Mankiewicz's script includes many mini-monologues delivered by characters pontificating about the politics of the theater, including Margo declaring that she is forty—"Four-0"—an admission that she says is like taking off her clothes. When Lloyd protests that she has "no age," she retorts by saying she will star in his next play "wearing rompers and rolling a hoop." Like many prophetic lines in the film, this one more or less describes Davis's entrance in *Baby Jane*. The myth of the fading female star at the center of *All About Eve* is in fact challenged by Davis herself, who, along with many of her contemporaries, wanted only for scripts, not youth, to sustain their voracious talents that were not declining at all. The aging credo is further compounded in the film in another of Davis's speeches in which she declares that being a woman is a career in itself. Sooner or later, everyone has to work at it. The implication is that an ingénue like Miss Casswell, Monroe's character, is not working at it at all, despite her elaborate gowns and hairstyles. DeWitt prophetically says to her, "I can see your career rising in the East, like the sun."

Many of the commentators on Mankiewicz feel obliged to say that he has been described by unnamed others as a director of "talkies" with little "cinematic" vision—a myth they feel bound to destroy. *All About Eve* is certainly loaded with witty dialogue and well-aimed zingers, and the camera rarely moves; yet, is it not cinematic to imaginatively crowd the characters repeatedly into small spaces like dressing rooms, cars, pantries, ladies rooms, staircases, and bedrooms? The theater world is depicted as a gossipy small town where everyone is stuck together for better or worse. The crisp new 4K digital restoration throws the rich textures of the costumes into relief and shows off the architectural details of the Curran Theatre in San Francisco, which stands in for Broadway. Mankiewicz also makes a lot of his actors' voices, with Baxter cooing her innocence and Margo barking her declarations. George Sanders is at his most high-toned snobbishness and Thelma Ritter, as Margo's maid, speaks plain truth in her New York drawl. As Sam Staggs notes in his commentary, "Nobody fools Thelma Ritter." Unfortunately, she disappears halfway through the movie.

Among the many supplements in this two-disc box set is a remarkable 1983 feature-length documentary in which French film critic Michel Ciment interviews Joseph Mankiewicz about his life and career. Much is revealed about Herman Mankiewicz's younger brother who followed his sibling to Hollywood and worked his way up from junior writer in 1930 to win consecutive Oscars as writer/director of *A Letter to Three Wives* in 1949 and *All About Eve* in 1950. A university dropout, he was known in Hollywood as an intellectual, a label he took to with relish, just as he admits that Addison DeWitt is his fictional alter ego. He was a frustrated playwright, and he tells Ciment that he was never interested in the "unwashed and the unwanted," but preferred the complexities of "quality" people, since they have problems, too. (Christopher Mankiewicz says pretty much the opposite in his adulatory remarks about his father.) Joseph Mankiewicz's comments on *All About Eve* are particularly revealing. "Eve does not act," he says. "Margo is an actress," referring not to Baxter and Davis but to their characters, which is odd as we never see either of them actually acting on the stage. "Eve is a predator…the typing pool is full of Eves," and he continues to judge this character so harshly it's a wonder that Baxter pulled off such a fine performance, making the character just a little bit sympathetic.

As a film about the theater, *All About Eve* derides its pretensions, all the while invoking its style. The play in which Margo is appearing is called "Aged in Wood." Its antebellum sets and costumes invoke *Jezebel* (1938), one of Davis's first hits, but it is marked as old-fashioned—with the exception of a fabulous lobby poster of a caricatured wide-eyed Davis in a hoop dress blasting two pistols like Yosemite Sam. Mankiewicz's hobby was theater history, and a portrait of the real Sarah Siddons—an eighteenth-century English actress—hangs in Margo's apartment. Before he flies off to a meeting in Los Angeles, Bill Sampson, Margo's director/husband, delivers a passionate speech about theater being just as democratic as the movies. Eve is not impressed, having set her sights on Broadway. In fact, the tension may not be between theater and film, but between acting and stardom.

All About Eve is a film about acting, to be sure, as Davis gives a theatrical performance, full of large gestures and monologues, while Baxter's is far quieter with greater nuance, visible only on the screen. Her final meltdown, when Sanders blows her cover, is superb film acting with a range of emotions in close-up, and a full-blown tantrum on the bed. Many of the other actors, including Sanders, Ritter, and Monroe, are playing personalities that may have made for great entertainment, but which made it difficult for them to assume the guise of other characters. Something similar happens to Davis after *All About Eve*, of which commentators repeatedly suggest that she "plays herself." She will be forever thereafter the fading star, a parody of herself. In the bonus features, only Staggs makes any reference to the film's lesbian undertones and the "camp classic" label that later attached itself to Davis's star image.

In Hollywood mythology, the figure of Eve seems to stand for the snake in the grass, a threatening character that we are now ready to recognize as a powerful threat to the status quo. In *The Lady Eve* (1941) Barbara Stanwyck plays a con artist who successfully makes her way into Henry Fonda's heart and fortune. In *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957), Joanne Woodward plays a depressed housewife whose alter ego likes to party, while her "real self" is a stereotypical 1950s wife and mother. Anne Baxter's Eve is likewise masked and disguised, a woman not to be trusted. In all these films, the women's power lies in their performance, their ability to deceive and to shape shift. Bette Davis had the same power as an actor, but in *All About Eve* we see it literally stripped away as her character is declared to be old, and thus becomes aligned with her actual star image at that time.

—Catherine Russell

The Far Country

Produced by Aaron Rosenberg; directed by Anthony Mann; written by Borden Chase; cinematography by William H. Daniels; edited by Russell F. Schoengarth; art direction by Alexander Golitzen and Bernard Herzbrun; set decoration by Oliver Emert and Russell A. Gausman; music by Joseph Gershenson; starring James Stewart, Ruth Roman, Walter Brennan, Corinne Calvet, John McIntire, Jay C. Flippen, Harry Morgan, Royal Dano, Robert Wilke, and Steve Brodie. A two-disc Blu-ray, color, 97 min., 1954. An Arrow Academy release, www.arrowvideo.com.

At this point in film history, I would hope it unnecessary to reintroduce Anthony Mann, but his name isn't, unfortunately, as familiar as that of Alfred Hitchcock or Orson Welles. He was among the most important directors of the late studio era, certainly to be ranked with Douglas Sirk, Nicholas Ray, and Vincente Minnelli in his intelligence and erudition. A stage actor since childhood, Mann climbed the production ladder in Hollywood until being given his own projects, including significant film noirs like *T-Men* and *Railroaded!* (both 1947), and a portion of the superb *He Walked by Night* (1948), which spawned Jack Webb's *Dragnet* radio and TV series. But his real achievements were the cycle of Westerns he made in the Fifties; he is the prime candidate for founder of the "psychological" Western, bringing to the genre his interests in Athenian tragedy, Shakespeare, the Bible, and classical myth. His ambition was to make his version of *King Lear*, partially accomplished in *The Man from Laramie* (1955) and *The Naked Spur* (1953), certainly in his masterpiece *Man of the West* (1958), the last Western of the cycle.

Mann made very credible Westerns, like *The Furies* (1950), before he forged a partnership with James Stewart that resulted in eight movies, including the blockbuster biopic *The Glenn Miller Story* (1954), a pet project for Stewart, containing, at Mann's insistence, an integrated nightclub scene with Louis Armstrong. But five of the films were Westerns that did well at the box office, and, with the rise of film studies, established Mann's reputation. The Stewart–Mann partnership lasted much of the Fifties, but collapsed when Mann refused to direct the juvenile *Night Passage* (1957). The two men never spoke again.

Stewart is the lead in all five Westerns; in each, he is perverse, with a chip on his shoulder (*The Naked Spur*), either out for blood (*Winchester '73*, 1950), with a secret past (*Bend of the River* [1952], and the non-Stewart *Man of the West*), or simply looking out for his own interests, the devil with the common good (this film). It has been theorized that the postwar "demented" Stewart—visible also in his astonishing work for Hitchcock, especially *Vertigo* (1958)—was a consequence of the actor's World War II traumas in the Army Air Corps. But this fails to explain Stewart's postwar comedies, like *Harvey* (1950). The best evidence says that Stewart wanted to stretch as an actor after so long being the cheery, all-American boy. Reasons aside, Stewart's performances for Hitchcock and Mann make us note his special importance to screen acting.

In *The Far Country*, the third film of the cycle, Stewart is Jeff Webster, a surly cowboy with a shady past (we learn he killed two men) driving cattle to the Yukon (the film earned the silly label of "Northern" Western) with his pal Ben Tatum (the always-elderly Walter Brennan). In the corrupt town of Skagway, Jeff runs into a malevolent hanging judge named Gannon (John McIntire), a character constantly associated by reviewers with Judge Roy Bean—minimal research tells us he is most likely Soapy Smith, a hoodlum who fancied himself the Boss Tweed of the Klondike. Gannon threatens to hang Jeff on absurd charges before he's won over by Webster's easy charm ("I'm gonna like you! I'm gonna hang you, but I'm gonna *like* you!"). Jeff's chestnuts are pulled from the fire by Ronda Castle (Ruth Roman), a saloon keeper (read, brothel madam), when the law comes calling, and Jeff's cattle are confiscated by the grinning Gannon.

Ronda is the generous Whore of the story, therefore she has to be shot down; the Virgin is Renee Vallon (Corinne Calvet), a tomboy constantly infantilized as "Freckleface" by Jeff; she witnesses the hero's moral redemption. Mann includes eroticism, inoffensive to the Production Code, when Ronda hides Jeff in her bed—while she is still in it. Ronda hires Jeff to help her move a supply train to Dawson City—over a mountain of sheer ice—until Jeff rebels. An avalanche and an ambush precede the arrival in Dawson—where Gannon has established authority, in entrepreneurial partnership with Ronda. The killing of Gannon is inevitable, but not before the tortured transformation of the hero.

There is a clarity of pictorial vision in *The Far Country*, in counterpoint to its image of moral degradation. Mann's imposing landscapes (shot in Alberta), finely etched in Technicolor by William Daniels, lack Ford's melancholy shadows, and there is no empathy here between nature and humanity, as in *Shane* (1953). The action unfolds in Mann's characteristic deep space and unflinching bright sunlight. The land, as in all the Mann Westerns, presents a threat, as characters climb treacherous mountains or cross merciless deserts that exteriorize their (and audience) anxiety. While the threats of nature are obvious, the motivations of characters are murky, but equal in their danger. Jeff seems almost manic in his self-centeredness ("I take care of *me*!").

Tough loners saturate the Western, but Jeff Webster's asocial isolation seems practiced—except that his egotistical pronouncements are offset by his recurring gesture of placing Ben's pipe in his mouth, gently lighting it, and telling Ben, "In a pinch I can take care of you, too!" (He plainly can't, his arrogance anticipating his temporary downfall.) The commitment to Ben is unflagging, and his murder by Gannon, in an ambush that wounds Jeff, is the film's dramatic pivot. In a sequence anticipating similar scenes in *One-Eyed Jacks* (1961) and *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), Jeff hibernates, nursing his wounded gun hand, then is "resurrected," returning to avenge Ben and liberate Dawson City.

The moral ambiguity throughout the film is striking. Jeff tells Gannon that he killed two men who rustled his cattle—is this true? Jeff's quick flashes of anger erase the grin used by a younger James Stewart; he is ready for violence without much provocation. The town of Dawson City (an obvious set, but Mann's combination of tents and rough-hewn buildings anticipate the dilapidation of *The Wild Bunch* [1969], *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* [1971], and *Lonesome Dove* [1989]—civilization disintegrates as it is built) seems to be living in happy anarchy. It certainly doesn't need Gannon—but it doesn't need Jeff's meanness, either.

Many years ago, Mark Rappaport presented a paper to the Columbia University Seminar on Cinema and Interdisciplinary Interpretation, which was later incorporated into his film *Color Me Lavender* (1997), that deals with the gay themes of *The Far Country*. Robin Wood trod this ground in the late Sixties in discussing Howard Hawks, especially *Rio Bravo* (1959). Of course *any* Western (or action film for that matter, as focused on male emotion as they are) can be queered, but *The Far Country* represents a stunning case. Jeff and Ben have plans to build a house in Utah (of all places); on his saddle horn Jeff has a tiny bell destined to be a doorbell in their finished home. What? Ben is killed, but the bell survives, representing Ben's presence as much as Jeff's reborn conscience—the bell is the focus of the film's final shot, with Renee looking at Jeff, as if providing heterosexual benediction. Mann is certainly applauding male bonding and intimate domestic life, if not gay romance.

Some writers have posited Mann as a jobbing studio director rather than an auteur, but, speaking of Robin Wood, the late critic noted that Mann's Westerns have a consistency of focus whether his screenwriter is the excellent Borden Chase or the equally talented Reginald Rose, who authored the final film of Mann's Western cycle, *Man of the West*, a stunning accomplishment, borrowing from Dickens, Freud, Gothic fiction, and expressionism; it is Mann's fullest realization (within a Western) of *King Lear*, with Gary Cooper rather than Stewart. The Stewart–Mann breakup was fortuitous, when we see the shock and clenched-teeth torment in Cooper's face, exceeding even the anger and hysteria of Stewart's characters. Mann is one of the talented filmmakers (he began directing *Spartacus* before Kirk Douglas sacked him) of Hollywood's final phase.

Jeff Webster (James Stewart) and his partner Ben Tatum (Walter Brennan) drive their cattle into Skagway in the opening scene of Anthony Mann's *The Far Country*.

Arrow Video and Arrow Academy easily rival Criterion and Kino Lorber in their conscientious restoration of important films, with Arrow dealing with genre, Arrow Academy "art" cinema. *The Far Country* is presented in a crisp 4K, all-region 1.85:1 aspect ratio transfer with a 2.00:1 version on a separate disc, featuring an amiable, intelligent commentary by Adrian Martin, and a documentary about Mann at Universal with commentary by Alan K. Rode, C. Courtney Joyner, Michael Preece, Michael Schlesinger, and Rob Ward. In another supplementary documentary, critic Kim Newman offers background remarks about *The Far Country* that are useful for those unfamiliar with Mann, and the two-disc set also includes a fine booklet essay by Philip Kemp. With this package, accompanied by Eureka's release of *The Man from Laramie* and *Man of the West*, Kino Lorber's *Bend of the River*, and Warner Bros.'s *The Naked Spur* (not a Blu-ray), Anthony Mann's Westerns might enjoy renewed consideration.

—Christopher Sharrett

Fragment of an Empire

Directed by Fridrikh Ermler; screenplay by Katerina Vinogradskaia and Fridrikh Ermler; cinematography by Yevgenii Shneider and Yevgenii Mikhailov (exteriors); film editor not listed; set design by Yevgenii Yenei; original piano score by Vladimir Deshevov and a second score by Stephen Horne and Frank Bockius; starring Fiodor Nikitin, Liudmilla Semionova, and Valerii Solovtsov. Dual Edition Blu-ray and DVD, B&W, silent with English subtitles and a choice of two scores, 110 min., 1929. A Flicker Alley release, www.flickeralley.com.

Among the exceptional generation of Soviet directors who emerged during the first fifteen years of Bolshevik rule, Fridrikh Ermler is the least well known. Not that he has been entirely forgotten: Jay Leyda, Denise J. Youngblood, and several other recent commentators mention him respectfully in their books and articles. In general, they have gauged the value of his work through the prism of "realism" since several of his early films reflect some of the existing social inequities and tensions that Lenin and Stalin permitted to be aired in the new medium over the course of the 1920s. Describing his style in this way, however, obscures much that is of artistic interest about *Fragment of an Empire*, his best film. Released on October 28, 1929, just as Soviet film culture approached the end of what the late film scholar Annette Michelson called "the heroic period of Soviet cinema," audiences who watched it at its premiere probably had little inkling that only a couple of years later Stalin and his cultural henchmen would crush most exploratory innovations in cinema as well as the more traditional arts.

Born Fridrikh Markovitch Beslav in 1898, Ermler grew up in a small, predominantly Jewish, Latvian town in Czarist Russia's Pale of Settlement. As a movie-mad teenager who came of age simultaneously with the development of cinema, his future filmmaking career would have been highly improbable given the regime's restrictions on the areas in which Jews could live and the occupations they could pursue. The Russian Revolution at least initially exploded most such impediments to social mobility. Like other provincial Russian Jews (or those of Jewish origin) who became filmmakers—Vertov (born in Białystok, 1896), Eisenstein (born in Riga, 1898), or Mikhail Romm (born in Irkutsk, 1901), to name only three—the Revolution and the subsequent Civil War swept Ermler into the Bolshevik ranks as they fought against the reactionary White Russian armies. He served as a spy for the Revolutionary Military Commissariat (where he learned to speak proper Russian) and, after joining the Communist Party in 1919, he worked for several years in the intelligence division of the feared Cheka, the state "security" police. Along the way, like Vertov (or Trotsky, too, for that matter), Beslav changed his name to help him assimilate into what many younger left-leaning Jews hoped would become a more openly tolerant and egalitarian Soviet society. His new identity as "Ermler," with its barely veiled connotations of poverty in his native Yiddish, clearly signaled his sympathetic identification with those the communists were ostensibly fighting for.

Unlike most of his future filmmaking peers whose Marxist–Leninist convictions remained more intellectual and armchair in character, however, Ermler became a True Believer in the party and its leadership. He remained a staunch supporter of the communist cause after Lenin's death, and remained faithful even after Stalin imposed a ruthless dictatorship. Sad to say, Ermler's politically tendentious propaganda films over the course of the 1930s and 1940s clearly supported the noxious regime's artistic strictures and turned a blind eye to its cynical, murderous politics. That Ermler's films won no fewer than four Stalin Prizes says all too much about his political loyalties and personal caginess.

This brief career overview makes his achievement in *Fragment of an Empire* all the more surprising and fascinating. Ermler was able to complete it, seemingly without compromise, in the wake of the Communist Party's first major salvo against "decadent" Western film styles at the conference on Soviet cinema the political leadership staged in March 1928 to rein in Soviet directors' stylistic experiments. In an obvious way, *Fragment*, like Ermler's previous "realist" films—*Katka's Reinette Apples* (1926), *The Parisian Cobbler* (1928), and *House in the Snowdrift* (1928)—reflects the emerging communist cultural principles because it highlights the fate of individuals in a way the party regarded as "accessible to the millions." But the film itself as a whole is anything but orthodox.

Like the earlier Ermler films just mentioned, *Fragment* stars Fiodor Nikitin, a Stanislavsky-trained actor, who gives here perhaps the finest performance of his career. He plays a factory worker, Filimonov, who is traumatized by shellshock while serving as a soldier in the Czar's army during the First World War. He loses his memory and identity for ten years, precisely the period in which the Bolsheviks won their revolution and began the construction of "real existing socialism" in the new Soviet Union. A chance encounter at a provincial train station with a woman who turns out to be his former wife rekindles his memory and he returns in search of his past to St. Petersburg, his hometown where he had lived, worked, and loved.

He is at first unnerved by the massive new modern buildings (actually filmed in Kharkiv, Ukraine), then amazed at the new social and economic mores on display in the de-Imperialized streets of the former Imperial capital. Women bob their hair and wear stockings. The owner of the factory where he worked has been discharged and reduced to a cramped bourgeois existence in retirement. Once back on the job at the factory in which he labored before the war, Filimonov is stunned when the Soviet government's friendly inspector comes over to welcome him and shake his hand. His naiveté leads him to ask puzzling questions that engender laughter and incredulity among his co-workers. The story's arc seems bent on transforming a Soviet version of Rip van Winkle awakened from a decade-long political sleep into an updated *yurodivy*, a naive Russian religious figure of a holy fool whose simplemindedness and questioning provokes consternation.

There is a kind of happy end to the story, although it also bears an ominous foreshadowing of events that would unfold—indeed, were already unfolding at the time. Even as Filimonov grows accustomed to his work and develops new, supportive friends, something, or rather someone, is missing: Filimonov's wife. In a rather unlikely coincidence, the chief of the factory, whom Filimonov had saved from being shot by White sympathizers during the Civil War, encourages him to meet his wife and hands over her address. Filimonov soon learns, however, that she has changed and not for the better. Remarried to a hypocritical "culture worker" who champions women's participation in the workplace but insists upon a traditional patriarchal division of labor at home, she is unhappy. (In fact, in another, not very believable coincidence, her new mate may even be the former White thug who had threatened to kill Filimonov's friendly boss.) Arriving at her apartment, Filimonov makes a romantic pitch, and his former wife is momentarily tempted to leave