

Funeral Parade of Roses

(**Bara bo sôretsu**)

Staff

Production Matsumoto Productions, Art Theatre Guild of Japan
Producer Kudô Mitsuru
Director Matsumoto Toshio
Screenplay Matsumoto Toshio
Photography Suzuki Tatsuo
Editing Iwasa
Sound Katayama Mikio
Lighting Kume Shigeo
Music Yuasa Jôji
Art direction Asakura Setsu

Cast

Peter, Shiro Yoshimi, Flamenco Umeji, Manji Tarô, Shibayama Mikirô, Tsuchiya Yoshio, Ogasawara Osamu, Azuma Emiko, Nakamura Kôichi, Ôta Sâko, Uchiyama Toyosaburô, Hikonagi Wataru, Kobayashi Chieko, Zero Jigen Shôkai

Release date: September 13, 1969 (X-rated)

107 min.; B&W; 1:1.33; 35mm

From Pasolini to Jean Genet, Sophocles' Oedipus to Freud's theory of the negative Oedipus, kimonoed drag queens to club-toting student radicals: Such dizzying, rather dissimilar coordinates provided Matsumoto with the building blocks for his parodic, aesthetically disturbing deconstruction of both national growth and conventional, oppositional politics found in his 1969 *Bara no sôretsu*. Its title is a reference to *Pompes funèbres* (Funeral Rites), Jean Genet's perverse novel of homosexual treachery and uncontrollable, metonymically organized fantasy, and Matsumoto's film has been recently claimed by a globally marshaled, retroactively constructed lineage of queer film for its sardonic, faux documentary representation of Tôkyô's mid-century gay underworld. *Bara no sôretsu* is, however, no laudatory representation of an oppressed minority. Its dominant metaphor of Oedipal overload and its cyclical, conch-like temporal schema lovingly explode the reproductive logic of the Oedipal triangle, the homosexual, negative-Oedipus notwithstanding.

Perhaps the most formally complex feature film to emerge from the Japanese New Wave and certainly one of its most brilliant, the film finds instead in male homosexuality a unique, anti-redemptive position to criticize the family romance of mommy-daddy-me as metaphor for national growth and reproduction. In doing so, the film's bewildering structures of flashbacks and seeming flash-forwards also critique the embedded notions of time, production, and development that underpin the contemporaneous ascendancy of Japanese high-growth economics, offering in their stead a logic of metonymic and lateral implantation to replace the ill-fated regimen of re-production and progress. In its tale of resistance rather than revolution, Matsumoto pessimistically troubles fixed distinctions between fiction and documentary, between commercial cinema and independent counter-cultural production, between present and past, and between pleasure and politics. The film warrants multiple viewings to fully comprehend the plethora of Oedipal triangles presented, a multitude that makes the film not simply, as Matsumoto described it, "a parody of the Sophoclean myth", but one of the inevitable organizations of desire in capitalism through the familial structure.

The story focuses around the aptly names Eddie and his rivalry with the current “Mama” of the Bar Genet fort he affections of its master, Gonda. Yet, intersecting this banally Oedipal story are the non-normative efforts of the drug-users and dealers, student radicals and underground filmmakers, social dropouts and dispossessed *gêboi* (gay boys) each in the complex space of the late 1960’s Tôkyô. In documenting these groups, Matsumoto relied on faux documentary, radical montage, and the super-diegetic insertion of one of his earlier experimental projection pieces. Such techniques of diegetic and cinematic movement that are lateral and metonymic were part of a conceptual plan to “jostle the gap between the signifier and the signified and evade the implantation of a new meaning”. Such techniques also found allegorical expression in the constant movement along the periphery of normative spaces, and the absence of any clear object of either celebration or approbation. A politically apathetic Eddie takes in a severely wounded student radical who, in a crosscut limbo shot, announces the ideology of his group; photographic images of murdered Vietcong tumble from a black GI’s pocket onto the scene of lovemaking with Eddie; anonymous passers-by are stamped with the homosexual symbol of the rose. Such centrifugal passage of elements between groups, through sex, violence, and vision, is as much the focus of the film as the characters themselves.

Already a crucial element within the Japanese New Wave, sexuality for Matsumoto refused conformity to its two dominant tropes in the Left. Neither was it a subversive, oppositional space associated with individual resistance to the state (Pace the Ôshima of *Hakuchû no torima* [Violence at Noon, 1966], or even *Ai no koriida* [In the Realm of the Senses, 1976]), what David Desser describes as “liberated sexuality practiced against a backdrop of repressive politics”. Nor did Matsumoto understand sexuality as a privileged space in which the political/social could be brought into relief and altered, as if sexuality were some royal road to socio-political transformation (pace the Yoshida of *Erosu + Gyakusatsu* [Eros Plus Massacre, 1970], in other words a liberated sexuality practiced for a liberated politics. Instead, sexuality for Matsumoto was neither a pastoral, utopian space nor a redemptive, political one, but a language ridden through with the complications and uneasiness of the unconscious’ workaday irrationality. As *Bara no sôretsu* so clearly demonstrates, in Matsumoto’s body of work sexuality was neither object, nor metaphor, but a mode of address that shared with the political, tropes of repetition, claims to authority, as well as the possibility of shattering rupture. A truly mesmerizing drag queen melodrama, starring Peter in her film debut, the pleasures of *Bara no sôretsu* are well worth any spectator’s surrendering to its disjunctive powers.

Jonathan M. Hall