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Claude Goretta is a horse of a different color as a director. He seems to strain for a haunting elusiveness by never letting the audience know in which direction he intends to go. He hovers perpetually at the edge of fantasy, but invariably comes down to earth with the standard Swiss avant-garde critique of bourgeois society. *The Invitation*, *The Wonderful Crook*, and now *The Lacemaker* all begin with an uneasy picture-postcard prettiness, and end on a note of chastening disenchantment. Goretta's abrupt shifts of perspective are not exactly facile, but they do strike me as somewhat manipulative.

The biggest problem with *The Lacemaker* is that one never knows whether Goretta is looking at his characters from the inside or the outside. About halfway through the film there is a stirring crane shot that seems to link the two lovers in a mystically shared destiny. Both have been

playing a little hard to get, and both are now trying to make up for lost time. The setting is an unfashionable resort area on the coast of Normandy. It is the off season, itself an ominous sign of an eventual maladjustment. Beatrice (Isabelle Huppert) works in Paris as an apprentice hairstylist. She lives with a widowed mother, and pals around with a flamboyantly blonde woman (Florence Giorgetti) from the shop. She has come to Normandy with this woman after the latter's stormy break-up with a lover. By contrast, Beatrice has seemed level headed and self-contained throughout. She is a pretty little thing with freckles, but she seems inordinately passive, even at this stage of the proceedings. Francois (Yves Beneyton) pops up out of nowhere as an unattached university student just after Beatrice's girl friend has moved in with a rich American. Why do they come together? It is clear from the beginning that their backgrounds do not mesh socially. She tells him right off that she works in a beauty shop, and he seems to stop in his tracks with disillusionment, but the affair proceeds nonetheless. The only rationale for the relationship is that he seems a little gawky and awkward and bookish, and, hence, not as worldly as he might be. Also, he is radical enough in his sympathies not to want to seem too meanly conscious of class distinctions.

But once they get back to Paris he quickly tires of her uncomplaining devotion, her oxlike silences, her lack of intellectual curiosity. Goretta never makes it clear, however, whether Francois is providing a critique of Beatrice, or Beatrice a critique of Francois. Did Francois really expect a new Simone de Beauvoir to blossom forth from a beauty shop? Once Francois breaks off the relationship, Beatrice is so completely destroyed that she ends up in an asylum. At that point Francois's friends suggest that he has behaved toward Beatrice as a capitalist boss toward a proletarian employee and, for an instant, we are back in the overly schematized Tanner-Berger parallels between the personal and the social from *The Middle of the World*. Goretta concludes with a famous shot from Bergman's oeuvre (*Monica*, to be precise) by having his heroine stare at us for one long moment before she descends into catatonia. We are being judged, and for what? Inconstancy? Intellectual smugness? Bourgeois prudence? Beatrice is clearly a victim, but of what and of whom? These questions would not arise if Goretta had resisted the temptation to editorialize, however delicately and marginally. It may be simply that Goretta could not avoid sharing some of the guilt over what so often happens Ever After. In the 19th century Beatrice could

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have gone gloriously mad on her own, but in the 20th she must turn to take one long look at the society that spawned her. Happy or sad, Isabelle Huppert's performance cannot be overpraised.