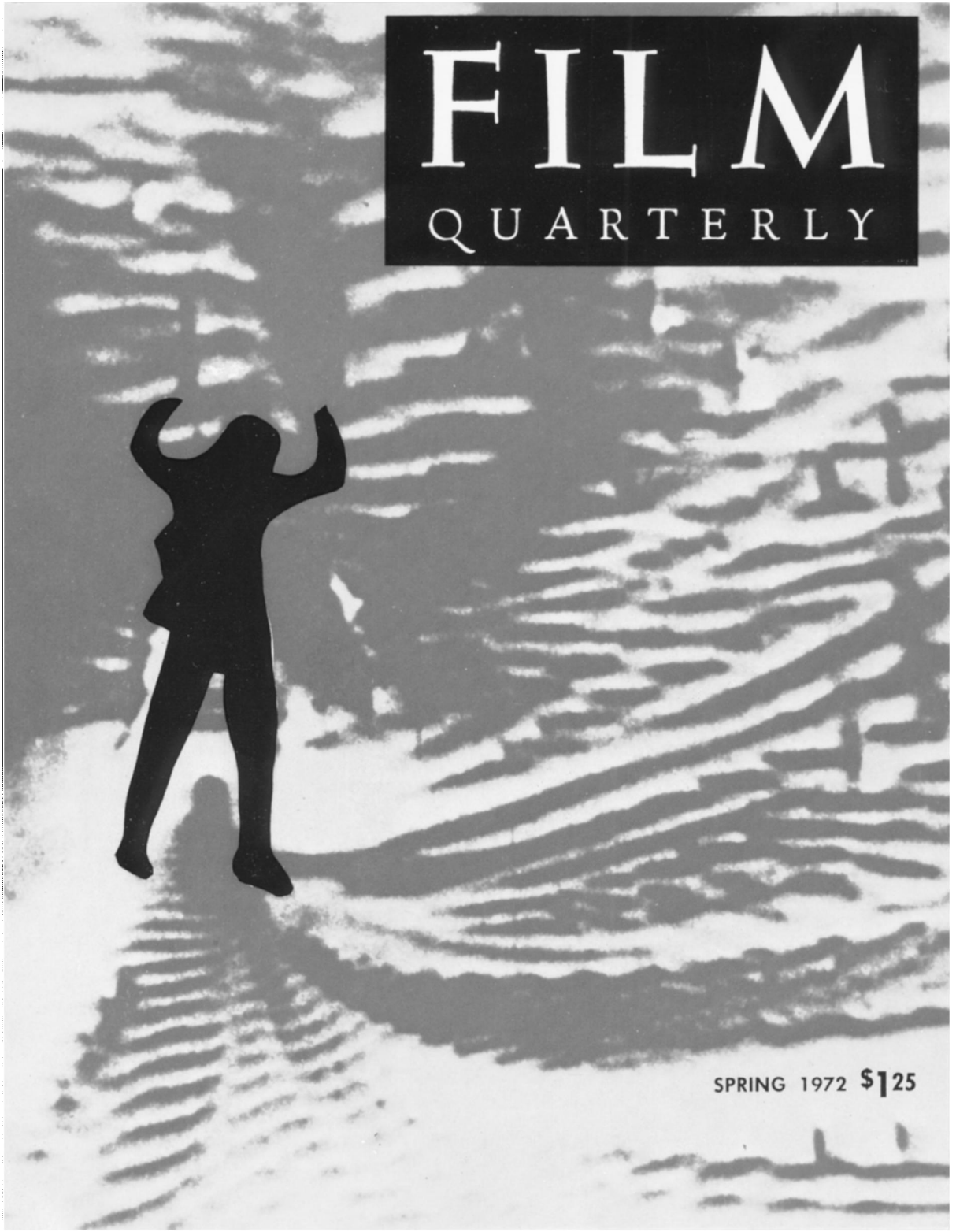

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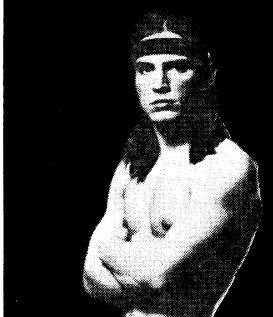

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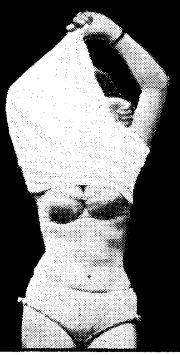

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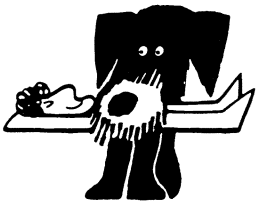

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VOLUME XXV, No. 3 Spring 1972

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FILM QUARTERLY is published by the University of California Press, Berkeley, California 94720. $1.25 per copy, $5.00 per year in the U.S., Canada, and Pan-America. Special two year subscription rate, $8.00. Elsewhere: $6.00 per year. Institutional rates slightly higher. Editor: Ernest Callenbach. Assistant Editor: Marigay Graña. Los Angeles Editor: Stephen Farber. London Editor: Colin Young. Paris Editor: Ginette Billard. Rome Editor: Gideon Bachmann. Advisory Editorial Board: Andries Deinum, August Fruge, Hugh Gray, Albert Johnson, James Kerans, Neal Oxenhandler. Views expressed in signed articles are those of the authors. Indexed in *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Art Index,* and *Social Sciences and Humanities Index.* Published quarterly. Second-class postage paid at Berkeley, California. Printed in U.S.A.

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JAMES ROY MacBEAN

Sex and Politics

WILHELM REICH, WORLD REVOLUTION, AND MAKAVEJEV'S WR

Nearly fifteen years after his death, Wilhelm Reich is beginning to get some long overdue attention, particularly from the American New Left, which is discovering, as Paul Goodman put it, that "more than any other figure of our times, Reich has had things to say—and do—essential for the chief revolutionary actions of the young, whether in their politics or their hippie life style: indeed he is the connecting link between these tendencies." Makavejev's WR confronts the Reichian challenge directly.

In the past few months, there has been a sudden surge of interest in Reich, evidenced by new American editions of several pioneering works from the early part of Reich's lifelong research into human sexuality, the human psyche, and the psychosexual foundations of political behavior. (The original American editions of many of Reich's books were mostly burned by the Federal Food and Drug Administration after Reich's death in 1957). A new translation of Reich's very important *Die Massenpsychologie des Faschismus* (The Mass Psychology of Fascism) has recently been published in paperback by Noonday Press, and the same publisher has just brought out the first English translation of Reich's companion-piece to his study of fascism, *Der Einbruch der Sexualmoral* (*The Invasion of Compulsory Sex-Morality*). In addition, the October 1971 issue of *Liberation* is devoted entirely to Reich and includes the first English translation of Reich's 1934 essay "What Is Class-Consciousness?"—an essay Reich wrote in response to certain criticisms from the left of his study of fascism.

Another related manifestation of a burgeoning Reich renaissance is the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based publication *The Radical Therapist*, which serves as a mobilizing broadsheet for a group of young psychologists and psychological social workers who are committed to the notion that "therapy is change . . . not adjustment." Included in their December 1971 issue (which pictures Reich on the cover) is an article devoted to Reich's correlation of sexual and political repression, and a translation of the concluding chapter from Reich's *The Sexual Struggle of Youth.*

In addition—and this is what mainly concerns us here—a number of widely discussed feature films have been released in the last year or so which, with widely varying degrees of insight and artfulness, have directed the filmgoer's attention to issues of sex and politics which Wilhelm Reich was one of the first to explore. Of these films—among which the most prominent are Visconti's *The Damned,* Petri's *Investigation of A Citizen Above Suspicion,* Z by Costas-Gavras, and Bertolucci's *The Conformist*—far and away the most original and most probing film, in my opinion, is Yugoslav film-maker Dusan Makavejev's *WR: The Mysteries of the Organism.* And not incidentally, I would argue, of all the films just mentioned Makavejev's is the only one explicitly inspired by the film-maker's desire to come to grips with the life and work of Wilhelm Reich.

REICH, FREUD AND MARX

However, before undertaking an analysis of this complex film, I think it will be useful to summarize briefly the main points of Wilhelm Reich's pioneering work in the field of sex and politics. As a young protegé of Freud in the 1920's and early 1930's, Reich directed his attention to the overwhelming importance of infantile and adolescent sexuality in the development of personality. What seems to have been the catalyst for Reich's examination of the relations between sex and politics was the recognition that parental suppression of naturally developing sexuality in their children has the effect of anchoring, in the character-structure of the individual, the authoritarian and repressive principle on which class society is based. In other words, Reich saw that the patriarchal family's authoritarian structure and its taboos on childhood sexuality were tremendously effective *ideological* weapons that served to perpetuate and reinforce, on the *unconscious* level, the authoritarian political structures of class society.

Unlike Freud, however, who believed that the Oedipal conflict—and therefore sexual repression—were biologically rooted, Reich argued that sexual repression was unknown in matriarchal societies and therefore could not be biologically rooted, but was rather the historical product of the rise of patriarchal, authoritarian class society. For Reich, in other words, *suppression* of sexuality by society preceded and produced the individual's internalized *repression* of sexuality. In answer to the troublesome question of *why* society suppressed sexuality (Freud's answer was "for the sake of culture"), Reich took the boldly materialist position that it was for the sake of class interest: he traced sexual suppression to the interests of the ruling class in protecting its inheritance lines and property; he pointed out that, historically, chastity was first imposed upon members of the ruling class alone, particularly the patrician women. Sexual repression then becomes the rule in all classes of society simply because, as Marx pointed out, "the dominant ideology in any society is always the ideology of the dominant class." And, of course, the exploited classes are by no means immune to envying the ruling class and either consciously emulating "their betters" or unconsciously internalizing the ruling class values.

It was this "mass-psychological" vulnerability of the exploited classes that intrigued Reich as he began to study the burgeoning fascist movement in Germany in the early thirties. In his brilliantly prophetic *The Mass-Psychology of Fascism*—originally written in 1933, revised and enlarged in 1935 and again in 1945—Reich analyzed the powerful emotional content of fascism, pointing out that the German masses were attracted to the Nazi movement not so much by its political platform (which was purposely vague) as by the emotional appeal of mystical notions of "blood," "racial purity," "fatherland," "Master Race," etc. Through close readings of innumerable Nazi pamphlets and texts, as well as of the Nazi propaganda distributed through the German churches and religious organizations, Reich brought to light the underlying sexual content of these mystical notions; and he argued that religious mysticism —indeed all mysticism—was a symptom of unfulfilled, repressed, or distorted sexuality. The "mystical longing," he maintained, was really an "unconscious orgastic longing."

Because mysticism was such an important element of fascism, Reich argued that combatting fascism on the strictly rational level of political analysis would be futile, and that since, in his view, both mysticism and authoritarianism could be traced to repressed sexuality, the way to combat fascism was to combat sexual repression. As a therapist, Reich's way of combatting sexual repression, however, was very different, theoretically and practically, from Freud's "depth psychology" approach, for Reich concentrated on the *physiological* manifestations of repression—on the rigid, tense, unyielding muscular "armor" which the individual uses to shield his emotional vulnerability. And instead of using therapy to help sublimate libidinal energy away from direct sexual expression into what Freud considered more

socially constructive channels, Reich boldly rejected the value of sublimation, which he saw as still another way in which the ruling class inculcated in the working masses "civic virtues" which were against their individual and class interests. He proclaimed that only free and unmitigated satisfaction of mature genital sexuality could be genuinely healthful and liberating for the individual. And only by liberating individual sexuality, Reich argued, could the authoritarian behavior structures of class society be eliminated. Toward this end, Reich, who at this period in his career conceived of his "sex-economy" approach as filling a long-ignored gap *within* Marxism, founded a Communist youth group known as *Sexpol* and organized informal dances and open forums for Communist youth where problems of sex rather than politics were the topic of discussion and where the avowed goals were to encourage and assist young people to attain a full and healthy sexual expression.

As one might expect, such a heretical approach got Reich in trouble with the "vulgar Marxists" who controlled the Communist Party; but it also got him in trouble with Freud and the politically conservative psychoanalysts —with the result that by 1933 Reich was excluded from both the German Psychoanalytic Society and the German Communist Party. And by 1934 he went into hasty exile from Hitler's rapidly burgeoning fascist state.

Reich settled briefly in Norway, where he developed his body-oriented therapy, then came to the US in 1939. Extremely bitter and resentful over the German Communist Party's refusal to heed his warnings regarding Hitler's mass appeal, and particularly rankled by the Party's hostility towards his attempts to redirect the energies of the Marxist movement to the neglected "cultural front," Reich gradually but strikingly changed his mind about Marxism, eventually railing against the Communists—whom he called "red fascists"—and heralding the average bourgeois American as the world's greatest hope for genuine liberation. Thumbing his nose at all politics, Reich devoted his later years in America to esoteric research on something he called "Cosmic Orgone Energy," to which he attributed marvelous powers, including fuller orgasms and the cure of cancer.

SEX AND POLITICS IN SOME RECENT FILMS

Turning now to look at the way the relations between sex and politics are examined in some recent films, it seems to me that with this brief introduction to Reich's thought fresh in our mind we will be better equipped to appreciate the complexity of Makavejev's *WR: The Mysteries of the Organism* and to understand more clearly just how simplistic is the superficial "Reichianism" heralded in films like *The Damned, Investigation of A Citizen Above Suspicion, Z,* and *The Conformist.* Let us deal with this latter issue first.

The claim has been made—somewhat misleadingly, I think, by Joan Mellen (see her "Fascism in the Contemporary Film," *FQ,* Summer 1971)—that the portrait of the fascist mentality that emerges from these films corresponds to Wilhelm Reich's theory of the psychosexual foundations of political behavior. However, more than merely establishing certain similarities in approach, Mellen encourages us to take the picture of fascism presented in these films as Reich's picture of fascism, and she deals with each detail of character portrayal in each of these films as if they were individual instances conceived by the film-makers to exemplify Reich's general theory.

Attempting to defend these films against the charge that their relating homosexuality to fascism is simplistic, Mellen invokes Reich—carefully adding, however, that "the implication is not that homosexuals all display such a pattern. Too many homosexuals are artists, rebels, and gentle people for that." Here I think Mellen misses an important point: the implication which needs guarding against is not the obvious oversimplification that all homosexuals are fascists, but rather the more insidious oversimplification that all fascists are homosexuals or have latent homosexual tendencies.

Moreover, the *singling out* of homosexuality as *the* fascist character-structure (a point em-

Reich being hauled off to jail.

phasized by each of these films) does not at all correspond to Reich's views, which were that the roots of fascism are in the "normal" family, particularly in parental suppression of the naturally developing sexuality of the child. It is this "normal" inhibition of sexuality which, according to Reich, "makes the child apprehensive, shy, obedient, afraid of authority, 'good' and 'adjusted' in the authoritarian sense; it paralyzes the rebellious forces because any rebellion is laden with anxiety. . . . At first the child has to adjust to the authoritarian miniature-state, the family; this makes it capable of later subordination to the general authoritarian system."

In short, there is a vast difference between Reich's position and that reflected in *The Damned, Investigation of A Citizen Above Suspicion, The Conformist,* and *Z:* while Reich offers a process-oriented approach that sees both homosexuality and fascism as *effects* of sexual repression, these films either invite a terribly simplistic notion of cause and effect ("They were fascists because they were homosexuals") or they simply equate the two, omitting any consideration of their underlying causes. In addition—and this is especially deplorable—these films all too often make the correlation between homosexuality and fascism in a snickering, elbow-nudging way that merely invites the spectator to add a self-righteous condemnation of the fascists' sexual behavior to a self-righteous condemnation of their political behavior. Far from inviting us to consider —as Reich did—the ways in which our "normal" sexual mores might contribute to the development of fascism, these films offer us a scapegoat—the homosexual—which absolves us of responsibility for fascism and allows us to gloat in smug complacency over the evil decadence of these fascist "perverts."

WR: THE MYSTERIES OF THE ORGANISM

Fortunately, however, a film has come along which confronts Reich's ideas directly and, unlike the work of Visconti, Petri, or Bertolucci, succeeds admirably in suggesting the complexity of Reich's notions on the psychosexual foundations of political behavior. Makavejev describes his film as "in part, a personal response to the life and work of Wilhelm Reich."

WR—the initials, by the way, stand not only for "Wilhelm Reich" but also for "World Revolution"—actually seems to start out as a free-wheeling documentary on Reich; then not quite a quarter of the way into the film it takes a sudden lurch into fiction with the introduction of a parallel plot set in contemporary Yugoslavia (Makavejev's homeland); and from then on the film jumps back and forth from America (Reich's adopted home) to Yugoslavia, from more or less "documentary" material to more or less "fictional" material, and from sex to politics as well as from politics to sex.

Makavejev edits all this diverse material with a great deal of virtuosity and brio; he is an immensely talented film-maker whose experiments with *montage* and *collage* are among the most stimulating and original to come along in recent years. (For a penetrating analysis of Makavejev's earlier films—*Man Is Not a Bird, Love Affair: The Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator,* and *Innocence Unprotected*—see Robin Wood's essay on Makavejev in *Second Wave,* published in America by Praeger.)

While sharing certain characteristics in common with Godard's experiments with montage and collage, Makavejev's films have a greater emotional density than Godard's most recent

films (although not more than, say, *Vivre sa Vie, Une Femme Mariée,* and *Masculin-Féminin*) and Makavejev's work probably shares more affinities with the early Surrealist experiments of Buñuel (*Un Chien Andalou, L'Âge d'Or,* and *Las Hurdes*) than with anything else. And although Makavejev acknowledges the fundamental importance of Eisenstein's theoretical elaboration of montage, his own use of montage differs radically from Eisenstein's: whereas the author of *Potemkin* used montage primarily to reinforce an idea or an emotion, Makavejev uses it to build a highly complex network of cross-references, associations, and above all, of contradictions—with the result that one montage-cell does not reinforce another but rather calls it into question.

In *WR: The Mysteries of the Organism,* however, the complexity of the collage construction is almost undermined and neutralized by the insistent—and, to some, irritating—tone of light-hearted humor that sometimes smacks of the crowd-pleasing ploy aimed at young audiences who couldn't help but respond favorably to the film's bouncy appeal for sexual freedom. While I personally do not find this to be a major problem, I am aware that there is a danger that the film's flippant tone will make Makavejev's treatment of sex and politics seem deceptively facile and frivolous.*

This is a particularly strong danger in a film dealing with Wilhelm Reich, for even many of Reich's admirers will admit that there is a great difference between Reich's early illuminating work in Europe and his later, seemingly facile and far-fetched work in America. Opting for a tone of irreverence and *insouciance* throughout his film, Makavejev seems to have focused primarily, if not exclusively, on later Reich—and in doing this he has perhaps compounded the weaknesses and contradictions embodied in Reich himself.

In any case, where the man himself is concerned, the film tells us very little, for the documentary material on Reich is, by necessity I am sure, rather thin. Even scouring archives in Germany and America, Makavejev was able to come up with very little documentation on film of the young Reich's activities with the German *Sexpol* organization he helped found in the early 1930's; nor, for that matter, could he find much film footage of Reich's activities during his later years of exile in America. So, aside from a snapshot glimpse or two of Reich himself, what we see in *WR* is footage shot by Makavejev's small 16mm crew during their 1968 visit to the little town in Maine where Reich had lived and worked in his later years.

There are brief, amusing interviews with local people who knew Reich—including one with the pokerfaced deputy-sheriff who doubles as town barber stepping out of his barber shop in his police uniform to tell us that, yes, he cut Dr. Reich's hair many times, and that "Dr. Reich was a little eccentric; he didn't wear his hair like normal people"—pointing, as he says this, to his own "butch" crewcut. (This fortuitous little anecdote has very rich associations and connotations, evoking as it does the politically as well as sexually repressive notions of "normality" that dominate society—and which Reich devoted his life to combatting.)

Then, too, there are brief interviews with Reich's widow (who accuses the socialist countries of stifling and suppressing the "creative individual") and with Reich's son, who recalls the time his father grabbed a gun and went to confront a bunch of Maine citizens who had marched up to Reich's research center shouting "Down with the Commies, down with the Orggies"—the latter being their term for Reich and his Orgone Research colleagues. A tape recording of Reich's own voice then recounts this event, with Reich explaining that he simply told the angry mob he was no more a communist than they were; that he, too—"like everybody else"—had just voted for Eisenhower, and that, in fact, if they wanted to fight the Commies, he was glad, adding

*In San Francisco, the exhibitors advertised *WR* in the sex-house section and it closed in a week. In Boston, newspapers refused to run ads for the film. Its "real" run, on university campuses, has not yet begun.

"I've been fighting the Commies longer than you have."

Finally, there is a long tracking shot of the forbidding outer walls of Lewisburg Penitentiary in Pennsylvania where Reich died in 1957 while serving a two-year sentence for contempt of court arising out of his refusal to appear to answer charges alleging that he violated interstate commerce laws in selling his Orgone Accumulator Boxes, which the US Government argued "could have deleterious effects on one's health." Prison authorities at Lewisburg, by the way, refused Makavejev's request to do any filming inside the prison.

In addition to the material on Reich himself, there is some brief footage devoted to Reich's disciples and their ongoing practice of Reichian therapy. This footage is of two basic types: there are interview-statements by several Reichian therapists who explain one or another aspect of their practice of therapy, and there is some brief footage of therapy in process. In the first category, Dr. Alexander Lowen (author of *Love and Orgasm*) does a slightly hammy demonstration of the way a person's inner tensions are expressed in "body language"—what Reich called "character armor." Another protegé of Reich's gives us a humorous explanation and demonstration of how the Orgone Accumulator Box supposedly works. In general, the Reichian therapists come off as rather nice, gregarious people, but there is just enough of a touch of glibness about them to evoke the kind of skepticism which we muster when we suspect we're somehow being taken.

Footage of actual therapy in progress, however, reveals a more serious—although not necessarily more reassuring—aspect of the Reichians' approach to psychological problems. When we see patients being encouraged to scream and sob and shake, we may recognize the therapeutic potential of their giving physical vent to their emotional tensions, but the actual experience of therapy itself seems so traumatic we may wonder if the cure isn't likely to be as psychologically disturbing as whatever was bothering them in the first place. And since Makavejev gives us only very brief glimpses of isolated aspects of Reichian therapy but does not provide us enough information to place these within the context of an overall program, whatever we do see is very likely to appear gratuitous and merely exotic. This is particularly true of the footage where we see a huge roomful of men and women lying in rows on the floor, stripped down to underwear or bathing suits, taking turns standing on each other's stomachs or jumping up and down on each other's buttocks. (Moreover, the poor lighting of this footage—producing a fuzzy image—combined with the prominence in the foreground of several very fat individuals in their underwear, unfortunately evokes a rather dingy, sleazy atmosphere that would not even be flattering to a reducing salon—which is what the scene resembles.)

All in all, then, Makavejev's presentation of Reich and Reichian therapy raises a great many questions in our minds, not just about Reich but also about Makavejev's attitude toward Reich. Obviously he is sympathetic to Reich, and the film is in some ways a tribute to Reich, but it is also clear, I think, that Makavejev's attitude toward Reich is by no means uncritical. And this is a very healthy sign. For one thing, it enables us to begin to appreciate the complexity of the relations between sex and politics which Reich was one of the first to examine.

To further complicate matters, Makavejev suddenly introduces in rapid succession two new blocs of material whose relation to Reichian therapy or to Reich's ideas in general is very ambiguous. The first, introduced in the guise of a "Sexpol film, Yugoslavia, 1971," is a humorous allegorical fiction about a cute Yugoslav girl (Milena Dravic) who, much to the chagrin of her jealous worker boy friend, advocates "free love." Significantly, this allegorical fiction (which will dominate the latter half of the film) begins with an argument between Milena and her boy friend, who yells angrily that she is betraying her working-class origins by hanging around with the "free love" crowd, whom he contemptuously accuses of

indulging in the same kind of consumer-product fetishism as the capitalists. In a pun on "Max Factor," he shouts that Yugoslavians are urged to buy "Marx Factor"—and at this instant Makavejev cuts to a shot of New York's 42nd St. and a heavily made-up drag queen sharing an ice cream-cone with his/her homosexual boy friend. Since this travelling shot, which follows the "couple" as they walk, is obviously not a part of the Yugoslav material, and since it brings us back to America, we associate it with the Reichian documentary material and suspect that it somehow refers to still another aspect of the Reichian movement in America —an association which is strengthened when Makavejev cuts from this shot to more documentary footage of Reichian therapy in action.

However, although certain associations with the Reichian movement are intentionally set up by it, this shot itself belongs to a third bloc of material that is neither documentary footage on Reich nor part of the allegorical fiction set in Yugoslavia, its function being to mediate between these other two types of material and to raise questions about both of them. Also included in this third bloc of intercut material are a brief visit to the office of *Screw* magazine (whose editorial staff walks around nude), an interview with a woman artist who specializes in painting portraits of people in the act of masturbating, and a long sequence which examines an enterprising young sculptress's process of making a plaster cast of an erect penis in order to turn out "individualized" penis-shaped sculptures for display on your own or your girlfriend's coffeetable. Aside from its shock value and its humorous quality, this material seems intended primarily to illustrate what Makavejev considers certain characteristically American *aberrations* of sexual identity. Makavejev has said, (*Positif*, July-August 1971), that the case of the drag queen—who later in the film recounts his first homosexual experience and reveals that, turned on to homosexuality, he went transvestite, only to be spurned by his original homosexual partner, who, "being used to boys, just couldn't make it with 'girls' "—seems to him perfectly symbolic of contemporary America's deep confusion over sexual identity.

The intercut material also has the effect, however, of calling into question Reich's ideas —particularly the directions his later work in America was leading him. Although Makavejev is careful to respect the integrity of the documentary material on Reich and Reichian therapy, nonetheless, his montage construction of the film as a whole suggests certain associations and affinities between Reichian sexology and the attitudes towards sex of the individuals in the intercut material. And as bizarre as these attitudes may seem, there is, after all, almost a family resemblance between them and the Reichian pitch on the Orgone Accumulator Box. In fact, the penis-sculptures, the masturbation-portraits, and the Orgone Box might all be considered fertility or potency *fetishes*. (My own guess is that Reich intended the Orgone Box to function as just such a fetish and thereby to open up a *mythic* dimension that would hopefully enable people to relate more freely and fully to their own sexuality.)

The problem with fetishes, however, as Marx brilliantly observed, is that in capitalist society all consumer-products are fetishes (and today nearly all have sexual overtones, as scrutiny of any advertising pitch will reveal). For contemporary Americans, then, the mythic dimension is plugged directly into the consumer economy of advanced capitalism, which tries to sell us ever greater quantities of fetishes. Instead of liberating our natural sexuality, we get bogged down at the level of what Marcuse calls repressive desublimation, where, deluded by the new aura of permissiveness and hedonism cultivated by advertising, we throw ourselves—without any more guilt pangs, but *compulsively* nonetheless—into the consumption of sex, which becomes another commodity. The old Puritan morality which was necessary to a society dominated by scarcity has given way to a new, more permissive but equally repressive morality geared to serve the needs of the consumer society.

But Makavejev's use of the intercut material

not only points out the fetishistic aspect of American society, it also comments on the fetishistic aspect of Russian communism, particularly under Stalin. There the mythic dimension is plugged directly into politically cultivated hero-worship. Stalin becomes a fetish. And a cut from a shot of Stalin (as played by the actor Guelovani) to a shot of the finished penis-sculpture, then back to Stalin, clearly suggests the affinities between these two fetishes—both of them representing, at the psychic level, sexual energy that has become rigid and lifeless while enshrined as an object of veneration.

But in order to understand clearly the rich implications of Makavejev's montage of the Stalin-footage, we need to establish, as closely as possible, the shot-by-shot progression of this important sequence. As Milena finishes her impromptu speech advocating free love, she joins arms with the Yugoslav workers whom she has been haranguing and leads them in a triumphal march around the inner balcony of the low-cost apartment house where they all live (recalling, incidentally, the central courtyard which, more than just functioning as a décor, was almost the central protagonist in Renoir and Prévert's examination of a workers's community in *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*). At this point, as they move from left to right across the screen, Makavejev cuts to a shot of Mao, also moving left to right across the screen as he walks along a reviewing stand waving triumphantly to a huge throng of admirers, who, red book in hand, jubilantly wave back. The last words of Milena, just before the cut, are that "Socialism without fucking is dull and lifeless." The first impression created by this statement and the sudden cut to Mao is that Mao's brand of socialism is not exempt from Milena's criticism. However, as the camera moves from Mao himself to the wildly cheering sea of humanity in the huge public square, we are reminded that, numerically at least, the world's most populous nation must necessarily do a healthy amount of fucking; and that in this literal sense, "lifeless" is hardly a word that applies to China.

To add to the ambiguity, however, Makavejev then cuts to a shot of Stalin, who is also parading triumphantly from left to right across the screen. Moreover, superimposed on the shot of Stalin (again, it is the actor Guelovani) are images of Nazi flags unfurled beneath Stalin's feet as he walks. Not having seen Tchiaorelli's *The Pledge* (1946), which is the film Makavejev has borrowed his Stalin footage from, I can't say whether the superimposed flags are part of the original or whether Makavejev has added them; but more likely they are in the original and were used to suggest that to Stalin goes the credit for trampling underfoot the infamous Nazi banner. Here, however, in the context of Makavejev's *WR*, the Nazi flags suggest a certain affinity between Stalin and Nazism and seem to indicate that the path down which Stalin was leading socialism was in reality the path of fascism.

This latter interpretation clearly becomes the dominant if not the exclusive one, when immediately following Stalin's ceremonious declaration that the Russian Revolution not only destroyed the old bourgeois order but also succeeded in building a new socialist order, Makavejev intercuts a gruesome shot of a hospital patient being force-fed by having a tube jammed up his nose while uniformed attendants hold him down (an image which recalls an almost identical shot in Frederick Wiseman's *Titicut Follies*). Then there is a cut back to Stalin, who declares that Russian Communism continues to advance on the path marked out by Lenin—"with the present leaders carrying out each directive he passed on to us." And at this instant, Makavejev cuts to another hospital patient (or perhaps the same one?) being given electric shock treatment which induces uncontrollable body spasms.

The implication is obvious here, and although one could argue that Makavejev intends the reference to Lenin ironically in order to point out how Stalin invoked Lenin's name to justify policies of ruthless self-aggrandizement, nonetheless, in light of the thinly veiled indictment of Lenin which later follows, this particular sequence must be seen as the film's first attempt to trace the authoritarian and repressive trends in Soviet Communism to Lenin himself. Finally, the sequence closes with a return to Stalin, then a cut to the young American sculptress removing the finished penis-sculpture from the plaster cast and placing it for display on a table, followed by a cut back to Stalin again as he proudly announces that "the first stage of communism has been achieved"—at which point Makavejev intercuts one final shot of a mental patient repeatedly banging his head against the wall of his locked cell.

At the close of this important sequence, then, a certain "false climax" has been reached, and Makavejev has skillfully and humorously associated the betrayal of the genuinely liberating potential of the Russian Revolution with the channelling of sexual energy into rigid and lifeless fetishes. Now the scene returns to Yugoslavia and there ensues a gradual development of the fictional plot of Milena's love life.

The Russian Ice Follies come to Belgrade. Milena and her roommate attend a performance, where a pair of Yugoslav soldiers on leave try to pick them up. Milena, however, is fascinated by the handsome star of the ice show, the Russian figure-skating champion, named Vladimir Ilyich. She goes backstage to meet him, flirts with him, and invites him to accompany her back to her apartment. Once there, Milena and Vladimir carry on a conversation that is quite funny due to Vladimir's persistence in avoiding Milena's questions about his personal life—which he dismisses by saying that personal accomplishments don't matter much when, as in Russia, everyone is "happy to be a servant of the state." Moreover, Vladimir remains so caught up in his pronouncements of lofty idealism that he is completely oblivious to the antics of Milena's comely roommate, who has casually taken off all her clothes and nearly sat in his lap in an unsuccessful attempt to get his attention. Meanwhile, Milena's working-class boy friend —who has been locked out by Milena—uses his pickaxe to break through the wall from the

nextdoor apartment, barging in triumphantly and shouting that he will "protect Milena from bourgeois intellectuals," as he throws Vladimir Ilyich into a closet which he nails shut.

After some brief (rather gratuitous) intercut material depicting the antics of a street-theater "guerilla-fighter" who clowns around the financial district of New York City with a toy machine-gun, the film returns to Milena and Vladimir as they go for a walk in the snow—apparently the morning following the scene in Milena's apartment. Vladimir's incarceration in the closet seems to have been in fun and presumably brief, for he laughs over the incident and speaks admiringly of Milena's boy friend's having broken right through a wall to protect her. He also speaks of having enjoyed listening to music the night before—particularly, he says, the Appassionata Sonata by Beethoven. "The trouble is," he adds, "I can't listen to music too often. It's bad for my nerves; it makes me want to say stupid, nice things and stroke people gently on the head; but you stroke people on the head today and you might get your hand bitten off. What we need to do today . . ." he adds with sudden anger, "is hit people over the head, without mercy . . . although in principle of course we are opposed to all violence."

These words—which Makavejev puts in the mouth of his Russian figure-skating champion—are, of course, the actual words of none other than "Vladimir Ilyich" Lenin himself, as recounted by Maxim Gorky in his *Days with Lenin.* Makavejev has simply tacked on to the end of Lenin's remark the qualification that "in principle we are opposed to all violence." (Makavejev has also framed the shot after a famous photograph of Lenin vigorously driving a point home to the masses.)

As Vladimir says this, Milena reaches out to gently calm him, but he turns suddenly and slaps her brutally in the face, knocking her down in the snow. Shaken, she looks up at him, and here Makavejev cuts to a shot of Stalin standing in the snow presiding over a public rally while a huge banner is unfurled behind him bearing the image of Lenin. Stalin declares proudly that Russian communism need fear no would-be enemies, for the life and work of Lenin are "an arrow thrust boldly and with true aim toward the enemy camp."

Stalin's metaphor is then taken up by Milena, as Makavejev cuts back to her. Sobbingly, she throws herself at Vladimir, pounding him on the chest repeatedly with her fists, slapping his face, and telling him what a phony he is—"a petty human lie dressed up as a great historical truth." "You profess to love all humanity, but you are incapable of loving one human individual. Have you ever loved anyone as a man should? Have you ever been able to fulfill a woman, thrusting your arrow boldly and with true aim?" Finally, overcome at last by Milena's emotional goading, Vladimir passionately draws her to him and kisses her on the lips, eyes, face, then full-mouthed as Milena acquiesces in spite of her anger.

What happens next in the drama of Milena and Vladimir, however, is only pieced together in retrospect by what transpires in the next sequence—following more brief intercut material—in which two police inspectors discuss clues relating to a savage murder of a young woman whose body and severed head were found along a riverbank. The severed head is brought to a police laboratory and placed on an examining table. We recognize it immediately, of course, as Milena's. One officer remarks that the presumed murder weapon was found nearby—pulling out of a sack an ice-skate which he admiringly identifies as of professional championship quality. The other officer remarks in passing that an autopsy revealed that the victim's vagina contained 4 to 5 times the normal amount of sperm. Since there didn't seem to be any marks on her body, however, or signs of a scuffle at the scene of the crime, he concludes that it is unlikely that she was the victim of a gang-bang or repeated rape. "It seems," he adds, "that she had sex willingly, perhaps at some orgy." Nonetheless, he decides it wise to check with local insane asylums to see if any sex-starved maniacs have escaped.

This attention to seemingly incidental detail

is characteristic of Makavejev's method—and this sequence recalls the very similar autopsy sequence in *Love Affair*. And, as usual, the detail is by no means incidental. The police, of course, are trying to gather information that will help them solve the crime—and the evidence leads them to consider the possibility of a sex crime. Moreover, Makavejev subtly evokes the connection between an individual's repressed or distorted sexuality and society's repressive structures by having the police officer suggest that they call the local insane asylums to see if any sex-starved maniacs have escaped; and this reference to insane asylums ties in nicely with the earlier shots of mental patients intercut with footage of Stalin—thus reinforcing the earlier suggestion that under Stalinist domination all of the Soviet bloc is turned into an enormous network of insane asylums.

Dramatically dominating this entire discussion by the two police inspectors, however, is our own awareness that we know something they don't know: namely that the skate presumed to be the murder weapon very likely belongs to Vladimir Ilyich, and that when Milena was last seen (by us, of course) she was locked in a volatile embrace with Vladimir at the very spot where, later, her dead body was discovered. Consequently, where the vicious decapitation and the sperm in Milena's vagina are concerned, we have reason to believe that that was no sex-starved maniac who put it to her, that was Lenin!

Ah, but there's the rub. With this seemingly incidental set of details, Makavejev has suggested a possible affinity between Lenin and a sex-starved maniac. And Lenin's readiness to resort to violence (even though against it in principle) is here associated by Makavejev with a sex crime in the sense that the violent behavior arises out of the individual's insecurity and tension in relating to his own repressed sexuality. (In conversation, Makavejev voiced the opinion that in fact Lenin's relations with women were not well resolved and were a source of serious tensions in his life.) The fictional plot concerning Milena's love life has thus enabled Makavejev to examine and dramatize Wilhelm Reich's insight and to apply these Reichian notions to a friendly but critical re-evaluation of Lenin's role in shaping the Communist movement.

The verdict on Lenin is harsh—and it is pronounced by Milena herself, as her severed head suddenly comes to life and she declares that "Vladimir Ilyich was a genuine red fascist"—adding, however, that "even now I am not ashamed or regretful of my communist past." The film does not close here, however, as Makavejev cuts from the severed head of Milena to a long, poignant panning shot of the Russian figure-skating champion, Vladimir Ilyich, walking aimlessly in the snow while on the sound track we hear Bulat Okoudjava's plaintive Russian song dedicated to François Villon. Phrased in the form of a prayer addressed to a god who doesn't exist (a touch Makavejev particularly liked), the song is a

plea to "grant to each person some little thing, but remember I'm here too"—words which touchingly evoke the communist commitment to a just distribution among all citizens, but which also touchingly evoke the personal plight of the individual, who, no matter how great his ideals may be, remains as frail and emotionally vulnerable to life's troubles as the rest of us . . . even if his name happens to be Vladimir Ilyich.

Ending on this poignant note, *WR*, like all of Makavejev's films, leaves us with an acute

sense of sympathy for the solitary individual whose private, personal turmoil and struggle are dialectically set against the public aspirations to grand humanitarian ideals. But precisely because Makavejev's method is so profoundly dialectical, we sense that the contradiction between the individual and the social aspirations need not necessarily be an antagonistic one: the plea in Okoudjava's song is a plea for the individual, but for the individual who himself subscribes to the communist commitment to create a society which provides to each according to his need.

The film, then, while critical of the authoritarian and repressive elements within the communist movement—some of which are traced to Lenin himself—seems clearly to be an honest and sincere attempt to bring out the revolutionary potential for genuine liberation which has so often been betrayed and distorted by our neglect of the all-important psychosexual foundations of political behavior. And the tribute which is offered to Wilhelm Reich by *WR: The Mysteries of the Organism* is all the more meaningful because Makavejev no more adopts an uncritical attitude toward Reich than he does toward Lenin, but instead chooses to respect the complexity of our human predicament—caught up as we are, and as they were, in a sound and fury of sex and politics.

MICHAEL DEMPSEY

The World of Ken Russell

Given the limited standards of restraint, good taste, and humanism on which most of our film critics generally base their opinions, any films they viciously attack on these grounds stand a pretty good chance of being innovative, adventurous works. *The Music Lovers* and *The Devils,* both directed by Ken Russell, have received incredibly poisonous reviews from most of these critics, but their wrath cannot hide their naiveté. Most of this abuse was mere finger-pointing—at Glenda Jackson rolling around naked on the floor of a train, Richard Chamberlain pounding the piano and staring soulfully off into space, the King of France in drag, the crazy nuns, the disease and torture and madness, the pyrotechnical camerawork. These are just the things for snap-judging reviewers to belabor with words like scabrous, hysterical, garish, or vulgar. It is certainly a lot easier than giving these maddening, contrary, breathtaking films a close look. Such a look is overdue. Russell's films are as personal as any auteurist could desire. More important, despite their varied subjects—Tchaikovsky, the Loudun witchcraft case of 1634—their themes, characters, and stylistic devices possess a thorough artistic unity.

Begin with style. Russell favors theatrically extravagant images, sounds, and performances. Sometimes these three elements comment on each other, working deliberately at cross-purposes; sometimes they blend to intensify each other; either way he pushes them to extremes. His opulent imagery seeks to draw us into worlds that promise splendor and excitement, even if terror and suffering also threaten. The dialogue in *The Devils*—lines lifted from John Whiting's play, adapted from Aldous Huxley's prose, or written by Russell himself—is theatrically self-conscious, aphoristic, rhetorical. So are the letters of Tchaikovsky and Mme. von Meck in *The Music Lovers* and D. H. Lawrence's own speech in *Women in Love. The Music Lovers* also uses Tchaikovsky's music with

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Sister Jeanne's exorcism: THE DEVILS

similar flourish, while *The Devils* employs an elaborate complex of stylized sets, costumes, and props. These theatrical motifs italicize the actions of the characters, making them exotic and startling. Thus, we can view them with some detachment and concentrate on the psychological *processes* that they undergo, even when their panache and passion most enthrall us.

To this Russell adds an outrageous, volatile sense of humor; both movies, like *Women in Love* before them, are often very funny. But this mirth is also upsetting. Viewers may find themselves laughing at a vicious lover's quarrel or a mystical dance (*Women in Love*); a musical première or an attempted suicide (*The Music Lovers);* a public mass exorcism or a ghastly deathbed scene (*The Devils*); or the heroes and heroines of all three films. Many may feel confused by this irreverence towards serious, even shocking matters; they may regard it as proof of Russell's inhumanity. This is a shortsighted reaction because both the humor and the flamboyance are directly relevant to Russell's central theme.

The characters of many films want to strengthen their sense of their own individuality; Russell's people seek to change, deny, or flee their identities. Those who fascinate him most are romantic idealists struggling against their own personalities in order to achieve a level of existence that they regard as higher, more noble. In *The Devils* Father Urbain Grandier tells his young mistress, Phillipe Trincant, "The body can transcend its purpose. It can become a thing of such purity that it can be worshipped to the limits of imagination." In the film's other source, *The Devils of Loudun,* Huxley states that the "urge to self-transcendence is almost as widespread and, at times, quite as powerful as the urge to self-assertion. Men desire to intensify their consciousness of being what they have come to regard as 'themselves,' but they also desire —and desire, very often, with irresistible violence—the consciousness of being someone else. In a word, they long to get out of themselves, to pass beyond the limits of that tiny island universe, within which every individual finds himself contained. . . . Even among those whom nature and fortune have most richly endowed, we find, and find not infrequently, a deep-seated horror of their own selfhood, a passionate yearning to get free of the repulsive little identity to which the very perfection of their 'adjustment to life' has condemned them."

Huxley names three varieties of transcendence—Upward, Downward, and Horizontal. The first inclines people toward divinity, the second toward depravity or sensuality, the third toward society and its causes. The adjectives suggest the bias toward the first kind of transcendence that colors the entire book, a bias all the stranger in the light of the author's later experiments with drugs. The transcendental theme sketched here by Huxley is the core of Russell's work, and the bias is unexpectedly central to *The Devils* which, despite its X-rated torture, violence, and nudity, is a deeply Catholic film.

Russell's style projects his ambivalence towards those who actively pursue self-transcendence. He admires them for their valor, imagination, and spirit, yet he harshly satirizes their excesses. He makes their expansive gestures silly as well as daring, their passionate declamations windy as well as eloquent, their uninhibited behavior monomaniacal as well as marvellous. Rarely does he provide a neat separation between these opposites. His visual luxuriance, his outlandish humor, his unabashed theatrical exaggerations embody *simultaneously* the respect and the skepticism that

he feels for his "Huxleyan" romantics. Each film is a dialectic between these extremes, between immortality (which the protagonists want) and death (which they also want). Each film oscillates between weddings and funerals; each gives us images of harmony and grandeur (the wrestling match in *Women in Love,* the opening carnival in *The Music Lovers,* the marriage of Grandier and Madeleine de Brou in *The Devils)* but opposes them with frightening, obsessive portrayals of physical agony and decay. This primal tension energizes the films, making them both baroque and mannerist.

Viewed this way, much of what might seem unaccountable in *Women in Love*—the gross caricature of Hermione, for instance—can be explained. Lawrence's idea on love and sexual freedom, once fresh and revolutionary, can no longer command the messianic allegiance that his characters swear to them; too much has happened since he wrote his great works. Today people may praise these ideas as gospel truth or denounce them as crackpot ravings. But no one can push them as the solution to all, or very many, problems without sounding like an idiot. So Russell highlights the foolishness as well as the glory of the characters and refuses (or is unable) to reconcile the two. The film fails because it leaves out too much to be coherent. Russell is interested in *self*-transcendence, so he glosses over the novelist's social concerns. His unresolved feelings about homosexuality and about women like Gudrun Brangwen (which surface in the other films as well) blur things further. Nonetheless, *Women in Love* looks more interesting now because its halting experiments with irony and multiple perspective have paved the way for its successors' achievements.

In *The Music Lovers* art takes over the role played by love in its predecessor. During shooting the film was called *The Lonely Heart,* but this title, so suggestive of corny old movies like *Rhapsody in Blue,* could hardly be less appropriate to the finished work, which undermines the traditional figure of the lonely, Promethian artist. "Music lovers" refers both to Tchaikovsky, the creator of artworks, and his audience of family, friends, and patrons, who use what he composes in various ways, just as we all do with art that means something to us. Russell has obviously not made a straight biography; he has added, subtracted, compressed, and rearranged too many historical facts for that. Instead, *The Music Lovers* employs Tchiakovsky as a *pretext* for a study of how artists and art lovers try to identify art with life. And not just any art, but romantic art—the most transcendental kind, the kind most likely to be divorced from society, ordinary life, or "reality." For Russell, Tchaikovsky is not the subject of a documentary but a preeminent example of the romantic sensibility.

But, because he is equally romantic, Russell approaches his subject with intense sympathy. The Tchaikovskyan melodies on the soundtrack match the director's sensuous pictorialism; repeatedly they merge to thrilling effect. During the joyful opening, Tchaikovsky and his lover, Count Chilovsky, tumble down a fairground sled run into an exhilarating spectacle of shopkeepers lugging slabs of raw meat, stately soldiers on horseback, agile sword dancers, tumblers throwing each other around, brawling drunks—a cornucopia of carefree humanity in the throes of celebration. Later, the composer and Mme. von Meck's children dance like elves through a curtain of fireworks in honor of his birthday. Russell's gliding cameras add heady lyricism to a brief near-encounter between Meck and Tchaikovsky; in each case musical excerpts add to the spell worked by these moments. Director follows musician into romantic rapture; the visual-aural splendor of *The Music Lovers* represents a whole-souled plunge into the intoxication that the artist experiences when working at the height of his powers and those of his medium.

However, this is only one of the many perspectives that the film brings to bear on its subject; comedy, visual irony, elaborate intercutting of different scenes—the full range of Russell's comic-theatric apparatus—all combine to provide a complex, many-sided view

of the composer and what he stood for. In particular, the film examines the inhuman potential of romanticism. This makes it an auto-critique, a romantic film that seriously questions its own sources.

The sequence in which Tchaikovsky plays the piano at a private première of the *Concerto in B-Minor,* a scene that begins like a conventional depiction of the young genius's first triumph, is a case in point. After the performance is underway, Russell introduces Tchaikovsky's pastoral memories and fantasies of a summer with his married sister Sasha and her family. The images, some imaginary, some distorted by recollection, do more than tell us that he was in love with Sasha and guilty over his homosexual leanings. Since most of these shots are quite banal, full of pseudo-lyrical focus-racking and woodsy romping, they also parody what they show. Clearly Russell gets a certain pleasure out of some of these shots and out of editing them together, yet the visual clichés are also deliberate, just like the sideways love scene of Ursula and Birkin in *Women in Love* or the shots of their love nest that could have been scissored out of *Vogue.* Russell also provides comic reaction shots of the audience: a deaf and dumb boy waving peacock feathers, Tchiakovsky's mentor Nicholas Rubenstein yawning scornfully, his future wife Nina pining after a hussar and daydreaming a tempestuous courtship-marriage with him. The irony of these last interpolations is twofold: Nina's silly woolgathering images are completely irrelevant to the music—some rapid notes make her think of horses' hooves, and off she goes from there—yet these images are very similar to those running through Tchaikovsky's mind. Russell thickens the jest with some satirical reprises of old movie routines: the camera careening up and down the keyboard or in and out of the orchestra to the tempo of the concerto, Tchaikovsky battering the ivories madly and looking teary, Sasha's and Meck's rhapsodic moues (so much like those of Hermione and Gudrun in *Women in Love*). By the time the performance ends and Sasha cries, "It's as if . . . all of last summer were in it!" an aura of forced, hothouse emotionalism has enveloped the characters and their responses. Rubenstein blisters the score unmercifully and, though he is boorish about it, Russell implies that his criticism has validity. Tchaikovsky defies him, screwing up his face and shouting just as misunderstood creators have always done in the movies. Cut to Nina bopping her head in a doorway. The sequence is far from clear-cut in its implications, but one major thrust of it is unquestionably to mock the romantic desire to overwhelm the senses of the audience.

A profounder mockery follows. Hearing a woman singing in her bath, Tchaikovsky recalls his mother singing the same song during his boyhood in a room suffused with an aura of warm, blissful femininity. Then these comforting images yield to a shocking sequel: the death of his mother, her body ravaged by cholera, through immersion in a tub of boiling water, a cure of last resort at that time. In this scene, the film *contrasts* image and music; the music is art, an ordered expression of emotion, while the images give us the pain and emotion of life untranscended through art. Russell repeatedly uses this kind of contrast, giving it many different connotations. Here its significance is brutally evident: Tchaikovsky can transmute, can idealize, all else, even his guilt over his homoerotic and incestuous desires. But not this repulsive horror of wounds, pus, and rotting flesh. Unlike Isadora Duncan, in Karel Reisz's film, her mind spinning out a bleakly beautiful vision of the deaths of her children, Tchaikovsky is unequal to this transcendental task.

By this point *The Music Lovers* has also begun to concentrate upon Mme. von Meck and Nina. In *Women in Love,* Russell cut from drowned to living lovers locked in identical embraces; here he takes this technique to much greater lengths with his elaborate intercutting of three lives. However much they differ, they all share a longing to break down the boundaries between art and life, between fantasy and reality (a theme and a desire of many filmmakers, Russell no doubt included).

Mme. von Meck subsidizes Tchaikovsky's career but refuses to meet him. For personal

THE MUSIC LOVERS

contact they substitute passionate, high-flown letters. She embraces the role of patron fiercely. Countering Rubenstein's restrained skepticism (restrained lest it cost his conservatory her financial support), she confidently predicts that the composer's works will outlast all else. In her own mind she becomes his lone defender against the philistines and the only one who truly understands his music. When she receives a segment of his opera *Eugene Onegin,* she exclaims, in stoned, dreamy tones, "This is real love!" Later she goes even further, writing that she "would like to die hearing" the music, which "alone convinces me that life can be rich and full of meaning."

The same sardonic humor that Russell directed at Gudrun he applies to Meck; her words and gestures take on the same studied, overblown, artificial quality. She gushes over choice chords, sighs and moans at the poignance of the *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy.* The news of Tchaikovsky's wedding casts her as the jilted bride who heroically keeps faith with her beloved. Like Sister Jeanne of the Angels in *The Devils,* she is an actress (Huxley's term) seeking her transcendence in elaborate role-playing. Seeking relief from her isolation and sexual frustration, she attempts to lose herself in a nirvana of beauty. She resists everything that contradicts her reveries; when Chilovsky informs her of his relationship to Tchaikovsky, she continues to play her part, giving him a scornful laugh as if she didn't care. Through her, Russell stingingly ridicules the cultish enthusiasm of many art lovers—so stingingly, in fact, that this part of the film might have degenerated into meanness were it not for the impressive performance of Isabella Telezynska (who also appeared in *Isadora* as Paris Singer's rejected wife. The films, it should be noted, also share screenwriter Melvyn Bragg.)

Nina knows nothing of art (though in reality she was one of Tchaikovsky's students). She tries to lose herself in love instead, like Ursula and Birkin of *Women in Love.* She also unknowingly copies Meck by writing letters to men she has never met. In her way, she shares the romantic fire of the others and must cope with poverty as well. Thus, she takes refuge in transient affairs which she transmutes into exciting romances. She, too, resembles Sister Jeanne; both fantasize about fascinating men before meeting them. From Meck beginning to melt at the opening passages of *Romeo and Juliet,* Russell cuts to Nina, bound and raped by her dream hussar, switching at the same time to the music's low, drum-haunted conclusion. Yet he regards Nina more tenderly; her deprivation mutes his satire. Glenda Jackson adds glimmers of charming mischief to her early scenes: interrupting the writing of a florid note by popping a bit of food into her mouth and laughing or burning her hand on a stewpot while exulting over a reply from Tchaikovsky. But we never lose sight of her desperation and how it connects her to the others. Both women seek through Tchaikovsky "a life rich and full of meaning," the very thing the movie continually questions.

As the music lovers try to identify life with art, Russell ironically zeroes in on life's imitations of art. The core of the story is that bizarre historical coincidence of Nina's love letters and the plot of *Eugene Onegin*; from this peculiar development, the film works up an elaborate sequence of crisscrossing comedy and tragedy. At the outset Tchaikovsky and a singer perform for Sasha a segment of the unfinished opera, none other than his musical version of the very letter that we also see Nina

composing in her room. Again we have emotion subsumed into art next to emotion untransformed, but this time they relate to each other differently than they did with the memory of Tchaikovsky's mother. Tchaikovsky's song, in which his heroine describes her "life of misery," her desire for love, and her vow of fidelity, has tenderness and beauty far beyond Nina's crude letter; played over her image, the song says all that she wants to say but cannot. Yet at the same time her letter, trite and coquettish as it sounds (Sasha and Tchaikovsky's brother Modest later mock her language), seems more genuine than the song because it is the direct outpouring of a suffering heart rather than part of "a wonderful subject for an opera."

Personal emotion artlessly expressed, fictional emotion artfully expressed—Russell's juxtaposition of the two does not use the first as a stick with which to beat the second. What it does do is call our attention to the *artifice* in art and prepare the way for the film's investigation of the destructive potential of this artifice. After the song is over and while Nina delivers her letter, Tchaikovsky, Sasha, and the others dance deliriously around the room, like Gudrun before the cattle in *Women in Love* and the whirling nuns of *The Devils*. Amid the mad activity (Russell's films are full of dances and dance-like behavior, which always contain at least a hint of possible madness), we find a telling shot of Sasha lying on a couch, exhausted by all this intensely cultivated emotionalism. A moment later she revives, but this brief instant was enough to betray her.

Tchaikovsky, believing in fate, romantically decides *not* to imitate art; unlike Onegin, who ignored his letter and thereby "ruined his life," he marries his mystery woman. Russell films their wedding as a moment of genuine transcendence, a dream achieved. It represents the culmination of the characters' desire to live at fever pitch, spurning the banalities of mundane life. The glowing color heightens this impression; the willingness of the bride and groom to take romantic risks contrasts favorably with the caution of the others. But we also avoid noticing the resemblance between this ceremony and the one that Nina daydreamed about during the concerto.

Naturally, the marriage begins to disintegrate almost immediately, with Tchaikovsky impotent on his wedding night and Nina clinging to the vain hope that they can one day "be part of the world." Here Russell gets into some trouble because Richard Chamberlain cannot effectively meet the demands of these scenes. He showed some talent in *Petulia* and does well enough in scenes that call for shouting and rage. Besides this, his old-fashioned, matinee idol handsomeness makes him perfect for Russell's parodistic purpose. But his voice is way too flat for the subliminal anger and frustration that this part of the film requires, and so he comes off badly opposite Jackson, who can create the most subtle vocal effects. But later, as the film develops the perversion of his romanticism into narcissism, as he chooses to sacrifice all for the sake of art, Chamberlain again looks right and his inadequacies matter less.

During their honeymoon, Tchaikovsky takes Nina to an outdoor performance of *Swan Lake* in hopes of returning to his private world. The ballet, with its leaping, pirouetting dancers and natural backdrop of trees and water, becomes a kind of midsummer afternoon's dream of perfect freedom. But the film also emphasizes its vanity; Tchaikovsky imagines Sasha in the role of the white swan and the story as his own tragedy. Meanwhile, Nina tries to hide her embarrassment at not knowing what is going on. Enter Chilovsky, who offers an icy plot synopsis in which he obliquely names himself as the composer's "true love." In this most pointed of the movie's art-life comparisons, Chilovsky, though his motives are self-serving, condemns the hollowness of Tchaikovsky's heavenly pretenses.

Yet Russell does *not* simply exchange a saintly stereotype for a villainous one. The train scene shows his lack of interest in easy debunking. As the train pitches and shrieks, Tchaikovsky and Nina get drunk in their compartment. In trying to arouse him, Nina loses control of herself. *Women in Love* contains

a completely different version of this scene; there it is a decadent charade enacted by Loerke as the mincing, self-pitying artist and Gudrun as the meowing temptress. Loerke makes fun of Tchaikovsky with a deliberately mawkish monologue about "a homosexual composer" marrying "a scheming young nymphomaniac" to avoid scandal. In *The Music Lovers*, the same scene, shot from Tchaikovsky's point of view, turns into a nightmare of destroyed beauty and sexual horror. Nina's writhing body becomes for him a disgusting carcass; to his eyes she presents an overwhelming image of decay and insanity, one that links up with both his memory of his cholera-scarred mother and our later sight of Nina confined in a filthy bedlam. Using powerful excerpts from the *Manfred* and *Pathétique* Symphonies to score the scene, Russell makes us experience Tchaikovsky's despair so fully that even when he is most callous later we can never forget what drives him. The scene's original use of nudity to portray psychosexual revulsion is a cinematic advance.

The arrival of Nina's mercenary mother gives Tchaikovsky an excuse to avoid sleeping with her; and at every turn he rebuffs her overtures, mocks her optimism, and blames her for his failure to work—until he provokes a tumultuous quarrel, after which he melodramatically wishes himself dead and stumbles out to throw himself into the Moskva River (which he did in real life). Russell cuts from Nina's tensely rocking figure to an Ozu-like shot of watery reflections, accompanied by the *String Quartet #3*. But Tchaikovsky cannot make the prescribed gesture of romantic anguish; the river is too shallow and a passing woman too amused. As the audacious satirical gap between music and image shows, Tchaikovsky cannot fuse reality with his romantic self-image. As Modest had suggested, he can deal with fictional characters but not real ones, can finally cope with Nina only by trying to strangle her. His life is now a negative image of "life at fever pitch," and self-transcendence veers towards self-destruction.

As he recuperates alone at Meck's estate, an earthly paradise replaces cluttered, constricted rooms, and platonic passion expressed in letters and music supersedes marital conflict expressed in angry words and blows. "A friendship such as ours is best preserved in thoughts and words rather than by personal contact," he writes, pouring out passionate avowals of his feelings (which he rarely offered to Sasha, Nina, or Chilovsky). The distant Mme. von Meck, like the fictitious Eugene Onegin, never endangers his idealizations. Nevertheless, the preceding scenes were so agonizing that we gratefully surrender to the restful idyll that Russell now conjures up with soaring music, fervent love notes, and lovely landscapes.

But we cannot do so for long because every idyllic moment is double-edged, revealing narcissism along with rapture. Patron and composer each become a mirror before which the other can preen. When Tchaikovsky delivers the score of his *Fourth Symphony* to Meck (a parallel to his sarcastic bestowal of *Onegin* on Nina), the camera tilts down from the ornate porch ceiling of her house to his chiseled figure, exactly as it did when he married Nina. The re-use of this camera movement in another context certifies his immersion in fantasy, which he later confirms again by striking the classic pose of Narcissus gazing at his own reflection in a pond. (Throughout the film water is a touchstone of deadly delusion.) A giant likeness of his head, traced by fireworks at his birthday party, embarrasses him but perfectly sums up the stupor into which he has fled. Yet he also condescends to Meck: wandering through her house, he smiles with the smugness of Ursula and Grandier, and he meets Modest's surprise at one of her more overheated letters with a complacent smirk.

For her part, Meck wallows in emotionalism, a connoisseur of her own extravagant sensations. In his music she finds *her own* feelings instead of his and, like Nina, regards her letters as his inspiration. Even when she almost meets him in the forest and Russell's crosscut tracking shots heighten the moment, he still points up the overintense, glassy stare

that congeals on her face. Like the subsequent scene of her finding him sleeping in her house and lying down beside him, Juliet to his Romeo (with that very composition accompanying her reverie), this scene crystallizes the blocked sexual longings that partly account for the way she responds to the music. But this Freudianism does not fully encompass either moment; the color, (first sunstruck, then burnished), the mesmerizing camerawork, the semi-surrealistic use of her twin sons exalt her dream as well.

Certainly, no such splendor touches other, more *practical* characters. Modest helps Tchaikovsky through his crises (though the film never mentions his role as his brother's occasional librettist), giving him sensible advice throughout. Yet he is also a bit of a parasite and a dullard. A more acrid example is Nina's grasping, opportunistic mother, as greedy an upstart as the one portrayed so memorably by Avis Bunnage in *The Whisperers*. Russell may show slight interest in common people—witness the glancing references to the miners in *Women in Love* or the enslaved Protestants pulling a crane in *The Devils*—but neither does he imitate John Whiting's sewerman, a sentimental lump of earthy salt dispensing peasant platitudes. Nina's mother, cashing in on her delusions by collecting from the pickups she mistakes for famous musicians, is the epitome of hard-headed common sense. Not for her the lofty airs and messed-up life of her son-in-law, whom she mockingly toasts. Instead, she displays every banality of the stereotypical middle class; she thinks only of comfort, status, and money. Indeed, money figures almost subliminally throughout the film as an emblem of sordid practicality; one shot of her deftly thumbing a wad of bills connects with another of Modest doing the same thing during the *1812 Overture*.

The other "practical" character, Chilovsky, offers a more direct challenge. Seeing through Tchaikovsky's veils of romantic reverie, he calls on him to "accept what you are—don't pretend!" Even though he refers to homosexuality, his remark takes in the entire spectrum of transcendentalism. But the film undercuts this advice by refusing to pin down "what" Tchaikovsky is. Moreover, Chilovsky is a foppish, sarcastic dilettante. If Tchaikovsky's self-transcendence becomes self-destruction, Chilovsky's self-acceptance is indistinguishable from complacent self-satisfaction. But here the film is weak. Perhaps to underscore this anomaly (perhaps because of anti-homosexuality), Chilovsky's character never emerges. We never feel that Tchaikovsky loves him, and only on occasion does a glint of vulnerability pierce his chic hauteur.

But, in any case, romanticism and practicality meet in a cockeyed transitional musicale scored by the cannons of the *1812 Overture*. Tchaikovsky's narcissism, as he flees everyone he knows while they try to capture him or turns cartwheels across a stage while a bevy of Rockettes forms a high-stepping chorus line, meets common sense in the form of cheering crowds, colored ribbons, and blowing rubles. Romanticism degenerates hilariously into bombast, art into commercialism, anguish into navel-gazing.

Only during its coda, however, does *The Music Lovers* reveal its full scope. Having drawn us into the joys and the ambiguities of the romantic artist's life, Russell now casts doubt on art itself. He begins with Tchaikovsky enshrined in stone, there to receive at best the ritualistic lip service most people pay to great monuments that they regard as irrelevant. Then we encounter the artist and his brother several years after the break with Mme. von Meck, shortly after the death of Sasha, whom they have ignored for years, and the composition of the Sixth Symphony, which needs a title. "I put my whole life into it . . . tragic?" Yes, tragic—he settles for it and recalls again the death of his mother, "the only woman I ever remember loving." Modest cannot stomach this; he proposes "pathetic" instead, making the English word sound entirely different from the softer French "pathétique." Recognizing Modest's irony, the composer accepts his suggestion, declares the music his requiem, and deliberately drinks a

glass of contaminated water, after which he sickens and dies as his mother did. (This suicide, like Meck's discovery of his homosexuality, is sheer speculation; neither has ever been proven.)

Cut into these scenes and scored by the symphony's climactic *adagio lamentoso* are glimpses of Nina in the insane asylum where she was confined after her husband's death and lived out her remaining years. Few horror films could equal the grisliness of these flashes. But their most piercing revelation is Nina's sudden understanding that "he hated me." Her fantasy finally collapses, too; she moans piteously and fights off a straitjacket while other inmates gyrate and attendants strap her to a bed.

Once more Russell places a work of art beside a parallel scene from life, but this time a subtle disjunction occurs. The *Onegin* song and her letter had expressed the same emotions, though from different perspectives; here her outcries and the symphony express totally different feelings, hers on the one hand, Tchaikovsky's on the other. But whereas she laments pain that was not of her own making, the suffering he mourns he largely brought on himself through egotism and selfishness. When he shrieks on his deathbed, "I tried to love her!" we cannot be sure who "her" is. The clear implication is that by abandoning Nina for his career he insured her eventual breakdown. Her screams reduce the music, even though the film makes it speak for her as well, to "sound and fury, signifying nothing." Russell has called the symphony "tortured and terrible." If you disagree, as I do, the movie still remains a study in erosion, the erosion during this century of the Western artist's value system, with its once unshakable confidence in art's eternal value and relevance now crumbling where it does not already lie in ruins. Death and decay engulf Tchaikovsky, who worked under the shelter of this value system; for us they make his transcendentalism something of a mockery, a mirage. *Even* if we also respond to it and to his work. Russell's exuberance in *The Music Lovers,* the almost childlike glee that he seems to get out of making movies, is in the end the only mitigation of the film's bleak truth. The film speaks for an age that can no longer believe so deeply in art or stand in such awe before the artist-as-priest.

Suitably, the hero of *The Devils* is a priest. Every priest by definition concerns himself with transcendence, not only his own but that of others as well. After *Women in Love* and *The Music Lovers,* we might expect *The Devils* to trace the failure of religion as they did the failures of love and art. But Urbain Grandier's story, despite his fate and the questions it raises, is one of *fulfillment.*

Grandier is no ordinary priest who lives by vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. He flouts all three, living in luxury, sleeping with many women, and actively opposing his superior Cardinal Richelieu. Nevertheless, he is a towering figure—humane, learned, and authoritative. During his ringing eulogy of Loudun's late mayor, we first see him in long shot, a tiny figure on a distant church portico. Yet he dominates the screen effortlessly, and his voice rolls with majesty. Huxley calls Grandier's eloquence on this occasion a mere exercise: "A showy and superfluous erudition exhibited itself complacently at every turn. The periods rumbled with artificial thunder." Russell eliminates Huxley's skepticism; he makes Grandier's speech and his presence genuinely impressive. Leading the funeral cortege, he materializes through a cloud of incense like a stately frigate entering a harbor. Bravely and efficiently he repels the wall-razers of Baron de Laubardemont, Richelieu's chief lieutenant, and cuts down medical and religious stupidity as well. He discreetly parallels Christ's words by ridiculing St. Angela Merici's rulebook for nuns, and Christ's deeds by expelling two quack physicians (with their herbs, hornets, and stuffed crocodile) from the death chamber of a plague-raddled woman whom they have tortured with their hare-brained remedies. Comforting this woman in her last agony, he draws upon profound faith and compassion

Oliver Reed and Georgina Hale: THE DEVILS

when he swears to her, "I envy you!"

Yet before long we discover in him someone akin to Robert Bresson's *curé de compagne,* the priest who gives to others what he himself lacks. Hard upon his magnanimity at the funeral comes his cold abandonment of his mistress when she announces her pregnancy. As she whimpers, he enunciates the aforementioned speech on the possible beauty of the body. But his tone *ridicules* the words. When he leaves the dead woman whom he comforted so movingly, he encounters the girl's father, the public prosecutor. Instead of kowtowing to the man's power or trying to make amends, Grandier grins at him smugly. Later, while he and the prissy Father Mignon sprinkle holy water over a Dachau-like open pit of whited cadavers, Grandier does venture an explanation for his contradictory behavior: "I began to understand that all worldly things have a single purpose for a man of my kind. Politics, power, riches, women—I chose them with the same care that other men select a weapon. But my intention is different. I need to be united with God." In Whiting's play, someone calls this revelation a sickness; Grandier replies, "No, sir. It is the meaning and purpose." The film deletes this exchange and has Grandier utter the other words with the same jocular contempt that he uses on Phillipe and her father.

Soon we can surmise the true explanation for ourselves. Grandier is tired of life, drained by it to the point of desiring death. This condition unites him with key characters of the other films: Gerald Crich, who before going off to die in the snow says, "I'm tired"; Loerke and Birkin, who are tired of love; Tchaikovsky, too "tired to respond to the loss of" Sasha; Sasha herself, during that brief moment of emotional exhaustion. Weariness with existence runs through Russell's work as a corollary to the quest for a better, more intense life.

The wretched epidemic and the political chicanery that inundate Grandier's world make his anomie easy to comprehend. But the root of his disenchantment lies in the failure of his transcendental hopes. The verses that he picks for Phillipe's Latin lesson ("But in everlasting leisure,/Like this, like this, lie still/And kiss time away./No weariness and no shame,/Now, then and shall be all pleasure./No end to it,/But an eternal beginning,") symbolize what Catholics call the Beatific Vision. But love-making is not the customary Catholic metaphor for eternal bliss; Grandier, in repudiating religious asceticism, desires to "come to God through the love of a woman" and a love of earthly life. "And we were to have been each other's salvation," he tells Phillipe. "Did I really believe it possible?" He did and does. He despises this disappointed, festering aspiration, without which life's pleasures bore him. Hence he courts self-destruction by cultivating powerful enemies—Trincant, Richelieu, Mignon, Laubardemont, even the two quacks. *The Devils* begins where *The Music Lovers* ends.

It also applies Russell's theatrical methods much more thoroughly than the earlier film. Now the stylization embraces the sets and costumes in a more unified way. Blazing whiteness, not the dark stone and dim light customary to churches, nunneries, and seminaries, highlights the city walls and the Ursuline convent. The costumes are keyed largely to sharply contrasted black and white, to which the photography adds the orange glow of fire. Instead of the fluid camerawork of *The Music Lovers, The Devils* relies on a more restrained shooting style that frames many sequences, especially the exorcisms and Grandier's trial, like theatrical tableaux. The result is not just

a distancing of the audience from the film's depictions of torture and disease, which remain very hard to assimilate at one viewing. The style also turns Loudun, where most of the action happens, into a literal stage for characters who are deep into transcendental role-playing.

Russell's comedy also goes to new extremes. When the film opens with Louis XIII, decked out in crown, rouge, gold lipstick, and conch-shell-jockstrap, enacting the birth of Venus at a drag ball, we are completely disoriented right from the start. Further comic moments, now merged with horror, add to our impression of a world gone mad: pedestrians swatting corpses aside as they walk the streets; the quacks chortling about "hanky-panky" after nearly disembowling Sister Jeanne during a gynecological examination; the king gunning down costumed Protestants and saying "Bye, bye Blackbird"; a sodomite prince leading a retinue of pretty young boys into an exorcism, reducing it to nonsense, then telling all to "have fun"; a crazed nun who takes his advice and conks Father Barré, the frothing chief witch-hunter, with a large cross. So deliriously absurd, so senseless is this world that a person of Grandier's stature captures our attention all the more.

The senselessness of this world does not keep the film, unlike its predecessors, from developing a political dimension. Grandier's problems interact with those of Loudun and France. As spokesman of Loudun, Grandier supports local autonomy, local fortifications, and religious toleration at a time when Richelieu demands national unity, the demolition of Loudun's walls, and the persecution of the Huguenots. Russell succinctly foreshadows the Cardinal's victory by intercutting elaborately between each man stating his position. Richelieu clearly cuts a poor figure next to Grandier, who has eloquence, loyalty, idealism, and righteousness on his side. But Grandier is swimming against the tide of history. Furthermore, as the intercutting emphasizes, his advocacy of confidence in the king's justice is suicidal because Richelieu is the real ruler. Grandier's private motives make his public deeds and zeal highly suspect. Is he defending the city, or is he goading his most powerful enemy in hopes of bringing it down on himself?

Like Tchaikovsky, Grandier becomes involved with two women without meeting one of the two. Like Nina and Mme. von Meck, Madeleine and Sister Jeanne differ only superficially. Their Catholicism is just as suffocating as the musical emotionalism in *The Music Lovers*. Madeleine almost dies of shame when telling her "unclean thoughts" in confession; they so torment her that she resolves to take the veil to suppress them. Jeanne, under the guise of praying the sorrowful mysteries of the rosary, dwells morbidly on the spikes piercing Christ's hands. Infatuated with Grandier, she projects him into perverse fantasies based on Christ's life: walking across a lake or coming down from the cross to make love to her while she, Virgin Mary and Mary Magdelene, wipes his feet and sucks his stigmata. These two fantasies, especially the second (shot in black-and-white suggesting something out of D. W. Griffith), have the liberating force of blasphemy. They explode Jeanne's pietistic talk about divine love and lay bare the twisted masochistic sexuality not only sublimating into her feverish meditations but also inherent in the Crucifixion story itself. Jeanne, who was placed in the convent because the hideous, reptilian hump on her back made her unmarriageable, becomes (through Vanessa Redgrave's daring performance) a baroque example of spiritual deformation as well.

But Madeleine discovers a way out of this cul-de-sac. Despite her heritage of puritanism, she reveals herself to Grandier. When she says that she would not fear coming before God with him "even in our sin," she takes, in Catholic terms, the ultimate risk (unlike Jean-Louis in Rohmer's *My Night at Maud's*). Their nuptials share the beauty of the ceremony in *The Music Lovers*, with Grandier the presiding priest as well as the bridegroom. But the aftermath is different. In contrast to the pan-

demonium swirling around them, their scenes together are islands of serenity—a charming debate on priestly celibacy, a few quiet shots of them sleeping, the irruption of untrammeled nature into the film when Grandier rides back from an audience with the king and she goes out to meet him. Recalling Christ's parable of the missing sheep, Grandier, while consecrating a loaf of bread for a solitary outdoor mass, describes himself as one who had been lost but now, freed from his burden of self-hatred, accepts himself as "a small part of God's abundance." Just as he saves Madeleine from her crippling guilt, she rescues him from his spiral towards self-annihilation. None of Russell's other characters achieve a comparable redemption from his or her blighted nature.

Their mutual rejuvenation leads them, while they take communion before a majestic, cloud-wreathed mountain, to a vision of a utopian "city of God," a citadel of freedom and honor whose potentiality the gleaming white walls of Loudun have symbolized all along. Grandier and Madeleine represent a new kind of religious person, one free from the old claptrap of pietism, sin-counting legalism, self-mortification, fear of the body and imbued with ideals of generosity, service, love of earthly life, and unblinkered hope. Their conversion arouses in them a fresh concern for their fellow human beings. Their divine city would be a place, not where church and state are one (as Richelieu desires), but a place where the needs of the flesh would no longer war with those of the spirit. Alone among Russell's characters, Grandier and Madeleine reconcile the three Huxleyan transcendences.

During the exorcisms Sister Jeanne and everyone else present enact a monstrous travesty of this vision, a comic but frightening *danse macabre*. All along she has tried on role after role—stern Mother Superior, wanton lover, pious mystic, debauched innocent. The public exorcisms provide the largest audience yet for her performances; and she takes full advantage of the opportunity, laughing, cracking jokes, telling lurid fantasies about Grandier's sexual sorcery, encouraging the demon-haunted Barré, for whom "sin can be caught as easily as the plague." When she later confesses that she has wronged an innocent man and still later tries to hang herself, we cannot tell whether she is sincere or just playing Judas to Grandier's Jesus.

Despite all this, Sister Jeanne's distorted mirror image of Grandier's conduct has a certain weird validity at times and makes us wonder about him even after his conversion. Seeing Madeleine's conventionally seraphic face and equating it with "a virgin martyr in a picture book," she unknowingly underlines the irony of Grandier, the sophisticated seducer, falling for this prude. Several of her nuns even stage a lesbian parody of their wedding (like the Loerke-Gudrun bit in *Women in Love*). And when she dreams of Grandier as Christ or carries on like Judas, she calls attention to the film's frequent parallels between Grandier and Christ. Such parallels are usually a phony way of inflating a character's significance. Sister Jeanne's antics make us relate them to Grandier's pride and self-destructiveness, especially when we see him extend his arms during his outdoor mass to form a cross.

Gandier's radical change of heart, made wholly convincing by Oliver Reed's splendid performance, does not alter his political position or mollify his old foes, who have him arrested and condemned. Laubardemont, another of Russell's practical people (and wittily played by Dudley Sutton), is just the person to bring this about. A shrewd man with no cumbersome convictions, he knows perfectly well that Sister Jeanne is not really possessed and that Barré is a mere fanatic. So, like a master puppeteer, he can manipulate them and the superstitious populace. He arranges Grandier's execution without malice. To him Grandier is not evil, just politically troublesome and, thus, expendable. When Grandier was actively seeking his own death, we could at least feel that he controlled his fate. Now, when he regained his desire to live, he must fall to forces beyond his power.

Wavering between resolve and fear, he

crawls on crushed legs to the stake. As the fire swallows him, he must watch the city and all that it has symbolized topple before his eyes. The exorcists howl at him; the mob, infected by a mass dementia as contagious as the plague, shouts mindlessly; skulls, held aloft by revelers, float before him. Camus's Meursault wanted such a death; the curses of the crowd would have helped him accept it. But Meursault was only one person; Russell makes us witness an apocalypse that ends not only one man but his world as well. When Bresson's curé dies, a cross fills the screen, and a narrator tells that "all is grace." Grandier's death makes us feel that all is chaos.

If *The Devils* is really a story of fulfillment, the emotional logic of this climax may seem strange. But I feel that it holds up, however tenuously. Though he is a convert to Catholicism, Russell does not seem to set much store by the Catholic concept of "grace," which Bresson relied upon in *The Diary of a Country Priest.* (Bresson's recent films may indicate that he no longer does, either.) But even though these two directors could hardly be more dissimilar stylistically, they both arrive at practically the same destination. Bresson's cross releases us from the "holy agony" of his curé; Russell releases us from Loudun with a crane shot. His camera follows Madeleine up a pile of rubble and through a gap in what used to be a wall. Leaving the city behind her, she stumbles down a road that extends beyond the horizon of a broad, bare plain. Gibbets and skeletons line the route. All color drains out of the image. But she has been set free. This affirmation is fragile but real, befitting a film that is itself an exorcism. And an account of resurrection from the dead.

Because *The Devils* seems to be a credo, the obvious question is, "What next?" The jury is still out, since *The Boy Friend,* at least in its American prints, is a mass of loose ends thanks to James Aubrey, the Metro-Goldwyn-Mangler. (Russell apparently allowed the cutting to save the complete film for Europe. *The Devils* also suffered some two dozen cuts, according to reports, totaling two or three minutes.) But, besides making some kind of star out of Twiggy, the new film continues Russell's preoccupation with theater and comedy in a lighter vein, being less a musical than a movie about several versions of a musical. Clearly, his is a style that could go spectacularly haywire. *The Devils,* in fact, is right on the edge and sometimes, as in Michael Gothard's Jesus-freaky portrayal of Barré, over it. But whatever comes in the future, Russell has two beautiful movies to his credit *now.* Hopefully, more serious filmgoers will get to know them better.

DAN GEORGAKAS

They Have Not Spoken: American Indians in Film

The American Indian has been an essential dramatic ingredient in Hollywood's epic of the West, and a key element in the vision of America and its destiny embodied there. Whether we take the Indian's role as that of the abominable id—a projection of the bestiality white culture could not face in itself—or as a stand-in for the hostile "nature" that Americans thought they could overcome, it is hardly surprising that with the turmoils, re-evaluations, and rebellions of the sixties a different image of the Indian should have begun to emerge in American films. Recent Indian films make a point of advertising their sympathy for the Indian point of view. Generally "real" Indians play all minor Indian roles and occasionally even major speaking parts. At first sight, no effort seems too great to obtain an aura of authenticity in regard to speech, music, customs, and history. Usually white guilt is admitted through the device of at least one rabid saliva-at-the-mouth racist ready to command a massacre of a sleeping village. This beast is contrasted to the dignified Indian spokesman who is invariably peace-minded. Such an approach is an improvement over the grunts and howls of an earlier period but only at the lowest level: the new films tell us very little about the Native Americans and even less about ourselves and our own history.

A MAN CALLED HORSE

On the surface, Elliot Silverstein's effort, which uses some five hundred Sioux actors, might seem the most authentic of the recent films. The Sioux language makes up 80% of the dialogue, the impressive Sun Dance ceremony is a central plot element, and all the action takes place within an Indian environment. The headdresses, dwellings, artifacts, masks, and ceremonial paint are as genuine as research can make them. The only trouble is that all this authenticity is an illusion and a waste. The film is a fantasy from start to finish.

The year is 1825 and Lord Morgan (Richard Harris), an English aristocrat on a hunting expedition, is captured by a Sioux band led by Yellow Hand (Manu Tupou). The Englishman is not treated as a human being but as a horse. He is given to Yellow Hand's harridan mother, Buffalo Cow Head (Dame Judith Anderson) who ties him to a stake. This is all wrong. The Sioux had a tradition of hospitality toward strangers. Anyone so odd looking as the yellow-haired pale-faced Wasichu (a term for Europeans that had no racial overtones) would be treated with great curiosity and respect, much as Lewis and Clark had been treated a decade earlier. Even if the encounter had turned hostile, there would not be torture and the kind of abuse shown for that was not the Sioux way. The idea that a man should be tied up and treated as an animal is something that might have occurred to the New England Puritans but it was as far from Sioux thinking as hunting for pleasure instead of need.

The Englishman learns the ways of the Indian slowly and Silverstein comes up with an interesting device in handling the transition. The Indians speak only Sioux and Morgan/Horse speaks only English. A captive French half-breed (a European designation, by the way) supplies minimal translations and interpretations of strange acts. This de-emphasis on dialogue makes the kind of demands on a director the silent screen once made and calls attention to the Indian trappings. One almost

wishes there was no dialogue at all for almost everything the half-breed says is nonsense.

Horse's moment to impress the Sioux comes when a group of Shoshone creep up on the camp when the warriors are absent. Horse slays the intruders and is immediately elevated to human and warrior status. This dramatic turnabout would be likely, as Sioux placed importance on what individuals did and most likely would have interpreted Horse's actions as having the favor of the spirits. That Yellow Hand's daughter, Running Deer (Corrina Tsopei) falls in love with Horse is also credible as the Sioux were a romantic people and the strange white warrior who might possess special magic would be an extremely attractive figure.

But to establish full membership in the tribe, Horse undertakes the Sun Dance Ceremony, and here the film is simply sacrilegious in terms of Indian beliefs. The Sun Dance was not designed to show individual courage to other men or to win a bride. The Sun Dance was the highest religious rite of the Sioux. In it, a man proved his humility and worthlessness to the spirits by mortifying his flesh. Elaborate purification rites were absolute prerequisites as a successful dance might bring a vision of use to the entire tribe. Skewers were fastened under a man's flesh and he attempted to pull loose by dancing. The pain was caused by his own acts and the onlookers pitied him and encouraged him with song and music, praying he would have an important vision. (Sitting Bull performed the Sun Dance before Custer's attack. He lost some sixty pieces of flesh but had a vision which foretold the coming triumph.) In *Horse* the ceremony is reduced to a primitive sadistic test of courage in which the vision is a delirious by-product.

Naturally, Morgan-now-Horse is successful in the Sun Dance and marries Running Deer. He sees this as another step toward his escape. His problem is cut short by a massive Shoshone raid. Again the film falls apart historically. The men of the plains never waged war in European fashion; small bands went out to steal horses or to fight small engagements more akin to duelling than war. The highest honor was

A MAN CALLED HORSE

to "count coup," which was to touch a living opponent still surrounded by his fighting comrades with a ceremonial stick shaped like a shepherd's staff. Killing an enemy was a less important coup. In *Horse*, the Shoshone attack like US cavalry. Horse-still-Morgan saves the day when he lines up the tribal youth in English archery rows and their arrows cut down the Shoshone who attack like the Light Brigade itself. Yellow Hand dies in the battle and tribal leadership falls to Horse. Running Deer also dies conveniently but Horse shows his sensitivity to his new post by taking the harridan Buffalo Cow Head as his own mother. She waits for spring to die so that he can have good weather for his return to England.

Rather than a tale of Indian life, *Horse* is thus really about a white nobleman proving his superiority in the wilds. Almost every detail of Indian life is incorrect. An angry Sioux writing

to the *Village Voice* complained about the treatment of the Sun Dance. He also noted that the Sioux never abandoned widows, orphans, and old people to starve and freeze as shown in the film. He points out that the cuckold husband in the film would not have lamented as shown but would have wiped out his disgrace by charging ten enemies single-handed. The writer adds that even something as simple as kissing on the lips is incorrect, for the custom did not come to the Sioux until mid-century. The list of such mistakes and inaccuracies is as long as the film itself.

Stripped of its pretentions, *Horse* parades the standard myth that the white man can do everything better than the Indian. Give him a little time and he will marry the best-looking girl (a princess of course) and will end up chief of the tribe. It is also interesting that Yellow Hand and Running Deer look very European while some of the nastier Indians are darker with flat features. Sioux features in fact did range from Nordic to Mongol and their color from white to copper red, but this case seems the usual pandering to ideas of Anglo-is-beautiful.

The Sioux were called the Vision Seekers because they placed so much importance upon receiving communications from the spirits in the form of visions. They were cheerful people very fond of jokes, games, and romance. Above all, they liked to feast, dance, and sing. None of this comes through in *Horse*. Even the use of the native language becomes a handicap for eloquence was another Sioux characteristic. Without their own words much of the beauty of their way of life is lost. The half-breed's silly interpretations should be compared to some of the speeches of the Sioux holy man Black Elk to see how much has been lost.

> You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round . . . The sky is round and I have heard that the earth is round and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours.

SOLDIER BLUE

Ralph Nelson's version of the Indian massacres is an obvious commercial rip-off on the new sympathy for Indians. Instead of the dirty Injuns making dastardly attacks on helpless whites, it is the cavalry which makes dastardly attacks on helpless redskins. The director relies totally on explicit scenes of carnage for his argument and effect.

The film opens with a payroll detachment of cavalry ambushed by Cheyenne seeking gold to buy guns. The sole survivors are Honus Gant (Peter Strauss), a naive young soldier blue and Cresta Lee (Candice Bergen), a woman who has just been released by the very band which has staged the ambush. The couple start the long trek back to the main army unit and encounter the gamut of wilderness perils. Cresta shows far more skill than simple simon Honus. She sweats, belches, and seduces while slowly convincing Honus that the white men are much more murderous than the Indians.

The Indian lore in the film is spotty. One pleasant surprise is Cresta's admission that Spotted Wolf has released her because he could not make her happy. Many Apache warriors claimed they would not have sex with a woman captive until they had "won her heart." Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce stated that in his long war with the whites no women were ill treated. Such intriguing claims may yet undermine the image of the raping savage that is imperative to any racist mythology. Unfortunately, the virtue of the Indians in *Soldier Blue* is only a device to be set against the lusty soldiers who are bent on raping everything that walks.

Naturally, Honus must fight a duel with an Indian. Naturally he is victorious—for nowhere in film history does an Indian win one of these duels, though they are supposedly part of his culture. The victim in this case is one of three Kiowa who come upon Cresta and Honus. Good Honus cannot bring himself to kill the warrior after beating him but one of the other Kiowa does the job for him out of disgust for his comrade's defeat. This is Hollywood Indian myth at its most flamboyant. War parties were almost always made up of relatives and close

friends. The other Kiowa would not have killed their companion but would have waited to relate how he had wiped out the disgrace by some brave deed in another battle or duel.

Honus and Cresta are eventually separated, but they make their individual ways to the army camp. Cresta finds the colonel there is planning to massacre her former tribe and she rushes off to warn them. Honus does not believe the attack will occur until it actually takes place. The attack itself outdoes the many previous violent scenes by several tons worth of blood and torn limbs. Nothing is left to the imagination. Heads get chopped off and breasts sliced away. Blood and brains splatter in slow motion. Children are tossed about on bayonets. Women are raped, then mutilated. The mayhem is so grisly that it loses its effect, seeming more like a comic book than a genuine slaughter. The victims seem unrelated to the idyllic Cheyenne laughing and playing in the village shortly before the attack. Honus is outraged and rebels. He gets put in chains for his troubles. Cresta takes a Cheyenne child in her arms and goes into captivity with the survivors.

Nelson writes that he got ideas for his film by reading of the massacre at Sand Creek and making a connection with war crimes in Vietnam. Nothing so complex comes over on the screen. Colonel Iverson (John Anderson) is a maniac. His soldiers are beasts. Obviously these whites are insane. There is no question of land, skins, reprisals, or what Black Elk called "the yellow metal that makes Wasichus crazy." There is only an irrational kill instinct that horrifies the "real" white society represented by Honus and Cresta.

Nelson's use of violence for its own sake causes him to lose at least one important visual effect. At Sand Creek, Chief Black Kettle rode out to meet the soldiers waving a huge American flag given to him at a meeting when he was promised the land would be his "as long as the grass shall grow and the rivers run." The scene is shown in *Soldier Blue* but given the clichés surrounding everything else, the sight of the American flag trampled beneath the hoofs of advancing cavalry becomes the shallowest of social comments.

Had Nelson done his research more zealously, he could have produced an even more revolting scene as an anti-climax. The "real" Colonel Iverson was named Chivington, an itinerant preacher, and the assault troops were not regulars but civilian volunteers. When the battle was over, the victors and their preacher leader took their scalps, heads, arms, and other trophies to a large Denver music hall. There the show was stopped and the stage cleared so that the men could parade their souvenirs to the wild applause and cheering of the entire audience.

LITTLE BIG MAN

Arthur Penn takes a longer and more sophisticated road to dish out the same conclusions as in *Soldier Blue*. His Chief Old Lodge Skins says that everything is alive to the Indian but everything is dead to the whites. Thus the massacres are once more reduced to racial mania unconnected with social or economic considerations. Even the defeat of Custer becomes personal rather than social. Custer is an insane egocentric general who seems to know that his charge will fail. The Custer with one eye on the Democratic National Convention, the Custer who had political supporters drumming up votes at that convention, the Custer who counted on the public's partiality to successful generals, the Custer who had taken mineralogists, reporters, and miners into the Black Hills —that shrewd Custer is lost. We have only another insane Iverson commanding more soldier blues.

Penn chooses the form of the comic elegy, a tall tale told by 121-year-old Jack Crabb (Dustin Hoffman), the last survivor of Custer's Last Stand. The conception of Crabb is interesting. Unlike the typical Western hero who serves the interest of "progress" (expansion) in one form or another, Crabb just wants to survive. Captured by Indians, he becomes an Indian just as later he will be gunman, medicine seller, hobo, etc. He is Everyman and lives out various lives of the West with frequent returns to the Cheyenne and Chief Old Lodge Skins. It is through

this character that for the first time an Indian speaks with more than grunts. The chief is played by Dan George of the Salish and is so much the ideological center of the film that it seems impossible that Penn originally wanted Sir Laurence Olivier or Paul Scofield for the role and indeed at one time had cast Richard Boone. The notion of these fine but very Anglo-Saxon actors playing the stoic and gracious chief who is the repository of Indian lore reflects a cheapness in Penn's conception. This cheapness surfaces on various occasions. When the chief is enjoying a good pipe, there is a hip suggestion that the old boy is smoking grass. His farewell speech to earth is made into a joke. Even more misleading, the chief's reference to the Cheyenne as "the human beings" leaves the idea that the whites must be something less. Actually, almost all tribes referred to themselves as "the people" or "the human beings"; the names we know them by are usually names given by their enemies. Similarly the often used, "It is a good day to die," is not personal idiom but the standard phrase used by plains people to bolster their courage in a tough spot.

Penn does break through to some new ground in a scene toward the end of the film. The chief has become blind and is sitting in his tepee prepared to die because a battle is raging outside. Crabb convinces the chief he has become invisible, and the old man chortles and laughs, completely delighted with his invisibility as he walks amid the struggling Indians and soldiers. Penn also goes out of his way to explain what counting coup means and to note other Indian customs accurately.

Penn's use of a homosexual Sioux is far less successful. The homosexual is an offensive limp-wrist drag queen from a Manhattan Hallowe'en ball. The people of the plains had reverence and fear of homosexual men. They lived in special parts of the village and warriors might live with them without loss of dignity. At certain times, the homosexuals were sought out to perform specific rituals and other times they were studiously avoided. All this is lost between flittering eyelashes and a lispy come-into-my-tepee-sweetie performance.

The warrior who does everything backwards is another bastardized conception. He is the most disagreeable of the Indians and for some reason is shown as the slayer of Custer. Such men were usually charged with keeping camps cheerful with their jokes. Special backward ceremonies were also common to emphasize the power of the circle and to note the two faces of reality.

Backward warrior and homosexual aside, because Penn allows the audience to know the Cheyenne, their slaughter is far more horrible than that in *Soldier Blue*, even though the scenes are less brutal. The Indians' right to strike back militarily at the Little Big Horn doesn't have to be argued. (The parallel with Vietnam is strong. Crabb's wife has distinct Asian features and there is no trouble in imagining a chat between Uncle Ho and Old Lodge Skins.)

Yet, all too conveniently, *Little Big Man* is two movies in one. One paints a sympathetic picture of Indian life and the other is a crude burlesque of the white West. Nowhere is there a clash of real values. We identify with the Indians because they are nice. We are not troubled with problematic things like ownership of skins, minerals, and land. The Indians held the land was owned communally and could not be bought or sold. Their lives emphasized spiritual over material things. Their fights were matters of individual fame-seeking rather than politics and economics. Their communal way of living with reverence for all life made their way incompatible with the "manifest destiny" of the young American republic. Like *Soldier Blue*, *Little Big Man* fails to deal with these questions as it moves simple-mindedly from massacre to massacre.

TELL THEM WILLIE BOY IS HERE

Based on actual events in California, *Willie Boy* marked the return of Abraham Polonsky to Hollywood after twenty years on the blacklist. The story is set in 1909 after the defeat of the Indians but at a time when war chiefs such as Joseph and Geronimo were still alive and

warriors who had fought the cavalry were still alive to teach the young. In spite of this, Indian ways were dying. The Indian Bureau had outlawed use of Indian religion, language, dress, hair style, and customs. They penned the tribes on reservations, then whittled down their size each year. A few Indians had adjusted and become like whites. Most had fallen into despair, poverty, disease, drunkenness, and often suicide. Some like Willie Boy found new ways to rebel.

Polonsky only touches on the outlines of Willie's rebellion but we know he is not a "good Indian." Willie (Robert Blake) has been to a reformatory. He has a fight with pool-hall racists. He is taciturn and the audience quickly recognizes in him the alienated, isolated twentieth-century rebel hero. His life is rubbed out for the most trifling of circumstances. An Indian father forbids Willie to see his daughter. They meet and make love. The irate father intervenes with weapons and Willie has to kill in self-defense. He takes his woman and begins a flight that he, the girl, and the audience immediately understand must end in death.

Fate seems to be Willie's worst enemy. President Taft happens to be visiting in the area. The national press corps plays up the "Indian outbreak" and the possibility of presidential assassination. Old Indian hunters get out their knives for one more scalp. The local lawmen fall over themselves to prove the West is as lawful and orderly as the East. Posses chase the fleeing couple and in due time, Sheriff Coop (Robert Redford) takes up the hunt personally.

Polonsky goes out of his way to underline the equality of Coop and Willie. Their handprints in the mud match. The muffled sex cries of their women mingle on the screen. Coop respects his prey and would prefer not to hunt him, but like all white screen sheriffs he is better at the Indian game than the Indian. After cornering his man, the sheriff offers a rifle duel which Willie accepts even though he has no bullets—the suicide of the modern existentialist.

Actually, aside from some comments on how Willie is a great runner and woodsman, his Indianness is only a device. He might be a black or rebel white youth. The other Indians are faceless, opinionless men. They help neither the sheriff nor Willie. When one Indian-hating sheriff is killed by Willie, they are pleased. When Coop allows them to burn Willie's dead body Indian-style, they are equally pleased. They are divided over the mysterious death of Willie's woman. One thinks she has killed herself to let Willie escape. Another thinks Willie has had to kill her himself so she would not be captured. Neither alternative is as likely as that the woman would have attempted to stay hidden and if captured would wait until the warrior came for her. Such common sense is very much in line with Indian thinking and very much out of line with Hollywood Indian mythology.

Hoffman as white Indian: LITTLE BIG MAN

Such misconceptions are less critical than the mistaken interchangeability of Coop and Willie. They seem so alike their roles could be reversed. But this is a contemporary myth element; it didn't hold in 1909. Willie was a lone rebel from a defeated civilization suffering profound cultural shock. Coop was one of a people still fresh from the conquest of a continent. He could offend politicians and reporters when it came to the matter of Willie's burial but not in the matter of his survival. Their duel was not the apparent man-to-man struggle seen on the screen. Coop has traced his prey through the aid of the telegraph and

the train and the printed map and the Indian informers and the gangs of white men waiting at every possible escape point from the wilderness. Like the Nez Perce pursued by seven different regiments over fifteen hundred miles, Willie is not defeated by valor but by logistics. The liberal/radical Polonsky can afford to posit his antagonists as equals but it is not so.

Polonsky and the other directors have doubtless worked with as many good intentions as any Hollywood production allows, but they have only done a facelifting on the old Cowboys & Indians bit. The grunting, foul-smelling savage may never ride again, but it will be some time before the Native Americans are treated as serious subjects in themselves rather than as stand-ins for Vietnamese, blacks, or youth culture. But their challenge to the screen remains, and becomes more acute year by year: understanding the nature and depth of the crimes against the Native Americans is essential to understanding where the United States has been and where it is going. The Indian has always been the white man's mystic enemy, dreaming dreams and living lives the whites have never dreamed or lived. Standing Bear of the Sioux spoke of this antagonism near the end of his life some four decades ago. His words seem as valid now as then:

> The white man does not understand the Indian for the reason that he does not understand America. He is too far removed from its formative processes. The roots of the tree of his life have not yet grasped the rock and soil. The white man is still troubled with primitive fears; he still has in his consciousness the perils of this frontier continent, some of its fastnesses not yet having yielded to his questing footsteps and inquiring eyes. He shudders still with the memory of the loss of his forefathers upon its scorching deserts and forbidding mountain-slopes. The man from Europe is still a foreigner and an alien. And he still hates the man who questioned his path across the continent. But in the Indian the spirit of the land is still vested; it will be until other men are able to divine and meet its rhythm.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Andrist, Ralph K., *The Long Death: The Last Days of the Plains Indians.* Collier Books, 1964. $2.45. Beautifully written history.

Astrov, Margot, ed., *American Indian Prose and Poetry.* Capricorn Books, 1946. $2.45. The best available collection.

Black Elk, *Black Elk Speaks.* U. of Nebraska, 1932. $1.50. The classic account of Sioux life by the cousin of Crazy Horse.

Day, A. Grove, *The Sky Clears.* U. of Nebraska, 1951. $1.75. 200 well chosen poems with commentary.

Deloria, Vine, *Custer Died For Your Sins.* Avon, 1969. $1.25. Revolutionary rap by contemporary Indian spokesman.

Josephy, Alvin M. Jr., *Patriot Chiefs: A Chronicle of Indian Resistance.* Viking, 1958. $1.95. Important point of view.

Kroeber, Theodora. *Ishi in Two Worlds.* U. of California, 1961. $1.95. Moving biography of the last of the Yahi Indians.

Brown, Dee, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee.* Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1970. $6.95. The new touchstone of Indian scholarship.

Due by the author of this article in fall, 1972: Georgakas, Dan, *Red Shadows* and *The Broken Hoop.* Doubleday-Zenith, $1.50 per volume. Poetic prose history of the tribes who inhabited what came to be the territorial United States.

Any of the above books not available at local outlets can be ordered by mail from Eighth Street Bookshop, 17 W. 8th St., N.Y.C. 10011.

Reviews

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE

Director: Stanley Kubrick. Script: Kubrick and Anthony Burgess, from the Burgess novel. Producer: Kubrick. Photography: John Alcott. Warners.

Art is, among other things, a source of comfort, of consolation, even of courage, and this side of art becomes especially important in times of trouble. Unfortunately, it is precisely in times of trouble that a good many people look to art for images of their own despair, for flattering reflections of their terror and their interior violence. You hear: "Only a disjointed (or a violent, or insane) world." It is a profoundly philistine view, assuming that art has some grim debt to "real life" and placing it firmly in the service of the meanest imaginable idea of truth, yet artists continue to pander to it, or to be ensnared by it. In this respect, as in more obvious ones, the movies are peculiarly vulnerable to the demands of their presumptive audience, which may account in part for a vein of nastiness which has begun to run through serious moving-pictures: a strain of bully-love, and a tendency to treat the audience as an emotionally malleable object to be manipulated rather than as an active participant in the artistic event. The human pain, wickedness, and foolishness which have always been the subjects of drama are coming to be treated as transcendent and absolute, which means we get more and more films constructed like the "battle conditioning" films to which I was subjected during World War II—images of viciousness presented so authoritatively as to obliterate the possibility of any humane context for them. Their implication is that human experience is definable in terms of violence—that the world consists of brutes and their brutalized victims.

Well, if anybody is looking for a film which will embody and reinforce his worst moments of panic, it is available in Stanley Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange*. It is the simple, fairytale-like story (taken from an Anthony Burgess novel) of a juvenile thug, Alex, who is imprisoned for murder, volunteers for "conditioning" to get out of jail, is conditioned to become sick at the prospect of sexual or aggressive action, and is then released to be abused by all his former victims. Hospitalized after a suicide attempt, he is "de-conditioned" by a government now fearful that he may prove an embarrassing example of its social engineering, and at the close of the film Alex, his thuggishness fully restored, smiles wolfishly in the embrace of the slimy Home Secretary. The equation is clear and neat: the brutality of the fist differs little from the brutality of "law and order." Except that that isn't, in fact, Kubrick's point. Quite clearly, he prefers the brutality of the fist, for Alex is made charming while the Home Secretary is thoroughly contemptible. Kubrick's point is made earlier with the introduction of a prison chaplain who argues against conditioning on the ground that a man who loses the power to choose between good and evil has lost the chance of redemption, has lost his soul, has been de-humanized. Thus Alex, who has *chosen* to be evil, is better than all the mealy-mouthed others in the film who have either chosen evil pretending it is good or have timidly not chosen at all.

In fact, all of this logic-chopping doesn't really function in the film at all. Kubrick said (in an interview with Penelope Houston of *Sight and Sound*) that Alex—whom he mysteriously compared with Richard III—is attractive for his "candor and wit and intelligence," but then quickly gave the show away with ". . . and the fact that all the other characters are lesser people and in some way worse people." The others in the film are all "lesser" in that they are less brutal, less physically strong, less ruthless, or take less joy in bloodshed. The means by which Alex is celebrated are simple enough: he is not made into a morally significant figure but into a comic hero. He is comic because he is so completely and maniacally what he is, and he is heroic because no other character is much of anything at all. The only gesture toward "significance" lies in giving Alex a deep and poetical sensitivity to music, and especially

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE

to Beethoven—which is spoiled for him during the conditioning when Beethoven is inadvertently mixed in with the things that make him sick.

The austere, symmetrical story unfolds in a strange, balletic style. Scenes are theatrically structured and photographed—even to two scenes being presented upon stages and another, a rape, done as a musical-comedy number. The sets are vaguely futuristic, but not very. All the usual reliance of movies upon circumstantial reality is dispensed with in favor of a stark, dreamlike quality enhanced by the choreographic integration of movement and score. The kind of thing Kubrick did with the spaceships in *2001*, waltzing through the void, he here does, infinitely more subtly and imaginatively, with his actors, waltzing through an ethical and social void. The film is tersely and economically edited, and is fairly short, but it gives a curious feeling of gluey slowness at many points, for once Kubrick sets up a bit of violence he immediately goes stylized —slow-motion, balletic, or ritualized, but something intensely cinematic—and the effect is powerful.

The technical excellence of the film is no surprise. Kubrick can do everything well, and has an almost supernatural gift for pace and tempo, for the counterpoint of physical and emotional movement. What did surprise me was the tawdrily fashionable quality of the film. I had gotten used to Kubrick working upon, around, and against convention: the conventional war film, love film, or science fiction film. In *A Clockwork Orange* he has put his great talents to the unquestioning service of a modish image: the sexually smoldering young brute. I guess they are the spawn of Stanley Kowalski. They multiply by the hundreds in television adventure series: slack-jawed and full-lipped, vaguely androgynous, their tight jeans bulging at the crotch, their nervous and strident musical themes blaring. Their sullen glance makes grown men sweat and tremble, and awakens in every woman her repressed desire to be dominated. Pretty infantile stuff at best, it has now been reduced to a cartoon. What on earth has prompted Stanley Kubrick to try to breathe life into this particular scarecrow?

Both Kubrick and his star, Malcolm McDowell, have referred to the picture as "satire," so I guess their comic hero is supposed to hold something or other up to ridicule, although I can't imagine what. Kubrick calls it (same interview) ". . . social satire dealing with the question of whether behavioral psychology and psychological conditioning are dangerous new weapons for a totalitarian government to use

to impose vast controls on its citizens and turn them into little more than robots," but you can't satirize a question, only an answer. I guess he means his answer is "Yes" and he wants to make fun of those who would answer "No," but the film really doesn't clarify who he thinks these benighted beings are, why they love these toys, or what makes them ridiculous. Alex, God knows, is not the target of the satire, and the others Kubrick isn't especially interested in.

As to the moral and psychological significance, they seem to me flimsy claims. The proposition that what is done to Alex is "worse" than what he does is nonsense in any ordinary human terms. A club over the head may be cruder than a syringe in the arm, but that doesn't make it somehow more humanly personal. As for the sanctity of man's right to choose evil, that's superstition, for it amounts to dealing in a few selected religious terms ("evil" and "free will") while conveniently leaving out the terms that make religion something *more* than superstition ("Providence," for instance, and "salvation").

What it really boils down to is forty minutes of seeing Alex torture people, and then forty minutes of seeing Alex tortured. He wins because he brings to his torturing more style than his tormentors, in their turn, can muster, since he is disinterested while they are moved either by conviction, ambition, or passion. Kubrick has suggested that the violence portrayed is somehow "sterilized" by the mythic stylization he has given it, but if anything the opposite is true. The stylization shifts your attention, in a sense, away from the simple physical reality of a rape or a murder and focuses it upon the quality of feeling: cold, mindless, brutality. The quality of feeling tends to get forgotten in the endless arguments about movie violence, which sometimes suggest that realism of treatment is an index of unwholesomeness. The feeling of this film is quiet hysteria, as if Kubrick were using Alex as a stick to beat not only totalitarians but the whole of the human race, especially including the audience. I don't see where he's standing to wield this weapon, and I don't think he knows. In fact, I suspect there is nothing under his feet more substantial than an imperfect glimmering of Anthony Burgess's fastidious Roman Catholicism.

Kubrick has long shown a horrified fascination with dehumanization: the vision of machinelike people, or man-like machines which mock our humanity. The tragedy of *Paths of Glory* (one of his best films) is not the killing of the three innocent men but the army's way of doing it and how they are, before they die, robbed of whatever character they had, good or bad, and turned into little more than limp dolls borne by robotlike executioners to their ridiculous yet real execution. *Dr. Strangelove* (to my mind Kubrick's masterpiece) plays maniacally upon all sorts of wierd confusions of the human and the mechanical, from Keenan Wynn's shooting a coke machine to Peter Sellers's autonomous artificial arm. In these pictures, and in *2001*, he explored images of dehumanization and set them in suggestive parallels, contrasts, and analogs, but he was never complacent. He was clearly out to unsettle his audience in those pictures; in *Clockwork Orange*, he seems merely trying to hurt. *Dr. Strangelove* discovers and comically explores a division within each of us—a real division, already there; *Clockwork Orange* simply pulls the levers of fear, which is a different thing. It's a spook show. If it weren't the work of a serious artist, and if it weren't so painful, it would be trivial.

In morals, as in politics, human beings with fascinating regularity turn themselves into the thing they hate, and something of the sort has happened to Kubrick in this film. The technique of the picture *is* the technique of brainwashing: emotional manipulation on the most visceral level of feeling. The dynamics of the film is the dynamics of totalitarianism: all choices and all values are derived from fear. Courage, difficult and uncertain as it is, is still the only defense against the rule of fear, which brings me back to the subject of satire, for the laughter of satire is restorative and courageous, while the laughter of *Clockwork Orange* is a mean and cynical snigger at the

weakness of our own stomachs. Personally, I suspect that a weak stomach may do more to protect us against the horrors of the total state than any amount of medieval niggling about free will and natural depravity. A strong stomach is the first requirement for a storm trooper.

Visual horrors abound in *A Clockwork Orange,* yet the worst moment may not be any of the murders, rapes, tortures, or beatings, but the moment when you notice that the film's monster, the manager of the aversion therapy to which Alex is subjected, has a Jewish name. Mere bad taste? Or the fearful symmetry of a nightmare? —JACKSON BURGESS

DAYS AND NIGHTS IN THE FOREST

(Aranyer Din Ratri). Director: Satyajit Ray. Screenplay: Ray, after the story by Sunil Ganguly. Photography: Soumendu Roy. Art Director: Bansi Chandragupta. Editor: Dulal Dutta. Music: Ray. Producers: Nepal Dutta, Ashim Dutta. Production Company: Priya Films. Pathe Contemporary-McGraw-Hill. 120 minutes.

The first good news of 1972 is that this superb two-year-old film by Satyajit Ray—as well as his older *Charulata*—have finally been picked up for American distribution. Which doesn't mean that they will be available overnight as the releasing organization involved, the Pathé Contemporary division of McGraw-Hill Films, paid a relatively steep price for US rights and can be presumed to wait for a propitious moment to re-launch Ray in America. Though the amount may seem small to anyone not familiar with the declining market for foreign-language films in this country during the past few years, it will not be easy for Pathé Contemporary to recover the $10,000 reportedly advanced for each of these Ray masterpieces. It's doubtful if any Ray film released here since the Apu trilogy—*The Music Room* and *Mahanagar,* for two—have earned in the five figures, for example.

Will even a smidgen of the audience for *Carnal Knowledge* take an interest in *Days and Nights in the Forest*? Logically it should, because *Days and Nights,* like *Charulata,* is a deeper statement on male chauvinism and woman's estate, as well as being, apart from *Charulata,* the greatest film to date by a great director.

It concerns four upper-caste Calcutta bachelors—Ashim (Soumitra Chatterjee, once the adult Apu), Sanjoy (Subhendu Chatterjee), Hari (Samit Bhanja) and Sekhar (Robi Ghose) —who vacation for three days in the Bengali forest. But the only "forest" that they—or anyone else in the film—ever relate to is the forest of the self. That is the irony of the title: everyone in the film, city folk and "tribals" alike, has lost all contact with nature.

What remains remarkable about Ray is how skillfully he conveys ideas of alienation without any of the pushmi-pullyu straining of, say, Antonioni. His cinema is truly a *popular* one. We get to know his characters so completely that when they laugh, we laugh; when they're troubled, so are we. Our identification with each character is so sustained that Ray can change our mood simply by shifting his focus to bring somebody else into view. Is there any director since McCarey who has been able to involve us in quite this way?

The structure is "open" in a strange manner. *Days and Nights in the Forest* has been called Chekhovian, and this has some relevance except that the film ends with a series of revelations which in traditional dramatic structure would come at the end of the second (rather than third) act. Nothing has been resolved with any finality: Hari may have learned something new about the caste system, Ashim may or may not continue to see the woman Jaya (Kaberi Bose) when both return to Calcutta. All that can be said to have occurred is that some characters have seen some trees in their own forests. The vacation has been really a time in an unfamiliar environment (which might just as well have been another city), where one's own series of emotions can be seen against a neutral relief, and perhaps better understood. *Days and Nights* means to relate to the kind of complexity and lack of wholeness which confront us more often in life than in art, and for that reason the shots get shorter and

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shorter as the film progresses, less fluid and lyrical. A central image is a native dance performed at a county fair, shots of which are used as punctuation during climactic scenes. We see only the feet of the dancers, never their whole bodies.

But the dance is not a metaphor for the entire film; it is a suggestion. The film, India itself, is *maybe* a bodiless dance, *maybe* a part of a ferris wheel (we never see the whole wheel), *maybe* a word game interrupted visually with a search for pillows. We have always known that one can as well discuss Ray without India as one can discuss Ford without America. Here, the series of names bandied about in a word game—from Tagore through Shakespeare through Mao—is a sign of the dumping ground for the world's culture which India has become. But the game is not a simple narration track of a Godardian order. The *choice* of each particular name by each participant in the game is important, as is their success or failure at various stages in the contest.

Days and Nights confirms how far Ray has progressed since the relatively simplistic humanism of the Apu trilogy; he has developed a complex treatment of India based on coordinates with which Americans like myself may be unfamiliar. But I surmise that the ancestors of the main characters in the film were at the top of the heap at a time when the caste system was in full flower. Now, western influences have killed that system but offered no viable replacement.

At one point the men beg a ranger, probably of lower caste, into letting them stay at a forest road house where, undoubtedly, their ancestors would have been welcome guests when it was part of a maharaja's estate. Wanting old caste status, but in western terms, they are humiliated. They take out their confusions in aggressive ways—being mean to untouchables, for example.

All of the men want women to be westernized in appearance but Indian in their deference—but they cannot have it both ways. The Calcutta girlfriend of one has left him after he has responded to a six-page letter with a one-page note. His way of working out his disappointment is to seduce a peasant girl—and then to suggest she wear a wig, like his Calcutta mistress.

Subhendu Chaterji, Simi, Robi Ghosh: Satyajit Ray's DAYS AND NIGHTS IN THE FOREST

Another meets a woman in the forest and is attracted to her intellectual background. But he admits to being glad that she deliberately let him win the word game. For all its behavioral charm and comedy, *Days and Nights in the Forest* is one of the most despairing films ever made. There is no hope for India, it seems to be saying. India can never be whole again—unlike Japan, as one character points out. One culture imposed on another resulted in a humpty-dumpty fragmentation—like the dance like the wheel, like the word game.

—STUART BYRON

THE GO-BETWEEN

Director: Joseph Losey. Producers: John Heyman, Norman Priggen. Script: Harold Pinter, based on the novel by L. P. Hartley. Photography: Gerry Fisher. Music: Richard Rodney Bennett. MGM.

Joseph Losey has always been, by vocation or destiny, a fringe man. Caught in the sidelines of the McCarthyist vortex, this self-defined "romantic Marxist" paid grievously, not really for the fairly mild social comment of films like *The Lawless* and *M*, but through guilt by association. Never subpoenaed, he ended up a martyr by proxy, a sympathetic bystander stung by a senseless backlash.

Blacklisted in Hollywood and exiled in England, Losey's punishment slowly proved

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Blacklisted in Hollywood and exiled in England, Losey's punishment slowly proved

to have fringe benefits. Uprooted from his milieu, signing films under assumed names, he became the jaundiced observer of an alien tradition, dissecting the British class structure with the coolness of an entomologist, always watchful and uninvolved.

For this he had an innate talent. The best in Losey's films always emerges when someone stumbles into relations not fully understood, vaguely incomprehensible and therefore awesome. A Freudian analysis of his pictures will obviously point to the primal fear felt by the child watching Mummy and Daddy in the act. It is not by coincidence that his finest Hollywood film is *The Prowler*, with its roaming voyeur, dangerously outside looking in, framing the world in open windows ready for an enterprising spy.

In his British period, Losey gains the perspective of the foreigner and comes into his own as a sort of sociosexual Peeping Tom, in multilayered plots where love and pleasure are a matter of pedigree, a baffling yet seductive Old World charade for an interloper from La Crosse, Wisconsin. In the special vision of this Jamesian not-so-innocent abroad, the most interesting characters are, somewhat like Losey himself, third parties to dramas not really their own. Envious and befuddled, they pry into forbidden secrets with often murderous curiosity.

The fringe people quickly become the center of a Losey movie: anguished Dirk Bogarde interposes himself between Stanley Baker and Jacqueline Sassard until *The Accident* grants him at last the stunned carcass of the girl, prime cut for quasi-necrophiliac violation. Stanley Baker is lured less by *Eva* herself than by her enigmatic sex life. Elizabeth Taylor rapaciously circles around the *Secret Ceremony* that Mia Farrow and Robert Mitchum shut her out from.

Like rejected figures in impossible threesomes, they cannot bear being mere spectators. "If you can't join them, beat them" is their perverse motto. What they can't share they destroy, like the master's gentility in *The Servant* or the soldier's stolid integrity in *King and Country*. Propelled by the envy of the unwanted, their life-force turns into death-force.

Even in Losey's failures one can sense the possibilities to be explored just by shifting focus to the outer edges, to Joanna Shimkus eagerly watching the Taylor-Burton dance of death in *Boom!* or even to the inscrutable helicopter pilot hovering over the doomed *Figures in a Landscape*.

The Go-Between is the ultimate distillation of Losey's style. Significantly, even the credits are run over a windowpane drenched in stubborn raindrops that remain oddly individual, rarely melding into a sentimental, tearlike rivulet. We are again outside looking in, but this time through the ideal Losey character: a child eavesdropping on adult sex and adult social prejudice. Freudian-Losey and Marxian-Losey have at last found a catalyst.

The protagonist is a thirteen-year-old-boy, born into the drab Edwardian middle class and invited by a school mate into the sumptuous world of the aristocracy, during a summer holiday. Knowing himself to be an outsider, Leo craves to break the codes of this grown-up, glamorous realm into which he's been suddenly plunged. In school, his special ploy to gain respect and attention has been magic: he delves into astrology, curses and conjuring.

Leo's formulas are mere infantile mumbo jumbo. Yet one of his spells has coincided with a tumble from a roof by a couple of school bullies, so Leo has accepted the credit. Not a fatal fall, mind you. To his amused hosts at Brandham Hall, Leo explains that they were only slightly fractured, for there are curses and curses. Like the pathetic sorcerer's apprentice he is doomed to be, Leo's incantations work only by mistake. He is brother under the skin to another typical outsider and bumbling criminal, Buñuel's Archibaldo de la Cruz.

Like Archibaldo, Leo falls under the spell of whomever he tries to subjugate. During this fateful summer, it is the beautiful and capricious Marian, a lady who in turn is sexually beholden to Ted Burgess, the rough and virile tenant farmer. The time is fraught with urgency, for Marian is pregnant by Burgess and

must quickly hide it by marrying a blue-blooded Viscount.

It is the Viscount who first uses Leo to carry idle messages to Marian and who, in a shrivelling hot afternoon, baptizes him Mercury, a double-edged sobriquet: "the smallest of the planets and the messenger of the Gods." There is indeed a triple meaning, for as the mercury rises in the record-breaking English summer of 1900, so does little Mercury rise and revolve around the Gods of his own making.

Marian senses the child's willingness to please and moves this wingless Mercury into her private orbit. He is soon carrying letters to and fro between the fair lady and the man she cannot marry. Leo, born under the sign of the Lion, embraces his task with ferocious zeal. It is mid-July and near his birthday. At his Zodiacal zenith, it is clear he won't hold his place for long. Pining for the center of the stage, he reads one of the *billets doux*. The aftermath is bitter.

Archetypical Losey character that he is, Leo wants a piece of the action, however piddling and indirect. He must find out what "spooning" means, what goes on beyond the kissing he has seen in picture postcards at beach resorts. As a bribe for his clandestine postman, Burgess promises to tell him the facts of life, but Leo is destined to discover them in a cruder, more shattering manner.

Jealously, he puts a curse on the lovers and then betrays them to Marian's mother, who catches them in the act and forces Leo to witness the defilement of Virgo by Taurus. The sight marks him forever and the curse destroys not only Marian and Burgess, but also the magician. The mentally castrated Leo becomes the Freudian capon, who dwells upon the moment and narrates the story after fifty sterile years.

Losey explores his go-between's meanderings on multiple levels. There's the boy's sexual anguish, far more acute because it is formless, because he must stand poised at the threshold of this adult mystery and curse, eager and left out. Yet there is also his shuttling between two classes, two worlds, not really at home in either. The idling elite frighten him, yet he can find no identification with the working class, as is subtly hinted by Losey in a cricket match: Leo's lucky catch nullifies Burgess's most spectacular feat of batting. By chance, he suddenly *belongs* with the rich, but his triumph is based on imposture and is therefore rootless.

Dominic Guard, Julie Christie: THE GO-BETWEEN

There is still one more spiral to Leo's alienation. The original novel, by L. P. Hartley, is narrated in flashback by an aging Leo, on the verge of revisiting the scene of his youthful crime. Harold Pinter's screenplay cleverly opts for an odd continuum of time, with the past interrupted by dreamlike flashes into the present. Old Leo and young Leo are seen almost coexisting, with the character a stranger on each level, leading the endlessly shadowy life of the uncommitted.

This boy, this man, this boy-man drifts in perpetuum between lovers, between layers of time and society's strata. A soul doing penance, he must again and again reenact the role foisted on him by Marian, for the movie is as much about role-taking and assumption of personality as the best of Hitchcock's. At the conclusion, we see him bloated and chalky, still carrying a final message from his Nemesis to her grandson. That we never know whether he delivers it or not is a fine stroke of Pinterian ambiguity, far more fetching than the rather literal ending of the book.

Strangely enough, it is these ambiguities that

the critics have most complained about. They are annoyed at finding no clear relation between young Leo and wizened Michael Redgrave, who plays him at sixty-odd. As if there were any direct line between the child Kane and the recluse of Xanadu! *The Go-Between,* nonetheless, is richer for these zigzags of the soul in transit, like Losey's equally splendid and misunderstood *Secret Ceremony.* Or, for that matter, like *Vertigo, Madame De* or *Citizen Kane,* with its incomplete jigsaw puzzle. They are all films about a lonely and eager character taking a role to be socially or sexually accepted, and then inextricably becoming the person they played at being. As movies, their style is equally tangential, elliptic, indirect, for such is the language of the fringe-people.

In truth, Losey has done no more than faithfully chronicle Leo's inclinations, for a go-between is essentially an *arriviste,* whichever way he may be heading. There is much moral righteousness and little logic in blaming him and his movie for this tortured upward mobility while sympathetically applauding someone like Beau Bridges in *The Landlord* for moving into the ghetto. Whatever their motives, they are both vertical tourists along the social spectrum and Leo's little excursion curses him for life. For this crushing destruction by snobbery, what ceremony else?

Losey has avoided easy traps and been unjustly chided for his discretion. He has told the story not in caveats and harangues, but in shades and shapes, in suggestions and feelings. It is said that diabetics, during an attack of hypoglycemia, intensify their perception of temperature and color. Losey has filmed this potentially sweet tale in an acerbic manner. With his sugar content at lowest ebb, he is like a supersensitive instrument registering the heat of the day, the respite of the shade, the dampness of musty interiors, the dominant green of Leo as opposed to the off-white of Marian, the rusty earth colors of Burgess and the starchy black of the pale Viscount.

Gerald Fisher's splendid photography makes the film almost into a dynamic Lüscher test. Take green, for instance, as Leo's special color. Green is the suit that Marian gives him to gain his allegiance. Green is the bicycle she means to present him with, as a concrete symbol of his role-taking: he will find it easier to carry love letters while pedalling along. Thus Maid Marian has beknighted (and benighted) her aspiring Robin Hood in classic garb. Frivolous and superficial, she fails to realize that green is also the color of callowness, of immaturity, and the color of envy. In Losey's first film, *The Boy with Green Hair,* it stood as a distinguishing trait, a cause for rebellion, an affirmation of individuality. Twenty-three years later, the director seems more resigned. His new "green boy" has learned to wear his difference with rue.

May this autumnal calm serve him in good stead. For Losey, often called the most baroque of film-makers until Ken Russell flipped his lid, has made a movie of almost monastic control. With firm rein on his symbols and his decor, he has not gone overboard with his actors, getting subdued performances from potentially dangerous professionals like Julie Christie, Alan Bates, Margaret Leighton, and Michael Redgrave, as well as from young Dominic Guard. He has brought in a stunningly beautiful film on a very limited budget and under a severe eight-week shooting schedule. Yet most critics have granted Losey the backhanded praise of saying that Pinter's script is the steadying factor that held him in check, like some benign strait-jacket.

However, a reading of the novel reveals that —except for the time-juggling element and the elimination of a foolishly coincidental first meeting between old Leo and Marian's grandson— Pinter's screenplay follows the plot to the point of servility. He might, after all, have dispensed with Burgess's suicide, for this Laurentian pillar of life force could have been sent to die in the Boer War, pushed by the ruling code of the bellicose Viscount. This change would have strengthened the anti-aristocratic stance of the film while making Burgess's death more believable. After all, a backwoods roué just doesn't blow his brains out because he's been

caught fucking the lady of the manor. One can even sense Losey's doubts about the incident by the almost subliminal, Resnais-like shot that disposes of it. Some viewers who evidently blinked at the wrong time even argue it isn't there.

Otherwise, Pinter has reproduced the novel scene by scene and almost word by word, in an excellent though certainly un-Pinterian job of adaptation. It is Losey's film sense that brings it to life in image by enchanting image, from the sensual tension of a bathing party to the stately polonaise of the guests entering the dining room, from the ritual piety of masters and servants joined in morning prayers to the longing, cursory glance at Leo's new green bicycle, forever useless now that little Mercury's planets and Gods have all crashed in space.

The Go-Between is Losey's ironically nostalgic pavane for a defunct principle, a solar system on the blink. More is the chagrin—if not the surprise—of walking by a marquee announcing the film as "Pinter's *The Go-Between.*" Only around the corner of the theater, in unfairly small print, is Losey's name. It doesn't really matter, all things considered, for Losey has once more entrenched himself in the sidelines and stubbornly edged his way towards the center. The fringe man rides again.

—RENE JORDAN

KING LEAR

Director-adapter: Peter Brook. Photographer: Henning Kristiansen. Designer: Georges Wahkevitch. Editor: Albert Jurgenson.

MACBETH

Director: Roman Polanski. Adapters: Polanski, Kenneth Tynan. Music: Third Ear Band. Editor: Alastair McIntyre.

"Mine eyes are made the fools o' th' other senses,
Or else worth all the rest."—MACBETH

There are many parallels between the two films. The directors are cosmopolitan men who have worked in England, France, and the US. Both have restless talents of the kind that may be called clever by people who dislike their work, while those who like it may feel that neither has yet put his best into a film—Brook because he is more at home on the stage, and Polanski because he has never committed himself to a serious, involving subject. Both are attracted to the grotesque, the cruel, and the blackly humorous: the similarities between *Marat/Sade* and *Lord of the Flies* on the one hand and *Repulsion* and *Cul-de-Sac* on the other are as striking as their differences. Brook has continually found these qualities (among others) in Shakespeare, and it is not surprising that Polanski has now met him on almost the same ground.

Shakespeare wrote *King Lear* and *Macbeth* at about the same time. Both are somber tragedies set in cheerless castles and blasted heaths, and there is a kind of inverse relationship between their themes: the authoritarianism of Lear crumbles into humanity, while the human indecision of Macbeth petrifies into tyranny. This is not, of course, anything like a single, reversible process. There are no resemblances between the two protagonists at any stage in their careers, or between the events they precipitate and suffer. Even if Shakespeare intended the mirror-image relationship between the two kings, he developed it in thoroughly different ways. We view Lear from a distance, partly because he starts out by rejecting human sympathy and common sense, and partly because the action is divided among other major characters and subplots. Macbeth, by contrast, remains the center of the action throughout, and we always know and follow what he is thinking. One incidental result of this difference in treatment is that *Macbeth* is considered understandable enough for high school students to tackle, while *Lear* is a "problem play" that needs deep interpretation.

This may partly explain the different approaches that Polanski and Brook have taken in translating Shakespeare to the screen. At first viewing, Polanski's *Macbeth* appears to be a straightforward, uncomplicated adaptation. The

caught fucking the lady of the manor. One can even sense Losey's doubts about the incident by the almost subliminal, Resnais-like shot that disposes of it. Some viewers who evidently blinked at the wrong time even argue it isn't there.

Otherwise, Pinter has reproduced the novel scene by scene and almost word by word, in an excellent though certainly un-Pinterian job of adaptation. It is Losey's film sense that brings it to life in image by enchanting image, from the sensual tension of a bathing party to the stately polonaise of the guests entering the dining room, from the ritual piety of masters and servants joined in morning prayers to the longing, cursory glance at Leo's new green bicycle, forever useless now that little Mercury's planets and Gods have all crashed in space.

The Go-Between is Losey's ironically nostalgic pavane for a defunct principle, a solar system on the blink. More is the chagrin—if not the surprise—of walking by a marquee announcing the film as "Pinter's *The Go-Between.*" Only around the corner of the theater, in unfairly small print, is Losey's name. It doesn't really matter, all things considered, for Losey has once more entrenched himself in the sidelines and stubbornly edged his way towards the center. The fringe man rides again.

—RENE JORDAN

KING LEAR

Director-adapter: Peter Brook. Photographer: Henning Kristiansen. Designer: Georges Wahkevitch. Editor: Albert Jurgenson.

MACBETH

Director: Roman Polanski. Adapters: Polanski, Kenneth Tynan. Music: Third Ear Band. Editor: Alastair McIntyre.

"Mine eyes are made the fools o' th' other senses,
Or else worth all the rest."—MACBETH

There are many parallels between the two films. The directors are cosmopolitan men who have worked in England, France, and the US. Both have restless talents of the kind that may be called clever by people who dislike their work, while those who like it may feel that neither has yet put his best into a film—Brook because he is more at home on the stage, and Polanski because he has never committed himself to a serious, involving subject. Both are attracted to the grotesque, the cruel, and the blackly humorous: the similarities between *Marat/Sade* and *Lord of the Flies* on the one hand and *Repulsion* and *Cul-de-Sac* on the other are as striking as their differences. Brook has continually found these qualities (among others) in Shakespeare, and it is not surprising that Polanski has now met him on almost the same ground.

Shakespeare wrote *King Lear* and *Macbeth* at about the same time. Both are somber tragedies set in cheerless castles and blasted heaths, and there is a kind of inverse relationship between their themes: the authoritarianism of Lear crumbles into humanity, while the human indecision of Macbeth petrifies into tyranny. This is not, of course, anything like a single, reversible process. There are no resemblances between the two protagonists at any stage in their careers, or between the events they precipitate and suffer. Even if Shakespeare intended the mirror-image relationship between the two kings, he developed it in thoroughly different ways. We view Lear from a distance, partly because he starts out by rejecting human sympathy and common sense, and partly because the action is divided among other major characters and subplots. Macbeth, by contrast, remains the center of the action throughout, and we always know and follow what he is thinking. One incidental result of this difference in treatment is that *Macbeth* is considered understandable enough for high school students to tackle, while *Lear* is a "problem play" that needs deep interpretation.

This may partly explain the different approaches that Polanski and Brook have taken in translating Shakespeare to the screen. At first viewing, Polanski's *Macbeth* appears to be a straightforward, uncomplicated adaptation. The

sensationalism hinted at in the prior publicity does not emerge: the youthfulness and sexuality of Jon Finch and Francesca Annis seem natural enough, and the nakedness of the sleepwalking scene is as demure as long tresses, folded arms, and deep shadows can make it. Violence is emphasized, but it is always appropriate, even in the protracted downfall of Macbeth. When Malcolm, Macduff, and the English forces enter the castle, Macbeth is beyond all fear or sense of evil. Believing in his charmed life, he is superman, a killing machine as mythic as Frankenstein's monster, James Bond, or Yojimbo, and he disposes of several challenging knights with brief explosions of ferocity. Then Macduff steps forward, revealing that he is the exception to the charm, and Macbeth is suddenly reduced—or expanded—into a mortal who knows fear and the certainty of defeat but will go down fighting. There is a lengthy, brawling duel; and the contrast between its messy desperation and the cold efficiency of the previous killings reinforces the drama and poetry of the play's climax.

The first impression of Brook's *Lear* is quite different. Right from the start, the action seems to be forced into unnatural shapes. The stylization of the opening scenes is promising: common people stand like statues as they wait to hear what is to happen to the kingdom; in the meeting hall, the door slams shut by itself; Lear (Paul Scofield) looks around through narrowed, shifty eyes and then speaks one word: "No." After a pause he continues, and it becomes clear that the word was actually "Know" —but a mood of negation has been intriguingly set. This mood pervades everything that follows. The common people vanish, never to be seen again: the countryside is bare of any sign of human life or settlement outside the nobles' castles. When the French army lands at Dover, all we see of it is a handful of soldiers who make a sudden and silent appearance in front of Lear, like a platoon of ghosts.

The film moves slowly, but with occasional bursts of exaggerated violence. Edmund, launching his plot against Edgar, sets off at a run into Gloucester's bedchamber and grapples him awake. When Kent tells Edgar to "vex not [Lear's] ghost," he also grabs him by the scruff of the neck and hurls him away. There are similar extremes in the way the characters speak: slowly and flatly for the most part, with occasional galvanic phrases, but always avoiding the middle ground where the verse might sound musical. If, as Shakespeare says elsewhere, "The man that hath no music in himself . . . Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils," the characters here are certainly a dubious crew.

In fact, Brook makes quite sure that no one in the film could possibly be mistaken for a hero. Goneril's accusations against the rowdiness of Lear and his hundred knights are shown to be completely true. Cordelia is deadpan, without warmth. Gloucester, Edgar and Albany all speak with light, plaintive voices, emphasizing their weakness.

In short, it is obvious throughout the film that Brook is trying to present a special view of *King Lear*. The view is well known: it was behind Brook's 1963 stage production of the play (also with Paul Scofield), and Brook has made no secret of his debt to the Polish literary theorist Jan Kott. In his essay "King Lear or End Game" Kott asserts that *Lear* can make sense today only if it is presented in the style of the "new theatre" of Beckett and Brecht, that is, with alienation instead of empathy, and in a grotesque rather than a tragic mood. How does the grotesque differ from tragedy? Both the tragic hero and the grotesque hero fight a losing battle against the absolute, but while the former takes it seriously the latter mocks it. In *Lear*, according to Kott, Shakespeare presents the absolute as a world of arbitrary cruelty which is unrelieved even at the end. Lear and Gloucester are grotesque heroes because they become clowns—Lear by going mad, Gloucester through his illusory suicide leap.

Any theory about Shakespeare (or films, or politics) which is put forward as the *only* one that makes sense is bound to be viewed with suspicion. In any case, Kott builds his theory on a shaky foundation: he starts out by declaring that the scene of Lear dividing his kingdom

is too absurd to be taken realistically. But as other students of Shakespeare (including Soviet director Grigori Kozintsev) have pointed out, Lear does not base his apportionment on his daughters' professions of love. The divisions have already been marked out on a map—as is shown even in Brook's film—and the professions of love are simply a ritual demanded by a king who no longer sees any important distinction between public and private life. The scene does indeed strike us as strange today—as much for Cordelia's bluntness as for Lear's choice of ritual—but it is not the tremendous problem that Kott makes it out to be. An autocrat demanding lip service from those close to him is hardly in the same league of grotesqueness as a blind man who keeps his parents in garbage cans.

Kott's theory might still be valid and interesting—but if so, Brook's film is a poor advertisement for it. In his attempt to create a world of arbitrary cruelty, Brook has had to maim the text of the play and distort characters and incidents to the point of (non-philosophical) absurdity. Goneril and Regan are made to appear as reasonable as possible toward the beginning, so that their later cruelty will seem to come from the (philosophical) absurdity of life rather than their own volition. On the other hand, the characters who are not cruel—Cordelia, Edgar, Albany—are systematically weakened until they appear helpless. Sometimes the two kinds of changes reinforce each other: by cutting Cordelias lines that begin "Why have my sisters husbands, if they say / They love you all?" Brook at one blow makes Cordelia less spirited than Shakespeare wrote her and removes a pointed reminder of her sisters' falsity. But more often Brook fails to realize that his changes are making nonsense of both the play and Kott's theory.

To show that Goneril has a legitimate complaint against Lear and his knights, Brook first shows them riding noisily home from a hunting trip. While 80-year-old Lear may have been exaggerating when he said that after giving up his kingdom he would "crawl toward death," would he really go whooping along at a gallop like John Wayne? Shortly afterward, at the height of his showdown with Goneril, Lear suddenly breaks off for another John Wayne stunt —overturning a heavy table. As if on cue, his knights start overturning tables throughout the hall, and for some time there is nothing but crashing and confusion. Then, as if nothing had happened, Lear resumes the quarrel with a shout: "Detested kite, thou liest!"

Goneril (Irene Worth) with Lear

This confusion of realism and absurdity persists throughout the film. Brook's attempt to keep pushing *King Lear* into the world of Brecht and Beckett reminds me of Laurel and Hardy trying to deliver a piano up a long flight of steps: excessive determination matched with ineptitude. In Brook's case, the ineptitude lies in his handling of the film medium. His persistent misjudgments of screen space and time turn a dubious interpretation of the play into a travesty. As with Laurel and Hardy, what's being delivered is destroyed along the way.

Many reviewers have deplored the flash cutting, optical distortions, and other conspicuous effects of the storm scene, but these are merely the symptoms of a deeper failure. Brook's direction goes astray long before and long after the storm.

I have already mentioned the film's manic-depressive tempo. The depressive state is set by Brook's interpretation of Lear (and, to a lesser extent, Gloucester). Since Lear is not to be heroic or romantic, Brook has Scofield speak in a slow, dry, deliberate voice. As a result, despite considerable cutting of the text, the major scenes involving Lear seem to stretch out

for an inordinate length of time. This is particularly true of the encounter between blind Gloucester and mad Lear. The scene is central to Kott's interpretation: in their extremity, Lear and Gloucester come closest to the place beyond hope where Beckett's characters live, uttering such lines as "This great world shall so wear out to naught" (Gloucester) and "When we are born, we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools" (Lear). Brook tries to stage the scene as if it *were* Beckett. The setting is a deserted beach. Lear and Gloucester are seated on the ground, close together. Edgar is made to stand about ten yards away, motionless, in the stylized waiting role of Clov in much of *End Game* or of Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*. Brook uses an oblique high-angle long shot to establish the scene—Lear and Gloucester in the near middle ground, Edgar beyond, beach and sea stretching out empty into the distance—and repeats it several times, always with the same fixity of viewpoint. No doubt this is meant to suggest that the three men are trapped in a world devoid of meaning. Instead, the scene has a curious air of blandness. To begin with, the slow deliberation of the dialogue leaches tension from the lines. Then, after the bleak earlier scenes, the sunlit beach looks rather attractive, none the less so for being quiet. And the fixity of the camera seems to result from some external constraint—perhaps an anachronistic yacht or motel lurking just outside the field of view. In the end, it is Brook, not the characters, who seems trapped.

In many scenes where Lear or Gloucester do not appear, or appear without speaking, Brook tries to compensate for their tedium by switching to the manic mood and whipping up physical action—sometimes literally, as with Lear's galloping. These outbreaks have two unfortunate results. First, they draw unnecessary attention to the mechanics of the plot, which most critics (including Kott) agree are somewhat clumsy and unimportant. In fact, in the scene where Edmund frames Edgar as a would-be parricide, Brook weaves additional complexities into Shakespeare's action. In the play, Edmund forges an incriminating letter in Edgar's name and gives it to Gloucester to read. In the film, Edmund persuades Gloucester to conceal himself, and then presents the letter to Edgar; as Edgar reads it aloud, Edmund draws him close to the hiding place so that Gloucester will think he is overhearing Edgar's own words.

This device, straight out of French farce, points to the second unfortunate result of the manic scenes: again, the wrong kind of grotesque. During the battle, when Edgar urges the reluctant Gloucester to move to safety with the words "Men must endure / Their going hence, even as their coming hither: / Ripeness is all," Brook has Edgar lug Gloucester along the ground with the rough exasperation of Ollie manhandling Stan. But the film's most spectacular blunder is the sequence culminating in the death of Cordelia. First, Goneril kills Regan by flinging her to the ground. Shakespeare's version of the killing (offstage, with poison) not only is too passive for Brook's manic purposes, but also suggests a more calculating perversity in Goneril than he can allow if her earlier accusations against Lear and the knights are to be presented as completely true. Moreover, Brook's version enables him to further weaken the character of Albany, who now witnesses the killing: poor Cyril Cusack is permitted to do nothing more than wear his my-wife-is-up-to-her-tricks-again frown. Then Goneril kills herself, not with a knife as in the play, but by squatting on the ground, rocking the upper part of her body in widening circles and dashing her head against a rock. Brook chooses this moment to insert a flash cut of Cordelia being hanged. The manner of Goneril's death suggests the winding up and sudden release of a spring; and by following this with Cordelia dropping on the gallows, Brook creates a link of cause and effect—as if Goneril and Cordelia were at opposite ends of a Rube Goldberg device for hanging. Here again, it is the mechanism of the film, not the action within it, that is grotesque.

With all its distortions and blunders, Brook's *Lear* adds up to neither Shakespeare, Kott, nor a film. Compared to it, Polanski's *Macbeth*

shines with skill and, for all its violence, with discretion. Yet there is something unsatisfactory here, too: a flaw more elusive than Brook's. At first sight it seems that Polanski and Tynan may have stayed too close to Shakespearian tradition.

Macbeth is filmed with a certain uncomfortable literalness. To begin with, unlike Brook's *Lear,* it is in color, and details tend to stand out more sharply in color than in black-and-white. Right at the beginning, when the witches first appear, the colored rags they wear play a large part in establishing them at once as solid corporeal beings. Later there is the dagger which Macbeth sees before him, floating in the air with a hard, platinum-like brilliance. Banquo's ghost, as invisible as it is to everyone but Macbeth, is undoubtedly there, three-dimensional, with red blood dripping down its pallid face. When Macbeth returns to the witches to be given a vision of the future, Polanski goes all out to convince us of their presence: he multiplies them from three to dozens, filling the screen, and presents them naked in the most naturalistic of Eastmancolor tones.

Shakespeare's witches are something of an embarrassment to modern audiences, and Polanski would have been wiser not to overexpose them. But this is not the heart of the problem. In fact, any attempt to present the witches in modern terms—as creatures from Macbeth's id, for example—would clash with the rest of the play at least as discordantly as any of Brook's "modernizations." What is really wrong with the film makes itself felt not as garish excess but as underlying monotony.

The fact is that Polanski and Tynan have interpreted the play from a viewpoint close to Kott's. They emphasize the cruelty of *Macbeth's* world and the grotesqueness of those who seem to understand and control it best—the witches. Like Brook, but less sweepingly, they have given a sinister bias to characters that are usually taken to be neutral or attractive. Ross is made a minor-key Iago, opening the castle gates for the men who will slaughter Macduff's wife and children, and then going off to break the news regretfully to Macduff. Banquo, in the early scenes with Macbeth and the witches, appears just as ambitious and envious as his friend. Even more significant are the shadings given to Duncan's two sons: Malcolm, who becomes king after Macbeth dies, has an epicene intensity which suggests that he might ripen into a Nero; while Donalbain, in a scene invented for the ending of the film, is shown approaching the witches' den—a clear hint that the cycle of envy and usurpation will go on. Most significant of all is the presentation of Macbeth's character—though this may result from the limitations of Jon Finch's acting as much as from the film-makers' ideology. In any event, Macbeth at the beginning of the film is just as morose and irascible as he is in the middle, at the time of Banquo's murder; if he hesitates to kill Duncan, it seems to be not for any "milk of human kindness" in him but merely for pragmatic reasons: fear of being found out, a physical repugnance for cold-blooded killing, and a psychological aversion to the breach of hospitality. He betrays no sense that the act is any different in kind from killing in battle.

Inevitably, these changes drain off some of the play's vitality. When so many characters are cruel, Macbeth's cruelty loses its edge. When Duncan's heirs are potential tyrants, Macbeth's tyranny arouses much less concern. Polanski and Tynan reveal the extent of these dramatic losses—and compensate for them—near the end of the film. From the time the army reaches the castle until the death of Macbeth, Kott's shadow disappears. As the army prepares to take the castle by storm, the gate is found to be unlocked: except for Macbeth, waiting calmly on his throne, the entire place is deserted. The contrast between the hundreds of keyed-up soldiers and glacial Macbeth opens up a new depth in the film. The aloneness of Macbeth, the irrevocable distance he has traveled into tyranny, burst into view and illuminate all the violence of his downfall.

It might be argued that with these scenes the film declines into melodrama: wicked Macbeth *vs.* the rest. After all, Macbeth is not the only cruel character in Shakespeare's play,

which exudes an atmosphere of fear and evil. True; but it is Macbeth's progression through fear and evil which brings these into focus. Making other characters more cruel, or Macbeth himself more cruel at the beginning, cannot deepen the atmosphere of the play. In the same way, it is the king's progression through rage and madness which refracts the cruelty of *Lear*, and this cannot be increased by suppressing human warmth and passion from his character.

Theorists like Kott have reacted—rightly—against the romantic excesses of those who see Shakespeare's plays primarily as displays of larger-than-life characters. But they have reacted too far. Whereas Kott cites the text of the tragedies to show that they reflect an absurdist outlook on life, others have found just as much textual support for world-views ranging from paganism to Christianity. In view of the conflicting evidence, it seems probable that Shakespeare was not trying to project any single world-view. Instead, his imagination may have worked speculatively: What kind of world would be created if such-and-such a character found himself in such-and-such a predicament? The inverse relationship mentioned earlier between *Lear* and *Macbeth* suggests how one play might have led speculatively to the other. There is an even more suggestive link between the two plays. Albany, in *Lear*, starts out as a weak character whose wife Goneril complains of his "milky gentleness"; but in the end, declaring "Where I could not be honest / I never yet was valiant," he stands up to the malevolent strength of Goneril, Regan, and Edmund. He is an interesting character, yet of little importance to the play: whether he yields to Goneril or stands up to her makes no difference to the outcome. Now, suppose a character like Albany is placed in the foreground, and suppose the balance between his honor and valor is given a tougher challenge: the opportunity to become king. His wife still regrets that he has so much "milk of human kindness" in him, but if there is no other rising star like Edmund to distract her, she will devote her energies to urging him ahead. What happens here, of course, is that the interesting but minor character of Albany becomes the interesting and central character of Macbeth.

Whether Shakespeare saw this particular connection or not, there is no doubt that characters fascinated him—that he experimented many times with similar characters in different predicaments and different characters in similar predicaments. The world-view implicit in each of his tragedies is both subjective and objective: it hinges on the central character as much as on the predicament. Thus in any production of Shakespeare, the central characters must not be undervalued. Without becoming the sacred monsters of romanticized productions, they must have enough density and power to carry Shakespeare's speculative vision.

On the screen, the vitality of the characters is even more important. For one thing, the camera eye tends to objectify everything that falls within its view, so that a tree or a rock may acquire as much significance as a human figure. Brook's film continually diminishes Lear in this way. In the opening scene, Lear refers to his "fair Kingdom" as being endowed "With shadowy forests, and with champains rich'd / With plenteous rivers, and wide-skirted meads"; but Brook, intending no doubt to reinforce the starkness of Kott's interpretation, shows us nothing of the kingdom except moors, marshlands, and beaches devoid of any kind of life. On a bare stage, the idea of power and authority can still be accepted in full; on the screen, however, it is qualified by whatever objective signs are visible, and the poverty of the signs shown here reduces Lear's predicament to the dimensions of a family quarrel.

Characters also lose vitality on the screen if they appear to be too consciously controlled by the director. I have already given some examples—Lear and Gloucester on the beach, the deaths of Goneril and Cordelia—of the way characters appear only as Brook's puppets instead of the puppets of fate. Polanski generally avoids this trap, though he comes close in one ingenious scene. On the eve of the murder, while Duncan and the other guests are making

merry, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth stand to one side whispering together; Lady Macbeth says, "What cannot you and I perform upon the unguarded Duncan," and at that moment the shadow of the crown falls on her face as Duncan approaches to ask her to dance; Macbeth, watching her smile as they dance away, mutters, "Bring forth men children only. . . ." Amid so much apparently casual movement, the shadow falls too neatly; Lady Macbeth for a moment becomes the director's puppet.

At first sight there seems to be the most elusive of dividing lines between this kind of contrivance and other scenes which carry the full Shakespearian vitality. When Macbeth is told that his wife is dead, he goes down to look at her body: the famous "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" lines coincide with his walking down the steps, and the physical action crystallizes his spiritual descent into hell. Even Brook's film has its vital moments. Riding away from Goneril's castle in a carriage, the Fool plies Lear with riddles, but Lear cannot keep his mind off his misery: he turns to the camera, which zooms slowly in until there is nothing but Lear's face on a black background, adrift in loneliness: "O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven. . . ." And, ironically, the final scene in the film—Lear's body slowly sinking off the screen into death—has more somber force than all the pyrotechnics of the storm.

What do these and other vital scenes have in common? They all focus on characters in action —acting on or reacting to their predicament. The balance between character and setting is just right: the character is not in any way made smaller than life (even if he is dying). Of course it is hardly possible for a Shakespeare film to be made up entirely of such finely balanced moments. The poetic speeches cannot all be fitted into the realistic rhythms we expect from screen dialogue, and yet they are too familiar to be subjected to the stylization of modern non-naturalistic drama. The physical settings pose another problem. How realistic should they be? Both Brook and Polanski settle for a kind of stripped-down realism, but they still do not avoid distracting details of time and place. In *Macbeth,* we could do without the medieval local color of geese honking their way across the castle courtyard and the preparation of rooms and linens for Duncan's arrival. In *Lear,* Goneril and Albany talk across a self-consciously primitive supper in the firelight, and Brook's mishandling of the camera calls unnecessary attention to details elsewhere: in a stylized, *Marienbad*-like profile shot of Goneril, the high collar of her bearskin coat stands out as ostentatiously as any *haute couture* worn by Delphine Seyrig.

Lapses like these are unimportant if the film as a whole has a convincing momentum. *Macbeth,* after a labored start, attains it. *King Lear* does not. The difference lies in the treatment of the characters. To fit his desired world-view, Brook reduces his characters in stature, failing to realize that the objectifying power of the film will shrivel them still further. Polanski toys with a similar approach, but then liberates Macbeth, letting him grow sufficiently larger than life to hold the film together.

In filming Shakespeare, it is better to overemphasize character than the reverse. It is no coincidence that the two most satisfactory film versions of Shakespeare tragedies I have yet seen are by actor-directors who played the leading roles. Olivier's *Hamlet* and Welles's *Othello* have many faults but, despite the bravura performances, they do maintain the right balance between character and predicament. What's more, neither film has dated in anything but inessentials. *Hamlet,* in fact (*Othello* embodies a more strictly personal drama), has managed to remain as topical as when it was first made. In 1948, the gloom of Elsinore which muffled Hamlet's attempts at action reflected the material and psychological bleakness of post-World War II Britain. Seen again in the mid-1950's, Olivier's Hamlet seemed like an Angry Young Man railing against traditions that were part of himself. Today, the Hamlet of 24 years ago has become in part a radical confronting the system. Yet Olivier did not impose any specific relevance on the play: he translated it to the screen as effectively as he

could, checking the *mise-en-scène* with an actor's eye to make sure that the character of Hamlet had sufficient freedom of action; and this was enough to let Shakespeare's speculative diversity shimmer through. Brook, striving for relevance, shuts out much of Shakespeare; and I suspect that in 24 years' time (if not sooner) his film will seem dreadfully quaint.

In his book *The Empty Space,* Brook writes: "Shakespeare is a model of a theatre that contains Brecht and Beckett, but goes beyond both. Our need in the post-Brecht theatre is to find a way forwards, back to Shakespeare." The paradox is striking, but it glosses over the crucial question: If the aim is to present a Beckettian world-view, why not film Beckett instead of Shakespeare? —WILLIAM JOHNSON

SACCO AND VANZETTI

Director: Giuliano Montaldo. Script: Fabrizio Onofri and Montaldo. Photography: Silvano Ippoliti. UMC Pictures.

JOE HILL

(The Ballad of Joe Hill) Director: Bo Widerberg. Script: Widerberg. Photography: Peter Davidsson, Jörgen Persson.

With no compulsion to portray revolutionaries as disordered adolescents, an American mode which finds its latest expression in Peter Watkins's *Punishment Park,* European directors have recently given us two films portraying the life and times of working-class leaders, Giuliano Montaldo's *Sacco and Vanzetti* and Bo Widerberg's *Joe Hill.* On the surface, these films seem strikingly similar. Both deal with the martyrdom of men who selflessly devoted their lives to movements greater than themselves. In both cases the men were framed for murders they did not commit because those in power (the press, the legal system, the state) wished to eliminate the threat of effective organization of the working class. If Sacco and Vanzetti were murdered because they were Italian immigrants and anarchists, Joe Hill, also a foreigner, a Swede, was executed because of his effectiveness as a Wobbly organizer. Both cases were hurt by grossly incompetent lawyers for the defense. Both films point to the world-wide movements which grew up around these men, making their cases a rallying point for radical political organizing. The parallels seem endless, even to the point of both films using Joan Baez to sing a ballad to the fallen heroes at the film's beginning and end.

But as cinema, *Sacco and Vanzetti* and *Joe Hill* are worlds apart. Montaldo makes his film in the increasingly tired mode of the Costa-Gavras suspense melodrama in which rhetoric and obvious ironies are permitted to cloud the film's perception of who Sacco and Vanzetti were and why the American political system found it necessary to destroy them.

Semi-newsreel footage opens the film to a background of the Palmer Raids of 1919, but these too are portrayed in terms of the violence of police brutality à la Z. The overlong first half of the film is devoted to the trial, punctuated by flashbacks to make clear ad infinitum that the witnesses whose memories are as blurred as their faces could not identify Sacco and Vanzetti as the men who held up the shoe factory.

The cinematic tricks in which Montaldo bathes his film do little to develop his theme. Blinding flashbulbs going off in people's faces throughout the film become disconcerting, even if they are meant to be ironic symbols of gratuitous violence. The slow-motion shot of the anarchist comrade who was thrown from the fourteenth story of a police headquarters is intercut into the film too many times to make much sense, even if Montaldo's point is how the image was burned into the memory of Bartolomeo Vanzetti. The soft focus used exhaustively in the courtroom scene seems to have no purpose, since the film's contention is that the issues were not blurred, but apparent. The suspense techniques, panning of the courtroom repeatedly, dollying back and forth, zooming in on key witnesses, are out of place in a film whose point of view has already been stated even before the credits, and of whose conclusion no member of the audience is unaware.

Finally, *Sacco and Vanzetti* is not about the two anarchists and what they stood for, but

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With no compulsion to portray revolutionaries as disordered adolescents, an American mode which finds its latest expression in Peter Watkins's *Punishment Park,* European directors have recently given us two films portraying the life and times of working-class leaders, Giuliano Montaldo's *Sacco and Vanzetti* and Bo Widerberg's *Joe Hill.* On the surface, these films seem strikingly similar. Both deal with the martyrdom of men who selflessly devoted their lives to movements greater than themselves. In both cases the men were framed for murders they did not commit because those in power (the press, the legal system, the state) wished to eliminate the threat of effective organization of the working class. If Sacco and Vanzetti were murdered because they were Italian immigrants and anarchists, Joe Hill, also a foreigner, a Swede, was executed because of his effectiveness as a Wobbly organizer. Both cases were hurt by grossly incompetent lawyers for the defense. Both films point to the world-wide movements which grew up around these men, making their cases a rallying point for radical political organizing. The parallels seem endless, even to the point of both films using Joan Baez to sing a ballad to the fallen heroes at the film's beginning and end.

But as cinema, *Sacco and Vanzetti* and *Joe Hill* are worlds apart. Montaldo makes his film in the increasingly tired mode of the Costa-Gavras suspense melodrama in which rhetoric and obvious ironies are permitted to cloud the film's perception of who Sacco and Vanzetti were and why the American political system found it necessary to destroy them.

Semi-newsreel footage opens the film to a background of the Palmer Raids of 1919, but these too are portrayed in terms of the violence of police brutality à la Z. The overlong first half of the film is devoted to the trial, punctuated by flashbacks to make clear ad infinitum that the witnesses whose memories are as blurred as their faces could not identify Sacco and Vanzetti as the men who held up the shoe factory.

The cinematic tricks in which Montaldo bathes his film do little to develop his theme. Blinding flashbulbs going off in people's faces throughout the film become disconcerting, even if they are meant to be ironic symbols of gratuitous violence. The slow-motion shot of the anarchist comrade who was thrown from the fourteenth story of a police headquarters is intercut into the film too many times to make much sense, even if Montaldo's point is how the image was burned into the memory of Bartolomeo Vanzetti. The soft focus used exhaustively in the courtroom scene seems to have no purpose, since the film's contention is that the issues were not blurred, but apparent. The suspense techniques, panning of the courtroom repeatedly, dollying back and forth, zooming in on key witnesses, are out of place in a film whose point of view has already been stated even before the credits, and of whose conclusion no member of the audience is unaware.

Finally, *Sacco and Vanzetti* is not about the two anarchists and what they stood for, but

about the impossibility of working for justice within a corrupt system. Its theme is not so much truth as martyrdom. And Montaldo has Vanzetti realize that the legend is more important than the men. "The name 'Sacco'," he tells his comrade, "will still live in the people's hearts. Without them we would die just worn-out workers." The most interesting question in this film, whether the men or the symbol should be saved, is debated by both sides. Prosecutor Katzmann would have chosen to save the men and destroy the "martyrs" had a reversal of the court's decision not necessarily revealed as well a weak link in the chain of power. Paradoxically, Montaldo too loses sight of Sacco and Vanzetti as living men. They emerge puppet-like and mechanical, and what counts is the political mileage of the affair, the indictment it makes of the system. This is why the idealistic Vanzetti (Gian Maria Volonte) is made the more attractive figure. "I too wish to live," he says when they are declared guilty, "but in a better world."

Sacco and Vanzetti is important not because it is a well-made film, but as a historical monument to innocent victims of repression. It is weak because it reaches for the emotions of the audience out of its rhetoric, and we are always aware of a governing hand behind the action. Sacco's breakdown in prison is played to the hilt (earning Riccardo Cucciolla a best-actor award at Cannes). Vanzetti is given the passionate statements: "All my life I want to make a just world . . . I have never wanted to get rich here. I am suffering because I'm anarchist." The two poles—of our despair at the foregone conclusion and our exaltation at the noble ideals—are expressed in the opposing personalities of the two anarchists. And there seems to be no excuse for the anti-climatic, overlong shots of the electrocutions of both men, unless it is to wring out of us what little emotion is left. In *Sacco and Vanzetti* technique is placed in the service of ideology and the rightness of the causes does not make the film any less didactic or heavy-handed.

Bo Widerberg elegantly avoids this trap by separating the man Joe Hill from the legend, manipulated, as Widerberg sees it, by the opportunism of the movements that came after him. But in so doing, he makes a major error in historical perspective which could be explained only, perhaps, by an unfamiliarity with the struggles of the American labor movement. There is a sinister moment near the end of *Joe Hill* in which Widerberg bleeds out all sound and one member of the Salt Lake City local of the IWW faces the camera and asks whether Joe Hill is worth more to them dead or alive: "What's better for us—if they kill him or not?"* In his desire to free the memory of Joe Hill from romanticism, Widerberg confuses the IWW, a non-manipulative movement, with the later American Communist Party, which did use the legend of Joe Hill for its own alien ends. To have a Wobbly ask whether Joe is worth more to them alive or dead corrupts the meaning of that movement, even if Widerberg is right in his general contention that political movements as hardened formations invariably lose the spirit for which they fought in their need to perpetuate themselves.

The weakest part of *Joe Hill* is this ending which attempts to draw a distinction between the memory of Joe Hill and the history of the political movement for which he gave his life. As the film ends, the ashes of Joe Hill are being used in the service of the organization. IWW leaders, two of whom look like Tammany Hall bosses and who have not appeared in the film before, are sitting around the table weighing and placing bits of ashes into envelopes to be mailed to locals in all the states for scattering across the country. The scene is remarkably like the parcelling out of heroin in *Panic in Needle Park*.

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*In Wallace Stegner's novel, *The Preacher And The Slave* (Boston, 1950), which believes Joe Hill guilty of murdering the grocer, it is Joe Hill who is given this cynical point of view: "You might call it an organizing job . . . the union stands to gain more if they shoot me than if they turn me loose . . . I want to die a martyr." Stegner also portrays Joe Hill as a hold-up man who always had pockets full of "obscurely got money."

Sounds of a dance the anarchists are holding upstairs distract the men and they abandon Joe's remains, confident that "he wouldn't mind." Yet all along Widerberg has characterized Joe Hill, like the real Joe, as ascetic, puritanical and always devoted first to union causes. Widerberg cuts to shots of the elderly, sweating IWW men whirling girls one-third their age around a dance floor and then back to the now-empty room with its posters, slogans and the pathetic pile of ashes on the middle of the table.

The satire is at best ambiguous, for historically there is no evidence that the IWW as long as it existed as a force abandoned the spirit of Joe Hill's memory. In a voice-over, Widerberg brings back Joe Hill to cancel out what we have seen by repeating his beautiful last will and testament. Then Joan Baez begins again with "The Ballad of Joe Hill," besides which the Sacco and Vanzetti song seems embarrassingly inane ("Here's to you, Nicola and Bart"). We are returned from a crass political meeting room to the sweet smile and open, honest face of Joe which Widerberg emphasizes throughout in a plethora of well-spaced close-ups. (The combination of gentleness and determination in the face of Thommy Berggren made him a particularly apt choice to play Joe Hill.)

To save Joe Hill at the expense of the IWW seems an unfortunate strategy on Widerberg's part. But aside from the ending, he has made a beautiful film about the man. *Joe Hill* fulfills the promise of *Adalen 31*, which is a much weaker film on a similar subject because it allowed the balance to fall too much on the personal daily life of the working man in a sentimental manner, and less on his emotional solidarity with the cause for which he gave his life. Despite the blatant unfairness of Joe Hill's trial, Widerberg actually devotes very little time to the event. Most of the details of the real trial are included: the confusion of the one witness to the murder, a thirteen-year-old boy, the fact that Joe Hill's coat had no bullet holes at all, suggesting that he had to have taken off his coat to shoot the grocer, the commonness of the "red bandana" (like Sacco's workingman's cap) as a style of dress, the jury's being allowed to remain present during Joe's dismissal of his inept, inexperienced lawyers, the judge's inaccurate application of the term *amicus curiae* to a case in which a client dismisses his attorneys, the prosecution's unconstitutional use of Joe Hill's refusal to testify against himself, and, most important, the absence of motive and indeed of any incriminating evidence other than that Joe was wounded the same night.*

These details are presented in fleeting moments, punctuated by fast fades. Widerberg allows just enough detail to make the point that the police obviously helped the alleged witnesses to "remember" Joe between the time of the preliminary hearing (not included, wisely, in the film), and the trial itself. In a flash Joe is rising and being declared "guilty." The rapidity of the event expresses for Widerberg his sense that the trial had a predetermined end. The martyrdom in this film is far less significant than the living presence of the man.

Joe Hill discovers the evolution of the union militant who tramps the American continent as a hobo, instinctively involving himself with people in trouble. Joe immediately identifies with the strikers whom he discovers one day put on a train and driven out of town to the wilderness. The long shot of the field of grain, on the horizon the silhouettes of tiny homeless figures, Joe among them, expresses Joe's immediate concern for others, his willingness to ally himself with them. For such a man a family life in the traditional sense would be difficult. This is why Widerberg includes the

*With no loss Widerberg omits other details: the bullet hole appearing four inches lower on Joe's jacket than on his body, the disparity between the lead bullet which had to have been fired from the grocer's gun and the steel bullet which hit Joe Hill, Judge Ritchie's incorrect definition of circumstantial evidence as not a chain in which one link is enough to declare a thesis invalid, but as a cable which, even with several broken strands, could still support a conviction, etc.

sequence of Joe and the farm girl who live together for a time. The necessity for his departure is conveyed without rhetoric drawn from the IWW pamphlets Joe has been reading. A shot of Joe lying awake at night with the girl sleeping in his arms, and another in which he tells her he would have to go sooner or later, make the point.

The beginning of the film, with Joe at twenty-three a new immigrant in New York, is a bit clumsy. An opening shot of the Statue of Liberty, a cliché for the absence of justice, should have been avoided. Living on the Bowery, Joe is initiated into the inequities between rich and poor in the United States by an immigrant child who steals everything he can get his hands on. Much time is spent by Widerberg on what he believes to be local color of America circa 1900. A nice bit is the juxtaposition of the rich ladies at their banquet luncheon in honor of "knitting for the needy" with the little waif who grabs the fox boa from around one woman's neck. But the skid-row bums the woman must pass as she chases the child are an anachronism. The eviction of the boy, his mother and brother from the slum, pushing a cart containing their worldly possessions, as Joe watches in silence behind three garbage cans, is well done. It comes as both expected, given the boy's poverty, and unexpected, because Joe was not ready for it.

Widerberg's romanticism finds its way into the film with the girl Lucia, whom Joe meets outside the opera house. An unreal character swept up into the world of the opera company, she is included in the film to grant credibility to the real Joe Hill's alibi that he was wounded in a fight over a woman. The one scene with Lucia which comes alive is when she and Joe, both in broken English, try to decide whether or not her hands smell of fish, since she works in a fish market. Lucia chooses to follow the opera company as mistress of the director, shedding her black skirt and white blouse (Joe wears the same colors) for iridescent pink as she is given a box inside. Joe chooses to ally himself with his class.

The stagey "New York" sets are too confining for Widerberg's camera. He is as happy as his character to escape the rubble of the slum to "Plainfield, New Jersey," Joe's first stop. Joseph Hillstrom is not yet "Joe Hill," only a homeless immigrant in search of a brother whom he never finds. Widerberg's impressionism is the perfect mode for locating in cinematic terms what made Joe Hill the man he became. For Joe Hill becomes the culmination of his experiences in a just barely settled America. Joe hops freight trains as a hungry tramp, steals hens for dinner, enjoys the camaraderie of the hoboes he meets on the road. Fighting for survival outside the privileges of the organized economy, Joe finds himself one with the workers who have been exploited and left out of Samuel Gompers's American Federation of Labor. Already the IWW is launching an attack on union bureaucracies and union elites. "The selfish unions are just out to help themselves," says the first IWW organizer Joe meets. "Did you ever see a Mexican or Indian with a union card?"

Short sequences with titles listing the date and place of Joe's sojourn (Salinas, 1906, etc.) creates a rhythm of movement for Joe's life analogous to the stanzas of a folk-song expressing the travels of a hero in search of justice. Widerberg's foreshortening of the real life of Joe Hill never loses the essential aspects. Joe's initiation comes alive through a montage of short scenes, beginning with Joe's meeting the IWW "Overalls Brigade" which travelled the country wearing red bandanas, holding meetings, and selling song cards. The evolution of Joe as folk poet is done rapidly within the context of his union work. The IWW are told that

Thommy Berggren as Joe Hill

the Salvation Army can hold street meetings because "they're singing." In the next sequence Joe is writing his most famous song "The Preacher and the Slave" ("You'll get pie in the sky when you die") to the tune of the Salvation Army hymn, "In the Sweet Bye and Bye."

When he sings, Joe is shown not in close-up as "hero," but between the hats of two workers in soft focus, occupying the foreground of the shot. Joe exists in relation to the people whose cause he has taken up. After a song, Joe points to the IWW button in his lapel without a word, as uncomfortable with slogans and propaganda as Widerberg. Although it is uncertain whether the real Joe Hill participated in the "Free Speech" fights of the Wobblies, Widerberg includes a sequence in which Joe, one among fifty, lines up with the others to take turns on the soapbox. Their aim is to fill the town's jail, forcing expensive trials and ensuring therefore a release (or so they believe).

Joe Hill is not without its false overdone notes, foreshortening devices which come off as hackneyed or precious. The unsympathetic black maid of Governor Spry who comments that once Joe Hill is dead, they'll have peace and quiet, since the protesters will go home, is straight out of Hollywood of the forties and unconvincing. Even worse is the Governor's cracking a soft-boiled egg all over his hands when he receives a telegram from President Wilson. The anguish of the youngest member of the firing squad that shoots Joe is stilted. Equally so is the Woodrow Wilson sequence.

The actual intervention of Woodrow Wilson in the case of Joe Hill came to nothing more than one short stay of execution: once Utah demanded its own right of jurisdiction, Wilson backed off. After a typically banal long shot of the White House, Wilson is shown telling Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (who actually pleaded with him for Joe Hill's life) that we like people to move along in the streets. Her reply, "There's the violence of a man pushing down another man" is powerful because throughout the film Widerberg has been so sparing in his use of statement. The Flynn motif is returned to the cinematic as Joe is shown in his cell singing with gusto "The Rebel Girl" which the real Joe wrote in prison for his friend, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn.

And there are perfect moments in this film that characterize Widerberg at his best, equal to the window-washing sequence in *Adalen 31*. The farm girl with whom Joe lives must find an explanation for her tears over Joe's departure. Her strangled cry of "I broke Mama's teapot" is drowned out by the strong rhythms of the guitar exulting as Joe returns on his path to the IWW. Unlike the director of the dour *Sacco and Vanzetti*, Widerberg finds room in the life of Joe Hill for a comic interlude. A working man out of his milieu, with considerable perplexity Joe orders a meal from a French menu in a fancy restaurant without being able to pay. We wait in anticipation as he rolls up his sleeves and heads for the kitchen. The next cut is to a picket line of kitchen workers outside the restaurant the next day.

Widerberg is at home with the romantic idealism of the Wobblies, with Joe drawing a pastel map of the United States marking the cities of major strikes of the IWW on the floor of his cell. "What a big country America is," says Joe in admiration, and only the grossest politicism would accuse Widerberg of a "cop-out" here. The remark suits perfectly the personality of Joe Hill whose rebellion for Widerberg flowed from love of America and its working men. Another graceful moment comes in the fortuitous flight of birds overhead as Joe waits for the firing squad to shoot him. And more harshly jarring than the endless death-seat scene of *Sacco and Vanzetti* is the death of Joe Hill, conveyed by a close-up of the convulsion of his right foot clad in the white canvas worn by the real Joe Hill.*

To some *Joe Hill* may seem weak and thin. For those who are looking in Widerberg's film

*Widerberg omits the attack with a broom handle Joe Hill made on the guards who came to take him away. He probably felt that the incident, coming in the last moments of Hill's life, was uncharacteristic of the man.

for a history of the IWW, its strikes, its free speech fights and its days of glory, *Joe Hill* will be disappointing. They may wonder why the figure of Big Bill Haywood does not appear in the film, although part of Joe Hill's famous last message to him does: "Goodbye Bill. I die like a true rebel. Don't waste any time mourning—organize!"

What Widerberg has given us is a portrait of the heart of the IWW through the man, Joe Hill. Hill's real-life reticence and willingness to discuss only the "One Big Union Grand" finds expression in Widerberg's creation of a character whose life in so many of its aspects remains as unknown to us at the end of the film as the life of the real Joe is shrouded in mystery. Others may see the film as an unmediated attempt to idealize the figure of Joe Hill. Many have felt that Hill's refusal to name the woman for whom he said he was wounded on the night of the Morrison murders deeply implicated him. And Widerberg could be accused of suppressing many of the facts that run contrary to the theory of Joe Hill's innocence, for example, the disappearance of Otto Applequist, Joe's roommate, on the same night as the murders. They might be more at home with the easy righteousness of *Sacco and Vanzetti* which goes to endless lengths to prove the incontrovertible innocence of the two victims.

Widerberg's film has fewer pretentions, and much more subtly unites style with substance. By taking Joe Hill out of the *genre* of the crime melodrama and into what for Widerberg is the more comfortable, the lyrical mode, the film's very texture expresses disbelief that a man like Joe Hill could have done either of those murders. The airiness of the imagery and the softness of the color make the film itself as sweet and unassuming as the character of Widerberg's Joe Hill. It is a very lovely film.

—JOAN MELLEN

Note: Particularly useful for an appreciation of Widerberg's film is a look at the real-life Joe Hill. See, for example:

Gibbs M. Smith, *Joe Hill* (Salt Lake City, 1969).

Philip S. Foner, *The Case of Joe Hill* (New York, 1965).

Wallace Stegner, "Joe Hill: The Wobblies' Troubadour," *New Republic*, January 5, 1948.

Patrick Renshaw, *The Wobblies: The Story of Syndicalism in The United States* (New York, 1968).

FALL

A film by Tom DeWitt. Available from DeWitt at: Bedell Road, Poughkeepsie, NY.

Tom DeWitt's is an intermedia-ary stance, exploring television technology as an agency to expand and transform the resources of film imagery. DeWitt is twenty-seven. In the mid-sixties, he studied at Columbia University and left because undergraduate film courses were not then available for credit. An instructor introduced him to Stan VanDerBeeck, with whom DeWitt worked as an assistant for six months.

Then he appeared at San Francisco State College. When I met DeWitt, he was bouncing a red ball against a wall of the film editing room: a gesture simultaneously directed at life, movies, and the penitentiary-style architecture of our building. Facilities were made available for completion of his ongoing project, originally titled *CityScapes*, later reedited as *Atmosfear*—a New York City built from metal and concrete, rendered ominous in images that seemed to assume animate identity by their high-contrast extremities, sometimes whiting or blacking out altogether, like polarized explosions. *Atmosfear* recently appeared in the special collection of Independent American Film Makers now circulated by the Museum of Modern Art.

At the college DeWitt met Scott Bartlett. The two collaborated on various projects including a series of film loops for light shows which eventuated in *Off/On*. *Off/On's* character as germinal film-television collaboration is spelled out in Gene Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema:* black-and-white loop inputs passing through a color film chain, integrated with more loops and portions of a live, rear-projected light show. At various times, the visual competition between separate sources of image information fought for one monitor and resulted in full-scale breakdowns into component colors. Alter-

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natively, a second live camera, televising the monitor and reintroducing its own additional image, initiated striking visual "echoes" as feedback.

With this access to sophisticated video technology, DeWitt's own films took further turns. In *The Leap* (again, described at length by Youngblood) a recognizable human figure is introduced into an urban cityside out of *Atmosfear,* but now rendered increasingly abstract and distorted through videotronic circuitries. This was done by means of an elaborate television special-effects board used to inject one image into another by keying ("Chromakey" in color TV parlance) and wiping. Something of the same effects have traditionally been arrived at through bipacking and by travelling mattes in film laboratory optical printing, but television provides certain temporal and financial economies. (The experience is bound by real time in the studio, with videotape and instant feedback; technological resources are usually "subsidized" in some institutional way). Also, the texture of the image and its colors differ between media. Additionally, layer upon layer of images can be melded, limited only by studio resources and by requirements for lightning-fast connections between decision-making and sensibility on the part of the artist at Master Control.

In consequence, space, particularly, may be complicated into patterns of overlays that are altogether unique. Not only can they lead to a staggering number of involved cross-perspectives, but the horizons of television space seem to differ dimensionally from film space. Thus, when DeWitt introduces a photographed image into a video-manipulated world, he forces an elemental confrontation between the media. This quality is most dramatically in evidence when one views the image as a projected movie, rather than on the tube.

Keying one image affords a "hole" to be filled by a second image within sharply defined boundaries. In color television, Chromakey pulls out all of a designated hue. Therefore, monochromes afford the most complete, non-transparent replacement. If the monochrome lacks integrity, its replacement "tears," a phenomenon which gives DeWitt some of his most striking effects.* When the keyed-in element is hard-edged, its relation to the surrounding environment sometimes, in my mind, poses problems of stylistic consistency. Where sharp edges and high contrast (another effect of Chromakeying) aren't sought, superimposition is an alternative.

DeWitt's creative process begins in elements of painting, animation-like preplanning and original camera images. He uses a flow-chart, manipulating the order of his iconography in preparation for later realization with the help of laboratory and video technicians. Some images in his new film have proceeded through as many as seven generational steps. Material finally returns to a conventional editing table and DeWitt's own optical printing equipment. Against the constant additive complications compounded by image combinations, he tries to eliminate extraneous information. Unities and simplifications are sought through graphic elements: time, space, color, shape, and action.

Both *The Leap* and DeWitt's new film, *Fall,* seem to draw on elemental emotional "movements." Visually, each has a kind of silhouetted, figurative protagonist; neither goes further in the direction of narrative, excepting the mythic substructure in *Fall.* In my experience, this poses certain problems with audiences, who tend to be awed by the visual effects, "in touch" with the sound tracks, sympathetic to sensed emotions, and non-plussed by many denotative and poetically connotative intentions designed into the iconography and the spatial movements.

Enacting in general outline Icarus's flight, *Fall* combines photographed and television-inflected images in order to equate the birdman's

*So expedient a response to technology has characterized the popular arts. One is reminded of Duke Ellington rescoring the *Mood Indigo* trio section in the studio so as to harmonize with an aberrant microphone frequency.

descent with American militarism, as in our intervention in Southeast Asia. Like melted feathers, bombs fall to ravage an unprotected countryside, and the film ends on an agonized evocation of that holocaust with which we all live daily on some dimension of consciousness and will.

DeWitt has most carefully predesigned *Fall.* Its images, the growing complexity of their interminglings, a tightly regulated color scheme, and developing variations on the accelerating descent: all are pointed toward an eventual destruction brought about by a folly of ego and of technological misuse.

The film opens with a poem alluding to the escape of Daedalus and his son from the Minotaur's labyrinth and the fate that befell Icarus. A preliminary iconography establishes the man-bird with rainbow-hued wings, the sun, and a deep expanse of cloud-flecked sky. A travelling shot bridge view seems to connote the maze of the minotaur, and the main title appears. This is designed in such a way that while the word *Fall* repetitiously descends, as on a crawl, a vertical strip partially whites out some of the lettering so that increasingly we seem to read *All Fall . . . All Fall.*

Special effects board manipulations develop suns within sun, circles within circles, the film maker's visual pun on paternity. Varicolored kaleidoscopic patterns of wing movements develop into a conjunction of sun and flight. Colors are predominantly blues, yellows, reds, minimally green and orange. Images of sun and eye (and I?) commingle and in them appears the pulsating orb of *Off/On.* Flight is equated with a falcon. An electronic accompaniment is interrupted by in-flight communications of the Tactical Air Command. Bombs are released. The airborne images shift and double. Falcon becomes national eagle. (Daedalus, we remember, escaped to Italy). There is a final mad try for the sun, then a nuclear blast. Icarus begins his descent, now a figure clinging to a parachute harness. Unlike the falling man of Ernest Trova, DeWitt's has arms, but, too, is the victim of gravity, an image alternately ambiguous and impersonal in silhouette, desperately bounded by all-encompassing sky, perpetually dropping, unmoving in outline, unidirectional. To fall is to lose status, to descend to lower rank, to lapse into sin, to succumb to attack, to pass into some emotional state.

In ironic xenophobia, bugled charges intensify the militarism. Colors evolve into reds, whites, and blues. The free, expansive sunsphere is replaced by restrained, constricting patterns of squared grids. Icarus continues to descend, an isolate figure, cut away from his chute. While bombs explode, the reds of solar energy are picked up at the base of the screen as flames—a patriotic inferno from the TAC. High-contrast black-and-white footage of bombs, explosions and a thrusting bayonet flash frame against a proud, vigilant eagle. The screen goes silent, chaos replaced by an image of the shore, lifeless and mounted compositionally beneath a soundless atomic blast. Explosions return against violent abstract patterns. DeWitt announces his credits.

In my own mind, *The Fall* is a mixed accomplishment. Its 18½ minutes are overlong. Some images appear arbitrarily included. There seems to be stylistic inconsistency in the sound track ("movie music library," realistic explosions, voices, electronics). The hard edge borders do not always sit easily among the abstracted patterns, overlays, and images so electronically manipulated as to lose their representational coherence.

The validity of a parachuted figure is arguable. On the one hand, he can hardly constitute a wingless Icarus plummeting into the sea. (There is nothing of Auden's poem in this version of the myth; there are no indifferent Brueghel plowmen in the Asian landscape.) Yet the image has several virtues. It maintains the airplane motif. By prolonging the descent, some element of suspense is engendered and its very longevity rationalized. A slower fall permits the figure to drop, still conscious, into the flames for which he is responsible; in so doing, he incinerates us all.

What is most powerfully effective in *The Fall* is the extraordinary sophistication of DeWitt's visual techniques, his graphic eye, and

FALL, *by Tom DeWitt*

his complex design. Because each unit of the exposition is so painstakingly conceptualized and nurtured, an audience is afforded a unique kind of purview on the elements as they are reconstituted in the more complex overlays. Thus the early, Magritte-like compositions of eye and sky establish a nuclear basis for later, more complicated efforts structurally to equate I and cosmos, inner and outer space. Color changes worked on given images (the bird, the sky) avoid the oversimplifications of hue/cues. Certain effects, as when clouds pass through the falling body which is outlined in a flaming orange, can only be described as awesome.

For myself, the high point of the film occurs in an early sequence which unites most of DeWitt's motifs. The eagle's outline (a combination of World War II irascibility and the nervous suspicions of a small-brained vertebrate) has been wrung through changes from real to abstract while serving as an anchor to multiple superimpositions of sky, grid, man, and flying bird. Since these elements are separately known to us in isolation, each with its own inherent space, their combination carries especially effective results, quite unlike the confusions of most multiple-exposed films. Here the various shots are isolatable within our perception both from memory and because of color differentiation. Separately, they evoke the multi-perspectives of Cubism. Because of their mixtures and the distortions into which each has been electronically manipulated, one has, equally, a sense of Abstract Expressionism. Against all these intermingled pictures floats the flat waferlike sun-symbol, a niggling memory of Stephen Crane's war.

A similar, although less involved, moment occurs when various views of the falling man are superimposed against the dehumanizing grid, itself reminiscent of DeWitt's *The Leap*, and before that *Atmosfear*. Variously, the figure seems to be now falling toward the squares, now pressed beneath them, apparently moving on a different space-dimension, then breaking through the geometric pattern, finally submerged and altogether dominated.

The Fall is a work of immense dedication and exceptional skill. If it is not entirely faithful to the ambitions of its intent, Tom DeWitt's film warrants our most serious consideration and reminds us again of a major talent in the field of personal film.—JOHN L. FELL.

SUNDAY, BLOODY SUNDAY

Producer: Joseph Janni. Director: John Schlesinger. Script: Penelope Gilliatt. Photography: Billy Williams.

Sunday, Bloody Sunday is an almost defiantly modern version of the traditional triangle: a prosperous, middle-aged London doctor (Peter Finch) and a divorcee in her thirties (Glenda Jackson) are each having an affair with a young sculptor (Murray Head) who is perfectly happy to be shared. His lovers don't like the situation very much, but they're mature and disabused, and don't really expect it to improve. When he decides to leave for America, apparently to seek success and to escape these entanglements, they're unhappy, but they survive.

Finch, as Daniel Hirsh, has the more interesting role. His characterization is precise, coherent and credible. He's not affected, effeminate, or tortured by guilt; but he avoids all these homosexual stereotypes so rigorously that one wonders how much truth is left. He seems simply to accept his homosexuality; but this very acceptance, without passion or regrets, is too easy to arouse much emotion or sympathy. He is resigned to his lover's other liaison, and isn't really very surprised when the young man leaves. He'll

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motor through Italy anyway, by himself. Hirsh is Jewish, but his religion doesn't seem to mean anything to him; maybe that's the point, but even his indifference is irrelevant to the rest of his character. He is most sympathetic and convincing in the few scenes where we see him as a doctor: he seems to take it seriously and do it well, and he's the only one in the film we see doing *any* work. It gives him some dignity and identity; we can respect him even if he's not very exciting.

There's more vitality to the part of Alex Greville, the woman who shares his lover. Glenda Jackson's performance is quite fine, always tense and alive, vivid in its moments of anger and jealousy, a realistic and modern characterization. She's the free, mature, intelligent woman who says she wants "more" out of life: she's not willing to settle for the relative contentment of domestic life that her mother managed with; she doesn't want to share her lover's affections with the doctor; she quits her job. But she shows no sign that she expects to achieve anything more than a few moments of bliss with her young lover or to find a better job. Her refusal to compromise is not part of a passionate, hopeful quest for fulfillment. It's closer to a bitter, desperate rejection of the world. The role is too static and passive to give much life to the film: she refuses compromise, she refuses hope, so she suffers—from her own emotions and from the world's blows, neither of which she can control. She has the hard, apprehensive look of a woman who's been suffering a long time and expects to continue, but isn't quite resigned.

The passion of these educated, sophisticated adults for a stylish, blandly handsome young artist is, clearly, meant to be arbitrary and capricious. Admittedly there's something inexplicable in all love, but here it's overwhelming. Bob Elkins is too shallow and facile to be at all sympathetic. He hasn't any internal conflicts and he avoids external ones. He isn't fully committed to anyone or anything, not to his art or even to the fame and money he expects to find in America. And Murray Head hasn't any dazzling superficial beauty, grace or charm which might help explain the love he is supposed to inspire. It's just too arbitrary, and makes it difficult for us to sympathize with his lovers' passion, which seems closer to a lapse of taste than to a mad love. A more magnetic screen presence wouldn't have saved the film or even the role, but it would surely have helped.

Schlesinger is a good director of actors. When his material is vital and entertaining, he can give his films a good deal of life and intensity. But his efforts to portray or satirize social milieus are just that: efforts, embarrassingly crude and at best distracting. It's not easy to achieve the right measure of sympathy and detachment to reveal the folly and beauty of people in the world, as did Renoir, Lubitsch, and early Fellini at their best. Schlesinger doesn't show much sympathy for anyone beyond his principals. And he rarely manages to be biting or caustic, whether or not he's trying to be funny. He hasn't a keen enough eye or a light enough hand to get things right, and only when they're right are they frightening or funny. Even the social context of the three main characters is a bit sketchy. And there's a sloppiness about the narrative that is often disorienting: we wonder about minor charactors—who they are and why they're there. This sort of confusion and obscurity can be bearable, even enjoyable, in a visually or dramatically exciting film, but in a slow, understated character study like *Sunday, Bloody Sunday,* it's annoying and distracting.

Penelope Gilliatt's script is a series of scenes designed to reveal the characters, not through their actions but through their dialogue, which is itself more expository than dramatic. Daniel and Alex are articulate and feel free to say what they mean; they don't evade or repress their emotions. So the dialogue rings true but sounds flat, because it doesn't conceal anything. The film doesn't build up any tension because it lacks any real conflict, explicit or implicit, between or within the characters. They are animated only when angry, and angry primarily out of annoyance. They are no more capable of profound despair than they are of profound hope. Perhaps some illusions are needed for any intense passion, and if so, we all manage to provide them, if only momentarily. But these two people can't

sustain any illusions. They both suffer some because their love isn't returned, but it's a pain they can bear. We don't feel that they are stronger than their emotions, that they are bravely facing the world, carrying on despite it all. Instead, they manage because they don't really need much to live. As characters, they haven't enough life or mystery to sustain our interest and sympathy. *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* hasn't much drama or atmosphere. It's a film that depends on its characters. And like them, it's lifelike, but it's not very alive.

—CARLON L. TANNER

Short Notices

Four Nights of a Dreamer, based on Dostoevsky's *White Nights,* partakes of Bresson's much-commented-upon austerity. As in all his recent work, Bresson attempts to link the opaqueness of physical reality to the theme of inevitable suffering. A young artist, a recluse, saves a girl from throwing herself in the Seine as a victim of unrequited love. Falling in love with her himself, he is rejected for the former lover who comes back unexpectedly on the fourth fatal night. But unlike the heroine of *La Femme Douce,* Bresson's previous film, Jacques does not commit suicide (although we expect him to) despite his despair over "Marthe." He returns to the fantasy world he has always inhabited, and in the last scene, aided by the tape recorder which whispers her name, he finds in his painting a more pure pain than the brief relationship with Marthe brought him. In art he finds the classic Bressonian salvation and grace, as well as the freedom deriving from a return to solitude. *Four Nights* remains a minor film, perhaps because Bresson's style is not especially suited to his theme, the bittersweet quality of young love. Here as in earlier work Bresson focuses on the stolidity of life, expressed in the structure of his shots: of the mid-sections of his characters' bodies, of people, boats, cars, buses moving in and then out of the frame, and of his holding shots of objects or settings after people have vacated the scene, the Seine after a boat has passed out of view, a door before it is opened or after it slammed. Bresson's style is a visual equivalent for a profound deterministic belief that felt life resolves itself always in long suffering, that a physical world of objects and forces indifferent to man survives him in triumph long after he has succumbed. Given Bresson's absolute determinism guided by a morose sensibility, Bazin underestimates the effect of Bresson's turning objects into abstractions ("They are there deliberately as neutrals, as foreign bodies, like a grain of sand that gets into and seizes up a piece of machinery"). Bresson's sense of pure form has his people act out their parts also as objects within a greater, incomprehensible design. This is why the faces of Jacques, Marthe, and Marthe's lover must remain expressionless, and why we see their feet, torsos and backs as often as we do their faces. Even Marthe's naked body which in her desire she admires in the mirror becomes objectified, part of a world of "things." The people in Bresson's film are like the spots in the painting by Jacques's friend: "The smaller the spots . . . the larger the world." Marthe as a character doesn't carry enough weight to be an agent of suffering, so similar is she to one of Truffaut's ingenues. The young artist whom we see early in the film following the pretty jeunes filles of Paris has too much youth and resilience to be Bresson's typical recipient of suffering. Unlike Jeanne d'Arc, Balthasar, Mouchette or the young wife of *La Femme Douce,* he has his art to sustain him. Out of the pure oranges and greens he carefully applies to his canvas, he can create his own world. The best moments in the film are those which locate objects reflecting Jacques's powerful inner resources, what Bresson means when he has Jacques say that "God has sent him an angel to reconcile him to himself": the brightly-lit *bateaux* in the colors of the night gliding under the Pont Neuf where Marthe and Jacques meet, and expressing a pure ideal of happiness and peace, the Brazilian folk singers, the American hippies singing of lost love. Bresson allows transcendent moments of lyricism to foreshadow Jacques's capacity for survival. They add a dimension that has been absent from Bresson's recent work, breaking the mood of anguish and quiet desperation making his films more and more narrow and special, the dark side of the cinema. Even if Bresson is saying that only the artist survives life's emotional injustices, it is at these

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magical moments, when he renounces his commitment to spare simplification, that Bresson's films are restored to the living. —JOAN MELLEN

The Last Picture Show confirms what *Targets* suggested: that Peter Bogdanovich can put movies together very well indeed. Its performances are better and cover a far greater range than those of *Targets;* its story is finer-grained, more nuanced, more subtly anchored in our social history—thanks in considerable part, no doubt, to the Larry McMurtry novel on which it is based. It is a well-made film of a kind that Hollywood scarcely has the drive and skill to turn out any more, and it's fitting that a devotee of the *auteur* theory should have made it. But it doesn't tell us yet whether Bogdanovich will ripen into a genuine *auteur* himself—a craftsman whose work displays, beneath the surface of various vehicles (he has just shot *What's Up Doc?)* a continuing style and concern with pervasive personal themes. *Targets* was partly efficient, almost TV-level story-telling, with a kind of expressionism in its climactic sequence which seemed nonetheless rather chilly and calculated. *The Last Picture Show* surprises, therefore, with the quiet warmth of its portrayal of the blasted years of the Eisenhower era—with the vestiges of small-town America rotting away in a body politic that would soon bloat up into the New Frontier and the Great Society, belching napalm on Asians and suffering bleeding ulcers within. Yet there *is* a continuity: the suburbanite driven into insanity in *Targets* is, after all, the child of the people who streamed out of the Midwest and ended up in the San Fernando Valley watching TV and cleaning their rifles. The youths of *The Last Picture Show* grow up in a world whose possibilities are defined by the weary humanity of the poolhall owner on the one hand, and the vacant depravity of the teenage heroine on the other—a beery trip across the Mexican border being the utmost adventure conceivable. Yet people survive, as they must; and Bogdanovich, who seems to care more about his characters here than he did in *Targets,* avoids melodrama and patiently chronicles the slow draining away of vitality by the forces of economic concentration, death, carelessness—and how people accept the draft, adultery, the consolations of shared despair. The film is modest and firm in style, fittingly without pyrotechnics—certainly one of the best films of the past year from anywhere, and as American as "American Pie."—E.C.

Roger Corman's **The Red Baron** is about strategy—the demise of chivalrous warfare in World War I—but is also a demonstration of cinematic strategy. The structure is schematic—the intercutting between von Richtofen and Brown, who finally shoots him down, is symmetrical even though Brown gets less screen time—but the movie's surface never lets the effect become academic. Corman's exhilarating flair for keeping the action on the move, unobtrusively selecting an interesting set-up and creating compelling visual images, has never been surer: an expository dialogue scene between top brass is shot in the back of a constantly moving car; the German squadron is likened to a flying circus, and circus music cues in on a cut to shots of the gaily painted planes in flight; when von Richtofen is decorated by the Kaiser, what might easily have been a static setpiece is made dynamic by a camera that in a single movement travels across the serried ranks of troops, then rises to look down on von Richtofen as he marches forward. And the aerial sequences (filmed without back-projection) are often dazzling to watch. But all this is far from just stylistic overlay: the rich romantic colors and the sense of fragility induced by the frequent high-angle shots take us inside von Richtofen's charismatic private world, explicitly described in the flashback where his childhood is recalled by a carousel of military figures. Our involvement is important, for like so many Corman protagonists, von Richtofen is doomed—the sequence in which he and his father talk about their future is laid in a graveyard—and the movie inevitably ends with his death. What gives *The Red Baron* an extra dimension is that Brown, apparently von Richtofen's opposite (the acting styles of John Philip Low and Don Stroud are neatly contrasted) ultimately seems doomed also. If von Richtofen represents the old order in terms of a Roderick Usher, Brown stands for the new in terms of Dr. Xavier, the *Man with X-Ray Eyes.* Earlier Brown describes himself as merely a "technician" but by the movie's end he has been led to a heightened plane of experience comparable with von Richtofen's. The master technician has become a kind of visionary—a progression to which Corman's development as an artist aptly offers a positive counterpart.—TIMOTHY PULLEINE

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The Last Picture Show confirms what *Targets* suggested: that Peter Bogdanovich can put movies together very well indeed. Its performances are better and cover a far greater range than those of *Targets;* its story is finer-grained, more nuanced, more subtly anchored in our social history—thanks in considerable part, no doubt, to the Larry McMurtry novel on which it is based. It is a well-made film of a kind that Hollywood scarcely has the drive and skill to turn out any more, and it's fitting that a devotee of the *auteur* theory should have made it. But it doesn't tell us yet whether Bogdanovich will ripen into a genuine *auteur* himself—a craftsman whose work displays, beneath the surface of various vehicles (he has just shot *What's Up Doc?)* a continuing style and concern with pervasive personal themes. *Targets* was partly efficient, almost TV-level story-telling, with a kind of expressionism in its climactic sequence which seemed nonetheless rather chilly and calculated. *The Last Picture Show* surprises, therefore, with the quiet warmth of its portrayal of the blasted years of the Eisenhower era—with the vestiges of small-town America rotting away in a body politic that would soon bloat up into the New Frontier and the Great Society, belching napalm on Asians and suffering bleeding ulcers within. Yet there *is* a continuity: the suburbanite driven into insanity in *Targets* is, after all, the child of the people who streamed out of the Midwest and ended up in the San Fernando Valley watching TV and cleaning their rifles. The youths of *The Last Picture Show* grow up in a world whose possibilities are defined by the weary humanity of the poolhall owner on the one hand, and the vacant depravity of the teenage heroine on the other—a beery trip across the Mexican border being the utmost adventure conceivable. Yet people survive, as they must; and Bogdanovich, who seems to care more about his characters here than he did in *Targets,* avoids melodrama and patiently chronicles the slow draining away of vitality by the forces of economic concentration, death, carelessness—and how people accept the draft, adultery, the consolations of shared despair. The film is modest and firm in style, fittingly without pyrotechnics—certainly one of the best films of the past year from anywhere, and as American as "American Pie."—E.C.

Roger Corman's **The Red Baron** is about strategy—the demise of chivalrous warfare in World War I—but is also a demonstration of cinematic strategy. The structure is schematic—the intercutting between von Richtofen and Brown, who finally shoots him down, is symmetrical even though Brown gets less screen time—but the movie's surface never lets the effect become academic. Corman's exhilarating flair for keeping the action on the move, unobtrusively selecting an interesting set-up and creating compelling visual images, has never been surer: an expository dialogue scene between top brass is shot in the back of a constantly moving car; the German squadron is likened to a flying circus, and circus music cues in on a cut to shots of the gaily painted planes in flight; when von Richtofen is decorated by the Kaiser, what might easily have been a static setpiece is made dynamic by a camera that in a single movement travels across the serried ranks of troops, then rises to look down on von Richtofen as he marches forward. And the aerial sequences (filmed without back-projection) are often dazzling to watch. But all this is far from just stylistic overlay: the rich romantic colors and the sense of fragility induced by the frequent high-angle shots take us inside von Richtofen's charismatic private world, explicitly described in the flashback where his childhood is recalled by a carousel of military figures. Our involvement is important, for like so many Corman protagonists, von Richtofen is doomed—the sequence in which he and his father talk about their future is laid in a graveyard—and the movie inevitably ends with his death. What gives *The Red Baron* an extra dimension is that Brown, apparently von Richtofen's opposite (the acting styles of John Philip Low and Don Stroud are neatly contrasted) ultimately seems doomed also. If von Richtofen represents the old order in terms of a Roderick Usher, Brown stands for the new in terms of Dr. Xavier, the *Man with X-Ray Eyes.* Earlier Brown describes himself as merely a "technician" but by the movie's end he has been led to a heightened plane of experience comparable with von Richtofen's. The master technician has become a kind of visionary—a progression to which Corman's development as an artist aptly offers a positive counterpart.—TIMOTHY PULLEINE

Sometimes a Great Notion. Brilliant novels are so scarce that it is disheartening to see one stripped of its essence and its leftovers tacked together for the screen. Ken Kesey's book, a roaring and eloquent glorification of defiance, has been converted

into a harmless entertainment. The culprits are Paul Newman, the director and star, and John Gay, whose title should be desecrator rather than screenwriter. Newman's first directorial effort, *Rachel, Rachel,* proved that he could handle a small, intimate movie. But to direct and star in a sprawling, multimillion dollar film like this one was apparently too much too soon. Newman portrays the number one son of the Stampers, a rugged Northwest logging clan who pigheadedly defy a local strike. They are too mechanically governed by tradition to sympathize with the demands of their fellow loggers; chopping down trees and meeting deadlines is too crucial to their lives to abandon it for a socio-economic exercise like striking. They are folksy, likable conservatives who equate masculinity with boozing and brawling; when a hip, long-lost, resentful son (Michael Sarrazin) drifts in from the East, he is treated like a long-haired pansy. His adjustment to the rigors of logging and his gradual re-acceptance into the family should be the core of the film. But Newman, abusing his power as director, pays too much attention to his own character. One nightmarish day, two Stamper men (Henry Fonda and Richard Jaeckel) are killed and a Stamper woman (Lee Remick) runs off. Yet this tragedy is not really moving because the characters are not developed enough to earn our empathy. The performances by Miss Remick, as a dissatisfied wife, and Sarrazin, as a confused young man, are merely rehashes of roles that both have been playing for years. Fonda's cantankerous patriarch is a departure for him, but he botches it by overacting. In his death scene, he moans and babbles like an actor shamelessly in quest of an Academy Award nomination. Newman, of course, has nothing new to offer. His trademark role—the virile, sassy maverick—grows staler with each repetition.

—Dennis Hunt

Two very fine examples of mothie Gothic slipped by last year, virtually unnoticed: Curtis Harrington's **What's the Matter With Helen** and Robert Fuest's **The Abominable Dr. Phibes.** Since neither film dealt with contemporary life in a realistic fashion, both were ignored. Harrington's film is based on a screenplay by Henry Farrell, who wrote *Whatever Became of Baby Jane* and again it deals with the depressing, suburban Hollywood of the thirties, the world which Nathanael West incomparably described. Two women, mothers of Leopold-Loeb-like murderers, join to form a horrible dance school for would-be Shirley Temples. There is some to-do about a dark stranger, threats in the night, and attempts at murder, followed by an unbridled camp-horror climax. All this can be safely discounted, since what really matters in the picture is the truly ferocious, inspired portrait of a Hollywood that has gone for good. Harrington, a gifted maker of experimental films, and a vivid critical historian of the movies, has been extraordinarily served by his art director, Eugene Lourie, who worked on Renoir's films of the thirties, in recapturing an Art Deco, black-and-silver gambling ship and its tango band, a Spanish-style house and an ambience of night streets; Lucien Ballard's photography has a subdued, lacquered elegance; David Raksin's score has an angular grace; and Debbie Reynolds, Shelley Winters and Michéal MacLiammoir as a Sidney Greenstreet-like, pampered ham are all first-class. Not the least of the film's merits is that it has a deliberate pace, a use of medium shots, uncannily redolent of the style of a Curtiz or a LeRoy at the time (1934) of its action.

The Abominable Dr. Phibes is set two years further back, in 1932. Dr. Phibes (played by Vincent Price in his first sharply realized performance in more than 20 years) is a ghastly relic of a human being, dressed up like the Phantom of the Opera and equipped with an appropriate organ (a rainbow-colored Wurlitzer) who avenges himself on the surgeons who destroyed his wife's career and life. He visits upon them the plagues of Egypt: death by rats, by frogs, by bats, by locusts, etc. James Whiton's inventive screenplay provides a charnel house of horrors of which even the Divine Marquis must surely have approved. But what really matters is the execution, a wonderful display of hard-edged pop art, photographed with glittering sharpness and staged—particularly in Dr. Phibes's London mansion—with a skill that recalls the best of the late James Whale. Not since Whale's heyday in fact has a film come so perfectly close to realizing its own Gothic comedy intentions. It is full of beautiful and daring touches: Phibes's mistress sadly playing a violin while one of his enemies is attacked by rats in a biplane; the couple's slow waltz in the mansion, she tipping champagne through a hole in his neck; the attack on the nurse by locusts admitted through a glass tube onto her sleeping face, a masterly sequence of refined sadistic fantasy. This classic of the macabre deserves to stand alongside Charles Brabin's *The Mask of Fu Manchu* in the cinema canon of terror. It even has a dance band of galvanized corpses playing "A Quarter to Three," the number Ida Lupino sang at a piano covered in cigarette burns in *Roadhouse.* Who could ask for more?—Charles Higham

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The film idea

STANLEY J. SOLOMON, Iona College

The Film Idea provides a complete introduction to the nature of the narrative film in regard to those characteristics that distinguish this art form from the other narrative arts. The book is divided into three main parts. Part One, "The Nature of the Narrative Film," discusses the basic principles of film form: motion and fixity, camera and eye, editing, the projected image, and the film-maker. Part Two, "The Development of Film Form," presents the historical development of narrative film (Chapters 6 and 7 follow a chronological order; Chapters 8-12 are organized according to genre). Part Three, "Theory and Esthetics," treats the theory and esthetics of film form, using the basic principles defined in Part One as the point of departure. Throughout the book, specific films are analyzed in detail either to illustrate their position in the history of narrative film or as examples of theoretical concepts. Seventy black and white illustrations and seven color photos are interspersed throughout. Appendices include a glossary of film terms, a selected bibliography, and filmographies of the major directors.

Paperbound. 416 pages (probable). Publication: *April 1972*

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