



CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
NATIONAL PASTIME

The trio of lovers at the heart of the fiercely intimate yet voraciously vast romance “The Mother and the Whore,” from 1973 (in a rare screening on April 3 in a retrospective of the films of the actress Bernadette Lafont at French Institute Alliance Française), are as



French as can be, and the director, Jean Eustache, made sure that we know it. The floppy-haired, scarf-wearing Alexandre (Jean-Pierre Léaud), who spends his days reading books in a café, philosophizing with friends, and pursuing affairs, lives with Marie (Lafont), a thirtyish shopkeeper who finances his idleness. But he picks up Veronika (Françoise Lebrun), a nurse who is open about her craving for sex and who falls in love with him, too. Eustache’s tender and passionate post-’68 view of their romantic roundelay—and of the sophisticated city that fosters it—is ferociously anti-libertine, even reactionary. The film’s

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THE NEW YORKER

Monday, April 2, 2012

three and a half hours are filled with the loam of collective memory, from prewar movies and popular songs to Nazi-era allusions. Eustache presents a world of tradition-bound youths who grow like weeds from a streetwise urban populism that's as artistically fertile as it is politically risky.

—*Richard Brody*
