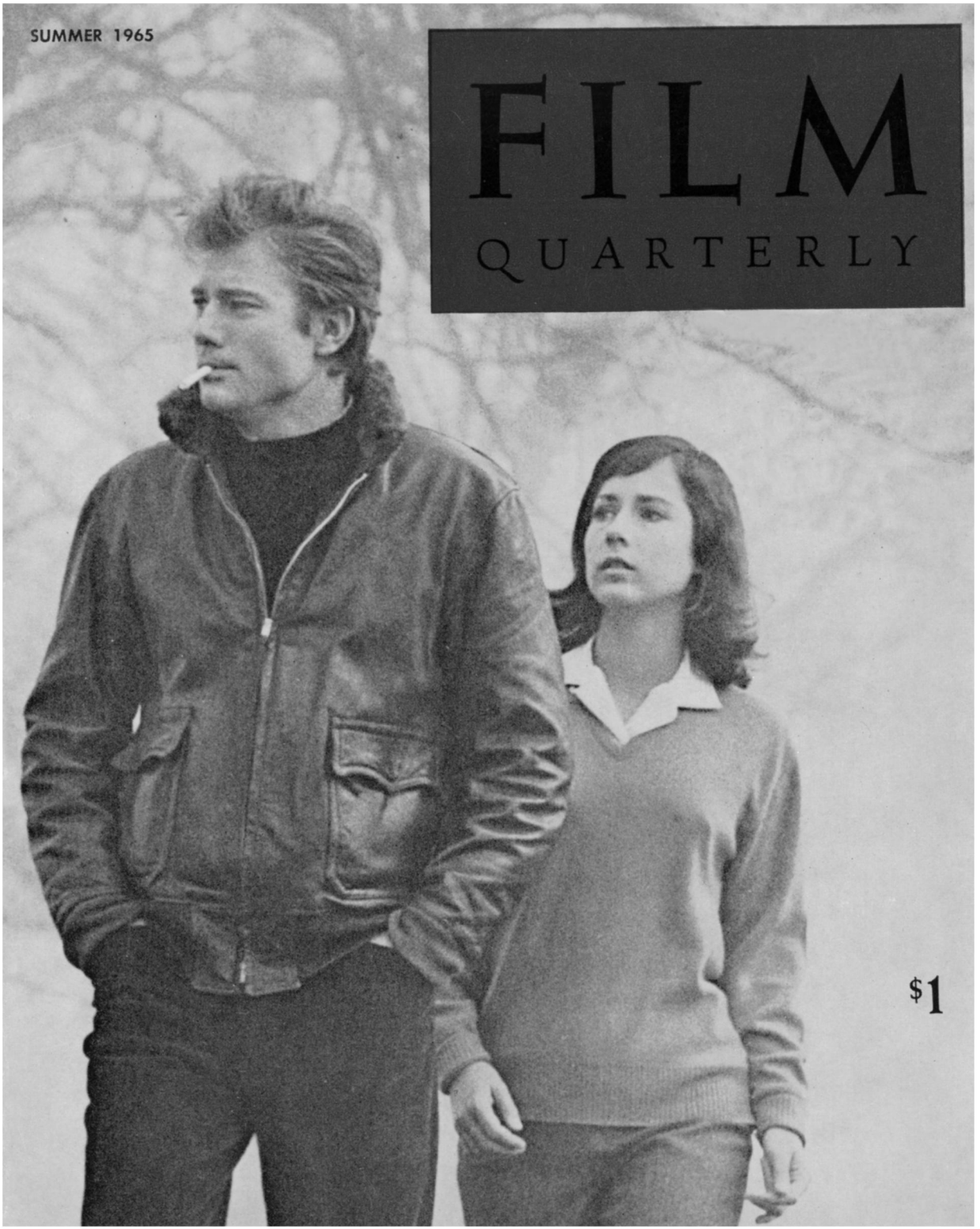
SUMMER 1965

FILM QUARTERLY



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COVER: Michael Parks and Celia Kaye in *Wild Seed*.

Editor's Notebook

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CONTRIBUTORS

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HELEN VAN DONGEN

Robert J. Flaherty 1884-1951

Who was Robert J. Flaherty? To casual acquaintances he was an exuberant man, witty, a born raconteur, always surrounded by an attentive audience eagerly listening to his tales of far-away lands and people. This image was reinforced by the many stories about his character, his habits and exploits.

Our interviewers and reporters, by choice or assignment, select as subjects people who make a good story. They find it necessary to create a personality with mass-appeal. It makes "good reading" but the resulting impressions often have no relation to the person or his achievements.

Flaherty was indeed impressive to look at. His great bulk, his broad shoulders, his pink face with deep blue eyes, and his massive head with the fringe of flowing white hair invited exaggerations and inventions about him and his idiosyncrasies. Flaherty himself lent, unwittingly, generous support to such stories and never did anything to correct or discredit some of the more fanciful tales. On the contrary, he seemed to enjoy them.

His art of story-telling was so great that, even if one knew that the tale was fabricated, even if one had heard it a dozen times before, just listening to how he would bring it off *this* time was a most enjoyable experience. No wonder then that the interviewer was not always aware when facts were left behind and fiction entered. And so, Flaherty became a legend in his lifetime.

Simultaneously he was also hailed as the "Father of the Documentary Film," as the man who "merges himself into the life of the people and brings back a dramatic record of their daily lives." Today, more than thirteen years after Flaherty's death, it must be confusing to young film students who try to reconcile Flaherty's public image, his "documentary approach" and the sometimes fanciful accounts of how he made his films, with the films themselves. The picture I had formed of Flaherty many years ago was based on just such publicity. It had no relation to reality. What confusion it caused in my mind and expectations when I started to work with him on *The Land.*

Flaherty would talk a great deal about possible future plans, about films he thought *ought* to be made by himself or others, but never about the work at hand. He let no one enter into his thinking process. He never explained how what had originated as a disjointed thought, gradually was shaped and elaborated into the form in which it ultimately appeared on the screen.* Some years after a film had been finished he would gradually come up with stories about the people, the places or incidents while on location, but these remained stories and did not touch on his thoughts or theories. The only documents which speak directly and truly for Flaherty himself are his films. They should be seen and studied with minds uncluttered by preconceptions about his "innocence," his "naiveté" or his

*See among others my own analysis on how the sequence of the lost and found racoon in *Louisiana Story* began and developed. MS now in archives of the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

◄ *Robert Flaherty and Helen Van Dongen*

"truly documentary approach." It is my opinion that none of these labels fit his films. The enthusiastic reporter who emphasizes the "documentary," actually leaves Flaherty's films open to attack. Flaherty himself would withdraw in embarrassed silence when other film-makers would argue the point with him. The following morning he would complain bitterly to me and ask: "What is the matter with these young fellows? Have they no imagination?"

When Flaherty was ready to begin shooting, his story-line had crystallized to a certain extent. Facts were interpreted and adapted by him and molded into elements of a world created by him, a world entirely his own, in which he firmly believed. These interpretations and adaptations, these new elements, now became the true facts of this new world, where he could indulge his need to turn away from the ugliness of the real world. That is why it is so misleading to call him a documentarian, probably the result of the label "father of the documentary" once applied to Flaherty by John Grierson. Though Flaherty might be considered the ancestor-figure for the documentary, though he got the documentary under way, he soon left the true documentary world for a universe of his own invention. His fantasy was plentiful. He was able to feed the transformation from fact to fable until he had formed an image that suited him and became part of The World of Robert Flaherty.

Of all his full-length films only *The Land* was a true documentary. But even here he could not refrain from a little adaptation to suit his fancy. I am referring to the sequence in which the old Negro dusts off the plantation bell. I was not on location when this sequence was filmed so that I am unable to prove that my assumption is correct. I base my judgment on long training to look at documentary and newsreel material as it comes from the camera and very seldom have I been wrong in spotting staged scenes.

No doubt the old Negro lived in the ruined mansion but my guess is that it was Flaherty's idea to make him dust off the bell. All scenes (and re-takes) had the same characteristics: the old man waiting at the beginning of the takes for a command from the director to move toward the bell. And again, after dusting for a while, for an order to stop doing so. What he muttered under his breath was probably not: "Where have they all gone?" but rather a complaint about having to exert his old and tired limbs so much. Some call it the most poetic sequence in the film and some refer to it as an unforgettable moment. It was Flaherty's privilege to stage this incident and to make it part of his film but at close study there seems to be a departure from the style of the rest of the film. When I innocently asked Flaherty about it he did not answer and left the room. The difference in quality between the bell sequence and unrehearsed situations is clearly visible when one compares it with the scenes of the young boy asleep in a tent, nervously twitching his fingers in the motion of picking peas, or with that of the prematurely old, gaunt young woman who turns full face to the camera, staring at it angrily while she waits in line to receive her small dole of surplus commodities. For neither sequence were there duplicate shots. These scenes are not poetic. They are unforgettable because of their stark reality. They cry out "HUNGER–POVERTY–ABUSE." The shocking truth leaps from the screen and needs no further elaboration. The boy, a child too young for such exploitation, cannot stop picking and his exhausted sleep gives no rest, while the young woman, in all the dignity she can muster in her cast-off life, shows her resentment at being made a potential subject for pity.

Robert Flaherty started *The Land* in the early summer of 1939 for the United States Film Service, then under the direction of Pare Lorentz. At the beginning of the new fiscal year, however, Congress failed to appropriate new funds for this agency and production of *The Land* was shifted to the Agricultural Adjustment Administration under Henry Wallace, then Secretary of Agriculture.

The vast farming operations in the Middle-

and North-West were thriving and producing an abundance of food with the help of newly invented machinery. A migrant labor force, the result of this mechanization in the fields, increased by indigent farmers who could no longer make a living on their home-farms with obsolete production methods, on soil already greatly eroded, swelled the ranks of the seasonal crop-pickers and roamed the country like gypsies.

During his first trip into the field Flaherty photographed mostly the richness of the land: the vast cornfields and mechanical pickers in Iowa; the enormous wheatfields and combines in the North-West, the huge granaries in Duluth. Rich crops everywhere. From there he went into the cotton country and finally, further West, came to the migrants working in the immense vegetable fields.

I began work on *The Land* early in March of 1940, having just finished in Hollywood the editing and scoring of *The Four Hundred Million* for Joris Ivens who, in turn, had left for Ohio to film *Power and the Land* for the Rural Electrification Administration. One morning the telephone rang in my New York apartment. A voice said that he was Robert Flaherty, calling from Washington where he had returned with 75,000 feet of film. Would I please come to edit it for him. I was unprepared but attracted and I must have answered "yes" because I went. I did not really know him though I had seen him on occasion at large gatherings, both here and in Europe and I admired him distantly as one does the famous film-makers of the world.

Thus far I had worked independently with my own crew, or in collaboration with Joris Ivens. Now I was to face an eminent film-maker whose work methods I did not know, with whose ideas I was unfamiliar, and by whose reputation I was overwhelmed. Upon arrival in Washington I found a note in my hotel, inviting me to come for dinner that night. I met him for the first time, face to face, at a small French restaurant on Connecticut Avenue, surrounded by a group of friends. All evening, until very late at night, he talked and told stories about *Nanook*, the Arctic, or the feasts the Polynesian chiefs had given him during the filming of *Moana*. Not a word was said about work on *The Land*. I thought it unusual that a man, engaged in the making of a film on such complex social and economic issues, could set aside his thoughts so completely when most film-makers would not have stopped talking about their problems and frustrations. I found Flaherty's disengagement extraordinary.

Then came my first work-day at the Department of Agriculture. Fighting my way through the miles of somber corridors along which I was to tramp so often during the next twelve months, I felt uneasy and slowed down once in a while. I tried to prepare some questions which would sound intelligent, I wanted to make a good impression. Finally I found his room. There he was, sitting behind a large desk, reading the morning newspaper. "Hello," he said cheerfully, getting up and extending his hand, "your name is too difficult so I'll call you Helen, O.K.?" and then, without pause or interruption, held forth on the bad state of the world. This took several hours of the first morning (and was to take as many hours of every following day so long as the film lasted). Then he said abruptly: "Come on, let us screen some film."

It took us several days to screen through most of the rushes. In the office I found a long "script" written by someone in the Department of Agriculture. It did not look much used and appeared to have little connection with the rushes I was seeing. During these screenings I waited for a word of explanation from Flaherty as to what some of the scenes represented, expected him to disclose his plans, hoped for some word of enlightenment as to what he had in mind. But he just sat there, rubbing the left hand through that fringe of white hair, smoking and groaning. Back in the office, after some more desperate sighs, he would start his monologue again, repeating almost verbatim a news report he had read about the war in Europe. He would also speak

in general terms about the fantastic abundance he had seen during the shooting. "There really is enough food in the United States to feed every man, woman, and child in the country," he would repeat. Other topics he continued mentioning were: the waste of human lives, the destructive influence of civilization, and the killing of human skills and crafts through the introduction of machines; but on these subjects we had as yet no film. He would repeat this day in and day out, by telephone if I had not yet come in, over and over again, until it became an incantation. There were variations sometimes but the nuances were so slight that they were hardly noticeable. Very, very slowly he would extract from it always the same sentences. The subtle inflections of his voice shifted a little to this word, then to that word until, in the end, they had affixed themselves to their chosen syllables, not to be changed again. This experience made me decide at the time of recording that only Flaherty himself could do justice to his commentary. Though his voice, technically, was far from perfect, no one could improve on his inflections, his cadence, or his feeling for the subject. The best actor could only achieve an imitation. But I did not understand all this during those first weeks. I was too inexperienced and too new to his working methods to realize that there was a connection between his monologues and the film.

After about three weeks we had done no more than screen the same material over and over and still he never came to the point where he would make suggestions, outline a possible narrative, or divulge his intentions. Each time when the lights would go on again in the screening-room he would groan: "My God, what are we going to do with all that stuff?" How would I know, if he did not? It puzzled me that a man who could quote lengthy reports he had just read with an almost photographic exactness, seemed unable to remember scenes he had filmed. What was he looking for, or was he simply staring himself blind on scenes he did not know what to do with? I gradually became familiar with content and subject-matter of all the raw material, longed to edit them but refrained from making the smallest suggestions because they might be contrary to his plans. It had to be *his* film, not mine. All seemed so hopeless because I could not get him to talk and he would not reveal what went on in his head as far as the film was concerned. In desperation I wrote to Joris Ivens explaining that all Flaherty did was talk about the war and attack machines in the morning, screen the same stuff all over again in the afternoon and tell stories about *Elephant Boy* in the evening, but never, never a word about what kind of a film he was trying to make. I could see, I wrote, that he might not need a script but he ought to have a plan or at least an *idea!* What did Flaherty want from me? Companionship to relieve the boredom of looking at uncut scenes all afternoon? Ivens, who does not like to write letters and shifts the ones he receives from pocket to pocket until they are beyond answering, wired back: "Observe, look, listen. Love, Joris."

Observe, look, listen. That was what I had been doing all along, without results. It took a lot more time before I understood Flaherty. To my great relief he soon went away on his second shooting-trip. Before he left I asked the inevitable question: "What shall I do with all the film we have and all the stuff you are going to send me?" "Oh? Well, you just go ahead," he said. During his absence I screened *Nanook* and *Moana* repeatedly, trying to see if I could discover any particular method in his assembly that could be applied to *The Land.* But there was too much disparity between the themes and it was no help to notice that, whenever he got stuck with the visual story line in these two silent films, he would flash a title on the screen and proceed until he go stuck again. I occupied myself with an initial selection and grouping of our rushes. If there were enough scenes on certain subjects I would put the sequence in a chronological order, editing it in the longest possible form. I juxtaposed scenes in trial form and made notes for sug-

gestions on possible interrelationships between sequences. Much more I could not do without danger of violating Flaherty's intentions—if he had any.

To make matters more complicated, the war in Europe was spreading, America became gradually more involved, and the directives of the Department of Agriculture grew vaguer. The first signs appeared that the government was losing interest in our production. When Flaherty had started the film a year earlier, millions had been homeless. With the war spreading, war industries expanding, and armies and navies needing new recruits, the legions of unemployed were being absorbed gradually into the labor and fighting forces while land that had lain fallow was put back into production.

Flaherty, who had continued to follow the crops and the pickers, returned to Washington. It is impossible for me to say now, how or when the subtle change came when I first thought that I had begun to understand him. I listened very carefully to everything he said no matter how many times he seemed to repeat himself. Certain remarks about subjects which did not seem related at that moment, slight changes in the way he repeated something he had told the previous night, changes in emphasis, differences of inflection, these would come back to me while we were screening and seemed to have a distant rlationship to what happened on the screen. Some previously unnoticed deeper meaning in the scene pushed itself to the foreground. It was not that I could not look before. It was that I had been looking at the rushes through *my* eyes because Flaherty could not or would not give me a clue.

My association with Joris Ivens was of such long standing and so close that I looked at his raw material through *our* eyes. We understood each other's intentions perfectly and lengthy discussions were not necessary. Half a word was sometimes sufficient to render a meaning, or the mention of a single scene would be the answer to a long unsolved problem. Together we had evolved a style. While at the beginning of our collaboration I would take most of Ivens' ideas, through the years he would accept increasingly more of mine.

Now I was just beginning to look through Flaherty's eyes, slowly discovering the signs which would give direction for the editing of the film with his story, his vision and his opinion. When I thought I was on the right track I would ask questions. But Flaherty detested direct questions about film theories and became almost inarticulate. One had to go slowly, 'roundabout, and approach the subject gradually and subtly. But more than asking, one had to watch him. Flaherty would never come into the cutting room. When I had assembled some part of the film and did not want to proceed beyond a certain point I would ask him to come to the projection room. With one eye I would watch the screen, with the other one Flaherty. What he did not say was written all over his face during these screenings: the way he put his hand through his hair or squashed out that eternal cigarette; the way he shifted position on the chair, sometimes rubbing his back against its rungs as if it were itching, these gestures would speak more than a torrent of words. After some time I came to understand that he transposed his thoughts. His monologues about the war, his preoccupation with the machine, were an indirect way of expressing what he wanted to say in the film. Gradually I was able to relate these expressions to the film material and learned to read the inspiration he sought in his scenes.

Possibly the Agricultural Adjustment Administration had been confronted too suddenly with the task of producing a film. Maybe they had hoped that Flaherty could be restricted to the subject of their obsession: the Ever-ready Granaries. One of the most barbarous wars in history had transformed the army of unemployed into a colossal labor force and the AAA did not want to be reminded of its agricultural dilemma. The content of the film and reality constantly clashed. Production had to come to an end quickly with so many reels of

"film" entered on the books in exchange for so much money spent.

In later years Flaherty never spoke to me about *The Land* yet it must have been a significant and lasting experience for him. When first I met him in Washington there always would be stories about past films. There were no funny stories connected with the filming of *The Land.* Flaherty liked to settle down where life was peaceful and where he could concentrate on what was graceful and beautiful, turning away from all that was ugly in the world. But during his journey through the country at that time life was not beautiful, not peaceful. He could not come to rest long enough anywhere. He had to keep going, follow the crops, follow the pickers. "Like locusts they move on when the fields were stripped," he said.

It has often been hinted that Flaherty was only too glad to get this job after having been pretty hard up for a while in London, yet he could have rejected the assignment and the conditions under which he had to work, or quit midway when no one in the government seemed to be interested any longer. It is not so long ago that I screened my copy of *The Land.* I remember how shocked I was, seeing it again after all these years. How emotion-packed are some sequences and how incredibly bad, empty and contradictory others. The film is no more than the record of a journey, putting most of the blame for the plight of the migratory workers on "the Machine"—a simplification of cause and effect. The film takes no position.

My report is mostly about what Flaherty did *not* say and never will say and though *The Land* may be no film, it is Flaherty's badge of courage.

The Land was given a prestige showing at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, then withdrawn from circulation. During the remaining war years I made films for the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (Nelson Rockefeller), the United States Signal Corps, the Office of War Information, and the Netherlands East Indies Government. I moved between Hollywood and New York during that time and saw Flaherty only occasionally. He could not earn a living making films for any of the government agencies. He might have been the last and greatest film director on earth, his special talents were unsuited for wartime when films often had to be made under duress, when decisions had to be taken quickly and there was little time for contemplation. And "Flaherty was slow." So he sold a story to the *Reader's Digest* for their series "The Most Wonderful Character I Have Known." His name was worth a check from the magazine. He asked me to help him—they had given him a deadline. I did not have much time but I said I would, setting aside a few days, guessing that would do for a short story. My idea was to get him over the hurdle of that first inertia. I had planned to let him tell the story while I, as well as possible, would set it down on paper, intending to return this first draft to him for revision, to be completed quietly by himself. We never progressed beyond the first paragraph. In spite of his natural gift for words, it is the *spoken* word that he is the master of. As with the commentary for *The Land* he repeated this first paragraph over and over until it had gone through that crystallization process, to take its final form, emphasis and inflection. But it was beautiful only when he spoke it. On paper the voice that cast the spell was missing. It seemed just another sentence. Eventually he wrote the story by himself but it lacked all the beauty and flavor of his spoken tales.

An old Chinese proverb says: one picture is worth a thousand words. Flaherty could do better. With only a few spoken words he could conjure up the most engaging pictures. Conversely he could intensify the effect of an already magnificent scene to unlimited depth by adding a few words, as in the opening sequence of *Louisiana Story.* Introducing us to the flora and fauna and atmosphere of the bayous, we discover in the swamp-forest, far away, appearing and disappearing behind the

moss-hung trees, a little boy paddling his pirogue. When we come closer, the boy is seen only from the back. We still haven't really seen his face. Flaherty's voice says: "His name is Alexander, Napoleon, Ulysses, Latour . . ." These three names, deliberately pronounced and separated, spoken with a soft almost mysterious voice—the combination of picture and words evokes the mystery with which Flaherty wanted to surround the scene. The mood is established, the basis for a fairy-tale set. From now on all is acceptable.

All of us during the production participated in dreaming up a name for the boy, writing down those which were associated with French heritage or Southern heroes. It was left to Flaherty to pick out the right names, in the right combination and right order. It was he who found the real cadence.

Early in 1946 Flaherty had gone on an exploratory trip for the Standard Oil Company to see if a story could be filmed in the oil-fields. When his proposals were accepted he started to form a crew to go on location in the Louisiana bayous where his story took place. He came to my studio one day to tell me the good news, then asked if I would come with him and help make the film. This time he wanted me, not only as editor but also as associate producer. I told him that my current contract would run through August, if he could wait that long I would like to come. He agreed. I joined the crew in the little town of Abbeville in southern Louisiana on August 10, 1946. The film "actors" had been chosen, a certain amount of random shooting had already taken place.

In general the working pattern during *Louisiana Story* was much like that during *The Land.* The crew went out shooting during the day, evenings and rainy days were spent almost exclusively in screening rushes. Because *Louisiana Story* covered less geographical territory than *The Land,* had more of a planned story line, and I joined the production-group early, the editing did not have such a chaotic beginning. And now I knew Flaherty better, knew that he would continually depart from his prepared story whenever he would accidentally encounter something that struck his fancy.

Flaherty, Ricky Leacock, Helen Van Dongen

Our rushes were airshipped daily to New York and the laboratory returned them daily, giving one time to absorb more leisurely their content, replace them in their proper, though always temporary, categories, to plan their potentialities, or simply to fill them for future reference. The number of scenes grew and the subjects they covered increased. It is not necessary here to repeat the details of production.* I prefer to focus on Flaherty himself.

He would continue to look at the rushes night after night. He seemed happiest when they were screened the way they were shot. Untouched, unorganized, unshortened, they contained all the possibilities, all the potentialities of all the ideas he had in his mind, and with his unlimited fantasy and vision he saw behind the screen, behind this incompleted material the story he had envisioned. "It's going to be great," he would say in general. But when the scenes were separated into categories, or put in a somewhat chronological order, though still in full length, he began to worry. An "arrangement" had occurred, gaps began to

*See among others my article "Three Hundred and Fifty Cans of Film" in *The Cinema* 1951. Pelican Books.

show. The slight order disturbed the wild flight of fancy. His expectations began to fade. Having only the core, or even less of his future sequence, in order of eventual occurrence, without embellishment or transformation as yet, standing independently without juxtaposition to other sequences, they lacked the magic with which he wanted to imbue them. They brought him back to earth and he suffered physically. The circle always repeated itself: elation when seeing untouched rushes with all their promises; black moods and despair during the formation and growth of the sequence until that moment when the composition was fairly completed and he began to see that the magic he had wanted to instill had taken hold at some point. The sequence promised fulfillment. But somehow he always prolonged this process and delayed the moment of relief. One should not progress too quickly.

As a realistic matter of time was involved I could not forever let him indulge his enjoyment of unarranged rushes. Sometimes I suspected that he would be perfectly content to do nothing but shoot, screen whatever he shot, and bewitch everyone with his enthusiasm about "what a wonderful film this will make." Naturally I looked a great deal by myself at all the scenes we began to gather. Half of the large porch surrounding the house had been screened in and closed off. It was my cutting room and off-limits to everyone. It was the only place where I could work undisturbed. Flaherty came into it only once: to have the picture taken which is now the frontispiece of that large volume *The Film Till Now* by Paul Rotha and Richard Griffith. He avoided coming in because it would involve him in details he apparently did not want to know about. I would search for scenes which might complete a sequence or give it just that atmosphere which was still lacking. Then I would go to Flaherty with suggestions with which I hoped to get his reaction. I often met with a cold shoulder; perhaps he thought that I wanted to take the initiative away from him or wanted to push my ideas to the foreground. "Give me the rushes for screening tomorrow, I want to look at them," he would counter and then, as if to protect them from contamination, would not return them for a while.

But I had to know whether my ideas would work or not. I would make the sequence as I thought of it—in a fairly long form—then confront him with it. That was a mistake. He would be too startled seeing his scenes in an unfamiliar arrangement and could not concentrate. I had hoped to trick him into a discussion, to tell me if he liked it and, if not, why not. Instead, he would get up and walk out. He would do the same if I asked him to shoot something I thought was needed. Flaherty instinctively revolted against anything resembling organization. Eventually he might shoot what I wanted but it would be months later when *he* had felt the need for it.

As time passed I would try out my ideas by myself. If I thought they worked I would put the sequence back the way Flaherty had last seen it, always leaving in just *one* change, making it as perfect and as smooth as it ought to be in the final version, meanwhile also always tightening my composition just a little more every time. If I had achieved what I had in mind I would hand the sequence to Flaherty for screening and if he did not get restless right away I knew I had been successful. I was wise enough not to point out what I had done. I would never work too long on one sequence but shift from one to another so that progression would not be noticeable within too short a time. Then would come that encouraging moment when he would exclaim: "She's going to come, she's going to come," referring to the sequence he had just seen. Then, somewhat with mistrust: "Did you change anything?" and I would say: "No, I don't think so. Just tightened it up a little." Because of his apprehensions, his doubts and hesitations the process of editing dragged considerably. Was it because two scenes in true juxtaposition, each newly composed sequence, brought the film closer to finality? Did he want to prolong production time in order to make the long periods

of unproductivity between films shorter? He knew the disappointment of not readily finding a new sponsor.

Flaherty gave me a free hand in only three sequences of *Louisiana Story*. This was essentially a silent film and he was not very familiar with the technique of sound or with the qualitative change that takes place when the right sound is added to the right scene. The sequence of the presents in the kitchen was primarily determined by the dialogue which, when repeated in re-takes, was never twice the same. The final form was arrived at by matching the best of the dialogue with the best parts of the picture, cutting away from the actor's faces when necessity demanded. As we had no sound-editing equipment in Louisiana he did not see this sequence until I showed it to him after his return to New York.

The second one was the oil-drilling sequence now usually referred to as the "ballet of the rough-necks." Here the editing depends on the interplay between sound and picture. Without the sound the picture is unsatisfactory and incomplete. The track is composed of sounds, general and in close-up, each with its own characteristics, which had been originally recorded on the derrick by our sound engineer Benji Donniger and his assistant Lennie Starck. I edited the sequence, without the sound, in Louisiana, showed it to Flaherty and explained how it would be changed by adding sound. He felt somewhat let down that there was a part in his film where he would not have the final say. Reluctantly but graciously he surrendered his prerogative. When he saw the sequence in New York in its combined form during the recording, he was elated.

And finally, the third sequence: the introduction to the film, the lyrical overture. The scenes out of which this sequence was composed came from everywhere. I scanned all the unused material to find the right scenes. I made it slowly and gradually, showing it to him at every stage whenever I had introduced new material. He never objected to any changes I made. Apparently it grew the way he wanted it. Was it because time and money began to run short and the film had to be brought to completion? Or did he no longer object to such close participation by someone else?

William Whitebait writes in *Sight and Sound*, Oct.–Dec. 1951:

> . . . so fittingly and unobtrusively made is the whole piece [film] that one never thinks to pick and choose among the several skills displayed . . . the depth and beauty of landscape—how much does that owe to camerawork, to the soundtrack, rich and chary of speech, and to the lovely score of Mr. Virgil Thomson? What part, in such sequences as the long struggle with the crocodile and the plunging of the oilshafts, has been played by that little-known hand, the editor's? . . .

Mr. Whitebait's question has been repeated to me many times and in many forms. Though Flaherty did some camerawork himself during *Louisiana Story*, he depended almost entirely on Richard [Rickey] Leacock's skill and artistry. I have explained somewhat in this article and in more detailed form in other articles* my own part in the production. I would like to give the following answer to all questioners: it is unimportant how large precisely was our share in the final product. One gives as much as possible, as much as is beneficial to the final form of the film, without overshadowing or obstructing the director's intentions. The director chooses his collaborators because they have skills and talents which he wants and needs. Flaherty took from us as much as he needed, as much as he wanted to put into his film, as much as was necessary for a film which he could not make alone. Neither Leacock nor I were mere technicians. Flaherty had asked each one of us to help. Our consent implied that we would try to suffuse our skills with his. It requires iron discipline to keep tight rein

*See pp. 135–155 in *The Technique of Film Editing* compiled by Karel Reisz (Focal Press, London, 1953) and my production diary, now in the archives of the film library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

on one's own imagination and to subdue part of one's self when necessary. Ours was not a glamorous role. Flaherty was no fiery orator who could spellbind with passionate impromptu speeches. He inspired but one had to dig and scratch to find the exact signs. The final realization of his unlimited fantasy came to him slowly. Flaherty himself sweated out each sequence, each thought. It took time and thought and labor and exertion from all of us to make this film which, at first sight, appears so easy of construction and so simple in its development. Flaherty himself recognized the value of the co-workers he had selected and was generous with praise. How often would he say to me: "I don't know what I would have done without Rickey [Richard Leacock]." When introducing me to someone he would usually add: "I could not have made the film without her." I think each one admitted with pride: "Yes, I worked on the film."

When I accepted Flaherty's invitation to join in this production I looked forward to my stay in Louisiana with a certain excitement. If the head of the expedition was known as a man who merged himself into the life of the people then, certainly, the members of his crew would share in this experience. Flaherty had lived a long time with the Eskimos and depended upon them. In Samoa he was an honored guest of the Polynesians. Making *Man of Aran* he lived among the Islanders. From these facts, oversimplified, I expected our home in Abbeville to be constantly overrun by the children of the neighborhood, by the more colorful characters of the small town, and by the large families of our "actors." The large mansion, already in decline, which he had rented at the edge of town was inhabited only by Flaherty and his immediate family, Rickey Leacock and his wife, Sidney Smith (Rickey's assistant), and myself. Lionel Leblanc (father in the film) and the local employees lived with their own families in a different part of town. The Boy was boarded out to a Cajun family near by. Once two friends of mine who were driving across the continent spent the night with us; the rest of the visitors were friends of the Flaherty family or people in one way or another connected with the Standard Oil Company, sponsor of the film. When lunch was eaten on location, all ate together. Lionel Leblanc was sometimes offered a drink at the house after a day's work, but I do not remember that he was ever invited to sit down at our table to share our dinner. Once in a while we would go to the small restaurant in town to eat steak and play the one-armed bandits, but we had no contact with others present. We paid a courtesy visit to the McIlhennys, owners among other things of the tropical jungle gardens where most of our mysterious-looking scenes were filmed, and a few times we went to see Mr. and Mrs. Roane who owned a sugar plantation and factory near Jeanerette. Once old Mrs. McIlhenny came in her chauffeur-driven car to pay us a visit. Mrs. Flaherty had invited her to tea but forgot about it later and joined the crew on a three-day trip to Lake Charles and its alligator preserve and I was the only one at home to receive her. As long as I was in Louisiana, which was slightly over a year, there was nothing that resembled close contact with the local population. We were people who had come to make a motion picture and we remained outsiders. No doubt Flaherty absorbed a great deal of local color when he went on his first exploratory trip to the South but the superstitions touched upon in his film can be found in the books of local folklore. Once having decided upon his main theme he could struggle through the details of the written outline in the seclusion of his room. One could observe him for hours, sitting at a card table, laboring painfully and slowly giving birth to the child of his imagination.

It was often said that Flaherty was naive and looked upon the world with the innocent eyes of a child. It takes great sophistication to portray a world of one's own making then to display it seen by a child. His mind was not as innocent as a child's nor was he naive. He had a penetrating mind and acute powers of obser-

vation. He was fully aware of the miseries, struggles, and ugliness of the world but these embarrassed him. Whatever he thought of it in the privacy of his thinking he was unwilling to display these thoughts publicly. He averted his eye and his camera from trouble and sorrow and bitterness, chose instead situations where man could still meet a not too complex challenge. Be it tattooing to prove manhood or the hunt to stay alive (at least temporarily), his hero would come off the victor.

When reproached for going to far-away places or choosing primitive peoples, showing only the skillful and enchanting sides of life, leaving out all unpleasantness, Flaherty defended himself by saying that it was not their decadence which interested him but that, on the contrary, he wished to portray their inherent qualities as long as this was still possible before the white man annihilated them all. In doing so Flaherty escaped into a world of little contemporary significance. If events or customs were no longer so colorful or quaint as he would like them, he pushed back the calendar a hundred years or restored customs no longer observed. Even in a film as contemporary and realistic as *The Land* his mind could stray. I am referring to the scene in which a primitive (by today's standards) bulldozer is clearing a patch of land of a few small trees. "Take it to Kenya," he would exclaim, "what a Paradise you could open up." Though in the final commentary Kenya was replaced by "some new space in the world," this new space seemed more accessible to him than America where the machine for him was a symbol of the destruction of man's skill and eventually man's lives. And this was a long time before the independence of the African nations. While oil-drilling is contemporary to the time and place of *Louisiana Story*, it is used only as a vehicle to enhance the fantasy and magic of the wonderland through which his character moves. Here Flaherty took the final step.

The first version of *Nanook* (which burned up accidentally) was a factual account of what he had seen. He did not like it, as he said later, because it looked like a travelogue. It was the first time Flaherty had used a camera to record what he had experienced but it did not satisfy his imagination. He had already discovered the potentialities of the camera which, added to that sensitive vision of his own eye and the powers of his own imagination, could create magic and tell "a story." The second *Nanook* became a conflict between the explorer-scientist who had been disciplined into giving facts and figures and the story-teller-turned-film-director who left out certain facts and emphasized others. Facts and figures, useful as they are to the mine-owners and fur-traders, were not exciting to Flaherty whose nature leaned more toward the dramatic. Certainly Revillon Frères had no objections to the omission of steeltraps. The ladies, enjoying the prowess of Nanook, might not feel so pleased if they saw how the foxes were caught whose pelts now adorned their shoulders. The story-teller won out over the scientist. The story-teller approximated reality, emphasized what would enhance his world, molded facts and transposed time until they would fit into the world of his own creation, omitting what would interfere.

All his films are variations on a theme: man's response to the challenge of nature. The careful student will notice, however, that in his films it is Flaherty who sets all the rules of the game. He creates the world, sets the challenge, and dominates the response and the victory. This is why his earlier films are sometimes so difficult to judge especially when they are presented as "documentary," when they are regarded as truthful accounts of the lives of peoples because their maker still had the reputation and renown of the explorer. His films are not the statements of the historian, they are creations of a story-teller. With *Louisiana Story* Flaherty drops all pretense, confesses that he helped nature along sometimes and admits freely that it is all a fable.

Flaherty was much like the minnesingers of a thousand years ago who had visited far-away lands and went from court to court, from hamlet to hamlet, to sing the praise of their

heroes and their fabulous exploits. As time went by and they repeated their songs they would add a little here, change a little there to suit their fancy. Those who had heard the tales would repeat them and embellish them in turn until the final product had no longer any resemblance to what once might have been true. But this does not prevent us from enjoying *King Arthur and the Round Table* or the *Song of Roland.* If Flaherty's films are regarded in this light they too can be enjoyed and savored for what they are: great and lasting contributions to the cinematographic treasures.

The day following the première of *Louisiana Story* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, I left for Europe. Flaherty had invited me for lunch at the Coffee House Club. During the meal he thrust a package at me. "Here," he said. It was a limited edition of a just-published cookbook, written by another member of the Club. I was particularly touched because I had once deeply grieved him by setting down the rule that I would not accept any gifts from him. Flaherty was generous to a fault and his presents could be expensive. He was also extremely possessive and did not understand why one was not always willing to attend whenever he was holding court. It was to prevent too much intrusion upon my private life that I had to set down the rule of which I had to remind him so often.

The only physical objects I have to remind me of Flaherty are this cookbook and a dollar alarm-clock which he once lent me. It keeps time here in my little library in the Vermont woods where I am writing this piece. But the real legacy Robert Flaherty left me are the memories of enforced discipline, a quality he himself did not possess, of warm friendship, and of unrelenting and rewarding labor. I shall always see him, sitting in the midst of a crowd, casting a spell over friends, acquaintances, admirers or just the curious, come to hear him—a sensitive and lonely man.

ALBERT JOHNSON

The Negro in American Films: Some Recent Works

Nowadays, it seems that a majority of Americans are committed, one way or another, to accepting the social revolution of the American Negro, as well as the demands for total recognition on the part of Negroes in other parts of the world. Fourteen years ago, film critics thought it brave to acknowledge the "daring" racial themes handled in Hollywood films. But when seen in the light of today's violences, how very tame and naively well-intentioned those films seem! Actually, however, it is harder than ever before to truthfully dramatize the American Negro's dilemmas on stage or screen, because the angers are too intense. Even James Baldwin (heretofore the most eloquent literary spokesman for the Negro intellectual) created a polemical stageplay in *Blues for Mister Charlie*, a work that manages to endow the Negro with an unintentionally mock-epic stature, and brings a hysterical sort of animosity to his heroic quest for political and social equality. Despite cries for "moderation" from the conservative elements in America, this

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quest goes on. Yet it seems impossible for writers and film-makers to capture the essence of courage or dedication that drives many Negroes toward self-sacrificial death in the Southern states, or compels young white men and women into violent demonstrations for the Negro's cause.

Recently, the Negro poet and playwright Leroi Jones has created a "revolutionary" theater, in which Negro characters articulate their grievances against white authority and social injustices with every nuance of spoken frustration and brutish malevolence, and it is his work that has emphasized the bold strides toward realism in dramatic images of the Negro and Negro attitudes. If one contrasts the allegorical subject matter of Jones' play *The Slave* with the film *The World, the Flesh and the Devil,* the distance between two decades' points of view is astonishingly clear.

In my article "Beige, Brown Or Black" (*Film Quarterly,* Fall, 1959), the plea for honest depiction of Negroes on the screen was based upon an exasperation with films that pretended to explore the Negro's social troubles, but only succeeded in exploiting the inflammable subject matter of Negro-white relationships. Since 1960, the gradual increase in racial demonstrations in American cities, the growing influence of such groups as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and its more militant counterpart, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), made it inevitable that Hollywood's film industry would be attacked by Negro leaders, and, at last, by Negro actors themselves. The bitterness against the industry's long-standing traditions of stereotyping minority groups finally exploded in 1963, when concerted pressure was put upon film and television producers to hire more Negro performers, with favorable results.

The 1963–64 period has indeed been an amazing one, in which television serials have included Negroes playing such unprecedented roles as doctors, nurses, lawyers, teachers, pilots, business executives, and, in a stroke of wildly off-beat but authentic casting, *cowboys.* The

Diahann Carroll

emphasis, in such instances, has been directed toward changing the *image* of the average colored citizen. Moving determinedly away from the chitterling-child inanities of the Step-in Fetchit-Mantan Moreland-Willie Best era, American television has rather self-consciously embellished standard plots with glimpses of Negroes in everyday situations. This is a welcome if hardly revolutionary contribution to racial understanding. In films, however, some closer observation must be given to those works that best illustrate the American cinema's experiments with the Negro's dramatic encounters with white compatriots; and the word "experiment" is necessary to emphasize the uncertainties with which producers and scriptwriters have approached the material involved.

It must be remembered, at the outset, that miscegenation is still the *bête noire* of American cinema, and only very recently has an independently produced film *(One Potato, Two Potato)* caused some critical controversy in dealing with this theme. Until now, Hollywood studios have only flirted with miscegenative plots. In Paramount's *Paris Blues* (1961), the American expatriate jazzmen (Paul Newman and Sidney Poitier) are presented as "hip," articulate, interracial soulmates, but their romantic involvements with two American girls on the loose (Joanne Woodward and Diahann Carroll) only hint at attractions between members of opposite sexes and races. The promise of an affair between Newman and Carroll, for instance, soon shifts its direction, and suddenly the races are

paired off in the conventional manner; the white and Negro couples jauntily walk the Paris streets, with Duke Ellington's score triumphantly playing in the background. Nonetheless, in certain respects *Paris Blues* is an excellent example of sophisticated racial understatement, and one guesses that Martin Ritt intended to say much more in this film than he did. The desire to present intelligent Negroes, with unaccented speech, fashionable clothes, and an attitude of contemplative pride about their racial heritage lies behind *Paris Blues;* its failure largely stems from an inability to allow the Negro couple to admit their own prejudices. Furthermore, the film unconvincingly tries to persuade an audience that it is basically the duty of expatriate Negro intellectuals to come back home and improve, or dedicate themselves to the civil rights struggle. This sort of unforgivable naïveté reduces Poitier and Carroll to likable puppets quite unlike any Negroes one might meet in Europe or America. They are, ultimately, only figments of a white person's literary fancy, and once past the initial hint of miscegenative romance, the film loses its nerve. According to Hollywood tradition the Newman-Carroll liaison would be acceptable to audiences (after all, it *is* in a Parisian setting), but the Poitier-Woodward romance would have sown dismay.

Another major flaw in Hollywood's racial romanticism concerns the Negro male as sexual symbol. Hollywood's choice of Negro actors has, for the past thirty years, been limited to a specific type of Negro—one who is representative of all the anthropological characteristics associated with the term "Negroid" (lest there be any uncomfortable hint of genealogical interracialism), and if these men were not subordinated to the leading white members of the cast, they were either stolid, humbly educated types embodied by Ernest Anderson, Canada Lee, or Juano Hernandez, or else postwar neurotics, embittered and jazz-maddened, like James Edwards. In any case, none of them were ever allowed to fall in love (unless the film had an all-Negro cast) or in any way intimate that they ever considered romance.

The change in the Negro image in American films within the last decade is illustrated by the robust, casually friendly personality of Sidney Poitier. Since this artist has recently won international distinction as the first Negro to win an Academy Award for Best Actor, it is indeed interesting, as is apparent, after re-screening all of his films, to see how his roles have been written in order to eliminate any deliberate sexual overtones. It is a unique shock to see Poitier playing a love scene in *Paris Blues*—not only because he does not appear to believe the inconsistent motivations of his role, but because the film-maker assumes that audiences accept Poitier as a romantic figure. Hollywood producers should, from time to time, watch their films in a theater with a predominantly Negro audience and learn that they, too, have been subjected to decades of the glamor image. This long exposure to the cosmetological gods and goddesses of the white race has very much contributed to the American Negro's desire to re-create himself in that image, no matter what the Black Muslims might think. It is a fact that Sidney Poitier does not fit the *Negro* ideal of the romantic hero, and his most successful roles have been those in which he is already married *(No Way Out, A Raisin in the Sun, Edge of the City)* and concerned with racial turmoils, or when he plays the carefree, humorous vagabond *(Virgin Island, Lilies of the Field)* without romantic involvements.

Of course, Poitier is a "star," and in the proper roles can be a tremendously moving performer; but in trick-parts like the disastrous *Porgy and*

Poitier in EDGE OF THE CITY

Bess or *The Long Ships* he is ineffectual. It is clear that attention must finally be given to presenting different Negro actors on the American screen, *with a wider range in types* to populate the cautious world of the cinema. The visual stereotype was only temporarily jolted by Harry Belafonte's frustrated screen career; and by now there is something definitely artificial about the omnipresence of Poitier and Sammy Davis, Jr. as the sole major Negro actors on the screen. As long as art is secondary to star-billing, regardless of race, color or creed, one can only shudder if Negroes are not allowed to choose their own cinematic gods. How can one help but feel apprehensive about future cinematic depictions of beautiful Billie Holiday, trapped by her lyric passions and the irresistible Mr. Levy, or the tragedy of Charlie "The Bird" Parker, his handsome face gleaming behind a blue-toned horn?

Ralph Nelson's second film, *Lilies of the Field,* is an example of the trend toward showing the American Negro "as he really is." Of course, this phrase is merely a generalized slogan, because actually the American Negro, educated or not, rich or poor, is actively engaged in trying to discover *what* he really is or should be in his own country—as a free, ordinary citizen. *Lilies of the Field* is an important landmark in the cinematic depiction of this kind of Negro free citizen, roaming across the country in an automobile and coming into serio-comic emotional struggles with a group of expatriate German nuns. It is important because the major character (Sidney Poitier) displays a subtlety and understanding by a Negro actor who is able to build his role with certain visual and intonational ironies and reactions which cannot be written into a script, but only improvised into it.

In other words, Poitier's intelligence and self-respect does not prevent him from playing a semi-educated, good-natured "nigger"; his portrayal of Homer Smith is an acutely realized interpretation of the type of American Negro who can be thoroughly appreciated both by Negro spectators (because they will recognize the humor in his intonations, the smile *behind* the

Poitier instructing the nuns.

smile and the truth of Homer's reactions), and by non-Negro spectators (because Homer is not presented as a "problem," but as an ordinary human being). The audiences are thus not intimidated by the racial differences between the major characters and the religious overtones of the story do not, as one might expect, turn the emotionalism into treacle. There have been charges of sugary sentimentality leveled against the film. However, this is a matter of one's personal acceptance or rejection of the emotional film as a genre. There are bound to be comparisons made with such films as *Come to the Stable* or *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison,* but it would be unfair to imply that *Lilies of the Field* is similar to these, except of course that nuns are involved in each film. It is also obvious that the intention of the latter film is to make a positive statement about the Negro's ability to become amicably involved with white people in the United States. The relentless good-will of the story makes *Lilies of the Field* a necessary opposite to the relentless angers of *The Cool World.* Both are necessary to the American cinema's gradual move toward a kind of neorealism—as well as to a motion-picture contribution to racial understanding.

Nelson's directorial style is exceptionally personal in *Lilies of the Field* (even to the point of playing one of the roles); only in the nuns' childlike responses to Homer's Negro hymn does the situation seem a trifle forced, despite the humor involved. In the nuns' obeisances to Poitier's grammar lesson, played entirely for laughs, the film indulges in an oversimplification of the nuns' intellectual curiosity about the mysteries of American linguistics. The incongruity of the situation does not keep the se-

quence away from vaudeville sketch levels, and one feels that although searching for subtlety, Nelson cannot resist the temptation to have Homer point out the difference in skin-color between himself and the nuns—or to slyly add a "Sho' nuff" to his grammar lesson, which the sisters repeat with the guileless innocence of kindergarten babes.

The film is at its best when the theme is not made too obvious: the image of the nuns walking to Mass along the stiflingly hot, dusty New Mexican highway; their unspoken gratitude and joy when Homer's stationwagon comes along to rescue them from their stoical exhaustion; the nocturnal solitude as Homer lies in the back of his car, listening to the radio, while the Mother Superior watches him from the convent window, annoyed by the secular cacophony but restrained by her own compassion—these are two instances in which the element of racial understanding is strengthened by the sort of understatement that cinema is able to convey *visually.* There is also a sequence in which Homer begrudgingly accepts help from the Mexican townspeople in construction of the chapel. It is primarily a wordless episode, and Poitier plays it beautifully, but Nelson has allowed the musical score to emphasize the purely comic aspect of the situation rather than its sardonic overtones, so that the sequence is weakened unnecessarily. The Mexican tavern-owner (Stanley Adams) and the patronizing construction boss (Ralph Nelson) are utilized as catalysts for the theme of the film; the former for humor and the latter for dramatic emphasis. There is a peculiarly elusive self-consciousness about the scenes in which these men talk to Homer, especially the biased construction boss. One knows, supposedly, that adult Negroes do not like to be called "boy" by white men, but one does not expect Homer to react with such indignation (without that Anatolian smile). For the first time, we wonder if Homer *is* from the South or not; suddenly it *does* make a difference. Homer as a symbolic Negro is rather annoying (again, this may be linked to the position of Sidney Poitier as *the* symbolic Negro actor) because what the spectator really wants from him is human *unpredictability* in his reactions to white people, bigoted or otherwise. The construction boss is far more interesting because it could be that he represents an average New Mexican attitude, which is strange enough to most American film audiences, and one wishes that his moral turnabout from antagonist-to-friend had more point to it than the casual joke about getting one's foot in the door of heaven.

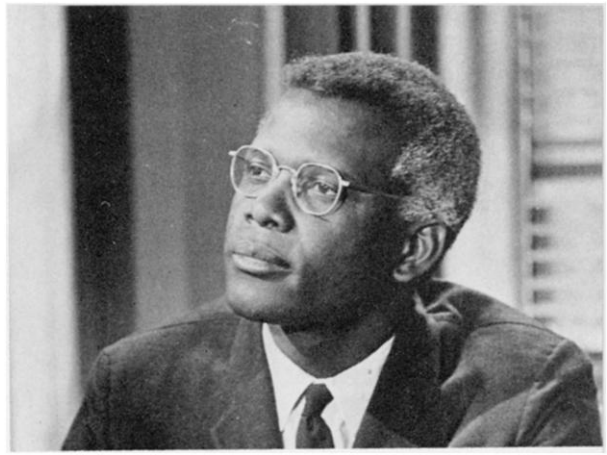
Lilies of the Field combines two compelling sociological issues (the Negro and Catholicism) in American life at the present time and it treats both with the sincerity of good intentions and scrupulous taste. One could have done without yet-another chorus of "Amen"; the point was made the first time, but when Nelson decides to close the film as if the entire story is akin to prayer, it is hard to deny that behind the film lie the director's deepest convictions about the growing interdependence of Americans, white and black, upon one another.

Hubert Cornfield's *Pressure Point* (1962) represents a more complex, more ambitious attempt to illustrate the ironies of racial prejudice. It presents us with an intellectual struggle between a Negro psychiatrist in a Federal prison (Poitier) and a truculent, incipiently violent patient who has been arrested for sedition (Bobby Darin). The period is 1942, and as soon as Darin walks into the psychiatrist's office, looks at Poitier and begins to laugh, the tensions of the film begin tightening. Poitier's physical appearance is slightly altered—he now has the intellectual's steel-grey temples and steel-rimmed glasses, the resigned patience of those to whom irrational human behavior is tragically commonplace. Although Darin, as a member of the German-American Bund, is the central figure in *Pressure Point* (and in the initial source of Cornfield's screenplay, the psychiatrist was a Jew, not a Negro) the implications are extremely revelatory of certain Hollywood viewpoints. The contemporary problem-figure of the Negro (quite box-office in the 'sixties) was interwoven with the "period" (are the 'forties so far in the past?) problem of Nazi anti-Semitism.

The film grips the spectator because it was, and still is, the most outspoken cinematic pres-

entation of racial feelings, openly spoken about between a white and a Negro character. "What have you got against us whites?" asks Darin, with craftiness in his eyes, and the effect of this line upon an American audience is nervous laughter. After studying reactions on four different occasions, with various types of audiences, I must admit that *Pressure Point*, despite its flaws, is one of the best of the American films dealing with racial encounters. It exemplifies many of the attitudes held by white Americans who have not lived around Negroes or who, for one reason or another, have not found it necessary to *think* about Negroes except as dream-figures in a modern jazz fantasy. Despite the technical brilliance of *Pressure Point* (its photography by Ernest Haller is altogether extraordinary, and the film's subtle stylistic excellences, unfortunately, cannot be discussed in this article), it remains most absorbing to us here because of the dialogues between Darin and Poitier. As Darin derides the psychiatrist, the latter remains imperturbable—the detached professional doing his job. One waits impatiently for the explosion, especially when the prisoner points out the doctor's second-class citizenship: "They've got you singin' *My Country 'Tis of Thee* and they're walkin' all over ya!" he jeers. At this line, a white audience murmurs its awareness, chuckling sardonically, while a Negro audience bursts into loud laughter and applause. For once, the Negro character was as much on the defensive as the white character, and if the entire problem of the home-grown Nazi became somewhat remote, so did the side-issue of the psychiatrist's colleagues doubting his abilities to remain unprejudiced toward his patient's racial views. This latter aspect of the screenplay was worthy of a full-length film in itself and tended to make *Pressure Point* rather overloaded with intricate racial relationships on an intellectual level; in other words, too much subtlety marred the over-all issue.

When Poitier's colleagues decide to release Darin from prison as "cured," despite the Negro's protestations, the mood is set for the emotional climax the audience has expected. The psychiatrist, disillusioned by the entire



The psychiatric Poitier.

case, resigns his position. As he is packing his office belongings, Darin, now freed and in civilian clothes, comes by for a farewell and final bit of mockery. His words comprise an incisive, terrifyingly apt monologue on the inequality of man, and Poitier, finally impassioned, responds with an eloquent, stirringly delivered speech, heavily patriotic, containing such lines as: "Now you listen to *me* . . . This is *my* country!" and ending with a violent "Get OUT!" The energy with which the speech is delivered is awe-inspiring. A white audience, dazed and moved by the unusual image of the symbolic Negro as a modern Patrick Henry, roars its spontaneous approval with deafening applause; the Negro audience is contemplative, tensely moved, and silent.

This duality of response to the crucial moments in *Pressure Point* is indicative of the ambivalent feelings in America about the position of intellectual Negroes in the civil rights movement. Patriotism is certainly not the proper approach, especially when the *cinéma-vérité* documentaries on television have supplied the country with truthful images of Southern bigotry and violence against Negroes. Besides, after all, Darin might have been correct in his assumptions regarding the Negro psychiatrist's status as an American. We never see the Negro's home or his life outside the prison, and one supposes that he went home to a comfortable part of the Negro ghetto, particularly in 1942. The gradual breakdown of the psychiatrist's control is also vaguely presented; after all, he

should have been accustomed to racial attacks by psychopathic patients *before* his encounters with Darin, so that his patriotic explosion, engendered by the patient's Nazism, seems theatrically motivated. The American Negro intellectual of 1942 was not the same as his counterpart in 1962; the former would not have cared much (if at all) about the already disrupted malcontents in Fritz Kuhn's German-American Bund. Assuming that the Negro psychiatrist was an intellectual product of the Depression, he would have been too mutely disillusioned to spout patriotism to an unregenerated bigot. The deepest flaw in *Pressure Point* is thus its inability to give depth to the Negro psychiatrist in terms of his own racial outlook and his position as a "period figure." Unless the psychiatrist had a brother or close friend in the service, fighting the Nazi order to preserve the zoot-suited teenagers of wartime Harlem; unless he was particularly frustrated by long-repressed anguish as a racial pioneer in his field, continually misunderstood by his colleagues, or unless memories of a semi-forgotten Dorie Miller or Jan Valtin's *Out of the Night* danced in his head, one found it difficult to accept him as a sepia version of Hollywood's familiar omniscient white headshrinker. It is not possible to merely put Negro actors or actresses on-screen, endow them with accepted clichés of celluloid intellectualism, and have them emerge as human beings; and this also applies to Chinese, Japanese, Tibetans, Indians and Eskimos.

Inevitably, there are always attempts to place the Negro character in his proper milieu of American urban life. New York film-makers are particularly interested in breaking the barriers of stereotype, and the intelligentsia of that city, comprising some independent film directors, have mostly concerned themselves with the exasperating anonymity of Manhattan (an inescapable cliché made more annoying because it is a fact) and its accompanying boredom and intellectual inertia. In order to give versimilitude to their stories, the directors of such independent works as Norman Chaitin's *The Small Hours* (1962) and Jack O'Connell's *Greenwich Village Story* (1963) will show Negroes as extras or bit players in party sequences, street or restaurant sequences—holding cocktails and in general being part of "the scene" of New York's semi-highbrow literati or artistic underworld. John Cassavetes' *Shadows* (1960) brought attention to the rootlessness of the city Negro in Greenwich Village, and established the beginning of a very tentative reëvaluation of the Negro image, since some interracialism was taken for granted in the plot of the film. For a time, it appeared that the actor Ben Carruthers might become a new and most interesting screen symbol of rebellious Negro youth—someone to counterbalance the placidity of Poitier and the matinee-idolatry of Belafonte. However, we now know that *Shadows* was a bit ahead of its time; its theme and interpretation were justly heralded, but the general public had not yet been forced to realize the truths of the "Negro Revolution," which was only beginning its first rumbles in 1960. The portrait of Carruthers living the life of a white man, hustling doxies in a café with his white buddies, and most of all, *resembling* a white man in physical characteristics and color—this was still a bit too discomfiting for audiences to accept. Carruthers' sullen, pessimistic character, alternately charming or hostile, seemed to represent something fearful and uncontrollable, someone that Hollywood film-makers would not wish to have imitated by the already restless Negro youth of America. It is indeed an unfortunate loss to the cinema that Carruthers' talents have not been utilized more often. He has been the most exciting new Negro *actor* (not personality) on the American screen since Henry Scott's brief debut (also not encouraged because he was "dangerously" nonstereotyped in *Anna Lucasta* (1959).

Occasionally, when film critics or screenwriters become involved with the creation of a film, the resultant works are, according to film distributors and reviewers, too abstract or surrealistic for popular tastes. Jonas Mekas, editor of *Film Culture*, and Ben Maddow, the famous scriptwriter (*The Asphalt Jungle* and *The Unforgiven*) have both made unusual, intelligent features, extremely avant-garde examples of the

New York school of American cinema, and important to us because of their presentation of the Negro in urban society. The critical reaction to Mekas' *Guns of the Trees* (1961) has been rather hostile because Mekas is an avowed "revolutionary" in his aesthetic tastes and because of his antagonism toward the more obvious aspects of conformity in American social and intellectual life. Mekas' view of America is symbolized by his treatment of New York City as the epitome of the *Angst* of the 'sixties, an impassive and unyielding fortress of complacent efficiencies against which his characters struggle to thrive. Here we have the cinema of the disturbed intellectual, one that coldly observes an American milieu with the subjectivity of a European emigré. In the world of Greenwich Village's watered-down Bohemianism (yes, the environment still exists: bearded young men linked with serious-faced young girls; loose-limbed and attractive Negroes of indeterminate, vague talent or pretensions toward art) Mekas indulges in petulant attacks upon day-to-day routine, police authority, atomic-bomb fears, and human noncommunication. Mekas' view of humanity is troubled, too. He juxtaposes the lives of two couples, one white, the other Negro. The relationship of the white couple is sterilized by their inability to transcend the wastelandish world around them, and their spiritual self-exile is based too much upon self-pity. The Negro couple, however, played by Ben Carruthers and Argus Speare Juillard, are amusing odalisques, exotic and undisciplined; if one were not certain of Mekas' good intentions, his depiction of these two could be termed patronizing. Again, over-simplification of contrasts between viewpoints (racial or otherwise) destroys the cinematic power of *Guns of the Trees* as a protest film. When one sees the Negroes wandering somewhat incongruously around a railroad yard, reading the names of various routes on the sides of boxcars (this bizarre piece of Americana went out with Dos Passos and Wolfe, one thought), or clowning aimlessly through a fish market, it is impossible to believe that Ben and Argus could ever be responsible to any single pursuit. Is it to be assumed that they have resigned

Ben Carruthers in GUNS OF THE TREES.

themselves to being social outcasts, and, if so, is their status the result of racial prejudice? Mekas does not tell us. When Ben seeks a job, the sequence becomes a comic pastiche of endless corridors, with a shifty-eyed applicant who races with Ben to apply for the same position. This touch of cinematic expressionism is contrasted to an image of Argus sitting forlornly at her office typewriter in what seems to be a large municipal building, gazing out of the window at the clear, sunny skies. We are asked to admire the overwhelming inner impulse toward freedom inherent in Ben and Argus; Mekas admires their childishness, their simple rejection of responsibility. Yet for all of their sensuality, the Negro couple seem oddly sexless—as if they respond to each other physically because of biological fact rather than from any sense of the responsibilities of *love;* they dress alike and respond alike, and are free to leave one another at will. Ben, representing the cynical city-Negro, handsome and semi-androgynous, is a character who treads a very thin line between mockery and despair; he refuses to take anything very seriously. Ironically, Ben is the major figure in the film's most singularly moving episode: the rainy-day café sequence. The four protagonists sit in a booth with nothing to do and Ben comments upon the world as he reacts to it. For the only time in its telling, the narrative and characters in *Guns of the Trees* merge into meaning. The quest for self-discovery in New York is captured in this moment of rain-provoked solitude,

and the atmosphere is absolutely authentic. Mekas has remembered most clearly in this instance that the outcries of isolated human beings are most telling in the anonymity of big-city bars and cafés, whether white or black.

The Negro as "free spirit" in the New York jungle of cultural malaise also appears in Ben Maddow's *An Affair of the Skin* (1963). The film has been almost unanimously denounced as pretentious, but actually it is a very honest and compelling attempt to dramatize the frustrated love affairs of overly sophisticated New Yorkers. It is an urbane fantasy, really, and if one looks at the film in this light, its truths are more evident. Maddow presupposes a certain chicness on the part of the spectator, and since the major characters are wholly unsympathetic, wallowing rather grandly in self-pity, he expects the audience to be able to discern the interweavings of exposed needs and the subterfuges of manner that people adopt in order to protect their emotions. In *An Affair of the Skin,* the disoriented lovers are represented by two couples—the married squabblers Allen and Katherine (Kevin McCarthy and Lee Grant), and a glamorous model, Victoria and her middle-aged lover Max (Viveca Lindfors and Herbert Berghof). When Allen becomes attracted to Victoria, Max tries to interest him in another young woman named Janice Cluny (Diana Sands), a commercial photographer. In contrast to the other characters, Janice is not dominated by her need for physical love (or so she says) and Maddow presents her as a sarcastic, lonely, often volatile Negro on the periphery of New York's social world.

Janice lives in picturesque splendor in a Village duplex, implying financial security and an enviable freedom of artistic expression. She sleeps as late as she likes, works at random, and is by implication promiscuous. Remembering Diana Sands' performance in *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961), one sees the dominance of her personality over the characterization. She personifies the hip, sagacious Negro woman who is already disappointed in her experiences with men, white or Negro, and who pretends to be emotionally detached from the love-throes of those around her. The part of Janice could have been played by an actress of any race, which makes Diana Sands' work in *An Affair of the Skin* of chief interest here. It is because she *is* a Negro that her behavior breaks all stereotypes established from the days of Madame Sul-Te-Wan through Dorothy Dandridge. Sands' character is also the most *alive* in the entire film; we first see her in a rhythmic succession of sequences where she wanders through Harlem, snapping photographs and thinking to herself "Oh God, I wish I were Michelangelo, but I don't think I'm gonna make it." When she shows Allen some of her work and he describes it as illustrating "the sad dance of ordinary life," she replies, "*Bull!*"

Maddow as writer-director is so intent upon having his audience think for themselves that he never tells us very much about Janice. From

Diana Sands in AFFAIR OF THE SKIN.

all that we observe, however, it is apparent that she is ashamed and resentful about her parents and her background. When her mother (Osceola Archer) comes to stay with her, Janice behaves abominably, rudely attacking her father's birthday cake (the mother insists upon having a requiem cake for the deceased) and arguing violently about the older woman's bourgeois standards of morality. Then, in a surprisingly tender duologue, Janice quietly admits her immoral behavior. The relationship between mother and daughter is odd, unnatural, and almost "absurd" in the Brechtian sense. Osceola Archer (the *grande dame* of the American Negro theater) is hardly representative of the old-fashioned Negro mother, and her sense of grandiose comedy is beautifully exhibited in a sequence of haughty outrage as she sententiously plays Beethoven on the piano in order to drown out a risqué conversation between Janice and her friends. Mrs. Cluny recognizes Janice's neuroticism and fears it enormously; regrettably, Maddow's script is so dependent upon the activities of his four major protagonists, and his determinedly "artistic" style of European cinematographics, that Janice and Mrs. Cluny are left stranded, blazingly memorable in a cobwebby narrative.

One of the film's strangest sequences occurs when Janice pretends to be having sexual intercourse with Allen on the upper level of her apartment, within full hearing of her mother. Mrs. Cluny, a plate of cupcakes in her hand, is unable to restrain her disbelief and sense of maternal outrage, and fearfully climbs the stairway in order to peek. She discovers Janice and Allen awaiting her appearance, mockingly amused at the deception; Janice had only simulated cries of sexual ecstasy and Mrs. Cluny, defeated by her daughter's triumphant stroke of dismissal, collapses in tears. It is a moving example of grotesque behavior in a love-hate relationship between parent and child; and how far removed it is from the same sort of conflict in *Imitation of Life!* How strange it was to see Negroes enacting a kind of psychodrama previously withheld from them on the American screen. At any rate, the Negro heroine in *An Affair of the Skin* remains the major positive creative force in that Antonioni-like world of cinematic New Yorkers, all trying to rework a suitable living-pattern for themselves in an atmosphere of wealth, existential death-wishes, and impotent love affairs. We finally see Janice encouraging Allen, as she stands like a phoenix amidst the rubble of a building site—quite free, the ghetto-girl escaped; and we wonder what is ever to become of her.

The Negro and his struggle for freedom and personal integrity in the American South is the most obviously urgent area for cinematic involvement today, but so far, only two television surveys have captured these turmoils *(Sit-In* and *Crisis).* It is not difficult for us to understand why. The members of the Motion Picture Producers Association, and practically every film exhibitor in the United States, would hesitate to release a fiction film based upon the true-life horrors experienced by white and Negro civil rights workers in the backward counties of Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama. To make such films today would be inflammatory and raise cries of anarchy. So far, only four American feature films have tried to analyze the Southern Negro's dilemma, and all in an undisturbing fashion. Roger Corman's *The Intruder* (1961) is the most daring; and as of this writing the film has not yet been shown commercially throughout America. The story, based upon a novel by Charles Beaumont, concerns an anti-integrationist, Adam Cramer (William Shatner)—an opportunistic white Northerner who comes to a small Southern town to arouse the townspeople against integration in the local schools. The film, as a whole, is a study in satanic demagoguery, but its best qualities may be seen in a sequence in which a Negro adolescent, Joey Green (Charles Barnes), is getting ready to go to school on the first day of integration. He is silently troubled and his mother anxiously prepares his clothes, while his old grandfather mutters his disapproval; this is excellent, perceptively authentic material. Another sequence dramatically describes a courageous white newspaper editor (Frank Max-

well) leading a group of Negro high-schoolers along the dusty street on their first day at an all-white school. For these moments alone, *The Intruder* is distinguished, because these simple acts encompass a major dramatic fact which was faced by hundreds of Negro school children in the South, and is still being enacted in real life. *The Intruder* was actually filmed in a Southern town, too, so that the atmosphere is real, and several townspeople (unaware of the nature of the film) participated. The Negro characters are peculiarly one-dimensional in their roles, however, and in the film's climax Corman grossly underestimates the wisdom of a typical Negro adolescent regarding the ways of Southern whites: he asks us to believe that Joey would innocently allow himself to be caught in a compromising situation with a white girl, particularly during a period of racial tensions in the area.

The characterization of the intruder himself ultimately became the center of the film; the integration theme was still a very taboo subject at this time. Nevertheless, Corman is to be commended for being the only producer-director who would venture to make such a film, and despite its melodramatic plot *The Intruder* is historically important as part of the American cinema's commitment to the civil rights movement.

Ossie Davis, the notable Negro stage actor, transposed his comedy *Purlie Victorious* to the screen, and in 1963 it appeared as *Gone Are the Days*, directed by Nicholas Webster. Most of the original cast appeared in the film, with Davis again playing the leading role of an oracular preacher who craftily overthrows a racist plantation owner, Cap'n Cotchipee (Sorrell Booke) in order to turn an old barn into an integrated church. The style of the film is entirely farcical; it is not very far removed from a prolonged vaudeville sketch. Davis' intention was to make audiences laugh, from a sophisticated distance, at the stereotyped image of the Negro held by the white Southerner. There are many amusing lines, indeed, but the film is not very laughable. There is too much self-consciousness about this deliberate attempt at parody. *Gone Are the Days* only intensifies the Negro spectator's reluctance to laugh at himself *on the screen*, even when he is trying very hard to do so. Subtlety is the essence of true comedy. For instance, there is a sequence in *Stand Up and Cheer* (1934), in which Stepin Fetchit does a slow, brilliantly ineffectual soft-shoe dance while muttering nonsense that recently sent an audience of white and Negro university students into orbits of laughter unmatched by any single sequence from *Gone Are the Days*. But Davis and his cast are guilty of overplaying their farce, and, considering circumstances in the South in 1963, it was extremely difficult to accept the film as satire. It is a Northern intellectual's amusement at the expense of what is considered to be funny in the Southerner's ignorance about Negro guile. The appearance in the theatrical world of such Negro comedians as Dick Gregory, Bill Cosby, Nipsey Russell, and Godfrey Cambridge sets a new standard and makes it imperative for Negroes who appear in film comedy today to maintain a high level of subtlety and sophistication, which before now was not expected of them. At long last, one can realize that Stepin Fetchit was *acting*, and no matter how many dreadful lines and actions he had to interpret, there were instances in which he revealed an artistry and style that transcends time, embarrassment, and popular tastes and which remain irrevocably comic.

Godfrey Cambridge's performances in the off-Broadway production of Genet's *The Blacks* and as a fire inspector with an Irish brogue in the film, *The Troublemaker*, exhibit his wide range of dramatic talent; since *Gone Are the Days* was made before Cambridge's rise in comic popularity, it is acknowledged that his scene with Cap'n Cotchipee, in which he is called upon to swear his allegiance to his master, is the film's most inspired and successful moment of comedy. In his performance as Gitlow, the epitome of the old-time darky, Cambridge underlined the nuances of bitter satire which are only beginning to be defined in a comic approach to the American Negro's search for self-identity.

An unusual amount of praise has been given

to Michael Roemer's first film, *Nothing But a Man* (1964), because it tells a calm, dignified story about an average "undramatic" Negro railway laborer, Duff Anderson (Ivan Dixon), who struggles to live decently and peacefully in a small Alabama town of today. The film is, however, exceptionally tame, chiefly because Duff's commitments to his race are entirely self-centered, and the civil-rights movement has not really affected him personally. He falls in love with a fairly prim but attractive young schoolteacher, Josie (Abbey Lincoln), and despite the disapproval of her family, he marries her. Roemer keeps his film focused upon the casual, understated sequences of Duff and Josie's relationship, and vignettes of Southern life meant to jolt the non-Southern spectator with the realities of prejudice and racial distrust in that part of America. These moments appear and disappear suddenly, like images of evil seen briefly in a dream. During their courtship, for instance, Duff and Josie are approached by two white youths while parked on a country road. The romantic charm of the Negroes' conversation and Josie's "twenty-ninth" kiss is disturbed by a charged air of danger which hangs in the silence; the youths drive away, but only after one of them recognizes Josie as a probable source of trouble if a rape is attempted (her father is a respected minister in the town). As their wild, taunting cries ring out over the motor noise, the lovers sit, inwardly troubled: "They don't sound *human,* do they?" Duff murmurs.

This statement might be taken as a keynote to the film: this awareness of the *humanity* of the Southern Negro's stoicism in a world of discrimination. Just as Renoir brought dignity to his poverty-stricken couple in *The Southerner,* so does Roemer concentrate his narrative upon those heartbreakingly commonplace situations of married couples everywhere: the courtship, marriage, new home (or shack), the quarrel, separation and reunion, and the imminent baby. This is familiar "Americana," though with a sympathy that strains for significance. Duff and Josie are likable characters; but their environment is, in reality, much worse than Roemer has pictured it. In order to avoid making

Ivan Dixon and Abbey Lincoln in NOTHING BUT A MAN.

a preachment, thus, *Nothing But a Man* falls into the category of mere domestic tragedy (along with *From This Day Forward, Dust Be My Destiny, Made for Each Other,* and the sadder moments of *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*). The only freshness about all the adversity here is that two young, attractive Negroes are involved. Ivan Dixon is noble and persuasive at all times, and Abbey Lincoln's look of controlled satisfaction is so unusual that she seems a contemporary Sibyl of the deep South. Yet all around them lie many more vivid things to behold, and in comparison to the conviction of the players, the atmosphere is somehow more lively.

There is squalor and deprivation, photographed with semi-documentary brilliance (by Robert Young), especially in the street ramblings; the workers' ginmill; the bar where Duff goes with his disconsolate father, Will (Julius Harris) and Will's common-law wife, Lee (Gloria Foster); and in the spattered, unkempt house where Duff's abandoned young son (by a previous marriage) is tended by a slatternly, wornout girl. In the little church, Roemer captures the fervent hyteria and emotional religious frustration of the singing congregation (though not as memorably as Reichenbach did in *L'Amerique Insolite*), and he is not too engrossed in streets and faces to miss a detailed glimpse of a flying cockroach or bottletops on a broken checkerboard. All of these are fine humanistic cinema, part of a traditional sense of storytelling.

As in most films where white directors are dealing with Negro themes, there is some awk-

wardness; the prostitute in the ginmill sequence and Josie's father (the acquiescent "Uncle Tomish" minister) are not properly handled. In these instances, Roemer needed a technical advisor, preferably Negro, to instruct him on the modes and subterfuges of such types. Also, the unguarded, bunkhouse raillery between Duff and his Negro co-workers often sounds a bit too literary and un-hip to be totally acceptable. It is a fact that Southern Negroes speak a different kind of slang than Northern Negroes, particularly inhabitants of a small Alabama town.

For all the vigor and fascination of *Nothing But a Man,* one cannot deny its major flaw of not being truly Southern in feeling; I am not sure where the film was actually made, but the absence of the tension of the contemporary South gives the film an air of unreality. One is confounded by Josie's lack of involvement with the civil rights issue; and Duff, feeling that one cannot live without trouble, finally deciding to remain in the South after suffering one indignity after another, never mentions the upheaval which has torn the South apart.

It is impossible to make a timeless film about Southern Negroes at present. To accept Duff and Josie as figures in a tragic vacuum might be a relief from the "problem" category of Negro films, but by its very nature and locale, *Nothing But a Man* must be a problem-film; only the Negroes are good and the whites are bad. It was Lee, finally, who seemed to best illustrate the Southerner's attitude toward her environment; she had set her indomitable features into a defiant mask, and all that she uttered had the ring of tragedy, truth, and a fatigued rebelliousness that would linger long after death.

The national image of the Northern Negro in the United States is not centered upon the "free" bohemians of Greenwich Village, but upon our country's most famous ghetto, Harlem. Nonetheless, films about life in Harlem are still rare, and fourteen years after the sad, memorable images of Lenox Avenue in Alfred Werker's *Lost Boundaries* (1949), or James Agee-Helen Leavitt's *The Quiet One* (1947), the imaginative and courageous director, Shirley Clarke made a film version of Warren Miller's novel *The Cool World* (1963).

For all its brusque cutting, disjointed narrative, and frustrating half-glances at its characters, this is the most important film document about Negro life in Harlem to have been made so far. It is a steadfast perusal of a group of adolescents, members of a gang calling themselves the "Royal Pythons"; but Clarke is as interested in the streets, buildings, backyards, and faces of Harlem as she is in her misguided young hero, Duke Custis (Hampton Clanton). With the aid of two extremely perceptive cameramen, Baird Bryant and Leroy McLucas, the director manages to seize upon those details which make *The Cool World* a work of visual poetry, and in sound, a tone poem of the slums. There is little humor in the film, although an early sequence, in which an anguished high-school teacher leads his unruly class of Negro boys through the Wall Street district, has a wild, improbable sort of inanity about it. Most of one's attention is drawn to the routine of the gang as they quarrel, fight, and disperse in Harlem's pattern of violence and moral corruption. We are shown a close-up of a Muslim's face, spouting black supremacy, and Duke's association with a "cool" racketeer, Priest (Carl Lee) gives us limited insight into two areas of accepted Harlem resistance to the white man. The former's hatred is explicit; Priest's personal war with his white colleagues from "downtown" is implicitly waged, but ends with his execution at their hands.

In the novel form, *The Cool World* was easier to tell; in the film version, every character is so vivid that each one struggles (because we are able to see him in many varying and fascinating situations) to have his story told. The film is so totally alive with the desperation of the dark, of being black and ignored, that Duke is often the least interesting person in the story. As we look at *The Cool World,* its restless air gradually works itself into a whirlwind of themes: Duke's desire to purchase his own "piece" (gun); the tragic obliteration of healthy childhood, exemplified by "Little Man" (Gary Bolling), a teenage drug addict, and LuAnne (Yo-

landa Rodriguez), the boys' exclusively owned, fourteen-year-old harlot; the desolation of Duke's home life, and, finally, the gang fight and arrest of Duke.

It is amazing that Shirley Clarke was able to compress as much into the film as she did, because it is fairly bursting with questions to unresolved problems and unresolved people. The cry of displacement is sounded by Duke's grandmother (Georgia Burke), an offshoot of the familiar, oh-lawdy matriarch from the screen lineage of Louise Beavers to Claudia McNeil. ("I'm sorry we left Alabama! Nothin's been right since!") His mother (Gloria Foster), a deeply disillusioned, hip scuffler, knows too well that Harlem usually gets to be "too much" for its men to endure; they run away to a less stultifying oblivion. Most denizens of Harlem are not overtly aware of their isolation, because when one is born into a ghetto, it becomes a refuge, and, disturbingly enough, a comfortable retreat from the vast anonymity of white life "downtown." The social crudeness of Harlem's youth and their unruffled acceptance of death, sex, and narcotics as necessary parts of human existence makes the film appear shocking to those white spectators who are only familiar with juvenile delinquency in suburbia. Duke has his dream-reveries of death and his coveted "piece," and when he makes love to LuAnne in the Pythons' cluttered den, he is still enough of a boy to imitate his mother's lover, repeating an endearment he had overheard earlier in the film. One has to adjust to the terrifying maturity of the children, each of them a trapped human being who is incapable of fighting his artificial exile.

We do not get close enough to Duke and his gang; Priest remains a mystery, a further extension of actor Carl Lee's mastery of restrained malevolence and simulated indifference, not very far removed from the world of "Cowboy" in *The Connection.* Priest's white mistress, Miss Dewpont (Marilyn Cox) has a touching scene with Duke as she describes her loneliness in the Hotel Theresa. Half-inebriated, influenced in acting style by the work of Monroe, Barbara Nichols, and Toby Wing, her caricature of a call-girl is rather moving. However, the character of Miss Dewpont is so fragmentary that one is not certain whether to be sympathetic or horrified by her advances to Duke, or to accept her as a serio-comic floozie. In reality, she would be a tragic figure, in much the same way that boxer Jack Johnson's white wife was—misunderstood by white and black in the hostile, fear-ridden atmosphere of miscegenation among the lower classes.

In the Mount Morris Park sequence, where the displaced, drug-ridden "Blood" (Clarence Williams), the Pythons' former leader, argues with his brother, the theme of rejection is brought to our attention. The older brother is well-dressed, handsome, and socially adjusted; he is carrying some books, but seems to be more of a Manhattan dilettante than a dedicated intellectual—a symbolic contrast to the dishevelled, wild-eyed "Blood," who slumps against a wall in a narcotized haze. The-brother-who-wants-to-help is also a typical, tragic Harlem figure to whom his beleaguered sibling is forced to shout: "I fought your battles for you, baby! Go back to your white world! Leave me alone!"

In *The Cool World,* the white world is rejected: its codes and standards, its well-meaning visitors, its curious stares from Sunday bus riders, its storekeepers, its landlords, its *everything* is rejected. Harlem's dependence upon the white world around it is not explored in this film, adding to the peculiar incompleteness of the story. For example, there had been some episodes in the book (and, I believe, in the initial cut of the film) describing the boys' hustling of white homosexuals in Central Park for spending money; and one of the boys, Chester, became the kept lover of a wealthy patron in a swank Manhattan penthouse. However, probably because of the taboo subject-matter and contemporary concern with "the image" of racial characterizations, these aspects of the narrative were eliminated. Only a passing snide reference to Central Park, leading to a sporadic fight between two of the Pythons, remains as an allusion to the boys' acceptance of profitable inversion.

The struggle for self-improvement is made to

appear a hopeless one for these Harlemites. When Duke stops in a playground to talk to Hardy, a neighborhood basketball player, it becomes clear that Hardy's skills are aimed toward athletic success which will surpass all similar accomplishments by "those half-assed little grey boys": at the basis of every motivation in *The Cool World,* there is an undercurrent of anti-white anger. The "coolness" that *must* be maintained is an emotional control, repressed in turmoil, camouflaging the Negro's realization that the white world, no matter how "uncool," is one in which he *needs* a place; a desirable world with which he is not yet able to cope.

Shirley Clarke's contributions to the American cinema are honest, extremely personal works, and *The Connection's* portraits of Negroes in the narcotics underworld and *The Cool World's* violent Negro juveniles illustrate the background of that urban demoralization which ultimately destroys whatever might possibly flower in American Negro culture. To Negro audiences, these lessons and images are not new; the works of Richard Wright and Ann Petry, for instance, long ago dramatized the ghetto-as-battleground in American literature. But to white audiences, wherever *The Cool World* is shown, the beautifully observed vignettes of Negroes living calmly in an unnatural habitat—the baking, narrow streets and tenements, the sidewalk conversations, the gambling, a tight-suited girl waiting for a bus—these are etchings of cinematic truthfulness. Naturally, there are jazz trumpets in the air; after all the decades of history-with-myth, the linkage of dark people and jazz music is inescapable, an accepted cultural cliché. But Shirley Clarke is very much aware of all these matters and in Harlem the muses do hum the blues.

One would like to think of America as a vaster place than the American cinema permits us to see. We have read of Negroes rioting in such unheralded places as Rochester, New York, or Cleveland, Ohio; if such dramatic conflicts break out there, what is the plight of Negroes in South Dakota or Firebaugh, California? Are there Nostromos arising in such settled, typical American communities to change the emotional and social patterns of their towns in some irrevocable way? The deepest and most interesting dramas of American Negro life have yet to be told: these will be stories about people who have become "accepted" by the white community and whose personal embattlements are totally emotional—in that struggle to reach another person's inner self and to find security in the torture-garden of human love. In 1965, there are still far too many ignorant people to bring about an integration of intelligences; the physical side of American life has too dominant a hold on our society, which can only become concerned with "toplessness" or the cacophony of much popular song-and-dance. The possibility of interracial love is additionally distorted by this routine vulgarity; held apart by a century of racial ignorance and hostility, the races in American life are also imprisoned by a strong undercurrent of puritanism in our social behavior. Today young men and women dance the Monkey, Swim, Jerk, and Frug, watched by their elders with the same dismay as their parents watched the Bunny Hug or the Shimmy; yet many whites believe that so-called "Negro music" is a chief contribution to the "moral decadence" of the younger generation, and conveniently forget their own earlier discoveries of Dixieland, ragtime, or swing.

The quest for intelligent integration of Americans on a simple, humane level, outside the South, is the concern of *One Potato, Two Potato* (1964), directed by Larry Peerce. The importance of the film lies in its sensitive treatment of a love affair and marriage between Frank (Bernie Hamilton), a Negro man, and a white divorcee, Julie (Barbara Barrie). The locality is a small town—Painesville, Ohio, replete with the cycle of the seasons and the nostalgia associated with the reveries of Wolfe or Agee. The screenplay, by Rafael Hayes, is honest in its dialogue and emotional understatement. The shock intrusion of racial antagonism on the part of the white man is presented joltingly, as in *Nothing But a Man:* here, a policeman insults Julie (believing she must be a prostitute) as she strolls along the street with Frank. The two

films inevitably resemble each other in a certain tendency to become symbolic. Peerce's difficulty lies in his overwhelming dedication to making Frank and Julie an "average" couple—so that he applies the average sentimentalities to this highly *unusual* couple. Frank is urbane (much too much so for Painesville) but Peerce makes him behave with what he believes is wholesomely appealing faunishness; his clowning is interesting but odd. The innate decency of Frank and Julie is cleverly emphasized, however; they attain a remarkable innocence. Their love-making is filled with a tentative sense of wonder, and their affair is respectably lustless. If the spectator relaxes and accepts *One Potato, Two Potato* as an imperfect breakthrough in the dramatization of interracial marriage, its successful episodes remain memorable, and the parable overtones are less disturbing. The sequence in which Julie wins Frank's confidence as they sit in an automobile is very poignant. The emotional disillusionments of the Negro are engraved upon Frank's face; and if one begins to believe that he *could* have remained in Painesville so long without a deep attachment to anyone, this very fact reveals something of the Negro's enforced neuroticism in America. When Julie's former husband, Joe (Richard Miller), appears on the scene, the anti-miscegenative feelings of white Americans are displayed in a highly melodramatic sequence. "You know how *they* feel about white women!" he tells her in an excellently played hotel-bedroom argument. Once touched by the reality of a Negro, a white man's intuitive inclination is to think the worst of him. The idea of serious emotional relationships between Negro men and white women is incomprehensible to Joe; and in an inept fury of self-righteousness he attempts to forcibly seduce his former wife. This particularly horrifying episode is a subtle dramatization of the age-old bugaboo supposed to underlie the competitive, masculine ego-struggle between black and white. Convinced that segregation has intensified the black man's lust (possibly true, and possibly also a projection of the white man's own intensified lust) the white fears that the Negro male is more sexually satisfying to womankind. This ancient piece of cultural mythology is, unfortunately, as indigenous to the Western world as Santa Claus; and one grows weary of having it dramatized and articulated as if it were truth—in the work of Baldwin and the "irreverent" Mr. Jones, for example. When Frank hears about Joe's mistreatment of Julie, he cries out, "They won't let me be a *man!*" He is unable to thrash Joe, and *any* assertion of his natural virility will be misunderstood. Frank's parents are initially hostile to an interracial marriage; their veiled glances and awkward silences represent a sense of shame, as if their son had heard the call of the lorelei and fallen under the curse of miscegenation—still linked in the Negro mind with the demoralizations of slavery. Frank tragically tries to resist the spiritual impotence that racial prejudice creates and maintains in American life, to escape being taken for granted, and for the wrong reasons. *One Potato, Two Potato* sympathetically portrays Frank's isolation. Before the marriage, he is seen wandering alone in the town square, reliving his games and chases with Julie, reading a Civil War monument inscription in silent misery. His symbolic self-exile is perfectly imaged in one of the film's most powerful moments: as he tearfully watches Indians charging cavalrymen in a drive-in movie, unable to control his dammed-up feelings, he screams within the isolated prison of his auto, "Kill him! Kill those white bastards!"

One is certainly moved to compassion for Frank and Julie when the court gives custody of her daughter to the biological father. The action is staged with cold simplicity, adding to an excruciating sense of injustice felt because Peerce has already proven that Joe is an insensitive blackguard, unworthy of his daughter. He takes her away as much out of spitefulness as racial prejudice, and if one's credulities are strained a bit, it is because the film implies that where interracial marriages are concerned, social position, love, intelligence, economic security, a home in the country, and preference of a child for her Negro foster father have no force whatsoever against American society's condem-

nation of miscegenation. *One Potato, Two Potato* bravely takes a position of racial tolerance but fails to eliminate the spectator's doubts concerning the "Why?" of the court's decision. When interracialism becomes too heroic, the machinery of theatrical maneuvering begins to creak very loudly. One is left closer to disbelief than complete, honest sympathy.

There are further steps being taken to emancipate the Negro from his cinematic stereotype, some faltering, some bold: Ford's *Sergeant Rutledge*, in which Woody Strode's epic stoicism set the pattern for assimilating outstanding Negro athletes like Rafer Johnson and James Brown into the image of either noble savage or stalwart nineteenth-century cavalryman; Sammy Davis, Jr.'s stylized performances in *Convicts Four* and *Sergeants Three* (in which he plays a Negro Gunga Din!); Samuel Fuller's *Shook Corridor,* in which Hari Rhodes plays a Negro student driven to paranoid schizophrenia by the strain of being at an all-white college in the South; and Eartha Kitt's strikingly mannered portrayal of cynical heroinistics in Richard Quine's *Synanon.* There are well-intentioned failures in *Black Like Me* (1964), directed by Carl Lerner, a potentially notable film marred by a weak script and over-cautious ineptitude in the dramatic approach; or successful mock-heroics as in Ossie Davis' splendid performance as a West Indian soldier-prisoner in Sidney Lumet's *The Hill* (1965); and Sidney Poitier as Simon of Cyrene steps forth in a spotless white-cowled robe to lift the cross from Christ's shoulders in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*—with obvious sociological implications.

An all-Negro film, *Living Between Two Worlds* (1964), directed by Robert Johnson, has not been widely shown; it deals with a mother-son conflict in Los Angeles, and it illustrates the growing desire among Negro artists to put together their own cinematic works. However, there are specific needs which must be attended to in future involvements of the cinema with the American Negro.

First of all, the drama of the intellectual Negro, isolated by the uniqueness of being ahead of his time or environment in American culture, must be illustrated, perhaps through depictions of the lives of such brilliant men as W. E. B. DuBois, Alain Locke, and Bert Williams. Negro screenwriters must be encouraged, as well as Negro directors; despite the brilliance of the Englishman Tony Richardson, one is disturbed that he intends to film Baldwin's novel, *Another Country,* when the talented Negro director, Lloyd Richards, has yet to make his film debut in this category.

Documentary approaches such as Haskell Wexler's *The Bus* (1963), and independent short works such as *We'll Never Turn Back, The Streets of Greenwood* or *Ivanhoe Donaldson* (1964), a feature-length documentary directed by Harold Becker, vividly illustrate the civil rights struggle; but the paradox of white-Negro relationships throughout the world must be dramatized in the narrative film, and the works of Nadine Gordimer and Shirley Ann Grau, for instance, are rich in elements from which great films could be made.

There must also be a more sophisticated role for Negroes in American lyric cinema, with the creation of a new style far removed from the *Carmen Jones* myths. This might happen through a merging of foreign and domestic talents: if Jacques Demy, Michel Legrand, and Duke Ellington collaborated on a Harlem musical, in color, with choreography by Alvin Ailey, including new, outstanding talent like Barbara McNair, Leslie Uggams, Lou Rawls, and Charles Louther, the brown Nureyev of modern dance—with these and established veterans from the world of Negro entertainers, an unqualified masterpiece could be created.

But finally, the strength and humanity of American Negroes, embodying the immigrant power, grit, and the struggle of thwarted hopes should be encompassed in the comedies and dramas to be visualized on film. Hopefully, a latter-day Aristophanes will emerge and create a new point of view about white and black Americans interrelating in a tragicomic world. For much too long now, we have grown weary of unvaried Sophoclean cries from the world of the darker brother.

MANUEL MICHEL

Mexican Cinema: A Panoramic View

The author of the following report is a Mexican film-maker and film student. He has produced five short films, studied at the I.D.H.E.C. in Paris, written many reviews and two books, and taught at the Universidad de Mexico. He has also done publicity work in the Mexican feature industry. This article, like Ulrich Gregor's survey of the German film in our Winter 1964–65 issue, brings us up to date on developments in a little-known cinema industry. Conscious that North Americans know shamefully little of the films that have been made in Latin America, we hope to follow up this piece with others on the film situation among our neighbors to the South.

The Mexican cinema has been in a crisis for more than ten years. The films which we send forth from our studios belong on the lowest rung in the scale of artistic and expressive values. There is an economic corollary: in spite of the industry's bankruptcy, the collapse of internal and external markets, the lack of investments and the difficulties of recovering invested capital, and despite the constant complaints of producers and technicians, some important fortunes have been made in the movie industry. It is not through a desire of self-sacrifice that many businessmen remain in the film industry.

Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of our film industry is its fossilization: for twenty years neither the films nor the directors have changed. There has been no renewal as in the French, Polish, Italian, and North American industries; nor are there noncommercial creators or independent agencies like the ones that have emerged outside of Hollywood.

As in everything which suffers from senility, a puerile attitude reigns in our film industry, but it lacks innocence. Throughout its history it has relied on stock characters and commonplace stories which have not even achieved the category of stereotypes because they are grotesque caricatures of reality. Thus far, those who have made our films have not known how to invent new rules of any cinematographic genre; at most, they have attempted to pastiche the genres invented by the North American or European cinema. Thus, our cinema took inspiration from westerns, detective stories, musicals, the *petit bourgeois* comedy, and occasionally films of social criticism; but having passed through the filter of our language and personality, and the commercial, vulgar attitude of our producers, the original strength has been diluted, resulting in deformed and ridiculous images of a reality whose actual depth has remained unexploited.

Across our screens flow the cult of mother-

hood, the exaltation of virility, superstitious and fanatical religion, a defeatist view of sexual relations, a bashful eroticism, the exaltation of the Díaz dictatorship (considered the *belle epoque* by our feeble-minded producers), the problems of virginity and of unwed maternity, the defense of the "home," the exploitation of patriotic flim-flam, the folklore hoax, the rejection of anything that would mean a close viewing of our problems, finally, all that can mitigate the authentic problems capable of inspiring a mature cinema. It is the tradition of *absolute unreality.*

The isolation of the Mexican cinema from authentic Mexican culture and from the aesthetic and cultural trends of foreign cinematography is explained by the complexity of the problems of an underdeveloped economy, and the struggle of a national bourgeoisie engaged in industrialization and concerned with veiling cultural problems. The results are venal commercial films and a censorship whose role is to castrate all authentic creativity.

In spite of the fact that we now possess a sound industrial foundation (capable technicians and laboratories), in spite of the fact that there are conscientious writers who are prepared to take up new cinematographic forms and themes, the obstacles are such that Mexico still produces the most old-fashioned films in the world.

The "primitive" movement of the Mexican cinema was initiated by the engineer Salvador Toscano who was the first to import Lumière projectors to Mexico. The projectors were followed by cameras which were used to film everyday scenes or civic and patriotic celebrations. In September, 1910, he filmed the Fiestas of the Independence Centennial which commemorated the end of our status as a Spanish colony. On November 20th of the same year Francisco Madero rebeled against the thirty-year dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. Engineer Toscano captured with his camera important aspects of the revolutionary struggle and of the activities of its most important leaders—Zapata, Villa, Carranza, and Madero. The struggle for "land and freedom" was engraved forever in Toscano's films. Many years later, in 1950, Carmen Toscano Moreno, Salvador's daughter, was to assemble that profuse material, under the title of *Memorias de un mexicano (Memories of a Mexican).*

The Mexican imitation of North American cinema: La Corte del Faraon, *by Julio Bracho.*

The Alva brothers were also "primitives." Their work—*Concurso de niños en la Alameda (Children's contest at the Alameda), Fiesta de Toros (Bullfight), Un día en Xochimilco (A Day at Xochimilco), Viernes de Dolores (Good Friday)*—has been lost. These primitives portrayed everyday life or outstanding events; but Felipe de Jesús Haro's *El Grito de Dolores (The Battle Cry of Dolores)* was a reconstruction of the call to independence given by the priest Hidalgo in his parish of Dolores in 1810.

In 1919 Enrique Rosas produced one of the first feature-length Mexican films, *La banda del automovil gris (The Grey Car Gang),* based on the crimes of a gang that terrorized Mexico City. It was almost totally filmed on location and might well be called the first neorealist film in history. It is a spectacular work told with a rare feeling for continuity and ellipsis. It is still shown in small towns and in second-run movie houses throughout Mexico.

Two producers began work in the early 'twenties: Miguel Contreras Torres who directed a ten-reel feature on rural life, *El caporal (The Chief),* a melodrama *Almas tropicales (Tropical*

Souls) and the first film with a bullfight theme filmed in Mexico, *Oro, sangre y sol (Gold, Blood and Sun).* Twenty years later, in 1943, Torres was to film his best work, an adaptation of the Mexican novel *Pito Pérez* by José Rubén Romero. The second to appear was Carlos Stahl. Besides initiating a new genre (the weekly newsreel), he made some long films among which the most outstanding were *Malditas sean las mujeres (Let Women Be Damned)* and *La dama de las camelias.* Stahl made more than sixty newsreels of his *México* series, works which are documentaries as much as newsreels.

The first twenty years of development of our film industry were hazardous, notably because of the competition of the North American cinema with its great economic resources and its high quality. By the end of World War I, Hollywood studios were already producing more than six hundred films a year and the star system was solidly established. The Mexican public paid homage to North American stars such as Mary Pickford, Gloria Swanson, Douglas Fairbanks, and Charlie Chaplin. Comprehension was not blocked by a language barrier. Another major obstacle to the development of the Mexican cinema was the 1910 revolution, which actually lasted many years. Apart from the country's general state of distress, there seemed to be no end to the rebellions that continuously broke out in different provinces. Old social and economic structures were being shaken and modified. But by an odd paradox the cinema of that period hardly reflects the convulsive movement which shook the country; films were oriented toward *petit bourgeois* melodrama and adventure serials.

The talkies offered the film industries of the Spanish-speaking countries their first great opportunity. In spite of the fact that the North American monopolies defended themselves in all possible ways—including the filming of multiple language versions of the same film, and the introduction of stars of Latin American origin—it was impossible to abort the formation of film industries in Mexico, Argentina, and Spain. (The system of subtitles was impractical since illiteracy in Latin America often reached as high as ninety per cent of the population.) Later on, the solution found by Hollywood financiers was to invest either directly or through intermediaries in local film industries.

The outstanding directors of the 'thirities were promises which seldom bore fruit. Almost no director of Mexican cinema has filmed more than two or three films of real consequence or interest. Juan Bustillo Oro—still active in our studios—made *Los dos monjes (The Two Monks)* in 1934; it was a very personal work, belatedly influenced by Expressionism. This was the only film in which he expressed personal feelings; otherwise, the most that can be said is that he is a craftsman who knows his field. Ferando de Fuentes is the strongest personality of this period and one of the great names in the history of Mexican cinema. Two 1933 films *El prisionero 13 (Prisoner Thirteen)* and *El compadre Mendoza (Friend Mendoza),* and the 1935 *Vámonos con Pancho Villa (Off We Go with Pancho Villa)* are his most important. *El compadre Mendoza* is outstanding. It is the story of a deep friendship between a revolutionary and an idealistic landowner who finally betrays his friend for gain. Fuentes' direction here is sure, full of human shadings, rich in psychological implications, and free of all doctrinaire Manicheanism. It represents a serious critical inquiry into the course that the Revolution was taking.

Another of the films that opened the doors of Latin American markets for the Mexican industry also came from Fernando de Fuentes: *Allá en el Rancho Grande (Back on the Ranch* —1937). Prototype of the "comedia ranchera"—ranch comedy—it was the basic model for the majority of movies filmed in Mexican studios from that time on. It starred cowboys, ranchhands, and a supporting comedian in an atmosphere of sham folklore. The abuse of this formula, served up *ad nauseam* over a period of many years, plus certain added tidbits of *machismo* (maleness), corroded the aesthetic structure of the Mexican cinema.

Other memorable movies of the times were *La mujer del puerto (Woman of the Harbor)*

by Arcady Boytler, a Russian-born and trained director; *Aguila y sol (Sun and Eagle)* and *Así es mi tierra (Thus is my land)* were by the same director. These were important because they brought Cantinflas into the limelight: the comedian who was to become a true myth and one of the great stars of the Mexican cinema. His interpretation of a popular human type, characterized by cynicism and double-talk, gave rise to the term *"cantinflismo"*—confusing and meaningless verbosity. He became immensely popular in all Spanish-speaking countries, but his films progressively decayed in quality and comicality. Cantinflas no longer represents anything authentic, but in his day, he was the incarnation of popular rebellion against social prejudices and authority. Arcady Boytler thus set the greatest myth of Mexican cinema in motion.

Eisenstein came to Mexico in 1930 to film *Que Viva México* of which several mutilated versions were later released. Eisenstein exercised a degree of influence on Fred Zinnemann who in 1934 made *Redes (Web)* in collaboration with Emilio Gomez Muriel, one of our future craftsmen of the melodrama. *Redes* was an attempt to make social cinema but had no impact. Together with Carlos Navarro's *Janitzio* it represents a formal attempt to experiment with plastic elements, montage and photography. These two films, however, were the aesthetic base of the films of Emilio Fernandez, "The Indian," whose best works are born of Indian inspiration.

In the mid-'thirties, with General Cardenas' government, nationalization of culture began. From then until almost 1950 national values in all areas of life were stimulated. In painting with Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros; in music with Revueltas and Carlos Chávez, followed by Moncayo, Galindo, and Sandi; in dance with the foundation of the Academy of Mexican Dance, aided by the collaboration of the Spanish refugees José Bergamín and Rodolfo Halfter and the American choreographer Ana Sokolof. It is lamentable that in this period of nationalization of resources, of exaltation of nationalistic and indigenous values, and the attempt to assimilate experiences brought from Europe by refugees of the Spanish Revolution, the cinema was not revitalized. No parallel attempt was made to create a national cinema. The responsibility for this omission is shared by members of the film industry—producers, writers, directors, and technicians—as well as by those in power. Even the opportunity of World War II, when North American producers dedicated all their energies to optimistic and propaganda films, was wasted. The businessmen of our movie industry took advantage of the situation only to produce films of a purely commercial nature. Emilio García Riera, a Mexican critic, describes this period as follows: "Patriotic and biographic films of an incredible stagnancy were made . . . nostalgic films that idealized the times in which the middle class could sleep peacefully (the dictatorship of Díaz) are abundant; the Spanish theater continues to provide patterns for pleasant and harmless comedies also directed at the middle class. The Mexican cinema has the mentality of the *nouveau riche.*" Lacking a philosophy and an aesthetic, the makers of the Mexican films wasted historic opportunities to elevate the level of their cinema and attain true independence.

Between 1938 and 1944, sixty-nine directors made their debut in the Mexican cinema; in March 1945, the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica de la República Mexicana (STPC—Union of Mexican Film Workers) was founded; between 1945 and 1958, only fourteen directors made their debut. Originally aiming to protect the workers of the movie industry against the abuses of the producers, the Union turned into a corporative association which closed the doors to all newcomers.

But Mexican directors in any event are only craftsmen—skillful at times—incapable of projecting a personal world. A director's cinema has never existed in Mexico. Instead the 'forties witnessed the emergence of star figures such as María Félix, Jorge Negrete, Arturo de Córdova, and above all Dolores del Río and Pedro Armendáriz. These stars became pillars of the international film industry. The "quality" cinema is represented by films such as Fernando

de Fuentes' *Doña Bárbara,* starring María Félix, *Peñón de las ánimas (Bulwark of Souls),* also starring María Félix, directed by Miguel Zacarías, and works such as *Distinto Amanecer (A New Dawn),* and *Ay, qué tiempos, Señor don Simon (Oh, the Good Old Times, Don Simón)* done by Julio Bracho, who was one of the many unkept promises of our cinema.

Artistically, the work of Emilio Fernandez dominates the 'forties. He created what could have been a Mexican school. *Flor Silvestre (Wild Flower)* and *María Candelaria* (1943), forged the style of our most celebrated director. From the beginning he formed a team with Gabriel Figueroa as cameraman and Dolores del Río and Pedro Armendáriz as stars. Figueroa's influence (he was at one time considered the best director of photography in the world) was of great importance in "The Indian's" productions. In all Figueroa's early works—*Enamorada (The General and The Senorita), Maclovia, Pueblerina (Paloma), Salón México,* and *La Perla (The Pearl,* with script by Steinbeck)—there is continuity of style, concern for indigenous values, romantic vision, and frequent poetic intuition.

In an industry which was modeled after Hollywood without its material advantages, in which directors were employees of the producers, the Indian Fernandez pledged all his talent to express himself as creator. Unfortunately, his adherence to externals of style bound him to stiff formulas.

AY, QUE TIEMPOS SENOR DON SIMON

MARIA CANDELARIA

Arcady Boytler left the film industry in 1944, after making his best picture, *Amor Prohibido (Forbidden Love).* Chano Urueta made two films that have not withstood the passage of time: *La Noche de los mayas (The Night of the Mayas)* and *Los de abajo (The Underdogs),* based on a famous revolutionary novel by Mariano Azuela. Alejandro Galindo approached the problems of the classes in Mexico City and created two outstanding works: *Campeón sin corona (Champion Without a Crown),* and *Una familia de tantas (One of Many Families).* Strange as it may seem, our directors have always preferred rural mystification to the better-known city environment; their only urban films have been historic reconstructions of the Golden Age of the Díaz dictatorship and mawkish, tearful melodramas about lost virginities and mothers abandoned by misguided sons or husbands. Galindo, however, approached the city milieu with honesty and even denounced, in *Espaldas mojadas (Wet Backs),* the demographic problems that cause the emigration of braceros to the United States.

The best film of Roberto Gavaldón, the leading director of so-called quality cinema, is his first, based on Blasco Ibáñez' *La Barraca (The Hut*—1944). He has produced nothing either personal or bold since. He is a serious man, without a sense of humor, knowledgeable in his field, efficient and a good technician. He is less original than some popular directors such as Juan Orol and Ismael Rodríguez who, in mak-

ing their films, have at least known how to adapt popular themes; their films renounce pretentiousness. (Later, Rodríguez discovered the "art movie" to which he has dedicated himself with an ardor uncompensated by results.)

Fortunately, we can speak of one great creator who has brought Mexico enlightenment and prestige: Luis Buñuel. He had produced *Un Chien Andalou* and *L'Age d'Or* before coming to Mexico in 1946. After filming two money-makers he made *Los Olvidados (The Young and The Damned*–1950), one of the great films in the history of world cinema. Buñuel's genius has given us many works which are fundamental for Mexican cinema: *Subida al cielo (Ascent to the Sky*–1951), *El (He*–1952), *Ensayo de un crimen (The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz*–1955), *Nazarín* (1958), and *El ángel exterminador (The Headless Angel*–1962). In Spain, Buñuel filmed one of his most important works–*Viridiana* (1960)–produced by the Mexican Gustavo Alatriste. Buñuel communicates his vision of man to us, severely flails hypocrisy, casts established values into doubt, and proposes a return to *l'amour fou* of the Surrealists. His morality–like all great creators, Buñuel is a moralist–strives to subvert traditional and conformist morals and struggles for freedom from spiritual restraints. Each work is a protest, a denunciation, the setting forth of a problem concerning human behavior, as in his *Simeón del desierto (Simeon of the Desert)* presently being filmed. Here he draws together the great themes of asceticism and the hermitic life in tonalities worthy of Bosch and Brueghel.

Buñuel's Los Olvidados

La Barraca *by Roberto Gavaldón*

The independent cinema is practically nonexistent in our country. However, a group inspired by Manuel Barbachano and Carlos Velo has produced two films. The first one, *Raíces (Roots*–1953), which appeared to indicate the beginning of a renovating movement, was directed by Benito Alazraki; the second was *Torero* (1956), produced by Carlos Velo. This film is a montage study of the life of the matador Luis Procuna and is one of the best bullfight films. In 1958, Giovani Koporaal, a Dutchman residing in Mexico, filmed *El Brazo Fuerte (Strong Arm)*, a work of bold denunciation concerning the problem of bossism, the leprosy of our country's political power, but as a production it is uneven. Sergio Véjar, formerly a director of photography, became a producer in 1961 with a film portraying the atmosphere of lower-class city life–*Volantín (The Pinwheel)*. Despite its defects, it is a noteworthy attempt to break away from the patterns of commercial movies. Other young people have tried to alter the commonplace trends of our industry with shorts and 16mm films. These are attempts which can be more or less successful, but are isolated and lost in the shifting sands of commercial movies.

At this time–the end of 1964–some pictures are being filmed for an exhibit of experimental movies organized by the *Sección de Técnicos y Manuales del STPC*. The enrollment of more than thirty groups is a favorable sign, and in

La Perla

many ways offers hopes for the renovation of our movie industry. Through it, a nucleus of directors, writers, technicians, and actors with enthusiasm, new ideas and new blood may be formed. The hopes of all of us who aspire to a better cinema rest in great part with the participants in that exhibit.

Much has been left out of this brief survey of the history of the Mexican cinema. I have omitted commentaries and full descriptions of films in order to present a general view of the films that have been most worthwhile. But what is it that truly *represents* the Mexican cinema?

Our films, regrettably, concentrate on diverse themes that must never reflect the social or psychological reality of the country. They are produced in *packages* in harmony with certain patterns and influences. For example: nostalgic comedies of the *belle epoque* of Díaz' dictatorship; folkloric comedies; melodramas of customs and manners; the *charros* (bumpkins) in all their forms, in any genre, with all the seasoning and gravy; melodramas remotely inspired by history and biographies of famous men; films concerning the Virgin of Guadalupe; melodramas about poverty, virginity, and abandonment; sweet little grandmothers; women of the slums, immaculate virgins in the midst of corruption and tropical music; vampires; male and female wrestlers; gangsters and mummies tossed in a salad; struggling humanity; rock-and-roll singers; imitators of gringo balladeers; rebels with and without a cause; co-productions of *charros* and gypsies.

For twenty years the same faces and the same figures have paraded past the viewers. Sometimes bullfight personalities appeared, such as Lorenzo Garza, Juan Silveti, and Pepe Ortiz in vehicle films; or boxers such as Kid Azteca, Raúl Talán, and Raúl Macías. The appearances of such celebrities are ephemeral and leave no trace behind; it is only a question of taking advantage of their passing popularity. Caribbean dancers and strip-teasers have had more influence: Rosita Fornés, María Antonieta Pons, Ninón Sevilla, Brenda Conde, Rosa Carmina, Mary Esquivel. Since the disappearance of some of the most appealing *charro* stars—Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante—substitutes have not been found.

If we were suddenly able to capture the whole of Mexican film production and make an enormous collage with its characters, a montage with its most characteristic moments, the result would be both ridiculous and grotesque; we would laugh with horror on seeing ourselves reflected by a cinema in which half-truth and hoax systematically reigned. But some traits do slip in, among those grotesque shadows, with a faint tone of veracity and communication. Those responsible for Mexican cinema have been shaping a public, molding the mentality of the consumers of its products for three generations. For that very reason, when viewing it in depth, we realize that the cinema survives because it reflects something of the image which the public expects to see of itself, its problems and its life—its ridiculousness, its shame-faced eroticism, its cult of generosity, its virility, its defects and its most subtle and involuntary virtues.

Until we have an impassioned sociologist who will study our cinema in depth, in order to uncover the lines of sentimental and ideological forces which structure it, let us inquire into the economic pivots of its life—the public and the private.

MEXICAN CINEMA

In 1938 there were 830 movie houses in Mexico and 66 million spectators a year attended them; twenty years later, in 1958, there were 2,465 movie houses and 365 million spectators. The viewing capacity increased 300%; the viewers 500%, without taking the rest of the Latin American public into account. In a sound economy, it might have been possible to undertake works of great scope, to develop another movie industry outside the realm of the commercial movies, and to stimulate renewal of technicians, writers, and directors. While the producers' thirst for profits was a deterrent to renovation it is also clear that the directors and writers never demanded freedom of expression and preferred to be *employees* of the producer rather than creators: they meekly conformed.

The movie industry in our country is founded on monopoly. It has four basic pillars: production and financing; distribution; exhibition; labor. The state intervenes through two agencies: the *Banco Nacional Cinematográfico* (National Film Bank), and the *Dirección General de Cinematografía* (General Film Administration) which carries out censorship of a political and moral character. Scripts and projects must undergo censorship before they can be produced; completed films must also receive approval. Another aspect of the state's intervention is the control over the exhibiting chains, which were acquired by the government about two years ago, and its decisive influence over the agencies of distribution.

This means that the structure of Mexico's film industry offers possibilities for an organic and well-laid-out development. Perhaps better organization in principle does not exist—at least in any Spanish-speaking movie industry. The bad aspect is the manner in which this machinery functions: as a kind of pump which extracts money for the benefit of a limited group of privileged people who have made fortunes while sheltered from risk by governmental agencies. Assistance from the *Banco Nacional Cinematográfico,* the advantages of centralized distribution, the benefits of governmental monopoly on exhibition, are all utilized by the producers not for improving the movie industry or for shaping a public, but for enlarging their capital and corrupting the taste and sensitivity of the spectators.

The juvenile-delinquency cycle, Mexican style.

The *Banco Nacional Cinematográfico* was created by a decree of President Alemán in 1951, its purpose being *"to further the production of movies of lofty quality and national interest with the assistance of credit in cash and the organization of exhibits . . ."* Credit is granted by a *Comisión de adelantos* (Commission of advance payments) formed by the managers of the distributing companies and two agents. That is, by the same producers, since the three official distributing companies—*Películas Nacionales, Películas Mexicanas,* and *CIMEX*—are creations of the producers associated for the purpose of unifying the handling of their films. The criterion for approving a grant of funds is in practice neither quality nor national interest, but the commercial value of a film according to its script, its stars, its director, and naturally, the producer's influence.

If an independent producer not associated with the distributing companies attempts to make a film, he must do it without financing, distribution, or support from the official agencies (*Dirección General de Cinematografía*). That is, he is practically condemned to keep his film filed away at home without chance of presentation or distribution—unless he is lucky enough to interest a North American company which operates in Mexico. Conversely, when a producer who is a member of the association

The "revolutionary" genre—with Maria Felix and Sorge Mistral.

solicits credit, his budget is inflated in such a manner that if he obtains the advance to make the movie, he has already made his money through his proposed overhead costs.

The determining factors in obtaining advances from the *Banco Nacional Cinematográfico* are the influence and the clever dealings of the producers. In that way, without risking a solitary cent of their own capital, many businessmen have made fortunes. They do not finance themselves, for they do not re-invest their profits in the movie industry; they shift them to less risky dealings. The Bank is the one to take the risk, but the producers wax exceeding rich. During the crisis from 1954–1958—to choose a precise period—*Películas Nacionales,* the distributor of films in Mexico, formed with an initial capital of 700,000 pesos, had 12,000,000 four years later; *Películas Mexicanas,* distributor for South America, the Antilles, and the Iberian Peninsula, increased its capital from 4,000,000 pesos to 16,000,000; and *CIMEX*, which handles films in the United States, Canada, Europe, and the rest of the world, grew from 1,000,000 pesos to 4,000,000.

The STPC (Union of Film Workers) has in theory eased up in acceptance of new technicians and new directors. But no producer is going to take many risks—nor is the Bank—on a beginner. The majority of movies are made in two or three weeks; the very ambitious ones in a maximum of four or five. For such run-of-the-mill productions, there are already many competent directors who film according to the producers' tastes and without personal ambitions. There are even "prestige directors" who are especially swift and efficient for these films. Other technicians—decorators, directors of photography—will have to ascend through seniority; that is, wait until the old ones pass away. And since in our times the life expectancy is ever longer . . .

Although the great actors and actresses are dead or aged, it is difficult to launch new stars. Young actors are not able to acquire experience and maturity. Instead they fall into a stereotype in serial movies according to the fashion. There are no new interesting faces, only attractive banalities who emerge for a moment and then sink into matrimony—the women—or into other activities.

A few producers who control the distributing companies obtain the best release dates and the

best theaters. The top prices—4 pesos, or 32 cents—at first-run movie houses, the absence of a performance tax which would provide funds for aiding the cinema, the slowness with which the reels are moved around because of the inefficiency of the distributors, and the competition of North American movies, are some of the most important factors now obstructing the rapid recovery of investments. For the bad quality of the Mexican movie industry and the competition of the North American and European movie industries have inevitably caused the Spanish-speaking markets to collapse.

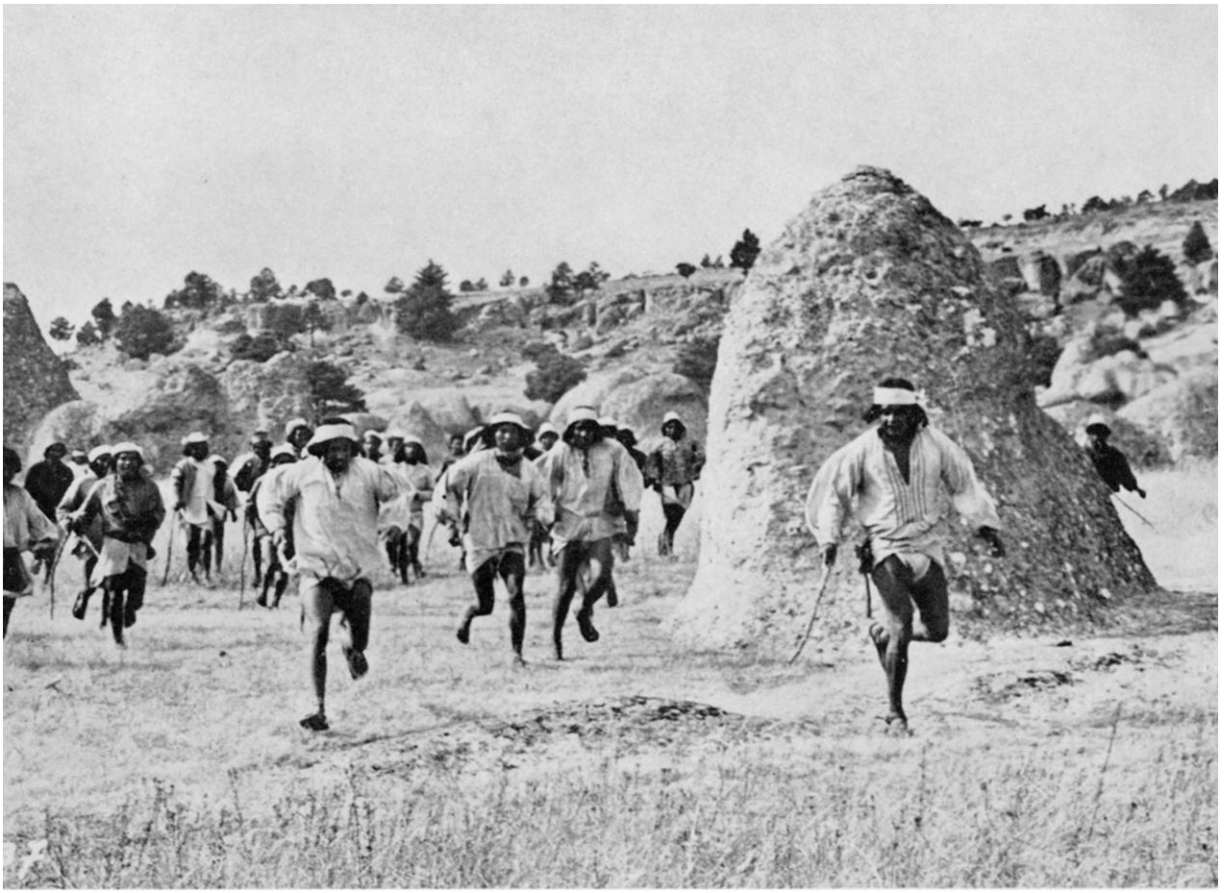
There is also the problem of censorship, exercised by the *Dirección General de Cinematografía,* which expresses official criteria—and the *Banco Nacional Cinematográfico* will not give a cent to anyone who does not present his project approved by the office of censorship. Censorship affects *all* pictures—domestic and foreign—which are to be shown in Mexico. Because of this we are condemned to see films with constant mutilations, or not to see them at all if it is judged that they attack the morality or the prestige of a country—our censors even defend the prestige of North America when it is cast into doubt by Hollywood! Thus Kubrick's *Doctor Strangelove* may not be shown in Mexico because it is an attack on the U.S. military and ridicules its generals. And so it is with other films which expound ideas opposed to those held by the censors, whether it be in the sexual, moral, political, or social domain.

Other forms or manifestations of the indifference to cinematographic culture in Mexico: until recently serious thought had never been given to forming a film library—now three are being built, the most promising by the University, another by a foundation, and the third by another group. Mexico is one of the few countries with an entire daily newspaper dedicated to the frivolities of the movie industry, but it is also one of the few in which there is no serious and systematic critical reviewing in the daily press. Only in four weekly publications in Mexico City is criticism written which is consistent and capable of providing orientation. Every day more illustrated magazines appear with gossip columns and pictures of pin-ups, but there is no serious magazine which deals with the social, aesthetic, or economic problems of the Mexican or world movie industry; those that have existed irregularly publish five issues and then die. The University of Mexico publishes a series of books about the movies (2,000 copies) which scarcely reaches a fraction of the population. There is a vast but incoherent movement of movie-clubs mainly frequented by students; these function poorly because of the difficulties involved in obtaining films.

Buñuel's THE YOUNG ONE

Thus, throughout its history, the Mexican cinema has produced very few important works. A limited group of ignorant businessmen, greedy fortune-making opportunists, has taken charge of the most formidable medium of expression of our time. They have manipulated for their own ends an excellent and well-organized industry which would have been capable of producing, if not a great cinema, at least a good one.

[Translated by Neal Oxenhandler]



TARAHUMARA—*Luis Alcoriza's entry this year at Cannes.*

Film Reviews

WILD SEED

Director: Brian G. Hutton. Script: Les Pine. Photography: Conrad Hall. Music: Richard Markowitz. Producer: Albert S. Ruddy. Universal.

The title—well, it strikes a faintly phony note, you must admit: as of Hollywood poetry and Symbols. But it is curmudgeonly, and perhaps unwise as well, to automatically disdain the constant promises of renewal in Hollywood—as the ads put it, NEW IDEAS! NEW FACES! NEW TALENTS! After all, *Wild Seed* sounds like the kind of thing we cry out for: low-budget pictures attempting to say something serious about contemporary American life. Even a genuine failure in such an attempt would be more interesting than most successes.

The trouble is, *Wild Seed* is not really that genuine. What is good in it is mostly reminiscent of the "road" film that made Nicholas Ray's reputation, *They Live by Night*, and of Kerouac's *On the Road*. What is bad in it is, dangerously, reminiscent of *David and Lisa:* pseudo-psychiatric "understanding" and sentimentality.

There is a solid realistic surface. You leave the theater thinking "Good try, but—" For the film has substantial drive and charm and even point. The central relation between the boy and the girl who cross the country by hopping freights is handled delicately—the girl with her middle-class manipulative ignorance (a bit incredible in a 17-year-old New Yorker, even private-schooled and protected) and the fruit-picker with his hurt pride, his sense of being a loser, his startled and grudging protectiveness when confronted with her innocence. The central social concern—the lack of moral contact between generations—is, together with the civil rights question, a chief locus of American moral consciousness. (There are only two massive groups who are visible and effective critics of American life today: the Negroes and the young. That vast "other America" of the poor is not—not yet—heard from, except as it overlaps these.) There is a welcome sense of life in the film: there is hardship in it and there is confusion and pain—but without that dreary, pushy existential gloom which emanates from so many New York low-budget films. —Just the ordinary American world: it has rail yards, it has beautiful countryside, and sunshine; it has Ray Charles; it has trainmen who leave you alone as well as bulls who run you in. Michael Parks displays a rare comic sense: his "gorilla" act as he comes dripping out of the creek, his fainting in the street when fearing arrest for panhandling, his nonhostile cynicism—"You old enough, but you not big enough." (This is the offhand American verve which Steve McQueen has now turned into a product sold by the ton.) Their battle of dependence and affection ends on an appealingly dubious note. "How we gonna make it?" he asks wildly. But she will stay with him; and her dog-like adoption of him, as we have seen, helps make him a man. "Are you hungry?" he asks, and they walk off down the row of honky-tonks.

Why then the let-down, the temptation to note at this point that it was competently shot, edited, plotted, and let it go at that? Some of the fault is bad acting; Celia Kaye is a little too sweetly unvaried, a little too silly, and the parental generation is all badly acted. More fault lies, I think, with the film's *wholesomeness.* It lacks the bite, the irresponsibility, the surprises of art. Like *Nothing But a Man,* its air of goodness takes you back to Hollywood before wholesomeness there had perhaps become completely synthetic. More important still, the film has not found a style. It tries to turn straightforwardness into a style; but this usually comes off as merely flat—there is not enough tension in the shooting, one never has the feeling that the film-makers had to go to their utmost to catch their material. There are occasional beautiful moments—as Frankenheimer's *The Train* reminds you, it's hard to be incompetent in shooting trains, no matter what story idiocies brought them in. Yet *Wild Seed* has terrible, give-away stylistic lapses. When the boy lies sick, we are given one of those time-wasting "montages"—reseeing glimpses of the story so far: a soft spot in a previously harder style, a betrayal of the performers, a lapse of imagination, a bore. Not long after, in a love-scene, the focus softens and the faces are back-lit. This kind of lack of control, of artistic perspective, results when real surroundings and relatively real characters are handled with the residual romanticism which is Hollywood's heritage to the new generation of film-makers. Those film-makers had better beware. The faults in *Wild Seed* all have a common tendency—to make it seem tame to the young people whose lives it is supposedly reflecting.—Ernest Callenbach

Celia Kaye and Michael Parks in Wild Seed.

YOYO

Directed by Pierre Etaix. Script: Etaix and Jean-Claude Carrière. Camera: Jean Boffety. Score: Jean Paillaud. With Pierre Etaix, Claudine Oger, Luce Klein, Philippe Dionnet.

At last a masterpiece? To be discussed in the same breath with Mack Sennett, Chaplin, Keaton, Max Linder *and* Jacques Tati would be a dire test for any comic. But not for Pierre Etaix, at least not for this film, which makes one wish to have saved specifically for it words like funny, charming, poetic, touching . . . a masterpiece.

In my opinion Etaix' first feature, *Le Soupirant (The Suitor)* was only a rough draft of what could be expected from this former Tati gag-man. His shorts too *(Bon Anniversaire* and *Le Revenant)* left one not entirely satisfied. But with *Yoyo* he has struck his *coup de maître.*

This is the story of a melancholy clown. His father—who bears a strong resemblance to Max Linder—once lived in an enormous castle. A very rich man, surrounded by too many servants, he led a sumptuous but empty life. Every minute of this life was precisely timed. He had everything he wanted, but he was deadly bored. But one day, when a circus passed, he found the bareback rider he had once loved, and the little boy Yoyo who had been born from their love. . . .

The film then switches to the life of Yoyo, who lives with his father (now ruined by the depression) an errant, poor, but happy life. Yoyo is here played by an extraordinary boy who is not at all a "child actor" but just a marvelous clown, full of the poetry of the circus. Later, Yoyo is portrayed by Etaix himself; he becomes a famous clown, TV brings him a fortune. But he throws this fortune away in pursuit of a life-long dream: to bring back to reality the decaying castle where his father had lived—of which he had only a glimpse. This takes years of hard work, leaving little time for personal life, for love. Finally the castle is rebuilt, and full of shining lights and high-society people. But Yoyo then realizes this life is meaningless; carried off by the old elephant who was his childhood companion, he rejoins the circus people to whom he really belongs.

Sentimental? Yes, but so is *City Lights.* Melodramatic? So is *Limelight.* What counts is that here Etaix, in this tender and melancholy tale, has been bold enough to rely on the visual gag—rejecting the *mot d'auteur* which has been debilitating French cinema. And he will sometimes turn the gag into cinematic poetry, as in the scene where the girl whom Yoyo might have loved comes to see him in a small-town hotel. As he watches her move away down the corridor, she drops her coat and starts climbing a rope, which leads her to her trapeze amid the lights and applause—and she then disappears from Yoyo's sight, leaving him alone in this small hotel corridor. . . .

Etaix is the complete author of his film: he wrote it, directed it, played the parts of father and son, designed posters for it, and even designed some costumes. This is creation in the old grand manner. With a craftsmanship that resembles that of a tight-rope-walker, Etaix balances humor and emotion. Until the last moment, one wonders if he will make it. And he always does—without any net, taking all the chances, he has you crying, smiling, laughing all at the same time, with never a clumsy hesitation or break in style. *Yoyo* is that rare phenomenon, a film simply to enjoy.

—GINETTE BILLARD

Entertainments

R. M. HODGENS*

Bus Riley's Back in Town, just out of the Navy, and almost everybody wants him—even the undertaker, but mostly lonely housewives, especially Ann-Margret as an old, now-married flame. We probably can blame William Inge for much of this, even though he has had his name removed on account of somebody's alterations designed to protect Ann-Margret's image. (And about time; but it still needs protection.) We can thank Inge for what little the film does have; apart from all the funny sex, more modest intentions are realized in a number of accurate, quiet dialogues. Ann-Margret is still working too hard at it. Michael Parks, as Bus, looks as if he's impersonating James Dean from time to time, but otherwise does well. Harvey Hart's direction is successful when the script is; when Hart strives for effects beyond straightforward realism, the film tends to look imitative.

Cartouche is a Belmondo-Cardinale vehicle to which director Philippe de Broca has lent his very considerable talents. Like his earlier and smaller black-and-white pictures, it is an art director's dream—as Cartouche and his seventeenth-century hoodlums steal from the rich and give to the poor every imaginable *haute monde* gewgaw. De Broca understands that Cardinale is perfectly tolerable if you keep her moving, and the film abounds with well-choreographed brawls (Belmondo even does some capable variations on Fairbank's balcony stuff) as well as a good deal of horsemanship. Marcel Dalio plays Cartouche's evil predecessor as gang leader with suitable malignity, and a faint smell of Prévert's influence—which I like—pervades the melodramatic proceedings. (Charles Spaak collaborated on the script.) As costume spectacles go, this is a good one; it will not insult your intelligence, it is not given over to fatuous cheeriness, it is mildly sexy, and it is extremely lush to look at.—E.C.

Cheyenne Autumn tries hard to give tragic dimensions to the incredible treatment the American Indian received from the whites. Its story of the 1700-mile trek by a desperate band of Cheyennes seeking to return to their own country is gloriously photographed. Richard Widmark carries the white-man's-burden of pursuit with appealing reluctance, and finally goes over his superiors' heads to the Secretary of the Interior, which saves the Cheyenne from the "final solution" the Army has set in motion for them. Still, no picture in which Sal Mineo, Ricardo Montalban, and Victory Jory figure as Indians can help being ultimately anti-Indian.—E.C.

Chushingura, which has run for some 36 weeks at the Cinema Guild in Berkeley, seems to me somewhat undeserving of so much admirable exhibitor zeal. ("*Chushingura* is on a plane with the Parthenon, the Taj Mahal, Mont St. Michel, the *St. Matthew Passion*. . . .") Hiroshi Inagaki's version of the traditional Japanese tale is spectacularly photographed, as claimed. But its classicism, I fear, lies chiefly in being a classic illustration of the fact that production values do not a move make, nor pretty shots a film. Although there is some psychological variety in the characterization, this expression of *bushido* remains, in Donald Richie's phrase, a "highly colored but meaningless historical excursion." The swordplay is done with an inexact bravura that makes one long for Kurosawa's raw and honest touch. The shogun's delay in deciding the fate of the young lord's clan, and the consequent delay in revenging him, seems inexplicable and—unless one likes ritual "suspense"—mostly tedious. The architecture and costuming are magnificent, however, and one would like to see *The Tale of Genji* filmed in such splendor.—E.C.

Circle of Love. "Roger Vadim's *Circle of Love*" is more like Arthur Schnitzler's *Reigen* than was Max Ophuls' *La Ronde.* Jean Anouilh has not done much to earn his credit as adapter; he has only blunted it a little and introduced an anachronism or two in moving it to Paris on the eve of the Great War. Schnitzler's characters are variously pitiable and contemptible, but generally funny. Ophuls softened them considerably. One would expect a certain celebration, as well as softening, from Vadim; but they aren't even very funny. The dubbing does not help, of course, but you can't blame bad dubbing for everything. Vadim only revolves about, peering at the generally tedious amours in generally tacky sets, inserting rather clumsy, gold-hued vignettes. The conclusion is so nostalgic as to suggest that sex was all pre-War. "It must have been all a dream," somebody said on the way out.

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Goldfinger runs the James Bond cycle pretty well into a hopeless rut. By the time Bond's peculiar sexual powers have persuaded Pussy Galore to save the U.S. gold supply from being turned into radioactive dust, you could hardly care less even about Hugh Hefner. Looking back over the extraordinarily repetitive plots of the Bond books and films, in which even the girls are more or less interchangeable, they begin to seem not only narrow but obsessively juvenile; what a wealth of character and incident there is in Conan Doyle, by comparison! And though it may all be a joke, perhaps there is still some question of who it is on.—E.C.

Masquerade. The question is not who is doing what to whom, but who cares. The film has some surprises and some acrophobia, but its pursuit of cynical humor along with standard thrills is so dogged—as bad guys turn into good guys and good guys turn out to be bad guys and get away with murder—that the audience is liable to feel doublecrossed, too. Basil Deardon directed.

The Rounders is a good-humored shaggy-horse story, in which cowhands Glenn Ford and Henry Fonda have a lot of trouble with a malicious roan. The horse, in a series of low-pressure and thankfully non-Mythological adventures, wins their reluctant and ambivalent affection; in the end they don't send him to the soap-factory after all, and he kicks down a stable, ruining them and their plans to escape their penniless cowpunching round of existence. Director Burt Kennedy keeps it all pleasantly relaxed, but his screenplay does not provide enough context or contrast for the relaxation, and the film ends up mostly scenic and dull.—E.C.

The Satan Bug, a virus allegedly capable of destroying all life, is stolen from a government laboratory along with a lesser strain that allegedly destroys all Key West and threatens Los Angeles. While we worry about catching the thief (an extremist) before he drops the bottle, we are also expected to worry about the hero (George Maharis) sent to catch him. He seems to know too much, but turns

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Synanon. This film about a center for the cure of drug addiction may be as authentic as it is supposed to be, but it doesn't look it. Chuck Dederich (Edmond O'Brien), who runs the place, warns us that they have to talk a lot, as we might expect. However, after one early seminar or "synanon" of disciplined mutual contempt, they don't talk much, and much of what they do say seems too neat and omniscient; their addiction seems merely a topic of conversation, and their cure looks easy. The script is careful, balanced and uninspired. The actors seem altogether too healthy. Producer-director Richard Quine's talents simply may be unsuited to this fictionalized documentary project. He has a tendency to choreograph everything nicely, as in his romantic comedies. Neil Hefti's score is nice, too, and you notice it. When either the State of California or an addict named Zankie Albo (Alex Cord) fouls things up, the effect is singularly unmoving. Finally, when Joaney (Stella Stevens) walks back to Synanon House after Zankie's death and her own superficial doubts, and finds the whole gang singing the Whiffenpoof Song, the effect is so nice that it's sickening. O'Brien grumbles well; only Eartha Kitt displays enough intelligent intensity to suggest that, in spite of some of her lines, she has been through anything really difficult, really painful.

Zorba, the Greek, directed by Michael Cacoyannis from the Kazantzakis novel, is a paean to the idea that sex is not only all right, it's positively great; of course you may get killed for it afterwards in that part of the world where, apparently, "Once a Cretan, always . . ." Anthony Quinn plays the Pan-god with exuberant prowess which is always fun to watch; but Alan Bates' Englishman is so stonily repressed that it's hard to share Zorba's enthusiasm about getting him into bed with Irene Papas—who is stagey as ever in the role of the haughty widow all the villagers lust after. Lila Kedrova wiggles charmingly and grotesquely as the antique courtesan, but even in her death scene the pathos palls a little. This is a worthy challenger to *Never on Sunday,* and has been packing them in at the art-houses, where its combination of calculated primitivism, sex, and "fatalistic" violence hardly seems ludicrous at all.—E.C.

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