

on the arm of Charlie Haskell, the man whose place Al takes after his accidental death: one that Haskell acquired while fighting a duel with his father's Prussian sword and one from the nails of a hellcat hitchhiker named Vera, whom Al will also pick up after Haskell's death. The repressed content (the source of the Uncanny, according to Freud) shines through because the scars are an image of repression as well as its trace.

Its plotting is as imaginative as James M. Cain's *Double Indemnity* (which Ulmer's friend Billy Wilder had filmed the year before), and the wild laughter that is usually provoked by the verbal farrago that is Al Roberts's defense against an outrageously hostile universe is akin to the dazzled smiles of audiences watching the cartoon version of *Detour*, Tex Avery's *Symphony in Slang* (1951). Ulmer was no writer, but he was a great editor, who knew just when to fade to black on something one of the two characters says: Al: "You sure did!" or Vera: "I just got a feeling." Making good use of the extra twelve days of shooting, he also guided them to breathtaking performances: Al playing the laconic yes-man to Haskell or kvetching at Vera; Vera taking complete charge of the movie with her clipped, vicious speech patterns as soon as she appears, walking slowly toward the car in a tracking shot that shows a woman wrecked by poverty, dirt, and exposure to the elements deciding whether she's desperate enough to get in a car with a man she presumes (we later learn) is a murderer.

Vera is introduced as a woman with two faces, the maternal profile Al rhapsodizes over in his head and the bloodcurdling harpy who stops the rhapsody dead when she suddenly turns toward the camera. She is Fortune, the Roman goddess of fate, traditionally portrayed with one beautiful profile and one monstrous one, and she becomes the focus for Al's ambivalent feelings about the virginal, beaming and theoretically faithful Sue. Making Vera and Sue the twin goddesses who rule over Al's universe is a mythological way of thinking about fate and free will, the mystery the film poses to every spectator and every critic who interprets it.

Isenberg concludes with a chapter on "remakes," literal and otherwise (*Lost Highway* is generally recognized as one of the latter), to which I can add one more. When François Truffaut, Ulmer's biggest fan in France, saw *Detour*, he understood that Sue is untrustworthy and Vera is capable of true love, which is the one thing Al fears. And he never forgot the potent romanticism of the scene where Al goes from playing classical to playing boogie-woogie, embodying the American archetype of the jazzman who once dreamed of doing great things playing his heart out to an inattentive room. Later Truffaut remade *Detour* as *Shoot the Piano Player*, which remains a beacon in film history. But it still isn't as good as *Detour*.—Bill Krohn

The Cinema of Naruse Mikio: Women and Japanese Modernity

by Catherine Russell. Duke University Press, 2008. 465 pp., illus. Hardcover: \$99.95. and Paperback: \$27.95.

It feels good, finally, not to have to write, as a preliminary to an article about Naruse Mikio, that he is a neglected figure. The director's 2005 centenary saw worldwide retrospectives, including one organized by the Cinematheque Ontario that toured North America. In 2006, Les Editions Cahiers du cinéma published Jean Narboni's fine study, *Mikio Naruse: Les temps incertains*. On the DVD front, the Naruse rediscovery is still in its early stages, but one feels confident that things will improve. In Japan, many of the director's Toho films are available on DVD, though without foreign-language subtitles. Meanwhile, an international underground of cinephiles has been busy preparing private editions of numerous Naruse films, some of them with English "fan subs," and circulating them via Internet file-sharing services.

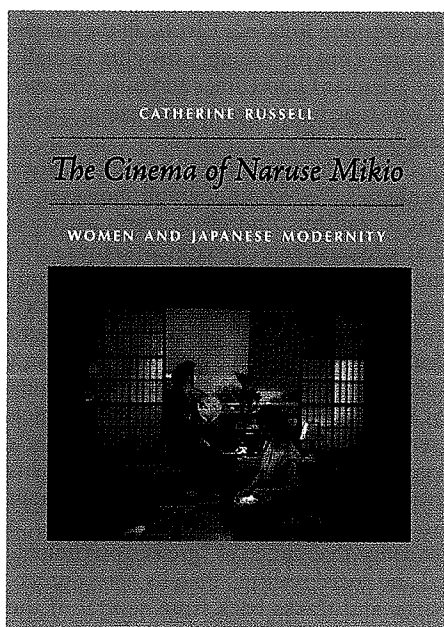
Whether you choose to tap into the last-mentioned supply or not, there's little excuse for anyone interested enough in film to be reading this magazine not to be aware that Naruse is now generally recognized (as he has long been in Japan) as one of the greatest Japanese directors, on a level with Mizoguchi and Ozu. Characterized by an exquisite awareness of the passage of time and by a sharp sense of how people who are linked together by blood or love betray and exploit one another, Naruse's cinema is as emotionally wrenching as it is formally profound. Watching a film such as *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* (1960) is a two-hour process of training and retraining the

eye through shifting tensions and parameters, all of them expressive: the distance between characters in a shot, the placement of actors in the frame, the use of corridors and doorways to emphasize perspective, the slight or pronounced discrepancy of the direction of a look. Each cut opens new "vistas," (a word that takes on such great prominence in *Sound of the Mountain* [1954]) and closes old ones. For every element that is lost, an element is discovered; for each absence, there is a presence. From this give-and-take arises the rhythmic excitement, the seemingly inexhaustible flow, and the feelings of inevitability and loss that accompany Naruse's films.

Catherine Russell, a professor of cinema at Concordia University, has now given us an excellent English-language book on Naruse, *The Cinema of Naruse Mikio*. The scope of the book is large and its theoretical project ambitious. She begins with a thirty-eight-page introduction that lays out some reasons why it has taken so long for Naruse's work to be appreciated in the West, outlines the overall pattern of his career (eighty-nine films in thirty-seven years), and sets out the theoretical and generic frames in which she is interested in viewing his work. Though Russell is conscious of the esthetic qualities of Naruse's cinema, her main commitment is to seeing his films as participating in constructions of female subjectivity in modern Japan. This means examining (in a manner guided, as Russell acknowledges, by Miriam Hansen's concept of "vernacular modernism") how the films, most of which have female protagonists, not only reflect the tensions, exasperations, and enjoyments of modernity through their stories and visual textures, but also helped (and still help) create the image of that modernity, designating or providing "spaces" for a specifically feminine experience.

This emphasis puts Russell in opposition to scholarship that focuses on the stylistic options of Japanese cinema and their differences from Hollywood norms. "My approach to Naruse is a methodological intervention into the paradigms of orientalism that have tended to emphasize the Japaneseness of Japanese cinema at the expense of its modernity," she writes. When she chides Noël Burch for discussing the cutting of *Wife! Be Like a Rose!* (1935) at length but failing to mention the suit and tie worn by the heroine of the film, Russell's biases could not be more explicit.

Russell divides Naruse's work into five chronological sections and devotes a long chapter to each: Naruse's silent period at Shochiku; his 1935-1937 films at P.C.L., a company that was subsequently absorbed into Toho; the films he made during the 1938-1945 period that saw the Japanese film industry subjected to strict government control; the films made under the 1945-1952 Occupation; the 1952-1958 period, often thought of as Naruse's artistic and commer-



cial plateau, including such famous works as *Mother* (1952), *Late Chrysanthemums* (1954), and *Floating Clouds* (1955); and a final period that concluded with *Scattered Clouds* in 1967. Russell begins each section with an overview detailing how the period in question marks a particular phase in Naruse's relationship to "Japanese modernity."

Subsections discuss each of the director's surviving films. (It should be noted, however, that two wartime films, *Shanghai Moon* [1941] and *Until Victory Day* [1945], indeed exist in at least partial form at the National Film Center in Tokyo, though Russell says that a fragment of the first film is only "rumored" to exist and calls the second one lost). Her decision to cover every Naruse film in some detail certainly adds to the book's comprehensiveness, while also posing the author the interesting challenge of having to work through her overarching arguments in close engagement with a number of films that don't necessarily offer promising material for these about modernity and female subjectivity.

Of all Naruse's periods, his 1930s work would seem to have the clearest relevance to "vernacular modernism," and Russell attacks these films with formidable insight in studies that touch interestingly on the problem of defining a "Japanese classical cinema." Her formulation of this cinema as primarily a narrative form based on melo-

drama is appealing in its flexibility, though more work needs to be done to define both what is specifically Japanese and what is specifically cinematic about it.

When she encounters the major works of the 1950s, the limitations of the film-by-film format Russell has chosen become most apparent. Since there simply isn't enough space for her to do more than suggest the intricacy of such masterpieces as *Sound of the Mountain* and *Flowing* (1956) while indicating how the films document changes in Japanese society (her overriding concern), the pleasure of reading her analyses tends to be inversely proportional to one's esteem for the film in question.

Russell's choice of the year 1958 as dividing Naruse's fourth and fifth periods is questionable. That a certain routinization sets into his melodramas of the early 1960s, and that a certain nervous strain, possibly the result of a struggle to adapt to the changing cultural climate, is palpable in such films as *Stranger within a Woman* and *Hit and Run* (both 1966) seems undeniable. Yet seeing *Summer Clouds* (1958) as inaugurating the final period because it was Naruse's first film in color and Tohoscope introduces a formalism that is otherwise absent from Russell's analyses (and basically irrelevant to them). In any case, Naruse's later films, partly because of their heterogeneity, free up Russell somewhat from the

framework of "vernacular modernism" and inspire some of her liveliest critical thinking.

Over the near-500-page course of her book, Russell uncovers a lot of valuable information about Naruse's films, their reception, and their promotion (I was fascinated by her account of a roundtable discussion about geisha involving six of the stars of *Flowing* and published in the women's magazine *Fujin Koron*) and says much about them that is illuminating. *The Cinema of Naruse Mikio* is an important work that will undoubtedly be essential for further Naruse studies and for the future study of Japanese cinema.—Chris Fujiwara

Behind The Pink Curtain:

The Complete History of Japanese Sex Cinema

by Jasper Sharp. Godalming, U.K.: FAB Press, 2009. 416pp., illus. Paperback: \$34.95.

One of Jasper Sharp's many achievements in *Behind the Pink Curtain: The Complete History of Japanese Sex Cinema* is to have written about seemingly salacious subject matter in a manner entirely devoid of sensationalism. Combining curiosity, enthusiasm, and an open mind with a sober tone

Singin' in the Rain

The Making of an American Masterpiece

Earl J. Hess and Pratibha A. Dabholkar

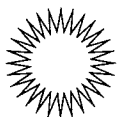
"A great movie deserves a great book, and that's what readers get in this meticulous, behind-the-scenes look at the movie the American Film Institute calls the 'Greatest Movie Musical of All Time.' The authors go into an amazing amount of detail, beginning with the film's origins . . . and extending to its long-ranging effects on cinema. The text is never dry; those involved—including Gene Kelly, Donald O'Connor, Debbie Reynolds, Betty Comden, and Adolph Green—are present through their quotes, commenting on the action. And what action! It's all here: the relationships, the decisions, the intricacies of how scenes were shot and how dances were choreographed."—*Booklist* (starred review)

"Loving and appreciative, researched to a fare-thee-well, and pitched to both fans and first-time viewers, this delightful book delivers almost as much fun as the film itself."—Jeanine Basinger, author of *American Cinema: 100 Years of Filmmaking* and *The Star Machine*

"Very much in the vein of Harnetz's classic works on *The Wizard of Oz* and *Casablanca*, this study should become the last word on its subject. . . . a bonafide page-turner that will be welcomed by general readers and academics alike."—Rick Altman, author of *The American Film Musical*



328 pages, 16 photographs,
Cloth \$29.95



University Press of Kansas

Phone (785) 864-4155 • Fax (785) 864-4586 • www.kansaspress.ku.edu