

## **Melodrama Interrupted: Kawashima Yūzō's Interventions in Genre and Gender\***

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### **Abstract**

Kawashima Yūzō (1918-63) directed 51 films between 1944 and 1963. Although he began as a “program director” for Shochiku Studios, his subsequent films for Nikkatsu, Toho, and Daiei are among the most innovative and at times daring in popular cinema of those years. Although highly regarded for his complex comedies, Kawashima’s melodramas are not only hallmarks of eloquent filmmaking, but at times venues for formal experimentation. This essay will consider four instances in which the formal experimentation constitutes interventions in the genre itself, especially in terms of the relation of melodrama to gender.

### **Keywords**

Kawashima Yūzō, melodrama, Shochiku, Japanese cinema, gender representation, popular culture, Japanese nationalism and film, Kido Shirō

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In recent years, the international canon of Japanese film directors has admitted two mavericks who worked within studio rules to join the ranks of recognized giants. Suzuki Seijun (1923-2017) is now celebrated around the world for the delirious gangster films that got him fired from Nikkatsu in 1968. At first celebrated then quickly disowned by Oshima Nagisa, Masumura Yasuzō (1924-86) left a body of work at Daiei that has proven both sensational and critically engaging. Kawashima Yūzō (1918-63) is now on the verge of a similar reassessment. The centennial of his birth was celebrated in Japan with several major events including cable broadcasts, and there are at least three recently published volumes on his films. There have been major retrospectives of his work in Seoul, New York, London, Berkeley, and Rotterdam, to name only the most prominent. Moreover, the online streaming service Mubi featured nine of Kawashima's Nikkatsu films throughout the spring of 2020.

While Suzuki and Masumura were closely associated with a single studio—Nikkatsu and Daiei, respectively—Kawashima worked in several studios including Shochiku, Nikkatsu, Toho, Tokyo Eiga, and Daiei. He was extremely prolific as a “program director” but also highly inventive, erudite, and stylistically daring. Kawashima is widely remembered for his acerbic, at times “zany” comedies such as *Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate*/ 幕末太陽傳 (1957). Kawashima's melodramas, however, are not only hallmarks of eloquent filmmaking, but at times venues for formal experimentation. This essay will consider four instances in which the formal experimentation constitutes intervention in the genre itself, especially in terms of the relation of melodrama to gender.

## **The Shochiku Melodrama and Kawashima**

Kawashima entered Meiji University as a literature major in 1935, and he was very active in cinema studies groups and in publishing a cinema journal. At times he would watch six films in one day. After graduating, Kawashima passed the entrance exam for Shochiku Ofuna Studios and began work as an assistant director in August 1938. The work was very difficult and the pay was extremely low because of the austerity policy of the head of the studio, Kido Shirō (Kawashima, “Jisaku” 216-19). Kido's impact on the studio in general and Kawashima in particular were deeper than the working conditions, however.

Kido was an extremely creative and hands-on producer who attained high positions in Shochiku while very young. He also focused on scripts and cultivated a kind of melodrama featuring the emotional lives of women that came to be known as “Ofuna melodrama” (Gu 307-08). In 1938 Kido purchased the rights to *Aizen*

*Katsura*/愛染かつら (*The Yearning Tree*), a novel by Kawaguchi Matsutaro serialized from 1936-38, assigning Nomura Hiromasa to direct. It was the story of a young widow (Tanaka Kinuyo) who had to keep secret the fact she had a child so she could remain working as a nurse. When she and a doctor (Uehara Ken) at the hospital fell in love, the difference in their status made life more complicated. But as they were about to run away together, the nurse's son fell ill and she could not keep the rendezvous, which meant they lost each other for many more episodes.

*The Yearning Tree* became a mega-hit of 1938, and its success led to two sequels. Kido was involved in the entire process, and claims that he coined the word すれ違い, *surechigai*, which literally means “brushing past each other without meeting”—the kind of terrible coincidence that keeps lovers apart as the plot moves forward for maximum melodramatic angst (Kido 171-72). Kawashima was assigned to work as assistant director for all three parts of this film. He also worked as assistant for several other assistants who made Ofuna melodramas: Shibuya Minoru, Hara Kenkichi, Yoshimura Kōzaburō, and Oba Hideo (Kawashima, “Jisaku” 220-23).

Working with these directors, Kawashima learned from the inside the mechanisms of constructing a certain form of melodrama. And he also witnessed other melodramas made on set with specific ideological purposes. Yoshimura Kōzaburō's hit *Danryu* [Warm Current] (1939) adapted the novel, removing all mention of the war in China and creating a dream-like bourgeois Japan, isolated from the threatening realities both outside and at home. Kawashima also saw the war propaganda melodramas, such as Yoshimura Kōzaburō's *The Legend of Tank Commander Nishizumi* (1940), which Yoshimura agreed to make in return for being allowed to direct *Danryu* (Jackson, “Passionate” 5-6).

In 1943, Kawashima became chief assistant director for Kinoshita Keisuke's debut film, *Flowers Bloom in the Harbor*/花咲く港, and in 1944 he directed his first feature, *The Man Who Returned*/帰ってきた男 (Ishiwata 276-83). Kawashima became prolific in directing “program pictures” but also chafed at the studio policy of punishing directors for box office failures by demoting them to assistant directors (Ishiwata 90-93).

After enduring both program picture assignments and the consequences of unsuccessful films, Kawashima scored critical success with his 1954 adaptation of Yamamoto Yūzō's serial novel, *The Path of Sincerity*/信実の路. As a result, the studio allowed him to direct the adaptation of Inoue Yasushi's extremely popular novel, *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow*/昨日と明日の間 (K. Takahashi 29-30). What Kawashima learned about the construction of melodrama, his dissatisfactions

with the form, and his belief in its potential are first put into practice in this final film for Shochiku before he moved to Nikkatsu.

Of course, no genre—including melodrama—is ineluctably bound with a specific political agenda. Nor all are engagements in genre theory academic. One of the most incisive interventions in the received knowledge of melodrama occurs in one of Kawashima Yūzō's comedies, *Burden of Love*/愛のお荷物 (1955). When Jotaro (Mihashi Tatsuya), the only son of a member of the Japanese Diet, learns that his girlfriend, Saeko (Kitahara Mie), is pregnant, he announces his intention to marry her, but his mother (Todoroki Yuriko) forbids it. In response, Jotaro leaves the family home and hides out in Kyoto. After a short time, Saeko visits Jotaro in Kyoto to tell him that his mother has had a change of heart and now approves of the marriage. He credits this to his dramatic gesture, observing that, "This is why melodrama film makes so much money in Japan." Jotaro uses both the borrowed word, メロドラマ *merodorama*, and the native term "Onamida chodai geki" 涙頂戴劇—literally, "'Tears, please!' theater." While the latter is slightly derisive, it is also affectionate. Furthermore, Jotaro is making the point that such films not only strike a resonant chord in the sentiments of Japanese film-goers, but the typical actions of the characters can also affect real-life situations.

But it was not Jotaro's withdrawal that made the difference. His mother had hired a detective who discovered Saeko was from an illustrious family, which undermines Jotaro's observation. Moreover, it was not merely the plot that changed the mother's mind, but more importantly, the genre. A comedy could not allow the prohibition of a love marriage to stand. Jotaro's speculation on melodrama and Japanese sensibility are supported neither by the plot nor the form. Ironically, as a direct address to the audience, the insincerity of Jotaro's statement is its saving grace, in that it conjures a commonsense notion regarding melodrama while refuting it. This meta-generic consideration of melodrama occurs within a comedy; this essay will examine Kawashima's meta-generic interventions within the melodrama.

Consider this list of classic Japanese melodramas that are known internationally: *The Fall of Osen* (Mizoguchi Kenji 1934); *Osaka Elegy* (Mizoguchi Kenji 1936); *Sisters of the Gion* (Mizoguchi Kenji 1936); *Flowing* (Naruse Mikio 1956); and *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* (Naruse Mikio 1960). One feature they share is a narrative that supports and advances a singular focalized affect. The plight of the women in these films is paramount, and the critiques that are raised are raised precisely by their suffering—the critiques never undermine the pathos at hand—even in a narrative as experimental as *The Fall of Osen*. Kawashima's melodramas depart

from this tendency in his insertion of some kind of commentary that interrupts the relation between narrative and affect.

### **Between Yesterday and Tomorrow/昨日と明日の間**

With *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow*, Kawashima was able to leave Shochiku as a success, both commercially and creatively. To be able to adapt such a high-profile novel was a turning point in his career, and his adaptation was engaging both aesthetically and intellectually. To appreciate Kawashima's reworking of the original, however, requires a brief synopsis of the first part of the novel.

#### *The Novel*

Inoue Yasushi (1907-91) was a prolific, extremely popular novelist and short story writer. He began winning acclaim with two novels in 1949—*The Hunting Rifle* (made into a film in 1961 by Gosho Heinosuke), and *The Bullfight*. In 1953 he serialized the novel *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow*, about an adventurous entrepreneur, Shirato Kaitaro. Kawashima's adaptation changes focus radically from the building of a private aviation company to the feelings of two women in Shirato's private life. Kawashima also compresses the detailed accounts of Inoue's realist narrative into at times radically imagistic sequences.

The novel opens with Shirato's boarding a Kyushu-bound ship in Osaka, where he discovers the captain is an old school friend. The captain tells him there is a beautiful woman passenger he received a telegram about, warning that she should be carefully watched as a suicide risk. He then assigns the woman, Saida Tōko, to Shirato's dinner table. Nothing about her seems particularly unusual, as her reserve seems typical of a woman of her age and social status, and their dialogues with each other are innocuous and remain within social norms (Inoue 11-18).

One night in an inn that is part of the itinerary, Shirato drinks too much alone in his room. When he goes to the washroom, he finds Tōko despondent and clearly contemplating suicide. He persuades her not to, and they agree to fly together as far as Osaka, where he will leave her as he continues on to Tokyo. On the plane Tōko confides to him that although she is married, she has been in love with another man for eight years and now that he is getting married, she felt that she might not be able to go on living. Tōko disembarks at Osaka, but the two will later reencounter each other when Tōko's husband sponsors Shirato's aviation company (Inoue 26-29).

Once back in Tokyo, Shirato's ex-girlfriend, Danjō Reiko, confronts him about the cold way he had abandoned her. She has not reconciled herself to their break-up and hopes to change his mind (63-65). Both Shirato and the narrative set this aside, focusing instead on Reiko introducing Shirato to former war pilots in Kobe, who will become the core team of his company (Inoue 71 ff). Kawashima reverses that focus back onto Reiko (and Tōko) and thereby rechannels the material into an inquiry into desire, gender, and their representation.

### *The Film*

The film opens with an extremely abstract dramatization of the background story of the novel's main plot. The opening sequence begins with Reiko calling Shirato, with a rear-projection screen behind her playing a tilted, kaleidoscopic pan of neon signs and night-time streets (Fig. 1). Shirato, also in front of a rear-screen projection, asks her to meet him in 15 minutes, bluntly informing her that he is about to quit his job and end his relationship with her. He then faces the camera, addressing an unseen company president while the screen behind him shows pans of precious Buddhist artifacts and tv-station crew members hurrying back and forth in the space between Shirato and the screen.



Fig. 1. "Hello! This is Reiko!"



Fig. 2. Reiko and Shirato struggle in a world of glasses as the screen that contains them shrinks.

The scene dissolves to a physical struggle between Reiko and Shirato, Reiko insisting she will not give him up, while the screen behind them features various close-ups of champagne glasses in rows on a glittering table (Fig. 2). Eventually Reiko laughs and tells him to get lost as she has a marriage prospect in Shikoku, which prompts him to hang onto her. As he tries to restrain her, the screen holding

the scene shrinks and recedes into blackness as an electronic score is replaced by a song apparently sung by Reiko that begins manically and ends like a torch song. The first part of the song plays over a pan of a city and a bridge. After the director's name appears against a black background, the screen changes to a tilted rectangle featuring a close-up of Reiko's face as she sings the bluesy conclusion of the song before this screen too recedes into darkness.



Fig. 3. Reiko finishes her torch song as her screen recedes into blackness.



Fig. 4. Friendly communication with a lethal overdose.

Even the relatively more realistic sequences in the film take shortcuts to represent psychological states that the novel only reveals gradually. Shirato encounters Tōko before meeting the captain as they both look at the sea from the deck, and she drops a bottle of sleeping pills, which Shirato retrieves for her. When she arrives at dinner, she is still carrying the bottle, which she places on the table close to her soup bowl. Tōko and Shirato have adjoining cabins, and he knocks gently on the wall as a greeting to her, which she responds to by knocking back, using her sleeping pill bottle to tap (Fig. 4).

This scene is rather benign and indicates a growing friendship between the two, and the fact that she taps with the pill bottle also suggests that her suicidal thoughts may have abated. The screen darkens on this innocuous sequence only to burst into the next scene that is so violent and so decontextualized it seems more like a trailer for the film than the film itself. It is suddenly broad daylight and Shirato and Tōko are struggling on the top of a mountain; he is holding her to keep her from leaping into the sea below, and she is inexplicably still holding onto the pill bottle (Fig. 5). He slaps her and when she collapses the film cuts to a medium two-shot of them sitting on the beach, calmly discussing what happened.



Fig. 5. Life and Death Struggle.



Fig. 6. Reiko grabs Toko in front of Osaka Station.

From the scene between Shirato and Tōko on the plane, to Reiko introducing Shirato to pilots in Kobe, the film follows the novel quite faithfully. But the setting of the pilots' company is Kawashima's creation. The group of ex-war pilots now run a business, cleaning plane lavatories for the US Air Force. Their headquarters is tucked behind a bar called Pandora, and the passage connecting the bar and the office is behind a movie screen, showing backwards whatever film the theater is screening. This configuration also occurs in Kawashima's 1956 film, *Balloon/風船*, where a frequent setting is a bar behind a movie screen. At one point the characters are thrown into relief by the trailer for *Harp of Burma/ビルマの竖琴* (Ishikawa Kon 1956) projected backwards.

The crew is itself a kind of parody of ultra-masculinist fantasies. Each member is fixated on his respective rank as a pilot in the Japanese military, a role that has foreclosed the possibility of flying in postwar Japan. Indeed, they are now dreaming of past Imperial glories while scrubbing the toilets of the enemy planes. The head of the group, Aoki Sankichi (Oki Minoru),<sup>1</sup> was one of three brothers, all war pilots, and he was the only one who survived. His dedication to the memory of his brothers and other war dead led him to form this company and to require all of his men to swear off association with women.

Just as the narrative was fragmented and accelerated by the representational strategies Kawashima deployed in the prelude and the encounter with Tōko, the geography of the field of action takes on a fluidity that borrows from cinematic

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<sup>1</sup> The character's name in the novel is Araki Sankichi, but when Kawashima noticed that one of the planes used in the film was clearly marked "Aoki Aviation," he changed the character's name to match that designation (Kawashima Kurabu, *Shochiku Jidai* 134).



imagery as well. When Reiko ushers Shirato into Aoki's office, their conversation is illuminated by a news reel behind them of an open-air market, perhaps in another part of Asia. And this feature also figures in refiguring space in "real" time as well.

One of the fundamental coincidences in the story is that the businessman Shirato seeks an investment from turns out to be Tōko's husband, Saida Shohei (Shinto Eitaro). Shirato succeeds in interesting Saida in the venture and as Shirato is seated in a train in Osaka Station, Tōko appears (sent by her husband) to deliver a check. Just as she does that, Reiko also appears to send Shirato off. She is very suspicious of Tōko, and when she grabs Tōko to have a talk in front of Osaka Station, all realistic notions of space dissolve (Fig. 6). Tōko objects and asks to be released, but Reiko pulls her firmly and says, "Come with me."



Fig. 7. Reiko committed, Shirato internally absent.



Fig. 8. Toko gazing at the harbor, dreaming of a fine day . . .

There is a cut to a car racing downhill in the night, but this is not Reiko and Tōko but a film projected on the movie screen wedged between the Pandora bar and the pilot crew's office. Stranger still, this image occurs before Reiko and Tōko arrive. Once they are in front of the screen, Reiko demands to know the nature of her relationship with Shirato, while dancing girls arrange themselves on the screen behind them, throwing the two women into partial silhouettes.<sup>2</sup> Unsatisfied with

<sup>2</sup> The film is *シミキンのスポーツ王* (*Shimikin, King of Sports*) (Kawashima Yūzō 1949) (Ueno 144). Determined by the access to copyright, the films selected in these constructions become

Tōko's answers, she lets her go with a warning and says, "there's a train station nearby." She grabbed Tōko in front of Osaka station, but the Pandora is in Kobe. How did she pull Tōko all the way to another city, and why? That question is never answered but rather deferred by the deliberate editing of the car scene on screen with the sequence in the plot.

Film also insinuates itself into even the minimalist emotional arrangement that Reiko attempts to negotiate with Shirato. Reiko camps out in the offices of the fledgling aviation company and persuades Shirato to take her to the movies. There we see him sleeping while Reiko and the other women spectators remain emotionally engaged in the Hollywood film on screen. When he wakes, Reiko persuades him to go to a hotel to talk. In the room she asks Shirato about the status of their relationship and suddenly says, "*Daite*, [embrace me], my darling [in English]." He tells her not to speak so strangely and she explains, "It's a line from the film, you slept through that scene."

Reiko again asks for an exclusive relationship, even if it is only for a limited time, and in response to his silence she bargains herself down from one year to six months to one month. He then looks at her with lust and says he has never desired her as much as he does at this moment. But is it Reiko that attracts him or her explicit promise to want nothing from him? Their embrace looks like a pose that illustrates Reiko's commitment and Shirato's internal distance from even his own emotions (Fig. 7).

Although nothing had happened between Tōko and Shirato when Reiko first became suspicious, Tōko's feelings for Shirato grow. Shirato also develops feelings for Tōko, but his affect remains unrelated to his confession of those feelings. At one point, Shirato and Saido, the object of and obstacle to Tōko's desire, respectively, have a conversation that is the polar opposite of the negotiation and confession that Reiko made in the hotel room:

Saida: What do you think of romantic love?

Shirato: It's a bother.

Saida: Is it a bad thing or a good thing?

Shirato: It depends on the situation.

Saida: What if it were I who felt romantic love?

Shirato: I don't see how that could be bad.

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signatures of their respective studio. Here, in his final film for Shochiku, Kawashima offers a glimpse backward to his earlier work. In *Balloon*, the screen shows the trailer for *Harp of Burma*, a present-day film of his fellow Nikkatsu director, Ichikawa Kon.

Saida: What if it were were Tōko who fell in love?

Shirato: Your wife?

Saida: You can't say that's good even kidding.

Shirato: Of course that would be bad.

Saida: Would you do me the favor of telling her clearly that romantic love is a bad idea? . . .

Shirato: Why don't you tell her yourself? . . .

Saida: She wouldn't listen to me. She thinks I have never fallen in love. . . . Well I guess I haven't. . . . If I fell in love I wouldn't have my business.

Shirato: Why don't you try it sometime?

Saida: [laughs] Ridiculous!

Although Shirato does not claim to have had the experience of falling in love, he seems to share Saida's annoyance with the idea, and the two talk about "love" as if it is a kind of "female trouble." While Saida rejects it outright, Shirato seems to acknowledge the need to humor it up to a point.

In the film, the men are marked by their inability to love and the women by the priority they place on it. And this absolute division was deliberately assured by Kawashima by cutting out almost entirely a prominent character in the novel, Shinomiya Otohiko, the man that Tōko loved for eight years. On the plane Tōko told Shirato that her eight-year relationship remained platonic, and she wasn't even sure he had ever felt the same way about her as she felt about him, but she was lying. In the first scene he appears in, Shinomiya declares his love for her (which apparently wasn't the first time) and promises not to marry his fiancé if Tōko would leave her husband. Tōko's mischaracterization of his feelings parallels the film's marginalization of him and his emotional capacity.

The conflict between women who demand love and men who are incapable of giving it is a tired standard situation in melodrama, but Kawashima revives it here as part of a new engagement with the form. To appreciate this further, we need to look closer at formal aspects of the film, especially the women on screen—not the characters but the actresses cast to play them.

### **Surechigai to Another Melodrama**

Kido Shirō was purged from filmmaking in 1947, but he was able to return to Shochiku in 1951 and served first as vice president and then as president until 1955

(Nakagawa 123-24). It was during this period, moreover, that Shochiku again enjoyed tremendous success with a three-part melodrama that depended fundamentally on *surechigai*, *What Is Your Name?*/君の名は (Oba Hideo, 1953-54).<sup>3</sup>

The film opens during a US firebombing of Tokyo on May 24, 1945. A soldier, Atomiya Haruki (Sada Keiji), and a young woman, Ujiie Machiko (Kishi Keiko), are caught in the attack on the Sukiya Bridge near the Ginza. They take shelter together, and before parting the next morning they make a pledge that if the war ends and they have both survived they will meet again on that bridge six months from the night they met. The soldier asks the young woman's name, but in the confusion she leaves without telling him. On November 24, 1945, Hiroki waits on the bridge in vain, as Michiko is at her aunt and uncle's home on Sado Island for the beginning of an *omiai* (arranged marriage negotiation).

Several months later, Ishikawa Aya (Awashima Chikage), a friend of Machiko's, comes across a journal that features a series of poems by Atomiya about the young woman he had encountered on the bridge who did not appear as promised. She shows this to Machiko, who in turn explains the situation to her would-be fiancé, Hamaguchi Katsunori (Kawakita Yuji). He offers to accompany Machiko on the search for Hiroki so that she could resolve her feelings, and to decide between Hamaguchi and Atomiya. When they travel to the Atomiya household, the only person there is his older sister, Yukie (Tsukioka Yumeji), a severely depressed war widow. Impressed by Hamaguchi's thoughtfulness, Yukie persuades Machiko to give up the dream of her younger brother and to marry this stable, promising suitor.

On the next November 24, Haruki again waits on the bridge, and this time Machiko appears. But his joy at the reunion is short-lived as she tells him she is getting married the next day. Machiko's life in the Hamaguchi household is difficult as the mother-in-law is unkind, and it becomes even more difficult when Machiko again encounters Haruki. There are several meetings and failed meetings (*surechigai*) over the three feature-length, tear-drenched films.

The star-crossed lovers, played by Kishi Keiko and Sada Keiji, are the center of *What Is Your Name?*, but Kawashima cast the two women from the polarized margins of that film to be the center of *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow*. In the Oba's trilogy, Aya (Awashima Chikage) was instrumental in finding Hiroki and generally supported Machiko's dream to reunite with him. Hiroki's older sister, Yoshie (Tsukioka Yumeji), talked Machiko out of searching for Hiroki and into

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<sup>3</sup> Makoto Shinkai went through three titles for his mega-hit anime before settling on a fourth, *What is Your Name?*. The allusion to its 1950s namesake would be lost on the anime's fans both internationally and domestically.

settling for a stable marriage. In fact, Yoshie not only represented marriage but also its resignation, as she is a war widow in the first part of the film who remarries in Part Two. In fact, it is Yoshie's second wedding in Tokyo that causes another *surechigai*, because Hiroki had gone to Tokyo for the ceremony by the time Machiko arrived in Hokkaido to find him.

In Kawashima's film both Awashima's performance as the brash Reiko and Tsukioka's performance as the repressed Toka gain an added affective power from associations with their respective characters in *What Is Your Name?*. Because *Between Yesterday and Today* was released the same year as Part Three of *What Is Your Name?*, and considering the box office bonanza the latter film was, it is very likely that any viewer of Kawashima's film would have already seen Oba's.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Meta-Melodramatic Conclusion*

Before the official launch of the Aoki Aviation Company, Tōko told her husband that she and Shirato loved each other, and she would leave Saida if Shirato would take her. At the celebration after the launch, Saida publicly asks Shirato if he is in love with Tōko, and if so, he promises to let them be together without consequences for the company. After a very long pause, Shirato announces that he will marry Danjō Reiko, who is as shocked as everyone else to hear this news. She then does a solo dance, and in a parody of a Kabuki monologue, she takes official leave of Shirato and runs away. Shirato's stunt (especially in front of Tōko) makes Reiko realize that none of his actions, even agreeing to something she had always wanted, were informed by anything resembling full human feeling, and she finally gives up. Later, Shirato, Saida, and Tōko are alone, with Tōko standing silently by an open balcony when Shirato resigns, not because of any of these emotional complications, but because, having achieved his goal of founding the aviation company, he is now ready to move on to the next adventure, salvaging sunken warships from Manila Bay.

The film ends with Shirato on board a ship bound for Manila, flanked by two deliberate *surechigai*. Unlike the heroines of *The Yearning Tree* and *What Is Your Name?*, Tōko and Reiko do not miss the send-off because of a fate they have each submitted to. Their absence is an abstention and a form of agency. Shirato is handed a letter from Tōko, and we hear her voice reading the letter as we see her on a distant mountain, overlooking Kobe harbor and Shirato's ship. She writes that she went to

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<sup>4</sup> *What is Your Name?* Part Three was released on April 27, 1954. *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow* was released on June 15, 1954.

Kobe but realized she did not have the courage to accompany Shirato to Manila (which is somewhat puzzling, since he did not ask her to come). Her monologue mourns her apparent fate and the fate “of all women trapped as wives in households,” which, she muses, “is perhaps what comes of being born as women” (Fig. 8).

On the day of the film’s release, June 15, 1954, *Nikkan Sports* printed a dialogue between Kawashima and feminist writer and performer Miyake Tsuyako (under her married name Abe Tsuyako). Miyake marveled at the rapid pace of the film and also wished that more melodramas like this one would be made. But on the other hand, she also wished this film “had had bit more of the fairy tale in it,” apparently hoping for a happier ending for both women. She also was uneasy with Tōko’s generalizations about “Japanese women” (Abe and Kawashima 94).

Tōko’s final optimism is even grimmer than her fatalism. She claims to be sustained by the feeling that “one sunny day” she and Shirato will “meet again,” and so she will live “as best as I can” while “waiting for the sunny day that may never come.” She also identifies that idea and that phrase from “*Un bel dio*,” “One Fine Day,” the infamous aria sung by Cio-cio san in *Madama Butterfly* as she looks out at the harbor, longing for Pinkerton’s return, a return that will bring her a final catastrophe. The soundtrack underscores Tōko’s wish by incorporating the aria’s themes into the film score momentarily. The discomfort of this scene and Tōko’s apparent lack of irony serve as one of two final indictments of Shirato on the level of cinematic address.

The second indictment is more direct and conscious of itself as such. As Shirato finishes reading Tōko’s letter, he sees Aoki’s plane circling the ship. When the plane gets as low as it can go safely, Aoki and his crew toss a bouquet to Shirato. From a close-up of the bouquet the film cuts to a view of the entire ship and the plane, projected as a film on the screen adjacent to the Pandora bar. Reiko stands watching the film and her younger sister (Nozoe Hitomi) joins her, holding a bouquet nearly identical to the one thrown from the plane. Her sister says, “You didn’t go to see Mr. Shirato off, even though [Aoki] Sankichi gave you the departure time,” to which Reiko responds, “Neither of them are part of my world now. They belong to yesterday.” She is correct on several levels. Aoki and his crew cling to their military past, and Shirato is off to facilitate the resurrection of the Japanese navy, both projects a symbolic if not necrophiliac engagement with a Japanese Imperial masculinity that has no place in the contemporary world, no place in today or tomorrow, where Reiko is heading. In her fantasy, Tōko casts herself as a heroine in a male-written tragedy, awaiting an already-written fate. Reiko watches a film of the departure, the screen providing the distance for critical scrutiny, something Kawashima also provides the

viewers. Tōko's *surechigai* is theatrical, Reiko's is *cinematic*, and the pair of them are meta-melodramatic.<sup>5</sup>

### *Starving Soul*/飢える魂

*Starving Soul* (1956) is a two-part film adaptation of Niwa Fumio's sprawling novel of adultery and sex after widowhood. Although the length of the novel warrants two films to cover it, Kawashima is not as interested in exhaustively or faithfully translating the plot to the screen as he is in experimenting with a mirroring structure between the two halves. The credit sequence and opening scene of Part One frames the entire film, radically altering the thematic focus of the narrative in ways utterly independent of Niwa's novel. The corresponding opening scene of Part Two will add another dimension to Kawashima's construction.



Fig. 9. Kawashima's ominous opening for *Starving Soul*, Part 1.



Fig. 10. The framing omits the woman's name, identifying her only as the gynecological condition to be corrected.

The novel opens in the home of a professor of French literature, Ajioka Reiji, and his wife Michiyo. The grounds and house are described in luscious prose that is more interesting than the rather banal social situation that serves only to introduce two of the major characters, the widow Ogouchi Mayumi and Shiba Reiko, a beautiful young woman suffering in a marriage to a cruel man 20 years her senior (Niwa 3-8). The

<sup>5</sup> Gu Mina observes that a melodrama aims to excite certain emotions in viewers, and historically this particularly applies to women. But in order to do this, the film needs to adhere to certain codes of realism in order to facilitate identification and incite the intended emotional response. But Kawashima deviates from this pattern in his violations of realist codes in this film (Gu 310-11).

main points of this scene, including a subplot involving Mayumi's daughter, are preserved in Kawashima's version but transferred to a setting that opens like a horror film.

The first image is a long hospital corridor where two nurses pushing an inert figure on a trolley, with ominous music on the soundtrack (Fig. 9). It is not clear if the figure is alive or dead. But the trolley stops at a blackboard listing the surgeries scheduled and focuses on the central phrase: "Uterine Fibroids" (Fig. 10). The film cuts to an operating theater and the scene lasts through the entire credit sequence (Fig. 11).<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 11. The stars' names imposed over the removal of a woman's uterus.



Fig. 12. Introducing Mayumi and Reiko in the post-hysterectomy recovery room.

The next scene is the hospital bed in which Ajioka Michiyo (Takano Yumi) is recovering. Ogouchi Mayumi (Tadokoro Yukiko) arranges flowers and then asks a question which is the first line of the entire film: "What is it like to have your womb taken out?" Akiko replies, "I feel like I'm no longer a woman." They then discuss the biology of women and how men have nothing corresponding to this and have never made an attempt to understand women's experience, also predicting that neither Professor Ajioka nor any other man will visit. At that moment Shima Reiko (Minamida Yoko) comes in briefly but has to hasten to another appointment her husband had arranged for her (against her objections) (Fig. 12).

We learn that Mayumi has been a widow for ten years, raising two nearly adult children and working as an estate agent. The Ajiokas are worried that Reiko made a

<sup>6</sup> Akiko does have a hysterectomy in the novel as well, but it occurs later and it only functions as one of several social obligations Reiko has to deal with while torturing herself over her feelings for Tachibana (Niwa 72-74). It is not a platform for feminist perspectives on gynecology.



mistake in marrying the older man, who is tyrannical and has given her little cause for joy in the ten years of marriage so far. The narrative that will unfold will involve both women's responses to the chance for emotional and sexual fulfillment, Mayumi with her late husband's best friend (Osaka Shirō), and Reiko with the very dashing Kobayashi Retsu (Mihashi Tatsuya), a friendly business rival of her husband's.

Although Professor Ajioka (Kaneko Nobuo) indeed does not appear at the hospital, he is featured in the first scene of Part Two, which creates an intriguing tension between the two beginnings. He is lecturing his university class on Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. The scene opens with a tight close-up of his face, sheathed in the smoke from his cigarette as he pontificates on "the woman problem." When he stands, the film cuts to a wide angle shot of the classroom which shows a phrase in French on the blackboard behind him: "*Ô femme! femme! femme! créature faible*"—"O woman! Woman! Woman! Weak Creature!" (Fig. 13). This is a line from the libretto of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, written by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, from Act V, Scene 3, part of a misogynist rant by Figaro who accuses all women of treachery.



Fig. 13. Professor Ajioka lectures on *Madame Bovary*.



Fig. 14. Reiko listens to the *Madame Bovary* lecture from outside.

As he paces forward, Ajioka describes Emma Bovary as a woman trapped in a tedious marriage, making her responsive to the courtship of another man. Reiko stands outside the classroom door listening, as if hearing an indictment against her (Fig. 14).



Fig. 15. Reiko ends the *Madame Bovary* lecture by peering in the window.



Fig. 16. Stars of *Women Are Born Twice*, going to see *The Magnificent Seven*!

As Ajioka continues, musing that there are many Emmas “even here in Japan” and that everyone might have “Emma” within them, Reiko peers in the window, disrupting the class and prompting Ajioka to dismiss the students (Fig. 15).

Reiko does not deserve the blame that Ajioka places on Emma—and indeed, neither does Emma. Reiko’s gaze into the window serves as an intervention in another male judgment against a woman’s reality that is deeply implicated in male fantasies about women. While Shima Reiko may not as yet have the attitude that Danjō Reiko achieved at the conclusion of *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow*, the larger context of this scene provides a discursive support for the critique she may not yet be ready to embrace. Let us consider the two opening scenes in tandem. The first scene poses three women discussing the physiological realities of women, which men keep a distance from except as an object of medical pathologization. The second scene is a male monologue, repeating truisms of a cultural elitism that exalts a woman’s suffering in marriage as an artistic condemnation of that woman. But just as Reiko standing outside the door ultimately stands as a contrary witness, the film itself vindicates the potential of a popular cultural text as a means of critical inquiry—even as it presents a lecture on a “great novel” that excoriates “popular romances” as the trash that leads women astray. This film stands outside that lecture hall with Shima

Reiko and encourages us to peer in the window with the alienated scrutiny (of Danjō Reiko observing Shirato's departure on Pandora's movie screen) that Kawashima has adapted the cinematic apparatus to instigate and sustain.

## Critical Ambivalence around the Melodrama

For decades melodrama was dismissed as an emotionally manipulative entertainment not worthy of serious attention. In the west, this changed when feminist film theorists such as Clare Johnson, Christine Gledhill, Mary Ann Doane, and others offered new analyses of films such as *Stella Dallas*, *Mildred Pierce*, etc., to illuminate how such texts raise questions surrounding women's desire and its suppression through the politics of representation and the contradictions within narrative closure.

In Japan, Ayako Saito's work on Masumura Yasuzō—and in particular on the significance of his collaborations with the actress Wakao Ayako—are fundamental to a deeper understanding of the genre. Other important investigations into melodrama in the Japanese contexts include Chika Kinoshita's monograph on Mizoguchi Kenji, and Misono Ryoko's study of the relation of Shochiku melodrama of the 1930s to the rise of fascist culture. Here I would like to look at one attempt to account for melodrama written during Kawashima's active years, a brief essay by film critic Izawa Jun that appeared in the August 15, 1958 issue of *Kinema Junpo*, "Today's Film Melodrama/今日のメロドラマ映画."

Izawa begins by observing that "books on film almost never deal with melodrama," since such books are intended "to theorize the art of cinema" and melodramas are too far removed from that category. In fact, he asserts that labeling a film "melodrama" is tantamount to invalidating it (Izawa 40). He also suggests that contemporary popular films reflect an aversion to the melodramatic as well, citing the Ishihara Yujiro boom as support for his claim. Yujiro became a star from two films: *Season of the Sun/太陽の季節* (Furukawa Takumi 1956) and *Crazed Fruit/狂った果実* (Narahira Ko 1956), both adapted from fiction written by his older brother, Ishihara Shintaro, who would later become a right-wing member of the Diet and long-term, highly divisive governor of Tokyo. Izawa writes of Yujiro's mega-hit *The Man Who Called a Storm/嵐を呼ぶ男子* (Inoue Umetsugu 1957), a film so well-known at the time that Izawa presumes any reader knows the plot. Ishihara plays a troubled youth with a hot temper that lands him in jail. He is bailed out and groomed for stardom as a jazz drummer, and he eventually achieves both popular success and emotional maturity after overcoming multiple obstacles including a broken hand, romantic entanglements, and run-ins with career criminals and unethical producers.

Not only the action of the film, but also the fact it was shot in eye-popping color and showcased Ishihara's sultry singing style, contributed to the film's popularity. Izawa describes the overall Gestalt of the film as a "dry" style that he argues is a glossy surface that disguises the underlying sentimental subplot of a son's reconciliation with his mother (Izawa 40). The reconciliation is the emotional payoff that Izawa contends Japanese audiences expect from popular film.

Izawa contrasts the "dry" style of Ishihara's film to the "wet" melodrama *What Is Your Name?*. While *What Is Your Name?* is definitely more sentimental than the youth films of the latter part of the decade, both that film and Izawa's attitude toward melodrama deserve closer critical attention, the former for what it offers precisely through its generic conventions, and the latter for its suggestive contradictions.

*Surechigai* comes under fire as a cheap narrative trick, although a more generous reading might consider it a trope for the kinds of emotional upheavals women experienced in the micropolitics of human relations. For Izawa, *surechigai* is a forced coincidence that further invalidates the genre that depends on it, just as the transrational insistence of Machiko to hold a love for Hiroki above all else after a chance meeting one night in the past renders her story "unrelatable." But both the fictional obsession of Machiko and Hiroki for each other and the textual celebration of that obsession could be read as expressions of post-traumatic stress or a means of dealing with that trauma.

On March 10, 1945, under the direction of Curtis LeMay, the US dropped nearly 1700 tons of incendiary bombs on Tokyo, creating an ocean of fire so great, survivors described city blocks turned into vacuums as the flames sucked the air out of them. And this was only the most devastating of over 100 bombing missions over Tokyo from November 1944 until August 1945. The atrocities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have understandably captured world attention, but the survivors of the fire bombings also had their own stories to tell. And the traumas lingered. Freud once compared the unconscious to Rome, noting that whenever the city of Rome engaged in renewal, excavation uncovered an older Rome buried beneath current surfaces. A similar but particularly ghastly encounter with a repressed memory occurred in Tokyo in 1967, when workers repairing the Tozai subway line unearthed a shelter housing the skeletons of two children and four adults. This triggered thousands of memories of the bombings, which were then publicized and recorded, many for the first time ever (Saotome 12-18; 56ff, and *passim*). That these memories were held in abeyance and triggered also supports the idea that memories of kindness, human warmth, and even the possibility of love during one of those nights that rained hell fire down on the city might form a kind of core belief, might even guide a template

for desire thereafter. And while that might not be “practical” in “real life,” it might form a valid and validating poetics of loss and recovery, and a spectrum of acquiescence and aspiration, such as the one *What Is Your Name?* could provide.

Although the drama of *What Is Your Name?* is definitely overwrought (much of the soundtrack consists of organ solos that range from crescendos to dirges) and strains credulity, it does not seem to warrant the contempt Izawa expends on it. Izawa notes that the film earned billions of yen for Shochiku Studio, but he claims that it harmed the director’s reputation, making it impossible for Oba to get backing for “serious” films thereafter (a claim that Oba’s subsequent filmography disproves). Izawa also suspects that directors assigned melodramas fall into some kind of indolent despair and make half-hearted films. While there may be films that fit that description, such a generalization preempts both empirical observation and critical reflection. *What Is Your Name?* draws on the Shochiku lineage of specific styles of melodrama that formed serious aesthetic and conceptual motifs in the mid-1930s. Although those films often supported right-wing ideals either directly or indirectly, their representational patterns and stylistic traditions were adopted for progressive agendas in the early post-war period (Jackson, “Passionate” 11-14).

But merely countering Izawa’s blind spots is not ultimately useful, since both his elisions and the complexities of his attitude are actually more illuminating than might at first appear. Izawa’s problem with melodrama would not be resolved by discontinuing the genre, since he discerns a need it fulfills among Japanese audiences. He admits that “the spectator yearns for melodrama. We can see that even in Yujiro’s films.” Because “the masses [大衆] seek in films that which belongs to the affective world of the Japanese, it is offered to them through Yujiro films, however these films then cannot escape the frame of the melodrama” (Izawa 40).

In a bizarre turn in his argument, Izawa counters his praise of Yujiro’s ability to *hide* the melodramatic impulse by extolling Kishi Keiko’s ability to *embody* it. He then expresses regret that none of the actresses who have emerged in the four years since the release of *What Is Your Name?* possess Kishi’s gift of becoming a melodramatic heroine (Izawa 40-41). Apart from Izawa’s dismissal of contemporary actresses, his reverence for Kishi also suggests a kind of melancholic attachment to the kind of lost object of desire she represented in *What Is Your Name?*. Although Kishi may have seemed lost to Izawa writing in 1958, she was not dead—Kishi married the French director Yves Ciampi in 1957 and moved to France. She appeared in two of Ciampi’s films<sup>7</sup> and soon began frequent returns to Japan to continue her Japanese film career as well. But Izawa’s high assessment of Kishi was not unique.

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<sup>7</sup> *Typhon sur Nagasaki* (1957) and *Qui êtes-vous, Monsieur Sorge?* (1961)

Two critics who shared such an assessment did a better account of it in 1961, when they offered their “Kishi Keiko Theory/岸恵子論.” This text was based on several conversations with the actress and a discussion of her new bicontinental life. But the writers also revisited *What Is Your Name?* and Kishi’s role.

*What Is Your Name?* holds a subtle position in Japanese cinema history, successfully bringing into communion prewar and postwar sensibilities. Kishi Keiko, who completely owned the role of heroine, already harbored within herself the character and scale of that period. Machiko was the tear-drenched heroine. And Kishi gave life to the heroine of the melodrama that unfolded in those tears (Hata and Endo 28).

They go on to elaborate how Kishi was able to portray the heroine overwhelmed by her situation while at the same time allowing an inner strength to shine through. With this double affect, Kishi could stand in for Japanese woman who endured the war without succumbing to despair, but rather intuited a new human potential in the post-war era (Hata and Endo 28-29).

In a final turn of his argument, Izawa ponders what will be lost in Japanese cinema if melodrama disappears. One of the hallmarks of classical melodrama is the depiction of romantic love independent of sexuality. While in some cases sexual desire may be suggested, it is only obliquely, and still subservient to the emotional bond. Contrarily, Izawa observes a tendency in contemporary films to confuse romantic love and sexual desire, or to replace love with sex altogether (Izawa 41-42). Although he does not cite examples, the youth films based on Ishihara Shintaro’s writings that catapulted Yujiro to stardom are prime instances of this tendency. Even Ichikawa Kon’s anti-Ishihara adaptation of Ishihara’s novella *Punishment Room/処刑の部屋* (1957) features a brutal date rape and discussions of male-female relations based exclusively on sexual appetite. Or consider the classical Shochiku melodrama *Warm Current/暖流* (Yoshimura Kōzaburō 1939), with its highly codified expression/repression of the loving tenderness of the nurse Ishiwata Gin (Mito Mitsuko) for Hibiki (Saburi Shin) compared to the blatant sexual attraction displayed by the same nurse (now played by Hidari Sachiko), who literally tackles Hibiki (Negami Jun) in Tokyo Station, shouting that she wants him either as a wife or a mistress but must have him in Masumura Yasuzō’s 1957 remake (Jackson, “Cinematic” 156-57). Whatever films Izawa had in mind, he warns that “Japanese emotional sensibilities have not assimilated the new conception of romance identified with sexual desire” and even admits that “Emotions entangled in a tragic love that

are called 'melodramatic' are far more in keeping with Japanese tendencies of feeling—including “enjoying crying at the movies” (Izawa 42).<sup>8</sup>

I am not presenting Izawa's statements on melodrama as a strawman to knock down. On the contrary, the conceptual turbulence within his position on melodrama is precisely what makes it so valuable and instructive. Melodrama is at once dismissed as trivial while its emotive-affective capacity is treasured and mourned in the very process of that dismissal as something valuable that has just been lost. But there is something else remarkable to glean from his text. If “Japanese” find a satisfaction in melodrama, then that also means that in that very enjoyment, the spectator is also being confirmed in that Japanese identity. This formulation has an ominous pre-war and wartime predecessor.

Misono Ryuko begins her chapter on the reception of *The Yearning Tree* by quoting the opening sentences of an essay Kido Shirō published in the January 1939 issue of *Kinema Junpo*, “映画の最大使命は国民娯楽” —“The Greatest Mission of Cinema is National Entertainment”: “Who does Cinema belong to? If it does not belong to the producers, the script writers, or the directors, it certainly does not belong to the critics. Cinema belongs to the masses (大衆)” (Kido, qtd. in Misono 205). The difference between the *kokumin* (国民, “national” or “people of the nation”) in the title of the essay and the “masses” (大衆 [taishū]) in the body of the text is a sign that the two terms were becoming interchangeable in the 1930s and throughout the war. Misono surmises that Kido wrote the essay as a response to growing criticism that Shochiku films were more focused on “entertainment” than education or moral enlightenment (Misono 206). As the debate continued, terms such as *kokumin bunka* (国民文化 “national culture”) and *Nihon bunka* (日本文化 “Japanese culture”) added to the conceptual slippage (207). *Kokumin* is at times translated as “nation,” but its meaning is contextually variable. In this case, *kokumin* imagines a people bound by a common culture and in this commonality the *kokumin* would serve the interests of the state (Doak 201-04). To be a consumer/believer in the melodrama becomes linked to acknowledging oneself as part of the *kokumin* and thus declaring allegiance to the state and its imperialist project on the Asian continent. The slippage between the masses and the *kokumin* in this cultural sense was exacerbated by the phenomenal success of the three parts of *The Yearning Tree* and the publicity around that success. The surveys of the films' popularity stressed the regional differences overcome in binding every corner of Japan into a national appreciative audience

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<sup>8</sup> Even a slightly later, more deliberately positive consideration of melodrama (the same films, in fact) is articulated as a confession, beginning with the title: “I Love Melodrama More than Anyone.” See Onuma.

(Misono 210-11). The once disparaged “women’s picture” or melodrama was now praised for its accessibility and the appeal through which it creates a commonality among spectators (208-09). As a result, “*kokumin* and *taishū*”—two similar but incommensurable categories—become fused (Misono 211). What I translated as “incommensurable” in Misono’s original is *surechigau*—the very slippage that became the central trope of the plots of both *The Yearning Tree* and *What Is Your Name?*. In other words, the rhetorical trends of the 1930s allowed the concepts of “the masses” and “the national people” to unite in ways forbidden in the deliberate postponement of satisfaction in the melodramatic films that now were mobilized to create that political union.

Kawashima was an assistant director at Shochiku precisely when these debates were raging. His attention to them, tempered by his long-standing commitment to leftist politics (which he had to keep secret at the time), allowed him to appreciate the potential of melodrama as a genre without subscribing to the ways it was exploited. In some ways, Kawashima’s practice of filmmaking evinces a productive ambivalence to melodrama reminiscent of the critical ambivalence Izawa displays. To expand on this point, I turn to a film in which Kawashima addresses both the seductive dangers of melodrama unchecked and the means of appreciating its emotive impact without abandoning a critical distance.

### *Women Are Born Twice*/女は二度生まれる (1961)

The film concerns the life of Tomoko (Wakao Ayako), who was orphaned when her parents died in a US air raid. With no other family, she became a Geisha (named Koen) whose services also include sleeping with clients. When the film opens, Koen is already well-established and maintains a clear distinction between her work and her off-duty sexual desires. Here I will look at two instances of her acting on her desire, but I will read the scenes as interventions in the ordinary understanding of the melodrama.

Isawa worried that abandoning the restrictions of the melodrama would lead to rampant sexuality in the films. There is a sequence late in the film that parodies such qualms, and in a way enacts what might be a parents’ nightmare about the seductions of cinema. One afternoon, 17-year old Kochan (Takami Kuniichi) stops Koen in front of a cinema, asking if she would buy one of the two movie tickets he had been stuck with. At first she refuses, but she finds the boy charming and buys it. They watch the film together and see each other at least two other times. This scene also is distinguished with an inside joke. The poster in the background when the two first



meet advertises *The Magnificent Seven* (John Sturges 1960), the US remake of *Seven Samurai* (Kurosawa Akira 1954) (Fig. 16).

During the second meeting, this time in an hourly room rental inn, Koen introduces Kochan to beer, cigarettes, and sex, although her affection for him resembles that of an aunt for a nephew. Wakao Ayako is regarded as one of the greatest actresses of Japanese cinema. She is also a great beauty, and in the idiom of the 1960s definitely a “sex symbol.” Her status and aura charge these scenes with a kind of metacinematic seduction, which culminates in a third scene in which Koen waits inside the movie theater mezzanine in case Kochan is there. He emerges amid the post-screening crowd with a young woman. When the girl excuses herself to go to the restroom, Koen asks him who she is, and when he says he just met her, Koen takes him away with her to the countryside (Fig. 17). In this fantasy, contemporary films do not merely put lurid thoughts into young people’s heads, the most alluring figures on screen come after them directly in the theater.



Fig. 17. The onscreen sex goddess plucks the youth from the theater.



Fig. 18. Maki translates the English Yasukuni sign into Japanese.

The other sequence to consider here is far more serious, as it concerns decoupling the melodrama from ideology, and the “masses” from the “*kokumin*.” On several occasions, Koen notices Maki Junichiro (Fujimaki Jun), a handsome university student, in her neighborhood. At one point she accosts him directly, and when he says he is going to Yasukuni Shrine, she claims she was thinking of praying there. He delivers documents to an office, and he then joins her at the main hall. On the grounds, they come upon a large sign explaining the function of Yasukuni Shrine in English, which Maki translates for Koen (Fig. 18). Maki’s translation includes the portion of the sign cut off in the way it is framed on screen. What he says is common knowledge anywhere in Japan, and certainly known by any visitors. Furthermore, there is a sign in Japanese next to the English sign that remains entirely out of frame. In any event, as Maki recites, the Shrine was built in 1869 to commemorate those who died in the war to “restore” the Emperor (thus ushering in the modern Meiji era in 1868). And it later commemorated Japanese soldiers from subsequent wars. What is not mentioned, of course, is that the names of over 1,000 convicted war criminals, including fourteen Class-A war criminals, are also enshrined here. This has made the site controversial, and visits from Japanese politicians are offensive to Koreans, Chinese, and Taiwanese, as well as to more progressive factions in Japan (T. Takahashi 16-18).

Maki and Koen’s conversation continues under the weight of the Imperial Chrysanthemum. He mentions that his father is enshrined here. Koen responds that her parents were killed in air raids but are not so honored. The desiring gaze she trains on Maki throughout the Shrine visit diminishes the gravity he attempts in his speech. Even her story of her parents’ fate seems part of her attempt at engaging his interest in her. In other words, Koen’s desire—Koen’s story (i.e., the melodrama of the film)—maintains a distance from the ideological message parroted by (and represented by) Maki. Asking him to translate the sign, in fact, is another distancing strategy.

In a much later scene, Maki is one of the hosts of two American VIPs at a geisha party where Koen is also working. At first she is glad to see him, but later he plots with his superior to sell Koen for the night to one of the Americans (“the tall foreigner,” she is told). This scene retroactively negates any earlier veneer of virtue that Maki displayed at the shrine. In other words, the two scenes considered together completely disassociates the “masses”—the viewers of the melodrama from the *kokumin* solicited by Yasukuni.

### ***The Flow of the Evening/夜の流れ* (Kawashima Yūzō and Naruse Mikio 1960)**

We have just considered three films primarily for the interruptions in the melodrama presented. I would like to conclude this survey by considering a film whose melodrama is constituted by interruptions. In 1960, Kawashima and Naruse agreed to co-direct *Yoru no Nagare/Flow of the Evening* by dividing up scenes beforehand. Kawashima was to direct the scenes featuring young people and Naruse the scenes that featured the older cast and less “hectic” settings. While the joint project seems to pose a young maverick against a golden age legend, to fully appreciate the complexities involved, this binary must be challenged first.

In her invaluable study of Naruse Mikio, Catherine Russell takes Oshima Nagisa to task for proclaiming “his generation of cineastes as the modernists of Japanese cinema” in opposition to classicists such as Naruse, without realizing that “Naruse was at the forefront of a modernist movement . . . in the late 1920s and early 1930s and managed to sustain its potential through the war and occupation.” Russell also surmises that the kind of myopia Oshima displays here might be because the kind of modernism Naruse advanced “had become unrecognizable to the postwar generation precisely because it had become a form of classicism. . . . Since the Meiji period, Japanese modernity has been in a continual process of reinvention which tends to perpetuate an amnesia about previous stages of modernity, of which the new wave filmmakers’ rejection of their cinematic forebears is only one example” (Russell 319).

The film is centered around the restaurant Fujimura, near downtown Kyoto, run by Fujimura Aya (Yamada Isuzu), who has been able to send her daughter Miyako (Tsukasa Yoko) to the university. Aya’s sponsor, Sonoda Koichiro (Shimura Takashi), has feelings for Aya that she does not reciprocate, as she is having a secret affair with the chef, Igarashi (Mihashi Tatsuya). Miyako’s friends include Sonoda’s daughter Shinobu (Shirakawa Yumi) and four Geisha who work in the neighborhood and serve at Fujimura. The film is both intriguing and at times disconcerting in its stylistic leaps, and more generally in the tension between the efforts toward a continuous narrative line and the diverse representations of the characters. The geisha move freely between the rigid discipline of the Geisha house and a new wave youth culture. They are equally at ease in the formal kimono and tatami rooms, where they serve clients, and the dance bars and swimming pools frequented by teenagers.

The difference in the two worlds marks one of the ways in which Kawashima and Naruse divided the scenes. Those divisions, moreover, included double staffing for camera, art direction, sound, and lighting. The scenario was written by

Matsuyama Zenzo and Ide Toshiro (Kawashima, *Gizen* 142). Both screenwriters were highly accomplished and each had written screenplays for Kawashima and Naruse previously, but in this case, Matsuyama wrote Kawashima's scenes and Ide wrote Naruse's scenes.

Two of the actors also brought complex screen histories to their roles. *Yoru no Nagare* was the eleventh Kawashima film Mihashi appeared in, counting *Starving Soul*, Parts 1 and 2, as two films. And Yamada Isuzu is one of the most celebrated actresses in Japanese cinema history, having starred in Mizoguchi's *The Fall of Osen*, *Osaka Elegy*, *Sisters of the Gion*, *The Song Lantern*/歌行燈 (1943), as well as Naruse's *Flowing*/流れる (1956). Ironically, in Kawashima's *Burden of Love*, Isuzu plays Mihashi's mother!



Fig. 19. Miyako and Igarashi at dinner.



Fig. 20. Aya and Igarashi, facing the end of the relationship.

Because Mihashi and Yamada were already so well known in earlier roles and have established personae, the ways they change in different scenes here is all the more startling. Miyako is attracted to Igarashi, not knowing he is in a relationship with her mother. In an early scene, the two are having dinner in a western-style restaurant, and Miyako is clearly flirtatious, while Igarashi remains restrained (Fig. 19). When she mentions that she had just come from an *omiai* (arranged marriage meeting), Igarashi's surprise seems to suggest he has feelings for her. On the street, he takes his leave of her, but in behavior reminiscent of Danjō Reiko from *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow*, Miyako follows him to his apartment and insists on entering. He eventually succeeds in getting her to leave, but his feelings remain illegible.

A subsequent scene takes place in the morning in an elegant *ryokan* (Japanese inn), where Igarashi and Aya have spent the night. He tells her that he is uneasy about their relationship and wants to break it off. She tries to find out why, but he is silent on that, and her response is classically restrained (Fig. 20). The scene is shot and acted like many such scenes in melodramas of the 1950s, scenes Yamada has already played many times.



Fig. 21. A very different Aya and Igarashi, facing the end of the relationship.



Fig. 22. Salesman Takiguchi tempting the geisha with kimono. Ichihana in the background.

Later, however, Miyako accidentally sees her mother and Igarashi embracing and she runs away, furious. After that, in the kitchen of the Fujimura, Aya discovers Igarashi packed and preparing to leave. He feels that he can no longer stay, now that their secret is revealed. Even though his ending of the relationship is something he had already spoken of, this time Aya becomes enraged, grabbing one of his knives and screaming that they should die together (Fig. 21). He has to struggle to get the knife away from her, and the scandal leads to Aya's dismissal.

Other scenes juxtapose generic set pieces with socially progressive aspirations. There are two scenes in a kimono shop where the salesman Takiguchi (Takarada Akira) unrolls bolts of patterned silk in front of each geisha in hopes for a purchase. The three younger geisha interact excitedly while Ichihana (Kusabue Mitsuko), a slightly older geisha, remains in the background (Fig. 22).

Such scenes occur in practically every film featuring the lives of geisha. But later, when Kusabue returns to her apartment, she finds Takiguchi lying on a futon reading *Vogue*. The pair embrace, kiss, and tumble on the floor before sitting at a table, planning on marrying and setting up their own shop (Fig. 23). Ichihana asks Takiguchi how he will deal with objections from parents and friends about his marrying a geisha, to which he promises to oppose everyone until they accept their relationship. The difference in the two scenes lies not so much in a secret relationship but in the difference between the trope of the kimono shop and the enlightened attitude of the suitor.



Fig. 23. Very modern lovers, Ichihana and Takiguchi.

Earlier in this essay, I quoted an observation on melodrama from Kawashima's comedy, *The Burden of Love*. In *Flow of the Evening*, there is a comic scene that also comments on the film's particular relation to melodrama. The geisha the film follows attend a full, all-women English class, conducted by a handsome flamboyant teacher (Okada Masami). When he attempts to teach the pattern, "Would you mind . . . -ing?," he gives the example in English "Would you mind opening the window?," when no one responds, he translates it to a very polite, rather endearing Japanese sentence:

*Mado wo akete itadakeru desyou ka sira?* まどを開けていただけるでしょうか s  
ら[“I wonder if I could have you open the window?”]. The students, enchanted by the teacher, immediately all rush to open all the windows, and surround him, fanning him, and wiping his brow with their handkerchiefs. He hurriedly corrects them, saying, “I’m not asking you to open the window, I’m just demonstrating this pattern written on the blackboard.”

Although this is primarily a comic scene, the students’ error models the structure of the film. They mistake the meta-language (the Japanese translation of the example) with the object language (The English request pattern the instructor is teaching.). The divergence between the “classically melodramatic” scenes in the film and the contemporary ones undermine the suspension of disbelief in the former. Even the casting of Yamada Isuzu, who starred in Naruse melodramas, gives her scenes an aura of display no matter how beautifully she performs them; along with the specific narrative or dramatic function of the scene, the film seems to also say, “this is what melodrama looked like.”

It is not only the realism of the “classical” scenes that is disrupted, but also the continuity of consciousness and behavior. The characters seem to change personalities suddenly, not necessarily through a psychological development, but because they are written and/or directed by a different person.

Russell has criticized the film for almost seeming “like two separate films, crudely tacked together” (348). And the criticism holds, but only if viewed as either a Kawashima film or a Naruse film. Perhaps trying to have it both ways, I suggest that the film be viewed as a collaboration that should be appreciated within the context of the body of Kawashima’s work. Here is another experiment in interrupting melodrama in a way that also reveres its possibilities. Kawashima discerned the continuing modernist legacy of Naruse that eluded Oshima, and in co-directing this work, he created a film that exposes the artifice of the represented personality, the cinematic tropes that concoct a psychology. He evokes not only the contradictions of desire and reality but also of romance and realism. In Kawashima’s interventions, the restrictions of the melodrama become guidelines for transgressive reworkings of the form, while the narratives are horizons for the interruptions that allow for the split subjects and contradictory agents of a new range of conscious fantasy.

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