
FILM

The Habit of Censorship

"We're Paid to Have Dirty Minds" — By DEREK HILL

"If there is a meaning, it is doubtless objectionable. . . ."

"The cinema needs continued repression of controversy in order to stave off disaster. . . ."

"People able to understand foreign languages are not likely to be harmed."

"Social comment and entertainment don't mix. . . ."

"WE WERE WRONG," the Secretary of the British Board of Film Censors publicly admitted last year, and granted a certificate to *Torero*, a Mexican bull-fighting film which even in a cut condition had been refused only a year earlier. *Expresso Bongo* was granted an A-certificate without cuts, despite its strip-tease club nudes. The Board passed *The Savage Eye* with exceptionally minor cuts (the mock orgasm of a strip-tease dancer, a glimpse of a homosexual party). *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, which not long ago would have lost several shots, was given an X-certificate without forfeiting a frame. During the year the Board tentatively suggested that those specialist cinemas which had been notably discreet in their exploitation of foreign films might soon be allowed to present such films without any cuts at all—which confirms that the case for control over advertisements on public display is far stronger than the case for censorship of films which people have deliberately chosen to visit.

But these signs of apparent progressiveness have failed to satisfy the seven hundred local authorities who theoretically control film censorship in this country. The County Councils Association and the Association of Municipal Corporations are hoping for a conference between local licensing representatives and the British Board of Film Censors to discuss the frequency with which the Board's decisions are being amended all over the country. A few local authorities' rulings show some wariness of the Board's much-publicised "new leniency;" but the majority indicate that its decisions are still considered too rigorous.

One distribution company which has suffered

heavy cutting of its Continental imports has announced the formation of a chain of cinema clubs, which by operating on a membership basis will be able to present films which have not been submitted to the Board. The company claims that a "working relationship" with the Board is envisaged, and that the clubs will not exploit their freedom from censorship; but the thousands of applications which have been received suggest that some of the public, at least, anticipate something very different.

FIFTY YEARS OF FILM CENSORSHIP have only further entangled the clumsy knitting which hides the Board's dubious form. The Cinematograph Act of 1909, "an act to make better provision for securing safety," gave local authorities the power of issuing licences to cinemas within their province. Two years later the High Court held that the wide terms employed in the Act enabled local authorities to impose any reasonable conditions in granting licences, including control over the films shown.

The fascination of censoring other people's entertainment proved irresistible to the national temperament. Within a year films were being arbitrarily banned by many of the seven hundred newly-authorised censorship boards, each of which seemed to react differently to each production brought to its notice. The industry was appalled at what was happening, and the Government, still somewhat startled at the growth of the new medium, began to show an interest in the methods of control exercised. Early in 1912 the Home Secretary intimated that he would be pleased to learn the trade's views of the most effective means of supervision. A trade deputation promptly appealed for a national system of censorship by the Home Office, but was advised that special legislation would be required and that Government censorship might not be in the public interest. They were referred to the London County Council, which refused to help on the grounds that official censorship was unnecessary.

As neither the Government nor the principal local authority would accept the responsibility, the industry set up its own "British Board of Film Censors" whose duty, in the words of its first Secretary, was "to induce confidence in the minds of the local authorities and of those who have in their charge the moral welfare of the community generally." Hence the choice of G. A. Redfern, who had just retired after twenty years as a play-reader in the Lord Chamberlain's office, as the Board's first President. Neither President nor examiners were to have any connection with the film industry, though the Board was to be financed with fees paid by the distributors for each film they submitted. Submission was, and in theory still is, voluntary.

By the end of 1913 (the Board's first year of operation), fifty local authorities had decided to pass on their censorship responsibilities by making it a condition of the licences issued to cinema managers that they showed only films granted a certificate by the Board. By 1921 almost every local authority had followed suit, but during that year a court held that "the licensing committee have no power to create an absolute body from which no right of appeal exists." The hint was taken, and in 1924 a provision that committees reserved the right to review the Board's decisions was accepted.

The local authorities and the Board both had reason to feel pleased with this ruling. The licensing committees were absolved from the necessity of seeing every film to be shown in their district but retained the right to reverse any Board decision with which they disagreed; while the Board, still an unofficial body, could now indulge in censorship with the foolproof excuse, still trotted out to-day, that in the last resort it is not responsible for its own actions.

BOTH groups have lived up to their irresponsibilities ever since. In 1929 a report by a Special Committee of the L.C.C. declared that an official, independent censorship system for the whole country, and for all classes of films was urgently needed, but the situation thirty years later remains exactly the same, as the anticipated conference between local authorities and the Board testifies. The years have seen a number of local diversions, most notably a self-styled Board of Censors appointed by Beckenham in 1932 to control every film show in the area. It operated with such stunning imbecility that within six months Beckenham's cinemas were desperate and local business had been so affected that traders were refusing to pay their rates. The Board expired after a spectacular nine months' existence.

The industry and the Government have each given a lick of paint to the wobbly structure which supports the British Board of Film

Censors and may have slightly strengthened the framework and even have given it a thin legal gloss. In 1933 the Kine Renters Society required its members to enter into individual agreements to rent out only films which had received certificates from the Board. So many local authorities (then as now) had been reversing the Board's decisions that the trade feared the Board might be abolished and replaced with an organisation which, owing neither birth nor finance to the industry, might well prove more hostile.

The Cinematograph Act of 1952 extended the provisions of the 1909 Act—which had applied only to licensed premises showing inflammable films—to "all cinematograph exhibitions;" and film societies and the like which had been immune from censorship as a result of using non-inflammable film had to be rescued from the necessity of a licence by a section excusing non-profit-making organisations and exhibitions to which the public were not admitted for payment. The L.C.C., generally more liberal than the Board in actually applying censorship, sponsored severely restrictive amendments against this section which demonstrated a disturbing eagerness to extend its powers of control. Fortunately they were defeated.

The censorship set-up may have been almost inadvertently established, but it is no accident that it has been allowed to stumble on so long without being overhauled. The British Board of Film Censors benefits the three interested groups on which it depends for its continued existence. The distributors regard it as the least of a host of possible evils. The local authorities let it get on with the work while they retain the real power. Finally, and less openly, Governments have always found it anxious to concur with the policy of the moment. Government censorship, it has often been alleged by people who have not looked closely at the Board's record, would be a terrible thing. In fact the Board has been responsive to the influence of successive Governments while maintaining the appearance of independence.

A GLANCE AT A LIST of the Board's past Presidents and Secretaries shows why. After the Lord Chamberlain's play-reader came T. P. O'Connor, an M.P. who had scarcely accepted the Presidential post before he began clamouring for the control of appointments on the Board to be given to the Home Secretary; then Edward Shortt, who had actually been Home Secretary; then Lord Tyrrell, ex-Ambassador to France. The first Secretary, Brooke Wilkinson, an industry representative, was succeeded by Arthur Watkins, who came from the Home Office, followed by John Nicholls from the Foreign Office,

who lasted only twelve months. "His métier," announced the President on Nicholls' resignation after fierce trade criticism, "seems to be in the artistic world rather than in the business of censorship." The present President, aged 83, is Sir Sidney Harris, an ex-Assistant Under-Secretary at the Home Office,* and the Secretary is John Trevelyan, an ex-County Director of Education with eight years' experience as an examiner on the Board.

"The President of the Board is the film censor, and not the Secretary, who acts under his direction," Sir Sidney has declared, and Trevelyan confirms that "the President sees many films himself, especially those which present difficult problems and those on which the examiners find it difficult to decide." The 1952 P.E.P. report on *The British Film Industry* described the selection and responsibilities of the President:

The practice is to elect a man, usually prominent in public life, who is acceptable to a trade committee as well as to the Home Secretary and the licensing authorities. When elected, he is responsible to no one but himself and he is not removable from office. . . . The appointment of the rest of the Board lies within the discretion of the President.

The Secretary, however, is merely the Board's spokesman. He makes no final decisions, but is responsible for arguing the Board's case to whoever cares to hear it, including the public. This has always enabled him to begin by stating, "I am not the censor." Recently he has adopted the still more slippery, "I am not a censor."

Since 1913 requests for enquiries, even Royal Commissions, on film censorship have been rejected by every Government. The Board, after all, offers a Government the malleability of minds trained by the Civil Service with the unique advantage of being such a transparently independent organisation that it has yet to be officially recognised. Herbert Morrison followed countless Tories in rejecting a questioner with the argument,

I freely admit that this is a curious arrangement, but the British have a curious habit of making curious arrangements work.

BUT how has it worked? It is impossible to obtain details of cuts or bans from the Board, who make it their sly policy to issue nothing but the barest statistical details of their activities. Yet the Secretary appealed to a critic, "I suggest that the Board should be judged on

its record as a whole for over forty-six years rather than on isolated instances." Here, then, are some examples of the Board's pre-war refusals from the fifty titles I have been able to unearth—less than a sixth of the total refused certificates during this period.

1916, *Civilisation* (a classic indictment of militarism); 1921, *The Betrayal of Kitchener*; 1922, *Cocaine*; 1923, *Beware* (an American anti-German film about the ex-Kaiser's trial for war crimes by a U.S. tribunal); 1925, René Clair's *Entr'acte* (refused on the grounds that a comic funeral sequence might give offence). The same year the Admiralty requested that *Battleship Potemkin* be refused a certificate, with the result that it wasn't submitted to the Board until five years had elapsed; even then it was refused.

1926, *Menilmontant*; 1927, de Mille's *King of Kings* (refused because an actor portrayed Christ). In 1928 Austen Chamberlain, then Foreign Secretary, asked that the Board should refuse to pass *Dawn*, a Herbert Wilcox film about Edith Cavell, because German politicians had protested it would re-awaken bitterness against their country. *Dawn* was refused a certificate before the Board—or for that matter, Chamberlain—had even seen it.

1929, Pudovkin's *Mother*; *New Babylon* (submitted for the second time, was refused because of its "constant alternation of brutality and bloodshed and its scenes of licence and in many cases indecency"). *Martin Luther* was refused in case it gave offence, but the decision was hastily reversed as the result of a considerable outcry. 1930, *Night Patrol*, a British film championed by Shaw for its exposure of white slavery in London was refused; the Board's President claimed it would discourage the girls which London sorely needed to fill domestic vacancies. Pudovkin's *Storm Over Asia* was rejected because it expressed disagreement with Government policy. A letter refusing a certificate to the avant-garde *La Coquille et le Clergyman* described the film as

so cryptic as to be almost meaningless. If there is a meaning it is doubtless objectionable.

(Not to be caught a second time, the Board later asked Len Lye to explain his abstract short *Tusalava* before they came to a decision. "The picture," replied Lye, "represents a self-shape annihilating an antagonistic element." It was promptly passed.)

1931, *Outward Bound* was refused as being religiously offensive, and *The Brothers Karamazov* as indecent; 1932, *The Ghost That Never Returns* and Eisenstein's *October*; 1933, *Extase* and *Poils de Carotte* (the latter presumably because the boy is seen attempting to hang himself); 1934, *An American Tragedy*; *Zéro de*

* This was written before the announcement of Lord Morrison's appointment as President, following Sir Sidney Harris' resignation.

Conduite; Bed and Sofa was refused as being "disgusting," and Richard Massingham's comedy, *Tell Me If It Hurts*, for "ridiculing the dental profession."

The period 1935 to 1938 was an active one for the L.C.C., who during three years granted certificates to fifteen films refused by the Board. Among the Board's rejects were *Amok* (eventually granted a certificate sixteen years later); *Golgotha* (because Mary Magdalene was portrayed by an actress, Edwige Feuillère); the Communist cartoon, *L'Idée*; *The Eternal Wanderer* (because the Jewish subject might offend the Nazis); *Free Thaelmann*; and two *March of Time* shorts showing the preparations for war in Japan and Germany. A two-minute peace appeal backed by the League of Nations and distributed free to cinemas was held up by the Board while they sought the War Office's approval.

DURING THIS LIVELY period, it seemed that there might after all be a Government enquiry into censorship. The Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association protested:

We are persuaded that the Board has constantly kept in mind the desirability of checking, and has checked, the exhibition of films almost entirely coming from abroad, and made for other peoples, which are unsuited to our English temperament and might appeal to baser passions.

Lord Tyrrell, the Board's President, made his attitude memorably clear. "Nothing," he announced in 1935, "could be more calculated to arouse the passions of the British public than the introduction on the screen of subjects dealing with religious or political controversy." A year later he went further:

The cinema needs continued repression of controversy in order to stave off disaster.

Disaster was staved off in 1938 with the refusal of certificates to *Millions of Us*, an American short explaining the point of union membership, and *Hortobagy*, a Hungarian feature which showed the birth of a foal. But 1939 was the Board's most unforgettable year. Their vigilant "repression of controversy" led them to refuse a certificate to *I Was a Captive of Nazi Germany* one month before war broke out. The treatment afforded *Professor Mamlock*, a Russian anti-Nazi drama, was even more remarkable. Refused by the Board on political grounds early in the year, it was privately presented at

the Film Society. Still refused the Board's approval, it was shown a few months later with an L.C.C. certificate. Immediately after the declaration of war, it was granted a certificate by the Board and distributed to a thousand British cinemas, the widest distribution any Russian film has ever been permitted.

This is a record of a mere fraction of the films refused by the Board, and one which takes no account of the thousands of films heavily cut. A few years ago Arthur Watkins begged the industry never to reveal the Board's cuts, dexterously arguing, "If the public think that something has been cut from a picture there is less incentive for them to see it. . . ." The present Secretary, who follows the same shadowy path, says, "The Board's examiners would be encouraged if it were realised that the majority of their decisions are not criticised at all. . . ." It is difficult to criticise what has always been so carefully concealed. This secrecy suggests a realisation that the publication of the full facts might well provoke an outcry from a public largely unaware that *more than half* of the features they see have been cut by the Board. (The L.C.C., incidentally, make available full details of all their own bans and cuts since 1921.)

THE Board's early decisions, it may be felt, hardly reflect the position to-day. After all, the X-certificate was introduced in 1951 to enable the Board to pass films considered suitable for exhibition only to adults. (This was twenty-four years after the L.C.C. first issued its own "Adults Only" certificate.*) Watkins had admitted that the position in 1950 was getting out of hand. "I went to the première of the French film *Passionelle*," he was reported as saying, "and I found some of the cuts made by my own Board so absurd that I had them restored next morning."

Watkins and Trevelyan have both defined what they feel the censor's task to be. Watkins stated:

The Board believes that a censor should not be an official arbitrarily imposing his will on a reluctant public but someone who tries to interpret that will and to reflect in his decisions the taste and reaction of the average responsible kinema patron. . . . It believes also that it is performing a service both to the public and to the film industry if it removes offensive and distasteful material which cannot be regarded as entertainment and which if not excluded would in the long run do harm to the kinema's claim to that universal patronage on which its economy rests.

And again:

This assurance the Board can give—that its general aim is, and will continue to be, the reduc-

* The A-certificate means that children under 16 must be accompanied by a responsible adult. The X refuses them admission entirely. The U allows them entry whether accompanied or not.

tion of censorship for adults to the minimum and in the case of films of the quality of those listed above (*La Ronde*, *Le Plaisir*, *Gervaise*, and *Baby Doll*) to the point of non-existence.

At least two of these four films were in fact cut by the Board.

Watkins' ideas of "service to the film industry" actually led the British Film Producers' Association to plan a committee to consider members' grievances against the Board and to make appeals where necessary. An industry organisation was thus preparing to defend itself against the Board which it helped establish for its own protection. Watkins recognised the dangers of the situation; three years later he left the Board to accept a £5,000 a year post as President of the same British Film Producers' Association which had earlier sought protection from him.

Trevelyan's definition is that

broadly speaking, the Board's aim is to exclude from public exhibition anything likely to impair the moral standards of the public, by extenuating vice or crime or by depreciating social standards, and anything likely to give offence to any reasonably-minded members of the audience.

Or, "It's our job to reflect intelligent public opinion." Or, more recently, "We're paid to have dirty minds."

Every decision clearly depends on the Board's conception of "the responsible kinema patron" or "reasonably-minded members of the audience."

The Board has always boasted that it has no written code to which it requires films to conform, though on its formation two firm rulings were announced—that neither nudes nor representations of Christ would be allowed on the screen. The only way to discover whether the Board, however unconsciously, does apply an elusive, unwritten code is to consider its more recent decisions and formulate the principles which seem to have prompted them. What follows may have its omissions; and the Board may be able to indicate an occasional exception. But as a guide to censor's logic I suggest it is as accurate as the circumstances permit. The circumstances, I should point out, include not only the Board's furtiveness but the acute awareness of all distributors that their disclosure of the Board's decisions and arguments may so worsen their relationship with the Board that their future films will suffer. The majority of companies are therefore even more tight-lipped than the Board.

AUTHORITY. (1) *Those established in authority are to be considered beyond all serious criticism, though satire sufficiently light-hearted to be considered entertaining may be allowed.*

This protection is to be extended particularly to the Royal Family, the Home Office, and the Foreign Office. Under no circumstances may this be termed political censorship.

When Selznick wanted the Board's approval for a proposed film on the Duchess of Windsor's memoirs, Arthur Watkins refused, stating,

It is contrary to the Board's policy to pass a film in which Royalty is depicted unless the depiction has already received the approval of the Lord Chamberlain's department. So far they have not lifted the ban on any royal personage later than Queen Victoria. The reason is so obvious it is not worth going into.

Entente Cordiale, a French film based on André Maurois' *Life of Edward VII* was refused a certificate just after the war. Edward Dmytryk was asked to remove a news-reel scene of the Palace balcony group on VE-Day from *The End of the Affair* because "it was not proper that the Royal Family should appear in such an immoral film."

The Board cut reform-school scenes in *Good Time Girl* to satisfy the Home Office. John Trevelyan has said that he regrets films which show the police as inefficient; that the writer of a film about a corrupt policeman should be careful to give the impression that this was an isolated and exceptional incident. A Fabian-of-the-Yard film, *Murder in Soho*, was turned down because "the Board rejects all films founded on recent criminal cases." Further protection is afforded the police by the Board's removal of all scenes which show the construction or use of easily imitated weapons.

Any sequence which attempts to indicate the true meaning of capital punishment has its execution scene details removed, though these are frequently passed in horror films. *Casque d'Or*, *Paths of Glory*, and *I Want to Live* were all cut for this reason. Fritz Lang, shooting *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, had to film a special version for Britain in which an execution was discussed instead of being shown. Four reasons have been given by Trevelyan for the cuts in *I Want to Live* (a film which has been shown complete in every other country, including Ireland): the gas-chamber method has no application to this country; passing such a scene would prompt British producers to take cameras into Wandsworth to film a man being hanged; an execution is not an edifying thing to show; the scene is more effective if left to the imagination. The first two points cancel each other out, and the second also demonstrates the hollowiness of the Board's frequent claim to judge each film on its own merits. Any comment on the third point would be superfluous, and the fourth indicates a worrying conception of the censor's purposes and rights.

The gentle, native humour of *Carlton-Browne of the F.O.* was allowed, but Communist indictments of Western policy are forbidden. *Song of the Rivers*, written by Bertholt Brecht, directed by Joris Ivens, with music by Shostakovich, cannot be publicly shown in Britain unless more than half an hour is cut because "it contains a large number of elements . . . which are likely to give offence to different countries and which might give rise to resentment and disturbance when exhibited." *Holiday on Sylt*, *Operation Teutonic Sword*, and *A Diary for Anne*, three East German documentaries which purport to show that Nazi war criminals now occupy prominent political, industrial, and military positions in West Germany, have been refused certificates by the Board, who claim that it is their policy not to pass anything defamatory to living persons. These would appear to be the only occasions on which this policy has been invoked. The films have been given local certificates by some councils, and extracts have been shown on television—including the "defamatory" scenes.

(2) *Those in authority over young people should not be criticised, nor should young people be shown successfully defying such authority. Under no circumstances may young people be allowed to see such subjects.*

The Wild One is still refused a certificate. One reported explanation was that "The police were shown as weak characters and the teenagers did not get the punishment which they deserved." Five minutes were cut from *Rebel Without a Cause*, including an argument between the James Dean character and a probation officer, before the film was given an X-certificate. Plans to film Michael Croft's *Spare the Rod* were dropped because Arthur Watkins advised the producer the film would be given an X, which at that time ruled out prospects of a circuit distribution. Watkins told Croft, "The moral deterioration of a teacher and conditions of indiscipline in the classroom are not fit subjects to show children of school age. . . . There will be riots in the classroom if we pass this film." He added that in his private opinion the film could do nothing but harm, that it might be shown in Russia as anti-British propaganda, and that if he had the power he would ban it altogether. Croft was later approached by a producer who wanted to introduce a love affair between the young teacher and a girl pupil into the film so that it could be sold as "the sexiest school film ever." Now, six years after hopes of giving the book the treatment it deserved were abandoned as a result of the Board's attitude, Max Bygraves is said to be planning to produce and star in an adaptation.

Lorenza Mazzetti, director of *Together*, was

advised by the Board that a sympathetic study of Teddy Boys she intended filming would not be given any certificate unless it concluded "by unconditionally condemning them." The film was never made.

RELIGION. (3) *Care should be taken not to offend any religious groups sufficiently organised and articulate to protest.*

A scene in *The Red Inn* in which Françoise Rosay confessed to Fernandel through the prongs of a toasting-fork, was cut. Details of a blasphemous mockery of the sacrament were removed from *Le Défroqué*. A sub-title in the latest version of *La Garçonne* (the original was banned) was obliterated because the phrase "I'm not a Salvation Army home for tarts" might offend the Salvation Army.

(4) *Certificates will not be granted to films depicting Jesus Christ except in cases where such a refusal would clearly provoke the film industry's united hostility. In these instances the restraint of the producer should be quoted as the reason for making the exception.*

"We cannot take the responsibility for allowing a general showing of any film depicting Our Lord," said Watkins in 1956, repeating a pronouncement regularly made since 1913 when he refused a certificate to *Day of Triumph*. But no objection has been made to the portrayal of Christ in *Ben Hur*, nor has the Board made any comment on the proposed production *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, an account of the life of Christ which will "cost more than any film so far made." Policy does seem to be growing more flexible here.

VIOLENCE. (5) *As a general principle violence may be considered legitimate entertainment when exploited for its own sake; it may not, however, be used with any kind of serious purpose. Violence which can be shown to have any kind of historical foundation may be detailed and almost unlimited, and can be safely passed for children.*

Baby-Face Nelson, in which gangsters were shot to pieces at close range, received an A-certificate. "An historical subject," commented John Nicholls. "Almost a documentary," said Trevelyan. "Cold-blooded killings of this kind may be typical of an American gangster." *The Vikings* featured a falcon tearing a man's eye from his head, a man having his hand severed from his arm and later being eaten alive by crabs, and another being flung to meat-starved dogs. Other ingredients included an attempted rape in which the man pleaded with his victim, "Go on, fight me, scratch me, bite me." The

film received an *A*-certificate. So did *The Strangers of Bombay*, on the grounds that its eye-gougings, brandings, and physical mutilations were based on fact. *Tonka*, with the bloodiest massacre I have seen on the screen, was given a *U*, presumably because it was based on the true story of a horse, and bore Walt Disney's name. *Attila the Hun*, in which the mutilations included an amputated hand flung around the floor, also received a *U*-certificate.

(6) *Horror films without historical foundation must be restricted to adults, but may use detailed and almost unlimited violence.*

Examples here are so numerous it is not worth listing them. One of the most notable, passed within a few days of Trevelyan's comment that the execution sequence in *I Want to Live* was "not an edifying thing to show," was the sequence in *Horrors of the Black Museum* which showed a girl adjusting a pair of opera glasses which had been tampered with in such a way that knives sliced into her eye-balls and blood streamed down her face.

(7) *Violence in thrillers which involves any hint of psychological and particularly sexual complexities will be cut.*

A memorandum issued to producers by the Board in 1949 lists the incidents it wishes to see reduced to a minimum in gangster films, the only type of film mentioned. These include brutal circumstances attending murder, the use of gruesome weapons, underlining of savagery, protracted killings, prolonged fights and beatings, and blows emphasised on the sound-track. Torture and sadism should be reduced as much as possible, with no emphasis on the method used, on the torturer's pleasure or the victim's suffering. Punishment must be minimised—flogging is specified. No close-ups of the effects on victims will be allowed. Scenes in which women are subjected to violence should be avoided and can only be allowed when absolutely essential and then with the minimum of emphasis. This includes shots of men striking women in the face.

Trevelyan has expressed great concern over violence and brutality in crime thrillers, but insisted that horror films are something quite separate and, he implied, less dangerous. He stressed, "Violence and sex is a dangerous cocktail which may stimulate some people to action."

It has certainly stimulated the Board to action. Heavy cutting along these principles explains apparent lapses in characterisation and motivation in *Rififi*, *Los Olvidados*, *The Wages of Fear*, *The Big Heat*, *Storm Warning* (where the whipping of a woman by Ku Klux Klan members was completely removed), *The Kentuckian*,

Brute Force, and countless other films right back to *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*. It may explain the bans on *Man Crazy*, a feature by Irving Lerner who made *Muscle Beach*, on *Wicked Woman* by Russell Rouse, and the heavy cutting which has been ordered on the highly-praised *Party Crashers*, which also breaks the rule about rebellious youth. Stanley Kramer's study of a sex-killer, *The Sniper*, was originally banned and then drastically cut. The re-make of *M* suffered even more cuts than the original version. The Board admit that its examiners have no qualifications which might enable them to assess the psychological effect of such films, and no such study has ever been attempted in the cinema's history.

(8) *Concentration on wounds and blood, though permissible in horror films, is to be discouraged in war films, whether or not such scenes are motivated by realistic or pacifistic intentions.*

Shots of one man bleeding onto another were cut from *A Farewell to Arms*. J. Lee Thompson was advised by the Board that if he wished to show a girl shot in his war film *Ice Cold in Alex* she should not be seen to bleed excessively.

SEX. (9) *Nudity: the moving nude may only be permitted in documentary circumstances, when it may be seen by children; stage nudes should be static; other nudes may never be more than glimpsed.*

Garden of Eden, *Elysia*, and *Isle of Levant* were all initially refused by the Board but later recalled and given *A*-certificates. *Back to Nature*, *Around the World with Nothing On*, and *Nudist Paradise* were awarded *A*-certificates, the stripping scenes in the latter presumably being considered as "documentary" as the rest. *Femmes de Paris*, a much-admired comedy revue by Robert Dhéry, was offered a certificate only if all its stage nudes were cut, which would have reduced the feature to about twenty minutes. The distributor refused. Then, according to Trevelyan, "We offered an *A*-certificate if all the moving nudes were cut to bring the film roughly into line with the Lord Chamberlain's stage ruling. This was a step forward." The distributor still refused, and the film has been widely shown under local *A*-certificates with only one minor cut.

The strip-tease club scenes in *Expresso Bongo*, on the other hand, were passed with an *A* and no cuts on the grounds that this was "documentary coverage of the Soho scene." But *Soho Strip-tease*, a half-hour film on the girls in the clubs, has been refused a certificate in its original version and in a revised version since submitted. In *Smiles of a Summer Night*, a few

frames disclosing Eva Dahlbeck's left nipple had to be removed.*

A nude bathing scene in *One Summer of Happiness* was somewhat cut, but as a couple of silhouette shots were left both Watkins and Trevelyan have widely quoted this sequence as an example of the Board's broadmindedness. A silhouette of a nude was cut from the Japanese X-certificate *Street of Shame*, though it appeared with the uncut nudist film *Isle of Levant*. *Girl of Shame*, whose heroine originally appeared naked in almost every reel, is now thirteen minutes shorter than when shown in Germany. Several nude scenes have been reduced on the Board's instructions to a series of rapid glimpses, an approach which tends to increase the erotic effect of such material.

(10) *No suggestion of sexual fulfilment may be permitted.*

The case of *Les Amants* has been widely publicised. The whole build-up of Malle's poetic study of a sensual woman's physical satisfaction with a stranger now leads to nothing but one of the Board's rough interruptions. The long-held facial close-up which has gone destroys the whole purpose of the sequence and coarsens the entire film. Two lengthy cuts have been demanded in the love scenes of *A Stranger Knocks*, a Danish prize-winning film. *Les Héros Sont Fatigués* lost twenty-five minutes in cuts, mainly in its love scenes. Visconti's *The Wanton Countess* was heavily cut. (The Board refused to allow this film's original title, *Senso*, either in the Italian original or as *Sensuality*.)

(11) *Sexual ethics may not be discussed.*

In *Sweet Smell of Success* the central character asks his girl to offer herself to a man who can do him a favour professionally. Originally the girl protested before agreeing. The Board ordered her arguments to be cut, with the result that in the version distributed she appeared far more ready to oblige.

(12) *Departures from accepted sexual conventions may only be facetiously treated.*

The Time of Desire, a Swedish film on Lesbians, and *The Third Sex*, a German film about homosexuals, have been refused certificates by the Board. A scene of Edwige Feuillère kissing a girl on the neck was removed from *Olivia*. But clearly homosexual characters are permitted to mince through many English U-certificate comedies, providing they do it for laughs.

* Ingmar Bergman, the director, told *The Times* he had not even been aware that the nipple could be seen; he had to run the film backwards and forwards on a viewer to find the offending shot. It took him some time, he said, but eventually he tracked it down. The nipple was visible for considerably less than one second, but the Board had spotted it.

In *Sunset Boulevard* the servant of a decaying film actress who now lives with a young writer tells the writer that he was her first husband. The line was removed at the Board's request. *Trois Femmes*, a compilation of three Maupassant stories, was refused a certificate because one story concerned a girl who willingly shares herself among several men. The L.C.C. have given the sub-titled version an A and the un-sub-titled version a U. The end of *Manon*, suggesting necrophilic desire on the part of the hero, was removed entirely.

(13) *Characters on the screen may not witness anything which the audience would not be allowed to see.*

This, the weirdest of all the Board's requirements, was most notoriously in evidence in the case of *The Bachelor Party*, where an important sequence was totally removed because it showed characters watching a pornographic film. Several vital characterisation points were made by close-ups of their faces; the film they were watching was never shown. Nevertheless the whole sequence was ordered cut. The reasoning behind this logic is still evident in the Board's arguments with distributors of Continental films. A girl undressing in private, I am told, is treated more leniently than a girl undressing before a man.

(14) *Foreign dialogue need never be censored.*

In *Mitsou* a girl discusses in French the number of orgasms she has enjoyed during one night. The film was given an A. "People able to understand foreign languages are not likely to be harmed by anything said," Trevelyan explains. According to his certificate this includes French-speaking children.

AUTHORITY, religion, violence, and sex—these are the Board's main concerns. Other themes subject to considerable cutting are child-birth, insanity (*The Snake Pit*), drug-taking (*Razzia Sur la Chnouff* lost fifteen minutes, *Three Forbidden Stories* was heavily cut), and drunkenness (two major sequences were cut from *The Lost Weekend*).

How far have we really come since 1913?

The Board's declared objections to unidentified films during its first year of operation were:

scenes tending to disparage public characters and institutions; executions; native customs in foreign lands abhorrent to British ideas; incentive to crime; holding up a Minister of Religion to ridicule; materialisation of Christ or the Almighty; gruesome murders; gruesome details in crime or warfare; morbid death scenes; cruelty to women; cruelty to animals; vulgarity and impropriety in conduct and dress; indelicate sexual

situations; indecent dancing; scenes accentuating delicate marital relations; procurations, abduction, and seduction; indecorous sub-titles; medical operations; confinements; excessive drunkenness. . . .

Advances have clearly been a matter of degree. Attitudes remain the same. The most damaging and persistently held is that as the cinema is basically a place of entertainment no serious work should be attempted within the film medium. Almost every decision I have quoted underlines this fundamental belief, and the present Secretary occasionally makes the Board's position still plainer.

"Social comment and entertainment don't necessarily mix . . ." Trevelyan assured an audience a few weeks ago. "Most people pay one-and-nine to be entertained rather than to receive social comment."

Within a few days of this statement he also wrote, "We want the cinema to have an adult approach to life," and claimed in an interview, "If we think a film is a serious piece of filmmaking, done with integrity and sincerity, we treat it more generously than we would a film which is obviously produced for sensational exploitation." In the very same interview there was also this: "Quite often I see a film which I consider the most frightful trash, but I also know the public is going to love it. And if the public enjoy it let them have it. It's not our job to be judges of æsthetics."

THE Board's effect on what reaches British screens goes beyond what its own examiners cut and reject. Distributors of imported films frequently endeavour to anticipate the Board's requirements by cutting a production before they submit it. Some extraordinary confusion can result. A sequence in *A Face in the Crowd* in which Lonesome Rhodes' drum-majorette bride dances on television to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony has never been seen since the film's Edinburgh Festival première. The Board denies having cut it. So do the distributors. No one has ever offered an explanation.

On British productions the Board's influence has been more subtle. Its forty-six years of activity have played their part in ensuring that British producers seldom tackle worthwhile themes. Trevelyan has expressed his opinion that American films intended for international distribution which expose and attack the less

savoury aspects of their society are thoroughly misguided.

"We're not faced with this sort of thing from British producers," he says with evident pride in the Board's effect on native production. A "voluntary" script censorship service is run by the Board to which more than 80 per cent of British scripts are submitted before shooting begins. J. Lee-Thompson reported ninety objections to the screen-play of *Ice Cold in Alex* and fifty to *No Trees in the Street*.

This situation is not new. In 1933 Dorothy Knowles wrote in *The Censor, the Drama, and the Film*:

Producers themselves complain that the higher morality insisted on by the Board with regard to British films cramps them and inevitably makes them unreal, whereas much that is turned down in English scenarios is allowed when the Board suddenly finds itself face to face with the finished American product.

The identical complaint is being made by Lee-Thompson twenty-six years later.

There has, of course, been progress, and never more than during the past year or two. The examples I quoted at the beginning are sufficient proof. Scarcely a month now passes without an example of something which a few years ago would have been cut.

ONE REASON IS TELEVISION. When it was found that homosexuals, nudists, prostitutes, strip-tease dancers, and the victims of frigidity and sexual assault were able to appear and talk freely on television—without a single complaint being received from the watching millions—the Board's failure to keep abreast of what the public will accept was brutally exposed. The film industry, upon whose support it so relies, has not been slow to point out the advantages enjoyed by its rival.*

The other incitement to progress has been the continued example of the local authorities. For obvious reasons the Board detests having its decisions reversed. The number of films refused certificates is therefore kept to a minimum, as these are very often submitted to local authorities for their rulings. The Board knows that if it cuts a film the distributor will scarcely ever undertake the laborious and expensive business of submitting it to each of the seven hundred licensing committees for their decision on the cuts when he can simply distribute it throughout the country in its cut state. Thus the Board prefers to cut a film, even by half an hour or more, rather than refuse it altogether.

The nudist films showed how foolish the Board can be made to look. *The Garden of Eden*, after being refused by the Board, was passed by 285 of the 300 towns to which it was

* This is not to suggest that television is free from censorship. I once took part in a late-night television discussion on "Horror Films" in which all the climaxes of the extracts to be shown were removed on orders received from an anonymous controller a few minutes before the programme began, thus effectively destroying its entire point.

submitted, and few of the fifteen licensing committees who rejected it even saw the film before coming to a decision. As a result, the Board quietly gave *Back to Nature* an A-certificate, invited the re-submission of all those it had previously refused and gave them A-certificates too. "In the light of all that evidence we felt we could not resist," explained Trevelyan. "We have given an A as a warning to parents and because an X would be so much more exploitable."

THE progress which has been forced on the Board cannot obscure one major issue. The Board is hardly any nearer being in line with the feelings of local authorities than it ever was. Since 1921 the L.C.C., for example, has found it necessary to amend or qualify the Board's decisions in 120 of the 156 cases it has considered. True, the L.C.C. was able to award an "Adults Only" certificate which the Board did not introduce until 1951. "A fair test of opinion will be possible now that there is an X-certificate," said the P.E.P. report. Since 1951, 42 films have been considered by the L.C.C., and in 26 instances the Board's decision has been in some way amended. (Only once since 1913 has a film awarded a certificate by the Board been refused by the L.C.C.)

The Board has often revised its decisions following local authorities' amendments or protests from the film industry or the public. A number of initially rejected productions I have referred to have later been given certificates. (*Battleship Potemkin*, for example, was passed in 1954, twenty-nine years after its arrival in this country.) But revisions are only made when a decision is made spectacularly public. For the most part, as I have explained, the Board works in secret ways. True, the films refused certificates are given their chance by local authorities. But if, as with the L.C.C., opinions over the few films which the licensing committees do consider are at variance with the Board's in more than 60 per cent of cases, is it not probable that more than 60 per cent of the Board's cuts and other unchallenged decisions would also be considered ill-advised if they were known?

The Board cuts about 300 of the 550 or so features submitted each year, and refuses certificates to about eight. The only decline in the number of films cut since the introduction of the

X-certificate exactly corresponds to the decline in the number of features submitted. Rejected films have actually risen, from five in 1950 to ten in 1958. Eight are reported to have been refused in the first six months of 1959.

Many cuts are made because distributors ask for their films to be made suitable for the U or A categories, and others because the Board feels that a production should sometimes be made to fit one of these categories regardless of the distributor's wishes. Cuts vary from less than a second to twenty-five minutes. A cut of one minute in the average film would be like removing well over a thousand words from the average novel.

Television and the local authorities each continue to indicate the extent to which the Board is still out of touch with contemporary feeling. Yet if it were abolished, the industry would be back with its original seven hundred censors, an arrangement equally impossible for distributors and licensing committees. Any form of national control, such as state censorship, would now be resented by the industry and the local authorities. The Association of Municipal Corporations recently declared it would resist any control which involved "the consequent loss of discretion at present exercised by local authorities."

A panel of critics has been suggested as the most suitable censorship board.* While this would be an improvement on the present situation, the current condition of film criticism scarcely suggests that such a panel would display much more enlightenment than the Board.

ALL the same, an intolerable arrangement should not be allowed to continue merely because nearly fifty years have blinded most people to its crippling stupidity.†

In America, where film censorship has been even more complex, the Supreme Court has now unanimously ruled that state censorship boards may not ban a film on the grounds that it "is sacrilegious, immoral, or tends to promote crime."

In any country where a free Press is cherished, there is and always has been a case for the complete abolition of film censorship. Indeed, this has been recognised in Britain by the fact that news-reels have always been deliberately excluded from the Board's restrictions on the grounds that the freedom of the Press is an established concept. In the *Sunday Pictorial* a few weeks ago a full-page picture appeared of a girl in a Bikini with a knife stuck in her throat and blood pouring down her body. A light-hearted caption explained it was "all a fake." If we object to this kind of thing in a family newspaper, the remedy is simple enough. We are all our own censors, and are as free to avoid a

* There is no record of critics ever succeeding in getting a ban lifted, but they once—in the case of *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*—got the L.C.C. to cut ten minutes from a film already passed by the Board.

† Films that the Board cheerfully agree might now be passed complete often exist only in their mutilated versions. It is exceptional to find a complete copy of any cinema classic.

cinema whose programmes we have found distasteful as we are to refuse buying a newspaper whose policy we consider offensive.

What would happen to the considerations with which the Board is concerned if it were abolished? Authority, I submit, should not need the kind of protection censorship affords it. An outcry would be raised if, say, the *Daily Worker* were suppressed. Why, then, is the suppression of Communist films so quietly accepted? A similar argument is applicable to the protection of religious sensibilities. Violence is sometimes dramatically justifiable; but even when it is not, it has never been shown that its influence is more insidious than, say, the glorification of war or the relentless emphasis on material values which together occupy such a huge proportion of the cinema's time without incurring the censor's displeasure.

Pornography would be prevented by exactly the same considerations, and where necessary, laws, that prevent the publication of printed pornography. When Lord Amwell protested that the jokes in the film version of *Look Back in Anger* were "pure filth of the most intolerable description," Lord Birkett advised him that the common law of England was powerful enough to deal with the kind of thing he had alleged.

Obviously children need some protection from certain films. At present the Board sometimes thrusts the responsibility for whether a child sees a particular film on to the parent by means of the A-certificate and sometimes keeps this responsibility to itself with the X. While a system of either warning or control—but hardly both—is required, the Board's record does not recommend it as an appropriate body for such a task.

The Board's reaction to the idea of abolition is predictable. Trevelyan has said:

I'm prepared to bet that if the Board went out of business to-morrow you'd have pornography on the screen and the public would flock to it.

This statement is worth comparing with a comment he made a few weeks earlier:

We are as tough as ever we were about anything that we think pornographic or obscene. We don't want this kind of thing and we don't think cinema-goers want it either.

At the moment we have the Board and we also have a cinema which presents *Dolls of Vice* and *Girl of Shame* as its recent Christmas double-bill attraction. Is it unreasonable to suppose that abolishing censorship would merely mean that this kind of cinema would continue to attract exactly the same audiences with the full versions of the films it now shows in diluted form? And that the circuit cinemas, which rely so heavily on family audiences that the majority refuse to show X-certificate films, would take little or no notice? There would certainly be a brief boom in the kind of Continental film that is now drastically cut or banned; but would it last any longer or be more widespread than the nudist film boom, which already seems to have ended?

There would be a public outcry; pressure groups would get to work; and the end result would be state censorship.

This time, I feel, Trevelyan may be nearer the truth—though not about the end result. The past efforts of the Public Morality Council, Watch Committees, the National Council of Women, even the T.U.C., have shown that many people are not content to restrict powers of censorship to themselves.

Yet the Board could be abolished. An effective system of protection for children could be established in its place. Local authorities' licensing powers could be confined to enforcing safety regulations, as was originally intended. And anyone with a complaint could be required to prove an offence under the new Obscene Publications Act before a film was cut or banned. Is it impossible that an appeal to reason, based upon the national acceptance and pride in the freedom allotted the Press, might free us at last from the wretched habit of censorship?

THEATRE

Optical Delusions

By Nigel Dennis

OUR text this month is taken from Mr. Terence Rattigan, who said recently: "A theatre is a place for laughter and tears, a temple of the emotion, not of the intellect." Our first reaction to this pure idea was laughter; our second, after seeing Mr. Harold Pinter's play, *The Caretaker*, a storm of tears. We wept for the repetitiveness of artistic life—for its hideous habit, generation after generation, of beginning like Mr. Rattigan and ending like Mr. Pinter. Only five years ago, our stage was pure Rattigan. We pined for Pinters. Now, already, we are being thrust in the other direction. We may not pine for Mr. Rattigan, but we prefer him any day to Mr. Pinter. "Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds."

It is not entirely Mr. Pinter's fault. The speed at which things happen is responsible, too. We should have realised when we first saw Mr. Samuel Beckett's revolutionary tramp taking off his boots on-stage and scratching for the little people under his arms that the like disbooting and scratching would happen quite conventionally on the same stage of the same theatre only five years later. We should have expected this, because it always happens, in all the arts. There was a day when the new prose of Mr. Hemingway rose like a new sun, clear and beautiful beyond imagination. There was a day when the first line of a poem by Mr. Auden made poetry itself seem astonishing. But within five or ten years, Mr. Hemingway's imitators had made a farcically festered lily of the original, and there was hardly a weed of poetry that had not rooted itself in Mr. Auden. This is such an unpleasant and distressing form of cannibalism—the mind of the missionary being eaten, but his flesh left to go beg—that we are half inclined to take sides with Mr. Rattigan and denounce the intellect as an intolerable beast that should be rejected in favour of the wholesome nervous system at the earliest opportunity.

Our trouble is, that this is such a difficult thing to do. Does Mr. Rattigan himself realise how intensely difficult it is, even in the theatre, to get

along without a head? Does he not remember how hard the wretched Hamlet tried to act on pure impulse and how the pale cast of thought kept spoiling his honest matricide? Does he not recall how much thought Orestes had to give the same matter, and that even the gods of the time had to discuss the whole question in learned conference? It is plucky, even revolutionary, to demand that intellect be expunged from the stage; but Mr. Rattigan's plea comes over two thousand years too late. Thought is the one incurable disease of the human race. It interferes with everything we do—so much so that even a man as clever as Mr. Rattigan will never be able to write a play which is completely free from intellect. Indeed, we suggest that instead of grumbling about the old enemy, Mr. Rattigan go over to it, as an ally—when he will find immediately that intellect has at least one marvellous advantage: it is astonishingly dramatic. So rigorously does it govern our behaviour, so vigorously does it push us into laughter or tears, that without it we should have no theatre at all—not, of course, that we should want one. Finally, intellect supplies the theatre with two other indispensable elements—vision and illusion. The nearest we can get to an unintellectual play is one in which vision and illusion have been crushed by too much factual persistence, or one in which they are no longer exciting because they are only the re-telling of a splendid original—like a fine dream drearily retold at breakfast-time.

THE CARETAKER is just such a play. It is as packed with emotion as Mr. Rattigan could want, but none of the emotion is interesting because the intellectual visions which inspire it, and the forms in which they are presented, are imitations—or rather, an ability to imitate everything except the very quality that gave life to the original. It was not the presence of Mr. Beckett's tramps that animated *Waiting for Godot*, still less their time-consuming, desultory conversation. It was the vision that lay just