Monogatari has been widely acclaimed as a masterpiece of the cinema since the moment in 1952 when its director, Kenji hi, won a Silver Lion award for the film at the Venice Film Festival. audiences immediately recognized the pictorial beauty of *Ugetsu* yrical power of Mizoguchi's camera movements, but most viewers nd the film's narrative elements puzzling and unsettling. *Ugetsu* move between two radically different worlds: the first is a world at veyed with graphic realism; the second, a highly stylized world of rnatural, filled with ghosts and apparitions. To understand why hi chose to incorporate these disparate experiences in one film and ly to integrate them requires an awareness of Mizoguchi's custom- ies and of cultural contexts that would be familiar to his Japanese .

volume presents a complete continuity script of *Ugetsu* and an tory essay by Keiko McDonald that analyzes the complex issues ese culture revealed in the film. Also included are a letter from hi to his longtime scriptwriter, the late Yoshikata Yoda; the com- ts of the two Japanese tales on which the film was based; Japanese, n, and American reviews and commentaries, some appearing for the e in English; and a filmography and bibliography.

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Ugetsu Kenji Mizoguchi, director

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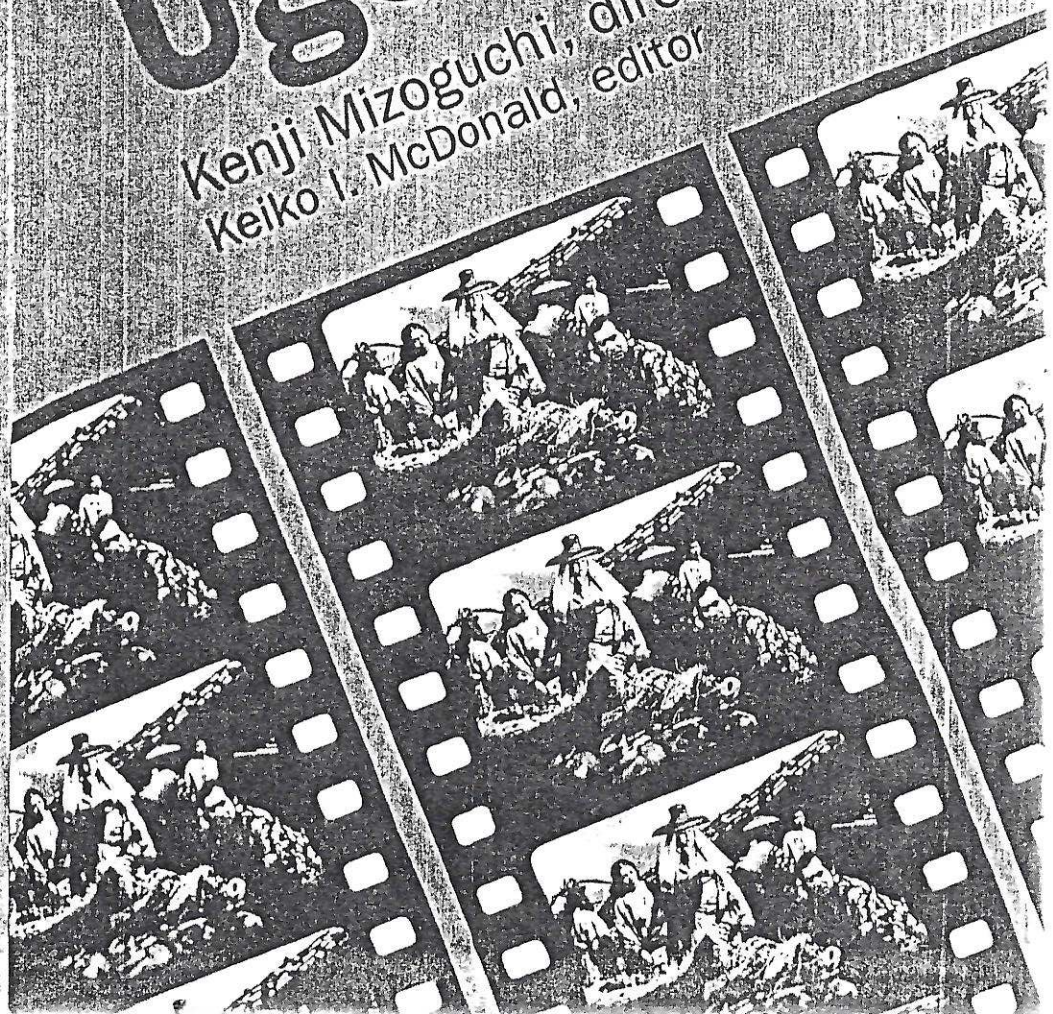
Kenji Mizoguchi, director
Keiko I. McDonald, editor



we are seeing a fairy tale, since we are always surprised by scenes of beauty, we come to realize that the film is not only about this human being—it is about what this human being symbolizes, it is about us, as all fairy tales are about us.

The psychological implications of, say, *Ugetsu* are clear enough: it is an allegory of the soul; those of *Sansho Dayu*, of *Oharu*, of *Yokihi* are different, but similar, and it is these implications which both conceal and reveal the richness of the Mizoguchi film. One might compare him with other directors. In a way the nearest parallel is Marcel Carné who, whenever he could, made pictures about love betrayed; a parallel less close is the young John Huston who used to make pictures about great quests which came to nothing, his implications being that the quest (in which *African Queen, The Treasure of Sierra Madre, The Maltese Falcon*—even *Moby Dick*) was everything, the result nothing.

Mizoguchi's implication is that the world is as it is, and our lot is to endure it, to live with and through it, and that if this is not pleasing (and I cannot think of a major Mizoguchi film with a 'happy' ending) it at least lets us know that we are living. His heroines (for he has naturally found women, particularly in Japan, closer to his truth than the men) all discover this fact and either die content despite all (as in *Sansho*, in *Oharu*, in *Chikamatsu*, in *Yokihi*) or, seeing this, decide to continue a bit longer with the game (as in *Akasen Chitai*, also called *Street of Shame*, *Gionbayashi*, and *Woman of the Night*). Is it this mythology, I wonder, which accounts for his contemporary appeal—now, seven years after the director's death?

He is the only Japanese director whom the French have taken to their hearts; the Germans have detected something they understand very well in his films; even the English are more attracted to him than to any other Japanese director. And the example of America—where the films of Mizoguchi are, except for *Ugetsu*, unknown and where others (*Oharu, Sansho Dayo*) have been misunderstood. It is as though this acquiescence to the world as it is, this emphasis upon existence as the only end, is a message grateful to Europe and not, as yet, to America.

To one living in Japan the wisdom of Mizoguchi is seen at once, because this is the wisdom of traditional Japan, and the Japanese are quite right to see Mizoguchi as one of their most typical and traditional filmmakers. Like all his contemporaries he believed in distance, he revered the past, and he sought wisdom in acquiescing to the world as it (unfortunately or not) happened to be. This he has shown in all of his major pictures—and has added that one element that is salient to traditional Japanese art: beauty is the means through which this inner wisdom is at last achieved.

The Master Mizoguchi in Six Critical Perspectives: *Ugetsu*

Felix Martialay

I have to warn that I have not seen the film more than twice. The first time wa two or three years ago. I didn't take any notes that time. That first occasion onl allowed me to view the film the second time with a greater serenity; to be a ease concerning the intricacies in the subject matter, which in itself is something For the second viewing, I was all set with sheets of paper and a ballpoint pen, bu I never used them. The fascination of the film was so complete, so all-absorbing that by the end of the showing I had written nothing more than the title.

If the above words seem to explain the evanescent quality of what I will no write, I want to remove myself even further from the whole gamut of topic concerning the Oriental film, in order to carry out this task free of that baggag Stereotypes, occult Japanese symbols, an incomprehension of that country's cus toms—none of these are pertinent here. *Ugetsu* seems to me to be a very hermetic very ambiguous, very complicated film, but not because of its Oriental source bu for the perfection of its workmanship, for the sheer height of its artistic quality This is its greatest difficulty. The superior artistry of Mizoguchi requires a pre paration and an effort on the part of the spectator that doesn't always begin— don't always begin—to capture all its poetry and grandeur.

For the critic, it would be very convenient to seize on these Oriental exoticism in order to fill the vacuum that is due above all to the critic's lack of artisti acumen, rather than to localisms. *Ugetsu* is, above all, cinema. Total cinema Cinema of here and there, independent of any specific place. If the film seem hermetic, it is not due to its geographic location but rather to its artistic richnes Good proof of that is that in *Ugetsu* one finds Anthony Mann, Rossellini, Renoi Murnau, Dreyer, Bergman, Welles, Preminger, Nicholas Ray . . . there are trait and details of all the great creative masters in this film because, in the richness of i status as a masterpiece, it has to have strong affinities in terms of forms of appearanc with the moments inspired by these directors, no matter what their nationality.

At the outset, *Ugetsu* is a work that is "larger than life," larger than Mizogucl himself. It is, in reality, the life of Mizoguchi, his quintessence, his death. Th work of a chosen one whom God has permitted to see his dream realize (Mizoguchi is the potter Genjuro. The dialogue of Genjuro with Princess Waka is a treatise of aesthetics and, at the same time, of ethics. The film-princess is t temptation that kills but saves, something like the palm of the martyr that dies a saves, but one must accept this death in order to reach salvation.)

From *Film Ideal* (15 January 1965): 44–45. Translated by Linda C. Ehrlich and David G. Anderson this volume.

In order to understand *Ugetsu*, it is necessary to have an extraordinary mastery over the material, and an extraordinary mastery over one's own human nature in order to give free rein to the mastery of the artist over his art.

This is possibly the first great theme of the film, the theme of the artist, of art. To give evidence of one's time is to give it of oneself as an individual immersed in that time. But evidence is secondary to the artist; it is something extra, because the main thing is to produce beauty. This beauty will be its own unique justification. But this beauty is the result of those tensions, that have solicited it, that have pushed it. Of these tensions, that of its own presence in this time is certainly not the most minor one. The problem of *Ugetsu*, the conscious problem, is that of Mizoguchi himself, an artist who wants to know the value of his "clay" and who dreams of beauty only to awaken, turning his potter's wheel, making film after film with the simplicity of an artisan who has no illusions about anything. *Ugetsu* is, actually, the Princess Wakasa of Mizoguchi, that creature of luxury that is a fantasy, madness, fascination, fire. . . . All of this has possessed him completely, bringing into existence the beautiful dream that is this film. Afterwards, until death separated him from his camera, the potter continued; the dream had passed. *Ugetsu* had arisen from his intellect and his heart.

Mizoguchi forcefully expresses in this film the madness of the creator—in that fire that possesses Genjuro, that makes him ignore the danger of the unchained hordes, his sobbing family, in order to keep up the oven where his works were being fired. It is that alienation that makes him forget what and who he is, what he has left behind, everything, in order to submerge himself in the ecstasy of beauty.

This causes us, in the first place, to philosophize with the author about reality and fiction, the real and the fantastic, what is lived and what is dreamed; about the pleasure of hours yet to come, about feelings and the illusion of those feelings, about real beings and guiding or destructive "phantasmas."

There are no boundaries between dream and reality. Or, if there is one, it is as ambiguous as those political boundaries which no accident of geographical relief explains.

Hence, in *Ugetsu*, let us not distinguish dream, hallucination, memory, or the mental image, from reality. We live reality with the protagonist in the same form that we dream our nightmare without knowing that it, indeed, is a nightmare; without distinguishing it from our conscious world. But, in the end—what difference is there between sleep and waking? None, in the moment of dreaming. Although we know perfectly well that only our waking hours have a physical reality and that dreams don't exist, this doesn't impede us from seeing and living both ways. All that we dream is the truth that we are dreaming, and it is the truth while we dream it. The truth that we dream and the truth that we live are the same. Then permit me the same sophism as Mizoguchi when he arrives at the conclusion that to deny the dreamt truth would be to deny the living truth. And that would be to deny everything.

For that reason Mizoguchi doesn't establish differences or distances. There isn't any conceit or "flow" or evocative music. Everything is realism. A violent realism

mixed with the most outrageous lyricism, the living with the dead, real beings with fantastic ones, the unreal world with the real.

Because enormous foundations are needed in order to raise skyscrapers to the sky, it is also necessary to take root totally in reality, in order to elevate one's fantasies. Images that are always realistic, always in the present.

Even though it may later turn out that the artist is the only one who dreams an ideal separate from reality. The potter does not idealize a reality—except when he thinks of his wife in the kimono stall—rather he begins an ideal world with an ideal woman, an ideal palace, an ideal love.

Even so, in short, it is not important whether one dreams or not, because every film is a dream, and the fact that inside this dream there is another is not important. If we accept the first dream, why not accept the second that is integrated in it?

It is possible that other critics will see in the film—more than a testimonial to that dream of the creator and to the anguish this creation produces for him—work with various "theses." Each one will favor a different one of these, because it is certain that each person sees in a film of this caliber what he wants to see, what he desires that it show him. I am inclined toward the Mizoguchian ambiguity. In that ambiguity the following ideas stand out, each given the same weight:

- war as the source of all calamity (Tobei says: "War has torn the spirit");
- ambition as the destroyer of the most solid human principles (as Tobei also says, "Ambition must be like the ocean, without limits");
- fatalism as an expression of the fight between the sky and the earth, between the gods and humans (beings dragged over the earth, stooped over, always on their knees as if flattened by a superior force that impedes their standing erect, their domination; spirits in constant defiance, desirous of standing proud, of dominating);
- a negation of all adventure, of all spiritual and social rebellion;
- an affirmation of conformity, in a system of social classes, in a lack of communication;
- an apology for destruction. All of the characters have an itinerary that leads them to their self-destruction. While Tobei buys a dazzling breastplate with which to begin the path of "samurai," Ohama, his wife, is raped and paid off (a reiteration of images of the purse of the false "samurai" paying for his illusion, and of the group of soldiers giving their salary to the violated woman). While Genjuro the potter falls drunk with wine and lust onto the picnic cloth in the garden after his bath, Miyagi, his wife, falls "doubly dead. "My fall is the price of your ascension," says Ohama. In contrast, Tobei's fall occurs when he finds his own wife in a brothel.
- a hymn of devotion to women. It is not a question of repeating what Julio Martínez wrote in the article "Words and Words, No Images to Draw Us Closer to Mizoguchi," published on page 7 of the previous issue of *Film Ideal*, 159, pointing to this attribute. The women in *Ugetsu* conserve the

> lucidity; even more, they possess a greater lucidity than the men; they know what they are going to suffer because of the men; they see almost simultaneously into the present and the future; they know their destiny and they fulfill it with their sacrifice. The lucidity extends to Princess Wakasa who already knows her illusory being and the outcome of her forcefully expressed love, even at the time that she gives the offering to the potter. The men, on the other hand, are blind to their destiny. They swagger with passion, neither weighing its overflowing force nor foreseeing its scope.

In my opinion, the ambiguity originates in the fact that Mizoguchi doesn't resolve anything in his film. And, at the same time, he resolves everything for us: both what I have said and what I have not even looked at carefully here. He doesn't resolve things because he is limited to showing the beauty of a simple world, whose existence would not be possible without the dream, without the illusion, without desire. The Mizoguchian man needs his own experience, not an inherited one, not one told to him. A lived experience, even if living it out costs him his very life. Man, and even more if he is an artist, needs to be fascinated by fascination, to dream the dream, to be endangered by danger, and to die in life. Only in this way can he return, as did Tobei and Genjuro, and appreciate the beauty of daily life, of the ordinary, of peace, of life.

This is what conditions the repetition of identical scenes whose difference lies in their shading. When a man walks, he walks. If we shade the direction, we know if he is going or returning. If we include him in the landscape, we give the direction and its consequence—going or returning—but the act is the same: to walk. From this double itinerary, of the venturing out to, and return from, the dream, from experience, from life, from illusion, there are repeated points although they are geometrically symmetrical. In Mizoguchi, the geometry is the drama. (In Fritz Lang, drama was the geometry; in Cottafavi, the geometry is the appearance of the drama.) Mizoguchi's moral posture is the contemplation of that double itinerary: an indolent, distanced contemplation, an indifferent contemplation. A total objectivization.

The slowness of Mizoguchi. This is the grand myth. And in this respect I remember the novels of Karl May in the Winnetu series; the novelist spoke of the cursed horses—some of exceptionally pure blood that had a speed that was quite superior to that of a normal horse, but, even more, had the trait that when a magical word was whispered to them, they took on additional speed that made them run like the wind. Well then, Mizoguchi is a "cursed" director. his films have an oppressive tempo; a very rapid pace, but when one thinks they are going at top speed, the story takes on even a greater speed that leaves the spectator exhausted. *Ugetsu* is a veritable shower of emotional and highly expressive blows, each impelled by the other.

The conciseness in the story makes each shot, each frame, pregnant with meaning modified in each expression, in each movement, of his actors. (Mizoguchi's cinema is one of mobile lines: his actors.) All of it turns and turns like maddened carousel that leaves breathless anyone intent on following it in detai Everything runs, moves, and is moved about with an astonishing velocity, eve when the camera is practically still. (It is still, for example, in the death of Miyag and, nevertheless, what the camera sees is truly dizzying: the flight of the woma with the child, the rice, the soldiers who pursue them, the encounter, the struggl the first fall, the child, the rice, the second fall, the agony, the soldiers distributin the stolen rice among themselves, death, the soldiers eating. . . . What a marvel Three simultaneous actions. And the camera is still, astonished, exhausted fro having filtered and filtered movements, passions, passages, life, death. . . .)

The speed that is in the music, ringing like the hooves of galloping horses ov a rock, in the dialogue, throwing out the words violently, in the movements of th characters who are almost epileptic and febrile. . . . Speed in the laconic, in th nakedness, in the correctness. . . . It is the fire of the creator in a "state of grace that is reflected in these spasms prolonged by the madness of not losing the drean of not allowing to escape that magical alienation that consumes him in privilege instants of which he has to take full advantage.

The same could be said in many scenes: the declaration of the princess—wh an impressive ballet, with her revolving around him with her erect figure whil Genjuro retreats, turns, drags himself, bending himself double at the sight of th maid who is actually directing the dance, cornering the couple more and more- the bath, the picnic in the country, the invasion of the soldiers, the rupture betwee the potter and Wakasa, the awakening of the artist. Each contemplated situatio has, in its repetition, a meaning which is deeper, more complete, more total.

The *mise-en-scène*—here is the true difficulty with Mizoguchi. It is difficu because of its uncommon richness that one has to capture—very slowly, in all its nuances. I suppose that to see *Ugetsu* in the hand-viewer (for editing) has to b something really beautiful and worthy of study by someone who wants to direc and not make himself look ridiculous. (Mizoguchi has taken to such a high leve the job of film directing that it would be difficult for him to contain his laughter o seeing what is concretely understood these days as a cinematic work.) A reall audacious *mise-en-scène* that enters, without any detour, in the interior life of th characters, with an astonishing sobriety in spite of the apparent baroque style the multicolored images, full, brimming with strong points, with actions an meanings. With a simple movement of the body contemplated in all its distanc traveled, we are given insight into the faintest trembling of a soul.

Normally he works in long shots, sequential shots in medium or general fram There are very few close-up shots—the one of Princess Wakasa in the market is exception and, for this reason, it has an unforgettable impact—and almost tot abolition of the countershot. It is, then, the totality of the bodies—human objects—that express everything. The body in movement, vibrating, stopped, b without ever being isolated from its milieu (forests, water, rooms, streets, air . . but rather living in it and with it. Land, rain, flowers, forests (Bergman), lak

(What perfect integration of life and death, beings and things, material and atmosphere, in the scene of the parting of the husband and wife on the lake, and the meeting in the mist with the boat carrying the dying man.)

The camera does not create the *mise-en-scène* but captures it whole, although in order to do so it has to fly up to incredible heights, or to drag itself through water or along the floor; it also goes where an emotional tension is produced between beings or objects, capturing that tension and its consequences.

Mizoguchi Kenji

Michel Mesnil

The greatest originality of the *Tales* is precisely to be found in its painting o conjugal love. Mizoguchi makes of this love an idea that does not fit withi a bourgeois framework. The atmosphere of tender love and of whispere complaisance that reigns between Genjuro and Miyagi brings the sound of at tained passion—a sound new to the cinema—to a delicate equilibrium, one that i always menaced since the potter will betray his love for a beautiful and risk adventure and, returning home, will meet up with a deferred punishment. Th return to the home—which is certainly one of the most beautiful scenes eve filmed, because it is one of the fullest, the most charged with interior life, as in painting by Chardin—is for Genjuro the explosion of happiness, although it turn out to be an illusory happiness: Mizoguchi is more cruel than Max Ophuls– felicity regained after the agonizing wound and perpetual incompleteness c pleasure and peril. In regaining his home space, the man suddenly finds himself n longer in agreement with others and with society. In fact, his house isolates hir more from the outside world than could the palace of a snake-woman, a sojour that was uncomfortable since dangers and memory beat their way in from a sides. In contrast, in the single room of his wooden house, he feels perfectly a ease, protected from all peril. This pilgrimage back to origins is like a reunion wit the warmth of the maternal breast, an asylum where, Mizoguchi seems to suggest active and adventurous spirits may dream of more than other people do. Stretche out on a ordinary futon, in a corner of the room, he falls sleep quickly, mumblin about his well-being while his wife calmly devotes herself to some needlewor and while a weak light watches over, like life itself, the heart of this closed world In the morning, just as the cold of the early hours will penetrate, through th broken joints of the devastated house, into the soul of Genjuro to disillusion him so will the hard truth of the world strike him in the face.

The opposition between Miyagi and Wakasa is thus not at all between a tranqui love fully open to the world of others and an exclusive passion, or betwee conjugal affection, as one conventionally speaks of it, and wild love [*l'amour fou*] Between Wakasa and Miyagi, it is the latter who offers the true image of passion– a passion lived to the limits of a Calvary and death—and it is the latter who, bett than the former, open to all compromises, maintains the hero in the full bliss of hi solitude. To a certain degree, in fact, the impassioned Miyagi must be carryin insider her a Wakasa that the troubles of life have suffocated. The two women a

From *Mizoguchi Kenji* by Michel Mesnil (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1965), pp. 75–77. Translated b Dana Polan for this volume.