picture's main themes." Matsunaga dreams of his own death and we see him, at the seashore, breaking open a coffin with an axe. He is horrified to discover his own ragged corpse within, and in poetic but agonized slow-motion he tries to outrun his death, which sprints after him with all the immediacy of an unwished-for "reality." Later, Matsunaga is similarly slowed by an overturned bucket of paint and cannot escape.

Kurosawa's ability to extract metaphor from images of reality was, no doubt, heightened by the limitations which his assignment placed upon him. But no artist works without limitations and it is clear that DRUNKEN ANGEL was a project that Kurosawa enjoyed enormously.

-----Philip Chamberlin