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I WAS BORN BUT... (Umarete wa mita keredo), 1932, silent, 89 minutes

Screenplay: Akira Fushimi. Photography and Editing: Hideo Shigebara.
Set Design: Takejiro Tsunoda and Yoshio Kimura.

Cast: Tatsuo Saito (Father), Mitsuko Yoshikawa (Mother), Hideo Sugawara (elder brother), Tomio "Tokkankozo" Aoki (younger brother), Takeshi Sakamoto (the boss), Seiichi Kato (his son, Taro), Shoichi Kofujita (the delivery boy).

AN AUTUMN AFTERNOON (Samma no aji), 1962, color, 112 minutes

Screenplay: Kogo Noda and Yasujiro Ozu. Photography: Yuharu Atsuta.
Art Direction: Tatsuo Hamada. Music: Takanobu Saito.

Cast: Shima Iwashita (Michiko Hirayama), Chishu Ryu (her father, Shuhei), Mariko Okada (Akiko), Keiji Sada (Koichi), Shinichiro Mikami (Kazuo), Nobuo Nakamura (Kawai), Kuniko Miyake (Mrs. Kawai), Ryuji Kita (Horie), Michiyo Tamaki (his bride, Tamako), Teruo Yoshida (Miura), Eijiro Tono (Sakuma, the old teacher), Noriko Maki (Fusako Taguchi), Kyoko Kishida (the bar "madame"), Toyo Takahashi (the restaurant proprietor), Daisuke Kato (Sakamoto, Hirayama's petty officer), Shinobu Asaji (Yoko Sasaki), Haruko Sugimura (Mrs. Sakuma).

In I Was Born But... an ambitious office worker moves his family to the suburbs simply to be near his boss' residence. His two sons, who must adjust to a new school and new playmates, pass quickly through the rituals of membership in the neighborhood gang. Confounded when told they must be nice to the boss' son prissy son, a member of the gang completely under their power, they go on a hunger strike in protest against their father's obsequious behavior. Their ultimate recognition of the politics of adult behavior marks the end of their innocence.

I Was Born But... won for Ozu the first of three consecutive Kinema Junpo prizes as best film of the year, all for silent films, though the industry was rapidly turning to talking pictures. "With everyone everywhere rushing into sound, I wanted to stage a last-ditch struggle for the silent film. I knew talkies would win when it was all over, but I wanted to hold off until the end so as to show how good silent films could be." He proved they could be very good indeed.

Thirty years later in An Autumn Afternoon Ozu's concerns were the same, but he had pared down his techniques. The thirty-ish parents of I Was Born But..., who were concerned for the future of their school-age sons, are now sixty-ish and concerned about their daughters' marriages and their own loneliness. The youthful protagonists of the earlier film were chiefly occupied with a struggle for power within their neighborhood gang. The boys disguised as old men in the later film are preoccupied with potency of a different sort.

The energetic kids fairly propelled Ozu's camera through numerous tracking shots in Born. By Autumn the camera has become still, a passive observer of its cronies awash in beer, whisky, and memories.

Both of these films are distributed by Dan Talbot's New Yorker Films, as are nine other films in this series. These eleven films comprise our first six Friday double features. The fact that New Yorker has fully one-third of Ozu's 32 extant complete features is an important reason Americans have become as fondly familiar with Ozu as they have.

John Simon's essay on An Autumn Afternoon is reprinted in this month's Japan Society Newsletter.