

promise has been fulfilled. In our parts of the world at least we do have enough bread for *alle Menschenkinder*, and *Zuckererbsen* too, if by that we mean a wealth of useful or useless commodities. We have left Heaven to the angels and sparrows. To the "world without sin", or an ethos for a pleasure-seeking and a permissive society—to these, too, we have come incredibly close. But roses and myrtles are not to be seen, and in their place we are plagued with grey slag heaps.

By which I mean to say that what was in the air 130 years ago, and was taken up by excited minds like Heine's and formulated by them, has not *simply* become reality 130 years later, though it bears a distorted relation to it, half the same and half not the same.

Heine, as Dolf Sternberger says very aptly, couldn't leave prophecy alone. Much of what he prophesied has not even begun to be turned into social or political reality. That terrible Teutonic revolution, at once primordially pagan and radical, neo-Protestant, extremely ferocious but possibly creative, has never come about. I suppose that no one will really want to associate it with the insane criminality that began in 1933. Other things did come about, above all that "Kommunismus" of which he knew how to speak in a way at once inquisitive and initiated, anxious and matter-of-fact. But it came about by such unpredictably devious ways and so much later than announced that its realisation could by no means accord with what was expected of it. That's how things tend to happen in history.

The great themes of the time, grasped by Heine's intuitive perception, could no more be tied down definitively by the artist's flashes of insight than by the erudition of the doctors of revolution. The hypothetical future slowly merged in a modern reality that both confirmed and controverted the hypothesis. Ideas and factions of 1832 or 1848, can no longer be identified with anything that exists today.

NARROW scholarship, economics, political ideology, the meaning of history, deadly earnestness of every kind: all these date badly. But how could life turned into poetry become dated? How can that become dated in which Schiller saw the chief characteristic of man, that which raises him up to his own dignity, namely play—the play of forms, the play of ideas? I once knew a philosopher who was grimly serious about truth, so serious that he looked down on mere literature, and looked down most reprovably on that kind of literature for which ideas were only true within the context of a work of art. I fear that not much will remain of that philosopher's legacy, and he didn't help us all that much even in his lifetime. They who deal with it cheerfully are closer to the truth, because they know how inexhaustible it is. The most reliable consolation comes to us from those who conceal their seriousness behind a certain serenity and who lend rhythm, colour, euphony to the doubts and sufferings of their souls.

Heine belongs to no one. Or rather he belongs to all those who love him.

The Tablets of Linear B

Footstools, ladles, jars.
Only some humdrum records
of things given and debts paid.
No royal annals of wars.

Only financial deals
described in these columns of clay.
Estates assessed, goods sold:
some bronzed and broken wheels.

Cretans making money
by bartering spices and grain.
In the abysm of time the usual business.
To the gods "one amphora of honey."

Stephen Miller

CINEMA

Minimal Relationships

By John Weightman

NOT THE LEAST INTERESTING detail about *Last Tango in Paris* is that the first act of copulation between the hero and heroine occurs within minutes of their initial meeting, when they know absolutely nothing about each other and are both fully dressed. It is the first time I have seen a lady in a hat being vigorously assailed by a gentleman in an overcoat. Moreover, the *prise de possession*, as the French call it, is carried out almost absent-mindedly. Marlon Brando hardly looks at Maria Schneider; he just moves towards her, as a cock would sidle up to a hen in a farmyard in the good old pre-battery days; there is a loud squawking, a few feathers fly and the deed is done. Then, having fluffed out their plumage again, craned their necks and looked beadily to left and right, the two participants walk off in opposite directions. Being human, however, they get into the habit of coming back to the same place for more anonymous animality. But, since this is a film, and basically no doubt a commercial one, the pact of bestiality has to go wrong and the story ends with a shooting, like any *crime passionnel*; that is, there is an attempt to maximalise the minimal relationship according to the neo-romantic clichés of the cinema world.

Last Tango compares rather unfavourably, I think with another film about minimal relationships; this is *Heat*, the third Warhol/Morrissey product after *Flesh* and *Trash*, which also ends in a shooting. Bertolucci and/or Brando have no doubt borrowed from Warhol/Morrissey, in the sense that they allow themselves a sexual explicitness that was hardly possible before *Flesh*, but they set this explicitness in a stagey Parisian framework, whereas the weirdies of *Heat* all seem quite credible in the sunlit psychological desert of their part of California. *Heat* has the same modest yet persuasive *cinéma-vérité* atmosphere as *Flesh* and *Trash*. *Last Tango* is much more ambitious and seems to be trying to do for Paris what Antonioni's *Blow-Up* did for London. But, in my view, it doesn't come off. It is a curious film in that the core is sincerely nasty and the outer layers made up of phoney aestheticism.

Appropriately enough, the credit titles are accompanied by two typically frightening nudes by Francis Bacon; Bacon's canvases, when seen from a distance, glow like pretty jewels and it is only at close quarters that the nightmarish twists become apparent.

Actually, there is no real reason why *Last Tango* should be set in Paris, apart from the nostalgic ring of the name in the title, and the Parisian associations of Henry Miller and Ernest Hemingway. We are presumably meant to take Brando as a sort of Miller-cum-Hemingway, the clapped-out American who has had an adventurous life all over the world and who finds himself, in middle age, on the verge of a breakdown in this most prestigious of European cities where, according to legend, all good Americans prefer to come to die. He has been married to a Frenchwoman, a beautiful hotel-keeper, who has been unfaithful to him and has committed suicide with a razor in the bloodiest manner possible. This part of the story is handled melodramatically and incomprehensibly by means of flashbacks. Why was the wife unfaithful? Why did she commit suicide? Why did she, the daughter of respectable provincials, keep *un hôtel borgne*, used by prostitutes, drug-addicts and other drop-outs? Presumably so that Bertolucci can work in some Miller/Hemingway Parisian local colour and Brando can do an embarrassing bed-side scene during which he weeps and curses over his wife's dead body, laid out among a riot of flowers. Unfortunately, none of this is properly motivated; Brando could have been brought to middle-aged despair by much more delicate and convincing means.

We have to accept, then, that he is wandering moodily around Paris and brooding on his middle-aged plight, when he strays into an empty flat, which is also being visited by Maria Schneider, a girl of twenty, who is looking for some place in which to set up after her marriage with her young film-director fiancé. In Paris, where flat-hunting is like trying to find a spare ledge in a gull colony, this large vacant apartment