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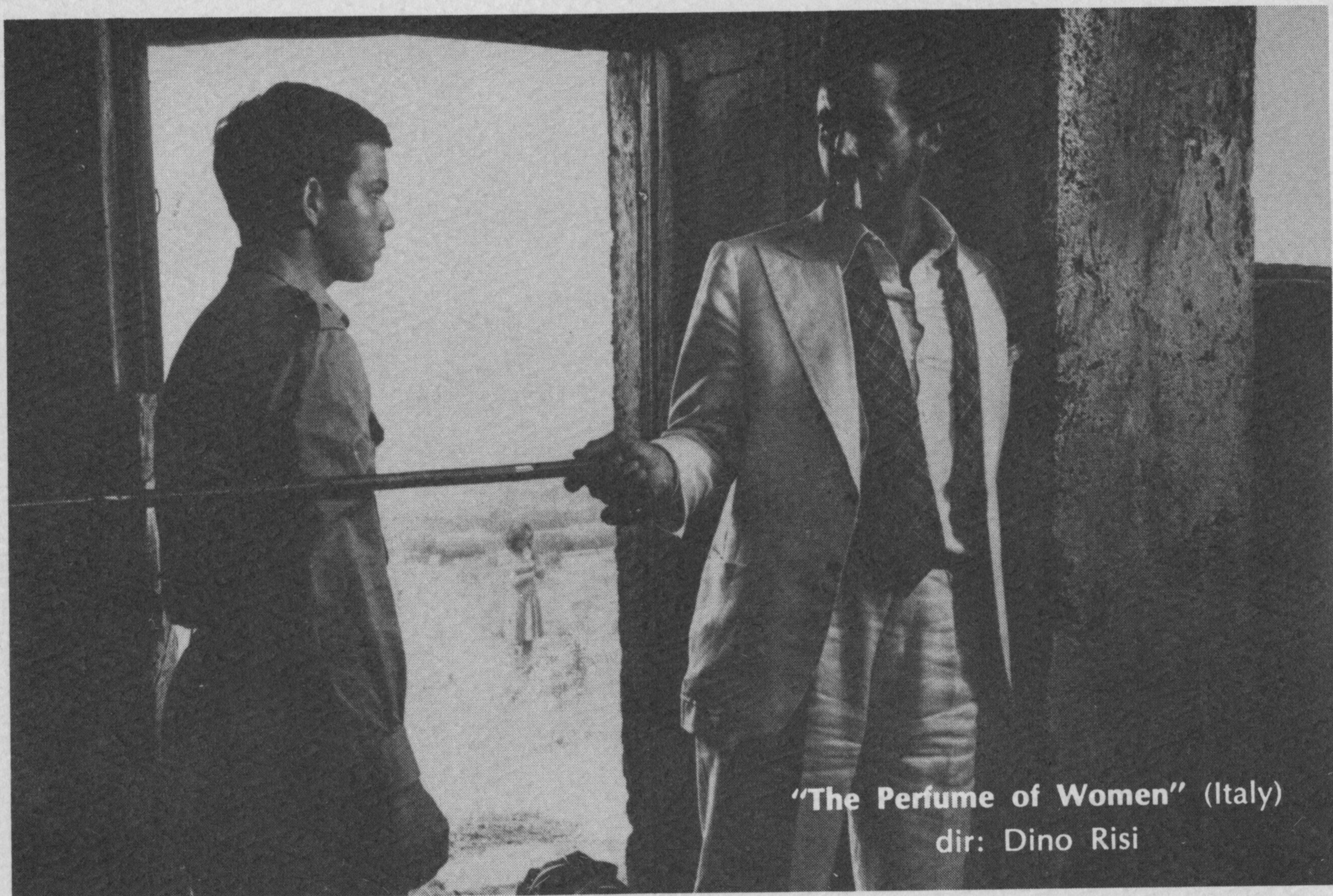
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Section speciale (Special section), Costa-Gavras,, 1975



CANNES 1975

Albert Johnson



"The Perfume of Women" (Italy)
dir: Dino Risi



"Special Section" (France)
dir: Costa-Gavras

LETTER FROM CANNES



The festival is twenty-eight years old, and this is my tenth experience with its incomparable variety, its never-failing ability to exasperate, stun or destroy the sensibilities of film-makers and distributors from all over the world. A great many more people have come this year, including many new faces, all with the same expectancies. On the plane, the attention of every passenger was distracted by the cries and whispers of eighteen Vietnamese babies and their caretakers enroute to Switzerland, where the children are to meet their foster families. Fortunately, the atmosphere was not totally cacophonic, because the babies were more often good-natured or sleepy, and my own comfort was ruffled only once, when, during dinner, a faint odor of urine collided with my Camembert.

I encountered Eleanor Perry, the noted screenwriter (*Diary Of A Mad Housewife*, *David And Lisa*) on the flight, accompanied by Raphael and Joan Silver. The latter has had her first feature film, *HESTER STREET*, selected for the *Semaine de la Critique* (Critic's Week) this year and she is quite excited about it. As usual, the opening night film was somewhat lost in the shuffle of things-to-come. I had to catch up with it on the next evening at the Olympia Theatre, a barn-like 1930's structure with seats unsympathetic to long legs. *A HAPPY DIVORCE*, by the Danish director, Henning Carlsen, turns out to be exactly what the title implies, a bittersweet comedy, well-acted, with what seems to be an entirely French cast, and overall, a trifle compared to the same director's past achievements.

By the second day, when I arrived, the festival had plunged into a frenzied schedule. At least five films a day were necessary for the journalists, critics, festivaliers, etc. The new Costa-Gavras film, *SECTION SPECIALE*, again on a political theme, with a scenario co-written by the director and Jorge Semprun, was disappointing to those who continually expect another *Z*. The new film is in the trend of French works about injustices during the German Occupation of France, and describes the iniquitous activities of a special judiciary section of the Courts of Appeal, where any action against the Petain regime by anarchist or Communist groups were judged (and pre-judged) with ruthless inattention to

proof of guilt. As an instrument of reprisal, the special section deliberately arrests and finally executes six French militant leftists, when the assassins of a Vichy politician are not apprehended. The film is cold, direct and talkative, and, as a politically-committed cinematic work, exceptionally successful. Yet, the stultifying atmosphere of bureaucratic villainy, intellectual jurisprudence (at its most hair-splitting) and marble corridors tend to lull the spectator away from whatever humanity Costa-Gavras expects his audience to grasp. For an American, hardened toward the vagaries of governmental corruption, SECTION SPECIALE lacks real excitement, one supposes. It is terribly earnest and outraged, and in the press conference, the dialogues between the directors and journalists seemed to stretch even further those intricate verbal jousts regarding why-and-how men and justice can become demoralized in times of war. The film is certain (one hopes) to be exhibited in the States this year.

The Hungarian, Miklos Jancso, in ELECTRA, cannot help but provoke controversy. His new film is the ultimate expression of his circular, choreographic visual imagination, a beautiful mood-piece in which Attic tragedy is translated into a newer, more personal world. The daughter of Agamemnon is an older, dynamically inspirational heroine, and Jancso, of course, does not adhere to the original drama. The entire film is moved out into the vast, open plains, as in his previous films: crowds of horsemen, seen from a distance, are counterpointed to groups of young people dancing, both nude and clothed, here and there across the countryside. Electra's exhortations to the people around her, and her ability to destroy life and revive it (one should simply accept Jancso's rituals) are only part of a thoroughly wonderful visual experience: in contrast to Costa-Gavras, Jancso is a lyrical politician, and his ELECTRA is certainly unforgettable, whatever it ultimately means. The critics were divided in their opinions, and Jancso told that ELECTRA is the last film he will make in this style. In fact, he is now living in Rome most of the time and intends to make a sexual film (or did he say sensual) that will shock people, he thinks, entitled *Vices And Pleasures*.

The Italians were not entirely well-served in the competition this year: Adriano Celentano, a pop-singer and comedian, who created some praise several years ago in Pietro Germi's *Serafino*, has now become a director and in YUPPI DU, he gives the impression of someone who knows that he is devastatingly droll, when in reality, he is not. From time to time, one was reminded of McCarey's *My Favorite Wife* and *The Awful Truth* because (hopefully) without Celentano's knowledge, his film is a poor imitation of screwball comedy. On the other hand, Dino Risi's comedy, THE PERFUME OF WOMEN, had Vittorio Gassman in the leading role of a blind, one-armed egocentric named Fausto, who lives alone with his aunt in Turin: Fausto had been crippled in an accident during war manoeuvres. Risi has always loved to bring an innocent youth together with an embittered libertine, as he did in *The Easy Life*, and in this film, he links Fausto with an eighteen-year-old military orderly, Giovanni, who is ordered to accompany the older man on a train journey to Naples. During the progress of this trip, Gassman has the role of his career: he is uproariously impossible, swigging whisky, bullying his youthful companion at every turn, and

always sniffing the air for the smell of women. The film becomes a series of setpieces for Gassman and he makes the most of them, not quite devouring the scenery and the actors around him. It was very interesting for me to observe Gassman off-screen, because we have met off-and-on, over the past twenty years. The sleekly-handsome leading man of the MGM period was Gassman at his most relaxed; he laughed a great deal then, and I think his sense of humor was totally overlooked in those days. After all, he *had* played Stanley Kowalski on the Italian stage, and the chest-thumping aspect of Gassman's personality has never really disappeared. My own conviction of his profound acting talent was based upon some monologues he presented at the University of California, Berkeley, while on an American tour. His interpretation of Pirandello's *The Man With A Flower In His Mouth* was among the greatest performances I've ever seen, and occasionally, in Risi's film, some glimpse of Gassman's dramatic power is allowed to shine through the laughter. At Cannes, I noticed Gassman's new airs, somewhat aloof, with a touch of the not-quite-aged maestro who has temporarily abandoned his voluminous cape. In the press conference, he was alternately witty, occasionally impatient with the journalists who were unfamiliar with Risi's work, as with Gassman's own career (he is equally splendid in Monicelli's comedies). It was revealed that young Alessandro Momo who played Giovanni in the film, had died in a motorcycle accident not long after *The Perfume of Women* was completed; a tragic loss, for the performance was quite a gentle and sensitive indication of a potential star in Italian cinema.

By the third day, an entry from Algeria, approached by most of us with some trepidation, managed to hold attention for almost three hours. The director, Mohamed Lakhdar-Hamina, has called his work *THE STORY OF THE YEARS OF EMBERS*, and it is a lavish chronicle of the sufferings and rebellions experienced by a young peasant named Ahmed, from approximately 1939 to November 1954. Lakhdar-Hamina's achievement in the genre of spectacle was brilliantly exhibited, and the chronicle, divided into six sections, is quite epic in style. To foreign eyes, it is a convincing presentation of tragic events, told symbolically at times, but also with much more restraint in acting than one expects from the popular Algerian cinema. It is obvious, too, from Lakhdar-Hamina's dedication of the film to Alexander Dovzhenko, that the unforgettable camera imagery, grandiose sweep of crowds and poetic interludes where either Nature mutely transcends the violent action or serves as a coda between bloodshed and cruelties — all these are ingredients of an imaginative "chef d'oeuvre".

The director himself appears in his film in the role of Miloud, a wandering madman-philosopher, who serves as the voice of poverty-stricken Algeria, past and present, and in trenchant explosions of verbal incantations, satirical diatribes and offscreen monologues to the spectators, he elucidates, quite universally, something of the inner feelings of oppressed individuals, trapped in colonialism. The political implications are clear: both the French *and* certain classes of Algerians were responsible for the eventual revolution, as well as, to some degree, the implacable turns of fate. Those episodes describing the years just before and during the German invasion of World War Two are filled with ironies. At one point, some villagers listen to Hitler over the radio, and discuss the possibilities

of constructive social change under Naziism. "Don't be mistaken", one man replies to another, "that bastard will wipe us out before the French do". Two of the most extraordinary sequences: the devastation of typhus upon an Algerian town, where Ahmed wanders through a church filled with thousands of dying people and watches his own family gradually perish: it is terribly moving and perfectly conceived. The other is the massacre in a town square of a group of Algerian political dissidents by a troop of horsemen, who bear down upon their victims with accurately deadly sabres.

THE STORY OF THE YEARS OF EMBERS surprised everyone. A French woman sitting next to me wept, and her male companion patted her hand. They were remembering. Its episodes remain in the mind for some time afterward, and even though there was occasional grumbling about the casting — a young Greek actor, Jorgo Vayagis, plays Ahmed (superbly too), the enactments depend mostly upon attitudes, a style of acting best suited to spectacles. In other words, everyone looks right, and, as Lakhdar-Hamina said to the press: "This is a great step forward for the Third World". And he is right about that, because eventually, his film won the major prize, the Palme d'Or — the first ever given to Algeria.

II

Someone has spoken of bombings, although I heard nothing during the night. That is, not until the night before the Jury reached its final deliberations. There was a terrible blast from the direction of the Palais des Festivals, which turned out to be a fatal event for a French youth who managed to explode himself near the Casino, without damage to the latter. There was much speculation about intimidation of the Festival-Jury, but ever since 1968, Cannes has been an obvious occasion, during its annual cinema publicity, for whatever special grievances certain "revolutionaries" might have against it. For instance, the Directors' Fortnight, or "Quinzaine des Realisateurs", now in its fifth year, has become really another festival, non-competitive, daring in its selections, and attracting practically all of the younger audiences, because it is easier (if one can brave being crushed in mobs) to get into the projections. The Fortnight presented at least twenty-eight films and a number of shorts. It was not unusual for a feature to get a last-minute screening under their auspices, and one had to keep alert (and very much awake) to glean the cinematic gems from the flotsam of celluloid pretentiousness to which spectators are subjected so often, in the name of High Cinema of Purpose. Anyway, the directors of the Fortnight now want to be very much a part of the Competitive section of the Festival: they want prizes, too. A rather hot-toned manifesto appeared in the daily bulletins, intimating that Maurice Bessy, the director of the Cannes Festival, is in for a great deal of haranguing between now and next May. The atmosphere of nervous irritability did pervade the festival as a whole this year. The critics moved about with set faces, and at Le Petit Carlton, the journalists' hangout on the Rue d'Antibes, only the Scandinavians were constantly jolly; most of my friends, either critics, chroniclers or festival directors, seemed gripped by the deterministic urgencies of keeping-up with all of the screenings. Surrounded by the glamorous, attractive hedonists on the terrace of the Hotel Carlton, who are *always* fun (because they see few films), it was difficult for the serious ones to get their lives in order. Socially, Cannes is staggeringly unimaginative. The two big nightclubs, the Playboy (it was Playgirl last year), and the Whiskey A Go-Go (a title which is really a 1963 period-piece) are alarmingly expensive unless one goes there with a party of rich American film people. The Festival itself is snobbish to a rather hilarious degree. Apparently, there is no one alive today who has the rare gift of inviting just the correct mixture of the haute-monde and the bas-fonds to make a splendid cocktail party, gala or super-event — like Elsa Maxwell was supposed to have had. At Cannes, there are *lists*, so I am told, of names of those privileged to attend the big functions. The Americans give the most interesting bashes, and, although I am fortunate enough to get invited to many parties, the film-schedule manages to disrupt any possibilities of attending the majority of them. It is very pleasant to see, at the formal, elegant dinner-dances, to which the most powerful French or foreign visitors hope to be invited (and are), the season's gigolos, local businessmen and the prettiest assortment of "cocottes d'Azur" moving nobly and graciously against a background of champagne and foxtrots! The best party this year at Cannes during the Festival was given by Paramount and C.I.C., their foreign company, at Les Ambassadeurs,

the large club attached to the Casino. John Schlesinger's new film, *THE DAY OF THE LOCUST* had been shown out of competition that day, and, as in America, this extraordinary work had been received controversially, which means, to me, that it is going to endure. The images of violence that conclude the film soon faded within the genial atmosphere of the party, and, at one point, a brilliant display of fireworks outside the high, glass doors of the terraces was enough to make one turn in search of Gatsby.

Schlesinger has decided to stop worrying about the heated reviews his film has evoked. A third viewing of it confirms my initial impression: Nathanael West would not be ashamed by it, and for those who do go-on a bit too much about the original novel, it has to be remembered that both the director and Waldo Salt, the writer, had to find a cinematic style that suited *their* visualization of West's Hollywood and simply make the film. The critics who say that *THE DAY OF THE LOCUST* is too beautiful in camera-style, do not know how "beautifully" one can perish under the California sunglow. As a non-American, Schlesinger's fascination with evangelism might seem a trifle overdone for cineastes (we have gone through *Elmer Gantry*, *Angel Baby* and *Marjoe* already), and the film has small flaws which are simply mistakes of judgment and assumptions regarding contemporary tastes. One should beware of having characters in an American period-piece behave as if they are aware of time; it is a characteristic of Americans to accept immortality, to forget that the fads and fashions of the moment will soon be as timeless and strange as those of Pompeii. In *The Day Of The Locust*, the hero and heroine seem too aware of being in the 1930's; they are not desperate enough, hunger is not in their eyes. The transvestite's rendition of "*Hot Voodoo*" is out of period in its band arrangement; the characters played by Burgess Meredith and Billy Barty are too fascinating to be kept in the background, and the monstrous child, Adore, so incredibly androgynous, should be given an entire sequence. There is enough pain and drama in Schlesinger's film to keep it going forever: it is filled with his sensitivity to human struggle and his imagined nightmare of American morality, but what *THE DAY OF THE LOCUST* lacks most is Nathanael West's sense of humor. I did laugh more often when reading the book, a long time ago. I do remember that. Unlike most people, I wanted the film to be longer, and shall just have to see it a fourth time, certain to discover more things to admire than to deplore. The moment in which Donald Sutherland and Karen Black, wracked by their particular sadnesses, move together to the lilts of "*Dancing On A Dime*", is altogether perfect: it haunts one as much as West's invisible spectre, pushing them round in small circles of agony.

In competition, for the United States, Martin Scorsese's *ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE* and Bob Fosse's *LENNY* aroused the expected excitement and *crush* for admission that each English-language film aroused. Foreign films are never shown in their original language in Cannes, so practically the entire town wants to get to these festival showings. The Oscar-winning *ALICE* did not overwhelm the foreign critics, but their reviews were respectful, with the usual speculations about whether Ellen Burstyn would win the Best Actress prize or not. Everyone was quite disappointed when Bob Fosse

could not attend the Festival. He is extremely popular abroad because of *Cabaret*, and the foreign offices of United Artists have published a very fine booklet on *Lenny*, containing an excellent essay on Fosse's career, fully-documented. However, Fosse's recent heart attacks and the demands of having a new Broadway musical success, *Chicago*, prevented his appearance, so one had to be contented with Dustin Hoffman, Valerie Perrine and the producer of LENNY, Marvin Worth. Since Lenny Bruce is unknown abroad, his humour escaped the audiences, who absorbed themselves in the dramatic episodes. To them, it was the story of a tragic comedian who was persecuted by the police. The film is also practically untranslatable into any other language, if the same effect is desired. The subtitles were about the best that could be done, but if some people did not laugh with Lenny Bruce in English, they cannot find him amusing in French. Enough variable opinions have been given about Dustin Hoffman's performance, and having seen Lenny Bruce only once, in 1964, which was his paranoid phase, so the social historians tell me, I can only say that Hoffman is a splendid actor and not at all like Lenny Bruce. I pretended to be French and enjoyed the film very much. Valerie Perrine's beauty and sincere charm dominated the press conference and she told us that if the true story of Lenny's wife had been told on screen, that is, in all of its details, then the audience would have had to be carried out of the theater on stretchers. Dustin Hoffman has long-since passed the era of *The Graduate*. I had first met him during the shooting of that film, when he could not wait to get back to Broadway. He is now a superstar. For several days, he was "hidden" by the recesses and swimming pool of the Hotel Majestic, giving mock interviews to silly foreign journalists. Hoffman was polite, formal and with an incongruous hipness of external appearance at odds with his solemnity: the unsmiling reserve of a perfect comedian.

Of the American films elsewhere in the Festival, the Critic's Week offered Joan Micklin Silver's *HESTER STREET*. This study of life in the lower East Side area of New York City, where many Jewish emigrants settled in the late 19th Century, was to me the best in the selection. At first, the accents and mannerisms seem forced, coming close to caricature in the Potash and Perlmutter sense. Steven Keats, in the role of young Jake Podkovnik, an emigrant totally in love with American ways, has a tendency to overplay his scenes, but convinces one that in those days when twenty-five dollars meant almost a thousand, money and success were definitely at one's fingertips. He develops a passion for Mamie Fein, an ambitious newcomer like himself, but neglects telling her that he is already married, with a small son. When Jake's wife, Gitl arrives from the old country, the drama thickens and *HESTER STREET* takes hold of any spectator. An actress named Carol Kane gives a magnificent performance as the old-fashioned, bewildered Gitl. Her authority is so pronounced that suddenly, everyone in the film acts better; she takes over every sequence because she manages to *be* someone of daguerrotype and I would not be surprised to learn that she was a spirit exorcised from those littered byways of New York past. Although one is occasionally reminded of Luise Rainer or Bergner, Carol Kane is an *original*. The way in which Gitl moves from subservience to eventual liberation from Jake's tyrannies leaves one with a sense of total satisfaction, and in a sequence where Gitl simply stares at her husband during a ritualistic divorce ceremony, one understands the true meaning of that still, sad music of humanity.

There is much ethnic humour in *HESTER STREET*, most of it supplied by aphorisms. When a gutsy, outspoken neighbor, (played with bravura by Doris Roberts) laces Gitl into her first corset she says: "You wanna' be American, you gotta hurt!" A disillusioned Talmudic student, bored with the unfulfilled promise of an American dream cries out, "A pox on Columbus!" And, in a great argument sequence, the irate neighbor shouts at Jake: "You can't pee on my back and make me think it's rain!" Joan Micklin Silver's directorial debut was a big success. Everybody felt good about it, too.

Robert Kramer, the director of political features (*The Edge, Ice*) has co-directed *MILESTONES*, an epic "vision" of America of recent years lasting over three hours. It was impossible to get into the showings, there were such crowds, so that I was only able to see the last two hours of it. Therefore, any critical evaluation must be withheld until my report from Berlin, where it will be shown as part of the Young Directors Forum. Kramer and John Douglas, his fellow artist, have described the film as "a Renaissance of ideas, faces, images and sounds. It is a film where the birth of a child is both symbolic of human rebirth and the visual Renaissance of film itself. It is also a film within a film, about the heroic people of Vietnam, a contribution to their revolutionary battle, to their victory and to their future." *MILESTONES* was one of the American entries in the Directors Fortnight and most critics I spoke to said they "liked it" or were vague. I suspect that for them, the film is too demanding to be seen *after* four previous films, and I wonder if *Hearts And Minds* will take some of the "edge" (pardon the pun) off of Kramer and Douglas' ambitious creation. The other American film, *THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE* by Tobe Hooper is a horror film about a very unfortunate group of young people, traveling by van across Texas, who manage to get hacked to pieces by a madman armed with a portable chainsaw. It happened that I attended a very late screening of this film, because there had been a bomb scare during an earlier film in the same theatre. There was a goodly group of New York critics with me, and it would be comforting to think that I was in a daze (six films had been seen already) At any rate, Hooper's film is a 42nd street or drive-in movie that got to Cannes. No harm done, really. The mixture of pseudo-*Psycho*, mock-Poe, penny dreadfuls and genuine huggermugger was more than any devotee of James Whale could endure, and, without popcorn or ice cream, it evoked weak, whimpering sounds from the audience.

III

The British entries: MAN FRIDAY, a re-telling of Defoe, with Peter O'Toole and Richard Roundtree, but seen from Friday's point of view. The scriptwriter said that the entire project was inspired by such a suggestion, and hopes that the film will be taken by black audiences who see it, as a criticism of white, western civilization. O, well, perhaps I am getting more cafe-au-lait every minute because *Robinson Crusoe* does not fit easily into the black "experience" as far as I am concerned and for those who so easily cry out against such heresy, it need only be indicated that skin colour is just a fact of Nature. Fortunately, Peter O'Toole can do no wrong, and Mr. Roundtree is extremely entertaining as Friday. Somehow, I kept thinking of other two-character films, like *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison* and perversely wondered which of these two gentlemen would turn out to be a transexualized nun. The film is excellently manoeuvred (what else, with such star turns) by Jack Gold, a brilliant man whose work I have admired ever since his classic study of British inertia, *The Visit*, which has more in common with the American black middle-classes than he imagines.

Joseph Losey's THE ROMANTIC ENGLISHWOMAN was a truly professional work and if it had been in competition, the wonderful Glenda Jackson would have walked away with a prize. From a scenario by Thomas Wiseman and Tom Stoppard, Losey again weaves an understated tale of adultery and menage-a-trois. A bored wife Elizabeth Fielding (Jackson) runs away from her novelist husband (Michael Caine). She wants to simply get away for a short time and goes to Baden-Baden, (out of season, but somehow, rainy-romantic). The appearance of a continental drifter, Thomas (Helmut Berger) soon leads to a flirtation and seduction, but Elizabeth goes back to England, her fling over and done with, to settle into her country life routine with Fielding. When Thomas inadvertently turns up and spends a short time with them, we are in Losey country again. The couple fling intelligent, veiled insults upon each other, and Thomas finds both of them overwhelming. Fielding's ego, plus his literary imagination, supply some highly comic moments, almost approaching Sturges' *Unfaithfully Yours* as a display of demonic jealousy, and in a sequence heralding Thomas' arrival, there is an emotionally-changed tea, sprinkled with witty dialogue. Everything is in the grand manner and the trio of actors, absolutely splendid. Gerry Fisher's photography captures everything that cannot be said and Richard Hartley's musical score works around a variety of leitmotifs with a majesty unheard since the old Warner Brothers days. Here is a very good romantic film for those who care for such leisurely fare, and it would be interesting to know how the two scenarists worked together. It has to be surmised that Thomas Wiseman, who wrote the original novel, is not on good terms with Losey. They exchanged some heated words in the Carlton bar, there was a brief, testy scuffle and Wiseman found himself with a scratched knuckle. Somehow, a glass landed on Losey's head. Nothing further to report, but one feels sure that the director will make another film.

Of the other master-directors, out of competition, there were Antonioni and Bergman, the former, with *THE PASSENGER*, already in release in America, and called *PROFESSION: REPORTER* over here. At the morning showing, attended by all the critics and local cineastes, the reception was rude, with whistles and catcalls. I longed for a machine gun, wondering if the age of the Yahoo is already upon us. It should be obvious that *THE PASSENGER* is a superior film, and Jack Nicholson's acting, to me, surpasses his work in the Polanski film, but then, his variable brilliance has long since convinced me that, if necessary, he could play Melville's great white whale. In the search for prestige, the Cannes Festival had to include Bergman's television film of Mozart's *THE MAGIC FLUTE*, and it was pitiable to see people who should know better rushing to *see* it rather than to listen to it, or *both*. Since I am continuously stunned by the triumph of mediocrity in this day and age, one must sadly report that several "intellectuals" declared that there was little cinema and too much singing.

In competition, the Soviet Union sent a mammoth tribute to the 30th Anniversary of the Nazi defeat, directed by their master director, Sergei Bondarchuk. The film, entitled, *THEY FOUGHT FOR THEIR COUNTRY* stars Bondarchuk and the two famous actors, Tikhonov (who was Prince Andrei in *War And Peace*) and Vassily Shukshin, whose film *Kalina Krasnaia* was a major success of the Soviet Cinema season last year. Since that time, Shukshin has died, and quite prematurely, for he had just gained international recognition, so Bondarchuk's epic is, to many of us, a tribute to his lost talent. A vast war film is nothing new to Bondarchuk and he has succeeded in making it as masterful as *War And Peace* in its juxtaposition of humanistic episodes, vignettes if you will, and battle sequences. The emphasis is on characterization rather than carnage, and unfortunately, coming as it did at the end of an exhausting Festival, Bondarchuk's achievement was overlooked. The panoramic, sometimes even pantheistic overview of the film is quite stirring, and the tone is one of philosophical, even elegiac reminiscence. The story is based upon a novel by Mikhail Sholokov (a figure of literary controversy at the moment) and concerns itself with the lives of a group of soldiers in an artillery regiment, but from this overworked situation, Bondarchuk's sense of poetry and his dedication to the subject made *THEY FOUGHT FOR THEIR COUNTRY* one of the most impressive films in the festival. The musical score by Vyachetslav Ovtchinnikov (who also scored *War And Peace*) is another splendid aspect of the film and it is hoped that recordings of Ovtchinnikov's symphonic works other than his film scores will find their way to this country. He is a superb melodist and orchestrator and one senses, with regret, that too little contemporary Soviet music is heard on our shores or in Western Europe.

In reference to music, the Soviet Union, in a special section of the Festival, yes *another* section called "Les Yeux Fertiles" (the French are so amusing; "fertiles" indeed, after so many films!) presented a ballet film based on *ANNA KARENINA*. It was shown at the beginning of the second week on a sunny afternoon, with mild attendance, and it was one of the great events. Maya Plisetskaya, the grand premiere danseuse of the Bolshoi, choreographed and

performed the title role, with the agile Alexander Godounov as a dashing robust Vronsky. Never fear that this was a stagey spectacle: the ballerina was flawless and Anna's hallucinations about the railway trackman and her eventual suicide are handled with adroit, imaginative camerawork that does not distract one from the dancing. The score is by Rodion Schedrin, the ballerina's husband, and another great modern composer. His chamber works and symphonies are seldom-heard in America but he is best-known through his somewhat daring "Carmen Suite". It was a thrilling innovation on Bizet's score, but the latter has spun in his grave ever since. This music for ANNA is emotionally apt, and at its best in the lyrical pas de deux episodes, with either Vronsky or the railwayman as Anna's partners. After the projection, practically the entire audience spontaneously lined either side of the foyer staircase and cheered Plisetskaya as she emerged. She was taken by surprise, for apparently she had been totally unrecognized upon entry. She wore no makeup and her hair was pulled back against her head and pinned at the neck. She was very thin, in a soft grey patterned dress and covered her face with her hands — a gesture of shyness and joy. The crowd screamed as she descended, and the cries followed her out to the street and along the Croisette. Plisetskaya smiled and seemed deeply moved, holding on to her companions as the cheers rose, passed over her head, and out toward the nearby sea.

IV

Le Marché du Film, or Film Market is the booming "other festival" among the several cinematic assaults against which one struggles during the Cannes Festival. It is a tremendous feast of motion pictures from almost every country, to be seen by potential buyers. Every theatre or private projection room is booked during the all-important two weeks, and to be a film maker, producer or distributor involved in the Marché is like facing Destiny. Money and life's blood are cruelly placed on the line; people's jobs depend upon whatever happens to those they represent, and once a crucial screening is announced, there is always that wrenching fear that no one will come. One's enemy can be simply a gorgeously sunny day when buyers (a capricious lot) may lie on the Carlton Beach. To film critics, the Marché is an adventure, because there are always some hidden talents there. The problem is two-fold: how to discern them or how to squeeze them into a tight schedule. Among the more unusual offerings were a South African film starring Jose Ferrer and Karen Valentine (*E LOLLIPOP*); Aleksander Ford's new film *DER MARTYRER*, made in Germany; Sergio Renan's splendid *LA TREGUA* from Argentina; an Austrian film, *KICKBACK*, with Ava Gardner and Dirk Bogarde; Chabrol's new Hitchcockian thriller *LES INNOCENTS AUX MAINS SALES* with Rod Steiger and Romy Schneider;

Daniel Moosmann (a brilliant French director) with *LE BOUGNOUL*; Pascal Aubier's *LE CHANT DU DEPART*; William Klein's *MOHAMED ALI*, *LE PLUS GRAND*; Zoltan Fabri's *THE UNFINISHED SENTENCE*; Mani Kaul's *INDECISION*, from India's "new wave"; Iran's best new director, Bahram Beyzai, with his *THE STRANGER AND THE FOG*; Pancho Kohner's *MR. SYCAMORE*, with Jason Robards and Jean Simmons. These were merely a handful of possibilities, gleaned at random during the first uncluttered days of the Festival, but as the days continued, so did the Marché grow larger, and within its confines, yet another festival revealed itself: a festival of pornographic films. These attracted mob scenes of males, most of them local Cannois and a healthy mixture of Eastern Europeans, Asians and any teenagers who could sneak past the doors. The Olympia Cinema at midnight was the chief location for the hard-core features, and two works from the Netherlands, *FRENCH BLUE* and *SENSATIONS* were very big hits. Each was directed by Alberto Ferro (unknown to me) and starred a very supple young redhead named Brigitte Maier, who has learned all the sexual positions to be found on the temples of Khajurahao. She is undoubtedly now concerned with providing new photographic angles for her director by learning to swallow the camera. The pornographic film has hit France, and the success of *Emmanuelle* has brought about a recent change in censorship laws, so that now, hard-core films can be produced there. One cannot imagine what awaits the cinema world.

The most exceptional discovery, as far as art is concerned in the Marché, was a single showing of Andrzej Wajda's new film, *LAND OF PROMISE*. It is based upon a novel by W. S. Reymont, who won the Nobel Prize a half-century

ago, and although his writings are hardly read today, in America anyway, Wajda's film should awaken interest in Reymont's literary works as a whole. LAND OF PROMISE describes the rise and fall of three ambitious young industrialists in the city of Lodz, a place swept by a feverish textile boom in the last century. The film is rich in its themes and imagery, for not only do the protagonists represent cultural and class differences (a Pole, a German, and a Polish Jew) but they dramatize by their personalities, the new laws of capitalism and the upheavals of Polish social, material and cultural history. What Wajda has created is an apocalyptic vision, in which Lodz is turned into a level of Dante's Inferno. Fortunately, the city today still holds in its atmosphere all of the ancient grime and forlorn red-bricked factories of the past; old structures that are now abandoned but which are utilized by Wajda as his authentic background. One gets an indelible impression of what it must have been like in early Pittsburgh, or Manchester or the mill-towns of Massachusetts. The excitement and joy felt by the "heroes" as they plan their future as factory owners is embellished by green-forested, pastoral scenes, exemplifying the traditional joys of ordered life among the gentility, so that contrasting looks at the degradation and gloom of the factory workers and their exploitation by greedy industrialists, are quite memorable, like visual descriptions from the worlds of Zola or Dickens. LAND OF PROMISE is a magnificent addition to Wajda's ingenious career, and it has been chosen as the official entry from Poland at the Moscow Film Festival. More will be said about it then, after I have spoken with Wajda.

The Polish entry at Cannes, THE STORY OF SIN by Walerian Borowczyk was one of its best films, and the first feature to be made by this eclectic artist in his homeland. His first two films, *Goto*, *L'Ile D'Amour*, and *Blanche* have already been seen in San Francisco, and *Immoral Tales*, seen last year at Berlin, has run into various censorship problems, cuts and all, so its future, alas, is uncertain. It is sad that Borowczyk's works are not in American distribution, because he is a major talent, and has been ever since the late 1950's when his collaborations with Jan Lenica and his subsequent animated films all bore the stamp of an unique genius. Again, as with Wajda's latest film, Borowczyk has turned to a famous Polish novelist's work as the source of his story. The novel is by Stefan Zeromski, whose writings, according to the director, had fallen into neglect over the past few decades, and Borowczyk wanted to revive attention to this particular writer — a sensual polemicist, angered by the hypocrisies of the Polish bourgeoisie. THE STORY OF SIN is a lush, baroque study of innocence betrayed, seen through the adventures of a virgin, appropriately named Eve. She is first seen in a confessional asking the priest for a definition of love, and is soon having an affair with Lukas, a handsome young boarder at her parents' home. Unfortunately, Lukas is trying to earn enough money to buy a divorce from his wife, and is singularly unsuccessful in this pursuit. Having tasted the abandonments of passion, Eve runs away from home in search of Lukas, and the film plunges into a series of tragic misadventures during which duel, murder, rape and semi-insanity are picturesquely dealt with in brilliant, highly decorative images. THE STORY OF SIN is visually hypnotic and the characterizations are magnificent. The Polish actors have *faces*, and in this film, one is held by them with absorbed interest from beginning to end. Yes, there are symbolic episodes and connotations: is Lukas good or evil? What was the nature

of the duel between Lukas and the young Count? that sort of thing prevails throughout the narrative, and suddenly, there is the actor, Mieczyslaw Voit (remembered as the embattled priest in Kawalerowicz' *Mother Joan Of The Angels*), symbolically arguing with the emblems of Good and Evil, embodying an early 20th century philanthropist with a kinship to Satan. Overall, Borowczyk's film is pervaded with anti-clerical ideas; the repressions of Catholicism, particularly erotic repression, are ultimately responsible for Eve's fall from virginal grace into prostitution and death. For a Polish film, *THE STORY OF SIN* is also quite daring in its explicit treatment of sexual interludes (Wajda's film also surprises one with its frankness of love scenes), indicating that with good taste, such matters can become art. The camera work by Zygmunt Samosiuk makes every image a breathtaking event and each locality (Lodz, again, and Varna, in Bulgaria) enriched by the luxuriant architecture and sumptuous trimmings of La Belle Epoque, is romantically softened by the strains of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto.

V

There were oddities in the selection of films in competition at Cannes: the Dutch entry, *MARIKEN VAN NIEUMEGHEN* by Jos Stelling was a strikingly-filmed story of pestilence in the Middle Ages; the East German film *LOTTE IN WEIMAR*, was based on a Thomas Mann novel about the woman who was Goethe's inspiration for the character of Charlotte in *The Sorrows Of Young Werther*. One remembers exquisite sets, cobblestoned streets, sparkling pottery and glassware, and amidst it all, the smiles of Lilli Palmer. The Mexican film, *NO OYES LADRAR A LOS PERROS?*, or "Don't you hear the dogs barking?" was really a Francois Reichenbach film made in Mexico. My early admiration for Reichenbach's talents is undiminished, but if one reviews his work from such superb films as *L'Amerique Insolite* and *Un Coeur Gros Comme Ca*, to this, one detects a growing penchant for facile entertainment whenever dealing with non-documentary subjects. Reichenbach has become wealthy enough to indulge his nomadic whims, and his great love affairs with the United States and Mexico have led him toward some strange conclusions about these countries. He tends to expect philosophical answers about the mood of both countries by wandering across them with a camera. But he does not have the insight of a Frederick Wiseman or the Maysles. Reichenbach's latest film is poetic, rambling, beautiful to look at, and odd; not boring. A film from Hong Kong also popped up. It was *SHA-NU*, or *A TOUCH OF ZEN*, directed by King Hu. It was a three-hour action thriller, with its hero and heroine managing to overthrow an evil secret police force called the Eastern Group, during the Ming Dynasty. There are some martial art sequences, and the acting is much better than the story demands. Mr. Hu, a very jolly and enthusiastic director, knows how to evoke suspense and reveals a talent for action-films, but one hoped that *A TOUCH OF ZEN* would be more, since it was in competition. I found myself more interested in the director and what he had to say about making the film, than in the film itself, and his future project, about the early Chinese emigrants who worked as railroad laborers in California, sounds very promising, indeed.

An unfortunate casualty, for me was missing half of Michel Brault's new Canadian feature *LES ORDRES*, because it seemed to be the most powerful political film in the entire Festival. The story is based upon actual events that took place in Montreal in October 1970, when the Quebec Liberation Front insurgents had kidnapped two government figures. In a panic, the Federal government invokes martial law and several people are arrested without warrant and kept in prison from six to twenty-one days. The ordeal of these victims is the subject matter of the film and it must be said that the director, who also wrote the script, has assembled a marvelous group of actors to give memorable portrayals of human anguish and futile anger. The film is certain to turn up at another festival and I hope to comment further upon it at a later time. *LES ORDRES* is the best Canadian film in competition at Cannes for the past decade.

The new German Cinema is still restless and experimental. Its best talents, or most noticeable, over the past few years have been Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Johannes Schaaf, Volker Schlöndorff, Peter Fleischmann and Werner Herzog. Jean-Marie Straub is still controversial with general audiences, and his new work, *MOSES AND AARON* was screened in a special section (*Les Yeux Fertiles*), and on a day when it was in conflict with something else. In competition, Werner Herzog's, *THE ENIGMA OF KASPAR HAUSER*, was a pleasant surprise, because it is a thoroughly fascinating story of a seventeen-year-old youth who really existed in the early 19th century. Kaspar Hauser suddenly appeared on the street in Nuremberg one afternoon in 1828, holding a letter in his hand. He had, for some inexplicable reason, been hidden away in a cellar for all his life, being fed, but never realizing that any other human beings existed except himself, not knowing anything of trees, houses or the sky. Kaspar is taken-in by the municipality, and used as a freak in a sideshow until a sympathetic professor rescues him and patiently teaches him to read, write and to appreciate music and nature. Kaspar soon becomes a perfect example of unspoiled humanity, exhibiting sagacity, a poetic impulse, and an altogether new way of observation. One day, after sneaking away from his guardians to take a walk in the countryside, Kaspar is found dying from stab wounds, inflicted by an unknown assailant. He was twenty-two years old, and the enigma of his birth and death has inspired thousands of books and studies. Some say that Kaspar was someone of royal birth, perhaps even the son of Napoleon. No one has ever unraveled the mystery. The role of Kaspar is played by an actor called Bruno S., whose own life has been severely marked by mental disorder and suffering. He is not a professional actor but a Berlin factory worker, and his performance in Herzog's film is incomparable; one mad touch of genius permeates every action. Bruno S. *is*, somehow, Kaspar Hauser. Herzog's sense of period is immaculate, beautifully-observed and rich in its mixture of baroque and grotesque, especially in the circus sequences. He had dedicated the film to the eminent German film scholar, Lotte Eisner — a superb gesture, since the beloved lady is too ill to attend the festival, and is very much missed by me and everyone else in the film-world. *THE ENIGMA OF KASPAR HAUSER* is a film she would admire and it is Herzog at a brilliant point in his career.

A brief return to the oddities: in the Quinzaine, a Belgian film by Thierry Zeno, entitled *VASE DES NOCES* (it was called *WEDDING TROUGH* at the last Los Angeles Film Exposition). There was a minor scandal because the film dealt with a youth who falls in love with a sow, copulates with the animal, has piglets, etc. No stand-ins or trick photography, I fear. It is all there before your eyes. As "coup de grace" to one's sensibilities, the youth, bereaved by the death of his beloved, turns to consuming his own excrement. No stand-ins etc. In reading over some of the material given out to the press, I understand that *VASE DES NOCES* is the first properly schizophrenic film that moves from the consummate breakdown of reality to the automation of a profound and unconscious dream, repetitive and obsessional. The film is certainly provocative and the ultimate in that bizarre category of porcine-cinema (*Futz, Porcile*) where bestiality becomes the most extreme symbol of man's inhumanity to himself.

The Brazilian entry, *THE AMULET FROM OGUM*, by Nelson Pereira Dos Santos was a mixture of folklore and contemporary urban gangsterism that did not quite succeed. A young man from the northeastern part of Brazil is given a magic amulet to wear which makes him invincible. He becomes an ideal trigger man for an underworld boss, but soon, everything becomes predictable. There is the boss' seductive mistress who falls in love with Gabriel; the final showdown between the boss and Gabriel; theft of the amulet, etc. There are also many striking interludes, purely musical and much too brief, that keep the film alive. The score, by Jards Macale, is brilliant (why has no one done a great musical film in Brazil?). Dos Santos said that, for him, *O AMULETO DE OGUM* is like a first feature, one that tries to translate the vision of a people out of the reality surrounding them. Perhaps, after one has experienced the rigors of the Cinema Novo movement, this film seems too lightweight for competition at Cannes. The leading man, Ney Sant'Anna, as Gabriel, is an impressive figure, however, and wears his indomitability with glamour; he should soon become Brazil's new matinee idol.

There were a number of striking films by women directors. Liliane De Kermadec's film, *ALOISE*, was a competitive entry from France, and I found it to be an effective case history of a fragile lady, who, through a tragic turn of 1918-war-time events, spends most of her life in an insane asylum where she becomes a famous painter, in the primitive or "naïf" sense. Aloise was a real person — referred to only by her first name, and De Kermadec's sympathy for this lonely and strangely-exalted woman is inherent in every frame of this beautifully composed, finely-acted film. Exactly *why* Aloise sank into madness is a matter of conjecture, but there are a succession of great sequences in the film, where Aloise suddenly reveals her talents, or at one point, breaks into lovely, operatic song (she had once longed to be a professional singer) while looking out of the asylum's window. The role of Aloise was played by Delphine Seyrig, an actress who managed to be in at least five other films shown in various sections of the Festival, and to be excellent in all of them. Two of these films were also written and directed by women, *JEANNE DIELMAN* by Chantal Akerman, and *INDIA SONG*, by Marguerite Duras. Akerman told a detailed story of an attractive widow (with a young son) who, shall I say, *enlivens* her lonely afternoons by receiving gentlemen for physical diversion. It is a film journal about a specific type of feminine personality and is rather too long (almost four hours) but Seyrig is somehow able to give tragic stature and absorbing interest to the heroine's commonplace environment and behaviour. This actress' first major film linked her with Duras and in *INDIA SONG*, a dreamy fable about the glamorous wife of the French Ambassador to India during the 1930's, she revives the rarefied, chic mannequin out-of-Marienbad. One never sees India, because the character played by Seyrig, one Anne-Marie Stretter, abhors the reality of Calcutta, which is hardly difficult for one to understand. Instead, the luxurious interiors of the Embassy serve as the heroine's setting for a succession of love affairs, double-entendre dialogues and a series of languorous tangos or rumbas. The lovers are played by an eccentric assortment of actors, each of them fascinating when vis-a-viscera with La Seyrig. Michel Lonsdale, who is beginning to look and act more like the late Mr. Laughton in every picture; Claude Mann,

obviously recovering from his cinematic jousts with Jeanne Moreau, still retains the cool, languid reserve of a French-Veidt; and the amazing Mathieu Carrière, who has taken the exigencies of young Törless into his very soul. If he is not careful, he will become something miraculous: a male Dietrich, or, to be exact, a cinematic *homme fatal*. Many of my colleagues were complaining about the meaning of INDIA SONG, and I could only reply that it would have been easier for them, perhaps, if their eyes had been open.

Duras has never been known for absolute clarity, and there are in this world, a number of cineastes who have begun talking to themselves after sitting through *Jaune Le Soleil* or *Nathalie Granger*. Since the director is strong-willed, a poet and a visionary — it seems best to permit the film to take hold of one, for whatever intellectual adventure that may (or may not) occur. INDIA SONG was strange, mysterious and beautiful, something that could not be said for many films in the Festival, and of course, it had Delphine Seyrig. Elegant, coiffed, coutured, slightly nympho-wracked, she could pluck a waxed pear from a cut-glass bowl and consume it with delicacy, leaving only thin shavings and amber seeds; a Circe of outrageous fantasies, far, far removed from realities.

IV

The sun was blazing on the final day; the prizes were not surprising for me. I was happy to hear that Lakhdar-Hamina had won the Palme d'Or; Vittorio Gassman, the Best Actor; Valerie Perrine, the Best Actress; Werner Herzog, the Special Jury Prize. The Director's prize was shared by the two political films, SPECIAL SECTION and LES ORDRES, and there was something called a "Jury Salute" to Delphine Seyrig for her contribution to the works of new filmmakers. The (British) short film, LAUTREC, by Geoff Dunbar won in that category, with an acknowledgement of a Soviet short, A STAR FOR A PRESENT, directed by Fyodor Hitrouk. The prizes were given to the winners by Ann-Margret who came to town with a great fanfare and trumpetings of rock music. Her new film, TOMMY, was the closing-night offering, and enough has already been written about that. One is only apprehensive about the future spectacle of Roger Daltrey as Franz Liszt, a consummation devoutly not to be wished upon the world. No matter, for TOMMY is a big commercial success in Paris, and I must say that Ken Russell's special brand of madness is needed in the cinema today, despite his destruction of *The Boy Friend*. The Festival audience was divided right down the middle about the artistic merits of *Tommy* although everyone had sold their souls to be a part of the glittering audience, with ladies in ermine and diamonds, escorted by gentlemen of Ted Lapidus-dignity, willing to stand for this occasion.

The closing-night party, by invitation only, or so it said, was a lavish dinner-dance at the Carlton. Very crowded and thunderously dull, except for Michael and Patricia York who are the international cinema's fun-couple of our time. Fortunately, some British critics knew of another gathering in St. Paul-de-Vence so we hired a cab and set forth. High above the Mediterranean, in someone's villa, we mingled with a lively crowd, most of whom lived in Antibes and mostly French. They knew of the Festival but had not managed to get down there. And, since I was dark-of-hue and speaking French, everyone kept asking for my opinion of the Algerian film. Whenever I spoke about the Festival, I discovered that only the best moments came to mind. This seemed to me a good sign, after ten years. The chaos and over-laden scheduling of films cannot be helped. The Cannes Festival is a great microcosm with too much energy and too much desperation, but there are all of those films crying out for attention. I found a deserted study overlooking the sea and turned on the radio. To my surprise (because on French radio, there is either endless talk or bad rock music), I heard Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto, one of my favorites, and settled back to listen. Musing, I tried to think of a description of Cannes during the Festival. It was not until the next day at the airport that I remembered Fitzgerald's description of Hollywood, and it seemed to fit. Yes it did: Cannes is like a mining town in Lotus Land.

ALBERT JOHNSON

"India Song" (France)
dir: Marguerite Duras



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"The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser" (Germany)
dir: Werner Herzog