

All the main characters in *Open City* are involved in this deadly ideological conflict, and any or all of them can avoid the consequences that come to them if they will "wait it out", collaborate, "be good sheep", etc. It follows that they are animated by some great faith, but how and why and where they have acquired the faith is only vaguely indicated, and, what is inexcusable in a movie, these very important motivations are not shown. The spectator has to pick them up by guesswork, implication and other hints, as well as his own experience as a member of movie audiences.

Don Pietro, the Partisan priest, is probably the most likable character in *Open City*, as well as the most fully developed, and is by far the most interesting to watch. Everything contributes to this: his attitude, bearing, gestures, the way he walks, and his bland, unsophisticated expression. However, is it enough for him to say, in explanation of his Partisanship, "It is my duty to help those in need", when we know that Partisan priests are rare creatures? We want to know how he got that way, and to make his unusual activities significant in the film would require more of the "historical lightning".

The strongest demonstration of this film's "unhistorical" character can be made by comparison with Russian pictures of 1925-1928, where the spectator is forced to recognize the characters in their cultural, moral, economic and social environments (to say nothing of the political climate!). In one section of Pudovkin's *The End of St. Petersburg*, the actions of the hero are interspersed with impersonal war scenes of all kinds, and the sequence is so brilliantly and powerfully arranged that the hero is revealed to be at once an individual and a part of the mass. It is this quality that is so sadly lacking in *Open City*. It is the picture's worst defect, since all the characters are shown only as individuals. Don Pietro asks the deserter where he has been, and the man answers, "Cassino . . . an inferno . . ." The shot of the character is more real than his words, and the only thing that could balance the picture of the man is a picture of the inferno too.

Perhaps this reliance upon words is the prime fault of motion pictures to-day. Nothing that an actor says in movies has even a small fraction of the validity possessed by visual images (this is one of the first steps to be learned about the nature of the medium), and since practically all "ideas" in *Open City* are in words, the intellectual content is submerged by what is shown on the screen. Shot after shot is nothing more than a portrait of an actor talking, and cinematically dull as they are, the pictures still rob the spoken words of much of their value.

What makes *Open City* doubly disappointing is that its material is top-notch. Its makers have attempted to present some of the most horrible troubles of these times, both physical and moral, and have approached their theme in a sincere manner that is rare in other pictures to-day. In the process, however, they have failed to work out a form of expression adequate to carry out that theme.

There is one fine bit at the very end. At various places throughout the film, a group of young boys is shown plotting and carrying out sabotage. After Don Pietro is shot, the camera shows the children watching in grief through the wire fence, then a final shot shows them walking slowly down the hill from the execution-place, and as they pass, the camera pans to the right to include a full shot of the city. This coda, so superior to the rest of the film in timing and visual expression, so full of poignancy and ironic overtones, is not just an added touch to something good. It is a bit of true movie making a clumsy film seem worse.

### THE MALRAUX FILM

*Man's Hope* is the work of André Malraux. It is based on that political insurgent's novel of the same title, and made almost at the same time (1938). It is directly opposed to *BYOOL* in many ways, the most striking of which is its non-professional character. This film was made almost on the battlefield, in the vicinity of Barcelona. There are several episodes leading up to the main event: the bombing of a hidden Franco airfield in the vicinity of Teruel.

The style is naturalistic, which is the style of practically all talking films. The function of the camera is to record as many scenes as can be accommodated in the finished picture, and it follows that more than 95% of the characters and events in the book have to be left out. Thus the panorama, the main feature of an epic, disappears from *Man's Hope* when it is transformed into a film. The ironic fact is that the movie medium is almost ideally suited to panorama, and what *Man's Hope* could have been in the hands of a genius is tempting to consider.

The hypothetical genius, knowing the capacity of his camera to go anywhere and to show anything; knowing, above all, that the time-and-space limits are Spain in the middle of a couple of years of civil war, would consider himself under no obligation to cut his panorama down to twenty characters and half a dozen events. The thing to cut is the time that a shot exists on the screen. What is significant about one character and his part in one event can often be realized in two or three seconds, and it is a mistake to let him "live" on the screen any longer than that, for other characters and other events are crowding in, demanding to be shown. This is a big idea, a tremendous theme of a nation in turmoil, a flood of action, whirlpools of emotion. The film genius would make the several thousand necessary shots, arrange them to fit his conception of the theme, and then perhaps *Man's Hope* would emerge in epic grandeur.

Malraux is not a film genius. If he were, he would not have made *Man's Hope* as he did, relying heavily on dialogue to express ideas, being forced to imitate the structure of scenes in his novel and thus to omit almost all of it. The film is poverty-stricken compared to the book, and its hundred minutes or so make it far too long (our genius, thinking in terms of film only, would compress Malraux's picture to ten minutes).

The bombing sequence, which is the heart of the picture, is a series of routine shots of a bombing expedition. Only one thing prevents its being forgotten practically on sight, and this is the character of the peasant who is the guide to the target. He has lived his life in the village and knows every square foot of the area, but he has never been in an airplane, and his whole world is changed. He is in an agony of bewilderment as the unfamiliar landscape spreads out below, until at last he recognizes the field, and then he becomes the embodiment of relief and joy. This is the point that Malraux is making throughout the film, or at least one aspect of the point: the peasants are becoming politically conscious. In the process, the

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film gets pulled out of shape, because the bombing sequence turns out to have been too big a setting for such a tiny jewel. It could and should have been done more economically. The waste of time and incident is typical of the unimaginative naturalistic film style, especially in movies that are picturizations of prose writing. In the book Malraux *also* gave the thoughts and hopes and feelings of the regular crew members; in the film only the peasant comes through. What works for the writer fails for the moviemaker; the two media are not compatible.

The picture ends with a much larger working-out of the point about political consciousness. It is necessary to rescue the crashed fliers, so another sequence is developed: the activities of the commanding officer, the climb in the mountains, the bringing-down of the dead and injured. Like the bombing sequence, it is more prose until the very end, dull and without any movement (although there is enough activity and incidents for a hundred pages of writing). One wishes that the camera would get going in its own peculiar way. We follow the officer as he observes the progress of the stretchers, we must wait while he talks with various people involved in the operation. It is all supposed to be very significant, but it is cinematically dead.

It is boredom until the camera breaks loose. The procession, slow and funereal, approaches a village perched on the slopes of the sierra. Then, seemingly miraculously, the people of the village are seen waiting as the procession approaches, gathering to pay homage to the fliers. This is where the film changes from prose-time to cinema-time, no longer chronological, but with the shots arranged according to their values in revealing this larger aspect of the theme. Shots are *repeated*, and emotional tension is developed because the audience is taken out of normal time, not knowing what shot will come next, a new one or a repeat. At last the sequence is given cinematic importance. It is made clear that one is seeing not what one wants to see or expects to see, but what the *director* wants one to see. As at the end of *Open City*, here is a brief bit that underlines the inadequacy of the bulk of the picture that has gone before.

It is at this point that Malraux, the non-professional, surpasses William Wyler, whose skill has been highly developed over a period of many years. Wyler apparently feels no compulsion to do more than his job of making inconsequential material momentarily interesting. Malraux, perhaps in desperation, has leaped cleanly over Wyler's head.

GEORGE BARBAROW

## PERIODICALS

*The New Republic*, December 16, 1946, to date.  
HENRY WALLACE, Editor.

**T**HE style of America's liberal journals is a proper vehicle for the expression of their thought; as with all styles, there is an integral relationship between it and the ideas it bears. The internal trepidation; the attempt to walk tightropes long ago slackened or cut; the "liblab" double standard towards Stalinist Russia and the capitalist democracies; the yearning for gentility, reasonableness and folksiness—these characteristics of liberal journalism are among the causes for its lamentable style. Result: frequent equivocal and leave-the-door-open sentences (*it is not unlikely, it seems, perhaps, it is to be regretted*, and above all, *it is to be hoped*); and the

jargonesque adaptation of sociological and psychological clichés (*compulsion, submarginal, mores, adaptation, etc.*)

To this add the low-brow folksy posturings of a populist journal (cf., *The Progressive*) and the capsulizing, English-twisting, high-speed, omniscient-reporter approach of *Time*—and you have the new *New Republic*, HENRY WALLACE, EDITOR. Nothing quite like it has been around in a long time. Whether by deliberate malice or not, it is an extraordinary compilation of what is bad in most varieties of contemporary journalism. But what is even more extraordinary, it has none of the occasional compensations of those varieties.

It has dropped the topical paragraph comments usually run by political weeklies and substituted several pages of selected news items. These are written by hacks apparently trained in the *Time* chain-gang. But somehow none of *Time's* crispness and cleverness is captured; the result is simply dull rewriting in a grey slack prose. (The opening sentence of the December 30 issue is a horrible example of journalistic clichés: "The White House crew worked feverishly to trim the sails of the ship of state against the gathering gale of a Republican Congress." Yes, yes, and we are told about the Skipper too.)

Editorial comment is now largely supplied by "Henry Wallace's Forum." I don't wish to duplicate what appears elsewhere in this magazine, but I must at least say that Wallace seems to me the most boring and humorless egomaniac on the American political scene since William Jennings Bryan. Who else would dare to write: "My field is the world. My strength is my conviction that a progressive America can unify the world and a reactionary America must divide it. My enemy is blind reaction . . . My friends are all who believe in true democracy. My master is the common man . . . I seek no personal gains . . . If I have importance it is because of the ideas that I have come to represent . . ."

Of course, Wallace is right in there pitching with platitudes of his own: "To attain industrial peace we must first of all pay a spiritual price. In our collective bargaining, both industry and labor must give up the law of the jungle . . . No matter what our nominal faith may be, we can all believe in the religion of the general welfare and the Golden Rule."

I have read most of the articles (no one can read *all* of Ralph Martin!) in the magazine these last two months but I have difficulty in summoning a recollection of any of them. The learned contributions of two political thinkers, Frank Sinatra and Billy Rose, do stand out, that of the latter having had an especially cheering affect because of his promise there will be no depression, which is merely a fantasy of dyspeptic radical professors. I was also impressed by a series on Russia By The Editors justifying Stalinist imperialism on the ground that Russia was not given her "just due" after the first world war . . .

Well, there's no getting around it; I have to say something about Ralph Martin, The Schmaltz Man. Martin has been leaving trails of verbal goo all over the country; he writes syrupy-sweet sketches about Good People Everywhere, which make one wonder how he missed the Daily Worker in the Popular Front days when it rhapsodized The People. Special mention is due Martin's interview with a vocational psychiatrist in Peoria, Illinois, who finds that his most difficult patients are the intelligent minority among returning veterans, "The Plus People." (I imagine that the *New Republic*, HENRY WALLACE, EDITOR, feels just about the same way.)

The Book Section of the magazine which once had some interest has been so sadly destroyed that all of its previous contributors seem, by implicit agreement, to have abandoned it. Wallace, who probably doesn't know Kafka from Tris Speaker, dislikes "arty" reviews, so now reviewers merely "tell the story" and append a few trite comments. (Wallace