

SOUR GRAPES
--A Critical Review of the Market Community

.....
Week of June 3, 2007
.....

Film Reviews of:
Dreams, Ascenseur pour l'échafaud, Une histoire d'eau, Deadly Heroes, Arthur, and Missing.
.....

DREAMS

A film by Akira Kurosawa

Review by Christopher Mulrooney

Eight dreams, with structural relations that begin with reference to *Ran*. "Sunshine through the Rain" depicts optimal weather conditions for the foxes' wedding procession. They tread slowly, steadily, Kabuki-style, striking a *mie* of circumspection every few steps. The dreamer as a boy returns home, his mother hands him a ritual knife for suicide from the foxes, who must be apologized to (cp. *Wild Strawberries*, and for the style throughout, *The Conversation*) for witnessing their rite. A field of flowers and a rainbow, under which they live, are the boy's destination.

By way of *The Little Foxes* and *The Cherry Orchard*, the dreamer comes to "The Peach Orchard". Again a boy, he serves refreshments to five girls next to a doll display of court figures. He has counted six, but they deny this, and do not see the other girl leave the house. He follows her, against their protests. The dolls are alive on a terraced hill, rebuke the family for cutting down the trees, which they represent. He resists the charge, weeping. They show the orchard in blossom,

dancing in four levels simultaneously for the camera. The vision departs, leaving bare stumps of trees.

The image from Eliot's *The Waste Land* ("Who is the third who walks always beside you?") evokes "The Blizzard", from *Scott of the Antarctic* and *The Illustrated Man*. The girl, a demon, besets a party of mountaineers, lulling them asleep with a magical garment or cloth (cp. the Golden Fleece in *Jason and the Argonauts*). The expedition leader wards her off and she flies away like the lovers in *La Belle et la Bête*, the skies clear, the peaks are visible, their camp is nearby.

By sheer dream progression, a demobilized soldier enters "The Tunnel", which is guarded by a strange dog, and emerges from it to be addressed from behind by Pvt. Noguchi of his old army unit. They recount how Noguchi, wounded in action, dreamed he was home with his parents eating special cakes, told his dream and died. The entire unit marches out to greet their commander, the sole survivor. He apologizes, and bids them rest in peace. Their makeup is from the Kabuki or *How I Won the War*, the reference is partly to Eliot's "Stetson!"

From this evocation of the past, "Crows" begins in a museum. Several famous paintings by Van Gogh are viewed by the dreamer with his outdoor easel and canvases ready for an excursion, beginning with a self-portrait, brushes in hand, *Starry Night*, *Sunflowers*, the famous drawbridge and the bedroom at Arles. The drawbridge is re-created on location, partly colored as in the painting, the dreamer with his gear goes to inspect it and talks with some local ladies, in French. "He's been in the madhouse," they tell him. He finds Van Gogh painting, who tells the story of his ear ("I was doing a self-portrait, I couldn't get the ear right so I cut it off and threw it away"), exhorts his visitor to paint ("I consume this natural setting"). The dreamer is matted into several Van Gogh landscapes, walking along the paths, etc. Van Gogh enters a wheat field, startling a flock of crows à la *The Birds*.

Having settled the Van Gogh matter, Kurosawa sets up his seventh dream with his sixth. "Mount Fuji in Red" has six nuclear reactors explode, sending radioactive gases toward a helpless populace. Each one (Plutonium-239,

Strontium-90, Cesium-137) has a different color for identification. This is a suggestion from the last scene of *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. From the artistry of Van Gogh to poisonous colors, the dreamer proceeds to “The Weeping Demon” and his radioactive world of ten-foot dandelions. He has one horn and suffers in his rags, there is no food, his kind are eaten by two-horned and three-horned demons, who are seen howling and writhing beside red pools. “Immortality is their punishment.”

There is a stone beside the river in the “Village of the Watermills” where children and townsfolk lay flowers now and then to commemorate a sick visitor who was charitably buried there. An old man explains the simple life in accord with nature, no electricity, no lights obscuring the stars. He joins the cheerful funeral procession of his first love, who broke his heart, dead at 99. He is 103, it’s a little like Fellini, echoing *The Wizard of Oz* (“Ding-Dong the Witch Is Dead”). The dreamer puts flowers on the stone and travels on.

Behind the credits, river grasses play in the current. “It’s good to work hard and live long and be thanked,” as the old man says.

ASCENSEUR POUR L'ÉCHAFAUD

A film by Louis Malle

Review by Christopher Mulrooney

An early influence of Hitchcock is in evidence here and there, notably during the café scene toward the end when after his ordeal the murder suspect is identified by a little girl resembling Patricia Hitchcock, and in the last scene with Jeanne Moreau done up like Grace Kelly.

An executive uses a grappling hook to reach his boss’s office from the outside one floor up, he’s an ex-paratrooper in the Foreign Legion who served in Indochina and North Africa, the boss is an arms dealer and war profiteer. They discuss a counterintelligence plan called Operation Pipeline (which, the boss

observes, ought to be diverted to Morocco), the executive uses the boss's pistol to kill him, leaving the appearance of a suicide.

On the street, he sees the rope still dangling from the balcony. He slips inside to retrieve it, as the security guard turns off the lights and power. It's Saturday, the office has just closed, he's trapped in the elevator. The boss's wife is waiting for him at a café.

A boy and girl take his car for a joyride, meet an older German couple at a motel and kill them. The executive's gun, raincoat and car are taken by the police as evidence. His picture's on the Sunday front page.

Every detail of the murders is eventually known to the police, even the relationship of the executive and the boss's wife. She's set to take the fall for a decade or two, but regarding the photos of herself and her lover seized by the police she reflects, "we're together here."

The Miles Davis score is heard to advantage in a long night solo as she wanders the streets and cafés looking for him, until the police pick her up at five in the morning without identification. "I was going to Mass," she tells them.

UNE HISTOIRE D'EAU

A film by François Truffaut & Jean-Luc Godard

Review by Christopher Mulrooney

Homage to Mack Sennett, for Films de la Pléiade.

"Every year, the same thing." The way to Paris is impassable, flooding. You can't get there from here, and so you have a sort of *déjeuner sur l'eau*, jokes, commemorations, *l'amour*.

Paris is free, "Avenue Stalin comes out on Boulevard Nicholas II." Baudelaire is the ideal poet. Aragon signifies an art of digression.

The Ford Taunus gets here and there amid the waters, back where it started, a man dangles his legs from a peaked roof, at last the Eiffel Tower is reached, the charming heroine reels off the credits.

DEADLY HEROES

A film by Menahem Golan

Review by Christopher Mulrooney

Enclosed within a bonehead aesthetic and a meager budget, Golan breaks out and makes free with his captivity in a wide shot of a harbor at night, or sunup on the ocean, or just the sea, and Jan-Michael Vincent offers pleasant opportunities for the evocation of Alan Ladd in some imperishable films.

Even in the nuts and bolts of this Frankenstein lab, there's plenty of rich material if one knows where to look, such as the breakwater of abstract concrete forms, the camouflage makeup on the SEALs resembling Nijinsky as the Faun, the lovely girls (one good and one bad), the formidable weapons of these masters of anti-terror derring-do: machine guns with silencers, and legs that won't quit (one man is tied by his wrists to the wall *à la* Christ, and he throttles a guard with his bare legs).

Dali is asked if he would suffer were he forbidden to wear his mustache. "Not at all," he replies, "for Dali loves the Inquisition, more than anything in the world, even if it's directed against Dali, and especially if it's directed against Dali! What bothers me most down here is liberty! At a very young age I discovered myself completely anxiety-ridden whenever I had a choice to make: I never knew whether I ought to write a poem, paint a picture, or what sort of picture to paint; I didn't know whether I ought to go to the movies or somewhere else. It was both extraordinary and awful. Suddenly, General Primo de Rivera threw me into prison because of my political activities—in reality because of my father's views. In my cell, I learned to enjoy life in an exceptional way. There was no question about choosing the movies over anything else. I was forced to hunch up over my own fate. I recall that they brought me small sardines in cans; my enjoyment was sublime: a little more oil, a little more bread, and always the same sardines that I would have spat out if I hadn't been in prison. The Inquisition always forces those people with a very strong moral makeup to get the most out of their sensations and their ideas. The Inquisition is beyond all question a boon. There was a time

when it refused to allow painters to depict the genitals. As a result, painters, faced with this ban, depicted all sorts of decorations all over the canvas to conceal genitals, which invaded everything else. A Jesuitical person like myself blossoms only under Inquisitional measures: he is forced to prevent himself from giving into easy activities, and he forces himself into the most beneficial labyrinth in existence. If you ordered Dali not to have a mustache in the usual place, he'd contrive to have mustaches coming out all over, through the asshole, the ears, and it would be the magnificent apotheosis of the hypocritical mustache."

ARTHUR

A film by Steve Gordon

Review by Christopher Mulrooney

Stroheim, Keaton, Poe—and Beckett for the butler. Thalberg saw the master boozing from a hip flask and said sayonara to *Merry-Go-Round* (Rupert Julian), or so the story goes.

Stroheim is the main beneficiary and exemplar of Gordon's great and acclaimed comedy. Keaton as son-in-law gets his kicks in, too.

The grandmother with Vermeer's *Pearl Necklace* is from Poe, translated by Baudelaire. The butler is in *Murphy*, I believe.

MISSING

A film by Costa-Gavras, 1982

Review by Paul Lambrecht

Could your paranoia be justified regarding America's adventures in foreign policy? In this story, Jack Lemmon travels to Chile to track down information about his expat son, who he's been told has gone missing. Chile is in the throes of a coup, and foreigners have been jailed, or are likely to be. Sissy Spacek, the

wife of the missing man, has been trying to goad the American consulate for information about her husband, and conducting her own investigation. Jack, an establishment businessman and pillar of his Christian Science Church, is initially calmed and edified by the spooky Embassy types who assure them his son is in hiding. After all, all of the American prisoners have been said to have been released. However, as the movie goes along, we realize that some were not released, and actually, that some were killed. Each new twist in the quest to learn his son's fate shakes his faith in the innocence of America in world affairs. Eventually the story succeeds in convincing one to be mindful of the paradoxes inseparable from America's prosperity. And for asking that question, it is an extremely topical film.

THE END