



Shades of Orwell

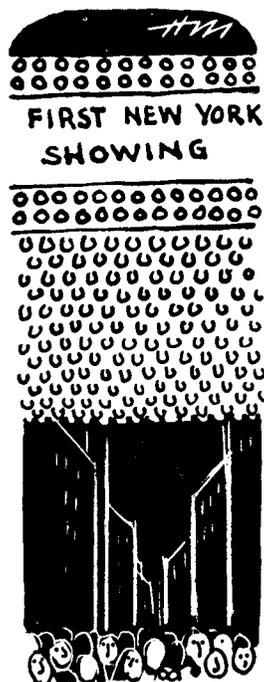
ALTHOUGH Ray Bradbury is often described as a science fiction writer, he himself tends to shy from that label, preferring to be known simply as a writer. There is more than ordinary justification for his view. Bradbury is enormously enthusiastic about writing, but not enthusiastic at all about the brave new world he fears the scientists and geneticists have in store for us.

Like George Orwell, he projects the more alarming symptoms of today's sicknesses upon a wall a few decades or generations away, where, magnified to super life-size, they scarifyingly dominate the entire landscape, blotting out the human spirit, exorcising our most cherished human values. But where Orwell in his angry works seemed to call for action now to prevent the world from slipping into 1984, Bradbury often conveys the impression that already it is far too late. His nostalgia is for the small-town America of back porches and rocking chairs, of fresh-mown lawns and nearby woods in which to ramble. For him, science is no panacea, and he seems to embrace science fiction writing as a kind of "Mene, mene tekel . . ." of things to come.

All of these qualities are abundantly visible in *Fahrenheit 451*, François Truffaut's vivid and imaginative adaptation of one of Bradbury's best, and best known, works. It postulates a not-too-distant time in which books are outlawed enemies of the state; they stir dissent and unrest; they make people unhappy. For a placid, non-questioning, utterly passive populace, the books must be destroyed.

Montag, the hero of this story, is one of the destroyers, a fireman-in-reverse whose job is to *start* fires. (*Fahrenheit 451* is the temperature at which paper turns to ash.) Meeting a teacher who reminds him disturbingly of his own wife, Montag begins to wonder about the job he has been doing so unquestioningly. If books are so bad, why do people jeopardize their careers to read them? If books are so dangerous, why are some people willing to give up their lives for them? For an answer, Montag rescues a copy of *David Copperfield* from the pyre, reads it clandestinely, and is denounced by his wife to the government. The fireman finds refuge in a community of subversives who read and memorize books to preserve them for the future.

This, of course, is Bradbury the humanist, the writer who holds that man



tully exists only when he is exercising all his senses and exerting all his faculties. But the Orwellian strain is present as well in the omnipresent television screens with their uninterrupted flow of tranquilizing Pablum, in the drab uniformity of the people's costumes and their responses, and in their dead apathy to news of war and disaster. Truffaut embraces Bradbury and Orwell with equal enthusiasm—which means that there is some ambivalence within the film itself. Logically, the book-burners are quite right; and if happiness is to be equated with wall-to-wall television, soma pills, and (Bradbury's favorite panacea for transportation snarls) high-speed monorails, then indeed who needs books? On the other hand, because Bradbury lacks Orwell's political bite, the book-burners remain peripheral to the theme of totalitarianism even while occupying screen-center; they are but one singular manifestation of a larger danger that is surely sensed but never shown.

As a film, *Fahrenheit 451* moves slowly but intriguingly, setting its intellectual snares for Montag, fashioning a world that we all know could exist but should not. Oskar Werner, his accent unaccounted for, makes of Montag a reluctant hero, a sensitive mau drawn ineluctably, irresistibly to the world of books. Julie Christie, also unaccountably, plays the dual roles of teacher and wife—which, as it turns out, is neither a plus nor a minus. But Truffaut, working for

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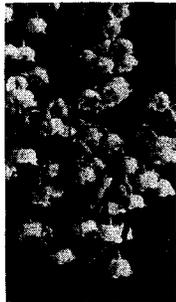
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the first time in color, continues his romance with the motion picture camera, playing with slow motion, maskings and movements, and constantly keeping the screen as alert and aware as Bradbury's own sensibilities would dictate. The resultant film is highly original, thought-provoking, and at the same time distressingly superficial. The dangers that lie ahead are not from the book-burners, but from those who may direct them; and somehow *Fahrenheit 451* never gets around to this.

SOME SORT of prize for the most apt title of the year should be promoted for Richard Brook's suspenseful melodrama, *The Professionals*, starring Burt Lancaster, Lee Marvin, Jack Palance, Robert Ryan, and Claudia Cardinale. A rock-solid professionalism pervades every shot, every line, and every performance as, soon after Pershing's skirmishes with the Mexicans, a quartet of veterans is enlisted by an American millionaire to venture once more south of the border and bring back his wife. Presumably, she is being held for ransom by a guerrilla chief; but in the course of their long and hazardous trek, the men come to suspect the motives of their employer. True to their contract, they deliver the gorgeous Miss Cardinale into the hands of Ralph Bellamy, then, in a last-minute switch, find a way to be true to their consciences as well. If some of their actions smack of small-boy heroics, Brooks generally manages to conceal the fact with his man-talk dialogue and a camera that is forever racing on to the next exciting facet of this taut adventure tale.

Just how important this kind of professionalism can be is illustrated, in reverse, by *The Defector*, Montgomery Clift's last film before his untimely death. It can be called another spy story, just as Brooks's picture can be called another Western. The difference is that Brooks has the skill to create characters and pace so effectively that the familiar seems fresh, whereas Raoul Levy, who produced, directed, and shares the screenplay credit for *The Defector*, is totally unable even to make the elements of his scenes fuse into a coherent unit. His story of an American scientist's being used in East Germany as a cat's paw by both the Russians and the CIA is admittedly complex; but in Levy's uncertain hands, it becomes merely confusing. Flat cuts, used to move the narrative along, only add to the confusion, and flat dialogue—at one point, Clift is required to say, "They can't make a schizophrenic out of me!"—only adds to the tedium. *The Defector* is a sad epitaph to the tragedy-strewn career of a young man who was once one of our most promising and interesting new stars.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.

SR Recommends

Continued from page 18

thriller, erased the original sound track, and dubbed in his own wacky lines, resulting in an effortlessly funny travesty of all James Bond films.

ART

Exhibitions

200 YEARS OF WATERCOLOR PAINTING IN AMERICA, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. More than 300 American watercolors dating from 1757 to 1966 survey a field rich in this country's history. Most of the works belong to the Metropolitan. The exhibition is strong in its eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth-century coverage, but weak in contemporary material. Opens December 7.

WILLIAM GLACKENS IN RETROSPECT, City Art Museum of St. Louis. The first important retrospective exhibit of Glackens's work since 1938, the year of his death, this comprehensive show will give Americans the chance to judge an artist who only recently has been considered one of this country's leading painters. The exhibition will travel later to Washington and New York.

PHOTOGRAPHY

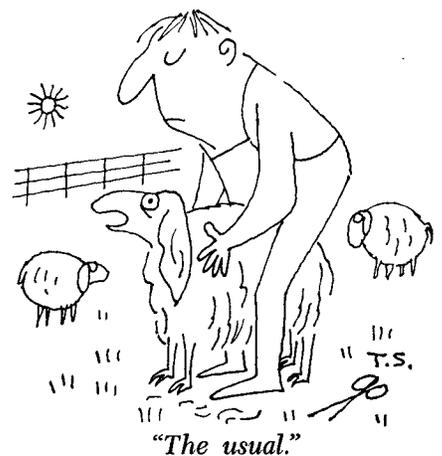
Exhibitions

FROM THE McALPIN COLLECTION, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Ansel Adams, Eliot Porter, Charles Sheeler, and Edward and Brett Weston are among the notables represented in this forty-print selection from an outstanding private collection.

MARIE COSINDAS: POLAROID COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. New England gets its chance to see the distinguished camerawork of Cosindas (See SR, Aug. 27).

ROBERT T. LITTLE—AMATEUR ASTRONOMER AND PHOTOGRAPHER, American Museum-Hayden Planetarium, New York. Camera and telescope in tandem capture a galaxy of images as distant as 2,000,000 light years away from earth.

THE THREE BANNERS OF CHINA, Asia House, 112 East 64th St., New York. Marc Riboud's book of the same name has inspired Asia House's first photography exhibit—a dramatic display of penetrating lenswork that explores life in the communes, the industrial scene, and political indoctrination in China today. Opens December 7. (See SR, Dec. 10)



SR/December 3, 1966



NET and Man at Yale

NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL Television (NET) has produced and is currently showing on its member stations throughout the country *To Be A Man*, a documentary about undergraduate life at Yale. Murray Lerner spent two years producing it, with the help of Yale's administration, faculty, and students. The style is *cinéma vérité* with no narration or comment, simply "unrehearsed and candid material from inside and outside the classroom in an effort to reflect the hopes, concerns, and doubts which are central to the students' experiences."

Because of the absence of any structure, save an additive one—the showing of more and more aspects of undergraduate experience—the hour-long film has a one-dimensional quality. There is no dialectic. One gets the message quickly: Yale is a place where students are challenged to think; learn about beauty, truth, space, light, comedy, tragedy; gain scope by living and working with others—in short, become men. Then tedium tends to set in.

The visual images are never dull, the cutting is brisk and often perceptive, the students and faculty are always interesting, and the rock'n'roll music is lively and integrative. But whoever set policy for the film yielded, unfortunately, to the temptation to get everything in: architecture, biology, drama, crew, film, art, big lectures, small seminars, track, dropouts, etc. Perhaps it was the public relations push by the administration, perhaps it was the producer's intention to let the university "speak for itself."

There is no such editorial virginity, however, not even in *cinéma vérité*. The film-maker disturbs, he enters, he comments. The most important commentary made by this film was not contained in its encyclopedic breadth; it rests in what was left out. This viewer came away with the impression that Yale is a place of monastic whiffenpoofery, where the eternal verities are pursued by gentlemen-scholars, so concerned with the development of their own souls and intellects that the world outside the medieval campus is nonexistent. Much must always be said for critical self-examination, for Socratic inquiry, but the bearded, barefoot satyr of Athens was a disturber of the social peace—he pricked away at the conscience of the city.

In *To Be A Man*, no one was shown discussing the war in Vietnam, the white backlash, the American poor, the degradation of the metropolis. William

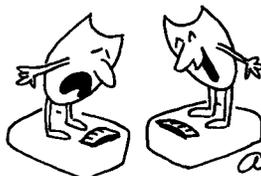
Sloane Coffin, Jr., Yale chaplain, came closest to such crucial concerns with the general admonition that universities must stop playing intellectual games and say not, "What must I think to be honest?" but rather, "What must I do to be saved?" University professors who appear to dismiss the latter question often reply that they, too, are concerned; they merely define the problem of concern in a different way. Their concerns, to be fruitful, they say, must be "long-range and disinterested." It's a jolly tug-of-war, endemic to most universities, but at Yale, it would appear from the film, not even the question of whether or not there is such a problem is discussed. Self-awareness seems to be all.

But how can one be self-aware without embracing the selves we live with in *communitas*? Yale is an urban university. New Haven sprawls around it. As a Harvard man, McGeorge Bundy, president of the Ford Foundation, said recently: "The great university in a metropolis must have a special and urgent concern for the future of the city and the future of those in our cities who lack full opportunity."

If Yale lent itself to this film because it wished to project an image that would attract superior students, it probably failed. The interests of the good undergraduates today may be highly personal in many ways, but they are no longer private. However noble, so serene an environment would not attract them. If Mr. Lerner meant really to make the comment that Yale is remote, then he did other universities an injustice by subjecting them to what may be taken to be a generalization. The day I saw the film, I read in the papers of Harvard students' throwing themselves under the wheels of Secretary of Defense McNamara's limousine.

The greatest injustice, however, may have been done to the Yale undergraduates and faculty. Are the wearers of the gowns of Old Eli truly so detached from the towns around them? If not, they ought to demand equal time from NET and make another film, showing them vigorously waving socially conscious white handkerchiefs (an alumni tradition) for God, for country, and for Yale.

—ROBERT LEWIS SHAYON.



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