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MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA
PORTUGAL'S MASTER FILMMAKER

November 9-25, 1984

Friday, November 9 at 6:30
Sunday, November 25 at 5:30

FRANCISCA. 1981. Written and directed by Manoel de Oliveira. Based on the book Fanny Owen by Agustina Bessa Luís. Produced by V.O. Filmes. Executive Producer: Paulo Branco. Production Director: Ricardo Cordeiro. Photography (Eastmancolor): Elso Roque. Music: João Paes. Art Direction: António Casimiro, Anahory. Editing: Monique Rutler. Sound: Jean Paul Mugel. Costumes: Rita Azevedo Gomes. Make-up: Paula Raimundo. Head of Production: António Luis Campos, Aura Carvalho. Mixing: Jean Paul Loublier. In Portuguese with English subtitles. 166 min.

With: Teresa Meneses (Francisca/Fanny), Diogo Dória (José Augusto), Mário Barroso (Camilo Castelo Branco), Rui Mendes (Manuel Negrão), Paulo Rocha (Doctor), Sílvia Rato (Maria Owen), António Caldeira Pires (José de Melo), Alexandre Brandão e Melo (Raimundo), Lia Gama (D. Josefa), Teresa Madruga (Franzina), João Guedes (Marques).

The film is dedicated to the memory of Joaquim Novais Teixeira.

"The chance to make Francisca cropped up unexpectedly. I had prepared (and was ready to start) another film- a comedy- when a last-minute disagreement with the author of the story concerned made me back out. The chance to make FRANCISCA (Fanny Owen) then occurred because I was already interested in this true story (connected with my wife's family): I had known the story for some time as people had talked to me a lot about it, and also I had read some of Fanny's letters that my brother-in-law Abel still has. Camilo Castelo Branco, the famous novelist who later wrote the well-known novel Amor de Perdição, was a friend of José Augusto and Fanny and with them a figure in this sad event which took place in 1850. With this title Camilo evokes the unhappy love affair of Fanny and José Augusto in his book Bom Jesus do Monte. Perhaps he did this in order, to a certain extent, to 'clear himself' of complicity in the indecorous nature of this highly romantic love affair. Recently the great writer Agustina Bessa Luís revived this story in her book Fanny Owen, basing herself on authentic facts and Camilo's writings. It was this work of Agustina's that spurred me to make FRANCISCA and it was on her work that I built up my film. And so FRANCISCA in effect transforms into a tetralogy of frustrated love affairs the series of three films that I had made previously: O PASSADO E O PRESENTE, BENILDE OU A VIRGEM MÃE and AMOR DE PERDIÇÃO."

--- Manoel de Oliveira

"...What we have been missing is a classically trained director who can admit his points of contact with the modern cinema. With the emergence of the 75-year-old Portuguese filmmaker Manoel de Oliveira we have one at last....

There are two kinds of filmmakers in the world: those who believe that the image is an illusion, a made thing that has no necessary relation to the world, and those who believe that the image potentially contains an element of truth, which can be discovered once the veil of illusionism has been lifted. The first approach is the classical approach, and it lends itself to story telling- the creation, through the manipulation of the image and its ordering into patterns that emphasize symmetry and closure, of a world that seems whole, logical, (continued...)

and intelligible, that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The second is the approach of modernism, which tries to tear through the illusory cohesion of classicism in search of an elusive authenticity, the ragged texture of life as it is lived. Modernism can't tell a story, because the logic imposed by story-structure is one of the chief illusions it is fighting against. Or so, at least, the saying goes.

In FRANCISCA, Oliveira uses modernist techniques to tell a story- a story of great subtlety, density, and emotional impact. Instead of murdering the fiction, as many modernists do, Oliveira attempts to purify it, stripping away layer after layer of stylistic incrustation, finally leaving the fiction clean and glistening, like a tiny precious stone. And yet, for all of Oliveira's drive toward the elemental and unadorned, the film retains a curling sense of the baroque, which rests in the incessant, meticulously observed emotional fluctuations of the characters. It is as if Jean-Marie Straub had collaborated with Max Ophuls: the refined mechanism of the materialist cinema is brought to bear on the most delicate mysteries of human emotions, in what can be described as an attempt to photograph and measure a soul...

The images that Oliveira gives us are true- true to their own artificiality. Oliveira has stripped the illusion of its power by identifying it as illusion, a common enough modernist strategy. Yet something else happens over the course of FRANCISCA's two and three-quarter hours: the inadequacy of the illusion seems to bolster the strength of the underlying reality, as we begin to form an impression of the three-dimensional events that have cast this flat shadow on the screen. Oliveira wants to show us only what genuinely can be shown- the thoughts of the characters as recorded in their writing, the vague outline of their world as it has been transmitted in paintings and photographs. He does not pretend to make the characters come alive, and he will not permit us to enter their emotions. But with every fact that he is able to give us, our grasp of the essential truth of the situation increases. It no longer matters if the action is literally true- it is emotionally, internally true, possessed of a weight and sharpness assembled from a thousand different fragments. Oliveira divides his characters, divides his scenes, and divides his forms, using elements of film, theater, and literature to cancel each other out. Just as José Augusto promised to produce an angel from an excess of suffering, so does Oliveira produce a clear statement from an excess of conflicts, confusions, and falsehoods. A sense of the spirit emerges from his microscopic study of material evidence, something whole and transcendent from his accumulation of parts. FRANCISCA leaves us with the fact of a passion- a dangerous, elusive passion that changes its sense and purpose as it moves among the three main characters. At the end of the film, you can feel its shape, you can hold it in your hand."

--- Dave Kehr in the Chicago Reader, September 23, 1983

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