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little man who thinks a lot and walks faster when he gets excited, a nice and slightly humorous person, absolutely credible as a human being. "After all, it was only a little sin," he says when he agrees to go into a church and pray rather than offend pretty Oulka's feelings. Equally interestingly, the film is made in the Russian tradition as it has been taken up and developed by the French *nouvelle vague* directors, but not much explored in the U.S.S.R. This gives it sleight of hand to match its lightness of mood. The editing is superb. The film is in the form of a narrative spoken by Lenin, so that what we are seeing is the flow of images backwards and forwards in time through the narrator's mind: out of the prison in his imagination to the railway station where Nadia has come to meet the train that he was prevented from catching; out of the prison in recollection to his first intoxicating glimpses of beautiful Cracow; out of the prison in reality to the portrait studio where his photograph is to be taken for the files and where he speculates on the future of the bridal couple in the wedding group being photographed before him. The form of the film makes it the most natural thing in the world that Lenin should be present in almost every scene, that he should even stand on the edge of a scene from Andrzej's past before he'd met the boy, and that he should appear against the same sky when he tells us about Andrzej's death. Oulka is presented like a West European New Wave heroine with lots of frozen shots and skipping movements, although there are moments when this is overdone in a recognisably Russian manner. The film as a whole looks marvellous, especially those arrestingly white images of the prison cell to which we constantly return. One suspects that realism—social or otherwise—has rather flown out of the window. But what a pleasantly engaging myth has taken its place.

Suitability: A, B, C.

E.S.

ORMEN (The Serpent), Sweden, 1965

Cert: X. *dist:* Richard Schulman Entertainments. *p.c.:* Minerva Film. *p:* Tore Sjöberg. *d:* Hans Abramson. *sc:* Hans Abramson. Based on the novel by Stig Dagerman. *ph:* Mac Ahlberg. *ed:* Ingemar Ejve. *a.d.:* P. A. Lundgren. *m:* Georg Riedel. *l.p.:* Christina Schollin (*Irene*), Harriet Andersson (*Vera*), Hans Ernbäck (*Bill*), Tor Isedal (*Sgt. Bohman*), Gudrun Brost (*Irene's Mother*), Eddie Axberg (*The errand-boy*), Lars Passgård (*Gideon*), Björn Gustafson (*Mattsson*), Tommy Nilsson (*Berndt*), Morgan Andersson (*Ake*), Lars Edström (*Pfatten*), Margareta Sjödin (*Inga*), Signe Ståde (*Inge-Lis*). 8,640 ft. 96 mins. *Subtitles.*

Sweden, during World War II. Bill, a young soldier, plans a weekend party in a borrowed country cottage and bullies his girl Irene, a canteen worker, into agreeing to arrange things for him. Having discovered that Sergeant Bohman is terrified of snakes, Bill secretes one in his kitbag and uses it to persuade Bohman to give him the afternoon off. He meets Irene in a café where she declares her love but he eyes the waitress, Vera. Packing Irene off to prepare for the party, he makes love with Vera, then gets into a fight with her lover, and is put under arrest. On the train Irene encounters her mother, who upbraids her for running away from home; a quarrel ensues, as a result of which the mother falls to her death. On arrival, Irene is guided to the cottage by an errand-boy who helps her clean it up, then tries somewhat unsuccessfully to rape her. The guests arrive—three of Bill's friends and two girls. So does Bill, now escaped from detention and accompanied by Vera. During the evening, Bill gets drunk and punishes Vera for causing his arrest by pushing her down a well, from which she is rescued and sent home by Irene. The party languishes, so Bill produces his snake. Terrified, Irene cries "It's true, she's dead!" Bill thinks she means Vera, but she explains about her mother. Telling her she has been dreaming, Bill goes with her to the railway line, where there is no corpse. "Can you let the snake go now?" she asks. But he tells her it might have been a different railway line and leaves her there, saying "Just lie there and dream".

Stig Dagerman's particular brand of metaphysical anguish does not seem to adapt very comfortably to the cinema. If *The Serpent* does not plumb quite the same grotesque depths of gloom as *Wedding—Swedish Style* (also Dagerman; same producer, different director), it comes fairly close with attempted rape by butcher-boy ("You might at least take your apron off"), Harriet Andersson in forties hairdo scrabbling crossly in the mud at the bottom of a well, and assorted couples puffing and panting in every available spot. Before it disintegrates, though, Hans Abramson reveals real talent in his sharp, edgy scene-setting—horseplay with an un-

dercurrent of brutality at the barracks, the first meeting with Irene when Bill suddenly plunges a bayonet into the windowsill to help her make up her mind, the hypnotic encounter with the snake during a military exercise. Particularly striking is the café sequence, a Pinteresque scene done entirely in close-up as Bill listens restlessly while Irene talks about her feelings, until gradually one realises (as she does) that he is really watching Vera's sexy manoeuvres in a mirror. All this builds a carefully controlled mood of curbed hysteria, which unfortunately blows up subsequently into crude and risible overstatement, obscuring Dagerman's symbolism. "It's the story of a piece of hell on earth", the producer has declared. "The insecurity of human beings in their dealings with each other... our need of violence", says the director. Which is fair enough but doesn't help to sort out the muddle. Ultimately the film seems more preoccupied with multiplying the sex, rape and violence than with clarifying the symbolic relationship between the snake, the military milieu, the 1939-1945 setting, and the real or supposed death of the mother.

Suitability: A.

T.M.

PERVY UCHITEL (The First Teacher), U.S.S.R., 1965

Cert: X. *dist:* Contemporary. *p.c.:* Kirghizfilm/Mosfilm. *d:* Andrei Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky. *sc:* Chingiz Aytmatov, Boris Dobrodeyev. Based on the novel by Chingiz Aytmatov. *ph:* Gheorgy Rerberg. *ed:* (not available). *a.d.:* M. Romadine. *m:* V. Ovchinnikov. *sd:* E. Kachkevitch, S. Katzenelenbogen. *l.p.:* Bolot Beishenaliev (*Dyuishen*), Natasha Arinbasarova (*Altinai*), Idris Nogaibayev, D. Kouioukova, M. Kychtobaiev, K. Rysmendeyeva, A. Kydyenazarov, S. Djoumadylov, N. Tchokoubalev, I. Ryskoulov. 8,820 ft. 98 mins. *Subtitles.*

1923: a Kirghiz village just after the Civil War. Dyuishen, an ex-Red Army man, arrives to open a new school for the villagers. At first he is greeted with open hostility, but he gradually gains the confidence of the children and especially that of a beautiful teenage girl, Altinai. He falls foul of the local Kulak when the latter takes a fancy to Altinai and demands that she become his bride. Dyuishen is seriously beaten by the Kulak when he tries to prevent her removal, but the girl is taken by force to the Kulak's camp. Next morning, Dyuishen arrives with the police and arrests the Kulak for abduction. This act makes the villagers feel that the teacher has shamed them and both he and Altinai are forced to leave. Dyuishen sends Altinai to a Tashkent school; but when he returns to the village, he finds that the Kulak's brothers have burned down the school. At first furious, he then learns that some of the villagers had tried to prevent the act; taking an axe, he begins to cut down a tree to begin a new school building and is joined by his friend, Kartenbai.

This film by one of the younger generation of Soviet directors is a curious mixture of over-familiar polemics and a youthful zest in the actual act of film-making. The setting, all bare countryside, running streams, rocky mountains, helps a great deal and Konchalovsky has a good eye for a telling landscape with figures, as in the scene when the teacher tries to dam an icy river with rocks. Just when the story seems to be following the old Soviet pattern of young idealist overcoming peasant ignorance (complete with the usual cuts to gnarled faces and photogenic children), he produces a sequence like the seduction of the girl by the Kulak—very deliberately done with a finely controlled sensual menace—and its aftermath with the girl purifying herself in the pouring rain. The final working out is a trifle prolonged, but here again Konchalovsky makes a basic cliché work for him in the final shots of the teacher cutting down the tree, which makes a similar kind of emotional impact to the persistent sound of the oars at the end of *La Terra Trema*.

Suitability: A.

J.G.

PLUS VIEUX MÉTIER DU MONDE, LE (The Oldest Profession), France/West Germany/Italy, 1967

Cert: X. *dist:* Miracle. *p.c.:* Les Films Gibé/Francoriz (Paris)/Rialto (Berlin)/Rizzoli (Rome). *p:* Joseph Bergholz. *p.manager:* André Cultet. *col:* Eastman Colour. *a.d.:* Max Douy, Bernard Evein, Maurice Petri. ÈRE PRÉHISTORIQUE (Prehistoric Times): *d:* Franco Indovina. *sc:* Ennio Flaiano. *l.p.:* Michèle

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