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JOHN GILLET on films in Berlin

Festival of love

It is curious how scenes and tendencies change from one film festival to another. This year Cannes seemed obsessed with violence, corruption and perversion; Berlin's image so far has been one of love and tenderness, ranging from the sublime (Bresson's Dostoyevsky adaption already noticed from Cannes), to the resigned (the French *Le Chat* with Jean Gabin and Simone Signoret as an old embittered couple torturing each other by not speaking), and the ridiculous. Kon Ichikawa's *To Love Again*, his first feature for six years and the festival's major disappointment.

The American "Love Story" has much to answer for, as its influence now seems worldwide. Ichikawa's Japanese version has a particularly insipid pair of lovers (one French, one Japanese), a lot of touristic trappings and an extraordinary car crash from which the couple emerge totally unscathed in the worst Hollywood tradition.

It is left to Ingmar Bergman to restore the balance and show that a basically banal triangle situation can be made meaningful and entirely personal. *The Touch* (shot mainly in English) concerns the wife of a surgeon who suddenly falls for a strangely disturbed American archaeologist and, although tormented by his violent moods and absences, finds herself continually drawn back to him.

Bergman's intuition and sheer filmic sense are as alert as ever, but it is Bibi Andersson's playing which gives the film its central force. In one of the great screen performances of recent years, she creates a totally creditable portrait of a woman, unused to making decisions, to have finally to decide which road to take. Bergman's mistake, unfortunately, was to use Elliott Gould as the lover; his awkward inflexible playing makes it difficult to accept aspects of the plot and weakens it where it can afford it least.

Seeing Pasolini's version of *The Decameron* shortly afterwards was like receiving a slap

in the face. Here love is mainly a matter of bawdy grapplings in dark cellars, and convents, spiced with decapitations and linked by the figure of Giotto (played by Pasolini himself) clambering up and down a wall as he constructs a fresco.

Like previous works by this director, we are given many painterly images as a poetic reconstruction of period, but found much of it tiresomely unfunny, aggravated by Pasolini's shooting style with its persistent close-ups of toothy, ravaged faces, acting it up like mad.

Parallel with the main festival is the Young Film Forum intended as an equivalent to the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes and sharing the latter's political commitment. Buried among the slogans and *cinéma vérité* documentaries (passionately made but often insuperably tedious), a new Greek director emerged called Theodor Angelopoulos.

Reconstruction documents a murder in a country village, tracing the fate of the couple responsible as they move around evading the police until they eventually accuse each other of the crime. Angelopoulos's film recalls the early neo-realist cinema going as far back as *Ossessione*, yet his camera eye is very much his own. Shot in stark black-and-white, it vividly recreates the village scene, with police cars nosing up country roads, dark figures moving through rainy landscapes and an air of uneasy ambiguity hovering over the characters' actions.

Sad to report that Britain failed to equal her Cannes triumph. *Dulcima* (director, Frank Nesbitt) is a fairly tepid country drama with Carol White nicely underplaying as a cunning mistress to farmer John Mills (all whiskers and malignant stares), but it was *Bloomfield* — actually a British/Israeli co-operation — which really brought on the audience's wrath. Acted and directed by Richard Harris as if he were Welles, Fellini and Lelouch rolled into one, its violent bravura passages and cute slow-motion lyricism obscured the few sensitive scenes where Harris relaxes with the child players. Greeted by shouts and hisses after the show, Harris gamely appeared down the aisle applauding and then booted the boos. The second week offers new work by Tati, Kramer, De Sica, Delvaux and Shirley MacLaine, so there is still hope.