BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Tokyo Story (Tôkyô monogatari)

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Ozu's gently melancholy but hugely moving masterpiece has an elderly country couple visit their grown-up children in post-war Tokyo; their offspring are focused on work and their own families, and only a widowed daughter-in-law comprehends their plight. The film offers a sublimely serene contemplation of changing values in a changing world, profoundly alert to the disappointments almost inevitable in life.

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Ozu described *Tokyo Story* as his 'most melodramatic' movie, an observation taken by most western commentators, dazzled by the director's minimalist style and resolutely quotidian material, as ironic. But irony was never Ozu's preferred tone, and his comment surely reflected the film's uncharacteristic explicitness: this is an almost didactic film about the disintegration of Japanese family values, full of characters and incidents designed to spell out social and psychological points with diagrammatic clarity. In calling the film 'melodramatic', Ozu may also have had in the back of his mind the story's origin in co-writer Kogo Noda's memories of the 1936 Leo McCarey film *Make Way for Tomorrow*, which similarly contrasts the emotional stoicism of an elderly couple financially ruined in the Depression with the brash impatience of their urbanised children, but does so with a directness entirely normal in Hollywood movies.

Although it is not a precise match with any other Ozu film in theme, tone or structure, *Tokyo Story* obviously shares characteristics and concerns with many of them. Its interests in parent-offspring relations, in urban/rural contrasts, and in the evanescence of happiness are all entirely consonant with earlier films, from *The Only Son* (1936) through conservative wartime films like *Brothers and Sisters of the Todo Family* (1941) and *There Was a Father* (1942) to other films of the post-war 'reconstruction' like *Late Spring* (1949) and *Early Summer* (1951). It also uses most of Ozu's well-known visual tropes, from the use of low camera positions for domestic interiors to patterns of cutting based on visual analogies rather than conventional eyeline matches. What's different here is, again, the overall explicitness of the film's aim. The fact that this is a film in which the main characters frequently and directly discuss the issues that confront them (for example, parents' disappointment in their children's levels of assessment, or a young woman's disgust at her elder sister's uncaring meanness) militates against both the psychological nuancing and the structural playfulness that Ozu elsewhere used freely.

In part, the film's overt seriousness springs from its persistent undercurrent of social commentary. This is absolutely a film of its moment: it faithfully records everything from Tokyo's post-war rebuilding boom to the raucous and hedonistic behaviour of young people in a hot-spring hotel, the latter an early sign of the 'Sun Tribe' delinquency that was to become Japan's hottest social topic only three years later. (Since Ozu and Noda habitually retreated to hot-

spring resorts themselves to work on their scripts, it's amusing to speculate that they themselves had experienced the same kind of sleepless night suffered by the Hirayama couple). Equally topical was the core theme of the chasm between traditionalist, rural parents and their city-based sons and daughters: the breakdown in age-old family support structures in the years of American occupation and 'democratisation' was a widely discussed topic in the early 1950s. And the financial plights of Koichi and Shige, one struggling to run a suburban medical practice, the other managing a tawdry hair salon, both in conspicuously unfashionable areas of the city, are observed with the same fastidious eye for social and economic demographics.

The characters are also somewhat less nuanced than in many other Ozu films, even when played by the directors' favourites from the Shochiku 'stock company' of contract actors. Haruko Sugimura's account of Shige, for example, is a nakedly explicit picture of the death of sentiment: the woman is a cypher for selfishness, opportunism and greed. Ozu allows himself one set-piece of comedy (in an otherwise generally sombre movie) at her expense: the scene in which she is embarrassed to have her drunken father and two equally comatose strangers dumped on her late at night by the police. The chief exceptions to this tendency towards caricature are Shukichi, the emotionally repressed patriarch played by Chishu Ryu, and Noriko, the more than dutiful daughter-in-law played by Setsuko Hara, Japanese cinema's 'perennial virgin'. Shukichi's feelings for his wife are expressed only silently, in worldless scenes after her death, while his only avenue for open discussion of his frustrations as a parent is while drinking with long-unseen buddies in a bar. Noriko, shown to be both a hyper-efficient 'office lady' and a model of selfless consideration, is given dialogue scenes (most notably with Kyoko and Shukichi, in quick succession at the film's climax) to admit her inner doubts and insecurities, especially in relation to her fidelity or otherwise to her late husband. Both actors achieve the deepening of their characters with practised ease and supreme conviction.

Aside from Taizo Saito's lush but sparingly used Hollywood-style score, the film's soundtrack is dominated by three elements: chirping crickets, boats chugging and sounding their sirens, and train noises. The crickets evoke the rural ambience of Onomichi, while the other two sound elements evoke travel and the space between places – and by extension, people. But Ozu is far too subtle and humane an artist to reduce his sound design to a matter of schematic symbols. In a film concerned with constant journeying, it's significant that the only shot of anyone in the act of travelling is the image of Noriko on the train back to Tokyo in the end. In the shot, she pulls out Tom's heirloom, the pocket watch, and examines it with deep emotion. The shot mysteriously clinches the association between the idea (or sound) of travel and the motif of evanescence. This may be the least 'melodramatic' moment in the film. It is also probably the most truly Ozu-esque.

Tony Rayns, *Sight & Sound*, February 1994

TOKYO STORY (TÔKYÔ MONOGATARI)
Director: Yasujiro Ozu
Production Company: Shochiku Co. Ltd.
Producer: Takeshi Yamamoto
Production Manager: Tomiji Shimizu
Assistant Directors: Yamamoto Kôzô, Takahashi Osamu
Second Assistant Director: Shôhei Imamura *
Screenplay: Kogo Noda, Yasujiro Ozu
Assistant Director: Kozo Yamamoto
Screenplay: Kogo Noda, Yasujiro Ozu
Director of Photography: Yuharu Atsuta
Assistant Cinematographer: Takashi Kawamata
Lighting Technician: Itsuo Takashita
Lighting Assistant: Takeshi Yakuwa
Editor: Yoshiyasu Hamamura
Art Director: Tatsuo Hamada
Set Designer: Toshio Takahashi
Set Decorator: Setsutarô Moriya
Costume Designer: Taizô Saitô
Music: Taizo Saitô
Sound Engineer: Mitsuru Kaneko
Sound Assistant: Yoshiomi Hori
Sound Recording: Yoshisaburô Senô
Film Development: Ryûji Hayashi

* Uncredited

Cast
Chishû Ryû *(Shûkichi Hirayama)*
Chieko Higashiyama *(Tomi, Hirayama's wife)*
Setsuko Hara *(Noriko, Hirayama's daughter-in-law)*
Haruko Sugimura *(Shige Kaneko, Hirayama's elder daughter)*
Sô Yamamura *(Kôichi, Hirayama's elder son)*
Kuniko Miyake *(Fumiko, Koichi's wife)*
Kyôko Kagawa *(Kyôko, Hirayama's younger daughter)*
Eijirô Tono *(Sanpei Numata, Hirayama's friend)*
Nobuo Nakamura *(Kurazo Kaneko, Shige's husband)*
Shirô Ôsaka *(Keizô Hirayama's younger son)*
Hisao Toake *(Osamu Hattori, Hirayama's friend)*
Teruko Nagaoka *(Yone Hattori)*
Mutsuko Sakura *(woman at oden counter)*
Toyo Takahashi *(Noriko's neighbour in Onomichi)*
Tôru Abe *(railway clerk)*
Sachiko Mitani *(woman at Noriko's apartment)*
Zen Murase *(Minoru, Koichi's elder son)*
Mitsuhiro Mori *(Isamu, Koichi's younger son)*
Junko Anan *(beauty salon assistant)*
Ryôko Mizuki, Yoshiko Togawa *(beauty salon customers)*
Kazuhiro Itokawa *(tenant at the Hattori household)*
Fumio Toyama *(patient)*
Keijirô Morozumi *(police officer)*
Tsutomu Niijima *(company section chief at Noriko's office*
Shôzô Suzuki *(clerk at Noriko's office)*
Yoshiko Tashiro, Haruko Chichibu *(maids at inn)*
Takashi Miki *(singer at inn)*
Toshinosuke Nagao *(doctor)*

Japan 1953
136 mins

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

A Farewell to Arms
Sun 1 May 12:00; Mon 16 May 18:15; Tue 24 May 20:50
Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans
Mon 2 May 12:20; Mon 30 May 18:20
Tokyo Story (Tokyo Monogatari)
Tue 3 May 14:30; Sat 7 May 15:00; Sat 21 May 11:10; Wed 25 May 18:00
The River
Wed 4 May 18:10 + intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large; Sun 15 May 15:10
El Sur (The South)
Thu 5 May 14:30; Mon 16 May 18:10
Daughters of the Dust
Fri 6 May 20:50; Fri 20 May 14:40; Thu 26 May 20:40
Syndromes and a Century (Sang sattawaat)
Sat 7 May 18:10; Thu 12 May 20:50
Still Walking (Aruitemo aruitemo)
Sun 8 May 15:15; Wed 11 May 17:50 + intro by Dr Alexander Jacoby, Senior Lecturer in Japanese Studies; Mon 23 May 20:45
The Long Day Closes
Mon 9 May 18:30; Sun 22 May 12:30; Thu 26 May 20:50

Journey to Italy (Viaggio in Italia)
Tue 10 May 20:50; Thu 19 May 18:10; Wed 25 May 20:50; Fri 27 May 18:20
The Umbrellas of Cherbourg (Les Parapluies de Cherbourg)
Fri 13 May 20:45; Tue 17 May 20:50; Sat 28 May 18:15
Cleo from 5 to 7 (Cléo de 5 à 7)
Sat 14 May 14:45; Wed 18 May 18:10 + intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large
The Miracle Worker
Tue 17 May 14:30; Sun 29 May 11:20
The Incredible Shrinking Man
Thu 19 May 14:30; Tue 31 May 18:20

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