

☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

CLC

164

Volume 164

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers



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Scope of the Series

CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete biographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

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- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
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Milos Forman

1932-

(Full name Jan Tomas Forman; also spelled Miloš Forman)
Czechoslovakian-born American director, screenwriter, and memoirist.

The following entry presents an overview of Forman's career through 2000.

INTRODUCTION

During the 1960s Forman was recognized as one of Eastern Europe's most sardonic and accomplished filmmakers. Leaving his homeland of Czechoslovakia after the Soviet Invasion of 1968, Forman relocated to the United States, where he gained notoriety for directing film adaptations of several critically acclaimed literary and theatrical works by such authors as E. L. Doctorow, Ken Kesey, and Peter Shaffer. In 2000, when the American Film Institute compiled its list of the top 100 films of all time, two of Forman's films—*One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) and *Amadeus* (1984)—were ranked as 20 and 53, respectively. His films offer a refined blend of realism and naturalism, often featuring the theme of the common man struggling within an oppressive society.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Forman was born on February 18, 1932, in Cášlav, Czechoslovakia, to Rudolf, a Jewish professor, and Anna, a Protestant homemaker. During his youth Forman's parents were imprisoned by the Nazis and sent to concentration camps. His mother died in Auschwitz in 1943 and his father died in Buchenwald in 1944. In 1951 Forman enrolled at the Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts in Prague. Upon graduating he worked as a director and screenwriter for Czech television, and as an assistant director of short films. His first full-length films, *Cerný Petr* (1963; *Black Peter*), and *Lásky jedné plavovlásky* (1965; *Loves of a Blonde*), both received critical honors, including the Grand International Prize from the French Film Academy. His third film, *Horí, má panenka* (1967; *The Firemen's Ball*), met with controversy when forty-thousand Czechoslovakian firemen walked off their jobs following the film's release. Forman was forced to make a public apology, explaining that the film was a political allegory and not intended as a slur against the fire department. *The Firemen's Ball* was eventually banned in Czechoslovakia by the reigning Soviet regime. During the Soviet Invasion of 1968 Forman was scouting film locations in Paris and elected to emigrate to America instead



of returning to his home country. His first American film, *Taking Off* (1971), was neither a popular nor critical success. However, his next film, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, won five Academy Awards from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, including best picture and best director. In 1978 Forman joined the staff at Columbia University as a professor of film and co-chair of the film division of their School of the Arts. Forman was awarded the Academy Award for best director again in 1984 for *Amadeus*—which won eight Academy Awards overall, including best picture. He was also nominated for the best director award for *The People vs. Larry Flynt* (1996).

MAJOR WORKS

Forman's early career as a director and screenwriter in Czechoslovakia was integral to a movement later known as the Czech "New Wave" of theater and arts. Noted for its blend of fiction and realism, the movement included directors who used the government-controlled film industry

to explore the problems of living in a totalitarian society. His first feature film, *Black Peter*, is a partially autobiographical tale about a dispirited young man who works in a department store, arbitrarily reporting on shoplifters. *Loves of a Blonde* follows the life of an unhappy factory worker named Andula. Her small town has a ratio of sixteen women to every man, forcing Andula to make desperate and awkward attempts at finding romance. She falls in love with a young pianist and relentlessly pursues him, eventually following him to Prague. Despite the controversy surrounding the release of *The Firemen's Ball*, the film was well received by critics and audiences alike. The story centers around a well meaning but inept fire department that wishes to honor their retiring chief with a gala ceremony. Despite their good intentions, the banquet comically falls apart due to problems with the door raffle, a poorly-planned beauty contest, and a nearby house fire. The film's political allegory links the ineptitude and bickering of the firemen to the oppressive bureaucracy of the Czechoslovakian government. For his first American film, Forman directed and co-wrote *Taking Off*, which depicts the increasingly permissive American society of the late 1960s as personified by a staid businessman named Larry Tyne and his family. When Larry's daughter Jeannie becomes involved in a Greenwich Village theatre production in New York City, Larry and his wife try to acquaint themselves with their daughter's environment in an attempt to convince her to return home. They attend a meeting of the Society for Parents of Fugitive Children, where they learn how to smoke marijuana, and they venture into "The Village," where they are appalled by the habitants' casual attitude towards sex and drugs.

In 1975 Forman directed *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, an adaptation of Ken Kesey's critically acclaimed novel. The film focuses on a battle of wills between R. P. McMurphy, an antisocial but engaging patient in a mental hospital, and Nurse Ratched, the domineering head-nurse who attempts to force McMurphy to conform to an established behavioral pattern. McMurphy inspires the other patients to rebel against Ratched's strict rules and regulations in a variety of ways. After a young patient commits suicide, McMurphy physically attacks Ratched, causing the hospital to lobotomize him. Forman revisited this theme of an individual fighting against the Establishment with his 1979 adaptation of the popular Broadway musical *Hair*. John Savage, a small-town farmboy, comes to New York City to experience life before being drafted into the Army and sent to Vietnam. Savage falls in with a group of hippies and radicals living in Central Park who embody the counter-culture of the 1960s. *Ragtime* (1981), an adaptation of E. L. Doctorow's novel, follows multiple characters and storylines, and is set against the backdrop of the early 1900s. The lead characters include Coalhouse Walker, a proud young African American who single-mindedly pursues restitution for the social injustices he has suffered. The film examines values in transition in turn-of-the-century America and explores the ways the nation coped with post-Civil War racial issues and dealt with the cultural changes brought by the expanding immigrant

population. In 1984 Forman directed *Amadeus*, which was adapted from the play by Peter Shaffer. The film is loosely based on the life of renowned composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, focusing on the relationship between Mozart and his mentor, Antonio Salieri. Mozart is depicted as a childish and outrageous genius who flouts social norms and contemptuously rejects many of the personal and artistic ideals that Salieri holds sacred. *Valmont* (1989), an adaptation of the novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* by Choderlos de Laclos, marked Forman's first return to screenwriting since *Taking Off*. The film—which Forman also directed—depicts a cold and cunning game of seduction played by Valmont, a rogue gentleman, and a manipulative lady, the Marquise de Meureuil. Set amongst the Parisian salons of pre-Revolutionary France, the film portrays Valmont as a confused young man who, despite his notorious amorous adventures, is only discovering his sexuality. Forman's next film, *The People vs. Larry Flynt* is based on the life of Larry Flynt, the founder of the pornographic magazine *Hustler*. Flynt turned *Hustler* into the foundation for a multi-million dollar publishing empire and waged several legal battles involving issues of moral decency against Reverend Jerry Falwell and financier Charles Keating. Despite the fact that Flynt is a pornographer and former drug user, Forman characterizes him as a champion of the First Amendment right to free speech. In 1999 Forman directed *Man on the Moon*, a film based on the life of comedian and actor Andy Kaufman, who became known during the 1970s and early 1980s for his bizarre and experimental comedy routines. Forman depicts Kaufman as a misunderstood performance artist who enjoyed pushing the boundaries of comedy in order to get a reaction from his audience, even if the reaction was negative. Forman has also published a memoir, *Turnaround* (1994), which recounts his early days in Czechoslovakia and his successful career as a filmmaker.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critical reception to Forman's films has been varied throughout his career. His early Czechoslovakian films have been praised by international audiences, even though the Soviet regime at the time banned several of his works. Reviewers have consistently praised Forman's ability to show the universality of human emotions, complimenting his tendency to present well-rounded characterizations. Some critics, however, have objected to Forman's American films—particularly *Hair*, *Ragtime*, and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*—pointing out that Forman's European sensibility hampered his adaptations of such singularly American works. Several reviewers have also criticized *Ragtime* for overly truncating or ignoring the novel on which it was based, though some have asserted that the novel's complex plot structure is primarily to blame for Forman's loose adaptation. *The People vs. Larry Flynt* has met with sharply divided criticism, with some critics praising the film's anti-Establishment message and others declaring that the film acts as propaganda for pornographers. A number of noted feminist critics, includ-

ing Gloria Steinem, have argued that Forman glosses over many of the facts of Flynt's life and portrays him as a champion of justice, while his magazine routinely degrades women and mocks rape and child abuse. Other commentators have argued that the film uses Flynt's life as an allegory and that Forman is not obliged to factually recount every event from Flynt's life. Several critics agree that, despite the subject material, *The People vs. Larry Flynt* ultimately conveys a positive message about the American right to free speech.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Stenata* [with Ivo Novák] (screenplay) 1957
Laterna magica II [*The Magic Lantern*; screenwriter and director] (short film) 1960
 **Cerný Petr* [*Black Peter*; screenwriter with Jaroslav Papoušek; director] (film) 1963
Kdyby ty muziky nebyly [*If It Wasn't for Music*; screenwriter with Ivan Passer; director] (film) 1963
Konkurs [*Audition*; screenwriter with Ivan Passer; director] (film) 1963
 †*Lásky jedné plavovlásky* [*Loves of a Blonde*; screenwriter with Jaroslav Papoušek, Ivan Passer, and Václav Sasek; director] (film) 1965
Horí, má panenko [*The Firemen's Ball*; screenwriter with Jaroslav Papoušek, Ivan Passer, and Václav Sasek; director] (film) 1967
Taking Off [screenwriter with Jean-Claude Carrière, John Guare, and John Klein; director] (film) 1971
One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest [director] (film) 1975
Hair [director] (film) 1979
Ragtime [director] (film) 1981
Amadeus [director] (film) 1984
 ‡*Valmont* [screenwriter with Jean-Claude Carrière and Jan Novák; director] (film) 1989
Turnaround: A Memoir [with Jan Novák] (memoirs) 1994
The People vs. Larry Flynt [director] (film) 1996
Man on the Moon [director] (film) 1999

*This film was released in the United Kingdom as *Peter and Pavla*.

†This film has also been released as *A Blonde in Love*.

‡The screenplay was based on the novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* by Choderlos de Laclos.

CRITICISM

Peter John Dyer (essay date winter 1965-1966)

SOURCE: Dyer, Peter John. "Star-Crossed in Prague." *Sight and Sound* 35, no. 1 (winter 1965-1966): 34-5.

[In the following essay, Dyer examines Forman's emphasis on celebrating the emotions of his characters in *Peter and Pavla* and *A Blonde in Love*.]

Directors cannot be relied upon to look and sound like the films which they make. Milos Forman, who with two Czech films has made much the same quiet impact as Olmi did a few years ago, can. There's no good reason why one should expect him to live up to the image which his films create. It is simply interesting that—having lunch with him, hearing him introduce his latest film at the London Film Festival—his personality confirms one's feeling about his work. He has a puckish wit and a puckish love of pulling strings, like some benevolent puppet-master. Now that Central European directors of Shakespeare are all the rage, one would love to see him bring his fresh modern eye to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The ingredients seem tailor-made: mechanicals, star-crossed lovers, Oberon the supreme puppet-master and Pucholt playing Puck (obviously).

Peter and Pavla and *A Blonde in Love* are about the same things: adolescent difficulties with the other sex, a tangle of cross-purposes between boys and their parents, the dissatisfaction and search for identity suffered by only ordinarily intelligent boys and girls in soul-destroying jobs. Forman also has a love-hate (though in fact the term is misleadingly extreme) feeling about dance-halls. This is one of the characteristics which has led to the inevitable comparison with Olmi.

I think there is a closer link with the early films of another director, the English (but like Forman Czech-born) Karel Reisz. *Mamma Don't Allow* was one of the first films I can recall to take a close, quizzical look at teenagers' dancing habits. Much of *We Are the Lambeth Boys* commented on the deadly monotony of so many factory and office jobs. However, it is doubtful if Forman would recognise any deeper affinity than that. His two films are not confined within documentary disciplines; and his use of amateur actors is bound to be more fruitful than that of anybody filming the English at work and play.

There is a difference of tone, of emphasis, too. Karel Reisz once said to me, apropos of my strictures on a proselytizing critic bludgeoning some harmless little muddle-headed film, "You're right. One can't be serious all the time." Yet his own films, springing from a Free Cinema climate of protest and scorn, were and indeed then had to be openly committed to Left Wing didacticism. Forman, on the other hand, prefers to let his generalised social comments find their own way through situations that are presented in the particular, and characters that are amusingly semi-articulate.

For Forman, gently poked fun is the thing. This could be due to working in a nationalised film industry where criticism is safer the more general it is. But I doubt if this is the case. There is evidence, in the films and in Forman's own conversation, that he is doing exactly what he wants to do. Certainly his concerns are serious ones: about kids who don't know what they want to be and whether or not they should have sex; about parents whose attitude is one of nagging, irascible bewilderment. But there is a hint of

autobiography in Forman's concern (the problems are so commonplace there couldn't help but be), coupled with a wry determination not to take himself too seriously. His own conversation comes remarkably close in tone to that of his characters. Conscious that he has nonplussed a London audience by getting excited, in halting English, about the idea of filming Jesus Christ at the time He lived, he suddenly ends his speech by observing brightly: "Hasn't the weather been terrible lately?"

In *Peter and Pavla*, the spotlight is on the boy, a seventeen-year-old trainee in a supermarket. The humour springs from the particularity of his job, and his singular unsuitability for it. A shy, somewhat abstracted youth of limited intelligence, he is of all things a store detective. But this is by no means the sum of his problems. He is obsessively worried about sex and his own virginity; he can't do the twist; his time off with the slightly bored, slightly provocative Pavla is ruined by the ever-present Cenda (Vladimir Pucholt), a skinny and often tipsy young labourer who persistently reads offence into the intonation of the word "Hello"; his mother barrages him with questions about his love life; and his father is given to endless, rambling lectures in his braces, punctuated by turns up and down the living-room and the massage of an ample chest.

Like an expert juggler, Forman keeps all these themes running throughout his film. The narrative structure is fragmentary, composed of minutely observed details and a great deal of improvised dialogue. Forman is a master of the verbal and mental hiatus, of the comically strained pause for thought connecting truism with banality, and banality with some magnificently conceived non-sequitur. One cannot avoid quoting the film's already oft-quoted ending. To Peter's chagrin, Cenda and his mate barge in during one of his father's lectures. Their arrival encourages Peter's father (the formidable Jan Ostrcil) to embark on odious comparisons and homilies about hands blessed by honest toil. Out of his depth, Cenda brightly informs Peter's father that he has found the discussion "interesting." The word, though quite innocently snatched out of Cenda's shallow consciousness, strikes Peter's father as the height of impertinent inadequacy when applied to the insoluble problem (as he sees it) of a shiftless son. Failure of communication is complete on all sides, and the film ends on a frozen shot of the father's utter bewilderment.

This shot is the core of the film, what it has been informally leading up to. It is a perfectly ordinary terminus, the end of a relaxed and impressionistic journey through one stratum of working-class life today, and had it been unsupported by some focal narrative thread one's interest might well have flagged. That it doesn't is due to the brainwave of setting so much of the action in a supermarket. Peter's job as a store detective turns the film into an affectionate comedy of embarrassment in which we all become voyeurs as willing as he is unwilling. There is the sinister suspect whom Peter tails through the town without having the courage to go up to him. The comedy is heightened by our understanding that Peter knows

perfectly well he has no intention of challenging the man. (Later it turns out that he is a friend of the manager.)

But the highlight, almost cathartic in its relief after all those shots of hands feeling and prodding each and every product, is the great occasion when a woman suddenly steals something, then something else, indulging in an orgy of petty theft that leaves her shopping bag bulging as widely as Peter's eyes. True to form, Peter fails to make his move. Anything as violent as an actual nab would be as alien to Peter's timidity as to Forman's way of looking at life.

A Blonde in Love covers similar territory from a different, mainly feminine outlook. The heroine, a budding Czech Jeanne Moreau called Hana Brejchova, works in a factory and lives in a hostel. Vulnerably romantic, she gets picked up by a young jazz musician (Vladimir Pucholt). To her the night they spend together is the start of something precious. The boy, however, is still at the experimental stage, and he is utterly out of his depth when he comes home one evening to find that the girl has called to see him. His mother is appalled by the situation, delivering harangues as endless as those of the father in the previous film. Naggling curiosity (Forman's mothers are boundlessly curious and pessimistic) gives way to a curbed smile of hospitality, which in turn is quickly wrenched into a censorious inquisition.

The girl is put to bed in the boy's room, the mother drags him out to share the parental bed, and voices are querulously raised. There is a brilliantly timed switch of feeling here, with the audience relishing the prolonged, almost vaudevillian antics of the disrupted family and the girl listening outside and shaking. For a moment one imagines she must be laughing too, till a closer look reveals that she is sobbing bitterly. Silent sympathy overtakes the audience, a miraculous piece of mood-manoeuvre, and the scene quickly fades.

Again, the narrative is deceptively casual, zigzagging about to accommodate a number of comic set-pieces, but always coming back to the girl and her generous idealism, confiding to a friend that all is whiter than white where her current romance is concerned. In between, we get gently cutting glimpses of well-meaning adults, like the lady welfare officer in the hostel putting moral purity to the vote and gaining bland satisfaction from a herdlike show of hands.

Forman's view of hearty, well-meaning bullies and their obedient creatures, exemplified in a long, brilliantly worked out dance-hall scene involving three soldiers and the retrieving of a bottle of wine sent to the wrong table, is always gentle, never overtly critical. He respects people's shyness like no other director; and he sees the puzzled insecurity behind each show of self-assertion, as in the scene where a discarded boy friend argues his rights before the girl's hostel companions.

To be so scrupulous about the feelings of his characters, Forman resorts to a less scrupulous form of deployment in order patiently to achieve his ends. He leaves his actors

pretty much in the dark about the plot, the theme, the characters they are playing. The father in *Peter and Pavla*, he told me, saw the film as some sort of tragedy; the boys found the film's situations irresistibly comic.

An apparently unique aspect of Forman's use of amateur actors, like the father in *Peter and Pavla*, is the exhaustive length given to any take featuring improvised speeches. The actor eventually grinds to a halt—more than likely there has been a mental block—yet Forman's camera keeps on turning. It's rather like watching a chain-smoker work his way through two cigarettes, with the camera giving special attention to the lighting of the second cigarette from the first. This metaphorical lighting of a second cigarette, in fact a signal of anguished mental effort, is accompanied by a grim, unchanging expression of almost bovine concentration which is for the audience a source of unfailing comic pleasure. Much the same technique is used in the dance-hall sequence in *A Blonde in Love*. As the three bored, unwilling soldiers try to work up a synthetic interest in the local girls, the camera fixes a beady eye on their every indication of discomfort. It is difficult to say or even guess how much rehearsal goes into setting up such a scene. But once set up, there is no cheating the audience. The ball of wool slowly, expansively unrolls, rather as in that famous practical joke sequence in a Swiss hotel in Hitchcock's first *Man Who Knew Too Much*.

I think the secret of Forman's success lies in his self-awareness, his ability to respect and at the same time deploy the reluctance, intensity and bewilderment of the people he works with. One last story sums up what I mean. Commiserating with him on his return home to do his annual military service, we tentatively enquired whether it wasn't perhaps a rather boring intrusion into his professional life. Forman disagreed. How could it possibly be boring, when he spent most of his time relieving the boredom of his fellow reservists by recounting fictitious meetings with innumerable glamorous screen stars?

John Coleman (review date 20 May 1966)

SOURCE: Coleman, John. "Milos Forman, Marco Bellachio." *New Statesman* 71, no. 1836 (20 May 1966): 746.

[In the following excerpt, Coleman praises *A Blonde in Love*, complimenting Forman's subtlety, proficiency, and simplistic directing style.]

Milos Forman's *A Blonde in Love* is a wonderful film concerning, among other things, young love, sexual and social timidity, parental incomprehension, and the problems of a Czech community where the ratio of women to men is 16 to one. It's so much of a piece in fact, so funny and painful and precise in its observation of a sector of the human condition, that it presents a very real problem: how to describe it adequately? It enlists itself in

that—to me—central tradition of filmmaking which includes the works of Renoir, Satyajit Ray, Ozu, Truffaut, Olmi, the earlier De Sica and, most recently, James Ivory. Such men seem not only to have been born with a natural and happy instinct for expressing themselves in cinema but to bring to it a generosity of spirit, an intelligent openness and gaiety towards others, which gives them something authentic to express.

It may be time to declare my square predisposition towards most, if not all, their works now that irate Godard fans write in accusing me of hating movies. In certain highly-strung quarters M. Godard seems indeed to have become synonymous with 'movies.' As I tried to point out when I reviewed *Alphaville* not long ago, he does offer pretty occasions for those professional and amateur critics who've apparently spent more of their waking life in cinemas than out of them. His half-baked films, as Mr Winkler's 'interpretation' of *Pierrot le Fou* in last week's correspondence columns copiously demonstrated, don't merely lead themselves to exegesis: they come at you begging for it. This may be an exciting new art-form, of course, which produces more interesting stuff on a page than ever was there on the screen. But it reminds me disconcertingly of those records which supply an orchestral background, leaving holes during which you saw away on your own violin.

With Mr Forman's second film, as with his first, *Peter and Pavla*, all the work has been done beforehand. From the first shot to the last, he knows what he's about. Once again he turns an unclouded, affectionate eye on commonplace aspirations and bafflements and makes them absolutely fresh and important. His blonde in love (Hana Brejchova) works in a shoe-factory and lives in a hostel near Prague. Dreamily ripe for an encounter, she meets a young dance-band pianist (Vladimir Pucholt) during a hop organised to bring together the men of a local army unit and the romantically deprived factory girls. Later that night she goes to bed with him. He gives her his address in Prague. One evening, soon after, she turns up at his home with a suitcase, to be met by his bewildered parents. Grudgingly she gets a bed for the night. As the film ends, she's back at the hostel after lights-out, gently embroidering to an eager girlfriend on her disastrous trip to the big city.

Mr Forman's technique is as personal as handwriting, yet it never obtrudes. As before, he uses several non-professionals in his cast and certainly some of his effects must come from the way he lets them be themselves within a framework only he really knows about. (It is reported that the pontificating dad in *Peter and Pavla* thought of the film as some sort of tragedy.) Here there are notably the performances of the pianist's increasingly indignant mother (Milada Jezkova) and of a middle-aged trio of soldiers in confused quest of a pick-up at the dance. But to speak of these as performances in the conventional sense is clearly inappropriate. The camera settles patiently down on them, taking what it wants: watching the mother

steadily work herself up into righteous fury, following every fumbling move of the soldiers as they send a bottle of wine to the wrong table and half-heartedly spur one another on. The two longest sequences—and the most unaffectedly funny—are those in the dance-hall and at the pianist's home. Lanky Pucholt, the obstreperous builder's mate in *Peter and Pavla*, gets back late to find his blonde in love unexpectedly sleeping on the sofa: mother bustles in and drags him into the family bed. The recriminations, accusations and distraught efforts to get comfortable that ensue manage to be both hilarious and likely. Outside, the poor blonde listens and weeps.

The film is full of small, disconcerting switches of emotional tempo, which is one of its secrets. One is constantly invited to readjust one's sights. It never allows one to patronise. The editing is brilliant. An early glimpse of a striped tie round a tree acquires pathetic resonance when it's revealed on the top of the girl's things in her suitcase later on. One rapid succession of little episodes is worth inclusion in any film course for the lessons it might teach in economy without loss of clarity: at the hostel the girls are given a solemn talk on keeping themselves decent; the charming Hana Brejchova is seen hitching a lift into the city; an overhead camera dwells on another dance-palace, where Pucholt is soon discovered with another girl; a sudden, cryptic look at a hobo trundling a dummy from a store-window proves to be what Pucholt's somnolent parents are watching on television in the parlour; the bell rings and the blonde has arrived. Throughout, Mr Forman establishes the external, workaday contexts of his people's lives with the minimum of fuss—a couple of glances at Hana at the factory-bench, a shot or two of Pucholt at the piano. He is an extraordinary director and confirms the expectations aroused by that week of Czech cinema at the NFT last year.

Philip T. Hartung (review date 11 November 1966)

SOURCE: Hartung, Philip T. "Czech Mates." *Commonweal* 85, no. 6 (11 November 1966): 166-67.

[In the following excerpt, Hartung offers a positive assessment of Forman's casting choices in *Loves of a Blonde*.]

Now in general release is *Loves of a Blonde*, the Czech movie that opened the New York Film Festival in September and won huzzas from most of the reviewers. Perhaps the critics, impressed with the glamor of this opening night, let some of their enthusiasm spill over into their reviews of this heart-warming and unpretentious little picture about romance-hungry adolescents. In any case, audiences can now judge for themselves—and they will find *Loves* a well directed movie with a slight plot, some sharp character portraits, and a few delightfully realistic scenes. But for all its assets, a masterpiece with depth and scope it is not; and for my money, *Intimate Lightning*, another Czech comedy shown at this year's Festival, has greater humor, understanding and universality.

In telling the tale of Andula, a naive and romantic blonde who works in a shoe factory in a small town where there's a shortage of boys, director Milos Forman does come through with universal touches; and as you watch Andula and her girl friends and some of those boy friends, you begin to wonder if young people aren't pretty much alike the world over. Forman by no means limits himself to youngsters in showing their relationship to the not-so-young and to next-generation oldsters. His cast, in all ages, is fine, and he has directed them expertly—although only the two leads are professionals: Hana Brejchova as the dreamy, not-too-pretty Andula who has only vague notions about what she wants but is certain, at this stage of her life, she wants male companionship; and Vladimir Pucholt as the young pianist who's beginning to feel his oats and definitely knows what he wants from Andula and the other girls.

Although *Loves* lags from time to time, it has three hilariously funny scenes that are worth sitting through the slow stretches for: the episode in which three soldier try to date Andula and two of her pals at a dance; the sequence in which the pianist takes Andula up to his room and unsubtly goes about the seduction—although seduction is hardly the word for what goes on with the girl naked as a newborn babe, still saying, "I don't trust you" and then insisting he draw the window shade; and finally the episode in which Andula goes to Prague to visit her love, pops in on his bewildered parents, and later is put to bed in the living room while the parents make their son sleep with them. Although this scene is the film's funniest as the mother keeps them all awake with her clichés and scolding, it is also the most poignant as Andula realizes the boy hardly remembers her. The film's finale makes it clear that Andula hasn't learned very much or lost her romantic notions. Parents, seeing the new films about the younger generation like *Loves of a Blonde* and *Masculine Feminine* and *Georgy Girl* may be more befuddled than ever about kids today and may ask with this boy's mother, "Where will all this end?" or with Georgy's father, "I sometimes wonder to what this country's coming."

Stanley Kauffmann (review date 24 April 1971)

SOURCE: Kauffmann, Stanley. "Stanley Kauffmann on Films." *New Republic* 164, no. 17 (24 April 1971): 20.

[In the following review, Kauffmann commends Forman's artistic vision in *Taking Off*, but argues that the film lacks consistency and direction.]

Milos Forman had an interesting idea in *Taking Off*. He wanted to do a film about the generation gap that made its point primarily through pictures. The content of most films, particularly the ones with social themes, is usually conveyed in words and story. *Taking Off* has words and a story, of course, but they are only the scaffolding for the purely cinematic elements, which really state the theme.