

Japan Foundation Supported Project

Funeral Parade of Roses – Part of Wild Japan: Outlaw Masters of Japanese Film at the National Film Theatre.

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Venue: National Film Theatre, London

The tremendous and stunning *Bara no Soretsu*, (*Funeral Parade of Roses*), directed by Toshio Matsumoto, gives us a proper insight into the underground world of Tokyo during the 60s. The film is a revised Japanese version of the Greek Tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, in which father and son find themselves in a maelstrom of incestuous love, sex and drug dealing. It was acclaimed as one of the most subversive films of the seventies, featuring an amazing collage of perfectly depicted transvestites, drug-use and salary men looking for transgression. The film directly inspired Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*.

The main character is Eddie, a young drag-queen who works as a hostess in a gay bar. His life is split between three focal points: the continuous flashbacks of the murder of his mother, a relationship with Gonda, the owner of the bar where he works, and a group of young Japanese drawn to drugs and alcohol.

The provocative, disturbing topic and narrative style class this film as revolutionary. Throughout the film there is an interchange of fictional and documentary footage. Interviews with real-life drag-queens are mixed in with the complex and varied fictional characters. This bold experiment allows the audience a deeper understanding of the feelings of the era.

The loss of family remains one of the main focal points of the film. The burning face of the absent father and the wild murder of the mother symbolise the problems of the young generation in the 60s. This theme and its analysis was shared by other film makers of the time.

The idea of death also prevails throughout the story. Violent deaths, the funerary music, the processions and the burial are all elements that can be described as voluntarily subversive, bound to break social and narrative taboos.

When Eddie sees a vision of a drowned cemetery, he wishes the whole country to be under water, almost wanting to erase it. He clearly identifies his personal problems with those of Japan itself as a society. Wishing “death” to Japan is like putting an end, not only to his own little world, but also to the whole country. It feels like Eddie is actually aware that the biggest disease of modern life is its identification with something/someone completely different.

The distorted reality, people constantly living on stage, acting differently in different environments and the wearing of a mask are all thematic of modern Japanese society - a country that is still looking for an identity. The classical *Ura-Omote*, is perfectly depicted by the film’s protagonists.

Trying to impose another identity, trying to be someone else, trying to impersonate different roles: in this film these are characterized by a small group of people, but the ideas mirror society as a whole in Japan during the 1960s.

Gianni Dibiase