



Unsentimental Gentleman

IT IS SAID out in Hollywood that, given a list of ten top directors, any studio would choose for its next multi-million dollar spectacular the mild, soft-spoken, unassuming Robert Wise. Actors love him because he helps them to Academy Award performances. Studios love him because he generally manages to bring in a picture on time, on budget, and in a form that earns praise from the critics and dollars at the box office. Not only that, Wise is varied. He seems able to do almost anything, from the uncompromising realism of *I want to Live* to the operatic *West Side Story*, from the superbly manipulated shudders of *The Haunting* to the sunny splendors of *The Sound of Music*. But whatever the genre, Wise manages to give it the style most suited to the material, in contrast to most directors, who would rather stamp their pictures with the style most suited to themselves.

This virtuosity is impressively displayed in his newest film, *The Sand Pebbles*, based on the novel by Richard McKenna. Set in China in the late Twenties, it is a vast, wide-ranging adventure tale, panoramic yet also intimate as the upsurge of Chinese nationalism is viewed through the eyes of a handful of

American sailors on a U.S. gunboat assigned to cruise the Yangtze during this troubled time.

At the center of the film is Jake Holman, a "loner," an independent spirit who has transferred to the tiny *San Pablo* from a larger ship because he wants to run his engine room without interference. Once aboard, however, he discovers that in effect the Chinese are operating the vessel, the crew having gradually insinuated itself into every phase of the ship's activities except battle drill. The officers and his fellow enlisted men resent Holman's attempts to do his proper duty as a threat to their exceedingly comfortable way of life.

But on shore, events in China are posing a far more formidable threat to their way of life. The country, divided for centuries, is being forcibly unified by the new Nationalist Army; and the leaders of the new China, joined by the students, are fanatical in their efforts to drive the "foreign devils" from their country. As an understanding missionary explains the situation to Holman, "What would you do if Chinese gunboats were sailing up the Mississippi?"

The missionary, who runs a school far up the Yangtze, wants no help from the

crew of the *San Pablo*. A man of peace, he feels that nationalism can only lead to wars. When the gunboat arrives under orders to evacuate him and his staff, he declares himself a "stateless person" and refuses to leave. Ironically, in order to reach the mission, the ship has had to run a blockade manned by the students he trained at the school, and its official protectors. With his protection gone, the missionary is killed by Nationalist soldiers and, soon after, so is Holman and most of the *San Pablo's* crew.

Obviously, this is not only strange, but rather strong stuff for a multi-million dollar spectacular, and a far cry indeed from the marshmallowy *Sound of Music*. But just as, within the limitations of that



film, director Wise was speaking for human dignity and freedom of the spirit, in the wider dimensions afforded by *The Sand Pebbles* he is able to put forward some provocative ideas about the nature of nationalism, American intervention, and the need for a more basic understanding among people—ideas that are as relevant to our role in Vietnam today as they were to our position in China forty years ago.

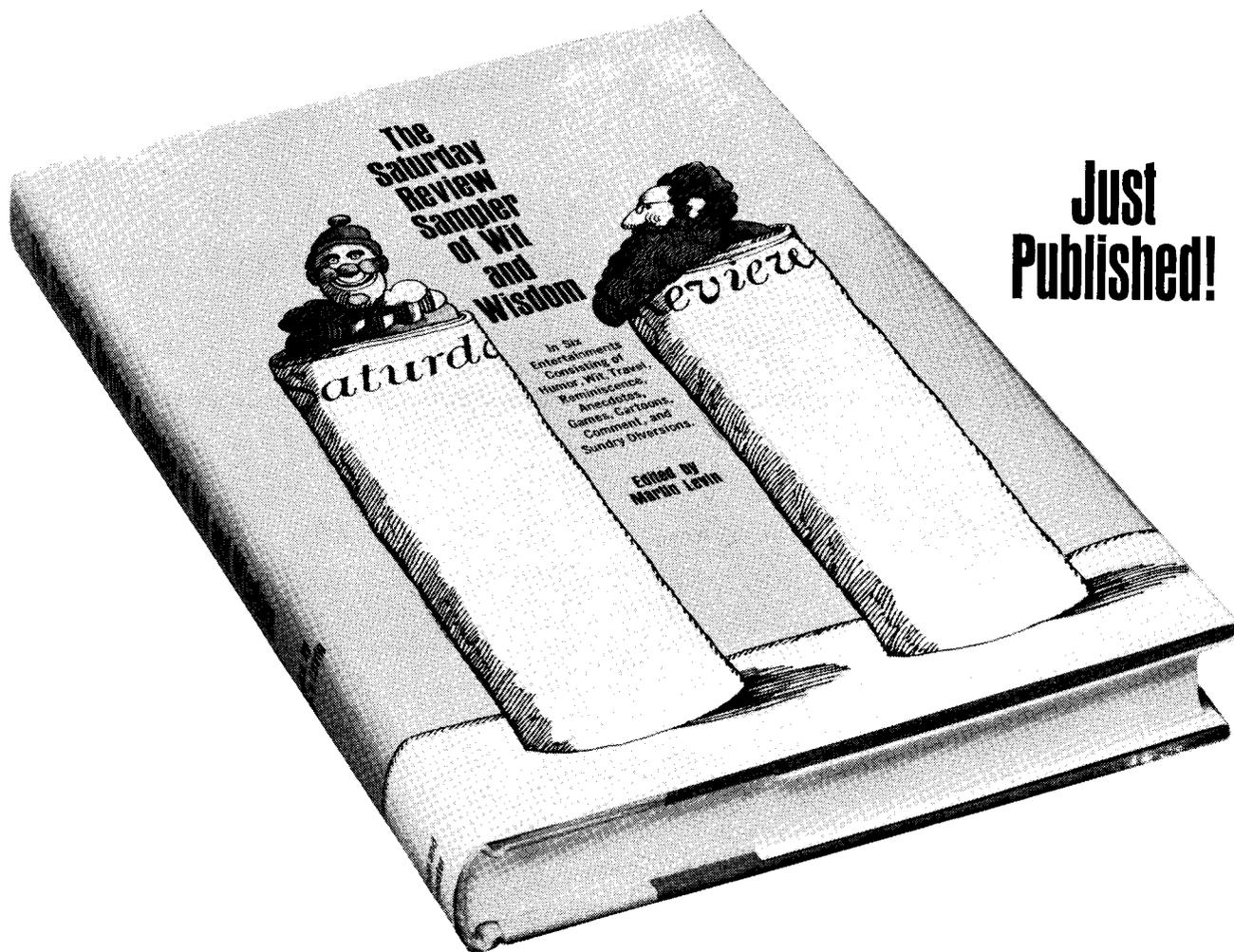
Robert Anderson's brilliantly succinct script blunts none of this, neither our untenable position in China in 1926 nor its implications for Vietnam in 1966. But the remarkable thing is that he achieves this with a minimum of harangue. The missionary is what he is, and he defends his position only when forced to do so by the *San Pablo's* well-meaning but jingoistic captain. Holman is simply searching for a decent way of life; and the tragedy of the film is that when he finally finds it, it is denied him by the intolerance of which he was unwittingly a part.

But action—often bloody, always colorful—is the essence of this film; and Wise has been nobly abetted by a script that keeps hurtling forward for more than three hours with scarcely a let-up in pace, by authentic-looking backgrounds in Taiwan and Hong Kong that are more than adequate stand-ins for the Chinese mainland, and by a large and excellent cast that seems wholly responsive to what the film is trying to say. Of the latter, Richard Crenna is outstanding as the starchy captain, Candice Bergen attractive as a missionary teacher, Richard Attenborough effective as a sailor who falls in love with a Chinese girl in a house of shame—and all of them dominated by Steve McQueen, who is nothing short of wonderful in the pivotal role of Holman.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.



"Please, Martha, I'm trying to hear the roar of the city."



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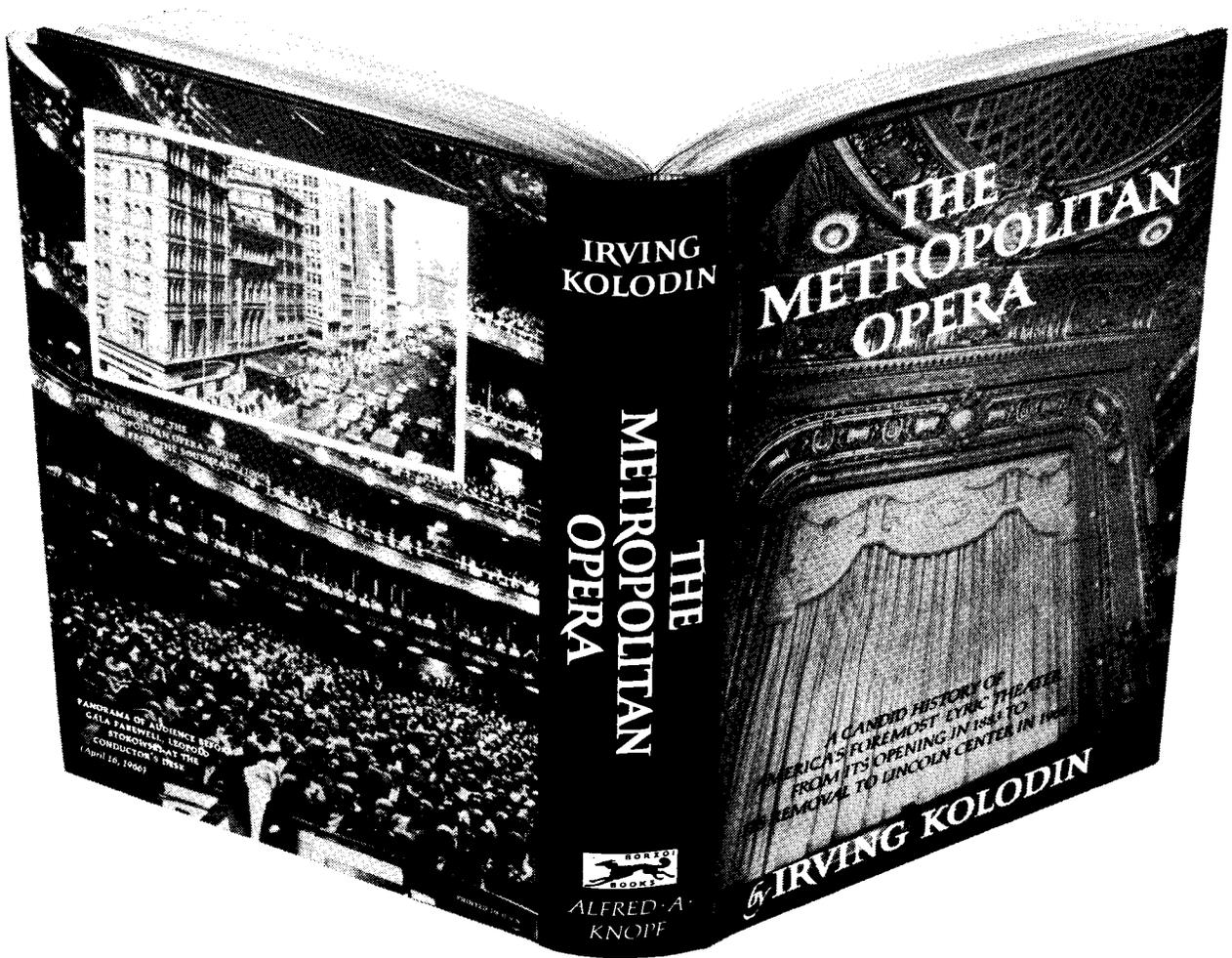
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Man Himself Talking

STUDS TERKEL's daily radio programs, featuring readings, documentaries, and interviews with world notables in literature and the arts, are heard in Chicago over WFMT, an award-winning commercial "fine arts" station, and in New York over WRVR, the noncommercial Riverside Church station. Listeners occasionally have been startled to hear unidentified voices of people who are unmistakably not of the academic or celebrity worlds. One voice, in response to the question, "Suppose you were God?" answered, "I'd have it so, when somebody goes to kill anybody, whatever they're usin' wouldn't work. And they couldn't kill nobody. They'd all go out and work together and grow food and stuff. They'd have fun together after workin' hard. No one person could set hisself up as lord and keeper."

The voices—compelling, provocative—are excerpts from more than a hundred on-the-spot interviews recorded by Mr. Terkel in Chicago: on streets, in taverns, in offices, in homes. They are, he says, people of "inchoate thought . . . rather than the consciously articulate . . . homeowners, homemakers, landladies, project dwellers, old settlers, new arrivals, skilled hands, unskilled, the retired, the young, the *haut monde*, the *demi-monde*, the solid middle *monde* . . ."

"Guerrilla journalism," the interviewer calls it—"making conversation; and listening." Now this urban prowler with the tape-recorder has edited the transcripts of the interviews and assembled them in *Division Street: America*, a book to be published in January by Pantheon. People who have read advance copies report that they "can't put it down. It just holds you." Students of urban life will find the book a valuable social document. The general reader will be entertained by it, often moved. The author, busy with his regular broadcasts, says he hasn't had time to produce a radio series of his tapes. But this, in its origin, is radio—good radio—and it should be heard.

At the Johnson Foundation's Wingspread Conference on Educational Radio in Racine, Wisconsin, where I first heard excerpts, the conference participants searched for a role that noncommercial radio could play in the coming era of satellite communications. "Do what broadcasting was meant to do," a speaker told the conference. "Confront great numbers of people with relevant and revealing images of themselves. Don't aspire to high culture, imitating

educational television. Get out into the community. Stop talking in élitist vocabulary. Get the silent people of our society into the democratic act. Nobody else is doing this in broadcasting. It's virgin territory. Grab it."

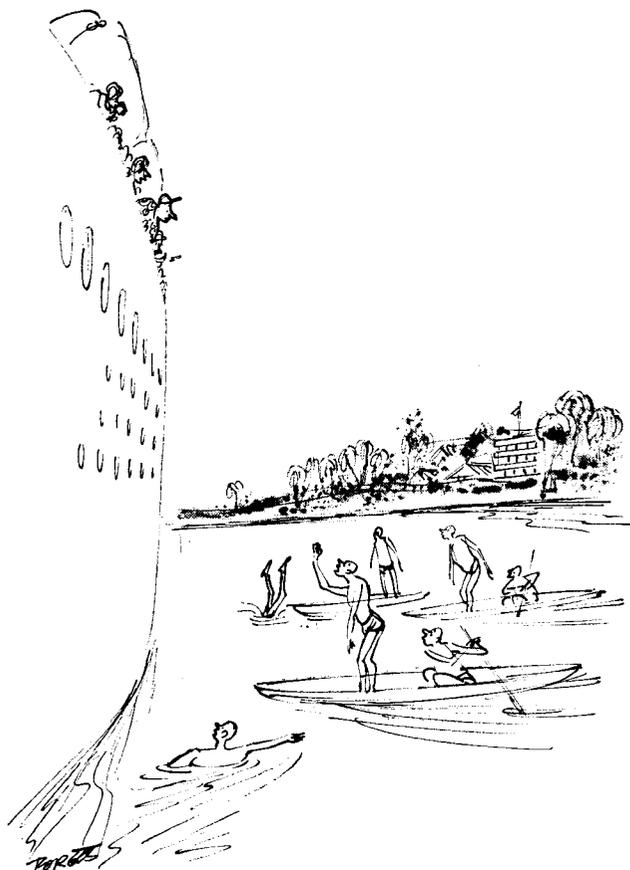
Studs Terkel has done just this. The subculture is not necessarily a matter of social class. He has a Chicago social lioness on his tapes; two advertising agency men ("one of whom loves his job as much as the other loathes his"); the wife of an ex-Wall Street lawyer, and others of the middle and upper classes. The real subculture lies in the hidden feelings and thoughts of Americans buried under the official mythology of the mass media. Radio today is awash with talk, but most of it is the yawp of trivia, chatter, gossip, the strident rasp of the staged controversy or the measured intellectualism of the public figure. The Bomb is a theme in the Terkel interviews; so are Vietnam and civil rights and automation. But these archetypal

issues are set in the context of people's deepest, most poignant, triumphant, or bitter personal experiences. "Not the doctrine of the announced idea. The man must listen to man himself talking." These sentences are spoken on one of the tapes by a Chicago architect, expressing his faith that "in the individual must lie the way out, because he is society."

In the phrase "man himself talking" the architect tersely described *Division Street: America*. There is hate in the talkers, and tenderness, despair, hurt, cynicism, an agonizing emptiness, and, sparingly, a sad hope. "I'm dedicated to one principle," declares a fascinating, compulsively fierce Chicago con-man, "taking money away from unqualified dilettantes who earn it through nepotism." In each of the speakers there is a piece of every listener.

Industrial societies, a political scientist has said, create inevitable tensions which create destructiveness and irresponsibility. *Division Street* is a metaphor describing the split psyche and the schizoid society. If these are to be healed, they must be confronted, listened to. This is radio's unique opportunity. Studs Terkel has shown us one way to open the ear.

—ROBERT LEWIS SHAYON.



"What am I supposed to do with a subway token?"