

pedestal. Handke's admiration contradicts the very philosophy of Ozu in filmmaking, because of the fact that Marianne's presence is always elevated, rendering all other characters as static and two-dimensional. They simply exist to trigger Marianne's actions behind a backdrop of neatly placed furniture.

The heavily considered set design surpasses a cast of characters who seem to function much like props themselves. Her living space repeatedly creeps back to the forefront of the audience's attention. By this observation, it seems that Handke's contradicting reliance on Ozu's cinematic signatures evokes not a subtle homage, but rather an aesthetic exercise that attempts to pass as homage.

Marianne seems to indulge in these moments that she has built around herself. Her quiet yet dignified solitude does not convince us that she is truly uncomfortable with her situation. She basks in the struggles of modern life to the point where it translates into a form of leisure amongst a cryptically chic setting. This portrait is arranged for Marianne's freedom from her overbearing husband, however, is not possible to escape the grasp of the overbearing direction of the film.

—Sung Pil Yoon

- ¹ Wim Wenders is credited as the producer of *The Left-Handed Woman* which screened as part of *Wim Wenders: A Retrospective* throughout October and December 2015. Wenders was a frequent collaborator of Handke's who also shared a profound admiration for the work of Yasujiro Ozu.

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The Left-Handed Woman

written
by

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about
the
film

The Left-Handed Woman
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PETER HANDKE'S *The Left-Handed Woman* centres around Marianne, a woman who has recently separated from her husband. It would seem



that she has not only divorced herself from an overbearing husband, Bruno, but also her ability to relate to the world in the aftermath of her marriage. When Marianne realized she wanted to divorce Bruno she proclaimed to him that it was an “epiphany”, but what informed this profound decision to be is not elaborated beyond that exchange, nor are her goals beyond that outcome.

Throughout the film, she wields a dignified loneliness by her refusal to be a victim. She does not submit to Bruno’s belittlements, nor to Franziska’s projection of her own doubts while in a similar situation. Depictions of Marianne’s struggles are presented exclusively for the audience and no other characters ever participate in this private spectacle. While many stand-alone scenes highlight her state of isolation—spending the occasional day sitting at home staring into space for prolonged periods of time, or even walking in endless circles in the backyard while her son and his friend play in the background.

Handke makes pronounced references to the work and personage of the Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu: first with his portrait making appearance in the set, and then a scene from *Tokyo Chorus* (1931) playing at the cinema. Striving for certain characteristics of Ozu’s film style is evident, most explicitly still-life background cinematography, with carefully arranged furniture with deliberate compositions in each nook and cranny. Even so, Handke does not succeed in emulating the concept of *Mu*—emptiness that gives heightened meaning to form. Handke attempts to appropriate Ozu’s “emptiness” for Marianne, but this “emptiness” is too literal, and no longer shares the same definition as Ozu’s. Marianne is actually not lonely; she maintains self-imposed solitude, therefore her character is never emotionally prompted to engage with any other characters, to reach out.

Ozu’s humane approach to character development evokes vulnerability as a common ground throughout his films. There is no focus in any particular character but a self-sustained model where plots seem to unfold naturally with no person elevated on a



Peter Handke, *The Left-Handed Woman* (1978). Film Still. Courtesy of the author.