Directed by Yasujirō Ozu
Written by Kazuo Hirotsu (based on the novel "Chichi to musume" by), Kôgo Noda (screenplay) and Yasujirō Ozu (screenplay)
Produced by Takeshi Yamamoto
Music Senji Itô
Cinematography Yûharu Atsuta
Film Editing Yoshiyasu Hamamura
Art Direction Tatsuo Hamada
Set Decoration Mototsugu Komaki
Costume Design Bunjiro Suzuki
Makeup Department Toku Sakuma (key hair stylist), Hisae Kakizawa (hair stylist), Kingorô Yoshizawa ...
Production Management Dai Watanabe

Mainichi Film Concours, 1950. Won : Best Film, Yasujirō Ozu; Best Actress: Setsuko Hara for Aoi sanmyaku and Ojôsan kanpai; Best Director: Yasujirō Ozu; Best Screenplay: Yasujirō Ozu and Kôgo Noda

Cast
Chishû Ryû…Shukichi Somiya
Setsuko Hara…Noriko Somiya
Yumeji Tsukioka…Aya Kitagawa
Haruko Sugimura…Masa Taguchi
Hôhi Aoki…Katsuoshi
Jun Usami…Shôichi Hattori
Kuniko Miyake…Akiko Miwa
Masao Mishima…Jo Onodera
Yoshiko Tsubouchi…Kiku
Yôko Katsuragi…Misako
Toyo Takahashi…Shige (as Toyoko Takahashi)
Jun Tanizaki…Seizô Hayashi
Ichirô Shimizu…Takigawa's master
Yôko Benisawa…Teahouse Proprietress
Manzaburo Umewaka…Shite

Yasujirō Ozu (b. December 12, 1903 in Tokyo, Japan—d. December 12, 1963, age 60, in Tokyo, Japan) was a movie buff from childhood, often playing hooky from school in order to see Hollywood movies in his local theater. In 1923 he landed a job as a camera assistant at Shochiku Studios in Tokyo. Three years later, he was made an assistant director and directed his first film the next year, Blade of Penitence (1927). Ozu made thirty-five silent films, and a trilogy of youth comedies with serious overtones he turned out in the late 1920s and early 1930s placed him in the front ranks of Japanese directors. He made his first sound film in 1936, The Only Son (1936), but was drafted into the Japanese Army the next year, being posted to China for two years and then to Singapore when World War II started. At war's end he went back to Shochiku, and his experiences during the war resulted in his making more serious, thoughtful films at a much slower pace than he had previously. His most famous film, Tokyo Story (1953), is generally considered by critics and film buffs alike to be his "masterpiece" and is regarded by many as not only one of Ozu's best films but one of the best films ever made. He also turned out such classics of Japanese film as Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice (1952),
Floating Weeds (1959) and An Autumn Afternoon (1962). Ozu employs the recurring theme of changes in post-war Japanese family and society, especially concentrating on relationships between the generations. He is also known through his cinematic trademarks such as rigorous use of static camera positioned only a few feet from floor, use of the color red, and characters looking directly into the camera. The camera was always placed low, close to the floor. He never used cranes, a moving camera, bird’s eye shots. Once or twice he tried them early in his career, but he abandoned them. When he edited, he never used overlaps, wipes, fade-ins. He was determined to create a sense of ordinary, everyday life without tricks or mannerisms. To Ozu the camera was never more than an uninvolved observer. It was never part of the action. It never commented on the action. It was through the repetition of short cuts moving back and forth from one character to another that Ozu created a sense of real life. Some of his other 54 directorial efforts are: The End of Summer (1961), Late Autumn (1960), Good Tokyo Twilight (1957), Early Spring (1956), Early Summer (1951), The Munekata Sisters (1950), Late Spring (1949), A Hen in the Wind (1948), Record of a Tenement Gentleman (1947), There Was a Father (1942), An Inn in Tokyo (1935), A Story of Floating Weeds (1934), A Mother Should Be Loved (1934), Dragnet Girl (1933), Woman of Tokyo (1933), Until the Day We Meet Again (1932), Where Now Are the Dreams of Youth (1932), I Was Born, But... (1932), Spring Comes from the Ladies (1932), Tokyo Chorus (1931), The Sorrow of the Beautiful Woman (1931), The Lady and the Beard (1931), The Luck Which Touched the Leg (1930), That Night’s Wife (1930), I Flunked, But... (1930), Walk Cheerfully (1930), The Life of an Office Worker (1929), Days of Youth (1929), Takara no yama (1929), Wife Lost (1928) and Wakôdo no yume (1928). He also has 47 writer credits. According to renowned film critic Roger Ebert, "to love movies without loving Ozu is an impossibility".

Yûharu Atsuta (b. 1905 in Kobe, Japan—d. 1993, age 88, in Japan) is most known his long time collaboration with Ozu, especially for his work on Tokyo Story (1953), Late Spring (1949) and Early Summer (1951). Both Atsuta and Chishû Ryû were featured in Wim Wenders’s Tokyo-Ga (1943), a documentary tribute to Ozu. Atsuta worked as a cinematographer or d.p. on 37 films: I Lived, But... (1983, Documentary), Zangiku monogatari (1963), An Autumn Afternoon (1962), Late Autumn (1960), Good Morning (1959), Equinox Flower (1958), Tokyo Twilight (1957), I Will Buy You (1956), Early Spring (1956), Tokyo Story (1953), Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice (1952), Early Summer (1951), Late Spring (1949), A Hen in the Wind (1948), Record of a Tenement Gentleman (1947), There Was a Father (1942), The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family (1941), Nobuko (1940), Four Seasons of Children (1939), Katei nikki (1938), What Did the Lady Forget? (1937) and Wakôdo no yume (1928).

A Hen in the Wind (1948), Record of a Tenement Gentleman (1947), The Fellows Who Ate the Elephant (1947), Army (1944), Port of Flowers (1943), There Was a Father (1942), Ornamental Hairpin (1941), The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family (1941), The Story of Tank Commander Nishizumi (1940), The Lights of Asakusa (1937), Children in the Wind (1937), A Star Athlete (1937), The Only Son (1936), An Inn in Tokyo (1935), A Story of Floating Weeds (1934), A Mother Should Be Loved (1934), Caress (1933), Dragnet Girl (1933), Woman of Tokyo (1933), Where Now Are the Dreams of Youth (1932), I Was Born, But... (1932, uncredited), Manchurian Marching Song (1932), That Night's Wife (1930), I Flunked, But... (1930), Days of Youth (1929), Wife Lost (1928) and Wakodo no yume (1928).

Setsuko Hara (b. June 17, 1920 in Yokohama, Japan—d. September 5, 2015, age 95, in Kanagawa, Japan) became one of Japan's best-loved stars over her 30-year film career. Her signature character type, variations on a daughter devoted to her parents and home, inspired the nickname that stayed with her until retirement: the Eternal Virgin. To some extent, reality mirrored her roles in these films—she remained single and childless, something of a controversy in Japan in the 1950s. In 1963, shortly after the death of her mentor, director Yasujirô Ozu, she suddenly walked away from the film industry. At age 43, and at the height of her popularity, she bluntly refused to perform again, angering her fans, the industry, and the press. She implied acting had never been a pleasure and that she had only pursued a career in order to provide for her large family; this explanation is seen as the cause of her popularity backlash. She moved to a small house in picturesque Kamakura where she remained, living alone (though apparently sociable with friends), and refusing all roles offered. Hara made six films with Ozu including the so-called Noriko trilogy, of which Tokyo Story (1953) is probably the best-known. She also worked with Akira Kurosawa, Mikio Naruse, Hiroshi Inagaki, and many others. Before choosing to withdraw from film, she acted in 77 productions some of which are 47 Samurai (1962), My Daughter and I (1962), The End of Summer (1961), Late Autumn (1960), Daughters, Wives and a Mother (1960), The Wayside Pebble (1960), Nippon tanjô (1959), A Holiday in Tokyo (1958), Tokyo Twilight (1957), Settlement of Love (1956), Sudden Rain (1956), Sound of the Mountain (1954), Tokyo Story (1953), Shirauo (1953), Tokyo Sweetheart (1952), Repast (1951), Early Summer (1951), The Idiot (1951), Late Spring (1949), Here's to the Girls (1949), Tonosama Hotel (1949), Temptation (1948), The Ball at the Anjo House (1947), No Regrets for Our Youth (1946), Kita no san-nin (1945), Hawai Marê oki kaisen (1942), Currents of Youth (1942), Toyuki (1940), Tokyo no josei (1939), Priest of Darkness (1936) and Tamerau nakare wakodo yo (1935).


Notoriously hard-working in later years, Ozu enjoyed his stint as an assistant director primarily because he “could drink all I wanted and spend my time talking.” He was nevertheless promoted before the end of 1927, joining the Shochiku division devoted to churning out period films. He made his debut as a director with Zange no yaiba (The Sword of Penitence, 1927), based on a Hollywood movie called Kick-In by the French-born director George Fitzmaurice. The script was by Kogo Noda, who was to write all of Ozu’s major films of the 1950s and 1960s. The young director was called up for another session in the reserve before shooting was complete, and when he finally saw the movie he disowned it.

This was Ozu’s only period picture. He switched once and for all to contemporary themes with his second film, Wakodo no yume (The Dreams of Youth, 1928), a comedy of college life made in imitation of American movies on the same popular subject. Between the beginning of 1928 and the end of 1930, Ozu made eighteen films on an assortment of topics—student life, the problems of young married couples, and the lighter side of life in the Depression. All of them were comedies, and some were made in as little as five days... . He was building up a team of regular collaborators, some of whom worked with him for the rest of his life.
At this stage, Ozu’s work still showed the influence of the Hollywood movies he had so loved during his adolescence. But increasingly he was finding his own way and moving in the direction of the *shomin-geki*—the “home drama” of everyday life among the lower middle-classes, in a Japan that was evolving at bewildering speed from feudalism to Western-style capitalism.

In the course of his career, Ozu would receive six *Kinema Jumpo* “best ones,” more than any other director in the history of Japanese cinema.

“Generally dissolves and fades are not part of cinematic grammar,” he remarked. “They are only attributes of the camera.”

Ozu’s own father had become reconciled to his choice of career, and by then he was living in the parental home in Tokyo, as he did for the rest of his life. He was terrified of women and, though he frequently fell in love with his actresses, and sometimes went so far as to arrange meetings, nothing ever came of these assignations and he remained unmarried. His father died in 1934, choosing him as head of the family “though he knew that I was the last person to be relied upon.” Much moved, Ozu seems to have taken his responsibilities very seriously and to have matured considerably, though he always remained a heavy drinker.

Ozu held out against sound long after other Shochiku directors had adopted it—he was intent on reducing his means rather than extending them. . . . The new medium affected his working methods less than he had expected: the stationary microphone gave him even greater control over his actors than before, forcing them to rely on the small stylized movements that for him spoke more clearly and precisely than more expansive actions.

Joan Mellen agrees that he was neither a propagandist nor an imperialist, calling him in fact “the least overtly didactic of any Japanese director, but argues that the movies he made during and after the war nevertheless endorse a reactionary Japanese spirit: “Ozu evoked traditional ideas not because the militarists forced him tom but because he believed in them,” and he accomplishes his propaganda for the war [which is scarcely mentioned] through appeals to a traditional style of obedience, which is, however, only a brief step away from enlisting that obedience in the service of the State.”

The facts remain that at least one of Ozu’s wartime scripts was rejected by the censors as “unserious,” that he somehow avoided making a single militaristic or imperialistic film, and that he took serious risks in defending against the censors the work of fellow-directors like Akira Kurosawa. According to Masahiro Shinoda, “he always made such funny jokes, always got everyone in such a good mood, and was so expert in saying a serious thing in a light way, that nothing ever happened to him.” In 1943 Ozu was sent to Singapore to make propaganda films and even then managed to do no such thing. He passed the time viewing confiscated American movies and was impressed above all by one absolutely remote from his own style, Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane*. After six months as a prisoner of war, Ozu was repatriated in February 1946.

By this time he was very clear about what he wanted to do, and how he wanted to do it. Like many Japanese, he had begun by exploring Western styles and attitudes, but as he grew older turned more and more to the traditional Japanese ideals, defined by Donald Ritchie as “restraint, simplicity, and near-Buddhist serenity.” The conflict between the radical individualism of the young and the older generation’s nostalgic devotion to these qualities is often a source of tension in his films, whose theme is almost invariably the Japanese family—most often the relations between parents and children.

“Pictures with obvious plots bore me now,” Ozu said after the war. He thought that conventional drama made it easy for a director to arouse emotions in his audience, but was only an “explanation” of human emotions that concealed the real truth. His endless variations on a few simple and archetypal themes gave him all the scope he ever needed for his purpose, which was the rigorous exploration of character as a revelation of what was fundamental in the human condition.

Donald Ritchie writes that “Ozu’s later films are probably the most restrained ever made, the most limited, controlled, and restricted.” They are typically built up as a mosaic of brief shots—often one for each line of dialogue—taken from directly in front of the actor who is speaking, and from a very low angle. “The Ozu shot,” Ritchie says, is “taken from the level of a person seated in traditional fashion on *tatami* [matting]. Whether indoors
or out, the Ozu camera is always about three feet from floor level, and the camera never moves. There are no pan shots and, except in the rarest of instances, no dolly shots. This traditional view is the view in repose, commanding a very limited field of vision but commanding it entirely. . . . It is the aesthetic passive attitude of the haiku master who sits in silence and with painful accuracy observes cause and effect, reaching essence through an extreme simplification.” Audie Bock maintains that Ozu consistently shot from a height of even less than three feet, however, and suggests that the effect of this on the audience “is to force [it] to assume a viewpoint of reverence. . . . toward ordinary people. Its power is not one of contemplation but of involuntary veneration.”

For many critics, the simplicity and purity of Ozu’s mature style reached its apotheosis in *Tokyo monogatari* (*Tokyo Story*, 1953) described by Robert Boyers as “a work that fairly epitomizes transcendental style.” [Transcendental style is defined by Paul Schrader as “a form which expresses something deeper than itself, the inner unity of all things.”] . . . Stanley Kauffmann, rating this film as one of his ten personal favorites of all time, writes, “By holding to truth, much more than to naturalism, Ozu gives us a process of mutual discovery, the characters’ and ours.”

Ozu enriched this [“home drama” genre in several ways. He strengthened the pathos of family crisis by suggesting that many of them arose from causes beyond the control of the individual. In the 1930s works, this often led to strong criticism of social forces like industrialization, bureaucratisation, and Japanese “paternalistic” capitalism. In later films, causes of domestic strife tended to be assigned to a mystical super-nature. This “metaphysical” slant ennobled the character tribulations by placing even the most trivial action in a grand scheme. The melancholy resignation that is so pronounced in *Tokyo Story* and *An Autumn Afternoon* constituted a recognition of a cycle of nature that society can never control.

To some extent, the grandiose implications of this process are qualified by a homely virtue: comedy.

Ozu had one of the most distinctive visual styles in the cinema. Although critics have commonly attributed this to the influence of other directors or to traditions of Japanese art, these are insufficient to account for the rigor and precision of Ozu’s technique. No other Japanese director exhibits Ozu’s particular style, and the connections to Japanese aesthetics are general and often tenuous. (Ozu once remarked: “Whenever Westerners don’t understand something, they simply think it’s Zen.”) There is, however, substantial evidence that Ozu built his unique style out of deliberate imitation of and action against Western cinema (especially the work of Chaplin and Lubitsch.)

Ozu limited his use of certain technical variables, such as camera movement and variety of camera position. This can seem a wilful asceticism, but it perhaps best considered a ground-clearing that let him concentrate on exploring minute stylistic possibilities. For instance, it is commonly claimed that every Ozu shot places the camera about three feet off the ground, but this is false. What Ozu keeps constant is the perceived ratio of camera height to the subject. This permits a narrow but nuanced range of camera positions, making every subject occupy the same sector of each shot. Similarly, most of Ozu’s films employ camera movements, but these are also schematized to a rare degree. Far form being an ascetic director, Ozu was quite virtuosic, but within self-imposed limits. His style revealed cast possibilities within a narrow compass.

Ozu’s compositions relied on the fixed camera-subject relation, adopting angles that stand at multiples of 45 degrees. He employed sharp perspectival depth; the view down a corridor or street is common. Ozu enjoyed playing with the positions of objects within the frame, often rearranging props from shot to shot for the sake of minute shifts. In the color films, a shot will be enhanced by a fleck of bright and deep color, often red; this accent
will migrate around the film, returning as an abstract motif in scene after scene.

Ozu’s use of editing is no less idiosyncratic. In opposition to the 180-degree space of Hollywood cinema, Ozu employed a 460-degree approach to filming a scene. This “circular” shooting space yields a series of what Western cinema would consider incorrect matches of actions and eyelines. While such devices creep up in the work of other Japanese filmmakers, only Ozu used them so rigorously—to undermine our understanding of total space, to liken characters, and to create abstract graphic patterns. Ozu’s shots of objects or empty locales extend the concept of the Western “cutaway”; he will use them not for narrative information but for symbolic purposes or for temporal prolongation. Since Ozu abjured the use of fades and dissolves, cutaways often stand for such punctuation. And because of the unusually precise compositions and cutting, Ozu was able to create a sheer graphic play with the screen surface, “matching” contours and regions of one shot with those of the next.

Ozu’s work remains significant not only for its extraordinary richness and emotional power, but also because it suggests the extent to which a filmmaker working in popular mass-production filmmaking can cultivate a highly individual approach to film form and style.

**Marvin Zeman: “The Zen Artistry of Yasujiro Ozu”**

In my opinion, what the other great Japanese directors, Mizoguchi and Kurosawa, have created is part of Western art (film) rather than Japanese art. Kurosawa, for instance, is for the most part a Western artist since even his themes are similar to those dealt with in the West, to say nothing of his technique. . . . Mizoguchi’s art, while dealing with Japanese themes, must also be considered Western: what one remembers from a Mizoguchi film is, most often, purely cinematic—the rippling of the water after Anju’s suicide in Sansho Dayo, the boat emerging from the fog in Ugetsu, the death scene in Yang Kwei Fei, ad infinitum, ad gloriaim. These scenes, although undeniably great, are clearly imposed from without by Mizoguchi. One of the basic tenets of Japanese art is that it be artless art: the artistry must come from within the work. As for Mizoguchi’s themes, they, too, are not uniquely Japanese: for instance Max Ophuls’ Letter from an Unknown Woman is a very Mizoguchian film. All this is not to say that Ozu is necessarily better than Mizoguchi or Kurosawa, but it does say that one must bring a new set of values to bear in discussing Ozu’s art. The criteria that one must use for Ozu should be those of Japanese art and not cinematic art.

If one is unsympathetic to Japanese art, one will probably be unsympathetic to Ozu. But if one considers Japanese art on the same level as European art, then Ozu’s art will become more lucid and more profound. R.H. Blyth wrote that the placing of Japanese literature on an equal standing with European literature is contingent upon the consideration of Bashō on the same level with Shakespeare, Goethe, Dante, and Homer. I further contend that if one does indeed accept Bashō in this way, then by considering Ozu with respect to Bashō—and Bashō is Ozu’s creative ancestor rather than D.W. Griffith—one will come to the conclusion that Ozu is the finest artist to use the film as a medium.

The basic idea behind Japanese art is Zen. Zen is the immediate and therefore inexpressible individual experience whose aim is inner enlightenment. D.T. Suzuki has stated that “Zen is not subject to logical analysis or to intellectual treatment. It must be directly and personally experienced by each of us in his inner spirit.” Art is the form-language of the human soul. The soul tries to disclose through art beauty—the revealing principle of the cosmos. This beauty is found in the **mu** (roughly translated as nothingness). If one can penetrate the **mu**, then one can achieve inner enlightenment/. This beauty can be found anywhere—in a simple flower, in a solitary cloud, in a short poem. The revelation of beauty is the goal of art.

**From Criterion Notes: “Late Spring: Home with Ozu” by Michael Atkinson**

Maybe it is something to do with the sensual seductiveness of cinema: as new-millennium Americans, we care nothing for Japenese poetry, little for Japanese painting and fiction, and certainly too much for Japanese cartoons, and yet Yasujiro Ozu, the least sensational filmmaker of all time, remains on our docket, calm as ever, brimming with semispoken disappointments, visually blocking out Nippono-bourgeois life maps with guileless wisdom. By all rights, an Asian artist of such sublime restraint should have been long forgotten in our ethnocentric, hyperventilating, digital-viscera mind-set, but here he still is, evoking new scholarship, igniting theatrical retrospectives all over again, being lovingly and enthusiastically bronzed on home video, one precious film at a time.
An enormous amount of literature has been generated about Ozu’s work, but a few line items need to be reaffirmed: He is one of the very few cinema giants you could never accuse of pretension (Jean Renoir, Luis Buñuel, and Robert Bresson are the others). He remains movies’ most disciplined creative voice—a matter of no small magnitude in a medium naturally prone to the infantilization of noise, speed, and bright colors. Each film is a raw lesson—nearly perfect and resounding, if not terribly different from twenty others—intended to realign in our hearts what cinema is good for.

It’s a cliché now to posit Ozu as the “most Japanese” of that nation’s great directors, but it still seems true. His focus on the society’s transitional struggles, quotidian living spaces, and enjoyable norms was not only unflagging (more than fifty films in a thirty-five-year career) but embodied in the very shape of his compositions and in the reasoning behind his cuts. It’s not Japanese-ness per se that draws us, though; why would it, after all? It is something more fundamental—a quintessential aspect of the medium, a breath-catching nexus of time elapsed and empahies shared. It just so happens that Ozu’s Zen-infused sensibility translates on film to something like the art form’s nascent formal beauty: patiently watching little happen, and the meditative moments around the nonhappening, until it becomes crushingly apparent that lives are at stake and the whole world is struggling to be reborn.

Like many Ozu movies, *Late Spring* (1949) is a triumph of sympathetic, respectful clarity and a surgical strike at the heart, but it also stands alone as a turning point in his development as a sociopolitical artist. It is, first of all, the magisterial archetype for the *shomin-geki*—the “modern family drama”—a genre Ozu helped define and that remains his kingdom to reign. (To genre-ize Ozu at all seems peculiar, so intense is his formal signature. Even so, *drama* is the odd word out here; the textures of Japanese life and the rhythmic bolero of Ozu’s stories deliberately subsume the dramatic in favor of the internal.) But the family in that equation wasn’t exactly what it had been before the war, and *Late Spring* is the first of his films made after those horrors to try to imagine what Japanese domesticity might look like in this new world.

Comparatively (and by an Ozu measure), *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* (1947) and *A Hen in the Wind* (1948)—his first two postwar works—are scabrous portrayals of a corrupt, demilitarized, firebombed landscape that swallows the vulnerable. It was as if Ozu needed to drain the war’s pus from his psyche. With *Late Spring*, he dresses the wound and moves toward his true aesthetic protocol; life during the reconstruction is viewed by way of the quiet tensions of generational conflict. The low-intensity but painful clash between domestic Japanese traditionalism and modernism and feminism—between the insecure old and the restless young—is Ozu’s range to patrol, and here it is realigned after wartime and complicated implicitly by signs of encroaching Americanization. (Was Ozu the first filmmaker to use the Coca-Cola logo as a symbol for rampaging Yankee capitalism? He certainly beat Jean-Luc Godard and Billy Wilder to the punch.) Indeed, postwar society (suggested further by discussions of treated anemias and glimpses of the *Saturday Evening Post*) lets Ozu raise the stakes. What had simmered as a timeless stew of generation-gap disconnect in his earlier films became, with *Late Spring*, a thunderously specific social dynamic. In the thirties, society was changing and westernizing at a familiar pace, but in the postwar world, as Ozu suggests in his inimitably respectful way, the old-fashioned lifestyle was under siege by commercialism, permissiveness, antimasculinism, and independent wives and daughters. Suddenly, the struggle to guide youth with ancient values wasn’t just a manageable matter of course but a project doomed to failure by progress itself.

Still, Ozu’s scenario isn’t a generational throw-down. What he depicts in this, his inaugural seasonal film, the first ideogram in a dozen-year exploration of parent-child relationships, is an altogether subtler dilemma. Loving, grown, contemporary-minded daughter Noriko (Setsuko Hara) lives with her gentle, if slightly distractable, professor father (Chishu Ryu); an irritating aunt (Haruko Sugimura) suggests the young woman should marry, and soon. (The matter of the father’s caretaker-requireing “eccentricity” is mostly taken for granted, although his capabilities as a scholar seem under question when he confuses Franz Liszt with economist Friedrich List.) Believing he is doing the right thing, Friedrish List.) Believing he is doing the right thing, Ozu as the “mo...
infliction roll out inexorably, wishing there were a cheesy, American-style resolution somewhere on the horizon in which all of the well-meaning characters could be happy. But that’s not Ozu. Ozu is the natural energy of Noriko’s generous grin, dispensed selflessly in all social situations, until she realizes where her life is helplessly headed—and the blood-cooling shock of seeing that resilient smile finally drop.

Justly praised for his temperate, rigorous form, Ozu is actually something of a calculating whammy master, and Late Spring saves its crushing blows for the very last shots and the simple peeling of an apple. But Ozu’s methodology in Late Spring, which would become an almost ritualized discipline in his subsequent films, expresses so much more than mere character and narrative: the famous still-life cutaways (themselves a codex of Zen commentaries and signifiers) and tatami-mat-high point of view; the compressed depth of the family’s rooms (Noriko and company pass in and out of sight through doorways we cannot see, suggesting haunting layers of quotidian complexity); the fastidious commemoration of the uniquely careful Japanese living spaces (that no culture has thought as much about the composition and physical meaning of their dwellings is a point not lost on Ozu); the vivid manner in which the architectural precision expresses the controlled tone of relationships. There’s an acute sense of home here, happily inhabited, that is unaccented and yet fuels Noriko’s tragedy. (Contrast it to the ill-fitting urban rooms suffered by the elderly couple visiting their ruinous children in Tokyo Story, from 1953, or the inverse discomfiture of the visiting actor in the home of his former lover in 1959’s Floating Weeds. Ozu’s palette may seem uniform from film to film, but it often yields very different atmospheres.) Late Spring can be seen as Ozu’s first absolutely crucial work, a step toward understanding the ripple effects of the postwar age among ordinary citizens—or, if that’s not possible, then at least capturing them in compassionate amber.

Donald Ritchie: Ozu and Setsuko Hara
The actress Setsuko Hara is now so coupled with her roles in the films of Yasujiro Ozu that she is often seen as the archetypal Ozu female, and her other parts are forgotten. Yet her career was as varied as that of any actress. Born in 1920, Hara was introduced to the Nikkatsu film studios by her brother-in-law, the director Hisatora Kumagai, in 1935, but she became popular only after having been chosen by Arnold Fanck to star in the German-Japanese coproduction The New Earth (1937). In it, she plays a pure-hearted Japanese maiden who attempts (unsuccessfully) to immolate herself in an active volcano. Having become a model of Japanese femininity in crisis, she went on to appear as a pathetic victim in a number of wartime films. It was not until she was cast in Akira Kurosawa’s first postwar picture, No Regrets for Our Youth (1946), that she was encouraged to show the independence and individuality that would mark many of her later appearances.

In such films as Kimisaburo Yoshimura’s A Ball at the Anjo House (1947) and Keisuke Kinoshita’s Here’s to the Girls (1949), she portrays the “new” Japanese woman, who optimistically looks forward to a brighter future. Just as often, however, her role was that of the typical long-suffering Japanese woman, supporting the man in her life, be he father, husband, or son. She made many such “women’s films,” the most superior roles being those in the movies of Mikio Naruse, the most risible one being that of the motherly and compassionate sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami in Hiroshi Inagaki’s The Birth of Japan (1959).

Hara’s work with Ozu began in 1949 and continued until 1961—twelve years of creative partnership. Given the uses the director found for her, it is possible that this division in Hara’s career—between characters allowed to express individuality and traditional-family personifications—in part inspired the people she would play in his pictures.

Certainly her role in the first of these, Late Spring (1949), is an illustration of this dramatic dichotomy. Noriko, a conflicted daughter, is fearful of venturing into marriage and adulthood, wanting rather to remain with the security of her father. The demands of society, on one hand, and the needs of her own emotions, on the other, are fully dramatized in a character rendered complicated, and hence interesting, by her very typical dilemma.

In Early Summer (1951), we see that Noriko (Ozu and Kogo Noda, his fellow scriptwriter, gave the Hara character this name in so many of these films that a connection among the roles became apparent), now older and more experienced, wants to get married and finds the courage to do so without the family’s approval. In the 1949 film, Noriko finds herself in a more conservative position than in the 1951 picture, where she is concerned with her own independence—but a conflict is a conflict, and this is what interested Ozu. And it was just these conflicting emotions that Hara had learned to display faultlessly. So much so that Ozu’s films might well have been somewhat different without her. He himself said that
he could no more write a script without knowing who was going to play a part than an artist could paint a picture without knowing what color to use. The subtle shades and radiant hues of Setsuko Hara not only fit but in a way contrived the characters that Ozu created.

In Hara’s next Ozu film, *Tokyo Story* (1953), Noriko has married, is now widowed, and thus is completely severed from familial connections—yet she is the only one of the children to observe the respect traditionally paid to parents. Once again, the dichotomy between society’s claims and the individual’s inclinations is touchingly portrayed.

In *Twilight in Tokyo* (1957), the heroine is once more separated from her social position, having left her husband. In the end, she resolves to return and try to make the marriage work. In *Late Autumn* (1960), Hara is the mother of a daughter who does not want to leave her, get married, and have a family of her own. The situation is that of *Late Spring*, with Noriko, now mature, as the parent. She knows that her child has her own life to live, and with considerable self-sacrifice, she is willing to insist upon it.

In *The End of Summer* (1961), Hara’s last film with Ozu, her role is again, as in *Tokyo Story*, that of the widowed daughter-in-law. Now, however, though older, she contemplates remarriage and still insists upon her right to choose the partner she wants. The conflict between expectations and inclinations continues.

Of course, to reduce the delicate balance of an Ozu film to such a primitive paradigm as social obligation/personal inclination (the old *giri/ninjo* formulation at the heart of kabuki and most of the early *chanbara* chop-’em-up sword-fight films) is ludicrous. At the same time, however, such a construct can suggest the shape both of Hara’s career and of those Ozu films that, it can be said, reflected it.

In any event, *The End of Summer* marked the end of their collaboration. Within two years, Ozu was dead and Hara had abandoned her career. She was only forty-three years old, and there seemed no reason for her sudden announcement. Whatever, her abrupt manner in doing so was held against her. This was no way for an Ozu character to behave.

Her studio, to which she represented a considerable investment, tried every blandishment, critics howled their disappointment, and there was even talk of her being *onnarashikunai*—“unwomanly”—a grave insult. She had her reasons, however. She was not Setsuko Hara—she was Masaé Aida. Her screen name all those years had been a studio-built pseudonym. And now, she said, she wanted to be herself again.

This very Setsuko-like reason was given in the Setsuko style, with some hesitation, then sudden smiles breaking through the doubt, but it was the one Hara performance that was not appreciated. For the first time since her 1935 debut, she was severely criticized, not so much for wanting to retire as for the manner in which the desire was presented. There was no polite fiction about bad health or a spiritual imperative or a burning desire to take up charitable work. She simply retired, moved to a small house in Kamakura (where so many of her films with Ozu were set), and was never seen again. The Setsuko Hara we have known and loved, Japan’s own idolized Eternal Virgin, now exists only on the silver screen; that old maid down in Kamakura is largely forgotten, the object of some idle curiosity, but not much.

In retrospect, the reason for her decision seems evident. Our Noriko, for so many years troubled by the demands of society on one hand and the needs of the self on the other, finally decided. She would do what she wanted. And she did. All attempts to lure her out over the years have been rebuffed. When a documentary was made on Ozu, she refused to appear, just as, when he died, she did not attend his funeral. Setsuko Hara was her own person at last.

**Norman Holland on Yasujiro Ozu's Late Spring, Banshun**

*Late Spring* is a simple story—or is it? 56-year-old Professor Somiya (Chishu Ryu) and his 27-year-old daughter, Noriko (Setsuko Hara with whom Ozu made several films) are living very comfortably together. In order to get the daughter to marry, the professor pretends that he will himself marry. And she gets married. End of story.

There are at least two ways to read these events. As Roger Ebert, for example, sees it, the film shows a pesky, meddling aunt (Haruko Sugimura) pushing father and daughter into breaking up their cozy household and tricking the daughter into an arranged marriage. Each makes a sacrifice. He lies, pretending that he will remarry. She lies, pretending that she is looking forward to this marriage more or less forced on her. Ebert concludes that the result of these misguided sacrifices is lifelong unhappiness, and he may be right. As for marriage, the father tells her that he often found his wife weeping in the kitchen and that it may take her five or ten years to find happiness in marriage. As for motherhood, Noriko’s obnoxious nephew suggests that motherhood is no picnic, either.
From this point of view, my friend Maril Meeks Monaco writes me, “That Noriko, although deeply wounded by her father’s insensitive betrayal, could with such profound grace, apologize to her father for being ‘selfish’ and causing him to ‘worry,’ and by act of will, make a choice not only to marry, but to marry someone she did not know, much less love, rather than be ‘resigned,’ shows a person of extraordinary strength of character.” Or someone trapped in the web of Japanese tradition of absolute obedience and servitude to parents.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, Noriko has it made in the shade. Her mother is out of the picture, and she has her father all to herself. She can mother him, treating him as a child, and she can be a child to him so that he becomes a protective, loving father. And all this without sex and the complications sex involves. She can remain virginal and innocent—guilt-free. Naturally, when her father says he will remarry, bringing both sexuality and another woman into the house, she is both hurt and outraged. “Why can’t we go on just as we are?,” she says. Why indeed?, according to Ebert, my friend, and others.

Alternatively, I think, and most critics think, that Ebert has it wrong. Her father and her aunt recognize a truth. She is twenty-seven, in “late spring,” getting old for marriage. Her cozy situation with her father cannot continue forever. When he dies in say, twenty years, she would be left alone, and who would provide for a solitary, aging woman with no money but what a professor could leave her? Her fanciful effort to become a stenographer like her self-sufficient friend Aya (Yumeji Tsuioka)—that goes nowhere. And Aya, her friend, says, after the wedding, that her father did the right, even noble thing by pushing her into marriage.

Her friend and her aunt both recognize—and Ozu shows us—that there is something not quite right about her relation with her father. In some ways, she is like a wife to him, buying his shirt collars, fixing his tea, sake, and dinner, doing his laundry, taking his coat off when he comes home, and so on. But she is also like a mother, telling the boys, as it were, the professor and his assistant, that they can’t play mah-jongg until they finish their overdue manuscript. In Kyoto she gets him his toothbrush and his gargle water; she turns off the light so that they can go to sleep (on adjoining futons).

To appreciate the movie fully, I think we need to take into account a host of details, like a meter reader interrupting that professor-father’s preparation of a manuscript or a reference (practically the first dialogue in the film) to cutting down a man’s trousers to fit a boy or long shots after a crucial conversation of an irrelevant vase, and so on. Then there are Ozu’s famous “pillow shots” that often intervene to break up normal cutting with an intermediate shot. And there is a peculiar conversation about cutting pickled radishes.

Certainly some of these details introduce the contrast of traditional Japanese ways to the modern and western, especially the American. This is the theme most critics focus on. The film was made during the American occupation, and it shows it. The film scarcely mentions World War II, but the hardships of the war have created a health problem for the heroine, Noriko. We hear of her “blood count” and loss of weight. Apparently, she spent a year or two in a sanatorium (TB?). Also many men have been killed, and the shortage of potential husbands is another reason she has not married.

Throughout the movie, signs are both in Japanese and English. Ozu starts the film with shots of a train station and train tracks (with a station gong on the sound track, but no train). Later, we will have a long train ride, trains being one of Ozu’s favored symbols for the rush and push into modernity. (Will Noriko sit down?, her father asks. I read this puzzling little conversation as standing for, Will she accept modernity? Or will she be traditional and do as her father wishes? She sits down by him.)
As for Americanization, on this trip to Tokyo, we see in the background a Time-Life building and a Bible House. Noriko and the professor’s assistant Hattori (Jun Usami) ride bicycles to the beach. The way that Ozu filmed this episode, the two of them look like two American young people on a date in an advertisement, sunny, healthy, outdoorys, smiling broadly. Symbolically they pass a Coca-Cola sign. One character, Noriko’s friend Aya, embodies this westernism. She did not settle for an arranged marriage. She picked her own husband, “Ken,” and divorced him when it didn’t work out (something first allowed by the new American-driven constitution). She supports herself as a stenographer and makes a very un-Japanese strawberry shortcake.

By contrast, the film opens with the ultra-traditional tea ceremony, although now it is a pastime of ladies with an afternoon to spare. There are the scenes in Kyoto of the famous Kodai temple (complete with monks chanting), and the world-renowned Ryoan-ji rock garden. There are the two weddings with bride and groom in traditional costume. There is an extended sequence at a traditional tea ceremony, although now it is a pastime of ladies with an afternoon to spare. There are the scenes in Kyoto of the famous Kodai temple (complete with monks chanting), and the world-renowned Ryoan-ji rock garden. There are the two weddings with bride and groom in traditional costume. There is an extended sequence at a Noh play.

Part of what is traditional is the belief, unquestioned in the film, that it is the duty of the younger generation to take care of their parents. Thus, the two professor-fathers, Mamiya and his chum Onodera (Masao Mishima), sit at Ryoan-ji thinking Japanese thoughts, that it is better to have a son than a daughter, because he will look after you, while she will look after her husband. But then, the professor’s friend points out, marrying someone else’s daughter provides a man with the appropriate domestic servant—a wife.

Noriko’s scrappy little nephew demonstrates a part of this tradition. Japanese families hugely indulge the precious eldest son, and this brattish boy shows it. He defies his mother and his aunt. He paints his already phallic baseball bat red, getting paint all over the hallway. He pokes his head into the wedding car, shaking it, showing his strength. It is he for whom the cut-down trousers in the opening dialogue are destined, a proto-man.

Most critics talk about Late Spring in terms of the contrast between traditional and “new” Japanese culture. That is surely important, but I think Late Spring also gives us a story of considerable psychological poignancy (as Ms. Monaco’s comment suggests).

Thus, less traditional as an attitude toward male and female is Noriko’s rather startling claim that her father’s friend (and agemate), Professor Onodera has done something “filthy” by remarrying. She extends the thought to her father’s apparent plan to remarry. Onodera and her father find her accusation amusing, and her father says it’s not important. And later, as she is acceding to her own marriage, she gives this opinion up. Is it just that she finds sex for men her father’s age repellent? Or is she repelled by all sex? Surely, for a woman like Noriko, the lack of sex makes her wife-mother relationship to her father all the more tranquil.

I think the psychological poignancy begins with the film’s rather complex attitudes toward male-and-female and toward the body. Contrasted to the professor’s scholarship and manuscript, we see him cutting his toenails and rubbing his cigarette holder on his nose to put body oil on it. We see him brushing his teeth and gargling. Incidental shots, notably in Ozu’s famously low camera, keep us aware of his and Noriko’s bodies, particularly feet. Her sweaters and her bra line reveal her breasts.

At the same time, Noriko seems overly girlish for a 27-year-old. She is certainly very smiley and giggly, even for a Japanese woman. (In general, the Japanese, at this time anyway, smiled more than Americans. Watch the professor who also can talk grim things while grinning. But Noriko represents an extreme, I think.) Noriko is a moga (“modern girl”). She has an easy way with men, not the traditional shyness, a change perhaps due to the American occupation. The actress, Setsuko Hara, was a great favorite with the Japanese for being a moga, projecting both sensuality and chastity (think Ingrid Bergman).

Recognizing that it is not just her satisfyingly Electral relationship with her father but also her sexual inhibition explains her unwillingness to get involved (go to the concert) with Hattori, her father’s handsome research assistant. He would be a perfect match for her, if he chose to break off his engagement. Perhaps that is what the puzzling “pickled radish” conversation points to. The radish in question is shaped like a male member, and she makes them “all strung together,” that is, all one, hence her being “the jealous type” (but I am guessing here, since I know neither Japanese nor the saying she refers to). Her inhibitions explain some of Ozu’s more puzzling “pillow” or “punctuation” shots. Many critics have commented on a simple but lengthy shot of a vase after a crucial conversation between father and daughter as they are going to sleep in Kyoto. She confesses that she told Onodera that his remarrying was “filthy.” He reassures her. She smiles and assents. Then she confesses that she even found the idea of his remarrying “really distasteful.” She looks across at him, but he has dropped off to sleep and lightly snores. He didn’t hear her. Cut to a
six-second shot of the vase. Cut back to Noriko who now is no longer smiling but sad. Cut to a second shot of that vase, nine seconds this time. Then he ends the scene by cutting to the next day and the highly traditional Ryoan-ji rock garden. The vase is a classic feminine symbol. Her vase is what will be penetrated in marriage, as Onodera penetrated his wife’s vase as part of being “filthy.”

Less commented on is Ozu’s lingering on, indeed returning to, the empty stool on which Noriko had been sitting when she was being dressed as a bride. Certainly it suggests the loneliness and emptiness both she and her father face. But the seat also reminds us, like the vase, of the part of her body that will now be penetrated. It echoes the empty seat in the concert hall, holding only Hattori’s briefcase, that represented the absent Noriko. Indeed the first part of Noriko that we see in this film is her bottom as she kneels before entering the tea ceremony (followed by the trousers discussion—“they are a bit worn in the seat”).

I thought these sexual interpretations far-fetched until I was able to find out more about the extended scene at a Noh play. An irrelevant interruption, it is where Noriko angrily reacts against her father’s possible marriage. Why did Ozu choose this play? It is called Kakitsubata or “Iris.” The iris is associated with late spring, the movie’s title, but Eileen Kato explains in an essay on Japanese culture that there is much more to irises and to this play:

From the most ancient times iris have been very special . . . they are Man and Woman: The leaf is otoko no are (the man’s you-know-what) and the flower is onna no are (the woman’s you-know-what). Kakitsubata and ayame [prized varieties of iris] thrive only in marshland, which is the symbol of the womb and fertility. The color of these irises is purple, the color of the deepest passion and also of the highest nobility. The word (and same character) ito means both “color” and “amorous passion.” [The subject of the monologue in the play is] Ariwara no Narihira, the mukashi-otoko (man of old) who was one of Japan’s most famous ito-otoko (man of color, that is, great lover). . . . Because of its configuration of leaf and flower, the iris is a symbol of yin-yang. The bridge [in the Noh play] has a zig-zag shape because that is a symbol of forked lightning, of the thunderbolt, which in turn symbolizes the sudden planting of love in the human heart by the thunder god, who is also the god of love and marriage. Lightning in Japanese is inazuma, written with the two characters for rice ear (denoting fertility) and wife. Lightning is also the symbol of all direct communication between heaven and earth, such as poetic inspiration. . . . A bridge is a symbol of all kinds of joining, from copulation to the reconciliation of opposites, the fusion that occurs when yin meets yang, and even the passage from this world to the next. . . . The zigzag bridge in the play is called Yatsuhashi, literally “8 bridges.” The figure 8 in Chinese and Japanese script \ is a meaningful character in itself: unlike the western figure 8, it is an open system, narrow above and broad below, and symbolizes many things, for example, the birth canal, open legs, a river reaching the sea, a delta, and a mountain with an opening on top like a volcano.

In short, the Noh play that father and daughter (and other Noh fans) are watching is richly and respectfully sexual, a tribute to the union of man and woman leading to enlightenment. Couched in archaic Japanese and stylized music and costumes, Noriko has no problem with the sexual innuendos. But when her father nods politely at Mrs. Miya (the wife the aunt has picked out for him) and Mrs. Miya nods back, that strikes Noriko as outrageous and outraging. Had this woman and her father arranged to meet at this play about sexuality? Is this remarriage “filthy” like his crony’s remarriage? She feels both angry and despairing. She is so mad at her father that, quite uncharacteristically, she angrily walks away from him after they leave the theater.

To sum up, as I understand the film, two themes shape Late Spring. One is the tension between Japanese tradition and modernity (mostly American). The other is the pushing of traditional and inhibited Noriko into marriage. That is either a necessity (one reading) or (in another reading) an unfortunate sacrifice of individual happiness to tradition. And one can read, another friend, Phyllis Saarinen, suggests, each of the two themes as an allegory for the other: the transition to modernity as her change into a married woman; continuing tradition as her continuing her relation with her father. In other words, Ozu has created—in the best Japanese manner—a film explicitly beautiful but rich in ambiguity and the unexpressed.

Many have celebrated the next-to-last shot of Late Spring. The weather is over. The father returns to his now-empty house. He sits and peels an apple. He starts to do the apple in one whole peel but it breaks—or he breaks it—and he bows his head in grief and despair. I feel for him; I feel cut to the core of that apple. And it resounds for me (and, I think, for Ozu too) with the Christian symbolism of the apple as the emblem of human mortality, the pain of birth and death and separation and fallibility, and the end of an edenic relationship.

In the final shot Ozu returns to the sea. Earlier he had used the sea as a “pillow shot” when Professor Onodera didn’t know which way he was pointed and again after Noriko’s joyous bicycle date with Hattori. Also the rock garden at Ryoan-ji Temple represents the sea with islands in it. Now the waves’ cycling and cycling suggest to me the eternal cycling of birth and death. They remind me of the seasons that Ozu used in his titles so often, spring, summer, autumn. They remind me, too, of Ozu’s many shots of spaces into which people enter and leave.
They express mono no aware, the pathos of the transience of all things, the transience that the waves express. The sea is natural, yes, a rhythmic symbol for birth and life, but the sea is also cruel and dangerous. It presses constantly against the land where we human beings do our best to live with time’s pushing us into ever-new modernity, with aging and dying, and with the passing of life to a new generation.

Roger Ebert: “Late Spring: February 13, 2005

Shukichi is a professor, a widower, absorbed in his work. His unmarried daughter, Noriko, runs his household for him. Both are perfectly content with this arrangement until the old man’s sister declares that her niece should get married. Noriko is, after all, in her mid-20s; in Japan in 1949, a single woman that old is approaching the end of her shelf life. His sister warns the professor that after his death Noriko will be left alone in the world; it is his duty to push her out of the nest and find a husband who can support her. The professor reluctantly agrees. When his daughter opposes any idea of marriage, he tells her she is also going to remarry. That is a lie, but he will sacrifice his own comfort for his daughter’s future. She marries. And that, essentially, is what happens on the surface in Yasujiro Ozu’s “Late Spring” (1949). What happens at deeper levels is anger, passionate and -- wrong, we feel, because the father and the daughter are forced to do something neither of them wants to do, and the result will be resentment and unhappiness. Only the aunt will emerge satisfied, and Noriko’s husband, perhaps, although we never see him. “He looks like Gary Cooper, around the mouth, but not the top part,” the aunt tells her. It is typical of Ozu that he never shows us the man Noriko will marry. In his next film, “Early Summer” (1951), the would-be bride in an arranged marriage sees the groom only in a golfing photo that obscures his face. Ozu is not telling traditional romantic stories. He is intently watching families where the status quo is threatened by an outsider; what matters to the brides is not what they are beginning but what they are ending.

The women in both films are named Noriko, and they are both played by Setsuko Hara, a great star who would drop everything to work with Ozu. When the studio asked Ozu to consider a different actress for the second film, he refused to make it without Hara.

In “Early Summer,” Noriko lives with her brother, his family, and their aged parents. She has no desire to marry -- at least, not the golfer. The same actor, Chishu Ryu (1904-1993) plays the professor in the first film and the brother in the second; in Ozu’s “Tokyo Story” (1953), he plays the grandfather and Hara is his daughter-in-law. In all three films he looks the correct age for his character; how he did that so convincingly between the ages of 45 and 49 is beyond my ability to explain.

“Late Spring” began a cycle of Ozu films about families; the seasons in the title refer to the times in the lives of the characters, as in his final film, “An Autumn Afternoon” (1962). Did he make the same film again and again? Not at all. “Late Spring” and “Early Summer” are startlingly different. In the second, Noriko takes advantage of a conversational opening to overturn the entire plot; to avoid marrying the golfer, she accepts a man she has known for a long time -- a widower with a child, whose mother’s dearest wish is that her son marry Noriko. The man goes along with his mother’s plan, indeed is pleased once he absorbs it; the meddling woman in this case has made two people happier.

“Late Spring” tells a story that becomes sadder the more you think about it. There is a tension in the film between Noriko’s smile and her feelings. Her smile is often a mask. She smiles brightly during a strange early scene where she talks with a family friend, Onodera, who has remarried after the death of his wife. Such a second marriage is “filthy and foul,” she says, and it disgusts her. She smiles, he laughs. Yet she is very serious.

Onodera tells the professor it’s his duty to marry off Noriko, and suggests an excellent prospect: Hattori, the professor’s assistant. Noriko and Hattori take a bicycle trip to the beach, and later have dinner; we think perhaps such a match will work. But when Shukichi suggests it to his daughter, she laughs and tells him Hattori is already engaged. How and when she learned that is left offscreen; what we do see is Hattori inviting her to a concert, her telling him she doesn’t want to make “trouble,” and Hattori at the concert with his hat on an empty seat. There is the possibility that Noriko could have married Hattori after all; she likes him, he likes her, he might leave his fiancee; the concert invitation is crucial, but she will not leave her father. This is her sacrifice, to match his later in the film.

Now Masa (Haruko Sugimura), her aunt, comes up with a new candidate, the Gary Cooper look-alike named Satake. Noriko tells her friend, “I think he looks more like the local electrician.” Realizing that Noriko will
not willingly leave her father, Masa proposes to the professor that he marry a younger widow, Mrs. Miwa. The professor is as happy as his daughter to remain single, but understands Masa’s scheme to deceive Noriko. Ozu brings everything to a head during an extraordinary scene at a Noh performance, where Noriko sits next to her father. The professor nods across the room to Mrs. Miwa, who smiles and nods back. Noriko observes this and loses all interest in the play; her head bows in sadness, and afterward she tells her father, “I have to go away somewhere,” and all but flees from his side. There’s a later scene of uncomfortable confrontation. “Will you marry?” Noriko asks him. “Um,” he says, with the slightest nod. She asks him three or four different ways. “Um.” Finally, “that woman we saw today?” “Um.” He defends arranged marriages: “Your mother wasn’t happy at first. I found her weeping in the kitchen many times.” Not the best argument for a father trying to convince his daughter to marry.

Masa the aunt, having proposed the new groom, now acts as if it is a settled thing, and begins to plan the approaching marriage. Noriko goes along, smiling as always. We see her beautiful but sad in her traditional wedding dress, but we do not see her wedding or meet her husband. Instead, we come home alone with the professor, who admits his own marriage plans were “the biggest lie I ever told.” In one of the saddest scenes ever filmed by Ozu, he sits alone in his room and begins to peel an apple. The peel grows longer and longer until his hand stops, he bends his head in grief.

Ozu ever made, with “Early Summer” deserving comparison. Both films use his distinctive later visual style, which includes precise compositions for a camera that almost never moves, a point of view often representing the eye-level of a person sitting on a tatami mat, and punctuation through cutaways to unrelated exteriors. He almost always used only one lens, a 50mm, which he said was the closest to the human eye. Here he wordlessly uses time and space to establish the routine and serenity of the household arrangements between father and daughter, in a sequence showing them coming and going, upstairs and down, through the rooms and central corridors of their house. They know their way around each other. Late in the film, threatened by the marriage, Noriko keeps picking things up and putting them on a table, compulsively acting out her domestic happiness. So much happens out of sight in the film, implied but not shown. Noriko smiles but is not happy. Her father passively accepts what he hates is happening. The aunt is complacent, implacable, maddening. She gets her way. It is universally believed, just as in a Jane Austen novel, that a woman of a certain age is in want of a husband. “Late Spring” is a film about two people who desperately do not believe this, and about how they are undone by their tact, their concern for each other, and their need to make others comfortable by seeming to agree with them.

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Nov 1 Hal Ashby *Being There* 1979…
Nov 8 Brian De Palma *The Untouchables* 1987…
Nov 15 Norman Jewison *Moonstruck* 1987…
Nov 22 Andrei Tarkovsky *The Sacrifice* 1986…
Nov 29 Alfonso Arau *Like Water for Chocolate* 1992
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