

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Kenji Mizoguchi</b>
Author(s)	Tony Rayns Ken Wlaschin
Source	<i>National Film Theatre (London, England)</i>
Date	1978 May 27
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	26-27
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	Mizoguchi, Kenji (1898-1956), Tokyo, Japan
Film Subjects	Orizuru Osen (The downfall of Osen), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1935 Miyamoto Musashi (Musashi Miyamoto), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1944 Maria no oyuki (Oyuki the madonna), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1935 Joyû Sumako no koi (The love of Sumako the actress), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1947 Gubijinsô (Poppy), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1935 Uwasa no onna (A woman of rumor), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1954 Naniwa erejî (Osaka elegy), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1936 Josei no shôri (The victory of women), Mizoguchi, Kenji, 1946



# Kenji Mizoguchi

A small season is intended simply to allow members another opportunity to see some of the earlier and rarer films by the Japanese master Kenji Mizoguchi which were featured in our highly successful extensive retrospective in January. All of these prints have been acquired by the NFT on a permanent basis so that we can continue to screen the early work of a director

many people consider among the greatest in cinema history. For those who know only the later films of Mizoguchi, such as *Ugetsu*, *Monogatari* and *Sansho Dayu*, these early films will be of extra interest. The condition of some of these early prints is far from perfect but their effectiveness as films is not marred.—K.W.



Sat 27 May 6.15  
**The Downfall** (Orizuru Osen)

A mid-30s film in which Mizoguchi's camera mastery can be fully discerned – the dark interiors with characters isolated in pools of light and the marvellous station scene with the camera tracking along rainy windows and half-obscured faces has all the chiaroscuro of a Gregg Toland. Sometimes described as Mizoguchi's first "pure" Meiji period film, it describes a woman whose beauty brings her misfortune. In fact, the action, placed round an enormous flashback, ends with one of the director's most terrifying scenes. *Japan 1934. 93 mins.*



Sat 27 May 8.30  
**Oyuki, The Virgin** (Maria no Oyuki)

Mizoguchi dismissed this transposition of *Boule de suif* to the Japan of 1878 as "badly written", but the relocation of the story in the Seinan War proves at least as interesting a re-reading of Maupassant as *Stagecoach*. The class tensions within the coachload of evacuees intersect with the clashes between Government forces and Saigo rebels to create political and moral ambiguities unique to this version. And there are some moments of purely pictorial exposition which prefigure later work.—T.R. *Japan 1935. With Isuzu Yamada. 80 mins.*

Sun 28 May 5.45. 8.15

## **The Field Poppy/Osaka Elegy**

(Gubigin-so/Naniwa Ercji)

*The Field Poppy* (1935 – 70 mins) is based on a novel by Soseki Natsume and is a family drama centring on a retired teacher and the mismatched engagement of his daughter to one of his former students. Mizoguchi attempts an Ozu-like story with tentative gestures towards a European visual style. *Osaka Elegy* (1936 – 68 mins) shows the early emergence of a favourite Mizoguchi theme – the fate of women in family and social situations which do not favour them. A young girl suffers many humiliations after allowing herself to be seduced by her boss in an effort to raise money for her family.



Mon 29 May 6.00. 8.20

## **The Swordsman/The Victory of Women**

(Miyamoto Musashi/Josel no Shori)

Mizoguchi's version of the saga of the swordsman *Miyamoto Musashi* (1945 – 50 mins) retells the story of the famous samurai who won a duel with a wooden oar in place of a sword. It opens with a brilliantly dynamic sequence though the action is played down. *Victory of Women* (1946 – 75 mins) is the first of Mizoguchi's polemic post war feminist statements. The heroine opposes the harsh sentences of the public prosecutor on war criminals but slowly begins to realize that the real problem is the oppression of women.



Tue 30 May 6.15. 8.30

## **The Love of Sumako, the Actress**

(Joyu Sumako no Koi)

After opening with a magnificent debate (on whether the meaning of *A Doll's House* would be compromised if a female impersonator played the lead), *Sumako* goes on to chronicle the rise of modern, Western theatre in Japan by focusing on the stormy career of one of the country's first actresses. The feminist thrust of the plot is gradually subsumed by the melodrama of Sumako's affair with her director, the reverse of the relationship in *Late Chrysanthemums*, which rises to Sirkian heights in its counterpoint of life with theatre.—T. R. *Japan 1947. With Kinuyo Tanaka. 91 mins.*



Wed 31 May 6.15. 8.30

## **A Woman of Rumour** (Uwasa no Onna)

*Woman of Rumour* (or *The Crucified Woman*) is set in a bordello, where the "madame's" daughter falls in love with a young doctor who is also loved by the mother. Unsensational and cool in treatment, it shows Mizoguchi's richly compassionate response to female characters (neither mother nor daughter is prejudged) and the infinitely varied life of the bordello is fluidly conveyed in the camerawork of the great Miyagawa. The ensemble playing is beautifully controlled and pitched. *Japan 1954. With Kinuyo Tanaka. 84 mins.*

