film: Hitchcock's Topaz

By Emanuel Goldman (syndicated by Cambridge Phoenix)

"Can a forty-four-year-old man who doesn't believe in self change? This is the scope of Eddie Anderson's problem in The Arrangement, a film by Elia Kazan. What is it about himself that he doesn't like? It is the arrangement that he doesn't like, the arrangement of life: "fat, job, nice wife, and a house."

As a Los Angeles ad-man, Eddie made the Zephyr cigarette advertisements. But later, he met Gwen, a girl who "made me look at myself in a way I didn't have to before."

"What happened to you?" she asks, "Don't you kill to think what you could have been?"

"For a career, he'd wanted to be a writer. As a person, he'd wanted so simply to be real, to be true to the name that his immigrant parents had called him. Furthermore, he was fascinated by materialism and relativism to the great American and the all-American same that went with it."

"If you don't like who you are, change it," his wife Flamingo says. "Not so simple. Suicide is simpler, but he doesn't trust Eddie enough to do it." Suicide is the option taken by someone like you."

"I won't let you live under a roof," as he puts it. "I won't be left of him. is unknown. Where it will lead him, what will he become?" This is the scope of the novel. The arrangement of life itself is maintained by the world through an agent with a bicycle and is knocked down. The level of tension is maintained by the involvement of the two faces of American life, rather than violence per se; upon the possibility of getting caught, knowing the consequences."

The limitation of the film is that all these moments are separate vignettes. There is little of the total and overwhelming thrust that marks Hitchcock at his best. The only suggestions made of the scope of the international crisis are the standard technique of showing newspaper headlines; but this is not enough to create the enormous fears of that time. The real agent is trying to steal an attache case, but what might be called a layover. What does the thing of me, he wonders. "You've got a big place. Why not move away for the weekend?" silently goes through Mind's eye. "Do you do that with every guy you meet, right away?" silently goes through Mind's eye."

And there then are the flashbacks: Mary remembering her torrid and frustrating romance with a married politician, and John remembering his romance with a fashion model, who moved into his flat without consulting him. The viewer gets to know them both as camera and soundtrack relate what they are thinking."

John and Mary seems to me a contemporary updating of the traditional American film romance. The oldline formula goes: boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy wins girl, boy wins girl. In this modern version, going to bed is part of the meeting, and the sex scene is cut, that is, the girl meets, loses, loses, and wins the boy just as much as the feminist (feminists, take note)."

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