

Films

You've probably already seen *Easy Rider* (at the Avenue), so this is going to be a forensic rather than an evaluative review. If you haven't seen it, and if it's still there by the time this sees print, I'll at least say that it's an enjoyable movie, very well done in many respects, and certainly worth seeing. Having thrown that sop to the Cereberus of critical honesty, I would like to move on to dwell on the faults of the movie.

Easy Rider takes us through a few days in the lives of Wyatt and Billy, two characters who represent an uneasy combination of the gentleness of the hippie and the self-interestedness of the bikey. Having completed an immensely profitable dope deal in the American southwest, they rev up their machines and head for New Orleans and the Mardi Gras. The film is picaresque in structure, moving from one episode to the next without more than a passing nod to character and plot development.

The one theme which holds the movie together, and which at the same time is its greatest flaw, is the conflict between Freedom, as represented by the long-haired heroes, and Oppression, incarnate in the rednecks who hassle them, beat them, and eventually kill them.

Now I am not going to deny for a minute that such conflict exists: anyone who has even been looked at sideways in the street knows that much of society has an inordinate intolerance of a deviant way of life. I am even prepared to admit that there may well be individuals who will go so far as to express their dislike by blasting people off motorcycles with shotguns.

And that, precisely, is the problem with the movie. It is unquestionably geared at younger audiences, at those who have experienced the ugliness of intolerance. And all of us, after we have sat through that horrible scene where the ignorant, leering figure of Intolerance blasts the figures of Freedom to smithereens, rise up and say to ourselves, "Yes, it's really like that: the man who pulled that trigger is the same man who kicked me out of the Bay cafeteria, and the brother of the little old lady who asked if I were a boy or a girl."

In other words, the movie is designed not to stimulate thought but to reinforce our inherent beliefs. It's not unlike those second world war movies that showed us what monsters the Germans and Japanese were as they gunned down the shining American hero with the malicious grin of hatred on their ugly, alien faces. Just as we identified then with the shining hero, so now we identify with Wyatt and Billy, and in the midst of our horror there is a warm, happy feeling that we are on the side of the good guys.

There's nothing wrong with this thematic element in itself, and had it been blended into a structure of genuine conflict it would have been quite successful. But beyond the obvious theme there is nothing in the plot.

None of the characters is given more than a cursory study, none of the episodes leads us anywhere but into a firmer conviction that rural society is ugly. (Perhaps the movie is teaching its own brand of intolerance.) The scene with the New Orleans whores is brilliantly done, a masterpiece of camerawork and directing, but it has nothing whatever to do with the movement of the story: the excuse given for the boys' visit to the brothel is a flimsy one (it is a kind of tribute to the young lawyer who has been beaten to death for casting his lot with Wyatt and Billy), and we can make little of Wyatt's apparent change of purpose ("We blew it, Billy") afterwards.

Hence, beyond the concession that the movie contains some very good photography, some good acting, and some interesting glimpses into the nomadic life of the hippie/bikey, there is little to be said for it as an integral work of art. It is heavy-handed, and seems an awfully elaborate way of showing us, or reassuring us, that it takes a great deal of daring to be different.

—Terry Donnelly

Poet publishes personal scratch pad

Lawrence Ferlinghetti:
THE SECRET MEANING
OF THINGS;
New Directions.

If you have never read Ferlinghetti, and are anxious to insert yourself into the cultural currents of young America, you could do worse than read his latest book, *The Secret Meaning of Things*. Ferlinghetti is a good poet, but the inconsistencies in this book give a profile of both his strengths and weaknesses.

One of the major flaws of these poems is that they tend to be very autobiographical. Naturally, all poetry must refer to personal experiences, however oblique that reference may be, but few poets insert themselves so noticeably into their work. One of the poems in this book, "Bickford's Buddha", gives the impression of being a sort of personal scratch pad that notes all of Ferlinghetti's observations during one particular day. Here is an example:

*And a threeyearoldgirl on a
sidewalk
licking the chocolate spreckles
off
a gooey ice cream cone
peering through the open
backdoor
of a drycleaningshop
where some sort of big belted
wheel
was going round fast
Missed what kind & went
back
& still couldn't tell*

As Ferlinghetti says in the poem, he is "... afflicted/with Observation Fever", but this surely does not justify him afflicting the reader with it.

Another characteristic of Ferlinghetti's, which might be considered a flaw in some circles, is his use of erudite references. Like Pound and Eliot, Ferlinghetti is a very

learned man, and he is quite willing to use the names and works of others as a sort of shorthand, to describe areas of thought and concepts already explored. An example of this is found in the first few lines of "Assassination Raga":

*Outside the plums are
growing in a tree
'The force that through the
green fuse
drives the flower'
drives Death TV
'A grief ago'*

The two lines in quotes are both from poems by Dylan Thomas, and if you haven't read them, you are already one step behind Ferlinghetti, and the gap will quickly widen. Readers who are not familiar with Buddhist and Hindu philosophies may also find themselves left out, as in these lines from "Through the Looking-Glass":

*... allowed the Ram
only Shiva and Contemplation
And Shiva advanced
with a broken arm*

However, it would be wrong to condemn Ferlinghetti for

these minor flaws. His work is sensitive, often lyrical, and provides a deep insight into the vectors of American culture. "After the Cries of the Birds" is a long and persuasive poem about the new inner frontier of western civilization:

*the "Westward march of
civilization"
comes to a dead stop on the
shores of
Big Sur Portland & Santa
Monica
and turns upon itself at last*

The best poem in the book is a long lyrical piece entitled "Moscow in the Wilderness, Segovia in the Snow", and rather than say anything about it, I will just quote part of it.

*He is his own message
his own ideal sound
And he sounds so lonely to
himself
As he goes on playing
in the iron-white streets
And he is saying: I say all I
know
& I know no meaning*

—Bill Pasnak

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