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left Troell on his own for ten months! When we talk about the craft of movie making, we need to include the coordinate factors: first the genius, then the compatible setting² . . . That Swedish society is otherwise stuffy and chilling is not contradicted by the ideal arrangement I have described; or rather, it is contradicted to the extent that the theatre world of Sweden is the single happy area in which unfriendly custom and envious levelling are disarmed by the reciprocities of art.

2. *Whorehouse in a Wilderness*

The American movie: what *is* at the heart of the matter? It can only "improve"—it *has*, technically, aesthetically and within a limited range of tone, assisted by actors among whom are fewer dummies than say fifteen years ago—it can only improve at the continuing cost of reaching lower and lower levels of consciousness. Professional surface, barbaric content. The same two months in which I saw a half-dozen critically popular American films, two of which are discussed below, offered me for unavoidable comparison not only *The Emigrants*, but also Bertolucci's *The Conformist* and four films-for-television: one from Poland, two from Hungary, one from BBC. Each of the TV films dealt with a private crisis. In one, something very simple and shattering happened to quite complex people; in the other three, something complex and equally shattering happened to essentially simple people. Inspired by diverse national and political backgrounds, they were commonly united by a commitment to the human scale; any one of them had finer nuances and a more worldly control of pathos than any American film release I can remember over several years. What chiefly struck me about the Bertolucci work (from a novel by Moravia), quite apart from its bizarre post-Antonioni treatment (perhaps a shade *too* mannered), was how much feeling for history it takes to translate the standard discharge of anti-social resentment into something more provocative and durable. When, ever, has an American film prosecuted a period and a type with such unmerciful intelligence as Bertolucci's tour de force of Italian fascism and its psychopathic ambience? (*Reflections in a Golden Eye* may have been the exceptional case and note how speedily Huston ducked out again to the exterior certainties of the love story and the manhunt.)

To argue plausibly, one doesn't expect from people interpretations of a special experience their culture doesn't provide. We *do* expect an

² Some statistics, for comparison with the American case. Production personnel for *The Emigrants*: 18 members, 20 actors, not counting 10 non-professional bit players, 500-odd extras. Initial plans called for 170 working days, 127 in Sweden, 43 in the U.S.A., excluding travelling time. 182 days were used. . . . Total consumption of film, 132,000 meters, from which 10,000 were edited. *Total cost* for the entire project: c. \$1,400,000—a fifth, I'd venture, of what it would cost if financed by a Hollywood company. . . . By the way, the unnerving sea-storm scenes on the brig were shot in the studio, the *only* studio scenes except Robert's visit to the bordello in Part II. The Minnesota lake was located in south Sweden, the Manhattan shots were made in Copenhagen, the Indians were hanged just outside Stockholm.

experience equal in force and the American film all too seldom supplies it; the tendency today, as I've said, is more than ever steadily downward in scale of values. Troell's film unarguably concerns itself with human beings at a low stratum of cognizance, yet those people have an irreducible decency; their efforts and their behaviour, even at its crudest, are in the service of an aspiration. What aspiration is being served in *Easy Rider*, *The Wild Bunch*, *Midnight Cowboy*, *Carnal Knowledge*, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*? So much for the "new" American cinema, a proletarianized commodity in which the perspective contrived by the director is not simply at the level of his characters, it is considerably *below* the level of these characters! The typical American film director seems sado-masochistically bent on confronting us, no quarter allowed, with sub-social creatures whose form of converse is limited to sex at the rape level and profane outbursts of hostility which he expects us to receive as revolutionary criticism. The latest *en vogue* feature is filthy language, generously bestowed.

What, pray, is *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* all about? A cheap gambler and a dead shot builds a warehouse in the Alaskan back-country, unwillingly shares his profits with an opium-eating whore who teaches him the window-dressing of his business and balks at being pushed around by the Big Company. "You sell out to us at our price or you get bumped off!" When he refuses their offer they set three gunmen on his tail; he kills them all and is himself killed; the film closes with snow enveloping alike the town and the dying McCabe, literally frozen in his tracks like a doll on a wedding cake, while Mrs. Miller, oblivious to the gaudy spectacle (fire in the church, the stalking and gunning), lies in an opium trance. Bret Harte used to boil up tripe like this, did he not? It's fable, *of course!* The usual pretentious lie. McCabe, with an outlaw's fame, turns out merely to have once killed a man in self-defense. All the same, he's an unerring marksman and what's more preposterous is his sputtering assertion when he feels too put upon by the Company and Mrs. Miller (from whom he wants breast-nuzzling love) that he's designed for better things. "*I'm a poet!*" he protests. This is surely the director speaking of his own person! Dishonest down the line: in the midst of a belching, greasy-haired, flannel-underwear community of lumber-camp backwash, Altman (the director) suddenly introduces a scrupulously clean, well-dressed Negro couple with no discernible function except the support of Altman's status as a liberal who agrees that black is beautiful. And could it have been mere coincidence that the most imposing man around, the six-and-a-half-feet tall heavy, speaks with an impeccable and plushy English accent—and is neatly shot between the eyes by our sawed-off, inarticulate American hero? Scenically, the film is set and mounted with loving care—the alpine-frontier location, claustrophobic and dripping, the dampened interior lighting,