

Scorpio rising

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«Well, might as well go the whole hog!»

He leaned towards me, and said:

«Com'on Rudi, don't be shy. Let's see what you're made of.»

And he gently pulled my robe from my shoulders, at the same time loosing the cord. I don't know what came over me, for, during those last few moments I had just sat there looking at Hank's marvellous body, and I was quite powerless to stop him, even had I wanted to.

«Com'on Rudi—I said don't be shy,» he breathed quietly.

He drew me towards him and I felt his beautiful long fingered hands, firm yet gentle, slide down my thighs, as he murmured:

«I promised myself this the moment I saw you at the Airport. I believe in Love at First Sight—don't you?»

At that, I gave myself to him, and, with eyes closed, we met in a searing kiss. All I could feel was the warmth of a trembling body pressed tight to mine, and we seemed to float away on a cloud of golden light . . .

then into a misty whiteness as I opened my eyes to look at the now clearing winter's mist and the great shining peaks before me. I must have been still far away, for suddenly I realised that someone had been talking to me for several moments. I jerked round to see the worried young enquiring face of my hotel porter.

«Are you alright, Sir?»

«Yes thank you, Henri. I was just day dreaming. Well, what can I do for you?»

« telegram, Sir.»

I took the yellow envelope, and, with the usual trembling hands, which always accompany the unexpected, I tore it open and drew out the sheet, still damp from the Post Office.

Surprise Stop Arriving Zürich 13.35 Stop This time for good. Love H.

by Roger S. Mitchell

SCORPIO RISING

a comment on a new film by Kenneth Anger

Many years ago when old Grace George was touring the United States with a road company of *Lysistrata*, the Los Angeles chief of police issued a warrant for the arrest of one Aristophanes, as the «author of a play considered obscene under the laws of the sovereign state of California.»

A quarter of a century has not changed the views of the police of our smoggy neighbor, evidently. Not long ago Michael Getz, owner of the Hollywood Cinema Theater, was seized by the Hollywood Vice Squad for permitting the showing of a new film by Kenneth Anger, creator of the sensational *Fireworks* of the early 1950's, an avant-garde film with strong homosexual overtones. This time the police confiscated a copy of *Scorpio Rising*, a film about motorcyclists. And they did it at almost the same moment that the Ford foundation granted to Mr. Anger a sum of ten thousand dollars to enable him to continue the production of his artistic films.

To call *Scorpio Rising* a 'film about motorcyclists' is like calling Leonardo an Italian inventor. *Scorpio Rising* is a multi-level thing; it can be many things to

many people. It is packed with meanings and symbols (the scorpion, for instance, in an old zodiacal reading, covered the genital region of man), and what you get from it depends entirely on what you bring to it. Thornton Wilder once said that in a theater people ought to pay proportionately for what they got out of the performance. Thus some persons would pay \$ 50 for their seats, others \$ 5, and still others—like the Los Angeles cops—would have to be paid for going. If you are in the bottom group, the hasty incidental glimpsing of a few erect penises in the wild Walpurgisnacht scene of the film will send you scurrying to the manager's office with a warrant in your hot little hand, still slippery from the seed you spilled into it. If you are a \$ 50 person, and someone mentions the fact that there are erect peenies in the film, you will barely have noticed them at all.

The film is actually about motorcyclists, however, and there is a loving attention given to them and the leather they wear. It is therefore by extension a film that has a tremendous appeal to all of the sadomasochistic group, especially the phony ones with their mystique of today's search for the vanished Male and Hero, a mystique compounded of moonlight and bosh and bullshit. But if you are a homosexual and you see the film, there is much in it that you will interpret as your own. Objectively, however (and yet who can view *Scorpio Rising* with objectivity?) one must be compelled to admit that *Scorpio* is not nearly so homosexual as *Fireworks*—and that both of them are certainly more artistic than pornographic.

There is no visible story in the film—sketches, perhaps, or vignettes. It is a grouping of moods, intense, passionate, bleeding with color and raucous with sound.

The screen is empty. It turns red, and rising from the bottom of it comes the cap of a motorcyclist, his head and hair seen from the back, the broad leather-jacketed shoulders bearing the title of the film set in the silver studs that every motorcyclist loves, and below the title in smaller studs on the belt, the name of Kenneth Anger. That's all—it's his entirely: no director, producer, photographer. He's everthing.

There is a sudden multiplicity of shots of unidentified and glowing objects, and after a moment you realize that here is a disassembled motorcycle—the scarlet jewels of reflector buttons, the polished chrome tubing, the glittering drive chains, the secret intestines spilling black oil and grease, the carburetors, the gaskets atop instruction books. And then you see the priest, the motorcyclist, engaged at the slow task of putting his god back together—the loving ablutions, the injections—as the teenager, the unattractive pimply nearsighted votary—attempts the work of resurrection. And swimming over his labors comes the music of the ritual—loud and penetrating rock and roll tunes, careful selected and integral with the scenes. Then, after a while, the task is ended, the god prepared for the ritual, and the clothing of the priest begins. He dons the chasuble of his black leather jacket, affixes the ceinture of his silver chain around his waist, and slips his feet into the black engineer boots . . . But meanwhile, what is taking place within the empty cavern of his mind? There is a child, playing with a wind-up toy of a painted tiny motorcyclist; there is a wish-dream of himself, godlike, blonde, handsome, and unafraid . . .

The concentration of the camera eye on the dressing is haunting and slow—a wrist-band fastened with thick and awkward nail-less fingers, the fly being closed, a leather jacket donned over naked flesh—all watched by the white plastic skull, hooded like Death, which stands with a scythe in one corner of the dirty room. And then the thick finger dips into the jar of white powder, and rises towards the nose—the kid takes snuff, in his own cant; and in ours, he inhales a pinch of amphetamines, just enough to make him reach the high plateau on which the evening's ride will be made

Then, curiously, interlarded between the glimpses of the progressing ritual, as the fully uniformed 'priest' leaves his vestry, come the pale blue flickering images of Brando and his wild ones, photographed from a TV screen; and joining those pictures are the bluetinted film clips of a sequence of views of Christ from an old movie—Christ riding the donkey, in the upper room with the rich man Zacchaeus—these old pale blue-green moments interposed between the brilliant scarlets and blues and greens of Anger's superb photography.

Before the priest leaves for the night and his machine (oddly enough, he has been metamorphosed now into a still better-looking young man) there occurs one of the two major sequences of the film. Sprawled on his dirty bed, the motorcyclist reads his favorite comics—Dick Tracy, Lil Abner. The walls behind him are covered with photographs and newspaper clippings of his dead idol, James Dean—and a membership card in the James Dean Memorial Foundation. The symbolic level of Anger's meaning here, tied up as it is in a Gordian knot of l'Amour and La Mort, becomes almost intolerable in its intensity. If you are going to cry with the power of this vision, it will be at this point, as you realize the contrast between the dream and the reality, between the ugliness of the boy and his symbols of disaster, and his own dream-visions of himself as the young god.

The other sequence is almost documentary. Like the great rowdy artists of the past, Anger films (where they wrote) a demon-sabbath scene, a Walpurgisnacht. Joyce did it in *Ulysses* for the 1920s, Anger does it today. Invited to a Halloween party, the drunken young Italian motorcyclists from New York's ghettos arrive one by one through the door (Jesus and his apostles are entering their door as well), wearing a skull mask here and there, or carrying plastered to the body a full paper skeleton, with a penis of flesh and blood erected through the white pelvic bone. The drunken black-clad cyclists select a victim, pull off his trousers, yank out handfuls of his pubic hair, and plaster his groin with mustard . . .

The demon sabbath ends. There is a propitiation at a mysterious phallic altar, and suddenly the god reawakens. The motorcycle comes to life; its tubing pulses with light and color—and the death-wish game begins. On a dark and sunless day, or night, or twilight, in a land of shadows, the motorcyclists gather to race—and one is killed. His brain explodes into red on the screen, amid violent patterns of pain—and quiets to the idiot turning of a police car-top red-light, flashing senselessly over and over on the screen.

The muted emphasis on the religious symbolism is hardly an accident with Anger, any more than the insistence on the death-wish. *Scorpio Rising* is a great film . . . It will bear viewing again and again. This sketchy report is written after only one time of seeing it, yet forty would be hardly enough to draw all its meanings out.

—John McAndrews

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