



TV AND RADIO

The Lesson of "Mayerling"

THERE has been some favorable comment on the recent TV production of "Mayerling," all of it written (as far as I know) by critics with color-receivers. It was the kind of costume-piece to which color adds a good deal and I, who saw it in black-and-white and found its ninety minutes inept and tiresome to the last degree, might have assumed that it was one of those productions calculated to make people dissatisfied with their present sets. It didn't out-pull "I Love Lucy," but it kept a sizable audience well into the third of its three segments. What this means, obviously, is that other people know far better than I do what will attract an audience.

It was an almost totally meritless production. I had hoped that the ratings would be disastrous, not to save my personal pride, but to save my pride in the American people. For every inferior production which holds its own in the ratings confirms the cynical principle that with enough ballyhoo you can put anything over.

The ballyhoo was sensational. For the first time, to my knowledge, *Life* magazine gave its cover to the stars of a television program before it was produced—and the stars were Audrey Hepburn and Mel Ferrer, making their first appearance in television. But the great publicity was the money: over \$500,000 for a single performance! All that and Hepburn, too.

The opening shot was a shot—a hand holding a revolver, the trigger pulled, a faint pop, then the trigger pulled twice again with a click each time. Then a chromo of snow on mountains and a palace. Then credits. Then a man in costume who turned out to be John Hancock, not a member of the cast but a representative of the co-sponsor, who started the commercial. At least five minutes were gone before we were into the action.

It was the same action as the movie in which Charles Boyer was so romantic (this is not surprising, since Anatole Litvak produced both and seemed bent on making the television version as big, if not as long, as the original). With endless singing in cafes and dancing in streets, a Viennese operetta was performed with dialogue right out of the 1890s. Sample: "Protocol—intrigue—deceit—I can't—I cant—ENOUGH!" (Sound effect: crash of glass).

Somewhere near the beginning a

student was arrested and later Rudolf protested against the arrest of an editor. For the rest, the story had no relation to the historical romance or to anything else real. Miss Hepburn's soft fragility met the stony immobility of Ferrer's Rudolf. An hour after the play began the story took hold; Rudolf wanted an annulment in order to marry his mistress; the Emperor prevented it.

The production wasn't one-fifth as good as the movie. I, who want intensely for television to create its own works, found no excuse for not having gone back and projected the movie, since nothing was added and a sense of life was conspicuously absent. And I wondered who had gained by the transaction. I wondered particularly whether the audience which stuck with it would want ever to see it or anything like it again.

For it is not what happens to a single broadcast, but what happens to the feelings people have about all broadcasting that will count in the end. In the movies what happened was that, long before television came in, people began to be tired of the popular things. It's a paradox, but it nearly wrecked the movies.

AN out-of-routine show which can probably run for a year on the budget of a single "Mayerling" is "The Last Word" (CBS). Professor Bergen Evans, well attended by John Mason Brown and a variety of guests (including Gipsy Rose Lee, who preferred "strip-teaser" to the Menckonian "ecdysiast"), discuss words, their use and abuse. It has a welcome touch of pedantry at times. Mr. Brown said that with his "hillbilly background" he naturally accented "exquisite" on the first syllable. "Why do you call yourself a hillbilly?" asked Dr. Evans. "That was irony," said Mr. Brown with a triumphant grin. The interchanges are, as they were on "Information, Please," the best part of the proceedings, a demonstration that if you give intelligent people something to talk about and change the subject often enough you will get a special kind of gaiety.

I thought I perceived a tendency in the first few programs to justify any usage if it is popular enough. Mr. Brown, with his background not hillbilly, and including SR, stands resolutely against this dubious development.

—GILBERT SELDES.

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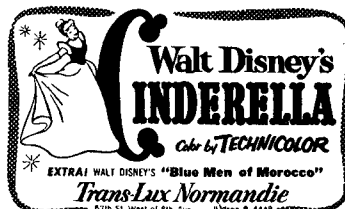
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THE FINE ARTS

Two Masters of Expressionism

IF ASKED to name some of the most interesting events of the winter art season in New York, I would place high on the list the exhibition at the Galerie St. Etienne of watercolors and drawings by the Austrian painter, Egon Schiele. It is astonishing that an artist of such talent should be so little known internationally. There are reasons. To begin with Schiele, born in 1890, died in 1918, whereas his more celebrated countryman Oskar Kokoschka is still going strong. Moreover, though Schiele's career was at times unbearably difficult, his works today are revered in his homeland and only with difficulty may be exported for sale abroad. All the publications on his art are in German with the exception of the catalogue of his current New York exhibition. It is encouraging, however, that the State Printing Office of Austria will soon release a portfolio,

"Egon Schiele as a Draughtsman," with comprehensive text in English by Otto Benesch, one of Vienna's most accomplished art historians.

Despite all the factors contributing to Schiele's obscurity, the artist has had a small but ardent group of champions in this country, and pictures by him hang in the museums of Santa Barbara and Milwaukee. His show of watercolors and drawings in New York this winter has been almost completely sold out, and some of the finest items have gone to public institutions. We will see his art more and more often, and he will almost certainly take his rightful place as a peer of Kokoschka and as one of the most gifted artists produced by Central European expressionism.

Like Aubrey Beardsley in England Schiele, dying appallingly young, was precocious. I don't know why Beardsley's name came to mind while vis-

iting the Schiele exhibition. Both artists were masterful designers, of course, but Schiele's draftsmanship is far more virile and lacks altogether the *Yellow Book* perversity of the English prodigy. It is art of a different, higher, and more intense order, and it is a significant fact that Schiele revered Van Gogh's drawings which Beardsley very likely would have thought too ferocious. A strong evangelical fervor underlies many of Schiele's images, and it is ironic that in 1912 he should have been jailed briefly for creating what the civic authorities considered to be pornographic drawings because their subjects were schoolgirls (today some of these drawings are treasured jealously in Austria).

Among foreign artists Schiele also greatly admired Toulouse-Lautrec, whose incisive line was an abiding influence. But his true master was his countryman Gustav Klimt, whom he met in 1907 and knew well until the latter's death, the same year as his own. It was probably Klimt who gave him the courage to break with his teachers at the Vienna Academy and who had some of his rebellious works included in the first progressive art



—Galerie St. Etienne.

Egon Schiele's "Man Draped in Red Shawl" and "Black Girl"—". . . strong evangelical fervor."