"The Lawless" was Joseph Losey's second feature as a director, following "The Boy With Green Hair," his first, and a quartet of shorts over 1939-45. It's typical of his best early work: tough, brisk, relatively uncompromising, unorthodox yet lacking the self-indulgent pretensions of much of his later and more elaborate work. It was followed by a trio of interesting noirs - "The Prowler," "The Big Night" - before he was blacklisted during McCarthy's period and switched his operations to Europe and primarily Britain. "The Lawless" is a particularly remarkable film in that it was made for the Pine-Thomas unit at Paramount, which had long been churning out literally very good but eventually very economical action "B" films and were now switching to Technicolor "A" films but still with an essentially "B" action format. It's a bit of a mystery as to whether Geoffrey Homes, a good writer, recognized Losey's ability and asked for him, or whether Losey himself, a writer, re-fashioned the film from what might, in original form, have been a more traditional social protest melodrama. Regardless, it's a striking and courageous film to come from such a commercial unit - even though there are plot weaknesses and contrivances - and it's even more remarkable that it should have been given a NT first-run at the big Astor Theatre (unless they were suddenly short of product, and needed a quick fill-in before the next attraction). It's not quite in the same category as "Fury" or "They Won't Forget," but it's still a powerful little film, boasting among other things some very off-beat casting in supporting roles. Had the blacklist not changed the whole course of Losey's career, it might well have had another long and storied. Incidentally, in the fairly recent film about the blacklist, "Rally by Suspicion," Martin Scorsese played a director clearly patterned on Losey - except that the facts were deliberately obscured to make him a well established director whose latest film ("The Boy With Green Hair") has to be finished by another!

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

EVE (France/Italy - Paris Films and Intercor Films, 1961/62; US release in 1965 by Times Film Corp.) Directed by Joseph Losey; Screenplay by Hugo Butler and Evan Jones from the novel by James Hadley Chase; John Cassavetes, Robert and Raynald Hakim Production; Camera, Gianni di Venanzo; Music, Michel Legrand, NY première at the Little Carnegie Theatre. 107 mins.

With: Jeanne Moreau (Eve); Stanley Baker (Paul); Virmal Lisi (Francesca); Nonna Maria (Anna Maria); Francesco Risso (Pierl); James Williams (McCormick); Alex Bordes (The Greek); Lisa Gastoni (The Russian); Riccardo Garrone (The Player); Giorgio Albertazzi (Jacques Malloni).

Losey's 13th feature, "Eve" - also often referred to as "Eva" - is quite frankly a film I'd rather not discuss. On the other hand, it is generally unavailable, much in demand by Losey fanatics, and was an enormous success when shown last year at the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley. Immediately after this showing, the print is going up to Canada for a Jeanne Moreau retrospective, the film not being available up there either. Thus it is the kind of film that this film series exists for, and regardless of its merits or problems, it is unfair not to show it. (We'll be running Losey's British psychological mystery, "The Servant" from 1963, in our Summer series.) When "Eve" first opened in Europe in 1962, Losey immediately denounced it, claiming all kinds of butcheries, which were increased when the film, cut by only a few minutes, went into release here three years later. Much of his resentment was justified, the Hakim Brothers (in the war years and immediately thereafter, they were notorious for their Hollywood remakes of earlier French classics like "Le Jour Se Leve") apparently re-scored, cut, re-arranged, dubbed, and even altered the original flashback framework. Clearly, damage had to be done. But how much? The film is based on a novel by James ("No Orchide for Miss Blanchard") Hadley Chase, which I have not read, but had units of its style it was probably highly enjoyable erotic trash. Trying to give it meaning and substance, as the film clearly does, may well have been the kiss of death. Obviously no film in which the hero dumps the enchanting Virmal Lisi for a woman who looks, dresses and behaves as Moreau does here, is, even allowing for the fact that he is Welsh, not one that can be taken too seriously. Losey discovers all claim that in its original form it was something of a masterpiece, but it is a little hard to believe that very, many great films have been reshaped or monumentally cut so that the acquisition of butcher is not unreasonable - but whether they are "Greed" and "The Magnificent Ambersons" on one level, or "The Great Moment" or "Red Badge of Courage" on
another, some element of the original greatness always manages to shine through. With literally hours missing, Stroheim's "Greed" is still a masterpiece. "Eve" certainly has moments of power and beauty, but they are only moments, and there is never any sense of a major work having been destroyed. I suspect that if we were ever to see a fully restored version of "Eve", it might well be as disappointing as the reconstructed version of DeSica's "Indiscretions of an American Wife", which plays much better in its initial U.S. six-reel release version.

However, for the record, so that my own apathy towards the film can be counter-balanced, let me reproduce the following note from the British Film Institute's review:

"Eve tells of the sado-masochistic relationship between a phoney Welsh writer, living in Venice on the fame of a novel written by his dead brother, and a provocative high-class prostitute. One of Losey's most intensely personal works, Eve is concerned with the corruption and destruction of a relationship by social forces. Losey (who worked with Brecht in Hollywood) adopts various Brechtian alienation effects - the foreign setting, the framework of biblical references and a high degree of stylisation and abstraction throughout. Indeed, the film displays that very objectivity and lucidity which its characters need so desperately. The film also abounds with symbols such as water, masks and mirrors, but the most powerful symbol is Venice itself: decadent, wintry, a museum town, a powerful visualization of a dead and deadening society."

Since there will be little need to analyze Douglas Fairbanks' "The Gaucho" next week, there will be ample time to devote to "Eve" if required! And regardless of my sour criticisms, Moreau's performance is grand bravura fun in its own demented way.

Program ends approx. 10:30. William K. Everson

A final post-script thought on "Eve". It has all the "look" of a long-in-production Orson Welles film; finalised only after years of scrimping and piece-meal shooting. Yet even when Welles came up with end products like that, his own unique brand was clearly on it. "Eve" has no such distinction. However, in fairness to Losey, even when he was at his most pretentious, he was always a fine craftsman. The "untidy" look of "Eve", if not its unsatisfying content, must surely be blamed on the post-production "doctoring" of the Hakim Brothers.