

Art on TV: *The Louvre*

“ON YOUR first visit to the Louvre, I would suggest you come with a Frenchman,” said Charles Boyer to viewers of *The Louvre—A Golden Prison*, NBC-TV’s recent hour-long color special about the celebrated art museum in Paris. A Frenchman, the narrator explained, comes to the Louvre not only to see the world’s greatest collection of art, but because he has a passion for the building itself, which is a sort of chronicle of French history. Mr. Boyer communicated this passion well. He traced, with national pride added to his customary urbanity and warmth, the evolution of the Louvre from its origin as a fortress in the year 1190 to its present eminence as the home of such art treasures as *Winged Victory* and *Venus de Milo*. We saw portraits of kings and queens who lived in the Louvre, paintings and drawings of scenes depicting historical events that happened

at the museum. The development of the Louvre’s architecture was ingeniously suggested by the manipulation of models of its early buildings and subsequent additions. The denuding of the Louvre during World War II, when the French hid their art treasures from the Nazi conquerors, was told with emotional force by Mr. Boyer, employing Sidney Carroll’s vivid text set against newsreel clips of Nazis marching in Paris and of empty Louvre halls.

Another Frenchman, Germain Bazin, curator-in-chief of the Louvre, capped the narrator’s record of the museum by noting that its history, like that of France, is ever in the making—continuous, profound, the work of French civilization itself. At this point, two-thirds of the way through the program, the producers exhausted the theme of historical passion. The problem now was what to do with the Louvre’s collection of art.

It was of no avail to have a Frenchman as guide here; perhaps an artist was needed. I say “perhaps” because even perceptive artists have not often been successful in commenting on works of art on television. The pictures are static, camera movement is limited and repetitious, and viewers are impatient. Lucy Jarvis, producer, John S. Sughrue, Jr., co-producer-director, and Tom Priestley, cameraman, tried to meet this challenge by showing people in the Louvre’s galleries pointing, talking, resting tired feet, etc., but this technique failed to work. The eclectic shots, intercut with momentary glimpses of the paintings, lacked in their own right a theme as unifying as the history of the Louvre. Quickly exhausting this vein, the producers tried again, this time with a return—as if in a dream—after the museum’s doors close, to wander through the Louvre with no one else present, “to possess it.”

THE lighting was rigged for a moody, evocative sequence—in color film the paintings glowed with tactile brilliance, but this, too, failed to come off. The paintings and statues were still seen fitfully in no pattern of meaning. Gaping individuals are as much at sea as gaping multitudes. Thus the design of the program was in three parts: the Louvre’s history—a unity in itself—and the two afterbeats, without adhesive tension in their own spheres, and lacking organic harmony with the main motif. The failure was honorable, for it was a difficult problem. The Louvre’s history is chronological, specific, but the world of art in the Louvre is a vast, vague cosmos; where do you grab it, what does it mean? It would have been splendid if the producers had been able to develop a total point of view toward their material. It might have been a thinking beyond the Louvre, a confronting of it with some other experience or value to produce the dialectical tension necessary for a work of art. Several brief sequences in the program approached this dimension. A bust of Louis XIV was seen in profile, close up. Lights changed as the camera held on it, giving varying tones of shadow and feeling, suggesting different characters in the same man.

This was a comment, a distortion of the event, but one that added a dimension—and the business of art is the addition of dimension of life, not merely the reproduction of it. *The Louvre* was a skilful, tasteful production on the whole. The television projection—black and white or color—could not match the rich texture of the real paintings. The music by Normal Dello Joio made a fine contribution. There was no great escape from the prison of literalness in *The Louvre*, but the program had its shining qualities. —ROBERT LEWIS SHAYON.

Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich and Yetta Arenstein

MORE USA-BLE WORDS

Simultaneously inspired to complete Norma Gleason’s partial list of USA-BLE WORDS (see SR, April 25, 1964), Lillian G. Sievers of Madrid, Spain, and Ralph Moore of Marysville, Ohio, compiled separate lists of the remaining states of the Union with acceptable abbreviations (postal authorities prefer that we spell out Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Ohio and Utah). Below, in a composite list, are nineteen state abbreviations incorporated into words whose definitions appear in Column Two. You are asked to fill in the blanks. Answers on page 29.

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| 1. — — — — — ARIZ — | pass off another’s ideas as one’s own |
| 2. — — — — — CALIF — — — — — | bearing a hallucinatory alkaloid |
| 3. — GA — — — | size of type |
| 4. — — — — — KANS — — — — — | immediate reply (2 words) |
| 5. — — — — — LA — — — — — | litter |
| 6. — ME — — — — — | submissive |
| 7. MASS — — — — — | slaughter |
| 8. MINN — — — — — | a German lyric singer |
| 9. MONT — — — — — | small hill |
| 10. — NJ — — — — — | damage |
| 11. — — — — — NY — — — — — | having a similar meaning |
| 12. — — — — — ND — — — — — | order |
| 13. — — — — — OKLA — — — — — | property granted through a charter |
| 14. — — — — — PA — — — — — | affinity |
| 15. — RI — — — — — | brittle |
| 16. — — — — — VT — — — — — | ruling body (abbr.) |
| 17. — VA — — — — — | greed |
| 18. — — — — — WVA — — — — — | so conceited! (2 words) |
| 19. — — — — — WY — — — — — | surging |



Books

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LITERARY HORIZONS

The Critique in Brief

A NEW series of pamphlets, "Columbia Essays on Modern Writers," is modeled upon and intended to supplement "University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers." (Minnesota has recently published seven new titles, bringing the total to forty-four.) The Columbia pamphlets are devoted to non-American writers, so far mostly English and Western Europeans. The pamphlets are of the same size as those from Minnesota, forty-eight pages, and sell for the same price, 65¢. They are physically somewhat less substantial and to me less attractive in appearance, but the first six are not at all inferior in content.

Number One in the Columbia series is Germaine Brée's *Albert Camus*, which illustrates very well what essays of this sort can do. A recognized authority on Camus, author of a book about him, Miss Brée has here summarized her findings in compendious form. After a brief but important account of the life of Camus, she cogently discusses the principal works. She studies with particular care *The Stranger*, *The Plague*, and *The Rebel*.

Miss Brée sums up, "Camus proposes the lucid acceptance of the situation: to love life, and to live with the knowledge that life is incomprehensible; to multiply all the chances for happiness, knowing its impossibility; to explore the infinite possibilities of life within the narrow limits of a life." It is easy to see why, even apart from their different attitudes towards Communism, Camus and Sartre should have gone their diverging ways. In these days when Sartre is in the headlines, it is good to have so convincing an estimate of the significance of Camus.

The reputation of Camus has pretty well taken shape since his premature and most unfortunate death in 1960. The position of Lawrence Durrell, on the other hand, is still in doubt. After the great enthusiasm for *The Alexandria Quartet*, there has been the usual Monday morning shaking of heads over his

limitations. In his *Lawrence Durrell*, John Unterecker, an associate professor at Columbia and author of a book on Yeats, helps us to strike a reasonable balance. He begins with an admirable summary statement: "Lawrence Durrell is a man of infinite variety. But he's a man of marble constancy as well. The forms in which he has worked embrace the whole range of literary possibility. Yet the themes he has dealt with—even the images which carry those themes—display a simple kind of shining directness, mark out a clear path for his developing but remarkably consistent point of view. He is consequently one of our most protean writers and at the same time one of our most predictable ones."

As he discusses Durrell's poetry, early novels, travel books, plays, and criticism, Unterecker defines and clarifies the persistent themes, and prepares the way for his examination of *The Alexandria Quartet*. He writes well on this work, clearing up certain points about which other critics have been doubtful, and coming to the conclusion that it has deserved a large part of the praise it has received.

"Most readers know Constantine Cavafy only as a legend encountered in Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*." Thus Peter Bien opens his *Constantine Cavafy*. What he says is true, but it is also true, as Bien points out, that the reputation of the eccentric Greek poet has grown steadily since his death in 1933. It is always difficult to do justice to a poet who writes in another language, but Bien, who uses Rae Dalven's translations, gives the reader a sense of Cavafy's quality. He relates the poetry to the man's strange life and to the course of Greek history in his lifetime.

William York Tindall, who is editor of the series, has chosen to write *Samuel Beckett*. The expatriate Irishman, who now usually writes his books in French and translates them himself, is a tough problem for the critics. Since he insists on the meaninglessness of everything, it is not easy to define the meaning of his

- 11 SR's Check List of the Week's New Books
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- 32 The Future of Man, by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin
- 33 The Meaning of the Twentieth Century, by Kenneth E. Boulding
- 34 The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle, edited by Joseph Slater
- 39 Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor, by Donald Davie
- 40 The Common Pursuit, by F. R. Leavis
- 41 The Ice Saints, by Frank Tuohy; The Lamp Post, by Martin Gregor-Dellin
- 41 A Man in the Wheatfield, by Robert Laxalt
- 42 The Wind's Will, by Gerald Warner Brace
- 42 Word of Mouth, by Jerome Weidman.

novels and plays. Tindall is convinced that they do have meaning, but he is cautious about saying what it is. Speaking of the reception of *Waiting for Godot*, he writes, "There was no better agreement among professional critics. To each his guess, the less certain, the more dogmatically propounded. 'The danger,' says Beckett in his essay on Joyce (1929), 'is the neatness of identification.' But this much is certain: each of the neat identifiers, justified more or less by something in the text, took a part for a whole too slippery to handle." Carefully making no large claims for his interpretations, Tindall tries to say what can safely be said about each of the works, and his comments are enlightening. The pamphlet is an excellent guide for readers of Beckett.

Samuel Hynes's *William Golding* is to me the most exciting of the six pamphlets. He discusses each of the five novels, from *Lord of the Flies* to *The Spire*, in an illuminating fashion. He is