

Still-Birth as Epitaph

STEARNS MORSE

THE fresco which Orozco is painting in the Baker Library at Dartmouth College is almost finished. In the last panel a flaming Christ has chopped down his cross and stands rampant against a background of piled up engines of war and the ruins of ancient religions and cultures. In the next to the last panel the sprawling corpse of the Unknown Soldier is concealed by gaudy wreaths and flapping banners while an incredibly pompous politician belches platitudes before a microphone. But it is the third panel from the end that is perhaps most fitting in its environment.

Against a lurid orange background of a world in flame stand learned doctors in their caps and gowns. They bear on their faces the expressions of the smugly damned: adamant conservatism; bigoted pedantry; arrogance; superciliousness. These are not the expressions of living men, even of a Brain

Trust, they are the expressions one might imagine upon the faces of upright corpses just before the last shred of flesh has rotted away. The corpses are oblivious of the flame behind them because they are corpses posing, as it were, with a ghastly simper for the camera; perhaps they are on the platform at some Walpurgis Night Commencement. And, indeed, they are presiding as a monstrous birth of knowledge. For sprawled among heavy gray books before them is another skeleton without benefit of gorgeous gown. She is evidently feminine for from the white skull, full of a black emptiness, stray the last grisly whitish locks of what once might have been an abundant head of hair. Is it Alma Mater to whom the alumni pray? Perhaps—at any rate the recumbent skeleton has just been through some sort of maternal labor: one long bony leg is thrust aloft across the faces of the grim professors, the other hangs down amongst the

books, the apparatus of knowledge. The master obstetrician bending with black obsequious shoulders, his skull a massive spheroid of white, holds in his hands the infant of which the female has just been delivered: a miscarriage, a little foetus of bones, a mortar-board set jauntily upon his overgrown skull. Scattered among the books below are other capped skeletal foetuses in test tubes, dead jolly little creatures with the unholy glee of the undergraduate on a peerade. For the little embalmed foetuses are, after all, the liveliest things in the panel (unless one excepts the background of flame).

The undergraduates, going to and fro for their books, stop and look and chuckle; they, of course, easily recognize in the gowned supervisors of the grim accouchement the likeness of their professors and now and again the more discerning recognize in themselves the gay tragic little still-born bastards. (Bastards they must be; it is impossible to think of the officiating doctors as having been capable of begetting even these dead foetuses. Perhaps the father was the football coach.) Many of them are about to be spawned out into a world for which this academic world has not precisely fitted them. Many of them are products of a world of stock dividends and bonuses and country clubs which is already an archaic world. They are doomed to become, not bond salesmen, not copy-writers for the Satevepost, not miniature editions of a Charles E. Mitchell with only lesser incomes, shamefully unearned, but members of the growing 'proletariat of the A. B.' And they do not know it yet.

There is much discussion as to the meaning. One prominent alumnus has labelled it: Dartmouth Dead. (Of course, Dartmouth is not dead. When another alumnus, a railway executive, can provide a private car for the three new football coaches on their first visit to Hanover it is very far from 'dead'.) But the panel raises a suspicion. Is the liberal college, like so many other institutions, in process of preparing its own epitaph?

Orozco, if you should ask him, would merely shrug his shoulders, I suppose. That is not my business, he would say, that is for the spectator to decide. Meanwhile he has gone on painting. The last half-panel is done, a strip above a recess opposite the delivery desk. The background is the red steel framework of a new building, in balanced horizontal and vertical planes. In the foreground a gigantesque workman lies stretched out at ease. He is reading a book with a certain unsentimental critical quizzicalness. His figure breathes repose and strength. At any rate, you feel, *this* is not an epitaph.

Art Notes

"Naïve Art"—At the 14th Street Gallery, an amusing show by John Kane, former Pittsburgh house painter and one of the foremost American primitives. Unlettered and unsophisticated, he has an amazing talent for creating interesting patterns, and in *Industry's Increase*, depicting industrial life along his native Monongahela. Kane is an unwitting



Adolf Dehn

ting example, however, of capitalist exploitation in the field of art. Shrewd "exponents of art" seized immediately upon his originality and sold it to their ever-gullible public, under the tag line "naïve art." It was scarcely a service to Kane, and equally improbable that it was a service to art.

Somnambulist—Walt Kuhn has gone to sleep, and we have at the Marie Harriman gallery a show done in this somnambulist condition. Nothing in the show comes up to *The White Clown*, owned by the Whitney Museum, in which Kuhn demonstrated that at one period at least he had extraordinary gifts. *Acrobats in White*, the best canvas, has a strength that is lacking in the others. Too many contemporary painters faded out because they have so little to say. Walt Kuhn is the best example of a man with unusual talent whose vitality seems to have been drowned in defeatism.

John Reed Exhibit—The first exhibition of work by students of the John Reed Club School of Art is being held this week (Feb. 19 to 26) at the John Reed Club Gallery, 430 Sixth Avenue. The exhibition, which coincides with the beginning of the Spring term of the school, shows representative work from all classes. Of particular interest is the work of the Political Cartoon class and the Fresco Class—two classes which are not offered in other art schools. The exhibition is open from 1:30 to 5:00 p. m. daily, and Friday evening from 7 to 9 p. m.

Miscellaneous—Thumb nail review of the Speicher show: The frames were lovely. . . Georgia O'Keeffe, painter of that erotic flower, has a one-man show at an American Place. . . The history of the art of scenic design from the Renaissance to tomorrow may be traced in the Theatre Art International Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. Of particular interest is the Soviet Union contribution, which arrived late. . . In the late American Group Show at the Barbizon-Plaza Orozco hung a fiery canvas called *Wounded Soldier*, which completely dominated the exhibition.

M. K. B.

Current Films

Search For Beauty—Produced after a high pressure world wide beauty contest. Stupid story poorly done. A pageant of healthy, good looking young men and women. See it only if they pay you!

Hi Nellie—Paul Muni. Hokum melodrama about a newspaper man. Vigorous direction by Mervyn Le Roy and expert acting may entertain, though they reveal nothing about the inside of a metropolitan newspaper.

You Can't Buy Everything—May Robson, Lewis Stone. The story of a money-mad woman financier who destroys banks and engineers Wall Street coups, but finds, alack and alas, that mother love comes before love of money.

Fugitive Lovers—Robert Montgomery. The Grand Hotel theme on a transcontinental bus. Hokum slickly directed, creates suspense. N. A.

★★★★ —Daily News

... The Group Theatre, and Sidney Harmon and James R. Ullman, present Sidney Kingsley's successful play

MEN IN WHITE

"Exciting, touching play"

—Atkinson, TIMES

"Vigorous and exciting drama. Should be seen."

—Lockridge, SUN

BROADHURST Theatre West 44th St.
Eves. 8:45—50c to 2.50
Mats.: Wednesday & Saturday 2:40—50c and \$2

The Screen

THIS excellent and necessary pamphlet published by International Publishers and sponsored by The Film and Photo League contains some of the late Harry Alan Potamkin's best writing on the motion picture, and some of the keenest Marxist analysis of movies ever written in America.

To think of the almost insignificant body of fundamental criticism of bourgeois films that exists today, is to realize the importance and value of a pamphlet like *The Eyes of the Movie*, which brings clearly and concisely to mind the reactionary character of the social and political forces that have dominated the motion picture arena from the days of the 1907 panic to the present crisis.

"The movie was born in the laboratory and reared in the counting house," writes Potamkin, remembering Edison and Griffith on the one hand and Morgan and Hearst on the other.

"It is a benevolent monster of four I's: Inventor, Investor, Impressario, Imperialist. The second and fourth eyes are the guiding ones. They pilot the course of the motion picture. The course is so piloted that it is favorable to the equilibrium of the ruling class, and unfavorable to the working class. This is truer in the realm of the film than in the other arts, for the film more than the other arts is the art of the people."

The history of the American movie is top-heavy with the stupefying atmosphere of greed, graft and glut created by that vicious "circle of vested interests whose circumference does not go beyond the perimeter of the screen for a knowledge of life."

Indeed one has to go a long way to find a parallel to the profligacy and waste of time, energy and money that has misshaped the American film industry for the past quarter century. What was born to be the natural art of the masses has been so arrested in its development by the piloting eyes of the motion picture, directed to preserve and vindicate the ruling ideology, at all costs, that it has become today an effective and stupendous weapon in their hands for use against the masses, although they would of course insist that "their merchandise is merely entertainment, passing amusement," in fact pointing "their finger of reproach to the Soviet film which is straightforward propaganda."

From time immemorial it has been the unalterable custom of the dominant ruling class, particularly during periods of stress and crisis, to employ every vehicle of expression at their command to sway the masses in close line with their dictation. Before the movie, the most potent bludgeon of the state for this persuasion was the church and next the school and press. Since the World War, when the imperialists accidentally hit upon the motion picture, which up to then had rarely been considered as a mighty propaganda agency for the ruling-

class, the movie has more and more cunningly assumed first position.

Today we have the pro-war and anti-labor film, modernized, motorized under the guiding genius of Gabriel Roosevelt in the White House. As an off-shoot in the general direction we have the growing political tinge of the costume pictures that are coming en masse—Rothschild, Antoinette, Catharine, Christina, Napoleon, etc.

"All these are thunder on the right. We on the left," concludes Potamkin, "must build both defense and offense to their reaction." Showings of Soviet pictures and other revolutionary films are themselves initial arguments against the shallowness of the American film, which has only prejudice as its basis. The Film and Photo Leagues, the John Reed Clubs, and other workers' cultural organizations through revolutionary film criticism and through their own revolutionary films must instruct this film audience in the detection of treacherous reaction of the bourgeois film. We must build—on the left—the Movie!

DAVID PLATT.

Current Theatre

Mary of Scotland—In Maxwell Anderson's eloquent, romantic historical drama, with Helen Hayes, Philip Merivale and Helen Mencken, historical factors, highly dramatic in themselves and essential to an understanding of the feud between Scotland's young Catholic queen and Britain's Protestant Elizabeth, are slighted in favor of personal sentiment.

As Thousands Cheer—One of the high points to date of the "smart" American revue stage, catering to the more sophisticated Park Avenue denizens, this production emphasizes imaginative dancing and some pretty savage satire directed at the Hoovers, the Rockefellers, Noel Coward and some Hollywood people.

Men in White—The play, dealing mostly with the hospital angle of the difficulties of personal life involved in the medical professional, is sentimental. It is all but mystical. But the Group Theatre has given it a production that is technically highly distinguished.

The Pursuit of Happiness—An irreverent comedy about New England home life in Revolutionary days. It offers testimony regarding the Hessian soldiery not found in school books. But its main concern is with the initiation of a youthful Hessian deserter in the technique of bundling. Respectable young ladies in colonial times took their admirers to bed with them on cold winter evenings to save fuel.

W. G.

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

The Bundling Hit

"Delightful comedy on Bundling." —Journal
"One of 1933's Ten Best." —World-Telegram

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