

Film

BY ELLA TAYLOR

## Evil Looks

Like all deluded people who prize action and emotion above reflection, Adolf Hitler seems never to have entertained doubt about anything, let alone his blueprint for world mastery. Barry Hershey's ambitious, fascinating feature debut, *The Empty Mirror*, imagines the dictator incarcerated after the Second World War and forced to contemplate his horrible life's work. Played by British actor Norman Rodway with a blackly comic balance of bombast and dementia, Hitler obsesses over newsreels and Nazi propaganda films, takes meetings with the likes of Freud (Peter Michael Goetz) and Eva Braun (the radiant Danish actress Camilla Soeberg), pouts at the fact that Roosevelt was *Time* magazine's Man of the Year more often than he was, and trashes every recipe for mystifying the masses that isn't his. ("Compared to you," says his diminutive yes-man Goebbels, wittily played by Joel Grey, "Wagner was a minimalist.") Though the dialogue, written by Hershey and R. Buckingham, is bracing ("The Jews take their removal so personally," muses the Fuhrer), when every utterance is a topic sentence, the cumulative effect can be wearing. What saves this two-hour movie from sagging is its inventive use of effects -- in particular the poetic ingenuity of Frederick Elmes (cinematographer to David Lynch and Jim Jarmusch), who integrates Nazi film footage (notably Hitler apologist Leni Riefenstahl's masterpiece, *Triumph of the Will*) into the dictator's mad soliloquies. Hershey's thesis is that confronted with the enormity of his crimes and the failure of his plans, Hitler must surely have come undone. I hope he's right.



*The Empty Mirror*

## Quiet Insights



Elodie Bouchez as Isa

There's a lazy shorthand often used in movies about young people, which reduces their lives to pop caricature -- heavy metal on the soundtrack, torrents of teen argot, bags of frenetic action. Not so in Erick Zonca's first feature: even the shocks are quiet in *The Dreamlife of Angels*, a delicately observed chamber piece about two French street kids trying to make their way in the world. Itinerant odd-jobber Isa (Elodie Bouchez, last seen in André Téchiné's *Wild Reeds*) lands in Lille and finds friendship with Marie (Natacha Régnier), who is house-sitting an apartment while the owner and her daughter languish in hospital following a car crash. Though the girls are very different, they forge a life together, finding work and hanging out with two amiable local lugs. But the vulnerable, paranoid

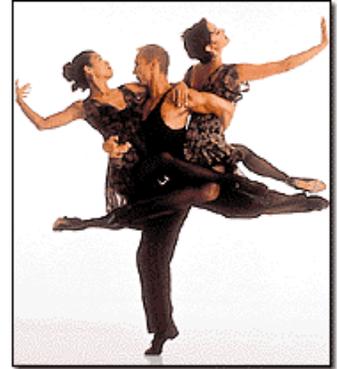
Marie's affair with a caddish rich boy (Grégoire Colin) tests both her fragile internal equilibrium and her friendship with the loyal Isa, who meanwhile treks faithfully to the hospital to reach out to a comatose stranger. Opting for a bald, naturalistic style, Zonca uses almost no incidental music to prompt our responses. Instead he allows his camera to do the emotional work, tracking the faces of the girls in slow, meditative takes as they react to the trouble around and within them. Bouchez and Régnier richly deserve the Best Actress award they shared at last year's Cannes Film Festival.

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## A Portrait of the Artist

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There's more ballet than bio in *Dancemaker*, Matthew Diamond's profile of legendary New York choreographer Paul Taylor. Just as well, perhaps, because Taylor takes a dismissively dim view of his lonely childhood with midwestern farmers who, he claims, were paid to love him. Not that Taylor's character is without interest. Like many artists, this former disciple of Martha Graham is propelled by "a fear of failure," which may explain his relentless driving of his dancers, in whom he inspires the ambivalent extremes of loyalty, terror, and resentment that typically run between a master and his slaves. A former choreographer, Diamond has a purist's eye, bringing Taylor's fascination with "ordinary movement" to the screen with simple austerity. Cutting between footage of the massively built Taylor dancing Aureole ("like water," says dance critic Deborah Jowitt) for Martha Graham, in 1962, and Taylor today as he struggles to perfect a new dance, Diamond also conducts backstage interviews with past and present members, and follows the company as it tours India and returns to a Broadway season threatened by strikes. Though it lacks the easy charm and warm affection of *Unzipped*, Douglas Kieve's comparable backstage documentary about the more immediately likable fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi, *Dancemaker* is a coolly elegant study of an artist through his art.



Paul Taylor Dancers

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