

Two Beached Whales

by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

LIKE WINES, some directors travel, others don't. The UFA talents of the 1920s—Lubitsch, Lang, Ophuls, Zinnemann, Spiegel, Siodmak, Curtiz, Wilder—made the transition to the United States of the Thirties without undue discomfort. Most of them absorbed the rhythms of a new land with astonishing rapidity. But the two directors of the week—the great Ingmar Bergman and the notable Claude Lelouch—plainly should have stayed at home.

The Serpent's Egg, a Paramount release, is Bergman's first film outside Sweden; *Another Man, Another Chance*, from United Artists, is Lelouch's first film in the United States. The danger in moving outside the realm of one's own vivid experience is the temptation to form one's new work not upon life but, as Howells once wrote in a different context, upon "the masters who became masters only by forming themselves upon life." Such acts of imitation are known in the trade as *homage*. The consequence is the contemporary weakness, noted recently by François Truffaut, for parody as the dominating cinematic mode. Away from familiar landmarks, Bergman has chosen to parody the German horror films of the Twenties; Lelouch, the American western.

The Serpent's Egg is a modern rendition of those movies that, as Siegfried Kracauer argued long ago in *From Caligari to Hitler*, prefigured the rise of Nazism. The *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, which was made in 1919, obviously did so unconsciously. *The Serpent's Egg*, made more than 40 years after Hitler arrived in power, has the knowing and contrived quality of recognizing how it all came out. It is set in Berlin in November 1923, where, as the narrator sententiously observes, "most everyone has lost faith in both the present and the future." The best things in the film are the vignettes of a city in despair—people demoralized by inflation and unemployment; horses carved up on the street and chops hawked to passersby; faces, stolid and desperate, in slowly moving crowds.

For the rest, it is a weird, murky, gener-

ally languid movie, filled with pointless mystification; the poorest Bergman I can remember. Abel Rosenberg, an American Jew and a circus performer, catches the whiffs of anti-Semitism in the air. A friend warns him to stay out of trouble. "I'm not going to act stupid," Abel says, "so I'm not going to get into trouble." That is one of those heavy signals. We know that by the end, he will realize that he is in trouble whether he acts stupid or not, because he is a Jew in Germany. But it takes a long time to get to the end, with various parodies along the way—of detective movies, of pornographic movies, of horror movies, and, most decisively, of the great *Caligari* itself.

Dr. Caligari, Kracauer wrote, stood for "an unlimited authority that idolizes power as such, and to satisfy its lust for domination, ruthlessly violates all human rights and values." Dr. Vergerus, Bergman's Caligari, conducts appalling experiments on human beings. After losing his brother and sister-in-law to the experimentation, Abel Rosenberg at last unmasks the mad scientist. A grateful German bureaucracy arranges for him to rejoin the circus in Switzerland. Rosenberg eludes his escort and disappears into the crowd. "He was never seen again." Why? This is typical of the pointless mystification. When did Rosenberg tell the detective inspector about the machinations of Dr. Vergerus? Was Rosenberg's encounter in the Vergerus house, after the death of Manuela, his sister-in-law, supposed to be fact or fantasy? Why did Manuela stay with Abel after he stole her savings? And so on.

David Carradine is appropriately seedy and baffled as Abel Rosenberg. The divine Liv Ullmann as Manuela does the best she can with an incomprehensible role. Gert Frobbe and Heinz Bennent, as the inspector and Dr. Vergerus, come off best, perhaps because their characters are relatively straightforward. The screenplay, allegedly by Bergman himself, is in English and contains lines like: "I woke up from a nightmare and find that life is worse than a dream." One must hope that Bergman will return as quickly as possible to his native land. He is too great an artist to expend his energy in parody.

Claude Lelouch is a prolific and engaging director, remembered best for the marvelous romantic film of the Sixties, *A Man and a Woman*. This time he follows a young French couple leaving Paris after the Commune for the American West. The film's novelty is that they are not only immigrants but photographers. For the rest, the scenes are stereotyped, perhaps deliberately so as part of *homage*. The husband is killed. The wife meets an American veterinarian whose own wife has been raped and murdered by a group of desperadoes. After vicissitudes, they walk off into the sunset (I speak metaphorically).

The camera-work is exquisite, but that is about all. There is no consistent system about language. French people speaking French among themselves are rendered sometimes by subtitles, sometimes by voices speaking English with a French accent. Parts of the film appear to be dubbed. The movie suffers, too, from Lelouch's recent addiction to the fragmentation of narrative. In an earlier film, the hero and heroine did not meet till the end. This time they meet after 83 minutes; but in the meantime the shuttling back and forth between parallel stories has dissipated most of the narrative drive.

James Caan as the veterinarian meanders along with the film, relaxed to the point of somnambulism. Still, he does convey a sense of gentleness, especially with animals, and his scene of revenge against the men who killed his wife is admirably done. Geneviève Bujold, courageous and delectable, almost makes the movie worth seeing. Francis Huster, as her first husband, has an interesting, sensitive face and gives a touching performance.

Another Man, Another Chance is not a pretentious disaster, like *The Serpent's Egg*; it is only an amiable and disarming bore. Both films show sophisticated talents trying to simulate alien genres. "It's stupid," as Truffaut said, "to imitate the cinema of innocence—you can't imitate innocence." ●

Answer to Middleton Double-Croctic No. 139

William D. Blankenship:
Yukon Gold

No real whiskey at all. Just hooch. Hooch is sometimes called "fifty-foot whiskey" because its aroma has been said to kill small animals at that distance.... They sold four different brands in the Dawson saloons: Red Tiger, Juice of the Snake, Chilkoot Dynamite, and Perry Davis Painkiller.

Does the Universe Breathe?



Lick Observatory

Spiral nebula in Ursa Major—"Galaxies move away from one another at incredible speeds."

by Albert Rosenfeld

*Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.*

*From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.*

—Robert Frost*

IN THE MOVIE *Annie Hall*, the actor who plays Woody Allen as a young boy sits steeped in depression in the analyst's office with his mother. "Why are you so depressed?" they want to know.

"The universe is expanding!" he explains. "It will break apart one day in all that emptiness."

Mother and doctor exchange a disbelieving look that seems to say, Crazy kid! Why should the ultimate fate of the cosmos, billions of years hence, be of any personal concern to a human being living on earth here and now?

I, for one, resonate to the crazy kid's

feelings. And so do many people, perhaps most people. Somehow, the destiny of the universe *does* matter on a personal, emotional level, though we accept that we as individuals—as well as any number of generations of our descendants—will long since have returned to dust and though we recognize that we have more to fear from our immediate co-voyagers on this planet than from any threat of cosmic oblivion. Virtually every culture in human history has felt obliged to devise a creation story, a cosmogony, to account for how the universe got here. As Leibniz asked, "Why should there be something rather than nothing?"

According to the creation story currently most favored by scientists, our universe began some 15 to 20 billion years ago with the celebrated Big Bang that shattered the unimaginably concentrated package of mass-energy that has been designated by such names as the "primeval atom" and the "cosmic egg." The Genesis Blast, as one might also call it, imparted to all matter in the expanding cosmos the momentum

that it still retains as the galaxies and clusters of galaxies move away from one another at incredible speeds. The Big Bang theory is the result of many lines of evidence that I will not attempt to catalog here. But Exhibit A for the continuous expansion of the universe is the red shift phenomenon: Light from a star or galaxy that is moving toward us should shift to the blue end of the spectrum; the faster it is moving toward us, the greater the blue shift. If the object is moving away from us, the shift should be toward the red end of the spectrum. It turns out that the light from stars and galaxies exhibits the red shift thus we know that these bodies are moving away from us—and by measuring their red shift, we can tell how fast they are moving away from us and from each other.

But can the universe go on expanding this way forever? Will it stop expanding one day? If so, what then?

There are two schools of thought among cosmologists and astrophysicists about the ultimate fate of the universe, and the triumph of one of these two distinct theories over the other depends on what certain critical measurements will be able to tell us about the density of the universe and about the rate at which its expansion is decelerating (if indeed it *is* decelerating). We can use a rocket launching as a helpful analogy: a rocket goes up with a certain velocity, and the earth's gravity tries to pull it back. If the rocket does not achieve escape velocity, it will fall back to earth, as nearly everything in our experience always has. In that case, we can measure the rocket's gradual deceleration before it reaches its apogee and starts back down. If a rocket is launched with sufficient escape velocity however, it has enough momentum to carry it beyond the earth's gravitational pull. No rocket could continue on to the moon or to another planet without achieving escape velocity. The outcome is predictable because we know the mass and the density—and therefore the gravitational attraction—of the earth and because we can precisely measure a rocket's velocity at any point along its trajectory.

In the case of the expanding universe however, with its confusion of multitudinous objects hurtling outward from the original center of the presumed primeval blast, these two critical numbers have been difficult to come by. We have not known except by sophisticated guesswork based on sparse data, the mass or the density of the universe; and we have not been able to measure with sufficient precision the rate of deceleration of the universe as a whole. So we have not been able to say with an

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