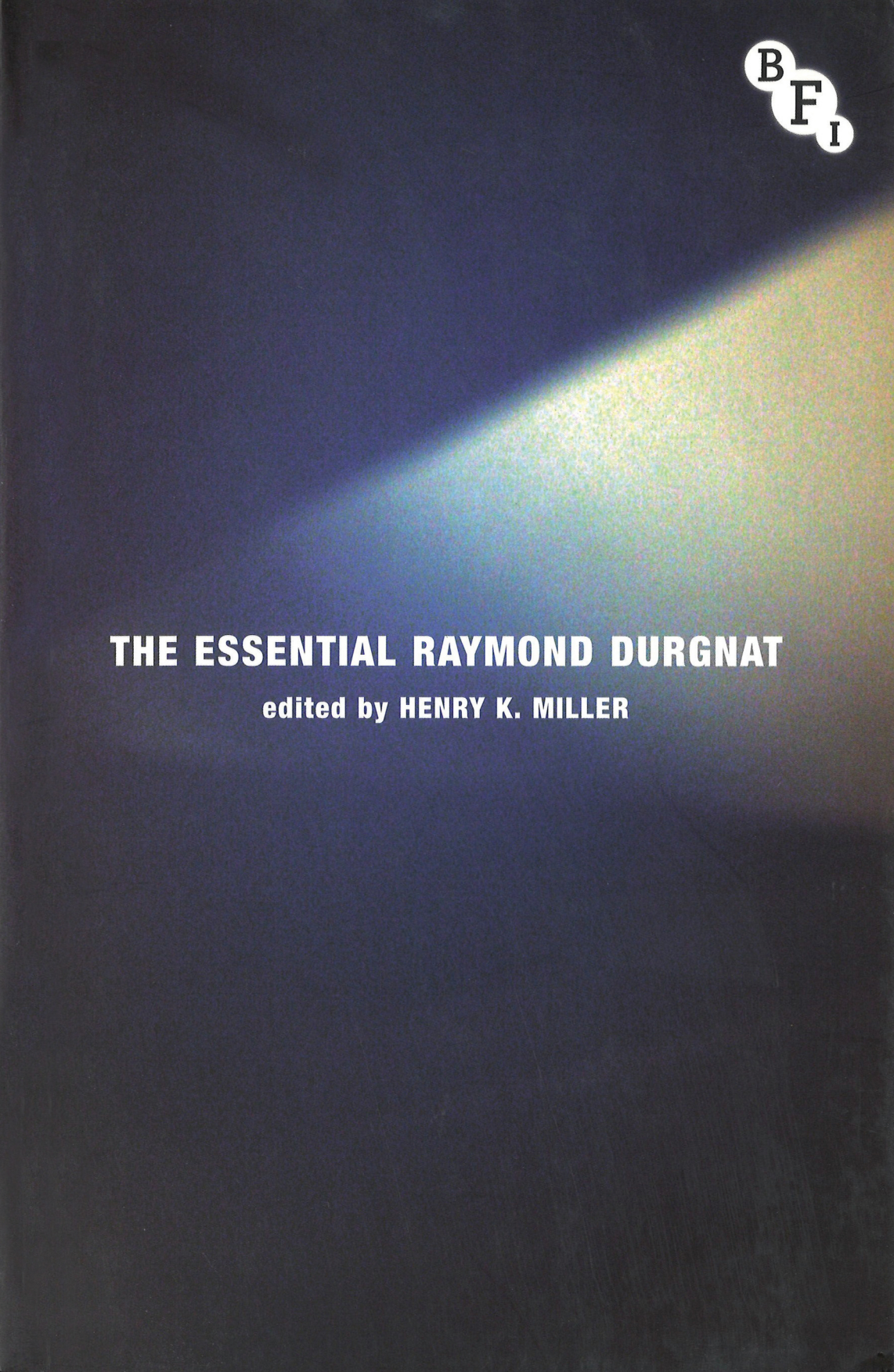
BFI
THE ESSENTIAL RAYMOND DURGNAT
edited by HENRY K. MILLER

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

It is tempting to believe that film culture has changed as much in the twelve years since Raymond Durgnat's death as in the half-century during which he was a published critic. His byline belongs to an almost vanished world of print magazines. Durgnat wrote for *Film*, *Films*, *Film Comment*, *Film Quarterly*, *Film Dope*, *American Film* and, especially, *Films and Filming*. Sometimes he was found in *Art and Artists* and *Books and Bookmen* too. He contributed to *Cinim*, *Cinema*, *Cineaste*. For a time he co-edited *Motion* and was given space in *Movie*. In two discrete periods he appeared in *Sight and Sound* and the *Monthly Film Bulletin*. In the late 1960s he was a presence in *IT* and *Oz*; and, in the same years, in the *Burlington Magazine* and the *British Journal of Aesthetics*. He also wrote for *Positif* and *Midi-Minuit Fantastique*.

Yet what he wrote anticipated our digital age. 'Ten years from now,' he wrote in 1968, 'movies may be as throwaway as pen and paper.' Ten years later he foretold 'the end of cinema's magnificence. With pocket TV sets, people will be able to watch movies as they sit on a bus or train, stopping and starting when it's convenient.' 'For the first time in history,' he wrote in 1982, 'the cultures of all times are simultaneously available. It's less like enjoying a vantage point than drowning in information.' He predicted that 'Word and image processors *plus* video cameras *plus* computer mail and networking *plus* videotapes will let everybody cook up his own moving image-text combos.' Well before the possibilities of digital image manipulation had begun to be realised, Durgnat championed films which went beyond 'the limitations of photographic realism'.

Far from being trapped in time, he has come into his own. Though this book pays tribute to the very diverse band of publications in which its contents first appeared by simulating their various house styles, it is meant for the present.

Over the years of its gestation I have incurred many debts to colleagues, friends and family. I want to thank in particular Patricia Aske; Rebecca Barden; Charles Barr; Justin Bengry; Judy Bloch; Donald Brett; Liz Bruchet; Ian Christie; Michel Ciment; Richard Combs; Sophia Contento; Kieron Corless; Paul Cronin; David Curtis; Manolis Daloukas; Gareth Evans; Will Fowler; David Gale; Nancy Goldman; Jean-Pierre Gorin; Brian Hunter; Ian Johnson; Stella Keen; Lucinda Knight; Brighid Lowe; Tom Luddy; Hannah Mowat; James Naremore; Neil Parkinson; Frank Pike; Al Rees; James Riley; Jayne Ringrose; Jonathan Rosenbaum; Yvonne Salmon; Melanie Selfe; A. C. H. Smith; Rob Vasey; Edwin N. Vidler; Rob White; Peter Whitehead; Emma Wilson; Leila Wimmer; Mandy Wise; and the staffs of the BFI Library and Cambridge University Library.

Henry K. Miller, Cambridge, 2014

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Evening Standard, 29 November 1949

INTRODUCTION: THE DIVIDED SELF

'As a schoolboy', Raymond Durgnat recalled in 1965, 'I often played truant to go to the pictures, and now that I'm a lecturer in "Studies Complementary to the History of Art" I'm an even firmer believer in the "truancy" theory of art.'[1] Movies like 'that bad-taste thunderclap' *Duel in the Sun* (1946) 'strengthened my schoolboy revolt – not revolt exactly, but respectful dissent – from edifying influence'.[2] He compared himself with the protagonist of *The Guinea Pig* (1948), a tobacconist's son 'scholarshipped up' from 'Walthamstow, E17, a terrible low district', where Durgnat was educated 'at an excellent grammar school founded in 1527'.[3] The influence of the Sir George Monoux was edifying indeed, and 'literary to the point of being blind. My grammar school teachers insisted that I drop even its sloppy-go-lucky art class for "Eng. Lit." and extra Latin.'[4]

> In 1950 I went to see [André Cayatte's] *Les Amants de Vérone*, eleven times in seven days. First to study [Jacques] Prévert's crackling yet poetic dialogue, and then to try and remember exactly how it worked as a visual succession. I came away baffled, frustrated, with nothing to show but some visually illiterate sketches and a few sentences which I dared show nobody, so hopelessly trivial were they in terms of literary content.
>
> But those images had hit me with their rhythm. They asserted the richness of a third dimension which in film criticism then was in its deepest point of eclipse: film as a graphic art.

Grammar School Eng. Lit., meanwhile, meant F. R. Leavis, the Great Tradition and attempted inoculation 'against the multitudinous counter-influences – films, newspapers, advertising – indeed, the whole world outside the class-room'.[5] Durgnat, a Baudelaire-reading jazz trumpeter who spent his weekends exploring Soho and the docks when not at the pictures, may have relished these counter-influences, but he was also a star pupil and editor of more than one school magazine. Nor were his teachers unresponsive: one sent an example of his work to Richard Winnington, film critic of the *News Chronicle*, and Winnington wrote back with encouragement. In December 1950 he won a place to study English Literature at Pembroke College, Cambridge, and a variety of scholarships to take him there.

At Pembroke's suggestion Durgnat took a year out, during which time he published his first articles in the British Film Institute's *Monthly Film Bulletin* and *Sight and Sound*, recently taken over by a group of critics from the Oxford film magazine *Sequence*, led by editor Gavin Lambert. University was further delayed by National Service, to which Durgnat intended to conscientiously object until dissuaded at the last moment by Pembroke's senior tutor. During his two years in the Royal Army Education Corps, some of it spent in Hong Kong, as reflected in his second *Sight and Sound* piece 'Oriental Notebook', he wrote a book on film which his future publisher Faber and Faber was not alone in rejecting.

Finally in the autumn of 1954, at the age of twenty-two, he went up to Cambridge, where his supervisors included the Leavisite D. H. Lawrence specialist Harry Coombes.

Durgnat took refuge in the cinema but wrote little, an anomaly perhaps explained by the title and tenor of his single *Granta* contribution, 'A Critique of Critics', published in June 1955. Castigating his fellow student reviewers for, among others failings, their 'adulation of Hitchcock', he concluded that 'perhaps not until professors and pedants get their hooks into the Tenth Muse will she command the attention she deserves'.[6]

His final year coincided with a national watershed at once political and cultural. 'Suez served to rally the first of a series of youthful "waves",' wrote Durgnat from the vantage of 1968, 'whose selfless indignation was doubtless sharpened by the denial of equalities and opportunities in a stagnant society. The first wave were the "Angry young men", and the brief boom in the New Left.'[7]

A quintessential Angry Young Man himself, Durgnat identified with – or projected himself on to – Jimmy Porter, the class-warrior antihero of *Look Back in Anger*. John Osborne's play, which opened at the Royal Court Theatre in May 1956, was twice televised that autumn, and twice came to Cambridge the following year, 'reached and revealed a new audience whose existence had been unsuspected, not only by the film industry, but by almost all the cultural "establishments"', Durgnat wrote a decade later.[8] 'The audience has the satisfaction, the liberation, of hearing its own smouldering discontents fierily expressed.'[9] Durgnat's Porter 'was unlucky enough to win a scholarship, intellectualise his gift of the gab, feel the full pressure of grammar-school earnestness'.

The play sent ripples through British film culture. Its director Tony Richardson was part of the *Sequence–Sight and Sound* circle, some of whose members had become film-makers. In February 1956 they had launched 'Free Cinema' with a National Film Theatre programme comprising Richardson and Karel Reisz's *Momma Don't Allow*, Lorenza Mazzetti's *Together* and Lindsay Anderson's *O Dreamland*. In the Autumn 1956 *Sight and Sound*, by then edited by Penelope Houston, Anderson (no grammar-schoolboy he) issued what became a famous manifesto for politically committed criticism, 'Stand Up! Stand Up!', illustrated by a photograph of Richardson's stage production and endorsing Porter's nostalgic lament, eleven dispiriting years after the 'glorious' Labour victory of 1945, for the lack of 'good, brave causes'.

Suez, which both shattered Britain's remaining imperial pretensions and made it seem as though the imperialist 'old gang', in Porter-speak, were still in charge, provided a cause of a kind, and the New Left emerged in its wake. In the spring of 1957 'Stand Up! Stand Up!' was reprinted in the first issue of *Universities and Left Review* (*ULR*) alongside essays by E. P. Thompson and Stuart Hall. It was at this moment, and with special significance for the New Left, that Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* appeared, described by Durgnat as 'perhaps the most influential attempt made in Britain to cope with the challenge of the mass media'.[10] Many of its readers recognised themselves in Hoggart's 'Scholarship Boy', as discussed in the second *ULR*, uprooted beneficiaries of the 1944 Education Act which had brought the grammar schools into the state system.

Durgnat was a scholarship boy, but as the son of Swiss immigrants, thrown around the country as a wartime evacuee, he may have known Hoggart's 'sense of no longer really belonging' before he took his eleven-plus exam.[11] Whereas for Hoggart the contradiction between homework and the 'magazines which are never mentioned at school' was a source of shame and insecurity, for Durgnat it became a reason for defiance.[12] Hoggart thought that his anxious but committed few had 'special value' in an increasingly affluent

society that was in 'danger of reducing the larger part of the population to a condition of obediently receptive passivity, their eyes glued to television sets, pin-ups, and cinema screens'.[13] Durgnat discerned in such passages the continuation of 'the Matthew Arnold–F. R. Leavis tradition' in post-war clothing.[14]

A branch of this tradition was being challenged in 1956 by another intellectual coterie with which Durgnat was more closely aligned. In August the Independent Group of artists and critics, based at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, came to public attention as part of an exhibition, 'This Is Tomorrow', at the Whitechapel Gallery. Fascinated by the imagery of American consumerism, and by its violent undercurrents, Independent Group artists like Eduardo Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton were especially interested in science-fiction movies. The group's room at the Whitechapel was dominated by the presence of Robby the Robot from the recently released *Forbidden Planet*. Its spokesman Lawrence Alloway recalled that 'our feeling was never that we were slumming, or getting away from it all, or not being serious'.[15]

Durgnat was predisposed to embrace Alloway's proposition that 'unique oil paintings and highly personal poems as well as mass-distributed films and group-aimed magazines can be placed within a continuum rather than frozen in layers in a pyramid', as against the Arnoldian–Leavisian approach taken by Alloway's immediate quarry, 'T. S. Eliot and his American followers'.[16] As Durgnat wrote in 1964,

> Those intellectuals of my generation who interested themselves in jazz, in the cinema, in science-fiction, in American comics, did not 'capitulate' to the 'pressures' of the mass media; on the contrary. We deliberately chose them – or rather intuitively responded to them – both as artistic pleasures unsullied by the assumptions of our schoolmasters, and for their 'subversive', vulgar view of human nature […] we felt fonder of the screaming teen-age girls who worshipped Elvis than of those who deprecated and bewailed this mass hysteria.[17]

At the height of the Suez emergency in November 1956, Durgnat and his friends were in a 'delirium of interpretation' over another film cherished by the pop artists, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, which opened in Cambridge on the day British troops landed in Egypt, and was discussed 'at mesmerised length […] Harry Fainlight saw it as an anti-Zen-Buddhism film – for the pod state of no desire, no attachment is all but nirvana.'[18]

The year 1956 was also a watershed personally. In October Pembroke arranged for Durgnat to begin a course of psychotherapy at the Tavistock Clinic in London. He was treated by a young psychiatrist who had joined the clinic, and begun to train at the Institute of Psychoanalysis, only that month: R. D. Laing, then nearing completion of the book that would make him famous, *The Divided Self*. Laing, who had been working with schizophrenic patients in Glasgow and


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characterised the Tavistock as 'an organization that dealt with normal people', nonetheless took his patients seriously and 'addressed myself to the best of my sensibility and intelligence to what they were on about'.[19] Most Tavistock treatment was done in groups, but Durgnat was seen individually by Laing every week for more than two years, and in some capacity thereafter.

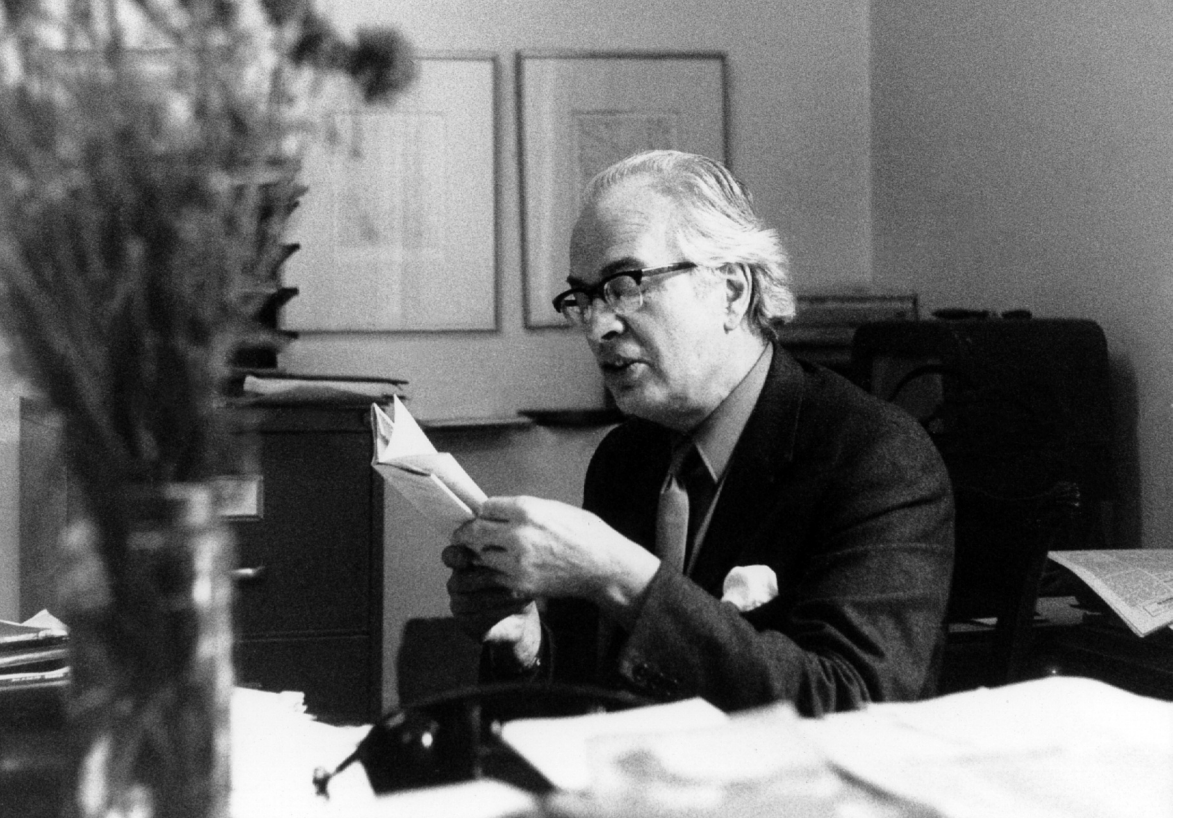
On graduating in the summer of 1957 Durgnat began what he called his 'Cloister-and-the-Hearth alternation between the film industry and the groves of academe'.[20] With the strong support of his supervisors he was offered a state studentship for postgraduate research on 'Aspects of French influence on Eng. Lit. in C19'. He was also offered a three-month position as a trainee writer at the Associated British Picture Corporation at Elstree. He chose the latter and, despite being kept on, regretted it. ABPC was largely committed to churning out routine, quota-filling fare, and was by the late 1950s, when television was cutting into the regular family audience and cinemas were closing in scores, 'too nervous to actually make any movies'.[21] In 1958 Warner Bros, which had a commanding stake in the company, began to turn the studios over to small-screen production. Thus Durgnat attempted to win a second studentship two years after turning down the first.

His proposed theme this time was a study of 'Literary Style and Techniques in relation to Psychology and Psychoanalysis', which would 'do for prose what Rudolph Arnheim did for art in "Art and Visual Perception"'; though he also mentioned an alternative, stemming from his day job, 'a study of box-office factors in commercial films; why some stories please the public enormously and others closely resembling them fall very flat'.[22] This was impossible at Cambridge, and Durgnat's application, which was eventually made to King's College London, was poorly focused. His supervisors were more cautious than before, and Pembroke sought reassurance from Laing about Durgnat's mental state. Laing replied that 'he is "erratic", but his personality has become much less turbulent in the last three years'.[23]

> I have not read anything that he has written, but from his speaking there is no doubt that he has quite an exceptional psychological understanding. He is genuinely gifted in this respect, and as with so many people who have such a gift, he has been wild and unstable in his life.

It is known that Laing discussed cultural questions in his sessions, including the Angry Young Men.[24] One of Durgnat's referees recorded that he had been 'moving towards the psychoanalytic discussion of literature' after he began treatment, and that his college essays were 'supported by a reading of the major psychological texts'.[25] Laing's remarks on Durgnat's 'psychological understanding' suggest an arrangement as much educative as therapeutic. 'I was in no way committed to the idea that they had come to see me for *psychotherapy*,' he once claimed. 'They had come to see me for a consultation as to what I could contribute to their life positively, which might not be a recommendation to get into therapy, it might be anything, absolutely anything.'[26] In any case Durgnat's application failed, and by the end of 1959 he contemplated going into teaching.

Fate intervened. Writing in the Winter 1959–60 *Sight and Sound*, Sir William Coldstream, Slade Professor of Fine Art, announced the appointment of a lecturer in film by University College London, and invited applications for two postgraduate studentships, to be housed at the Slade. The scheme was to be funded by industry bodies including ABPC, with assistance from the BFI. UCL's appointee was Thorold Dickinson, director of *Gaslight* (1940) and a central figure in international film culture since the 1930s.



Thorold Dickinson at the Slade (Courtesy the Slade Archive)

The studentships for 'research in some aspect of the Film' were formally advertised at the end of March. Durgnat was among the seven to be interviewed by a UCL–BFI panel in July. Dickinson was in New York, finishing his time as head of Film Services at the UN, but his two favoured candidates, Durgnat and Don Levy, came through.

The Slade itself being unprepared, teaching began at Dickinson's Chelsea home in the autumn of 1960. Durgnat's application promised versions of three of his future books – *Films and Feelings*, *A Mirror for England* and *Jean Renoir* – on top of his 'study of box-office factors'.[27] 'The idea', he recounted some decades later, 'was to give movie analysis some roots in industry and market pressure, public taste in particular, and it sounds easy, but the big problem was how to square it with all the prejudices built into high culture finessing.'[28] Or, as he put it closer to the time: 'Why do people find spiritual satisfaction in movies which according to film appreciators shouldn't work at all, but do?'[29] The hour of the professors had arrived. Durgnat was at last a student of 'film as a graphic art' – but still vitally a truant.

Notes

1. Durgnat, 'Film Goes to the Movies', *Film*, Winter 1964–5, p. 23.
2. Durgnat, 'Martin Scorsese: Between God and the Goodfellas', *Sight and Sound*, June 1995, p. 22.
3. Durgnat, 'Vote for Britain!' (2), *Films and Feelings*, May 1964, p. 12.
4. Durgnat, 'Towards Practical Criticism', *AFI Education Newsletter*, March–April 1981, p. 10.

5. F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1933), p. 1.
6. Durgnat, 'A Critique of Critics', *Granta*, 4 June 1955, pp. 35–6.
7. Durgnat, 'Fading Freedoms/Latent Fascisms & Hippie High Hopes: A Paranoid Guide' (2), *Oz*, no. 12, c. May 1968, n.p. The second wave was the satire boom; the third was the underground.
8. Durgnat, 'Loved One' (1), *Films and Filming*, February 1966, p. 20.
9. Ibid., p. 21.
10. Durgnat, 'The Mass Media: A Highbrow Illiteracy?', *Views*, no. 4, Spring 1964, p. 55.
11. Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p. 239.
12. Ibid., p. 242.
13. Ibid., p. 258.
14. Durgnat, 'The Mass Media', p. 55. Durgnat's conception of this tradition may have derived from another classic of the early New Left, Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society*, published in 1958.
15. Lawrence Alloway, '"Pop Art" Since 1949', *Listener*, 27 December 1962, p. 1085.
16. Lawrence Alloway, 'The Long Front of Culture', *Cambridge Opinion*, no. 17, c. December 1959, p. 25.
17. Durgnat, 'The Mass Media', p. 51. Elvis entered the British chart for the first time in May 1956.
18. Durgnat, rev. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, in *Films and Filming*, February 1969, p. 50.
19. Bob Mullan, *Mad to be Normal: Conversations With R. D. Laing* (London: Free Association Books, 1995), p. 148; p. 171.
20. Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), p. xi.
21. Durgnat, 'Culture Always is a Fog', *Rouge,* no. 8, 2006, n.p.
22. Pembroke College Archive: Letter from Raymond Durgnat to William Anthony ('Tony') Camps, Senior Tutor, Pembroke College, 21 January 1959.
23. Pembroke College Archive: Letter from R. D. Laing to Tony Camps, 2 April 1959.
24. Allan Beveridge, *Portrait of the Psychiatrist as a Young Man: The Early Writing and Work of R. D. Laing, 1927–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 283.
25. Pembroke College Archive: Reference by J. B. Broadbent, Assistant Tutor, King's College, Cambridge, 11 February 1959.
26. Mullan, *Mad to be Normal*, pp. 321–2.
27. UCL Records Office, AR 13 3(b).
28. Jeffrey Richards, *Thorold Dickinson: The Man and His Films* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 179.
29. Durgnat, 'Film Goes to the Movies', p. 26.

PART 1
AUTEUR WARS

INTRODUCTION

Just as Durgnat joined the Slade in the autumn of 1960, the season of the *Lady Chatterley* trial and the general release of *Psycho*, there began a revolution in transatlantic film culture. Earlier that year the student critics of *Oxford Opinion*, partly inspired by what they had seen of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, had mounted an assault on 'the standards and prejudices of this country's cinematic establishment'.[1] By this they meant principally the BFI, in particular 'the attitude', typified by 'Stand Up! Stand Up!', 'which exalts right-mindedness above form, style, and technique', and *Sight and Sound*'s consequent low valuation of such *Cahiers* favourites as Samuel Fuller. In response, Penelope Houston, posing the question 'Samuel Fuller or John Ford?', accused the young men of misusing art as 'something for kicks' and violence as a 'stimulant',[2] while Richard Roud charted *Cahiers*'s decline into 'crypto-fascist' nuttiness.[3]

Simultaneously, in the film society magazine *Film*, *Oxford Opinion*'s Ian Cameron reiterated his critique for a larger audience. BFI criticism, he wrote, 'could have been written entirely from the plot synopsis […] To judge a film on anything other than its style is to set up the critic's own views on matters outside the cinema against those of its maker. This is gross impertinence.'[4] The argument, which began even as the *Cahiers* critics' first films were appearing in London, spread into the Sunday papers and weeklies, and on to the radio. In December, the month Truffaut's *Shoot the Pianist* opened in the West End, Lawrence Alloway gave his qualified support to the Oxford critics on the Third Programme. Meanwhile John Osborne, with the French example in mind, lamented that such rows were 'substitutes for creativity' in Britain.[5]

The argument was also carried on abroad, in San Francisco's *Film Quarterly* and in the *New York Film Bulletin*, one of whose critics, Andrew Sarris, had recently made his debut for the *Village Voice* with a paean to *Psycho* and 'the wild young men of *Cahiers*'.[6] Cameron and his colleagues gained allies at home including Robin Wood, whose critical debut had been a piece about *Psycho* for *Cahiers* itself. They were also able to gain the material backing of Nicholas Luard, trust-funded business partner of Peter Cook in the Establishment Club, which opened in October 1961, and publisher from the following spring of the fledgling *Private Eye*. Published by Luard, edited and beautifully designed by Cameron, the pilot issue of *Movie*, with contributions from Sarris and Claude Chabrol as well as the British auteurists, was dated June 1962.

Durgnat wasn't in it. Nor had he written for *Sight and Sound* since 'Oriental Notebook' in 1954. Since April 1960 he had been a regular reviewer for a publication less exalted than either of these, *Films and Filming*. Part of the 'Seven Arts' group of similar titles – *Plays and Players*, *Dance and Dancers*, etc. – founded by the eccentric publisher Philip

Dosse, *Films and Filming* had a higher circulation – about 25,000 – than any other 'serious' film magazine, though its seriousness was not everywhere recognised. Perhaps not unrelatedly, 'it was the only mainstream, pre-decriminalisation, mass-circulation publication in Britain to remain successful while actively courting a queer market segment', most noticeably in the small ads.[7] Its editors Peter Baker and Robin Bean, who seem to have taken a broadly non-interventionist stance towards their writers' work, were endlessly generous with space, considerably less so with pay.

With his first feature article, 'A Look at Old and New Waves', Durgnat conveyed his mixed feelings about the official *nouvelle vague* by recalling the early 1950s, when a '"new wave" of the Occupation (Clouzot, Clément, Cayatte, Autant-Lara) suddenly belted out a batch of furious, brutally energetic protest films'.[8] In the month *Sight and Sound* took on *Cahiers* and *Oxford Opinion*, he published an appreciation of Claude Autant-Lara,[9] a director Truffaut had attacked in his essay 'A Certain Tendency in French Cinema' for 'his nonconformism, his "advanced" ideas and his fierce anti-clericalism'[10] – qualities Durgnat valued – and belittled *Cahiers*'s 'notorious adulation' of Hollywood craftsmen as 'a case of artists enthusing over talents convenient for their own development'.[11] Yet he praised *Shoot the Pianist* and called Truffaut 'the Cinema's key stylist'.[12]

Shortly before the first *Movie* appeared, Durgnat made his debut in another little magazine, *Motion*, which had been founded in 1961 by Ian Johnson, a student at the LSE. Lacking Luard's means, *Motion* used 'an old and sometimes battered typeface', Johnson recalls, but it had set a high standard with its first two issues and had a print-run of 5,000 against *Movie*'s 9,000, no mean achievement.[13] It served as British distributor for the *New York Film Bulletin*, and (in theory) vice versa. To its third issue Durgnat contributed 'The Apotheosis of Va-Va-Voom', an analysis of Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) – loved in Paris, all but ignored in London, and therefore ripe for auteurist revaluation. Instead he wrote of the commercial cinema as 'a "group art"', 'designed to appeal to, and to embody the beliefs, values, hopes and fears of a group, of a culture, rather than those of the artist himself'.[14]

The first *Movie*, conversely, included a 'talent histogram' that ranked directors from 'Great' to 'Talented' and downwards. Much of its second issue was given over to the 'Brilliant' Otto Preminger, much of its fifth to the 'Great' Howard Hawks. *Movie* did not last long as an almost-monthly – Nicholas Luard Associates went bankrupt in June 1963, soon after which the magazine went into hibernation – but its eleven issues during 1962–3 were a decisive factor in the auteurist turn in critical opinion. The Hawks issue, dated December 1962, coincided with a Hawks retrospective at the National Film Theatre, first mounted at New York's Museum of Modern Art by *Movie* and *NYFB* contributor Peter Bogdanovich. In the spring of 1963 came the first version of Sarris's *The American Cinema*, with its more enduring categories ('Less than Meets the Eye', 'Lightly Likeable', etc.), in a special issue of New York's *Film Culture*.

Durgnat was unimpressed. A year later he wrote that 'it became apparent with each succeeding issue of *Movie* that they worshipped their talent histogram with the same unswerving devotion that *Sight and Sound* lavished on their chosen few. However vicious some of the surface conflicts have been, criticism has stayed very much the same in terms of fundamentals.'[15] Some of these fundamentals would be called into question in the fourth *Motion*. The *Motion* 'Companion to Violence and Sadism in the Cinema', which Durgnat assembled with Johnson at Durgnat's family home in Chingford, was published simultaneously with Durgnat's first book, the 'Motion Monograph' *Nouvelle Vague*, in

The Newcomers (1964): 'a life of books and films and hats'

February 1963. The *Movie* critics, sharing at least some of Houston's assumptions, had taken umbrage at her 'something for kicks' line. The *Motion* 'Companion' reappropriated it.

Wasn't art, in a manner of speaking, for kicks? To deny the possibility was to cut away art's roots in ritual. Durgnat had defended screen violence in his maiden *Sight and Sound* article, which began: 'Because violence is a leading characteristic of the postwar world, it is reflected in a good deal of contemporary art'.[16] 'An essential part of films like *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom*', he had argued in his first *Films and Filming* series, 'Erotism in Cinema', in 1961, 'is that the whole pattern of guilt, terror, suspicion, pity, hope-against-hope and so on, is brought into play. […] One would completely misunderstand the way *Psycho* orchestrates the audience's feelings if one tried to make a distinction between the "sexual" elements and the others.'[17] (Here, presumably, were the 'Freudian components' of Durgnat's Slade thesis at which Thorold Dickinson 'bristled'.)[18]

The argument was put with more force and sarcasm in *Motion*'s opening pages, after a series of citations that juxtaposed Houston's remarks with gobbets from Freud and Artaud. Taking its cover image from Mario Bava's banned *Black Sunday* (aka *The Mask of the Demon*, 1960), the 'Companion' was an A–Z – not a histogram, nor a pantheon – of the disreputable, with entries on science-fiction, monster movies and 'Dentures, Death by'. Johnson provided a seminal piece on *Peeping Tom*, almost universally reviled on its release in 1960 and a shared passion of the two editors, while Durgnat's contributions included a note on the recently released *Dr. No*. Dated for the month before the release of the Beatles' first LP and the outbreak of the Profumo scandal, it was, according to Johnson, 'our best-selling issue, especially in Soho'.[19]

On 30 April, Durgnat promoted the 'Companion' with an 'evening on Violence in the Cinema' at the ICA, titled 'The Art of Scaring You to Death'. Later, the magazine made a cameo appearance in John Boorman's *The Newcomers*, a television documentary about a young couple living in Bristol, broadcast in the spring of 1964 on the newly launched BBC 2. The 'Companion' is shown in a montage sequence introducing the series's subjects, Alison and Anthony Smith, in the first episode. According to Anthony, seen reading it, the magazine was in fact 'specially planted' by Boorman 'to flesh out the cinéaste image of us that he wanted. *The Newcomers* was billed as a documentary but the BBC later allowed that it would be more accurately described as "television's first novel".'[20] The voiceover accompanying the sequence defines a generation – that of *Motion*'s contributors and readers, perhaps – as much as a couple:

> the first Welfare State people, succoured on free school milk and weaned on social security. They're both successes of the system. They passed eleven-plus, won scholarships to university, received grants, allowances, and bursaries. […] Godless, uninhibited, people without ties […] living the all-night talking life, a life of books and films and hats and time-consuming games: a long quest for the good life.

Motion's next, and last, issue, given the title 'Puritans Anonymous', would shape the subsequent course of Durgnat's career. Its centrepiece, 'Standing Up For Jesus', is an extended Jimmy Porter rant against Arnold, Leavis, Hoggart, grammar schools, Eng. Lit., the New Left, Free Cinema and, above all, *Sight and Sound*, subsumed together under the general heading of 'puritanism'. It is also, as this list suggests, an agonised reckoning with Durgnat's own background.

Decades later, writing about René Clément's 'ancienne vague' *Gervaise* (1956), Durgnat observed that, despite its fame, Truffaut's 'strange, challenging diatribe' 'A Certain Tendency', whose targets included *Gervaise*'s screenwriters, 'was not reprinted in his book *The Films in My Life*'.[21] Of his own diatribe, which likewise 'involves some central questions', he told interviewers that 'I'd let it be reprinted, but given footnotes and frameworks around it.'[22] 'Puritans Anonymous' was the last *Motion* for the usual reasons, 'shortage of both money and time', rather than any backlash, but it did lead to Durgnat's exclusion from the most powerful institution in British film culture, the BFI – and not only Durgnat's.[23] In 1977 Dickinson wrote to his former student that Houston had 'barred you and the Slade – and me for that matter – from Sight & Sound'.[24]

Durgnat's formal studies at the Slade had ended in mid-1961, but his connection with Dickinson's department, whose activities included screening series and seminars, continued through the decade. In early 1965, Dickinson told an interviewer that Durgnat 'is turning out what is in fact a thesis of his work here. He was here from '60 to '61 and in '65 all these masses of notes had been boiled down to this statement about cinema which is running as a serial and it's very interesting reading.'[25] It is probable that 'Erotism in Cinema' derived from the same source, but the first instalment of what was billed as 'a series of articles on style in film-making', based on the Slade thesis, had appeared in the December 1964 *Films and Filming*.[26] Readers were advised that it was 'designed to raise your temper to bursting point'.

The penultimate part, 'Who Really Makes the Movies?', takes on the auteur theory. Expanding on 'The Apotheosis of Va-Va-Voom', it reveals Durgnat's affinities with the similarly sceptical Alloway, who had written in *Movie* that 'To consider movies primarily as unique products of single controlling individuals to the same extent that poems and paintings can be so considered has vitiated a great deal of ambitious film criticism.'[27] Gently chiding his hosts, Alloway had gone on to recommend that the critic discover 'to what extent themes and concepts present in them can be found in movies by other, and for this purpose, less distinguished, directors'.[28] Durgnat's essay, consciously or coincidentally, takes up what Alloway called 'the necessity for considering movies in groups not necessarily dependent upon directors'.[29]

It helped that Durgnat did not consider many of the auteurists' chosen few very distinguished. Hitchcock, the only director other than Hawks whom *Movie* rated 'Great', was a partial exception. In the October 1960 *Films and Filming* Durgnat had written that '*Shadow of a Doubt* was the last Hitchcock film which was not a good joke (or tedious, like *I Confess* and *The Wrong Man*)', which was more or less the *Sequence*–*Sight and Sound* position; but this is likely to have been before he saw *Psycho*, which very quickly became a touchstone film, and forty years later the subject of his last book.[30] 'Cat and Mouse Games', the concluding part of his final *Films and Filming* series 'The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock', published in 1970, did not appear in the book of that title four years later, perhaps because of its concentrated ambivalence.

The last *Motion* had promised a future issue on 'the British cinema and the British character'; six months later, in the spring of 1964, Durgnat began a series on the same theme

for *Films and Filming*.[31] The avowed purpose of 'Vote for Britain!', published on the eve of the General Election that ended thirteen years of Conservative rule, was 'to trace some of the less obvious ways in which British films reflect ideological controversy'.[32] More specifically, it set out to explore through popular British cinema the question why, despite the post-war Labour government, the Welfare State and the end of Empire, 'old ways, old institutions, miraculously held good; every year we heard of a balance-of-payments crisis and every year we were a little more affluent; in 1945 the working-classes had half a mind to "soak the rich," by 1953 "they" were "ours" again'.[33]

The approach owed something to Siegfried Kracauer's 1947 classic *From Caligari to Hitler*, the difference being that most of Durgnat's examples were run-of-the-mill, barely remembered. Method and matter could hardly have been less fashionable. The *Movie* critic V. F. Perkins had condemned Kracauer's book in the *Oxford Opinion* on the grounds that 'it neglects the aesthetics of the cinema in favour of politics and sociology'.[34] And *Movie*'s first issue began with an editorial statement on 'The British Cinema' which contained the Truffautian declaration that 'the British cinema is as dead as before. Perhaps it was never alive.'[35] 'Vote for Britain!' did indeed neglect the aesthetics of the cinema; but one of its subjects, rated merely 'Competent or ambitious' in *Movie*'s histogram, was considered by Durgnat to be a true auteur: Michael Powell.

Despite Durgnat's harsh words about auteurism, there were ties between *Motion* and *Movie*. Wood had contributed a close reading of Joseph Losey's *The Criminal* (1960) to the 'Companion' – Losey being the one 'British' director whom *Movie* rated as 'Brilliant' – and Charles Barr and Gavin Millar, who formed the second cohort at the Slade in 1961–2, had written for both magazines. Thus *Movie*, which had come back for what turned out to be three issues in 1965, published 'Michael Powell' in the autumn number, over the pseudonym O. O. Green. As Perkins has recalled, it was allowed in 'because it was going against the critical consensus and anything that was intelligently argued, well written and went against the critical consensus was grist to our mill'.[36]

That consensus was formidably dense. By writing about Powell and Pressburger, Durgnat was by no means bringing forgotten figures into the auteurist light: their films were kept in circulation in commercial cinemas long after release. *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) was revived in Cambridge on three separate occasions in 1956–7, while *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) and *The Red Shoes* (1948) were both shown there at least once in the same year. But within elite film culture antipathy to the Archers was a common denominator uniting otherwise opposed or historically distinct critical schools.

Movie's hostility to British cinema and the press outcry over *Peeping Tom* only bolstered what was already an orthodoxy. Lindsay Anderson had anathematised the Archers in *Sequence*; and those nameless critics to whom Durgnat credits Powell's reputation as a 'technician's director' are likely to have included Richard Winnington, who called the *Red Shoes* ballet 'an essay in complicated camera trickery for its own sake'.[37] As Durgnat wrote in 1967, 'from the mid-'30s until the mid-'50s, film criticism in English was dominated by writers who were strongly influenced by, or actively engaged in, the British documentary tradition'.[38] This domination was in turn only the national aspect of 'the dogmatic realism which ravaged film criticism from Grierson until Bazin', and indeed Kracauer.[39]

Durgnat's description of Powell as 'an upholder, through its lean years, of the Méliès tradition' is an allusion to Kracauer's *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, published in 1960, in which Kracauer argued that 'film is essentially an extension of photography and therefore shares with this medium a marked affinity with the visible world

around us'.[40] Kracauer thus regarded Méliès, whose 'main contribution to the cinema lay in substituting staged illusion for unstaged reality' as aesthetically illegitimate.[41] Dismissing *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951) as 'cinema estranged from itself', he wrote that Powell and Pressburger 'retrogress from all that is fresh in Lumière to Méliès's theatrical *féeries*'.[42] Meanwhile André Bazin, in his 1958 essay 'The Evolution of Film Language', wrote of the eclipse of 'plastic expressionism' in the sound era.[43]

The third part of 'Vote for Britain!' was a savage attack on the Grierson school, and in his thesis, as we shall see in more detail, Durgnat sought to debunk the theoretical underpinnings of Kracauer and Bazin in order to reclaim film as a graphic art. In the second part, published in the same year as the Powell piece, he wrote that 'while the old-fashioned film criticism is still permeated with the assumption that the cinema is at its "best" when it records "real life", the cinema in fact accommodates fantasies and fairytales of every kind and style', naming Powell's *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940), the first film he could remember seeing, as an example.[44] Realism, Durgnat quoted G. W. Pabst as saying, 'is a means, not end'; a means to 'showing, surely, something deeper than the surface of life', something 'invisible to the camera-eye'.

Nonetheless, the strength of the consensus, and the hold it exerted over Durgnat, is suggested by his relative hesitancy, especially over the *Red Shoes* ballet, which he would in later and more confident years describe as '*the* peak of cinema'.[45]

The consensus against the Archers was, moreover, political as well as aesthetic, again dividing Durgnat's sympathies. As he observed in the first part of 'Vote for Britain!', *A Matter of Life and Death* 'makes perennial Conservative criticisms of the Welfare State', and 'the imagery is always High Tory […] – another form of romanticism, which English audiences very much enjoy even when they only half-believe it'.[46] Powell and Pressburger had, as Durgnat made clear many years later, 'ready access to government circles'; *The Battle of the River Plate* (1956), for example, had its Royal Command Performance just as the Suez emergency began.[47] *The Queen's Guards* (1961), in which Suez was symbolically avenged, went 'too far for public taste in asserting the gentlemanly tradition', too far also for Durgnat.[48]

In another mood, however, just as Jimmy Porter secretly admired his Blimpish father-in-law Colonel Redfern, so Durgnat was perversely attracted by Powell's pre-Suez, pre-1945, even pre-1914 outlook, which had little in common with modern conservatism. ('You're hurt because everything is changed,' Alison Porter tells her father in Osborne's play. 'Jimmy is hurt because everything is the same.') 'One of the things to be trumpeted in the favour of the Establishment, God bless its heraldic little socks,' Durgnat wrote in his 'Companion' entry on *Dr. No*, 'is that it maintains a healthy anarchic vigour, a proper admiration for guts, grit and attack as virtues in themselves, against the heavy moralizing drizzle that has mildewed English "committed" criticism from the foundations up,' words which may help explain his belief that Powell was 'the only director' equipped to film Bond as Ian Fleming had imagined him.[49]

The relationship which Durgnat proposes in his last sentence between Powell and various directors of the *nouvelle vague*, though more mysterious at first glance, is perhaps more significant still. Viewed through this international lens, Powell is seen to have presaged what Durgnat described in his thesis as the push of the 'pendulum of style slowly back from the "realistic" to the "expressionistic"', a process which was in full swing when he published it, and which he found more exciting by far than the exhumation of the Hollywood past.[50]

1.1 STANDING UP FOR JESUS

The root cause of the critical condition of English film criticism is the old triple threat. Matthew Arnold outflanked the philistines by selling culture to the agnostic puritans as something next to cleanliness but more deeply interfused that rolls through all things. Since then a high moral purpose has become the homegrown equivalent of the deep symbolical meaning beloved of our Teutonic cousins; and D. H. Lawrence joins the Puritans' Committee of 100, along with John Calvin, John Knox, William Prynne and other founder-members of the Lady Chatterley fan-club. The second stab-in-the-back comes from the literature courses at university where 18-year-olds are required to turn out weekly essays in each of which they solemnly "evaluate" Wordsworth, Milton, Webster, etc., and often from the vantage point of, society hopes, total virginity where sex, violence, death and even barrack-room camaraderie are concerned, discuss whether the "texture" of Fielding, Hardy or Baudelaire "reproduces the authentic density of lived experience". Not surprisingly the victims, who also have exams to worry about, study the critics and skim the texts, which are apt to be confusing. Nor are the disciplines of criticism furthered by the more dogmatic Leav(is)ites who by confusing democratic with demotic imagine that all culture is for all and that you don't need background knowledge to understand Shakespeare, Dante or "Finnegans Wake". All it needs is the grandiose claim to be "objective" in one's aesthetic responses for a total collapse of criticism into a collection of schools which not only can't communicate, but can't even disagree without jeering.

The last twist of the knife is that as the Anglo-Saxon culture puritan braces himself against the temptation to relax in the opium-dens of light entertainment, he treats all entertainers and artists as putative drug-peddlers whose work has to be carefully scrutinised before it may be allowed to communicate. In fact, the more earnest a critic is, the more incapable he tends to become of seeing a moral or a meaning unless it's so crashingly simple that any artist above the level of hack would have thrown it away before he began. Hence English arty criticism noodles endlessly round foredoomed attempts to equate "good" style with "true" (i.e., good) attitudes to life and bad with bad. And, my word, there's plenty of bad – what that Satan gets up to! he's got that entertainment industry sewn up tight! Who but Screwtape could have inspired the virtuous Anglo-Saxon working man to prefer entertainment to high seriousness, and pushpin to poetry.

The Absent Minded Professor

Deplorable as this preference may be, it's hardly as deplorable as the gulf which these cultural assumptions themselves created between the lowbrow public and the university-educated art world and artists. It's hardly as deplorable as the assumption that no man of good taste would prefer the joie-de-vivre implicit in B.B.'s b and bs to hearkening unto the Messianic wailing and moaning of T-for-Tiresias S. Eliot, O. M. And it's hardly as deplorable as the solemn charlatanry of the Hoggartites, who purport to survey the mass media and whine for censorship without a good word for Jerry Lewis, Bugs Bunny, "Mad", "Galaxy", Humph, Thelonious Monk, Bootsie and Snudge, singers like Eartha Kitt, Edith Piaf, Cleo Laine, songs like "September in the Rain" or "Tell Laura I Love Her", etc., and, to put it mildly, etc.

In a word the present generation of British left-wing intellectuals have never so much as dreamed of founding their cultural attitudes on left-wing attitudes, but have fallen hook, line and sinker for the petit bourgeois notions picked up in the sixth forms of grammar schools whose main purpose is still to segregate the white collar workers of tomorrow

from those rough, swearing working-classes; notions fatally reinforced by thoughtless theories of "objectivity" popular at university, where adolescence inevitably seeks something which will combine the certainties of both science and religion while necessitating no discipline of one's own whims and prejudices.

.... And Sons of Flubber

To this tradition the reigning house at Dean St. is heir. That the best of intentions, and a sincere belief that their personal responses were the absolute cat's whiskers, go with it we do not deny, indeed, we are anxious to stress, nor are these attitudes peculiar to "Sight and Sound". Only in the writing of Peter John Dyer did they become so marked as to be unpleasant. Apparently incapable of using critical techniques so as to clarify, deepen, explore a film's meaning, he seemed, and seems, totally unaware that an artist is something more than an examinee being given a credit, a passmark or a whigging. When in one notorious article he applied the terms "exhibitionism", "obsessions", "consulting-room horrors", "sexual fatality" to films by Bergman, Chabrol, Truffaut, Bolognini and Visconti, it became apparent that his main concern was to punish an artist for portraying (or having any sympathy for) the sort of weakness which (a) he, P.J.D., felt he was himself far above, and (b) which wasn't freely confessed in Surbitonian chit-chat. Had he said "These films upset me" or "I don't like these films" or "We don't wish to know that" or even "My experience of experience of rape, murder, sexual perversity and consulting-room horrors is so wide that I know these films don't show what really goes on" we could have respected him, but his own delicate prudery consorts strangely with the trenchancy of his vocabulary. Anyway, as Peter John Dyer said of Ingmar Bergman, "As Ernest Bevin said of George Lansbury, "He's been a martyr carting his own faggots around quite long enough. It's time someone obliged with a match."" When a match was applied, in the pages of "Film", Mr. Dyer went up with a whoosh.

The Same Old New Staggerers

But there is more than one strand of cultural tradition involved in the evolution of the Dean St. clique. Ever since the oft-lamented departure of Gavin Lambert, "Sight and Sound" has been a sort of pushmi-pullyou, with the editorial office straining to a sort of middle-of-the-road Lib-Lab culture, and the Red Flaggers tugging it towards notions of commitment in the narrowest and most puerile sense. Between 1955 and 1960 the paper had talked itself into misinterpreting and dismissing English and American films with something of the self-defeating bigotry which had characterized "L'Ecran Francais" in its Stalinist days. There were exceptions, of course: musicals – which can be enjoyed without having to sort out one's ideas (even here it was following a politique des auteurs laid down in the Gavin Lambert days – it missed "Give A Girl A Break" because it was directed by Donen who according to its theories was only Gene Kelly's sidekick). Anything by John Ford, even "Mogambo" with its difficult-to-obtain shots of gorillas was – well; one can't say that "The Wings of Eagles" is NOT a glorification of American militarism but then, there is something so healthy about all those open-air Westerns, isn't there? There's no connection, of course, between the individualism, the expansionism, the violence of the old-fashioned, pre-"Broken Arrow" Western and brinkmanship? no connection, in the American mind, between the bugles-and-flag ethos of the U.S. Cavalry and the U.S. Marines? or to come down to more recent times, no significance in the fact that John Ford lent his old Commie-baiting pal John Wayne a hand in cutting "The Alamo", where the Mexicans are undoubtedly the Communists and maybe the massacre is nuclear war? I'm not saying John Ford

is a Fascist, I'm not saying he never made "The Grapes of Wrath" (21 years ago), I'm saying he's an American patriot and hardly anti-militarist. So why were S & S so upset over the spate of war films during the '50s? if John Ford can make "They Were Expendable", can't we all? To be "against" war films as such is fatuous unless you are also against (a) fighting Nazism and (b) fighting back in Korea. But the general public has never wanted war films which attributed some courage and dignity to the sacrifices which they made.

The first article I ever cut out for my scrapbook, in 1938, at the tender age of 5, was "Will the Bomber Always Get Through?" By the age of 8 I was sleeping through the Blitz, at the age of 12 the German atrocity stories were in full flood and Vansittart was saying "Geld the lot", at about 13ish I was being V-I'd and V-2'd, at the sophisticated age of 14 I saw the Belsen shots in "The True Glory" (shown free and compulsory in schools), and the news of the first atomic bomb gave this avid s-f fan an eerie frisson. At 20 I was bayoneting straw men and enjoying the refined moral influence of the barrack-room (which was hardly coarser than that of at least 3 of the schools I'd been to). So exactly how is the X certificate coarsening my sensibilities?

The truth is that there is no logic at all, either aesthetic or Socialist, in the "Sight and Sound" horror at war films. It's sheer Lansburyism, the pacifistic reflexes of middle-class "refinement", like its perpetual obeisance to censorship. What masquerades as vaguely leftish goodness is really middle-class fear of the brutal and licentious proletariat. Only today there is a still more specific subsection – working-class youth.

The examples of committed criticism vouchsafed us in S & S (and for that matter "Definition") were depressing in the extreme. Lindsay Anderson sang a revivalist hymn, "Stand up, stand up for Jesus, Ye soldiers of the cross, Lift high his royal banner, It may not suffer loss," and sang it in close harmony with the Sons of the U.S. Cavalry.

One only wishes he hadn't also aspired to be the Sankey and Moody of film criticism, and it's not surprising that he got his ideological wires crossed in every one of his Free Cinema films which has any ideological significance. When at a rally of the Joint Council for Education Through Art a friend of mine rose and suggested that on the evidence of "O Dreamland" Mr. Anderson hated and despised the workers there was a good solid round of applause from the hall – in which I didn't join, but which I understood. As for "Every Day Except Christmas", Captain Anderson paints so glowing a picture of the jolly, hardworking British squaddie, always grumbling and rough with his tongue, but loyal at heart, so loyal that as he drives his lorry down the rolling English road he switches on the radio to listen to the Epilogue and God Save the King (or did we have a Queen already?), then, without a doubt, the Conservative government, the capitalist system and Fords of Dagenham, whose contented employees are currently bleeding them to death, have done the proletariat proud. All it needed was the Blessing of the Trucks by Father Karl Malden. Lindsay Anderson has produced at least one classic, "Thursday's Children", his Aldermaston film is deeply moving and we have a high opinion of "This Sporting Life". If the New Left hadn't been so sanctimonious about Free Cinema already we'd write an article in its praise. But while on the subject of Free Cinema, let's face it, "Nice Time" with its distaste for all those nasty X-certificate films was about as left-wing as a pep talk by Lord Hailsham. Even when Free Cinema got down to direct propaganda it could do so only by discreetly twisting social realities. "We Are the Dear Little Lambeth Boys" might have been subtitled "I Was A Teen-Age Little Lord Fauntleroy". At least it has like "Momma Don't Allow" the elementary merit of spoofing the toffs, but even Norman Wisdom films do that, and in any case MDA, while a fair enough picture of the "Fishmonger's Arms", isn't typical of the wider jazz movement, which was

pushed just as hard by grammar school boys, as by working-class youth, who, on the whole, preferred and still prefer those trashy pops (and don't come the old Acker with us, mate). I quite admit that it was a tour de force to get those earthy workers' faces on the screen, more like themselves than they ever had been in those Grierson Instructionals, and that Free Cinema prepared Messrs. Reisz, Richardson et al. for the big break which they seized with both hands and of which they made splendid use. I still don't want to see those Free Cinema films unless I have to, and it's not because they're badly made but because I can see how neatly the directors have squared them with middle-class prejudices.

By and large, committed critics show very little interest in how accurately the films they criticize reflect society. They refer films to their own broad slogans, not to the realities which the films purport to reveal. Lindsay Anderson goes haring away after so idiosyncratic an interpretation of "On the Waterfront" that the next issue of S & S abounded in counter-interpretations (well, three, anyway); and one suspects that Mr. Anderson under the guise of attacking the last reel is really attacking the last reel but one in which Terry alias Elia turns stoolie and squeals to a certain Congressional Committee. His main criticism of the film is that if it had been truly Socialist it would have shown the dockers banding together to right their wrongs. But one of the disturbing features of the New York waterfront racket was the extent to which the men connived or were cowed into conniving with the union's attempt to keep the racketeers in power; in fact (after the film was finished) despite the efforts of an uncorrupt union, **and** of the government, **and** of the press, the men voted the corrupt officials back into power, where they remain. The points of detail which outraged Mr. Anderson were quite correct: there was not just **one** Mr. Big but many of them (the shipping companies), a Catholic priest did take a conspicuous part in exposing the racketeers. I suspect, though I don't know, that why Terry had to turn to the government was that if his fellow-workers had turned out to be noble savages and righted their wrongs for themselves, the film might have been seen by American audiences as yet another proof that there's never any need for government interference in industry. Terry has to face Friendly afterwards to prove to the dockers that he still is, and acted as, one of them; his sacrifice will, it is hoped, inspire them to become conscious of themselves as a class, to the solidarity which they haven't got. The film is not a study in Fascist leadership, but in martyrology – just like "Earth". Johnny is the audience-identification figure: "this is what **you** must do, you must stand up for Jesus". Why is the great gate so forbidding at the end? Because Kazan wants to remind us that the bosses are no more the dockers' friends than Johnny Friendly is, that work isn't always such fun as it is in "Every Day Except Christmas".

Undoubtedly there's a romantic streak in the film; I maintain there is a romantic streak in Mr. Anderson, but that wouldn't justify my calling him Fascist, disgustingly cynical, or even, really, deviationist. It would incidentally have been nice if someone on S & S had noticed that "Wild River" has an open justification of "Socialistic" planning.

Why do we bring up so old a criticism? Because examples of "social" criticism by "committed" critics have been so few and far between, and because this particular article established the New Left's tradition of denouncing films, not by reference to their actual social accuracies or inaccuracies, but by their relation to a set of dogmatic slogans about what left-wing orthodoxy was. To be sure, S & S ran an effort vaguely focusing on, yes, of course, what else is there, The Youth of Today, with its alarming Method acting, its evil motorcycling and rock 'n' roll, which Nannie Don't Allow.*

* To this Sunday School atmosphere, Robert Vas, now departed, brought a welcome touch of reality.

Jimmy Porter at the pictures: *Look Back in Anger* (1959)

If In Doubt Sloganise

Even more depressing, though, is one's suspicion that even when our "committed" critics do have a direct acquaintance with social reality they sloganise everything into a caricature of itself. "Definition" ran a long article asking itself whether Flaherty wasn't a bit of a romantic really (no prizes offered for the correct answer) and characteristically it didn't do so by comparing (say) "Nanook of the North" with how Eskimos live, or "Moana" with how South Sea tribes live, but by comparison with theories elastic (i.e. vague) enough to cover all these forms of social organisation. Even more typical, alas, was an article on "Look Back In Anger", where Stuart Hall argued that "the film is **not** about the sex-and-love life of the James T. Porters, and the occasions when Jimmy threatens to bash Alison over the head far outweigh and outnumber the tight clinches"; and implied that the publicity still which implied that was a typical film industry lie. But the simplest spectator knows enough about Strindberg-type love-hate to resolve this ludicrous dichotomy between bashing and clinching – or they wouldn't be able to make head nor tail of David O's "Duel in the Sun". "The sexual and human relationship between Jimmy and Alison is a metaphor for the social relationship between Jimmy and the world." By "world " Mr. Hall presumably means the upper-middle-class ethos, which must of course have weighed pretty heavily on Jimmy down in the market-place sweet-stall. But if we rule out the love-story, what are the social significances of Helena and Cliff? what class significance can Mr. Hall find for such little details as the fact that Jimmy is more contented with Helena than with Alison but loves Alison more than Helena? Of course the film is about class and of course Mr. Hall is justified in reacting when critics try to dismiss a play or film because they don't like its protagonists (a fault from which left-wing criticism is hardly immune). But Mr. Hall seems to grudge the film its non-political meanings. The still which said "Look Back In Anger" was a love story was absolutely right. One reason why "Look Back In Anger" was the best English film since goodness knows when (and maybe still is, though we don't claim to have seen every English film made since goodness knows when – we mean this like other critics decide on the Ten Best Films Of All Time), is because it frankly admits that Porter is his own co-executioner (with society) and that one of the obstacles to his finding a cause to fight for is the closed-shop insularity of the English working-classes. It is because the film has all sorts of themes, political, social, emotional, that it is so splendid and true.

Not that it hasn't a snide defeatist streak – Alison's miscarriage brings it within the atmosphere of gynaecological moralising accepted by Schlesinger and quietly left ambiguous by Reisz – while like Celia Johnson and Alan Bates our old friend Mr. Porter sees the moral light on a railway station, which is nothing to do with nationalisation (Enter Dr. Beeching, pursued by a diesel). It's a thousand pities that since "The Entertainer" Osborne himself has capitulated to the left-wing moralists and produced a thin and sour strip-cartoon ("Paul Slickey") and a thin and solemn one ("Luther"), as if bidding for the title of the neurasthenics' Al Capp (The second play does have the merit of a timid return to ethical complexity; it goes without saying that we like "Under Plain Cover" better than the B feature). But the reader can see why we have looped our way from criticism criticism into film criticism. The "chastening" of all our working-class heroes by the desire for affluence (Heather Sears, Shirley Anne Field), by the equation of working-class wisdom with fundamentalist moralising ("Right's right and wrong's wrong and all this tones-of-grey nonsense is self-indulgence" as the Peggy Mount surrogate booms in "A Kind of Loving"), and by a private stoicism and loyalty (Jimmy Porter) – all this is the artists' *honest* acknowledgement of the bankruptcy of Socialist-puritan fundamentalism in our period when the working-class is being (relatively) emancipated. The New Left's sudden recrudescence of hymn-singing, its desperate attempts to reduce Osborne's play to the pious simplicities of a Wayside Pulpit are just what they seem; a regressive revivalism.

For the same reason committed critics relish the flags and bugles of a Ford picture while shuddering at the truly contemporary bitterness of "Run of the Arrow". It is the committed critics who are unable to grasp that Ray's films are worth noticing carefully not only because of their plastic language but because of their concern with man in society ("Rebel Without A Cause", "The Savage Innocents"). Just because of their intellectual fundamentalism they are constantly attacking, despising, ignoring film-makers who in some ways at least are on their own side (e.g. 'On the Waterfront', 'Kiss Me Deadly', 'La Loi', 'On the Beach', 'En Cas de Malheur', 'Notte Brava', all Losey's British films until 'The Criminal').

The only way one can tackle the issue of commitment, or even clarify the disagreements, is by starting from the ground up, e.g. what is culture for anyway? has it a moral duty to be propaganda, or is it highbrow beer-and-skittles, or is it anti-propaganda in the name of that refractory thing, human nature, or what, or all four together or at different times, and if so, when is it which? Maybe Socialists should make a point of seeing films which view the world through Tory eyes? maybe their opponents have some useful things to teach them? Why shouldn't Socialists be interested in, and sympathetic to, Tory or Fascist or Buddhist or Eskimo artworks for the same reasons that we hope Catholics are interested in Protestant films or modern democrats in Elizabethan drama or the Tories in what we think? Why shouldn't Socialists say to one another or to the world at large, "Do go and see "Triumph of the Will" again and again and again, you've never seen such a persuasive account of Fascist idealism, now at last we can really feel Fascism from the inside?" Ergo, "Triumph of the Will" is a great film – whether your interest in it is one of "Quicquid agunt homines", of "There, but for the grace of God, go I" or of psychological espionage or self-enlightenment. There is our attitude, we may be wrong, but instead of discussing issues S & S promptly took refuge in a smokescreen of insults ("cultural gauleiters") and Bloomsbury woolliness. "The governing characteristic of English critical writing seems to be its empiricism, its innate distrust of theory and reluctance to draw dividing lines." But the governing characteristic of Dean St. critical writing is that it never sees the necessity of theorising because it hasn't yet grasped that attitudes other than its own merit the courtesy of consideration.