

FILM

Julia is the best all-round film around

JULIA

Screenplay by Alvin Sargent
Directed by Fred Zinnemann
Starring Vanessa Redgrave, Jane Fonda, Jason Robards, Hal Holbrook and Maximilian Schell

Produced and distributed by
Twentieth Century Fox

Julia is a fine film.

Made from a fine piece of autobiographical writing, played by a fine and dedicated cast, directed and produced with skill, taste and intelligence, it works on many levels, any one of which would nominate it for top honors.

On one level it is the story of a deep, abiding and demanding friendship between two women. One is Lillian Hellman, one of our best and most successful playwrights and author of three best-selling volumes of memoirs. (It is from the second of these, *Pentimento*, that the plot of the film is taken.)

The other woman is "Julia"—the neglected child and grandchild of rich, uncaring American aristocrats, who grows up to be a brilliant medical student, interning with Freud in Vienna when the Nazi putsch occurs. Julia, who has been a socialist sympathizer, fights back, is brutally beaten, becomes a member of the anti-fascist underground and in that capacity asks Hellman to undertake the smuggling of some money from France to Hitler-held Berlin, to be used by the underground to buy release for Jews and political prisoners menaced by the death camps.

The setting up and carrying out of this mission is another level of dramatic interest: a meaningful melodrama with well-orchestrated crescendos of hope and fear. It has been a long while since an American film has projected the savagery of a rising fascist movement with real emotional power. It is in part the contribution of Alvin Sargent's restrained and evocative screenplay, in part Zinnemann's brilliant handling of

(Right)
Jane Fonda and
Vanessa Redgrave as
Lillian and
Julia meet for
the last time
in a Berlin
cafe.

(Below)
Jason Robards
and Jane Fonda
as Dashiell
Hammett and
Lillian Hellman



the big action scenes, and in part the completely convincing visual projection of the time and place. (None of this is in Hellman's original sketch.)

But powerful as the melodrama is, it cannot overwhelm the story of the two women. The scene in which the money is delivered (and Lillian is out of danger) is the most moving of the film.

The two women sit at a table in a Berlin cafe, pressed by time and the possibility that they are being watched by hostile eyes, trying to compress ten years of lives lived apart into five minutes, communicating by small gestures, interrupted sentences, smiles, tears. It is the profound, though muted climax to a love story entirely new to the screen.

Virginia Wolff wrote in *A Room of One's Own* that she "tried unsuccessfully to remember any case in the course of my reading where two women are represented as friends. Almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men. And how

small a part of a woman's life is that!" Since that day nearly 50 years have passed; novelists and playwrights (some, but not all of them women) have filled in a good deal of that literary void. But films—and not only American films—have been slow to catch up.

The friendship in *Julia* is not a sidelight on the characters involved. It is a story with a beginning, a middle and a transcendent ending. It has reasons for being and reasons for non-being. That is to say, given the particular circumstances and the general cultural context, one can understand how this relationship could be shunted into a backwater, out of the main work/love currents of the women's lives.

On still another level *Julia* is the story of a writer struggling with her craft and being supported in that struggle by the man she loves and lives with. A radical switch on a fairly familiar plot line! The relationship between Dashiell Hammett and Lillian Hellman comes across as a

real marriage between two independent and mature people. And that's another first.

Jason Robards is a believable and admirable Dash Hammett. Maximilian Schell's "Mr. Johann" is reminiscent of another Hellman anti-Nazi, the hero of *Watch on the Rhine*. Remembering Paul Lucas in that part, one can measure the achievement of Vanessa Redgrave as a tragic heroine. (When has such a role been written for a woman?) Redgrave's Julia is superb.

Unfortunately Fonda's Lillian is not.

There are many scenes—sometimes whole sequences—where Fonda's grasp of the character is firm and good. (Most of these are scenes played with Redgrave.) When it is not so good, it is not entirely her fault. She seems to have been cast in the role for her political convictions. Certainly not because she bears any resemblance to Lillian Hellman.

Fonda and Hellman are both women with well-defined *personas*, that do not accommodate

to each other. Hellman's may not have been as well-publicized before her memoirs appeared, but it exists now, and it rises like an indignant ghost in several crucial sequences.

What Fonda is playing in the scenes with Mr. Johann and on the train to Berlin is something more like one of her last starring roles. Make-up and costume are also working against her here. And when her extraordinarily pretty face suddenly hardens into a version of her father's, the illusion that you are in a world teetering on the brink of holocaust is battered, if not shattered.

(One wonders if the same thing happens to British film-goers accepting one of the Redgraves as a "character," which fortunately is no problem for us.)

In the final sequences of the film, Fonda is totally effective, and the lasting impression of *Julia* is that it is a giant step forward for American film-makers, and probably the best all-round film around.

—Janet Stevenson



CLASSIFIED

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POETRY

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Robert Lowell: patrician poet and pacifist

In November 1967, while patrolling near Quang Tri, Vietnam, my squad came upon a batch of badly printed English-language leaflets, scattered by the Viet Cong. The leaflets, complete with photographs and quotes, told about the march on the Pentagon only a few weeks earlier. One of the names listed as having participated in the demonstration was Robert Lowell, the distinguished poet who died of a heart attack in New York City in September.

Nineteen years old, with five months still to serve in Vietnam and my whole world coming apart, I hated those leaflets. I hated Vietnam, and the Viet Cong and the demonstrators—including Robert Lowell. But I have learned a great deal in the last ten years, and one of the things is that Robert Lowell was a man to be respected, admired and thanked—and not just for the gift of his poetry.

One can hardly imagine a more unlikely political dissident than Lowell. Schooled at St. Marks and Harvard, tutored by Richard Eberhart, Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, he was the inheritor of a aristocratic Puritan tradition stretching back to the Mayflower. Edward Winslow, Josiah Winslow, General John Stark, Amy Lowell, James Russell Lowell were his ancestors: ten generations of bankers and justices, academics and generals—Yankee bluebloods.

Lowell never got out from under the shadow of that past. Indeed, it was probably too vast for any human being to escape. But he never felt fully comfortable with it, and his life was punctuated by remarkably independent actions.

Unhappy at Harvard, he transferred to Kenyon College in 1937. In 1940 he converted to Roman Catholicism. Though at the outbreak of World War II he had successfully attempted to enlist in the navy (his father had been a career naval officer), by 1943 he had come to the conclusion that Allied bombing of civilian populations in Europe was morally indefensible. Denied conscientious objector status, Lowell was convicted of failure to obey the Se-

Lowell refused LBJ's invitation to a White House dinner, wiring that he regarded "our present foreign policy with dismay and distrust." He was the only major figure to decline the invitation.

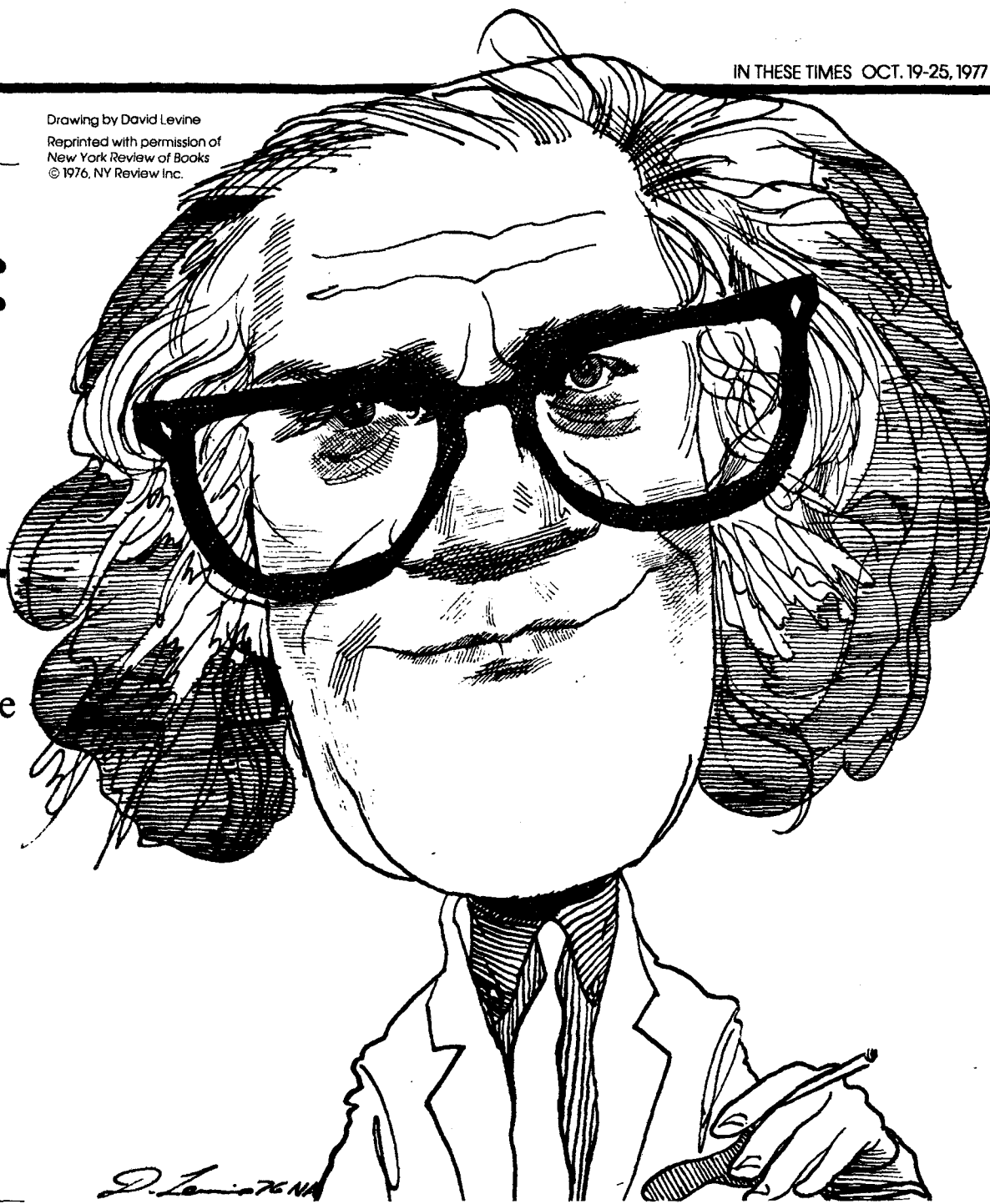
lective Service Act and served four months in Danbury federal prison.

Later in the '40s, with a growing reputation as a poet, Lowell was a member of the committee that awarded Ezra Pound the Bollingen prize. Pound was not exactly popular at the time, and the decision required more than a little courage and integrity.

In 1965 Lowell refused Lyndon Johnson's invitation to a White House dinner, wiring that he regarded "our present foreign policy with dismay and distrust." He was the only major figure to decline that invitation. That was two years before I enlisted in the Marines.

Several years later, at the Ambassador Theatre in Washington, D.C., Lowell received a standing ovation for the poetry reading he had just given to a largely student anti-war audience. Leaving the stage, "Lowell did not seem particularly triumphant," wrote Norman Mailer in *The Armies of the Night*. "He looked modest, still depressed, as if he had been applauded too much for too little."

The next day, Lowell was in the front rank of the marchers on their way to the Pentagon, matching strides with Benjamin Spock, Jerry Rubin and Dave Dellinger. Surely the staid patri-



BOOKS

The facts of (fish) life

THE ART OF FISHING WITH WORMS (And Other Live Bait)

By Harold F. Blaisdell
Alfred A. Knopf, \$10

*You may talk of gnat and hackle
When you're sortin' out your tackle
And the plans for the excursion
are still firmin'
But when it comes to fishin'
Ye'd best leave off silly wishin'
And set about the lowly art of wormin'*

Harold F. Blaisdell could not be expected to subscribe to such cynical sentiments. To hear him tell it in *The Art of Fishing with Worms (and Other Live Bait)*, there is nothing lowly about worming at all. It is just another method of catching fish, and one requiring its own vast measure of competence.

He is probably right about the competence. As the only downright bad fisherman in a family of virtuosos, I can testify that no aspect of the art is simple or uncomplicated: it just looks simple to those of us who couldn't fill a creel in a struck hatchery.

But I do not think Blaisdell is going to persuade many of us that worming is actually a noble calling. There is something unkindly, and maybe even inhumane, about his effort in this direction. He reminds me of all the genital technicians who seek these days to promote sex without guilt. Half the fun of worming, like two-fifths the joy of sex, is in the guilt. I'm not going to surrender all that pleasure to unadorned reason.

The reason, however, is of a very high quality.

"This book is dedicated to the proposition that the fisherman's

main objective is to catch fish. Its purpose is to help him succeed," Blaisdell writes in his very first paragraph. "It is true that many pleasant spinoffs accrue to fishing: the chance to observe nature, rapport with the outdoors, and many more. Yet when all in this vein has been said, as it has many times, none of the fringe benefits can compensate for the lack of success."

Blaisdell, who lives in a small hamlet north of Rutland, Vermont, and has been writing about fishing since before the Second War, is reverent to the point of superstition concerning the sensibilities of fish. He contends that worms, and all other bait, must be presented as naturally as possible, so that fish will not suspect that the bait is on a hook. I do not believe this myself; it flies in the face of what science has discovered about fish. But it is a fact that the people who share Blaisdell's reverence catch more fish by far than those who consult the latest scientific opinions regarding the fish's brain pan.

I was somewhat surprised to discover that there is less to worm fishing technique than I had expected. Blaisdell offers a new trick or two, and is wonderfully persuasive on the joys of bait fishing with ultra-light tackle. But mostly his book stresses the familiar essentials, repeating them and spinning tales around them for emphasis.

The art is all, I gather, in the execution. Which is reason enough to go back to the brook for another seance.

—Patrick Owens

Owens is a regular columnist for *Newsday*.

Concord

TEN THOUSAND Fords are idle here in search Of a tradition. Over these dry sticks—
The Minute Man, the Irish Catholics,
The ruined bridge and Walden's fished-out perch—
The belfry of the Unitarian Church
Rings out the hanging Jesus. Crucifix,
How can your whited spindling arms transfix
Mammon's unbridled industry, the lurch
For forms to harness Heraclitus' stream!
This Church is Concord—Concord where Thoreau
Named all the birds without a gun to probe
Through darkness to the painted man and bow:
The death-dance of King Philip and his scream
Whose echo girdled this imperfect globe.

From *Lord Weary's Castle*, copyright 1946 by Robert Lowell.
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cian must have felt awkward in such company, alien even. But he was there.

None of this is to say that Lowell was a flaming radical, for certainly that was not the case. Not long before Lowell died, Louis Simpson, writing for the *Saturday Review*, correctly said of him that his "life has been much too sheltered. He has kept the best company, he has made his political protests under the best possible conditions.... He can have very little understanding of the kind of people who make up the mass—the poor and unlucky and obscure."

But to a sadly marked degree, most of us are the products of where we have come from. Within the terribly confining limits of his heritage, Lowell did what he could and at times when too few others were doing anything at all.

A few days after Lowell's death, I got a letter from Jan Barry, one of the founders of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. "Lowell I will always remember," he wrote, "not for a particular poem, but for quietly being there at so many peace demonstrations." Peace—

*After the planes unloaded, we
fell down
Buried together, unmarried men
and women;
Not crown of thorns, not iron,
not Lombard crown,
Not griled and spindling spires
pointing to heaven
Could save us. Raise us, Mother,
we fell down
Here hugger-mugger in the
jelled fire.*

("The Dead in Europe")
Most people will remember Robert Lowell for his poetry. But though I have come to admire his poems very much, I will remember Robert Lowell because, on a day when I hated him, he was trying to save my life.

—W.D. Ehrhart

W.D. Ehrhart is co-editor of *Demilitarized Zones*, an anthology of anti-war poetry by Vietnam veterans, and author of two books of poetry, *A Generation of Peace* and *Rootless*.