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BY J. HOBEBMAN

CHILDHOOD'S END: THE FILMS OF HOU HSIAO-HSIEN. Four films directed by Hou Hsiao-hsien. At the Asia Society. July 9, 16, 23, and 30.

KARMA. Directed and produced by Ho Quang Minh. Written by Ho and Nguy Ngu, from Nguy's short story "The Wounded Beast." At Film Forum 1, through July 21.

These are Hou's themes; they seem intrinsic to his situation. He was born in 1947 in Mei county on the Chinese mainland. One year later his family moved to Taiwan, where they were effectively marooned after the Revolution. The director tells this story in his best known film, the 1985 *A Time To Live and a Time To Die* (July 16 at 3 and July 30 at 7). An act of re-creation, using his childhood house and neighborhood, the film is a relatively

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straightforward chronicle of lower-middle-class family life (somewhat marred by sentimental, if spare, piano music), in which the generations inexorably drift apart—the elders still yearning for Mei county, the children trying to find their footing in provincial Taiwan.

It's appropriate that the tormented, taciturn semi-delinquent Hou shows himself to be in *A Time To Live and a Time To Die* would emerge as part of the Taiwanese "new cinema" of the early '80s. (Among other things, Hou's movies were among the first to make extensive use of Taiwanese dialects rather than official Mandarin.) His first feature, *Green, Green Grass of Home* (1982), was a hugely successful vehicle for the local pop star Kenny Bee and made Hou's less commercial films viable. "I was lucky that when I started I made a lot of money," he's said. "That's why everybody wanted me to work for them. But about three years ago things changed. I made films that did not make money... I discovered what film really is." (How are his movies received in Taiwan? the interviewer wanted to know. "Worse as it goes along!" Hou laughed.) In a number of Hou's films, the commercial cinema is a phantom presence. Its posters and (in one superb scene) its soundtrack are dispersed throughout *Dust in the Wind*, lurking in the background as dialectical shards of the Other.

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