
The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society
February 14, 1977

Two early British films by Joseph Losey

The Intimate Stranger (US title: "Finger of Guilt") Anglo-Amalgamated, 1955
Produced by Alec Snowden; Directed by Joseph Losey; Screenplay by Howard Koch; Camera, Geoffrey Muller; Music, Trevor Duncan; 8 reels
Note: On the U.S. prints, producer Alec Snowden was also given directorial credit, whereas on the British prints Losey used the pseudonym of Joseph Walton; screenwriter Koch used the name Peter Howard on both British and U.S. credits.

Blind Date (US title, "Chance Meeting", through Paramount release)
Independent Artists-Rank; 1959; Directed by Joseph Losey; Produced by David Deutsch for Julian Wintle-Lealie Parkyn-Sidney Box; Screenplay by Ben Barzman and Millard Lampell from the novel by Leigh Howard; Camera, Chris Challis; Art Direction, Edward Carrick; Music, Richard Rodney Bennett; 9 rls

Tonight's two films are Losey's second and fifth British films, the first one done during the hysterical McCarthy period when Losey was out of favor here and, like Cyril Endfield, worked in England under assumed names. In recent years Losey has been so over-interviewed and analysed that it would be all too easy to go back to these earlier works and find in them the roots for themes explored more fully in later works. Easy -- but pointless. Losey's earlier films were complex and never superficial; certainly nothing is ever quite what it seems in tonight's specific films, and for those who want to peel away the outer layers, there is additional significance just below the surface. But if they are not superficial, neither are they pretentious. They are first and foremost good solid melodramas and thrillers in the tradition of Lang and Siodmak, and for my money (though I realise the view is not universal) it's a pity that Losey wasn't content to develop his artistry and forget about making films of "importance" with "personal statements". "The Damned" was both the peak of and the end of the older Losey; from "The Servant" on -- with perhaps the one exception of "The Go-Between" -- his films have been increasingly pompous, increasingly ponderous, and of constantly lessening interest.

Tonight's two thrillers are linked by a similar plot (with unstressed Kafkasque undertones) and even by similar individual scenes. The first one is possibly the more personal, due to its film-director protagonist being at times a spokesman for Losey; the second is certainly the more sophisticated, and a film that Losey himself regards very highly. For an independent production for a small company, "The Intimate Stranger" is extremely strong in its cast, though unfortunately the type-casting system gives the game away a little. We may not know what the solution is, but the presence of one major actor with little to do at least tells us in which direction to look for clues. If the ending is Agatha Christie, then the influence in the other film is more Dashiell Hammett -- although in the second film, the complexity of the mystery is of itself of more import than the fate of the victim-hero. Micheline Presle also commands attention in the second film by one of her best performances and an incredibly quickly-acquired mastery of English. I have been unable to acquire a copy of the U.S. version to re-study it; although the running time was virtually the same, it was re-edited and in some way, perhaps to satisfy the still observed Production Code, the climax was muted and seemed unsatisfying. Our print tonight is of the original British version.