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Subject: Re: Kim Ki-young

My friend Chris Berry, an Asian film expert living and teaching in Australia did the notes for me:

The Housemaid (35mm, 90 mins, b&w, 1960, Produced by Korea Munye Films, written and directed by Kim KiYoung).

The Housemaid makes Fatal Attraction look like The Brady Bunch. An ambitious wife wants to have a maid for her new two-storey house. But when her husband has the maid, too, all hell breaks loose. This overwrought parable about the dangers of domestic help was Kim KiYoung's breakthrough film and firmly established his penchant for sexually predatory women. Shot in contrasty, German Expressionist-style black and white with eye-popping acting to match, it marked his first move away from realism, and after its success he never looked back. However, Korean audiences loved hating the maid so much that the actor found it hard to work again.

The Insect Woman (35mm, 110 mins, color, 1972, Produced by Hallip Films, written by Kim KiYoung and Kim Sung-Ok, directed by Kim KiYoung).

As delightfully deranged as its main characters, The Insect Woman veers between horror, the Korean hostess genre, melodrama and exploitation to manifest the disjunctures of rapid modernisation. Schoolgirl Myoungja goes from braids to bouffant in one cut when her destitute mother makes her a bar hostess/prostitute to earn money. She cures impotent and schizophrenic Professor Lee, becoming his concubine. His entrepreneur wife is initially outraged but soon accepts the arrangement as though it were childcare. Look out for the rat-eating baby! Don't miss the classic sex scene on a glass coffee table covered in boiled candies!

Promise of the Flesh (35mm, 95mins, color, 1975, Produced by Dong-Ah Export Company, written by Kim Cho-hon, directed by Kim KiYoung).

Mild-mannered and modest Sook-young looks like a typical middle-aged woman, but happens to be a man-killing murderess. Within the regime of Kim KiYoung films, maybe that is a typical middle-aged woman. On a train trip to Mokpo, she remembers an earlier trip as a prisoner on furlough accompanied by a menacingly butch but ultimately kind female guard. On the train, they meet Hoon, a young man who falls for Sook-young. The guard lets them be alone together in a bizarre windswept marriage at the cliff-top grave of Sook-young's mother. Pounding seventies synthesizer music accompanies the entire film and never lets up.

Iodo (35mm, 110mins, color, 1977, Produced by Dong-Ah Export Company, written by Yu-sang, directed by Kim KiYoung).

Iodo is the name of a mythical matriarchal island endowed with mysterious powers. After a local journalist on a press junket cruise to promote a new hotel disappears, developer Woo-hyun travels to the island of Parangdo to investigate. This journey into Kim KiYoung's vision of Korea's traditional past is as distopic as his nightmarish renderings of the modern middle-classes elsewhere. Men are so rare on the island that a female shaman lures a floating male corpse to shore so that the island

women may attempt to extract its precious semen in a notorious scene that borders on necrophilia.

Killer Butterfly (35mm, 110mins, color, Produced by Woojing Films, written by Lee Mun-woong, directed by Kim KiYoung).

An old book salesman obsessed with Hitler and Nietzsche, a two-thousand-year-old female corpse and a mad scientist are all encountered by dour student Young-Bin in this spectacular three-episode melange of paranoid fantasies. Young-Bin wants to commit suicide but the book salesman insists the human will can even overcome biological death. Young-Bin puts his theory to the test by trying to kill him. The corpse comes to life in the hope that Young-Bin will impregnate her, and the scientist's house is the usual middle-class house of horrors favored by Kim KiYoung. Forget the barely coherent narrative and focus on the sex scene with the rice cake machine, or the fetishized Western consumer objects, looming up gothically in the foreground.

Woman of Fire e82 (35mm, 115 mins, color, Produced by Shinhan Munye Films, written and directed by Kim KiYoung).

For the second re-make of The Housemaid, the first being a 1971 film called Woman of Fire, Kim KiYoung moves the setting to a battery chicken farm run by the wife. This gives a new animal horror to add to his trademark rats, not least because the chickens are partial to blood and meat protein. He also gives the philandering husband a clock fetish. Before he has sex with the maid for the first time, he winds up a wall of elaborate western-style clocks. These chime the hour in a cacophonous crescendo that matches the pace of their sexual passion. Once again, most of the characters are murdered or commit suicide, including the children.

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