

## FILM

# Thieves needs more than stars and one-liners to stay afloat

## THIEVES

Directed by John Berry  
Screenplay by Herb Gardner from his original play  
Starring Marlo Thomas and Charles Grodin, distributed by Paramount

If one-liners did a movie make, then gagwriters could make movies.

*Thieves* is a collection of one-liners, perpetrated by writer Herb Gardner and director John Berry. (Can't imagine what happened to Berry who did such a tender, funny job with *Claudine* last year!) The poor stars, Marlo Thomas and Charles Grodin, work very hard. They bail and bail, trying to keep the leaky vessel afloat. But it's all too baleful.

Everything remains soggy.

The opening moments of the film hold a promise never fulfilled. The camera pans up the face of a 38 story luxury apartment house on New York's swank East Side. As you pass each jutting terrace, tantalizing swatches of conversation float out from the apartment behind the balcony. A visual demonstration of monumental NO privacy in crowded urban living. It's worth a snicker.

Now for the plot! Sally and Marty Cramer (Marlo Thomas and Charles Grodin) live in the luxury apartment, see, with no furniture, see, because she lost it all while they were moving, see? Lost it? Marty is beginning to think his swinging wife and childhood sweetheart isn't as cute as she once was. You have to agree, seeing as how she didn't really

lose \$55,000 worth of antique furniture (how could young school teachers afford that much stuff?). She sent it to Grand Street (their darling old slum neighborhood) to be kept by a nice old man for a \$2 tip—the idea being to entice her upwardly mobile husband back to their “roots.”

Marty is the principal of the Bluebell School for blue-blazered French-speaking rich kids, having started his own life as a member of a battling street gang on the Lower East Side. Upward mobility? Unbelievable culture vaulting! Marty, incidentally, shows emotional distress, when he feels it, by failing to shave (which also saves acting). Things get pretty grizzly before he feels better.

Also featured in the film is

night-club comedian Irwin Corey, as Sally's 78-year-old, maniac, cab-driver father who shouts homespun wisdom and bad jokes. Decibel for decibel, Corey can get more laughs out of his routines as the “World's Foremost Authority.” And then there's the doorman of the fancy building where the Cramers live who is totally unresponsive to the tenants' comings and goings. Turns out he's dead. Nobody noticed till he falls off his chair onto the street. Hilarious!

Mercedes McCambridge is wasted as an old “shopping bag lady” who hangs around the apartment house ripping off everything that's loose and repossessing what has been consigned to the trash cans.

There is a lot of talk about how



Father Irwin Corey and daughter Marlo Thomas

living in the city is a rip-off anyway. (One of Sally's younger students helps her furnish the empty apartment with things he steals from other tenants in the build-

ing.) But the talk never says anything.

*Thieves* and the thieves in it are all too bitterly cute.

—Mavis Lyons



## ADDITIONS & CORRECTIONS

In the article on *Brothel 8* in last week's issue, the Chicago critic quoted on the film was improperly identified. Christine Nieland is the regular film critic of the *Chicago Daily News*.

Too late for publication with the article, IN THESE TIMES received news of the death, in Japan of Kinuyo Tanaka, the award-winning actress who played the veneral Osaki. She was 70 years old.

## IN THESE TIMES

IN THESE TIMES T-SHIRTS FOR SALE: \$5 - Five for \$20. Don't delay folks, we're sure they'll disappear fast. Specify S, M, L, XL.

FUND RAISER: IN THESE TIMES needs an experienced fund raiser to organize fund raising activities, set up sustainer group, and solicit funds from individuals. Salary plus commission. Please call (312) 489-4444 to arrange an interview. 1509 N. Milwaukee Av., Chicago IL 60622.

### Classified rates:

Display:  
Per inch 5.00  
Non-display:  
Per word .15  
(20 word minimum)

### DISCOUNTS:

3 insertions 5%  
10 insertions 10%

## A New Magazine for the 70'S

### MOTHER JONES, Finally . . . A Magazine for the Rest of Us

We all grew up in the 60's—one way or another. And how different they were from the 50's. Or the 40's, or the 30's.

We're the generation that got back in touch with our world, in the most basic ways. We rediscovered ourselves. Music opened us up, and took off. The Beatles. The Stones. Dylan.

We found our own literature, with a tough cosmic, comic vision . . . Catch 22. Slaughterhouse Five. Cuckoo's Nest. We identified with a handful of writers. Pynchon. Grass. Barthelme. Vonnegut. Barth.

And the movies became The Cinema . . . from Eisenstein to Chabrol, through re-runs of Casablanca, to Strange-love and The Graduate.

Not just entertainment; it's all part of our lives.

We put our stamp on the world by fighting against Viet Nam, by working in the Peace Corps. And by confronting racism, sexism and militarism. In the process, we also discovered the dark side of the 60's.

MOTHER JONES is a magazine for the rest of us. As veterans of the 60's we explore the alternatives of the 70's. We offer the best in criticism, encouragement, insight and analysis. We report on the successes and failures of community organizers and mass movements.

MOTHER JONES is tough. On polluters, politicians and profiteers. MOTHER JONES is fun. With cartoons and trivia. We bring you the best in cinema, music, books and art. We talk about sexuality, working together, living well on less, buying things that last and much more.

A lot of the best writers in the country are with us. Writers

like Kirkpatrick Sale, Barbara Garson, Roger Rapoport, Vivian Gornick, Max Apple, Eugene Genovese, Margaret Atwood, Herbert Kohl, Robert Lipsyte and dozens more.

MOTHER JONES is a magazine for people who came of age in the 60's and 70's, and have been looking for something like us for a long time.

For a limited time, you can join us as a Charter Subscriber at a substantial savings. We'll start sending you MOTHER JONES and bill you later at just \$8—\$4.00 off the regular rate. Charter Subscribers will always be entitled to the lowest available renewal rates, gift subscriptions and other offers.

Why not take the chance? After all, there's no sense in living the 70's alone.

### Charter Offer

YES, start sending MOTHER JONES to me and sign me up as a Charter Subscriber at just \$8—a \$4.00 saving. I understand that, as a Charter Subscriber, I will receive the lowest available prices in perpetuity.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Send to: MOTHER JONES, 1255 Portland Place, Boulder, Colorado 80302.



# Who broke the Hollywood blacklist?

"Trumbo's position was that the producers should be made to see a financial advantage in dropping the whole ridiculous business and not needed into antagonism..."



"I am possibly not the best screenwriter in Hollywood, but I am incomparably the fastest."

Six of the Hollywood Ten.

No single Sampson pulled down the pillars of the blacklist, just as no single Senator from Wisconsin, or chicken-hearted motion picture executive, or committee of Congress was responsible for erecting it in the first place.

It came into being during the worst period of the Cold War (against the Soviet Union) and the hot war (against China) in Korea, in a time when Communist Party officials and members were being jailed under the Smith Act and naturalized radicals and progressives were being deported under the McCarran Act. It ended in a time of comparative peace, when the Smith Act had been rendered inoperative by a series of hard-fought court cases, and the House Committee on Un-American Activities and kindred agencies had been brought to the brink of dissolution by legal and political resistance.

There are at least three quite separate types of action that contributed to the final event, and each is worth at least a few illustrative examples. First, there were the legal actions: suits for breach of contract by writers who had contracts when the blacklist was announced; suits for damages sustained by groups of victims who had no contracts, but could establish a history of employment in the industry prior to the blacklist; even an anti-trust suit that threatened the studios with triple damages for conspiring to restrain trade.

Most of these were successful in the lower courts; most lost on appeal. Some were settled cheaply out of court. The one much-publicized victory on this front was the case of John Henry Faulk who won a judgment not on a challenge to the legality of the blacklist, but on the contention that he had been mistakenly chosen as a victim.

Little is said about these court actions in Cook's book, *Dalton Trumbo*, possibly because Trumbo was not involved and in most instances disapproved of them. Trumbo's position was that the producers should be made to see a financial advantage in dropping the whole "ridiculous business," and not be needed into antagonism toward what was in their own best interest. But with or without Trumbo's approval, the suits went doggedly on, year after year, and they had an effect.

Another type of court battle may have had a more critical effect, although it took a while for it to be evident. That was the legal resistance to direct political persecution that climaxed in the case of the California Communist leaders (convicted under the Smith Act) which was eventually decided in the defendants' favor and effectively ended the suspension of constitutional liberties for political dissenters.

Second, there was a series of actions by members of the professional guilds who had recovered from their panic and regretted their submission to so patently un-American an activity as the blacklist. Instances of Oscars voted to blacklisted writers are noted in Ring Lardner's article on the inner working of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (*ITT*, March 14).

In addition to those Lardner mentions, there are at least two other interesting cases, one involving a second recognition of Michael Wilson. Everyone in the Screen Writers' Guild, if not everyone in the in-

dustry, knew that Wilson had done the screenplay for "The Bridge on the River Kwai" when it was voted Best Picture of 1957. No screenwriter was credited. Pierre Boulle, a French novelist who does not write in English, was listed as the author of the book from which the film was adapted—presumably by actors and director improvising while the film was being shot.

Also, the 1958 award for the best motion picture written directly for the screen went to Harold Jacob Smith and Nathan E. Douglas for *The Defiant Ones*. Hal Smith was known to be "gray-listed" (a status in which one found it difficult to obtain work under one's own name without knowing precisely what offense had

## DALTON TRUMBO

By Bruce Cook  
Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1976

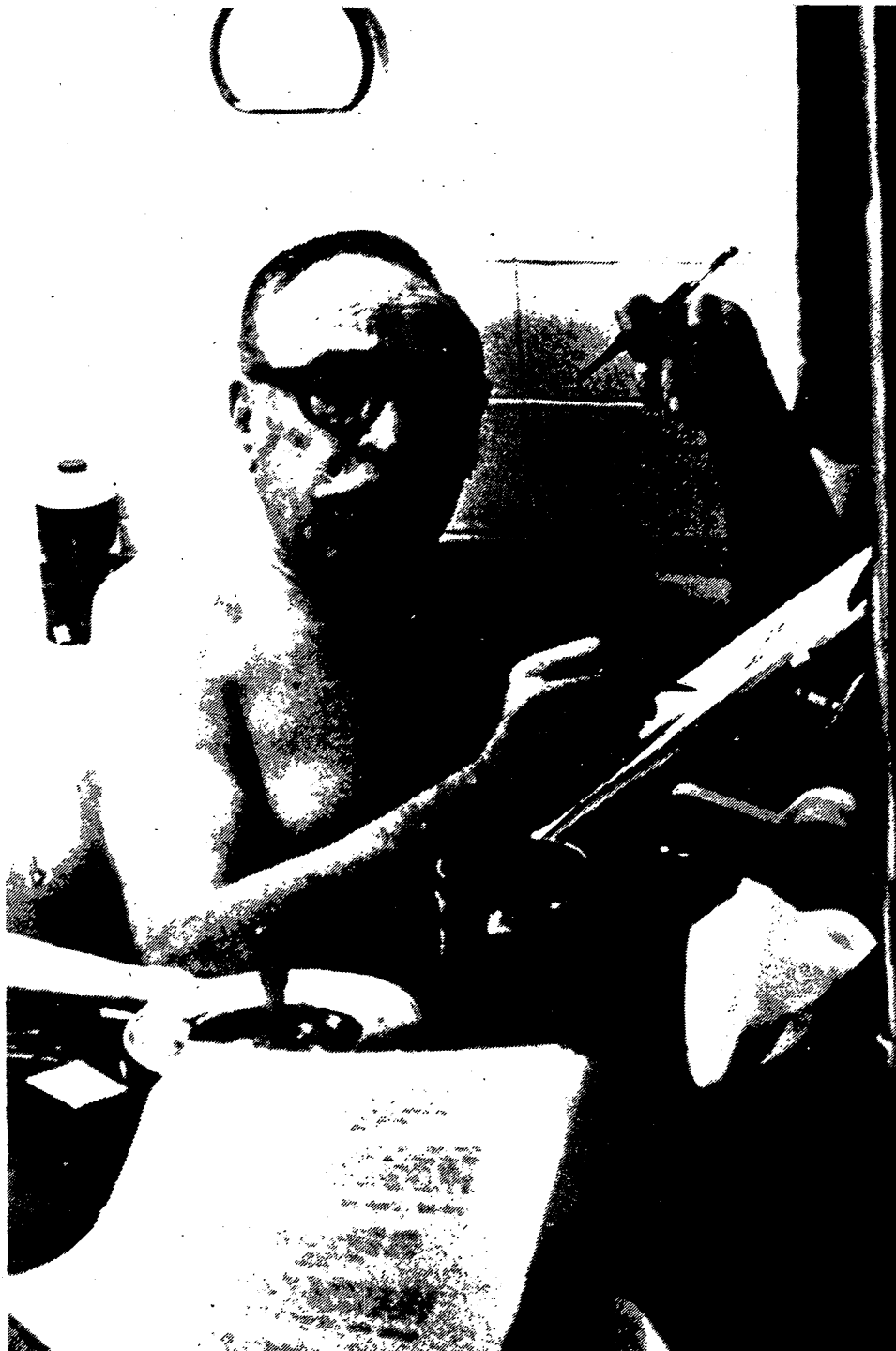
The subtitle of Bruce Cook's *Dalton Trumbo* claims that the book is "a biography of the Oscar-winning screenwriter who broke the Hollywood blacklist." Wrong on two counts. The book is not a biography in either of the senses in which the term is legitimately used; and Trumbo did not break the Hollywood blacklist.

This is not to say that *Dalton Trumbo* is not good reading, or that it does not throw light on the inner workings of the motion picture industry when America's movies dominated the screens of the world, or that it does not add significantly to the history of the making and the breaking of a blacklist that affected all of American

Continued on page 19.

## LIFE IN THE U.S.

Trumbo at work. Photo by his daughter, Melissa.



culture in the late '50s and early '60s.

It does, and is all these things—which would be enough, if so much more had not been promised.

What Cook has produced is an extended "profile" of a fascinating man who was completely involved in a fascinating milieu. He has pieced together from interviews with Trumbo, his friends and family members, and from reading masses of Trumbo's correspondence, a real life Horatio Alger story—the meteoric rise from genteel poverty to fabulous fortune of a man who could say of himself that he was "possibly not the best screenwriter in Hollywood, but incomparably the fastest."

Trumbo was an indefatigable—possibly a compulsive—worker, an ingenious solver of plot problems, the sort of doctor who can be called on the shortest of notice to save the life of a failing script. He did not write many original screenplays of distinction. He did write one first-rate anti-war novel (*Johnny Got His Gun*, made into a film by Trumbo himself 30 years after its first publication). He earned the distinction of being the highest paid writer in Hollywood by helping the big studios get films out of trouble.

This lucrative career was cut short by a subpoena to appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in connection with its investigation of Communist influence in the motion picture industry. Trumbo and nine other writers and directors called to the witness stand, denied their interrogators' right to question them about their political affiliations. They were cited for contempt of Congress, fought their case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, were denied a hearing there, and served sentences of varying lengths in federal prisons.

In 1947, even before the Hollywood Ten went to jail, the studios instituted a blacklist that made not only them, but all other writers, directors, actors, story editors, and back-lot workers who refused to cooperate with any investigatory arm of the government, unemployable in the industry. Hundreds—possibly thousands—of men and women were victimized. Actors got jobs as bartenders or supported themselves by selling miniature trees or no-run hosiery. A man who had written comedy routines for Abbot and Costello went to work as a paper salesman. A woman who had been nicknamed "the Queen of the Westerns" gave up writing screen plays and opened a public stenographer service. Some, who could not face the economic or the social pressure, turned informer and bought their own security at the expense of their friends'.

It was, as Trumbo put it in a brilliant polemical pamphlet, the *Time of the Toad*.

It is against this backdrop that the story of his one-man battle against the blacklist is played out in Cook's book. It makes a good third act to the Horatio Alger story, but it does not make good history.

There is a lot of interesting and valuable material on the making of the blacklist and on the operation of the black-market that made it possible for some writers

Continued on page 19.