

## Document Citation

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THIRTY-THIRD SEASON  
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ST. LAWRENCE CENTRE FOR THE ARTS

UGETSU MONOGATARI (Tales of the Pale and Silvery Moon After the Rain)  
Japan 1953 96 minutes b/w 35 mm

Production Company: Daiei. Producer: Masaichi Nagata. Director: Kenji Mizoguchi.  
Screenplay: Matsutaro Kawaguchi and Yoshikata Yoda adapted from "The House Amid  
the Thickets" and "The Lust of the White Serpent", from Ugetsu Monogatari by Ueda  
Akinari. Art Director: Kisaku Itoh. Settings: Uichiro Yamamoto. Musical  
Director: Fumio Hayasaka. Sound: Iwao Otani. Historical Research: Kusune  
Kaisho.

Cast: Machiko Kyo (Lady Wasaka); Masayuki Mori (Genjuro, the potter); Kinuys Tanaka  
(Miyagi, his wife); Sakae Ozawa (Tobei, the farmer); Mitsuko Mito (Ohama, his  
wife); Sugisaku Aoyama (the high priest); Ryosuke Kagawa (the village  
master).

Ueda Akinari's Ugetsu Monogatari is a classic collection of nine poetic short  
stories dealing with the supernatural. Though first published in 1776, the work  
continues to have the kind of popular appeal that Akinari sought for his tales  
which entertain but also embody a philosophically elaborate view of man and morals  
in society. "U" means "rain" and "getsu" means "moon", while "monogatari" means  
"stories." Obviously, a literal translation of "ugetsu monogatari" as rain moon  
stories or rainy moon stories would miss the presentational symbolism of the title.  
In the introduction to his translation of Ugetsu Monogatari Zolbrod (1974)  
discusses the meaning of the title from a number of perspectives unlikely to be  
available to the English reader, one of which is the presentational symbolism of  
poetry. "'Rain' and 'moon' are contrasting qualities. The first implies life,  
love, youth, passion, and innocence--in Yeats's terms, 'The young with one another  
in their arms.' The moon, that coolest of heavenly bodies, on the other hand con-  
notes grief and sorrow and stands for wisdom, maturity, and enlightenment.  
Together, rain and moon suggest a movement from innocence to experience. In the  
end the idea of moon gains ascendancy, as youthful ardour is mitigated by wisdom"  
(p. 21). This poetic meaning of the title is equally relevant to Kenji Mizoguchi's  
UGETSU MONOGATARI.

The nine short stories of Ugetsu Monogatari are set at widely varying times  
between the early tenth century and the late seventeenth or early eighteenth  
century. Only "The Lust of the White Serpent" has no explicit historical time, and  
it was adapted to form the central story in UGETSU. The splitting of another story  
to form a framing story for the film reflects the structure which Kurosawa had  
developed three years earlier for RASHOMON (1950). Both RASHOMON and UGETSU sim-  
plify the short stories from which their central stories were adapted, and place  
the main action of their framing stories at the end in order to emphasize their  
moral themes. In the case of Mizoguchi's UGETSU the moral theme is the same as  
that of Akinari's Ugetsu Monogatari, while Kurosawa rejects the cynical view of  
Akutagwa's "The Rasha Gate" from which he evolved the framing story of RASHOMON.

Between 1922, when he was 24 years old, and his death in 1956, Kenji  
Mizoguchi made 88 films. UGETSU MONOGATARI was his 81st film. His reputation in  
the West is based almost exclusively on his later films which suggest a preoccupa-  
tion with women and their psycho-social plight, though the women sometimes redeem  
men through their personal sacrifice. In these films he is particularly adept in  
developing the kind of historical drama called "jidai-geki" (these are costume

films set during the feudal period before the Meiji Era which began in 1867), e.g., PICTURE OF MADAME YUKI (1950) shown by TFS 10 April 1978, THE LIFE OF OHARU (1952) shown by TFS 4 October 1976, UGETSU MONOGATARI (1953), and SANSHO THE BAILIFF (1954) shown by TFS 28 January 1980. His films having a contemporary setting, which have been available to Western audiences, display the same thematic preoccupation, e.g., STREET OF SHAME (1956) shown by TFS 31 January 1966. According to Donald Richie, Mizoguchi's reputation in Japan is one of extreme eclecticism, however, it is almost impossible to comprehend such a reputation on the basis of the small proportion of his total work which has been available in the West.

The films of Mizoguchi which have been available in the West may constitute a very selective and non-representative sample of his overall work; however, on the basis of these, it seems impossible to deny that his recurrent theme is the status/role of women. He has an astutely developed empathy for his female characters which is probably shown to its best advantage in THE LIFE OF OHARU, but is interestingly manifested in UGETSU.

In addition to this thematic consistency, these films have a visual style which manifest considerable consistency but which is not discernibly eclectic. There is an evident concern with both pictorial composition and emotional tone which never violates a pervasive sense of realism. In the service of his somewhat painterly approach to the camera, he manifests a predilection for long shots, and he tends to employ a single camera set-up for each scene. He frequently uses dissolves rather than cuts. His approach to camera movement is dominated by gentle pans and crane shots. The conjunction of these characteristics is the locus of a pervasive sense of harmony and a kind of resignation. (Even though Kurosawa esteemed Mizoguchi more than any other Japanese director, he has commented that Mizoguchi could not handle scenes of swift and violent action and that in UGETSU "when you get to the war scenes it just isn't war" (The Films of Akira Kurosawa, 1970, p.97).)

Although Mizoguchi's protagonists in UGETSU are presumably the potter and the farmer who seek a worldly success that proves to be ephemeral, it is his women that most closely articulate with the style of the film. Both the narrative and the cinematic style of UGETSU emphasize harmony almost to the point of tranquility. Consistent with this, the characters of the women are both more rapidly established and more fully explored.

Both Lady Wasaka and the potter's wife return as ghosts to seek that which they could not attain in life. They lived their lives as they were supposed to and it is only as ghosts freed from social restraint that they live their lives as they would have had them be.

Ghosts figure in a number of Japanese films, and they display a sensibility to ghosts that is quite different than that which informs most Western treatments of ghosts. If one were to name English language films that represent the quintessence of ghosts, one might cite THE INNOCENTS (1961) and THE HAUNTING (1963) shown by TFS on 1 December 1980. In contrast UGETSU is an extremely fine example of the Japanese sensibility to ghosts. The well known KWAIDAN (1964) also vividly exemplifies this different sensibility to ghosts. There is a remarkable similarity between the last ghost sequences in UGETSU and the first ghost story in KWAIDAN, both films also contain a depiction of the female ghost as seductress. All in all, Japanese ghosts are less frightening and more benign than Western ghosts. Japanese ghosts are quite varied but they are never without motive as Western ghosts frequently are. They are typically more tied to history and frequently they figure in a moral tale as they do in UGETSU.