by Marcus Giamatti, but then she says:

Oh, ain't you real nice yet, you're two aspects of the same personality. And you and I are two aspects of the same personality, only we're male and female, and you're male and male, so I wish you'd get yourself into one person so you and I could combine into one person also. But if you remain two people, then when you and I combine, we'll be three people, and that's not what I want.

Here Durang seems to have hit on something that Shepard, in his exploration of the shifting American self, may have missed: the question of identity turns out to be nothing more or less than a math problem.

The second half of the evening is almost as impressive as the first, though the farcical gears eventually wind down, and we finish up with a funny but familiar scene of a playwright having to endure a business lunch at the Russian Tea Room with a vapid movie-development person. Still, there are great touches right to the end: the playwright is whisked from his apartment to the restaurant so quickly by a limousine being pushed up behind him that he's still in boxers and a polo shirt, and his basket of unfolded laundry, which was on a table in his apartment, winds up in the restaurant with him. All the sets are economical and evocative, and, under the direction of Walter Bobbie, so are the performers, who also include Keith Reddin, Becky Ann Baker, and David Aaron Baker. Mr. Reddin (who is better known as a playwright) is very good in a number of pathetic, repressed roles; he looks as if he were afraid that someone is about to hit him and afraid that someone isn't about to hit him. Sitting through "Durang Durang" is a little like going on the bumper cars at an amusement park: you're so caught up in the exhilarating hysteria that it doesn't matter to you that you're not actually going anywhere except—momentarily, blissfully—outside yourself.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

RED BLUES
BY ANTHONY LANE

RED is the conclusion to Krysztof Kieslowski's commanding "Three Colors" trilogy, a companion piece to "Blue" and "White." It is also, so he says, the last film that he will ever make. This may or may not turn out to be the case, for the moment, however, he is going off to smoke cigarettes, chop wood, and generally do whatever retired Polish film directors do.

The new movie certainly feels like a late work, even a posthumous one; it is about many things—a man of magisterial but mournful powers, a shipwreck, near-magic, and the pairing of young lovers.

In short, it is Kieslowski's "Tempus," suffused with valediction, with something sharp and autumnal settling over the simplest action. When just the sight of a car pulling around a bend above Lake Geneva at dusk makes you reach for your handkerchief, you know you're in trouble.

Most of the film is set in Geneva, and the plot is essentially a two-hander. Other hands join in from time to time, but their gestures merely direct us to the main couple. The heroine, Valentine (Irene Jacob), is a model—the only false note in the movie, since she looks too short to be a model, and too

Irene Jacob: She is to Krysztof Kieslowski what Catherine Deneuve was to Buñuel.

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habitant, and definitely too beautiful. She lives alone in her apartment, trudging awkwardness over the phone with a distant boyfriend, whom we never see. Driving home at night, she hits a dog—one of many accidents in the movie, ranging from a tiny stumble on the catwalk to a full-scale disaster. The dog is a German shepherd named Rita, whose role in life, it becomes clear, is to be a kind of furry Emma Woodhouse, yanking together those who might otherwise never meet. Valentine goes to the address on Rita's collar, and after passing through what appear to be the early stages of a horror movie—iron gate, gloomy house, the door unlocked and creaking—she finds the owner (Jean-Louis Trintignant) completely indifferent to the dog's fate. Days later, Rita leads her back to the same place, as if to insist that some good will come of the encounter. This time, Valentine approaches in sunshine, with no cause to be afraid; but, inside, the owner hunches in a darkness of his own, turning a radio so that he can spy on the telephone talk of his neighbors. "It's disgusting," she says. "Yes," he replies, "and, what's more, it's illegal." He seems to like it that way.

This perverse old man, it turns out, is a social judge, although he could equally be an ex-con, the wreck of that impenetrable killer played by Trintignant in "The Conformist." He is called Joseph Kern—a Kafka name, ideal for a person of his singular, secretive tastes—but we don't find that out until halfway through the movie; Kieslowski delights in feeding us information drop by drop, not just because of his own instinctive reticence but because of the halting, half-assed comedy of human acquaintance that he sees around him. Kern and Valentine square off against each other, their repulsion overcome by the simple wish to learn more; like Hannibal Lecter without the appetite, he cross-examines Valentine as if she, and not he, had committed a crime, guessing her family problems—her brother is a junkie—and predicting her future. As the movie proceeds, she turns the tables, and draws from him a confession of heartbreak, of the betrayal that blinded him and led him toward the secluded passion of the voyeur. "Maybe you're the woman I never
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THE CURRENT CINEMA
never a wholly convincing heartthrob, you could hear his brain throbbing as well, the hum of his mental radar as he scanned a swooning romance for danger signals. He had the intensity of a lover but the suspicious gaze of a private eye; his performance dried the tears of a wet movie, and made it more interesting than it had any right to be. In 1986, Trinignant and Anouk Aimée teamed up to shoot a sequel—an unwise move, needless to say, but also an unnecessary move, because the true aftermath, the only one that makes any sense, is "Red." When the judge tells of being cuckolded, you can't help imagining Anouk Aimée packing her bags and sneaking out at dawn. Joseph Kern has arrived at such a pitch of disillusionment that you wonder at the strength of the illusions he started out with. The old man is unsteady on his feet, hobbling out with a stick as Valentine comes to his gate, but the steadiness is still there in his eyes, in the crisp manner of his speech. Exasperated by his reluctance to engage with life, Valentine snaps. "Then stop breathing," she says. Kern considers for a second. "Good idea," he replies, sounding rather chipper at this sensible suggestion.

It would have been easy to set up "Red" as a clash of styles—the aging complainer versus the spirit of youth. But Kieslowski keeps blurring the divisions: Kern starts to come off his leash, unwrapping a bottle of eau-de-vie and taking his tank-like Mercedes out for a spin, while Valentine, in turn, seems old for her years, at least in the full tide of emotions that floods across her face. Irene Jacob was discovered by Kieslowski, who saw her playing a short role in Louis Malle's "Au Revoir les Enfants" and realized (goodness knows how) that she was the one; she has worked with him only twice—in "The Double Life of Véronique" and now in "Red"—but she seems to gather up and project everything that his movies are about, as Catherine Deneuve did with Buñuel. Her performances are wonderfully exhausting. Watch Valentine accepting a refill of eau-de-vie; from the tangle of dredge and delight in her expression, you might think that it really was the elixir of life. When Kern asks her to smile for him, she obeys, as she does when a pho-
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“TO LIVE” is the latest film from the Chinese director Zhang Yimou, who seems to be pursuing a policy of more open narrative. The rich, rigorous designs of “Red Sorghum” and “Ju Dou” have unwound and spread themselves into epic. The new movie starts in the nineteenth-forties and ends in the nineteen-sixties; you would need a wall chart to show the full sprawl of the story, including all the tricky switches of loyalty from one political group to the next, not to mention those crucial subplots about metal-smelting and steamed buns. And the photographer instructs her to “be sad”; but in both cases the look that follows is entirely stronger than either man would have expected, or even wished. Jacob is at the mercy of her moods, yet somehow they give her definition (it would be fascinating to see her play light comedy); she is both fated and free, a one-woman demonstration of Kieslovski’s abiding theme.

The climax of “Red” is a bit of a gamble, twisting events in order to tie the trilogy up. Valentine at last meets the man for whom she has been destined throughout: a young lawyer, a Kern-in-waiting, who shares many of the judge’s attributes, right down to his mustaches and his pen. (Whether he will be luckier in love is anyone’s guess.) With them are the main characters of “Blue” and “White”; when I first saw the picture, this struck me as little more than an in-joke, a nod to the director’s fans and a mystery to everyone else. The second time around, I didn’t mind it so much: the mystery felt lighter, a pleasing final flourish of the great Kieslovski principle that movies have no need to explain themselves. As the judge says to Valentine, “deciding what is true and what isn’t now seems to me worth the effort.” He stops, searching for the proper phrase, and finds it: “a lack of modesty.” At the end, when he stands in his garden, amid icy sunlight and dripping trees, he could be a filmmaker ruminating on the dramatic storm that he has cooked up, and wondering whether it was ever really under his control. If Kryziof Kieslovski is serious about giving up mortals, that only proves he was serious about making them, and seriously modest about what they could achieve.

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