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The question for the moment—one we posed to Pontius last week, with the answer, as always, unstayed for—is of reality, which is getting to be the big cinéaste shtick of the moment. On a recent swing around the campus circuit—North Dakota, Nebraska, Indiana, upstate New York, mid-Connecticut and right here in town—this was a major topic and about the best we could get to, amid all the semantics, is that one generation's reality is another's romanticism, and that the truth of the moment is in the timelessness of the telling.

But what happens when a romantic director aims his camera's realistic eye at eternity and its verities? The result can be Bo Widerberg's *Adalen '31*, a film that is so uncomfortable a blend of realism and romanticism that it emerges as a mechanical work doing justice to neither area. Widerberg is that lush moviemaker whose *Elvira Madigan* so delighted the souls of 12-year-old girls and 17-year-old boys—and I suspect that they will also revel in his latest film, touted at the recent New York Film Festival as one whose “strength comes from the tension between the horror of the subject matter and the sensual Renoir-like beauty of the treatment.” The “horror” of the subject is the martyrdom of five persons, shot by unnerved troopers called in after conflicts between strikers and strikebreakers. But the true horror of the movie is its contrivance, its structuring calculated to elicit push-button reactions from the viewer, its insistence that we weep for young lovers (the beloved always clutching a nosegay, the youth awkward and clear-eyed in his purity), that we shrink from Establishment violence (lush lilacs must frame the troopers at their gun emplacements), that we shudder at death (a young girl's wounds must ooze through to the white sheet that covers her), that we perk up with faith in life because a little boy is blowing soap bubbles—and he's cuter than anything we've seen in a Gerber ad.

That Widerberg can deal in this day and age with labor violence in terms of clean, plump, well-dressed actors described and self-described as victims of vile mill owners, that he can condemn the rich folks up on the hill in terms of etiquette, piano-tuning and—ugh—abortion, is certainly an accomplishment—as if he were pulling a sophomoric reverse on an old socialist cartoon depicting a shriveled worker crouching over a machine while a ballooned boss in top hat and dollar signs sucks his blood through a pipe in his back. But is it any more artful? There is no hint of the grit and grind of unemployment and oppression in his pretty village; papa broods about action vs. negotiation while mama keeps washing the floor mats; teenagers chase girls and try to play jazz; the family revels in a feast of fish and potatoes and bread while those beasts up the hill are picking at a fancy arrangement of foods that look a hell of a lot like fish and potatoes dressed up. And papa is shot down when the workers demonstrate. And our teenage hero vows that the fight will go on and that education is the answer for the elevation of the masses—and wee baby brother blows soap bubbles and we *know* things will be better . . .

And we've been hooked, deluded, because Widerberg's actors are excellent and they put a stamp of truth on a romanticized and pretty pastiche. Scarcely a descendant of Eisenstein's *Strike*, it is instead a bastard offshoot, perhaps, of Monicelli's superb *The Organizer*—with all the potential inner truth and outer sting vitiated by soft sentimentality and pretty pictures. It's the hard sell, of course—ill-starred teenage lovers, cute kiddies, rifles and apple blossoms and birds twittering. Hopefully, non-teenagers can resist.