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Portrait of Madame Yuki

Kenji Mizoguchi (Japan, 1950)

(*Yuki Fujin Ezu*). The first of three consecutive films (the others are *Miss Oyu* and *The Lady of Musashino*) Mizoguchi made about women of the privileged classes, none of which were successful either critically or commercially when first released, though all are fascinating psychological portraits. Though decorous by today's standards, *Madame Yuki* was considered extremely erotic for its portrayal of a woman "in love with the sex act itself." Yuki, the only daughter of a once-noble family, is married to a businessman whom she despises, though his sexual power attracts her hopelessly. The young assistant to whom she is drawn is too weak and indecisive to take any action of his own. In despair, she drowns herself in a mist-shrouded lake and it falls to a female servant to deliver an epithet of cowardice on her mistress.

"*Madame Yuki* is one of Mizoguchi's most elliptical films: the narrative unfolds in small bits and pieces, often as seen through Yuki's servants. The viewer's first glimpse of the sexual relationship between Yuki and her husband, for example, is the servant's horrified reaction to a bedroom in disarray, only a tiny portion of which is visible on the screen. The film is characterized by this sort of partial, indirect visibility, a quality emphasized by its many camera shots through curtains, gauze drapery, or leafy branches." --

David Owens

Written by Yoshikata Yoda, Kazuro Funabashi, from a serialized novel by Seiichi Funabashi. Photographed by Joji Ohara. With Michiyo Kogure, Ken Uehara, Eijiro Yanagi. (86 or 84 ?mins, In Japanese with English subtitles, B&W?, mm, Print from Toho International)