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THE LEFT IN EUROPE SINCE 1789

FRANTZ FANON

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VERONICA OR THE TWO NATIONS

THE WOMEN'S HOUR

JOSEPH LOSEY

A Revenge on Life

DAVID CAUTE

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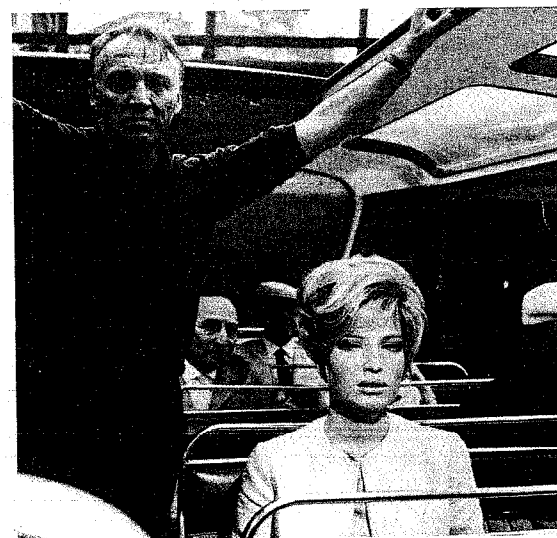
19 *The Servant*. Bogarde with Losey, haggard from pneumonia



21 *King & Country*. Tom Courtenay, Dirk Bogarde, Losey



20 *The Servant*. Losey with Richard Macdonald (centre)



22 *Modesty Blaise*. Losey and Monica Vitti in Amsterdam

Further Disasters

Throughout his years in France, Losey had continued to dream in his native language; and to reach across the sea in pursuit of the great English-language film projects which drifted, like becalmed galleons, several million dollars beyond his trembling, outstretched hand. Gallantly, indefatigably, he swam towards them – until a light, cold breeze or a sudden tempest carried them out of sight.

Take the spirit-breaking saga of *Ibn Saud*. He had first been approached in 1975, by the Egyptian film director Youssef (Joseph) Shahine, on behalf of a Saudi syndicate wishing to finance a feature film about King Ibn Sa'ud. Although the financial backing probably came from Sheikh Kamal Adam, the 'principals' chose to remain anonymous and to negotiate through a London solicitor, Peter Stone, of Wright and Webb, Syrett and Sons. Vesting his services in Citel, Losey signed a \$100,000 contract in March 1975; on the following day King Feisal of Saudi Arabia was assassinated. The iron gate of the desert kingdom descended.

Losey talked to a number of writers including Ring Lardner, Jr and Robert Bolt, to whom he wrote: 'I am not going ahead with you. It appears that you are too indoctrinated with Lawrence and too little familiar with Philby ...' He enlisted Barbara Bray for research and visited Algeria to talk to the writer Kateb Yacine, whom he'd met in 1967. But Yacine's script was a disappointment. 'The story was shapeless,' Bray recalls. Patricia read Yacine's French script to Losey in April and concluded: 'It's agit-prop, and theatre, not cinema, has no structure ... Incredibly disappointing.' (And particularly for her own hopes of translating it. Evidently there was an element of rivalry; her diary for 20 May 1975 records Losey telling Barbara Bray that her work on *Ibn Saud* was 'totally unacceptable'.) After further negotiations with Ring Lardner, Jr, who according to Losey was 'asking [for] \$200,000 and 5 per cent of the profits', he turned to Franco Solinas, the screenwriter of *Mr. Klein*, to achieve a Shakespearean rendering of a single critical year, 1929, when a major battle occurred between 'progressive' and 'fundamentalist' forces in Saudi Arabia. Solinas encountered a mental block. In April 1978 Losey wrote with tact and tenderness, begging the Italian writer to 'WRITE. Sit down and put it down.' Otherwise it would be a case of self-indulgence, masochism ... Solinas's reply (June 1978) was dignified, proud and slightly twisted: 'For the moment I force myself to ignore your displeasures and delusions ...'

Now a fatal row blew up. Patricia Losey had been translating Solinas's pages from the Italian as they arrived. Barbara Bray, who didn't appreciate Losey's habit of 'smuggling' his wife in to the work she herself was engaged on, suggested that the script should be translated into English by the poet and radio playwright (Prix Italia, 1951) Henry Reed, who was also the translator of Leopardi and Ugo Betti. The solicitor Peter Stone duly informed Losey that his clients wished to engage 'a first-class literary translator ...' Losey was furious: 'I was amazed and appalled at the brutality of your libel by implication of Patricia's work ...' To make matters worse Losey persistently referred to Henry Reed as 'Herbert Reed', i.e. the art critic, Sir Herbert Read. Having read 'Herbert Reed's' translation, he declared it inferior to Patricia's: 'I cannot begin to describe to you my rage and perplexity ... [your] insensitivity and discourtesy ... after *Don Giovanni* I am quite sure that Patricia's name will be far more known to the mass audiences than Herbert Reed's [sic].' Worse was to come: the principals put the entire project, plus finance, in the hands of the London-based Palestinian entrepreneur Naim Atallah, who promptly dropped Losey. Atallah explains that he was advised by distributors he consulted that Losey was a brilliant but ageing art-house director, inflexible, intractable, irritable. A furious Losey claimed to be contractually co-author of the script with Solinas and demanded damages of \$100,000 (this claim was later withdrawn). Solinas pleaded with Atallah on Losey's behalf but in vain. Bray decided to collaborate with Atallah as associate producer. 'Why should I cut my own throat?' she comments. The rest is epilogue. The film was never made. Franco Solinas died in September 1982, at the age of fifty-five. Three years later his children published his script.²

Losey's first discovered dealings with Graham Greene occurred in 1965, when he proposed that Greene should write a screenplay of *The Wings of the Dove*. Greene politely declined but the following year Losey was engaged by Daniel Angel's Keyboard Productions to direct a stage musical of Greene's *Brighton Rock*. Losey flew to meet Greene in Nice in March 1966 but nothing came of it. Six years Losey approached both Greene and Lillian Hellman to write a screenplay of Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. Hellman bowed out after asking for \$75,000 which, she explained, was less than half her last fee. Greene's asking price was a modest £15,000 but the producer, Jerry Bick, offered him an insulting £7,000 and Greene cut Bick dead in Paris, outside Ramponeau's. Six months later Losey inquired whether Greene would be interested in writing a screenplay of Patrick White's *Voss*. Greene declined. In March 1978, Losey opened a correspondence with Greene about his new novel, *The Human Factor*. 'It is the first time in five years I've heard Harold [Pinter] so enthusiastic on any project I proposed to him. I expect I am once

again too late. This is apt always to be the case with you – or me.' He was right; Otto Preminger already held an option and shot the film with Nicol Williamson and Richard Attenborough. Losey told the *Los Angeles Times* (19 March 1980) that 'all the grand old English actors – "the knights and would-be knights" – feared to play one key role after the exposure of the Queen's art expert Anthony Blunt'.³

In 1980 Greene published his novella, *Dr Fischer of Geneva and the Bomb Party*, having sent Losey the page proofs 'on the chance that it might interest you ... I am not sending a copy to Preminger!' Although Losey responded rather guardedly, asking for a few weeks to think about it, Greene passed on his own ideas for casting and proposed a screentest for a young actress, Martine Cloetta, whose photo he enclosed. 'She is not my mistress!' he added. Losey failed to raise the money. Meanwhile the writer John Mortimer approached John Pringle, of Consolidated Productions, who acquired the rights and, with them, Greene's commitment to Losey as director. Pringle offered him an advance of \$50,000 against an eventual fee of \$225,000 plus 7½ per cent of the profit. 'I know, Joe, that this is less than the amounts you mentioned in Paris ...' Losey found himself working with a screenwriter, Mortimer, whom he had not himself chosen; Mortimer recalls that Losey's own ideas about *Dr Fischer*, 'in particular his opening, might have gone too far and were not really compatible with Graham's book'. On 3 November, Pringle and two colleagues sent Mortimer a memo on his first draft, mailing a copy to Losey, whose temper was now on the boil. Patricia Losey's diary predicted a 'last-ditch' meeting between Losey, Greene, Pringle and Mortimer, in Cannes on or about 29 December. 'I tremble for it.' The journey began badly for Losey with a five-hour flight delay at Orly airport. According to Pringle, Losey came off the plane drunk and conducted himself like one of the megalomaniac Hollywood impresarios he despised. Losey behaved so badly at dinner, rude to everyone but directing his abuse mainly at Mortimer's script, that Greene afterwards advised Pringle to call it a day with Losey. (Mortimer was not present at this dinner.) The next morning Pringle found Losey in his big hotel suite disconsolate, guilty and confused, his stomach bulging from his dressing-gown – and broke the news.⁴

On the way home to Paris Losey fell on three granite steps and came off the plane in a wheelchair with severe swellings of the knee, elbow and eye. He had blown it. To Greene he wrote: 'Everything seems to have gone sour on *Dr Fischer*. To the extent that any of it was my fault, I am very sad.' Greene did not reply. The project went ahead, although slowly, without Losey – and then without Mortimer, turning into a BBC-backed television film which Pringle hated. Two further years had elapsed when, in March 1983, Losey wrote to Greene: 'Our last telephone conversation was so curt ... I hesitated to pursue anything with you ... since the Cannes disaster I have not heard

one word ...' He then changed gear into distemper. His contract contained a \$100,000 indemnity clause but he had so far been offered a mere \$20,000 in settlement. In reply, Greene professed ignorance, but with a sting in the tail: 'I may add that you are lucky to be getting so much money out of *Dr Fischer* ... I would be very glad to receive even \$20,000.' (Pringle believes that Losey's final compensation was \$50,000.) Shortly before his death Greene would merely say: 'I liked Losey and I don't remember the disagreement. But at eighty-five one's memory is very bad.'⁵

James Kennaway's novel *Silence* was incomplete when the author died in 1966. A decade later Losey persuaded John Heyman to finance a script by David Rayfiel, whose work with Tavernier on *La Mort en direct* (*Death Watch*) had impressed him. Heyman tried hard but Losey was restless, aggressive, bringing a protest from the producer: 'I would not have spent \$130,000 of my own money with another \$90,000 due next month on the option unless I really believed in the project and in you ... [but] every time I made suggestions [about the script] in New York it seemed to cause offence ...' For the year ending December 1979, Heyman's Film Writers Company paid Losey £35,000 for work on unrealized projects, principally *Silence*, for which his full fee was to be \$225,000.⁶

Set in Chicago, *Silence* portrays the love of a young black girl and an older white doctor, both of whom are escaping a race riot in mid-winter. While in Los Angeles in March 1980 Losey told the press: 'Essentially it comes down to a belief I have that the major world problems are finally left to individuals to solve among themselves.' In November he told *American Film*: 'I'm doing a picture – I hope ... in Chicago, where the music is Chicago blues ... a film in four colors. White, black, red and yellow.' But Heyman could not find a backer. Alain Bernheim of MGM and Elmo Williams of Gaylord Productions declined. With Heyman's concurrence Losey took the script to Alan Carr, producer of *Grease*, who bought out Heyman's financial stake. In October 1981 Losey again met Carr in Hollywood and discovered that his vague plans for producing *Silence* had been postponed. In his bitterness Losey seems to have misled French colleagues such as Bertrand Tavernier into believing that Heyman had callously decided to sell Rayfiel's screenplay to 'the horrible producer Alan Carr' – who then told Losey that he no longer belonged to the American film community! This was not the case; however, Rayfiel adds that Carr only began to push the project after Losey's death.⁷

The Loseys moved back to London in January 1983. Monique Lange accompanied Joe while Patricia stayed in Paris to finish packing. Tyger's enforced absence in quarantine depressed him. 'Why is it I suffer so much for this dog?' he asked Lange. On 17 March the Loseys gave a party to celebrate

- 19 I. Huppert to JL, undated, Item 281; D. Toscan du Plantier, int.; M. Lange, int.
- 20 M. Uрман, int.; D. Toscan du Plantier, *Le Monde*, 14 May 1985.
- 21 Henri Alekan, 'Miettes de souvenirs', pp. 15-19.
- 22 PL, int.

44 FURTHER DISASTERS

- 1 JL to R. Bolt, 17 March 1975; F. Solinas to JL, 10 June 1978.
- 2 JL to P. Stone, 29 December 1978; JL to B. Bray, 21 August 1979; Francesca et Francesco Solinas, 'Histoire de la Battaglia', *Positif*, No. 293/4, July-August 1985, pp. 50-52; B. Bray, int.
- 3 G. Greene to JL, 15 April 1978; JL to G. Greene 13, 21 and 28 March 1978, 10 and 25 April 1978, 12 December 1978, 12 January 1979; G. Greene to JL, 15 April 1978, 13 and 16 February 1979; Quentin Falk, *Travels in Greenland. The Cinema of Graham Greene*, London, 1984, pp. 178-89.
- 4 J. Mortimer, letter 16 September 1989; J. Pringle, int.
- 5 G. Greene, letter, 3 October 1989; J. Pringle, int.
- 6 J. Heyman to JL, 7 December 1979.
- 7 JL, int., *American Film*, November 1980; B. Tavernier, 'À la recherche de Losey', p. 29; J. Heyman, int. and letter, 22 October 1990; D. Rayfiel, int.; B. Tavernier, int.
- 8 M. Lange, 'En attendant Losey', pp. 4-7; D. Bogarde, int.
- 9 L. Archibald, *The Aquarian*, 22 June 1983; Jean H. O'Neill, letter, 26 September 1989; Jean H. O'Neill to Mary Losey Field, 10 March 1989.
- 10 J. Moat, int.
- 11 JL to D. Potter, 1 December 1982, 17 August 1983; V. Bacon, int.
- 12 G. Cabrera Infante, 'Joe Losey américain', pp. 13-14; JL to P. Syvertsen, 12 October 1983.
- 13 R. Dalton, int.; J. Loring, int.; PL, int.
- 14 J. Heyman, letter, 22 October 1990; J. Heyman, int.
- 15 JL to P. White, 1 October 1974; P. White to JL, 23 April 1974.
- 16 C. Challis, letter, 27 January 1993; G. Cabrera Infante, 'Joe Losey américain', p. 14; V. Redgrave, letters, 8 November 1991, 20 November 1992.
- 17 PL's responses to JL's report of notes from Georgina Hale, 22 February 1984; PL, int.; B. Bruce, int.; G. Hale, int.
- 18 G. Fisher, int.; J. Heyman, int. and letter, 20 December 1990; D. Slocombe, int.; C. Challis, int.
- 19 R. Durnat, *A Mirror for England*, pp. 3, 230, quoting *BFBMs*, August 1954, April and July 1956, May 1957, March 1958, September 1959, November 1960, May 1963; R. Durnat, 'Losey', *F&F*, May 1966, p. 28.
- 20 G. Jacob, 'Joseph Losey or the camera calls', pp. 62-7; P. Rissient, *Losey*, p. 148.
- 21 J. Baumbach, *Partisan Review*, 1974, No. 1, p. 88; P. French, *Observer*, 1 July 1984.
- 22 G. Jacob, 'Joseph Losey or the camera calls'; Jean Pierre Coursodon, 'Losey' in *American Directors*, pp. 205-7; D. Thompson, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Cinema*, p. 333.

- 23 T. Elsaesser, 'Joseph Losey: Time Lost and Found', pp. 171-5; R. Combs, *BMBF*, June 1985, p. 171.

45 HE'S JUST PASSED US

- 1 JL to A. Smith, 4 June 1982; A. Smith to JL, 1 July 1982.
- 2 A. Smith to JL, 24 March 1983; A. Smith to L. Harbottle, 5 July 1984.
- 3 Ints. with: N. Dunn, M. Williams, R. Dalton.
- 4 R. Dalton, int.
- 5 Ints. with: R. Dalton, PL, J. Loring, M. Williams.
- 6 Ints. with: R. Dalton, V. Bacon, J. Heyman.
- 7 D. Bogarde, int.

Part XIII The Films: A Viewing

46 THE FILMS IN PART III

- 1 Milne, p. 69.
- 2 Ciment, pp. 104-6.
- 3 Ciment, pp. 112-13.

47 THE FILMS IN PART IV

- 1 Ciment, pp. 139-40.
- 2 Richard Macdonald, int., *Isis*, 1 February 1964.
- 3 Ciment, p. 173.
- 4 D. Deutsch, int.
- 5 *Oxford Opinion*, int. with JL, typescript; *Cahiers*, No. 111, September 1960, pp. 11-12.
- 6 Philip French, *S&S*, Spring 1990.
- 7 Ciment, p. 200; Mary Losey Field, int.
- 8 For a detailed analysis of the prologue, see M. Riley and J. Palmer, *The Films of Joseph Losey*.
- 9 Hirsch, pp. 175-9; see JL, Int. in *Cinéma*, pp. 38-9.

48 THE FILMS IN PARTS V-X

- 1 Hirsch, p. 210; Losey production notes, Item 21.
- 2 Hirsch, pp. 189-94, 202.
- 3 M. Riley and J. Palmer, *The Films of Joseph Losey*.

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