

Hopper's Easy Rider tells it like it is

America wasn't meant to be this way

John Ford, Howard Hawks and Frank Capra are the great American directors. Not that they are Americans (Capra isn't) but that they direct Americana.

Ford's Young Mr. Lincoln is not so much a biography as a story about an "everyman," an everyman who would achieve greatness, but an everyman nonetheless. His Cheyenne Autumn seems to present a rather sorrowful pessimistic view of the future and Two Rode Together is a character portrait of a cynical American. American naivete is well documented in works like Stagecoach. The Long Gray Line is the story of an immigrant who never made it big, but felt big anyhow, and Ford's vision of America is quite clear in The Grapes of Wrath.

Howard Hawks makes two types of films (says Hawks), far-out comedy and adventure. He maintains that there is no adventure worth its salt without danger, and no danger without possible death, and so Hawks' heroes, Muni as Scarface, Bogey in To Have and Have Not, Bogey in The Big Sleep, Duke in Red River and Rio Bravo, are the old American rugged individualists, the pioneer and loners, who have what it takes, and do it on their own.

Frank Capra's major Americana are probably the most famous American statements — Mr. Deeds Goes to Town, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, and Meet John Doe. Deeds is the story of the rich man struggling with the establishment to give his money to the poor; Smith is a story that needs no introduction; and John Doe is the story of a nobody, built into a presidential candidate by a

neo-fascist opportunist. At first, Doe backs out of the arrangement, then summons up the courage to make good on the speeches he never truly meant. Nothing quite matches the final line of the film, as Doe's friend says to the opportunist: "There's the people. Let's see you beat them!"

What the artists have in common is that their canvas, no matter how they disguise it, is of an America that they love, and strangely enough, Dennis Hopper's brilliant essay, Easy Rider, is too.

The technicalities of filmmaking, cutting, fading, dissolving and dubbing are talents Hopper has yet to learn. But the mark of an artist is in his work — his concept, his composition, his pacing, in a word, his style — and style is something Hopper has.

Peter Fonda, as Wyatt, is the protagonist — the camera dwells on him a great deal. But he says little. Obviously, we are expected to interpret. (Greta Garbo's greatest moment was when the director told her to leave her face blank, because each viewer would have his own conception of what she was thinking.)

The supporting roles, Hopper as Billy, and Jack Nicholson as George easily give the film its more entertaining moments, but Fonda makes a startling impression, silently.

Like Ford's and Hawks', Hopper's camera is poetic. There is a reverence for the land in his images. This is Hopper's message.

It is easy for a screenplay to be juxtaposed ironically to the theme, and very often Easy Rider's is. Superficially, it is anti-

American, but you know just know on seeing it, that it is no such thing. The point is that Fonda's hippie is the character Hawks' films support as the rugged individualist, and the colony of beautiful people, pioneers tilling the land, are the Americans, as Ford's films bears out. The persecutors of George, Wyatt and Billy may be establishment, but as Capra proved, that fact makes them apple-chomping mother-lovers who

don't have any business saluting the flag.

In form, Easy Rider most resembles Capra's work. Any Capra film had a happy ending in spite of a very cynical approach. Capra said, "America should be a place where these things happen. It was meant to be so." Hopper says, "American should be a place where these things do not happen. It was not meant to be as it is."

I heard someone say, after

seeing Midnight Cowboy and Easy Rider, that he'd never set foot in the US. Easy Rider is not a warning. Like Mr. Smith goes to Washington, like Ride the High Country, by another Americana director, Sam Peckinpah, it is a lament for an America that is not as it should be. George isn't quite right when he says, "This used to be a hell of a good country." He should say, "This could be one hell of a good country, again." — D.M.

Monroe: Norma Jean or Marilyn

By DAVID McCAUGHNA

It seems that nearly every well-known American painter who has emerged in the past six years or so has done at least one painting of Marilyn Monroe.

Perhaps the best one was by the New York painter Robert Lindner. Called Marilyn Was Here, it has a stony, isolated Marilyn, wearing a corset, appearing with her shadow. Lindner said of her: "I think Marilyn Monroe was a victim of the misunderstanding of publicity in Hollywood which tried to create a star of the 1930's — no longer possible in the 1950's."

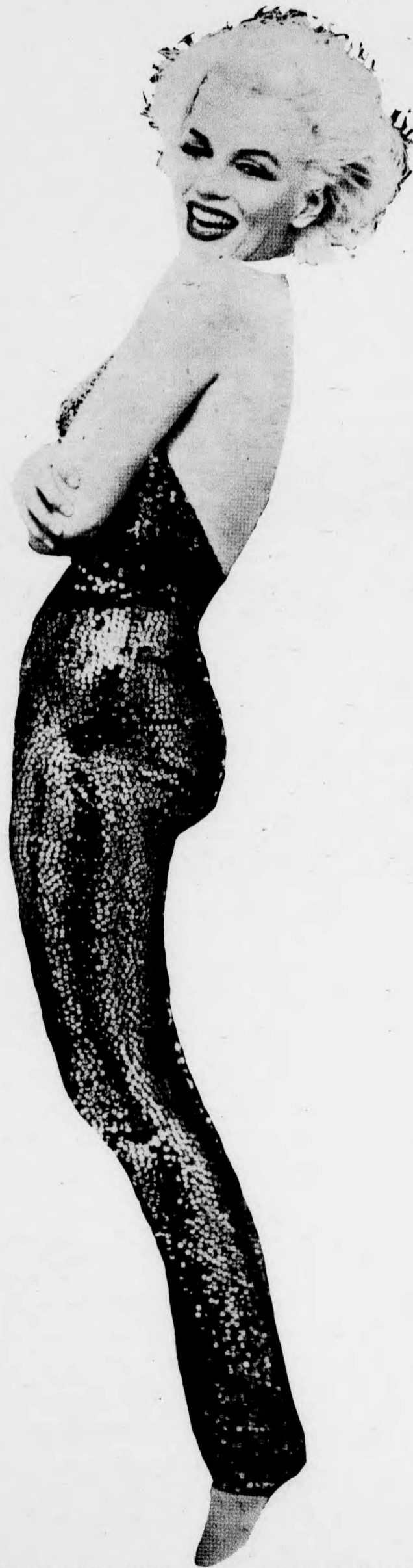
For many like Lindner, Marilyn Monroe came to symbolize the agony and horror of the age. It is the neurotic, anxiety-ridden era that Marilyn stood for. She had beauty, fame and a fortune — everything that is supposed to bring happiness and fulfillment, yet she rarely found happiness in her life. Alone and bitter, she died in Hollywood seven years ago.

Fred Guiles' biography of Marilyn, called Norma Jean is extremely thorough and despite a tendency towards gossip is the best book written on Marilyn Monroe.

The clouds were dark for Marilyn from the beginning — she was an illegitimate child whose only attempt to reach her father failed pathetically, and came from a family with a history of mental illness. A strong, hardy woman could have survived but Marilyn was weak and unsure of herself. Upon occasion she could be harsh and aggressive but basically she was extremely vulnerable, driven by a craving for love and acceptance. In the last years when her days as a sex-symbol were running out the clash between the aggressive Marilyn and the naive Norma Jean became painfully evident, leading to her mental breakdown and eventual death.

As I looked through the pages of photos illustrating Norma Jean I realized that there really was something special and alluring about her. She had a certain charm and style. It is obvious why vacuous stars like Raquel Welch and Carroll Baker have been unable to establish themselves as sex goddesses.

The great French photographer, Henri Cartier-Bresson photographing Marilyn on the set of her last film The Misfits, summed up the qualities that have perpetuated the legend of Marilyn Monroe: "She's American, and it's very clear that she is — she's very good that way — one has to be very local to be universal. There's something extremely alert and vivid in her, an intelligence. It's her personality, it's a glance, it's something very tenuous, very vivid that disappears quickly, that appears again."



The game's afoot or crime does pay

By DAN MERKUR

The Simple Art of Murder

Raymond Chandler maintains that cops just love fancy crimes, and that in acutality it is the unpremeditated, sudden murder of passion that is most difficult to solve. However, any eighth-grader will tell you the opposite, that Lestrade and Gregson are most confused with an overabundance of "clews". And the eighth-grader knows, you see, because the nine volumes of Sherlock Holmes are available again, in paperback, from John Murray and Company. Moreover, the Holmes myth has grown, with The Exploits of Sherlock Holmes, by Adrian Conan Doyle and John Dickson Carr (two volumes, Murray and Company; London) and A Study In Terror, by Ellery Queen (Lancer; New York: 60 cents).

And Philo Vance is back in print, too. America's answer to Holmes, the great Vance, has been unearthed, and his two first cases, The Benson Murder Case, and The "Canary" Murder Case, 1926 and 1927 respectively (Fawcett Gold Medal; Greenwich; 75 cents each- are in reissue. These are the classic stories by S. S. Van Dine about the great Manhattan socialite and art collector, who solves his crimes by examining the psychology of the crime and matching it to the psychology of the suspects. These books are full of fascinating footnotes and sidelights, and are well worth the few hours required to read them.

Other news in the murder racket, aside from the constant flow of stories from Raymond Chandler, Agatha Christie, John Dickson Carr, Earle Stanley Gardner etc. etc., is that Hodder and Stoughton, of London, are reprinting Leslie Charteris' inimitable adventures of the one and only Simon Templar, The Saint. The volumes, at 85 cents per, are magnificent — actually first-rate writing, with a keen sense of humour, and a great deal of variation, from detection to adventure to espionage — and if you're at all interested, you might just jot down the names of places Templar frequents. Charteris is a world-traveller and internationally famous gourmand, and so if you're ever near anywhere the Saint eats, you probably could do worse than to follow his example.

And Billy Wilder is in London, filming The Private Life of Sherlock Homes. Once again, "the game is afoot" and the master and his chronicler are ready to exchange remarks such as the celebrated four lines from Silver Blaze when Watson asks Holmes:

"Is there any point to which you wish to draw my attention?"

"To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

"The dog did nothing in the night-time."

"That was the curious incident," remarked Holmes."

Would you pass me the meerschaum, and, oh yes, the Persian slipper?