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NATIONAL FILM THEATRE Programme notes

JAPANESE CINEMA - WOMEN IN SOCIETY

Toyoda Shiro

MARITAL RELATIONS (Meoto Zenzai)

Director:	Shiro Toyoda
Screenplay:	Toshio Yasumi
Based on the novel by:	Sekunosuke Oda
Photography:	Mitsuo Miura
Art Director:	Kisaku Ito
Music:	Dan Ikuma

CAST:

Ryukichi	Hisaya Morishige
Choko	Chikage Awashima
Father	Makoto Kobori
Mitsuko	Keiko Morikawa

with

Yoko Tsukasa, Chieko Naniwa.

1955

Japan

Toho

Shiro Toyoda (born 1906)

While still a boy, Shiro Toyoda decided to become a playwright. Fascinated by the theatre, he read drama, studied theatrical history, and went to plays whenever he could. Wanting to become a part of the theatrical world, he asked a friend to introduce him to someone in the profession. The best the friend could do was Eizo Tanaka, a film director whose connection with the stage was then tenuous. Still, this was better than nothing, and so the young Toyoda called on the great man. He was told to start writing film scripts: they were easier than plays and, besides, said Tanaka, he could learn all he needed to know about films in half a year. When the half year was over, Toyoda had begun to find the films so interesting that he forgot all about playwriting. Entering the Shochiku Tokyo studios in 1925, he became an assistant to Yasujiro Shimazu when his chief assistant, Heinosuke Gosho, was promoted to director. As a result, Toyoda's original infatuation with the theatre vanished and in its place grew his love for the motion pictures.

... It was, in particular, the actors who attracted him to the stage; as a film director, it is his concern for the actor and the art of acting that has created his style and accounts for much of the strength of a Toyoda film. He personally believes that casting is the most important element in a film, that in it lies the key to success. He has consequently long insisted upon the right to cast his own pictures ... He has become known as an actor's director and, certainly, he can obtain performances which other directors cannot.

"What is important," says Toyoda, "is the unity of the actors' playing - everything must be in the same style. Casting is not just the director's concern. His selection must also please the scenarist and the cameraman..." Once he has cast the person best for the role, Toyoda achieves what he wants by merely guiding and suggesting. "It is often better for an actor to draw on his imagination in creating a role than to rely on actual experiences. In addition to the danger of being too literal, if you know too much about the reality of a character, you will lose the courage necessary to create that character." For this reason, Toyoda is rather suspicious of pre-production rehearsals. Sometimes he uses them, sometimes he does not. Usually there is only a brief reading of the parts.

-P.T.O.-

The real work begins on the shooting stage. In this way he creates the feeling of spontaneity which he requires and is so admirably presented in such films as WILD GEESE and MARITAL RELATIONS.

He reveals character by making his actors show what they feel. Though unusually dependent upon literary adaptations for his vehicles, he is by no means dependent upon the spoken word. His main concern is not with what his characters say but with what they show; his constant goal is rendering visible the psychology of his characters. Thus his films are filled with purely visual revelations of character ... This interest in showing human character has been Toyoda's from the very first film. In the 1929 PAINTED LIPS, he opened every sequence not with the then-mandatory long-shot but with a close-up, since he wanted to show what was happening on the face...

The best performance in the world will count as nothing unless the director gives it its proper form, creating from it the single shots and sequences which make up the grammar of the film. Hence, ... when studying a script he breaks down all of the scenes into shots and then decides upon the value of each one. He works out his continuity in advance and lets the actors know what it will be. He often constructs charts, drawings, graphs, anything to get his ideas across. He believes that "every motion, every emotion, must be planned so that the total film has a place for it." Toyoda first shoots the entire scene in one master-shot. Thus the actor plays the scene in its entirety and can build up emotion in a natural manner. Then when the necessary short shots, repeating the master-shot actions, are inserted, there is much stronger continuity of mood and expression.

... Toyoda's entire career has been one of close and thoughtful collaboration. From his scenarist, his cameraman, and his actors, he is determined to draw the very best and in this he is a "director" in the very best sense of the word: he regulates, he guides, he trains, he gives directions. This attitude is entirely responsible for the excellence of the Toyoda film, its fine polish, its expert craftsmanship, and its depth. He leaves his imprint on everything he touches and precisely what this imprint consists of was perhaps best expressed by Akira Kurosawa, upon seeing Toyoda's section of the omnibus FOUR LOVE STORIES, for which Kurosawa had written the script. Kurosawa did not believe his script had been used. He almost did not recognise it. Then he went back to Toyoda, still in the screening-room, and said: "Now I see what you've done. I understand now. I described the love of these young people merely psychologically; but you've described it physiologically."

- from The Japanese Film by Joseph I. Anderson and Donald Richie -

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