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How Two Drastically Different Scenes Invoke a Common Theme

The final scenes of two contrasting movies provide an opportunity to compare the different elements and moods produced by each director’s film techniques. The directors of *Late Spring* and *Hana-bi* made different choices in film technique to wrap up their films. However, they utilize waves as a symbol to convey a theme in their movies, which allows us to find parallels between the two seemingly different endings.

In *Late Spring’s* ending scene, when Shukichi returns to his home after the wedding, director Ozu Yasujiro maintains use of his characteristic “frame within a frame” technique, producing a stage effect that separates the audience from the actors on the “stage.” It should be noted also the aspect ratio used by Ozu adds to the box-like effect felt in theatrical stages. This technique allows the audience to feel a little disconnected from Shukichi, or in other words, allows the audience to isolate Shukichi. It is fitting because at this point in the story, Shukichi experiences loneliness for the first time since his daughter Noriko is no longer living with him. However, when Shukichi goes to sit in his chair, Ozu drops the “frame within a frame” technique, switching to the tatami shot, which allows the audience to empathize with Shukichi better. After establishing Shukichi’s loneliness with the “frame within the frame” technique, the audience is now able to feel the loneliness with Shukichi since the camera is positioned in a way that is personal, as if we are sitting right next to Shukichi. There is no camera movement in these shots, which effectively add to the grieving mood and energy created by Ozu. The only diegetic sounds are the sound of Shukichi cutting the apple and the sound of the crashing waves in the final cut of the scene. The nondiegetic sound is composed of the solemn score that fully captures the dignified loneliness and grief of Shukichi.

We can compare the techniques by Ozu to the techniques used in *Hana-bi*, a surrealistic film full of opportunities to feel the artistic brilliance of Kitano Takeshi. In *Hana-bi*’s last scene, we hear Nishi’s wife, Miyuki, speak for the first time in the movie, distracting the audience from the fact that Nishi loaded his revolver with two bullets a few minutes prior to the scene. The music is beginning to swell into a magnificent flourish of the film’s main thematic jazzy and sentimental score, as the camera leaves Nishi and Miyuki from a medium two-shot to a long shot, almost as if Kitano wanted to give the couple space and privacy. The camera further switches to an extreme long shot and is mounted on a crane, as the camera angle is now high, exposing the scene of the couple hugging on the log on the beach while a girl plays with a kite in the distance, with the roaring tides as a nice backdrop. The score is now in full groove, with percussion and a flute, two very happy-sounding instruments. The camera mounted on the crane pans away from the couple during this time, towards the horizon created by the ocean, as if marking the end of the film and wanting the audience to feel satisfied. However, we hear two gunshots in sequence, abruptly cutting the nondiegetic music. In fact, this is the first diegetic sound we hear since Miyuki spoke, as not even the waves were heard. But now that the audio switched from nondiegetic to diegetic with the gunshots, we now hear only the waves.

This scene has caused a lot of confusion and a rollercoaster of emotions and was most likely intended to do so. Throughout the film, Kitano’s style made it feel funky and out of rhythm, especially evident in his quick and random cuts. In the final scene, it seemed like Kitano finally gave the audience a predictable rhythm, wrapping up the movie in a conventional manner, using all the common elements of a final scene: the flourishing music, the camera techniques, the closure provided by hearing Miyuki speak for the first time. However, Kitano punishes those who do not remember Nishi loading his gun, and rewards those who do, since they have a chance to predict the ending, which maintained Kitano’s funky style.

It can be argued that there is an irony in *Late Spring*, since Shukichi and, naturally, the audience feel loneliness and grief instead of relief. Likewise, there is irony in *Hana-bi*’s ending since the audience expected relief and a “happy ending” but received a shocking, yet artfully realistic, “bad ending.” Additionally, both scenes feature waves, which might be a cultural reference to *Under the Wave off Kanagawa*, the famous Japanese woodblock print by Katsushika Hokusai. According to Getty, the “Great Wave” can be a symbol of disaster, since it is linked to tsunamis (Christine Guth). Another interpretation is that waves are unpredictable, which match each scene perfectly. There is one more interpretation that seems to work for both films: the wave symbolizes the “irresistible force of nature and the weakness of human beings” (Hiroe Nirei). In *Late Spring*, Noriko leaving the nest was naturally inevitable, like the waves. It can also be interpreted that Shukichi wanted to appear strong for his daughter, but his weakness shows once his loneliness is felt. In *Hana-bi*, Miyuki was suffering from cancer, so her death was naturally inevitable, and Nishi could do nothing to stop it from happening.

There is a surprising amount of parallels between the two film’s final scenes. At surface level, each film seems incredibly different, especially when considering the film techniques that each director use. However, when considering the reasons for the director’s film techniques as well as the employed cultural references, the audience can reduce each film’s intentions and draw comparisons in their themes.

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