

# ARTS

## What makes Herzog crazy

by Dave Cox

Werner Herzog is a man obsessed. *Burden of Dreams*, which showed last weekend at the Princess, is "a tortured portrait of a filmmaker who more than once questions his own sanity," as Vincent Canby of the *New York Times* puts it.

It is a film by Les Blank, a friend of Herzog, who says, "Now, instead of just watching Werner go crazy, you can see all the stuff that's making him crazy."

*Burden of Dreams* is about the making of another film, *Fitzcarraldo*, showing this weekend at the Princess. It also stars a brilliant crazy - Klaus Kinski, a veteran collaborator with Herzog. Besides this it features two South American Indian tribes, the Machiguenga and Campa Indians.

*Burden of Dreams* tells about the problems involved in shooting the film. Herzog's insistence on real atmosphere led the crew to a site 1500 miles south of Iquitos, Peru; in the middle of the jungle. Battling heat, rain, drought, accidents, and

disease, the production nearly reaches the end of its rope.

It is driven onward by Herzog's visionary mania - he insists on pulling a 320-ton steamboat over a 40-degree slope from one river into another.

David Chute of the L.A. Herald calls this "one of the most vivid studies of the creative process ever filmed." Herzog stands "in the middle of a Peruvian jungle, thinking out loud" about "running out of fantasy" as if it were more serious than food or medicine.

He calls the jungle "obscene, miserable, base, vile...a place of overwhelming fornication." Yet he says "I love it against my better judgement."

Herzog the creative artist makes his manifesto, "We have to articulate ourselves. Otherwise we would be cows in a field."

See *Fitzcarraldo* and you may catch a glimpse of how creative craziness can all be worthwhile.

## Jump Cuts

by Jack Vermece

As a charter member of the French "New Wave," Eric Rohmer is certainly associated with a well-known and influential cinematic tradition. Yet, in spite of this prestigious association, Rohmer the director did not come into the critical foreground until the seventies, a full decade after his more flamboyant counterparts. Films such as *My Night at Maude's*, *Claire's Knee* and *Chloe in the afternoon* (none of which I have seen) garnered much critical attention and showed Rohmer to be a directorial talent with a very personal touch.

In 1980 Rohmer began a series of films that he is collectively calling "Comedies and Proverbs." The second of this series is the just released *Le Beau Mariage*, presently showing at the downtown Cineplex. Having viewed this second "Comedy and Proverb," it is unfortunate to have to report that, although quite interesting, *Le Beau Mariage* is neither very funny nor very proverbial.

*Le Beau Mariage* shows us a few ordinary days in the life of Sabine (Beatrice Romand), a self-obsessed, somewhat spoiled young woman who divides her time between working in an antique shop in Le Mans and writing her master's thesis in Paris. Fed up with meaningless affairs with married men, Sabine arbitrarily decides to get married herself, and quickly spreads the word to friends and family. Armed only with the idea of marriage, and having no man in particular in mind, she attends a wedding reception at her best friend's house. There she meets Edmond (Andre Dussolier), a committed and very busy Parisian lawyer. Deciding that Edmond fulfills her image of the ideal husband, Sabine spends the rest of the film pursuing him; an activity that, at times, leaves both Edmond and the audience feeling rather uncomfortable. The end result becomes more apparent as the film wears on, and unfortunately for Sabine, the inevitable disappointment is known to the audience long before it gets through to her.

In synopsis form the plot of *Le Beau*

*Mariage* (if indeed it can be called a "plot") certainly seems to lend itself to a comedy format, perhaps in the tradition of the French sex-farces so popular in the mid-seventies. However, Rohmer chooses to deal with the subject in a very ordinary, almost mundane way, thereby reducing what could have been a funny film into a mildly amusing and ultimately unsatisfactory movie. Rohmer consciously avoids any real situational comedy in favor of protracted dialogue scenes in which what little humour there is, is smothered by the irritating, self-centered rationalizations of Sabine.

Rohmer's penchant for ordinary people talking and his unsympathetic characterization of Sabine are apt to work against an audience's acceptance of *Le Beau Mariage*. And an audience that is being bored by an unfunny comedy is unlikely to rouse themselves out of their lethargy long enough to discover some of the wonderful things that are going on in this film. For there are good things, although I must admit it took me a long time to see some of them.

First and most easily seen is the quietly marvelous visual style of the film. Beautifully photographed, primarily in shades of blue, *Le Beau Mariage* is a great travel advertisement for France. Idyllic country locations lit by a warm sun and buffeted by warm winds share the screen with the well-kept and scrupulously clean streets and buildings of the old quarter of Le Mans. Even the rain manages to look

## Fassbinder's last a blast from the past

by Gilbert Bouchard

Hooked on morphine, hooked on success, hooked on a past sired by hatred and death, *Veronika Voss* is the chronicle of a woman clinging to her past. She can only grasp jagged edges of the memory. Her success and sensuality are as dead and gone as the glamor of her Munich villa, depicted in the film shrouded in dust and covers.

Voss was director Rainer Werner Fassbinder's last completed film; he was found dead during the post-production of his last film, *Querelle*, in the spring of '82.

Voss is a fitting and brilliant epitaph. Patterned after the suicidal UFA star Sybille Schmit, Voss is an aging, beyond-her-prime vedette, unable to act, separated from her husband, and mortgaging away her soul to her doctor to subtain her morphine habit.

warm and inviting. These lovely settings are captured by a lingering, subtly-moving camera and enhanced by warm interior lighting. A viewer is left with a feeling of having seen something indescribably French.

Considering the quietly spectacular visual style, in relation to the resoundingly unspectacular plot leaves one feeling unbalanced by the contrast. Yet, a little probing reveals that *Le Beau Mariage* can be considered primarily a film of contrast and contradiction. Beginning with the title (The Well-Made Marriage) Rohmer produces a series of these contrasts and contradictions that continue to reverberate and accumulate long after one has seen the film.

The first contradiction is Sabine herself. Her actions seldom bear any relation to what she says. "Weddings depress me" she says as she pursues a husband. She's tired of having affairs with married men, so she plans to get married. The contradictions in Sabine can be extended to include her dual role as salesgirl and graduate student, and her dual lodgings in Paris and Le Mans. And, of course, let's not forget the contrast between Sabine and Edmond.

Continuing with this theme, another contrast/contradiction occurs between the idea of marriage and, for lack of a better phrase, unmarried love. The young sexually liberated Sabine embraces the traditional concept of marriage while her mother tries to convince her to live with the man first. In addition, Sabine's idea that marriage will solve her problems is contradicted by the fact that she herself has had affairs with married men. Obviously, marriage will not magically solve anything.

Confused and trapped between her past triumphs and her inevitable demise, Voss struggles to keep up her delusions and private illusions. Her last act before her fatal overdose is to put on lipstick.

This is a stark, violent film shot in black and white to emphasize Voss's obsession with light and shadow. The flick is a technical achievement shot with feeling and style. The script is subtle, rich in metaphor and symbol, well thought out and tempered with intrigue and personal conflict.

Voss's dilemma ultimately is symbolized throughout the film by that old country ditty: "I owe my soul to the company store." Who is responsible in the end? Fassbinder knew better than to touch matters of any brother's keeper.

A must see film, *Veronika Voss* shows us how the other half makes flicks.

A little more consideration reveals that *Le Beau Mariage* even contradicts many of the tried and true "New Wave" ideas. First, although it is very nicely shot, the visual style is secondary to the dialogue. Second, whereas the "new-wave" films often dealt with men agonizing over this need for the perfect woman, *Le Beau Mariage* focuses on a woman's desire for the perfect man. Finally, marriage, seemingly a dirty word in the "new-wave" films, is the sought-after happy ending in *Le Beau Mariage*.

I mention these contradictions very briefly because the contradictions themselves are not the important thing. Rather, the question is why did Rohmer introduce such a complex combination into his film? It may have something to do with the absurd delight involved in showing a world that has come full circle: from marriage as the norm, to "free love," all the way back to a Victorian morality as displayed by Sabine. In addition (although this may sound pretentious) the contradictions in *Le Beau Mariage* may reflect the contradictions inherent in the human condition. *Le Beau Mariage* can be seen as a comedy in the same sense that human existence is a comedy.

Lofty philosophizing aside, I still can't shake my negative reaction to the film. Despite whatever meaning can be drawn from it in a post-hoc analysis, *Le Beau Mariage* remains a comedy that just isn't very funny. If you ask, "It is worth five dollars?" I'd say yes, the visual style alone makes it worth five dollars. If you ask "Does it succeed?" I would have to say no!

Best bets for the next week: *Chilly Scenes of Winter* (in my top three for 1982) at the NFT and *Burden of Dreams* at the Princess.

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