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THE MAD FOX

Koiya koi nasuna koi /
Love, Thy Name Be Sorrow /

恋や恋なすな恋

CAST

Hashizō Ōkawa Abe no Yasuna
Michiko Saga Sakaki no Mae / Kusunoha / Okon
Junya Usami Kamo no Yasunori
Shinji Amano Ashiya Dōman
Sumiko Hidaka Kamo no Yasunori's wife
Rinichi Yamamoto Akuemon
Ryūnosuke Tsukigata General Ono no Yoshifuru

CREW

Directed by **Tomu Uchida**
Written by **Yoshikata Yoda**
Produced by **Hiroshi Ōkawa**
Editor **Nobutarō Miyamoto**
Director of Photography **Sadaji Yoshida**
Music by **Chūji Kinoshita**
Art Director **Takatoshi Suzuki**



CONFUSION UNTO MADNESS: THE DUPLICITOUS REALITIES OF TOMU UCHIDA

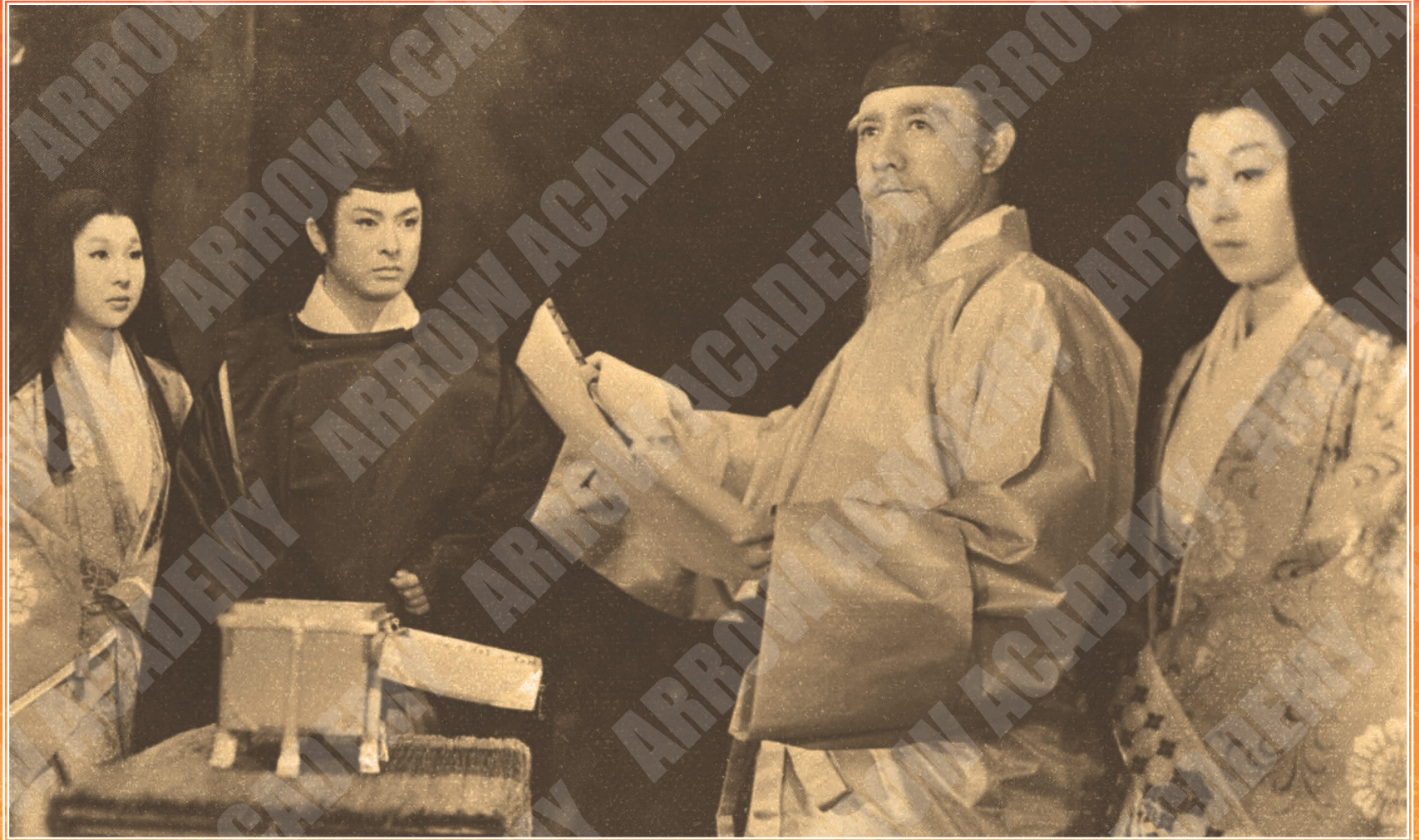
by Hayley Scanlon

"I am in confusion unto madness," an exasperated bystander exclaims on realizing she has strayed into a dream world built to shelter another weary soul from the confusions of the society in which he lives. Born in 1898 in the late Meiji era, Tsunejirō Uchida later took the more familiar name of "Tomu," adopting the English name of "Tom" but using the Japanese characters which effectively mean "to spit out dreams." His name, as pregnant with significance as it already is, hints at the director's various contradictions – a left-leaning liberal enamored with bohemian Western culture who nevertheless found himself falling hard for the inherent romanticism of militarist ideology, only to travel to Manchuria and become a temporary Maoist before finally returning to Japan after the end of the American occupation.

One reason given for Uchida's failure to attain the same kind of international renown as his contemporaries such as Ozu and Mizoguchi is that his films do not display an easily identifiable signature style, but a huge aesthetic variety which, coupled with his close identification with genre, made him a difficult fit for auteur-centric Western critics. Following the release of his "comeback" movie *Bloody Spear at Mount Fuji (Chiyari Fuji)* in 1955, Uchida would continue to be most closely associated with period pictures, mainly working at Toei both on the studio's most mainstream samurai series, and on artier historical fare such as 1962's *The Mad Fox (Koiya koi nasuna koi)*, inspired by a Bunraku play by Takeda Izumo, *Ashiya Dōman Ōuchi Kagami* ("Ashiya Dōman and a Mirror of the Imperial Court"), first performed in 1734 and adapted for the kabuki stage a year later.

Set in the distant past of a mythical medieval Japan, *The Mad Fox* opens with the unrolling of a scroll into which the action eventually blends. Inserting himself within the world of a scroll painting with its classical compositions and peculiar poetry, Uchida sends his hero on a journey into dreams and madness as he, unable to restore order to his chaotic times, attempts to find escape in delusion and fantasy.

As the ominous red of the opening informs us, this is a land colored by fear and uncertainty. Mount Fuji has erupted, bandits roam the land, and the Emperor is weak. Court astrologer



Kamo no Yasunori predicts that there will be a great disturbance and the realm will split in two. Consulting the Golden Crow, a scroll of such secrecy that it can only be accessed with the twin keys of Yasunori's wife and daughter, he comes to the conclusion that the Crown Prince is cursed but cannot divulge further information to any but his chosen successor, whom he has not yet named. Yasuna, perhaps the most trusted of his disciples, has rushed to his side to help, but Dōman, favored by the astrologer's wife, has been to the palace apparently to "put in a good word" for his master, but more obviously to curry favor on his own behalf.

The fate of the nation may depend on the petty squabbles of a series of minor players, each making use of social and political instability to further their own aims. Yasunori's resentful wife, a sister of the Minister for Civil Affairs, has begun an affair with Dōman hoping to exercise power through him by ensuring he succeeds her husband. Soon enough, Yasunori is killed by "bandits" on his way to the palace to tell them what he's concluded from the Golden Crow. In love with the kind and honest Yasuna, Yasunori's adopted daughter Sakaki pleads his case with the Emperor, but the plan is foiled by Yasunori's wife who steals the Golden Crow and frames Sakaki, later having her tortured to death in front of Yasuna. Yasuna himself survives but is driven mad by what he has seen, leaving the house in flames as he wanders away with the Golden Crow carefully concealed in his kimono.

Switching to kabuki, Uchida dramatizes Yasuna's psychotic breakdown as a musical sequence, during which the narrator underlines the drama's central tragedy in advising the hero from offscreen about the dangers of falling in love. Yasuna thinks he sees a vision of the departed Sakaki and is consumed by his own heartbreak only for a curtain to fall on his delusion, unveiling the image of another Sakaki, apparently alive and well and picking flowers in the tranquility of a pastoral paradise. Yasuna has found his way back to a fracture point. Ten years previously, he and Dōman were dispatched to find a prophesied child. Yasunori was instructed to adopt through his divination. They eventually brought back with them Sakaki, the older of twin sisters, leaving the youngest, Kuzunoha, behind in tears.

Trapped in his delusion, Yasuna becomes unable to accept that Kuzunoha is not Sakaki, forgetting entirely about the existence of her double. The problem is further compounded when Dōman and his faction make up their own prophecy which requires the blood of a white fox, bringing them to the kitsune center of medieval Japan, Izumi, which is coincidentally where the family of Sakaki and Kuzunoha are from. When "bandits" attack the villagers, who are peacefully dancing to celebrate their harvest, and strike an old woman with an arrow, Yasuna intervenes, little knowing that the old woman is a kitsune, or fox spirit, in disguise. Such spirits are well known for taking on human form, their true natures here represented in theatrical fashion by the means of traditional fox masks.

Yasuna's intervention gets him spotted by Akuemon, the treacherous retainer working with Dōman, who then returns to attack him in the hope of recovering the Golden Crow. Yasuna is struck, but the old lady's kitsune granddaughter, Okon, raises the alarm and repays her debt by summoning the foxes to protect Yasuna. To nurse him back to health, she takes on the form of Kuzunoha, which is also the form of Sakaki, and sends Yasuna into a further realm of confusion as he falls for a third woman with the same face as his first love.

Like the narrative singer to Yasuna, Okon's grandfather cautions her not to turn her back on her own kind and walk a foolish path by falling in love with a human man, but Okon is a woman as well as a fox and cannot resist Yasuna's essential goodness. Gently licking his wounds, she creates for him an artificial reality, shedding her own identity to become his vision of Sakaki as they cocoon themselves in a bubble of artificial domesticity complete with a tiny baby to cement their new family. Okon hopes to keep up the pretense for as long as possible, knowing that, were Yasuna to discover her real identity, she would never see him or her son again, but the outside world eventually begins to penetrate the borders of their fantasy. "Bandits" creep through the background, while Yasuna begins to remember that he was once the bearer of the Golden Crow and sole possessor of the means to bring peace to his fracturing nation.

Meanwhile, back in the "real" world, court intrigue continues to intensify. The Crown Prince is still weak. The nation does indeed seem primed to "split in two" as we're told that the lords Taira no Masakado and Fujiwara no Sumitomo have rebelled in the East and West, giving us our first hint of a concrete historical moment in its signaling of Heian-era political instability. Small rebellions and banditry also run rife with the general populace, still panicked by the ill omen of Mount Fuji's eruption, convinced that the volcano will erupt again, destroying the shape of the mountain and sending crop-killing ash over the entire nation, filling Lake Biwa and provoking a deluge that will drown the capital Kyoto, taking the government with it.

The government is, however, weak and divided, even if it were not fundamentally disinterested in the affairs of ordinary people. Yasuna's sole rebuke of his master, offered with characteristic mildness, was to point out that the townspeople were in a state of panic because of the eruption and it might have been wiser to offer them reassurance before running off to court to chat with the Emperor, but his advice fell on deaf ears and Yasunori went to his death. Now the Emperor faces a similar dilemma, caught between twin rebellions and faced with the possibility of losing his power, the nation split in two between Taira no Masakado in the East and Fujiwara no Sumitomo in the West. The advisors are torn in two themselves, some believing that the populace must be told these rumors are baseless to prevent further panic and others suddenly remembering about the Golden Crow



and insisting on finding Yasuna to recover it, including Dōman's faction, who now realize they must find and kill Yasuna before he can hand the scroll over to the authorities while trying to ensure the Crown Prince conceives an heir to head off the prophecy.

Yet for all that, it is love, as the narrator reminds us, that threatens the social order. Yasuna, who still has the scroll, is trapped in an artificial world of domestic bliss, entirely protected from external chaos by the fox spirit Okon's spell. Knowing it will only break her heart and condemn her to a life of lonely wandering, she creates a false paradise to trap Yasuna for as long as possible. She alone has the key to end the chaos, but knows the moment she gives Yasuna the scroll is the moment her world will die. Someday the madness will end, she tells their child, but it's a day she dreads rather than anticipates. Lamenting that her heart led her into a sin of a love that could never be, she confesses that the griefs of the world of animals are a hundred times that of humans, while admitting that man is vicious and cruel. Yet, not even a fox spirit can hide from reality forever, and chaos eventually penetrates her tiny bubble of safety when confronted by the figure of the "real" Kuzunoha and her family who have come in search of the long-missing Yasuna, not for reasons of politics but for love – Kuzunoha too pines alone for the soul of the "mad" nobleman who only sees her sister. In a *coup de théâtre*, Okon's magical dreamscape collapses into dust, leaving nothing behind but her child and the Golden Crow.

Rather than freed, Yasuna, realizing he has lost love once again, returns to the scorched paradise of his heartbreak, trapped in the sulphurous yellow of his madness. History tells us that the Heian era endured for a while after that, whether thanks to the Golden Crow or not, the crisis apparently averted at least for the moment. Was Uchida, like Yasuna, attempting to retreat from his social responsibilities by hiding out in the comparative safety of Manchuria, conflicted in his attraction to certain aspects of militarism and the people who embodied them but lacking the strength to resist? Chaos, he seems to tell us, cannot be escaped by hiding from it, or by artificially reordering the world, because reality will always get you in the end. Holding the mirror up to nature, Uchida hints at its essential dualities in a world that is perpetually tearing itself in two.

Hayley Scanlon is a freelance film writer and editor of East Asian cinema website Windows on Worlds.





THE MAD FOX AND ASHIYA DŌMAN ŌUCHI KAGAMI

by Ronald Cavaye

Director Tomu Uchida (1898–1970) made *The Mad Fox* in 1962. The film has its origins in a play which was first written for the Japanese *ningyō jōruri* (人形浄瑠璃), known today as the Bunraku (文楽) puppet theater. It was premiered by the puppets in the tenth month of 1734, and very soon after, performed by the actors of the Kabuki (歌舞伎) theater. Bunraku puppets are operated by three men in full view of the audience. The principal puppeteer, dressed in formal costume, operates the hand and right arm, while the second operates the left arm and the third the feet. Both the second and third puppeteers are dressed in black with covered faces, creating a notion of invisibility. Kabuki, the popular theater of the townspeople in feudal Japan, had been founded by a woman, Izumo no Okuni, in 1603. Women, however, were banned from the stage for reason of immorality in 1629 and, although the all-male actors developed a repertoire of plays and dances of their own, they were also very quick to adopt any plays which had been successful with the puppets.

With a typically complex title – *Ashiya Dōman Ōuchi Kagami* (芦屋道満大内鑑) which translates as “Ashiya Dōman and a Mirror of the Imperial Court” – the play is set in the court of the Japanese Heian period (794–1185) and its story depicts the rivalry between two young pupils of the court astrologer, Kamo no Yasunori.

When the tale begins, Yasunori, having no children of his own, and guided by an oracle, has sent his two pupils, Abe no Yasuna and Ashiya Dōman to find a child whom he can adopt. According to the oracle, however, the child had to be a girl and also be born according to the Chinese zodiac in the year and day of the sheep. After a long and arduous search by both his pupils, Yasuna finally found two suitable girls – one called Sakaki, and the other, her younger sister, called Kuzunoha. Yasuna decided to take Sakaki home to become his master’s adopted daughter, leaving Kuzunoha behind, grieving for the loss of her sister.

The author of the original play, Takeda Izumo I (?-1747), is said to have made his debut at the age of 15 as a puppeteer in the famous Takemoto-za theater. This puppet theater had been founded by Takemoto Gidayū (1651-1714), who originated a new style of dramatic



narration to accompany the puppets, which is still employed today in both Bunraku and in those Kabuki plays which were adopted from the puppet dramas. When Gidayū retired in 1705, Izumo took over as the Takemoto-za manager. His son, Takeda Izumo II (1691-1756), also became one of the theater's most prolific playwrights.

In Bunraku, a single narrator, accompanied by the three-stringed *shamisen* (三味線), provides the voices for all the puppet characters. In Kabuki, the actors, of course, speak for themselves and so the narrator's role is confined to commenting on the thoughts and actions of the onstage characters. At 1:26:30 in the film, one can hear a Gidayū narrator take over the lines of the actor, as he would do in Kabuki.

Ashiya Dōman Ōuchi Kagami was written in five acts but only scenes from the fourth act are regularly performed by both the puppets and Kabuki. Yasuna himself, and the younger sister, Kuzunoha, are central to the drama. The film begins some ten years after Sakaki has been adopted by Abe no Yasunori. His evil wife, however, has designs on the young Ashiya Dōman, and wishing to hold on to power, contrives to have her husband assassinated and to make Dōman, rather than Yasuna, the successor to her husband's court position. She steals Yasunori's secret scroll and blames Sakaki and Yasuna for its loss. Sasaki is tortured to death, driving Yasuna mad with grief.

While Abe no Yasuna's madness is shown in Uchida's film, it is most famously depicted in a Kabuki dance called *Yasuna*, which is accompanied by a lyrical style of narrative music called Kiyomoto (清). Kiyomoto was created in Edo (the former name for Tokyo) around 1814 by the singer Kiyomoto Enjudayū (1777–1825). The vocal lines may be pitched quite high, and the style is often characterized by a very pronounced vibrato. The earliest success of the Kiyomoto school of musical accompaniment was with the *Yasuna* dance.

In the film, the lyrics and music which depict Yasuna's madness – “Love, O Love / Inside is emptiness / Never fall in love...” are identical to those of the classical dance. Yasuna is also depicted wearing Sakaki's own robe, and his purple headband is a stylized Kabuki convention indicative of illness or, in this case, his agitated state of mind. Yasuna wanders distractedly through the forest of Shinoda and comes upon the family of Shinoda no Shōji, the father of the two sisters he found so many years ago. Among them is the beautiful younger sister, Kuzunoha, whom the mad Yasuna immediately believes to be Sakaki, come back to life. (The name Kuzunoha means “vine [*kuzu*] leaves.”) Realizing that Yasuna is not in his right mind, they kindly take him home.

In the film, while still in the belief that the girl is Sakaki come back to life, Yasuna is out walking with her when he is set upon by factions from the court who believe him responsible

for the loss of the secret scroll. A fox is injured in the fray and Yasuna saves its life. Tales of the magical nature of foxes which can assume the shape of human beings are well-known in Japan, so when Yasuna too is injured and separated from Kuzunoha, the fox's granddaughter takes on the guise of the girl, tending his wounds and generally taking care of him.

It is at this point in the film that the distinctive “clack” of the *hyōshigi* (拍子木) wooden clappers is heard (1:21:48), symbolizing a return to the plot of Act IV of *Ashiya Dōman Ōuchi Kagami*. The set suddenly changes to that of a theater stage and the light, billowy draw-curtain with broad green, terracotta, and black stripes, called a *jōshikimaku* (定式幕). Opened from left to right, this curtain is the emblem of the Kabuki theater, representing the three great theaters of Edo (Tokyo): the Nakamura-za, the Ichimura-za, and the Morita-za – all said to have used tricolored striped curtains similar to the curtain we see today.

Residing in the secluded village of Abeno, Yasuna has now married the “girl” and the couple have been living happily together for six years, during which time she has given birth to a son. Yasuna, however, still has no idea that the mother of this child is actually a fox.

Kuzunoha helps to make ends meet by weaving cloth and she is busy with this task when Shinoda no Shōji, his wife, and their daughter (the real Kuzunoha) arrive. He had promised to give his daughter to Yasuna in marriage, but having heard nothing from him for some time, they have now brought her in order to formalize the ceremony.

Shōji is shocked to see another Kuzunoha in the house. Yasuna himself returns and after greeting Shōji happily, he is also amazed that there are two seemingly identical Kuzunohas. The medium of film enables one actress to play both parts quite easily, but in Kabuki the *onnagata* (女形), a male actor who specializes in the performance of female roles, has to achieve this by employing identically dressed stand-ins (who do not show their faces) and, with a specially designed trick kimono, switch roles using a variety of *hayagawari* (早変わり) quick-change techniques. Special attention is paid to the difference in characterization: the real Kuzunoha is played as a refined and sheltered young lady, while the fox Kuzunoha is performed as a loyal, hard-working, and practical *sewa nyōbo* (世話女), “domestic wife.”

Realizing how impossible her situation has become, the fox Kuzunoha has no choice but to return to the forest and leave her husband and child in the care of the real Kuzunoha. Though it causes her great anguish to leave, she cannot face her husband now that he knows the truth.

For the actor, the climax of the play requires great skill and practice. Resolving to leave her husband a farewell poem, the fox Kuzunoha decides to write on the sliding paper doors. She



begins to write but when her sleeping child awakes, she has to comfort the boy. Holding the boy in her right hand, she transfers the brush to her left. When the young boy will not stop crying, she holds him with both arms and then takes the brush in her mouth in order to finish her poem. These abilities reveal her supernatural fox powers. The poem, in the five-seven-five syllabic meter common in Japanese poetry, reads – “If you yearn for me, (5) / Come seek me in Izumi. (7) / Shinoda Forest, (5) / is where Kuzunoha waits, (7) / filled with bitterness.” (5)

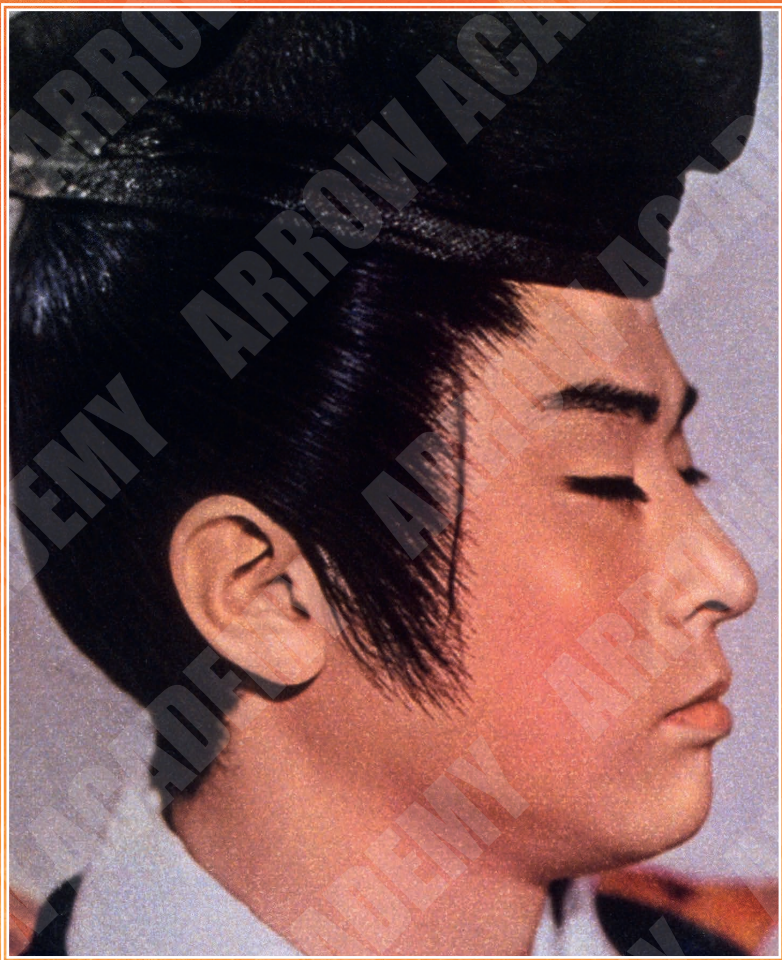
With this, she magically disappears, leaving behind her beloved son. This is a famous example of a scene of separation between a parent and child known as *kowakare* (子別れ), “parting from one’s child.” Yasuna then returns home, anxiously calling to her. He reads the poem, and in the desperate hope of seeing her again, rushes after her with the child in his arms.

Occasionally one further scene is performed as a *michiyuki* (道行き), a kind of dance in which the character is depicted traveling through the countryside. Making her way through the forest of Shinoda, the grief-stricken and dejected fox Kuzunoha is set upon by members of the court faction. Her magical powers easily defeat them, and, in some productions, she flies off the stage by means of a *chūnori* (宙乗り) – a wire attached to a harness which is concealed under her kimono.

In the original play, the son of Abe no Yasuna and the fox Kuzunoha becomes the famous *onmyōji* (陰陽師), diviner or astrologer Abe no Seimei (921-1005). Active during the middle of the Heian period, he was responsible for advising the Emperor and the court on matters of astrology and the most auspicious times to hold festivals and events. He is a legendary figure in Japanese history and there are a number of stories concerning his life. There is a popular shrine dedicated to him in Kyoto.

Ronald Cavaye first went to Japan to teach the piano and has been working as a translator for the Kabuki and Bunraku theaters for over 35 years.





ABOUT THE TRANSFER

The Mad Fox is presented in its original 2.35:1 aspect ratio with mono audio. The High Definition master was provided by Toei.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **James Flower**
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert**, **Francesco Simeoni**
Technical Producer **James White**
Disc Production Manager **Nora Mehenni**
QC **Alan Simmons**
Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**
Blu-ray Mastering **Visual Data Media Services**
Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**
Design **Obviously Creative**
Artwork **Matt Griffin**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Ronald Cavaye, Hayley Scanlon, Jasper Sharp, Naoki Shinozaki



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