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Thursday, May 6 Screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda in Person!

UGETSU MONOGATARI 7:30

"Admired at the time of the Venice Festival, UGETSU MONOGATARI is Kenji Mizoguchi's masterpiece, and one which ranks him on equal terms with Griffith, Eisenstein, and Renoir. The action takes place at the end of the 16th Century, during the time of the civil wars. It tells the story of Genjuro, a humble country potter who is bewitched by the beautiful Wakasa, and of his brother-in-law, a vain, glorious brute who dreams of military prowess. After many disappointments in the city, they both return home to spend the rest of their lives in the fields."

"Everything which made the power and magnificence of CHIKAMATSU MONOGATARI, the cool cruelty of PICTURE OF MADAME YUKI, the jovial bawdry of STREET OF SHAME, the tenderness of NANIWA ELEGY, is here combined and the effect increased a thousandfold. It is DON QUIXOTE, THE ODYSSEY AND JUDE THE OBSCURE rolled into one. An hour and a half of film which seems to last an eternity. Subtlety of mise-en-scene is here carried to its highest degree. Mizoguchi is probably the only director in the world who dares to make systematic use of 180-degree shots and reaction shots. But what in another director would be striving for effect, with him is simply natural movement arising out of the importance he accords to the decor and the position the actors occupy within it."

"Let me quote two examples of technical conjuring tricks which are the acme of art. Genjuro is bathing with the fatal enchantress who has caught him in her net; the camera leaves the rock pool where they are disporting themselves, pans along the overflow which becomes a stream disappearing into the fields; at this point there is a swift dissolve to the furrows, other furrows seem to take their place, the camera continues tranquilly on its way, rises, and discovers a vast plain, then a garden in which we discover the two lovers again, a few months later, enjoying a picnic. Only masters of the cinema can make use of a dissolve to create a feeling which is here the very Proustian one of pleasure and regrets."

"Another example. Having killed the enchantress, Genjuro returns home. He does not know that his loving wife, Miyagi, is dead. He enters, looks in all the rooms, the camera panning with him. He moves from one room to the next, still followed by the camera. He goes out, the camera leaves him, returns to the room and frames Miyagi, in flesh and blood, just at the moment when Genjuro comes in again and sees her, believing (as we do) that he didn't look properly and that his gentle wife is really alive."

"The art of Kenji Mizoguchi is to prove that real life is at one and the same time elsewhere and yet here, in its strange and radiant beauty." (Jean-Luc Godard, 1958)

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi, written by Yoshikata Yoda and Matsutaro Kawagushi, based on Uyeda Akinari's collection of Gothic tales (1776). With Machiko Kyo, Masayuki Mori, Kinuyo Tanaka, Mitsuko Mito, Sakae Ozawa. (1953, 96 mins, 35mm, English titles, Print from PFA Collection).

Thursday, May 6 Screenwriter Yoshikata Yoda in Person!

GION FESTIVAL MUSIC (GION BAYASHI) 9:30

A young geisha rebels against her environment, encouraged by her older sister, also a geisha, who thinks herself too far gone to change her way of life. Yet the older woman resists in her own way, refusing to become a common prostitute, the lot of many geishas after the war. The younger, soon lost in the upside-down world of the postwar geisha, is actually the daughter of a former patron of the elder geisha; their mutual sacrifices form a very severe criticism of the geisha tradition.

This remake of the 1936 masterpiece SISTERS OF GION (GION NO SHIMAI) is almost completely unknown in America. In Japan, however, the film was regarded as superior to the director's other work of that year (UGETSU MONOGATARI) and as his most fully realized depiction of geisha life.

In her 1964 book on Mizoguchi, the Vietnamese critic Ve-Ho describes the film in the following terms: "The changes in the screenplay serve to simplify the plot, and the story no longer has the sad and shocking ending of SISTERS OF GION. The geishas' condition is still precarious and pitiful, but Mizoguchi no longer has the impassioned attitude that he had in the earlier film. In GION FESTIVAL MUSIC he shows profound compassion, infinite tenderness, and calm serenity. In comparing the two works, we can see how far the man and the artist have come. The first film, while dealing with the drama of two geishas, is concerned essentially with their social condition, while the second is enriched with the lived experience which has matured its author since that time. The fate of his characters is examined by a man who has understood and then accepted the profound meaning of the human condition." --translated by Peter Scarlet

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi, Written by Yoshikata Yoda and Matsutaro Kawagushi, With Michiyo Kogure, Ayako Wakao, Eitaro Shindo, Ichiro Sugai. (1953, 85 min, 35mm, French titles with English voice translation provided, Print Courtesy of Japan Film Library Council)