

ART «» ENTERTAINMENT

FILMS

THE LAST TYCOON

Screenplay by Harold Pinter; directed by Elia Kazan; produced by Sam Spiegel
Released by Paramount Pictures, Rated PG

Narcissus had nothing on Hollywood. It has never tired of looking at itself in the mirror of the silver screen. That the rest of the world does not take Hollywood history or mores as portentously serious subject matter has been a source of never-ending amazement to *The Industry*.

The Last Tycoon is a case in point.

Based on an unfinished novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald and the life of the man Fitzgerald used as a model, the film takes liberties with both sets of antecedents. It may not satisfy Fitzgerald fans, or biographers of Irving Thalberg. But it takes Hollywood of the late 20s and early 30s seriously and projects a milieu in which you really believe: the Hollywood of big sparkly productions, palatial residences, temperamental stars, and smooth, venal boards of directors; Hollywood when it was still in the hands of the showmen, the powerful personalities, the killer-wheeler-dealers who controlled the tears and laughter of the 80 to 90 million Americans who paid their two-bits or half-dollars to enter the movie palaces once a week; Hollywood before the eastern banking interests took over.

The film opens with an im-

mense close-up of a couple kissing. The film is black and white. You are rooted in time. Monroe Stahr (Irving Thalberg) is in a screening room, editing a production in progress, absolutely certain of everything he does and that it will translate into glorious box-office dollars.

Harold Pinter's script treats the character of the young production wizard with dignified introspection, and Robert de

Niro's performance attains a sense of reality that is enthralling. De Niro is not acting; he is Monroe Stahr: a silky imperial figure who surrounds himself with respectful and terrified kowtowers. He is as one-directional as a laser beam, focused on making motion pictures. There are no unions, no boards to appeal from his decisions. Everything he does comes out right. The Studio is his oyster; he swallows it and smiles.

But fate is already in the outer office. Spear-headed by Pat Brady (Robert Mitchum), the bankers are moving in for the kill. A writers' union is organizing. And Stahr has become hopelessly infatuated with a beautiful and mysterious British girl who does not return his affection.

The love story becomes central in the later sequences. Stahr turns out to be as helpless in love as

he is powerful in his work. There is a scene where he takes the girl out to see his unfinished house by the sea, and the stick-skeleton of the mansion stands as a symbol of his inner life—a grand plan only lightly sketched in.

The supporting actors are all first-rate. Jack Nicholson steps outside his usual self as a writers' union organizer. Jeanne Moreau and Tony Curtis play aging movie stars with affection and humor. Robert Mitchum as Pat Brady is tough and jaded. Brady's daughter is convincingly played by a new actress, Theresa Russell. (In Fitzgerald's novel she was the narrator; here she is part of the action.)

Ingrid Boulting as the girl Stahr loves is more a somnambulist than an actress. Fortunately dialogue is sparse in *The Last Tycoon*. A lot is said with the eyes.

The visual period details are deliberately played down. The cars are right, but the costumes are comfortable adaptations of the times, and the settings only casually suggest art deco. Director Elia Kazan was delving for a more "internal" sense of the period, and he achieves it.

Very low key and deliberately paced, *The Last Tycoon* emerges as a quiet, "thoughtful" film.

—Mavis Lyons

Mavis Lyons is a film editor working in New York and *In These Times*' regular reviewer.

De Niro does it again

TELEVISION

Requiem for Mary Richards

The *Mary Tyler Moore Show*, one of television's longest running, most popular series, is coming to the end of its final season and I, for one, am going to miss it. I've grown very fond of the cozy little crew in the newsroom at WJM in Minneapolis. But mostly, I've grown fond of the heroine herself who, when the series first began, was probably the most progressive model of womanhood on TV. In the wake of such scatter-brained incompetents as Lucille Ball and—for those who go back that far—Imogen Coca, Mary Richards was a model of intelligence and self-respect.

First, she had a serious and responsible job as a producer of a news program—not a daytime talk show or soap opera—but the news. She handled herself in a dignified and principled way most of the time. On one occasion she went to jail rather than reveal a news source. On another, she quit her job when refused a raise she felt she deserved. "If they think you're scared of losing your job, they own you," she said.

Equally interesting was Mary's private life. She was portrayed as an "over-30" career woman whose life was fulfilling in spite of the fact that men played almost no part in it. There were occasional suitors and romances, of course. But they all ended quickly, leaving Mary dry-eyed and contented with her life, which revolved around her job and friends.

To that extent, it's safe to say that the show was at least par-

tially a product and reflection of ideas made popular by the woman's movement. But there were also a lot of problems with her character—as a woman and a worker. It's probably a healthy sign that the show has seemed more dated and out of touch with reality each year.

For one thing, in portraying Mary as an independent career woman, the producers seemed to feel obligated to make her not only sexless, but downright prudish. She still blushes at the mention of sex and projects an image of a woman who "does without," neither a realistic nor desirable lifestyle for most of us. Then, too, there's a whole lot of sexism in her relationships at work. What are we to make of the fact that her boss still calls her "Mary" while she calls him "Mr. Grant"? A bit backward, I'd say. And then there's the workplace itself. WJM is a snug little "family" of professionals, in which problems are worked out in purely personal, as opposed to political ways and distinctions between bosses and workers don't exist.

In short, although there's much about the realities of the average working woman's life that is nearly avoided in the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*, it's been a funny, usually intelligent show about a woman who is rarely an embarrassment, and often a credit to her sex.

However, the times they are a'changing—even on TV—and the complexities of life in the '70s have pushed the networks beyond the neat, antiseptic life of a Mary Richards. Audiences are turning

more and more to shows that treat the real problems—personal and economic—of the average woman: one who increasingly works at a less than ideal job because she has to, who has real and often painful sexual relationships, and, often as not, family responsibilities.

Phyllis and *Rhoda*, spin-offs of *MTM*, have been dealing with divorce, single parenthood and the problem of job-hunting for women who lack skills and experience. Other new shows, like *Alice* and *One Day at a Time* deal even more seriously with the problems of working women who are also single parents.

None of these shows has much in the way of class or feminist consciousness, but they do point to a trend in TV programming: the networks sense that audiences want to see shows about women with whom they can identify; women with the same problems they have about money, men and children.

And so, while I'm sorry to see Mary Tyler Moore go, I'm encouraged by the kind of women that seem to be replacing her. Wouldn't it be nice, after all, if the next few years saw the development of some real flesh and blood TV heroines who weren't middle-class housewives or middle-class professionals? And wouldn't it be even nicer if it happened because the American public demanded it?

I think that's what's happening and I hope I'm right.

Elayne Rapping teaches English in Pittsburgh and wrote regularly for the *New American Movement*.

Big Blue marble,

I think it's for anyone, BECAUSE it shows people what others are doing around the world and how people feel. and another reason is, you can get a pen pal watching that show and you can watch different dances and they have a review, if children ruled the world, which is pretty good. only I wish they would have more recipes to tell the only one I've seen is pizza I've been watching the show for two years, and I hope lots of other people around the world enjoy it too.

By Esme Raji Codell
age: 8

Esme Raji Codell intends to be a sports writer.

"The Big Blue Marble" is a children's program aired by PBS on Saturday mornings (see *In These Times*, Dec. 13, 1976).

BOOKS

Unlimited options
prove limiting
for grads of '65

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO THE CLASS
OF '65?
By Michael Medved and David Wallechinsky
Random House, N.Y., \$10

Time devoted one of its 1965 cover stories to the class that was graduating from Palisades High School in suburban Los Angeles. Affluent and sophisticated, with an almost infinite number of options open to them, they seemed to be standing on the threshold of a Golden Era.

But it didn't work out like that. Two members of the class, Michael Medved and David Wallechinsky, decided to chronicle the 10 years that followed in the lives of 30 of their classmates—a representative cross-section not only of the student body, but also of the stratum of society it represents. What they learned is the material of *What Really Happened to the Class of '65?*: a disturbing account of dislocation, alienation, suicide, and severe crises—of personal relationships, of jobs and life-styles, and above all, of identity.

There are a few conventional "success stories" among the 30: a millionaire, a CPA, an architect, and so on. But most of the graduates achieved some sort of stability only after years of floundering—changing jobs, friends, schools and living places. Some dropped out and stayed out, living on remote rural farms where they do more talking to plants than to people. Many turned to Hari Krishna, Scientology, Baba Ram Das, and Jesus Christ.

Medved and Wallechinsky talked about their own reactions to what they learned in an interview with *In These Times*.

Wallechinsky: "I was quite surprised by the number of people who never would have mentioned Vietnam and the draft if we hadn't brought it up." But once the subject was raised, "they always placed great importance on how they avoided being shipped to the jungles of South-

east Asia. Beating the draft was a major part of their lives."

The difference between the experience of these Pali grads and men from minority and working class background substantiates what the movement was saying at the time: that those with the bucks and the background weren't doing the fighting and dying. Only one man from Pali '65 went to Vietnam, and he came back alive.

Medved feels that for many the rejection of mainstream society began with the assassination of John Kennedy.

Wallechinsky: "It was a turning point in my development ... like a loss of innocence."

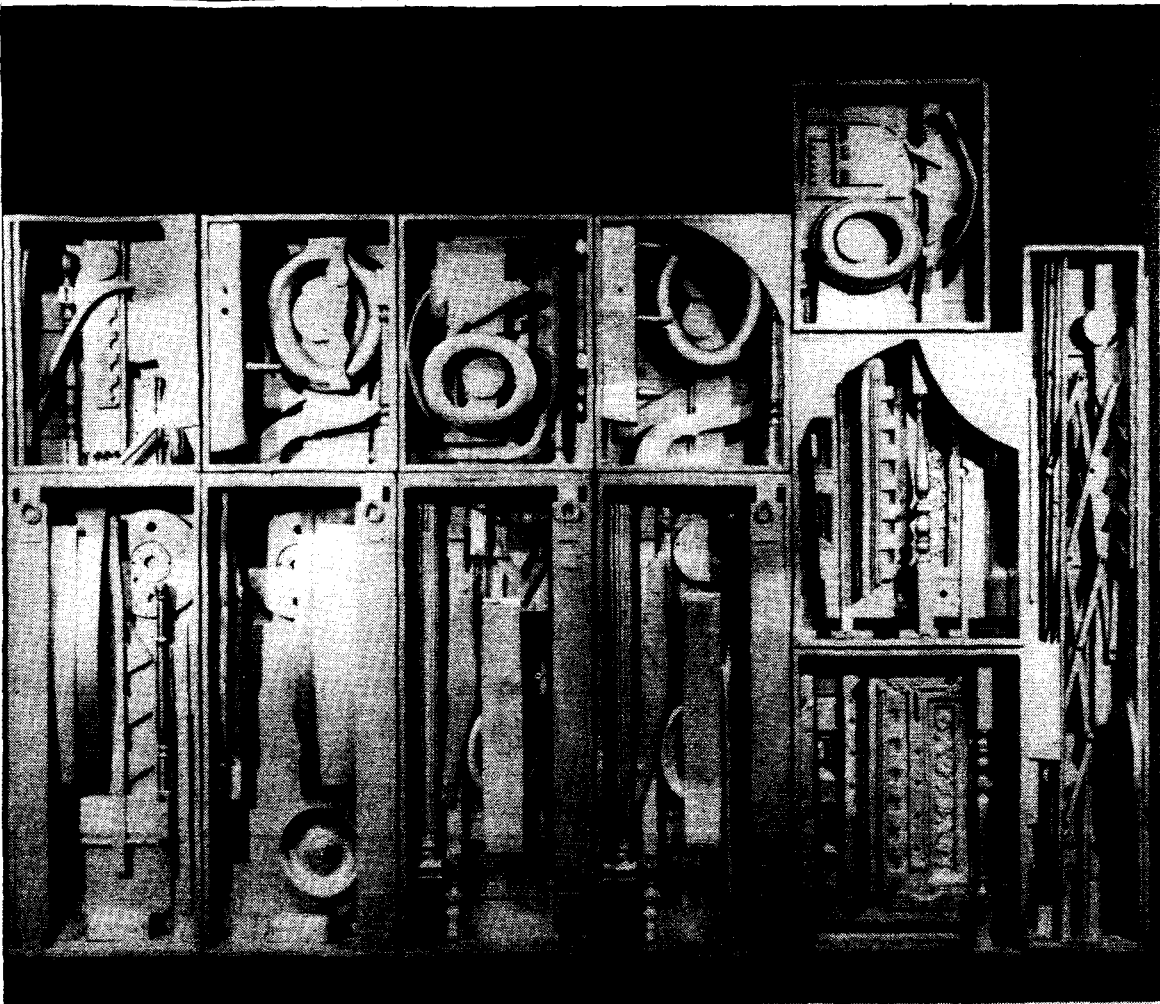
Medved: "The problem was that most found nothing to replace it with. They were left in a cultural vacuum." The movement was not able to fill this vacuum because its radical view of life was so apocalyptic, so unrelated to the day-to-day problems these people were facing.

The problems were almost the reverse of those faced by their contemporaries from other parts of American society. "When your options in life are unlimited, it's much more difficult to choose," Medved said. Their potential ability to succeed (in their parents' terms) became a burden, particularly since the '60s had alienated many of them from their parents' values. "There were very few who wanted a life just like their parents."

To graduates of high schools like Pali, *What Really Happened* will have a nostalgic impact. It is an accurate description of that scene wherever it exists. To readers whose experience is different, the book is a view of how the upper half lived during the '60s and early '70s.

—Dennis Levitt

Dennis Levitt is an editor for KFWB, Los Angeles, a member of the Southern California Journalists Alliance, and a graduate of Beverly Hills High, class of 1966.



Royal Tide II, painted wood, 126 1/2" x 94 1/2", by LN, 1961-63. Whitney Museum of American Art

ART

Louise Nevelson talks
about her life and art

DAWNS AND DUSKS
Taped conversations with Louise Nevelson
Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y., \$12.95

Louise Nevelson is one of the few women artists in history to achieve great success, one of a handful of women sculptors. She has seen her work shown all over the world. Her huge metal constructions are welded firmly to the ground at M.I.T. and in the center strip of Park Avenue. And her wood sculpture moved cubism into the third dimension.

Whatever one may think of her art, there's no question the woman can talk clearly and colorfully. In this short book (copiously illustrated with photographs of her work) she talks about the entire scope of her life.

"I knew I needed to claim my total life.... I don't think I real-

ized the price that would be demanded for what I wanted. I've been so lonely for long periods of my life that if a rat walked in, I would have welcomed it.... No more marriages for me ... I wouldn't marry God if he asked me...."

For the women's movement, Nevelson indicates strong, if non-specific support. "I also think we haven't yet—I haven't anyway—solved the relationship ... the battle of the sexes.... I think that is what the women are really trying to do, to solve that problem. Not to solve it, but to get closer to understanding it. Because even when men have been good to women, well, we're good to our animals too."

In her life, Nevelson has known and loved a lot of men as

well as women, but she let none of them get in her way.

The Nevelson family came to Maine from Russia when Louise was four. "This was such a WASP country ... and they needed foreigners like I need ten holes in my head." Her parents have been a source of strength all through her career, especially her mother, who—when Louise's marriage was crumbling—offered to take care of her son. "You always wanted to continue in your art. You go and study."

Her mother, says Nevelson, never adjusted to Maine or to marriage, which may have fed her ability to give what Adrienne Rich (in *Of Woman Born*) calls a rare gift: unmitigated support by a mother for a daughter's pursuit of identity.

—Jane Melnick

New, bargain \$5.00 sub
Subscribe to *In These Times*

name

street

city/state/zip

name

street

city/state/zip

name

street

city/state/zip

☐ \$15 for one year.
☐ \$5 for three months.
\$_____ Contribution.
Mail your check to New Majority Publishing Co., Inc.
1509 North Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60622.