

OBLIQUE MELODRAMA: HOU HSIAO-HSIEN'S *DUST IN THE WIND* (1986)

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The quest for specifically Chinese forms of cinematic expression and a markedly modern approach have informed the career of Hou Hsiao-hsien, and the rigidly defined genre of melodrama has been the terrain that the Taiwanese filmmaker has chosen to bring these two aspirations together. This strategy is not without a certain logic, given that the deliberate twisting of the archetypal formulas that characterise melodrama in its Hollywood incarnation, familiar worldwide thanks to the hegemony of American cinema, is an exercise that has allowed Hsiao-hsien to subvert Western and classical forms of expression, and in doing so, to identify himself, through this very subversion, as a modern Chinese filmmaker.

With this in mind, in order to gain a clear insight into Hsiao-hsien's sabotage of the pre-established scheme of the canonical melodrama, it is useful to take into account the effort he has made in his films, at least up to *Millennium Mambo* (Qianxi mànbo, 2001), to adapt specific ele-

ments of his centuries-old cultural heritage (i.e., to transcribe them in narrative, dramatic and visual terms) to the cinematic medium. To begin with, his predilection for indirect narrative methods (divergences and second-level narrations in the form of flashbacks are a trademark of his) and the lacunar and fragmentary structure that give Hsiao-hsien's storytelling an opaqueness that is only ever cleared up remotely and retrospectively, constitute resources which, in the words of the filmmaker himself, are inspired by formulae of traditional Chinese theatre and painting: "That is what is meant by 'the part showing the whole'. This type of structure is like our ancient Chinese theatre. It simply gives a scene without much of a clear narrative, unlike Western drama where all the elements must be put in place. Ellipsis and other indirect narrative methods are, ironically, more clear-cut and to the point [...]. This is like a Chinese painter who paints a plum blossom. He doesn't need to paint the whole tree—just a twig—

and it would be enough to leave an impression, not only in terms of its fidelity to the subject but also the feelings it conveys" (Chiao, 1995: 48).

The same could be said of the parameters that govern his unmistakable compositional style (frontality, static POVs, distance from the framing, deep focus and continuous shots), finding its quintessential expression in those persistent, immobile sequence shots which, contrary to the interventionist approach of classical editing and staging, reflect the slow development of events while respecting their material continuity and duration, and which also seem to have their roots in certain aspects of traditional Chinese culture: "I know, however, that I have suffered the influence of an old Chinese proverb attributed to Confucius: 'Look and don't intervene,' 'Observe and don't judge' [...]. Every person belongs to his own context, his own environment. It is therefore useless and vain to judge. What I want to do is to enter the context and see what is happening inside each environment, without intending to judge. I know that I am only a subjectivity, but I can, despite everything, try to position myself in the middle of things without imprinting the mark of my subjectivity on that of others [...] Unconsciously, I owe this attitude to my Chinese cultural heritage [...] indeed, I believe that my attitude, my way of filming, my relationship with the world places me in perfect continuity with ancient Chinese culture" (Burdeau, 1999a: 68-69).

But the connections don't stop there, because this static, disinterested framing that scrutinises the action from a prudent distance without shying away from the absences and empty spaces left by the movement of the actors in the field of vision also reflects that singular delight in white spaces evident in traditional Chinese painting: "Sometimes my actors will leave the frame, but I still don't change my shot, and thus you get an empty shot on the screen. Here, I am utilizing a concept from Chinese painting, 'liu bai' (literally, 'to leave a whiteness') which means that even af-

ter a character has left the frame, or even when you have an unexplained space outside the frame, though it is empty and imagined, the audience must join together with me to complete the shot" (Chiao, 1995: 51).

Even the overhead lighting in indoor scenes evokes traditional Chinese architecture: "The ceiling lights are a result of conforming with the structures of old Chinese houses in the south. [...] The source of light for such houses comes from the ceiling, or a skylight on the roof. I designed my lighting accordingly, hoping to convey a mood of old China, its melancholia, its intimacy and density, its long history and sense of tradition" (Chiao, 1995: 51).

And more importantly, Hsiao-hsien manages these narrative, dramatic and visual frameworks with a view to representing the emotions and experiences of his characters in a uniquely Chinese way: "I have always been searching for a particularly Chinese style and method of expressing feelings. The Chinese people have always used a roundabout way of expressing emotions. Like my wife, for instance. I bought her a watch. Her first reaction was to ask: 'How much did it cost?' I replied: 'NT\$40,000 [Taiwanese dollars],' and she scolded me that I had lost my mind. But then, she immediately went to the kitchen and cooked several of my favorite dishes. This is how the Chinese express emotion. I feel that my movies are very much like me" (Chiao, 1995: 49).

It should consequently come as no surprise that Hsiao-hsien attempts a kind of modern, Chinese antithesis to classical melodrama, in which the ways of expressing the core emotions of the genre, such as sadness, frustration or a sense of loss, are combined in indirect, oblique and parabolic modes in an East Asian tradition, so that his films do not at first seem like melodramas, or, like a Polaroid picture, only reveal their status as melodramas in a kind of delayed action. To fully understand this technique that makes *deferment* and *delayed semanticisation* the cornerstone of his

work, we need to examine the sophisticated architecture of his films, and *Dust in the Wind* (Liàn liàn fēngchén, 1986)—probably Hou Hsiao-hsien's most *émouvant* film, to use Emmanuel Burdeau's description (1999b: 34)—offers the best case study for such an analysis.

COMING OF AGE

Dust in the Wind tells the story of Wan, an adolescent from a humble background who, supported solely by his father's wages as a miner, lives together with his parents, brothers and sisters, and talkative grandfather in a working-class neighbourhood in the hills around a remote mining site on the island of Taiwan. Despite his excellent grades at school, Wan notifies his father, who has been disabled by a workplace accident, of his intention to leave town and go earn a living in Taipei. When he reaches the capital, he lodges with some young artists in a kind of loft above a movie theatre, works by day in a printing shop and studies by night. Not long after his arrival, he is joined in the capital by Huen, a young girl from his home town. The girl gets a job at a tailor's but finds it hard to adapt to life in the city; the first time she manages a smile is after a few drinks at a farewell party for one of Wan's workmates who is leaving for military service. When Wan tells Huen off for her behaviour ("a girl drinking with men"), we become aware that there is a romantic connection between them. The couple prepare to make their first trip back home, but when they go shopping for gifts for their family members, Wan's delivery bike disappears. This has traumatic consequences for the young man, who decides not to return home, leaving his girlfriend on the platform and wandering along a beach where he watches a funeral ceremony in the rain. Drenched to the bone, he is taken in by a military detachment, where he loses consciousness while watching a TV documentary on mining, reminding him of his father's workplace accident. Wan contracts bronchitis

and, as they don't have the money for a doctor, it falls upon Huen to nurse him back to health; this consolidates their relationship, but then Wan is called up for military duty.

The couple bid farewell at the station in Taipei, and then Wan returns home to say goodbye to his family. His father gives him a drink and a cigarette for the first time, and repeats his advice that he should never give up his studies. The young couple cope with their separation by exchanging copious letters, and when their correspondence suddenly stops Wan plunges into another crisis, this time with the help of alcohol. A letter from his brother informs him that Huen has married the mailman. Wan returns home, now a man. His mother is sleeping and there is nobody else in the house. Outside in the garden, his grandfather is tending to the potato plants. After a lukewarm greeting, he tells his grandson that the typhoons came early this year.

As these details of Wan's story shows, *Dust in the Wind* is a kind of *Bildungsroman* that outlines the coming of age of its protagonist,¹ in which the loss of the beloved (or the first love) and the loss of childhood (also meaning innocence) go hand in hand as necessary rites of passage to attain the maturity needed to deal with the hardships of life with strength and self-assurance. But the action outlined by the plot barely gives us a glimpse of the emotional tectonics underlying the transition that transforms the fragile and uncertain youth into an adult aware of his place in the world. Put briefly, *Dust in the Wind* sets the parent-child relationship in opposition to love (or, more specifically, romantic relationships with people outside the family), suggesting that the latter is a circumstantial and transitory mirage, while the former constitutes the soundest and most enduring foundation for the human being. In other words, Wan becomes an adult when the emotional turmoil he suffers enables him to discern cathartically that we are what we are thanks to our blood ties.



Image 1. *Dust in the Wind* (Hou Hsiao-hsien, 1986)

Like all of Hsiao-hsien's films, *Dust in the Wind* is an extremely finely woven story in which the traditional moral that the centripetal force of family ties ultimately wins out over the centrifugal force of romantic love finally emerges at the end of complex detours and sophisticated inferential triangulations. We can appreciate the covert and protracted way that this effect of meaning takes shape by considering the successive semantic shifts that take place over the course of the film in relation to two objects that appear mundane, but that are nevertheless called upon to play an important symbolic role: a crutch and a watch. In the next section I will consider the semantic implications and connections that arise from their complex journeys.

MICROCIRCUITS OF MEANING

The film begins as it ends, with Wan's arrival in his home town on a train.² On his way to his hou-

se, a neighbour gives him a sack of rice for his family and asks him in passing when his father will be back from the hospital. Shortly after this, we see Wan stoking the fire at home while his younger brothers and sisters are eating dinner with their grandfather. The next day, his grandfather is working away on something that looks like a crutch. A little later we see him beside Wan, who has the crutch in his hands, waiting on a platform [Image 1]. Finally, a train rushes into the station and pulls to a stop, and passengers begin disembarking. After 25 seconds of waiting, while the protagonists remain motionless in the same spot, we see a limping individual aided by a woman descend from the back of the train. At this moment, Wan runs over to them, gives the crutch to the injured man and helps him to walk. When they finally get to where the old man is standing, he asks the wounded man about the state of his leg [Image 2]. By this point, the attentive spectator will be able to work out that the limping man is



Images 2, 3 and 4. *Dust in the Wind* (Hou Hsiao-hsien, 1986)

Wan's father, who has come back from the hospital with his mother, and that in her absence the grandfather has been taking care of the children and has even found time to make a rudimentary crutch for his hobbling son.

Shortly after this comes one of the most meaningful scenes in the film. In the hallway of the house, Wan's father is sitting in a chair smoking, while the crutch is leaning against the wall; in the background, with his back to the camera, is the grandfather, sitting in the doorway looking out-

side [Image 3]. After a few moments in which we watch the father smoking placidly, in the stairway leading into the house an individual appears, who is shortly joined by the mother; they enter the building, pass close by the smoking father, and walk out of the frame to the right. Immediately after this, Wan enters the frame where his mother has just left and, with the words "Dad, your watch," he hands him a watch and a notebook of school grades [Image 4]. While his father reads the grades, Wan tells him that instead of going to college he would like to move to Taipei to work and, if it can be arranged, to keep studying at night school. While placing the watch on his wrist, the father settles the matter tersely by telling him: "It's up to you. If you want to be a cow, there'll always be a plough here for you."

In addition to revealing other circumstances (such as the precarious economic situation of the family, whose only breadwinner is now unable to work), this shot connects the motifs of the crutch and the watch, both of which become symbolic of the inter-generational succession which, like a baton handed from one to the next, passes along the line of the family's three eldest sons in testimony to their status as successive links in the same hereditary chain: the grandfather gives the crutch to his son, who in turn gives the watch to Wan. Although the cause of the father's injury is yet to be revealed (a mystery keeping us in suspense for now), the film concludes the visual and symbolic journey of the crutch (metaphorically confirming the strength of the link between Wan's grandfather and father), but not of the watch, whose odyssey has only just begun, hinting to us that what is really at stake in this story is the strength of the bond between Wan and his father, the final family tie that will be subjected to a veritable stress test by Wan's romantic relationship with their neighbour Huen.

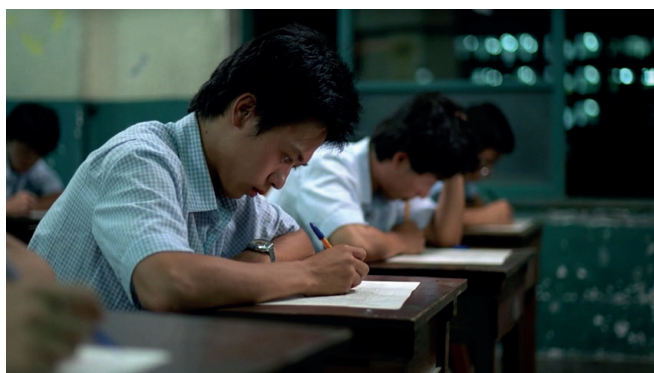
In fact, the watch reappears thanks to Huen, when she arrives in Taipei and gives it to Wan as a gift from his father at the welcome dinner they

have with a few friends. The others present marvel at the timepiece (they remark that it is a Timex, a world-famous brand, automatic, one hundred percent waterproof, and very expensive), while Wan sits in silence, overwhelmed by the paternal gift; finally, when Huen comments that Wan's father paid for the watch in instalments, Wan gets up and leaves the table on the verge of tears. In the next scene we see Wan checking the watch, which he is wearing on his wrist, while completing an exam at night school [Image 5], and in the very next scene he is shown at night with the watch immersed in a glass of water [Image 6] while he writes a revealing letter to his brother (his voice-over reads the words aloud: "I've received the watch Dad asked Huen to bring me. I wonder how expensive it was. How much would it have cost him each month? Find out discreetly from Mom. Then write to me. I remember that when I was at school for every important exam I would borrow Dad's watch. It was too big and would fall

off my wrist. So I tied it on with a string..."), until the light bulb illuminating the room suddenly goes out.

This series of scenes brings to light the symbolic burden of the watch motif and reveals the different nuances of Wan's relationship with his father, which, in addition to the genetic father-son connection, is also linked to the semantic field of culture, learning and erudition—in other words, all the knowledge that the father is unable to pass onto Wan because of his own lack of education, and that he wants him to acquire by other means. In spending money that he doesn't have to buy a watch, and first lending it and later giving it to his son to help him in his exams (and in life), Wan's father expresses the hope that his first-born son will break with the generations of illiteracy that has held the family back. In short, the watch is at once an expression of the father's longing and of the challenge that he sets for his son.

But there is even more to this, because Wan's first crisis unexpectedly introduces substantial information that contributes greater depth and surprising detours to the connections that link the family's three male members together. In the context of Wan's feverish delirium, the film presents two flashbacks: the first, provoked by the documentary on carbon extraction that he sees on the TV in the military barracks where he has found refuge, reveals that his father suffered a work-related accident in the mine (apparently, Wan witnessed his wounded father being brought out of the bowels of the earth by his co-workers); the second, a regression that takes us much further back in time to what could be the source of the central conflict that is resolved in *Dust in the Wind*, reveals a monologue that his grandfather delivered to his father when a four-year-old Wan was sick: "When he was born he was plump and white. After he turned one all the neighbours said he was cute. But after he turned three he started getting sick a lot and we had to go to the Wes-



Images 5 and 6. *Dust in the Wind* (Hou Hsiao-hsien, 1986)

tern doctors many times. That didn't help, so we changed to a Chinese doctor. His stomach kept growing while his hands and legs kept shrinking. I remembered what we agreed. After I adopted you, you were very obedient and followed our family's creed. You swore to our ancestors that if your first-born was a boy you would give him my name to succeed our ancestors and continue the tradition. You swore to our ancestors. Wan is already four years old now. You didn't keep your promise. Our ancestors in heaven will say: why didn't you keep the agreement? That's the boy has gotten this way. Maybe that's why. There's a saying that goes: 'Depend on people, and also on God.' You often take him to doctors and bring him back in the middle of the night. He is not an adult. He must have been traumatized. There is no other explanation. The best thing to do would be to get a shaman to perform an exorcism to protect our boy. That way he'll get well soon. We'll select a day to change the boy's surname before our ancestors. That will please them. They will bless you so that you make more money and protect the boy. That's the right thing to do."

Thus we learn that Wan's grandfather adopted his father, which means that there is no blood tie between them as there is between Wan and his father; and moreover, in breach of a promise made to their ancestors, his father did not give him his grandfather's surname (which the grandfather believes is the cause of his repeated illnesses). In short, the line from father to son that joins these three individuals of successive generations began with a situation of genetic discontinuity (Wan's father and grandfather are not related by blood) and a symbolic breakdown (Wan and his grandfather do not have the same surname due to his father's negligence), which Wan's father seeks to cover up by giving his first-born son a higher education that will place him on the same level as his grandfather (on this point, it is important to note that in the last conversation between Wan

and his father before he leaves for military service we learn that his putative grandfather is not illiterate, unlike the three previous generations of the father's blood family). Like the tip of an iceberg, all of this, which is no less than the very core of the story, is crystallised symbolically in the motif of the watch.³

IN A SUBTLE, SYMBOLICALLY EFFECTIVE DISPLAY, THE STRATEGIC APPEARANCE OF THE WATCH DURING WAN'S SECOND CRISIS ILLUSTRATES THE SUCCESS OF HIS FATHER'S EFFORTS TO SUTURE THESE PRIVATE WOUNDS THAT AFFLICT THE FAMILY

In a subtle, symbolically effective display, the strategic appearance of the watch during Wan's second crisis illustrates the success of his father's efforts to suture these private wounds that afflict the family. It is interesting to note that the young cadet drinks himself sick when his letter to his girlfriend is returned and, shortly thereafter, he receives a letter from his brother informing him that she is now married, adding insult to injury, to the mailman who had personally delivered his countless love letters to her (his brother also shares with him the emblematic statement with which his grandfather concludes the matter: "It's fate. You can't force it."). Wan's martyrdom culminates with a shot that shows him lying face-down on his cot, crying inconsolably while he pounds the mattress with his left hand [Image 7]. The fact that on the wrist of the hand that is repeatedly beating the mattress is that Timex so charged with meaning can only be understood as the victory of the life plan that Wan's father proposes for him, at the expense of the plan symbolised by Huen, who represented a life in Taipei, far from Wan's home town and his family ecosystem. Thus, the final scene of the conversation



Image 7. *Dust in the Wind* (Hou Hsiao-hsien, 1986)

between Wan (who is wearing the watch, with all its symbolic implications, on his wrist) and his grandfather in the garden of the family home, in which the weathered old man offers a peroration on planting potatoes and the weather cycles of the typhoons [Image 8], constitutes the definitive closure of the battle waged in *Dust in the Wind* between the family bond and the romantic relationship.

DECONSTRUCTING MELODRAMA

The analysis outlined above makes it clear that *Dust in the Wind* brings together all the distinguishing elements and features of the melodrama genre, from the initiation of the drama in a family context with a turn of events that threatens family unity (the first-born son's plan to leave the nest and pursue an independent life far away from the Oedipal topos with a woman from outside the family circle) to the final victory of the integrity of the clan and the unity of the lineage over romantic love, with a significant toll of suffering for the protagonist, who displays a passive and resigned attitude towards these early reversals of fortune. Wan is therefore very much a melodramatic character, a protagonist who fits the hero-victim archetype like a glove, whose personal journey ends with a test in the form of a decisive romantic failure that represents the loss of innocence (which in this case gives rise to a cathartic transition to



Image 8. *Dust in the Wind* (Hou Hsiao-hsien, 1986)

adulthood). Also drawn directly from melodrama is Hsiao-hsien's use of certain objects as symbolic condensations of the basic conflicts that define Wan's story, especially the wristwatch, which, in addition to all the connotations described above, in itself constitutes an obvious figurative representation of the excruciating passage of time, which is of course a central theme of this genre. Even the use of music, which has not yet been discussed here, responds to patterns typical of traditional cinematic melodrama (the film is marked by sudden bursts of a romantic melody played on a Spanish guitar; on the last of these flourishes, following Wan's inconsolable weeping and as a prelude to his final return home, the melody is played on an electric guitar and organ, thereby transcribing the coming of age of the protagonist onto the acoustic plane as well).

However, although it is true that the film operates as a compendium of clichés of the genre, it is equally true that Hsiao-hsien arranges these pieces on the board in a highly unconventional manner. This means that *Dust in the Wind* keeps its melodramatic credentials concealed (or discreetly implicit) until practically the end of the narrative (the story acquires dramatic traces in Wan's second crisis, when the interruption of the correspondence with his girlfriend catches the spectator as much by surprise as it does the protagonist), turning the film into a kind of *surprise melodrama*, an oxymoron that calls into question the semiotic device that gives the genre its *raison d'être*, considering that, as has been pointed out by numerous authors (Marzal, 1998: 305-309; González Requena, 2007: 282; Gómez-Tarín and Marzal, 2015: 206-209), melodrama is characterised precisely by its predictability—specifically, by the repetition of recognisable patterns (i.e., by presenting sufficient signals to identify it without confusion from the outset) so that in the interpretation of the typical spectator no room is left for surprises, unexpected turns or uncertainty (once the film has been identified as a melodrama, the

spectator, without even having any idea about the story, awaits the inevitable: the fall from grace of the hero, the loss of his object of desire, the ecstasy of his suffering and the final melancholy; in the words of González Requena, "the wound that fate must inflict upon the protagonist").

But as is also true of the suspense genre, the keystone of melodrama lies in this informational superiority that spectators enjoy over the fictional characters, a cognitive privilege that not only allows them to identify in an almost macabre manner with the martyr-protagonist (a paradigmatic feature of the genre), but also facilitates the cathartic and transformative function fulfilled by melodrama for an audience that experiences a kind of liberation through the ostentatious and stylised spectacle of another's suffering. In other words, the (genre) recognition-identification (with the protagonist)-catharsis sequence underpins this cognitive and emotional trajectory that is generally central to the experience of watching a melodrama. However, *Dust in the Wind* inverts the terms of this boilerplate reading by placing spectators in a situation where *they are unaware that they are watching a melodrama*, thereby undermining their horizon of expectations and provoking a fundamental change in their interpretative approach.

In this article, I have explored in some detail how, inspired by the idiosyncrasies and certain traditional artistic forms of the Chinese, Hsiao-

DUST IN THE WIND INVERTS THE TERMS OF THIS BOILERPLATE READING BY PLACING SPECTATORS IN A SITUATION WHERE THEY ARE UNAWARE THAT THEY ARE WATCHING A MELODRAMA, THEREBY UNDERMINING THEIR HORIZON OF EXPECTATIONS AND PROVOKING A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN THEIR INTERPRETATIVE APPROACH

hsien controls the flow of information in a highly selective manner, so that the spectator's access to knowledge in *Dust in the Wind* always comes with a certain delay and with a retroactive effect after complex inferences based on signals that are sometimes barely discernible. Emmanuel Burdeau, who has underlined this particular feature of his films, suggests that "on the screen, the editing appears to have disappeared, but for the spectator editing is everything", so that "we understand, we sympathise, we participate, but always in a disoriented or retroactive way. To watch a film by Hou Hsiao-hsien is to undertake a ceaseless task of recovery and readjustment, lagging behind or taking the wrong road" (Burdeau, 1999b: 36, 38).

What is truly fascinating to note is that the inverted trajectory entailed in putting together each piece of *Dust in the Wind* ultimately has a powerful emotional payback for spectators, who, once they have put the puzzle together, will feel the protagonist's pain as their own, just as in traditional melodrama. Burdeau (1999b: 34) coins the term *delayed premonition* (*prémonition décalée*), a kind of "Mizoguchian digression", to refer to those scenes that seem perfectly innocuous when they appear, but which acquire the quality of ominous foreshadowing in light of subsequent events.⁴ In the end, Hsiao-hsien turns the smug, voyeuristic spectator all too familiar with routine melodrama into an unsuspecting protagonist in a coming-of-age story, to whom *Dust in the Wind*, in the tradition of Confucius, is offered as a meandering and moving path towards the light of Knowledge.

NOTES

1 This film completes the tetralogy that Hou dedicated to this theme (often referred to as his "coming-of-age" series), which included the films *The Boys from Fengkuei* (Fēngguì lái de rén, 1983), *A Summer at Grandpa's* (Dōng dōng de jiàqī, 1984) and *The Time to Live and the Time to Die* (Tóngnián wangshì, 1985).

- 2 This return to the physical and narrative starting point allows Hou to underscore Wan's transfiguration, as in the beginning we see him return home with Huen dressed as a boy scout, while at the end he comes alone dressed in adult clothes.
- 3 Wan's father also gives him a cigarette lighter, which, for its symbolic insignificance, serves to underscore the transcendent importance of the watch. Nevertheless, the odyssey of the lighter has semantic counterparts of its own that are far from negligible: the father buys it as a gift for his son's military service (because of its use—to light cigarettes—it symbolises the attainment of maturity represented by smoking), but because he gets drunk with his friends on the last night Wan spends at home (an episode that illustrates Wan's father's irresponsible and foolish side, contrasting with his grandfather's sensible attitude, explaining why his father wants him to follow his grandfather's example), it is his mother who gives it to him before he leaves for his military service; while his father is sleeping off his hangover, his grandfather sees Wan off to the train station, setting off firecrackers as they go. In contrast with the watch, which remains on Wan's wrist for life like an emotional tattoo, the boy will give the lighter to some fishermen from the mainland whose boat sinks near his military detachment.
- 4 The film is filled with these retroactive semantic complications: some of the very few camera movements can be seen retrospectively as foreshadowing the couple's breakup; everything that happens at his friend's farewell, especially Huen's "drinking with men", prefigures what will happen when Wan himself is called up; the two scenes that Wan shares with his grandfather—first at the station waiting for the train that will bring his injured father; then accompanying his grandson to the station when he is on his way to his military service—acquire their full premonitory meaning in light of the final frame where the two are conversing as equals, reflecting that, all details aside, the crucial conflict in this story is founded on the strength of the bond between these two individuals of the same family, separated by a chasm of blood.

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OBLIQUE MELODRAMA. DUST IN THE WIND (1986) BY HOU HSIAO-HSIEN

Abstract

Hou Hsiao-hsien proposes a kind of modern, Chinese anti-thesis of classical melodrama where the expressions of the main emotions of the genre such as sadness, frustration and the feeling of a loss are blended in the indirect, oblique or parabolic modes of Eastern inspiration. Subsequently, his resulting films do not look like melodramas at first glance or only reveal as such with certain delay. This article analyses one of his most emotional films, *Dust in the Wind* (1986), in which this device that turns *delay* and *slow down semantisation* into its cornerstone achieves one of its highest artistic peaks.

Key words

Melodrama; Emotion; Love; Family; Maturity.

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Article reference

Zumalde, I. (2018). Oblique Melodrama. *Dust in the Wind* (1986), by Hou Hsiao-Hsien. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 25, 71-82.

MELODRAMA OBLICUO. POLVO EN EL VIENTO (1986), DE HOU HSIAO-HSIEN

Resumen

Hou Hsiao-hsien ensaya una suerte de antítesis china y moderna del melodrama clásico donde las formas de exposición de las emociones troncales del género, tales como la tristeza, la frustración y el sentimiento de pérdida, se conjugan en modalidades indirectas, oblicuas o parabólicas de inspiración oriental, de manera que sus películas no parecen melodramas a primera vista o solo se revelan como tales con cierto retardo. Este artículo analiza *Polvo en el viento* (1986), una de sus películas más emotivas en la que este dispositivo que convierte a la *demora* y a la *semantización retardada* en su piedra angular alcanza una de sus mayores cotas artísticas.

Palabras clave

Melodrama; emoción; amor; familia; madurez.

Autor

Imanol Zumalde Arregi (Amorebieta, Bizkaia, 1967) es profesor titular de la Universidad del País Vasco (UPV/ EHU) y doctor en Comunicación Audiovisual. Junto a la historiografía del cine español, su línea de trabajo preferente se centra en el análisis fílmico, así como en la reflexión semiótica sobre los procesos de interpretación audiovisual, materias sobre las que ha publicado libros y artículos en las editoriales y revistas especializadas más influyentes del área. Actualmente, desarrolla junto a Santos Zunzunegui una investigación en torno a los fundamentos semióticos del discurso documental. Contacto: imanol.zumalde@ehu.es.

Referencia de este artículo

Zumalde, I. (2018). Melodrama oblicuo. *Polvo en el viento* (1986), de Hou Hsiao-Hsien. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 25, 71-82.

Edita / Published by



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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) / 2340-6992 (digital) DL V-5340-2003 WEB www.revistaatalante.com MAIL info@revistaatalante.com