

capital slips below a quarter of a million; a merger in the family business — hardly seem the stuff of high tragedy. This dearth of drama is compounded by the structure of the book. As characters, the Murphys remain flat and shadowy until the end, when the reader can finally hear their voices through correspondence with Hemingway, the MacLeishes, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos and others.

In a letter to Hemingway, Sara once wrote: "You are something living in a dead or dying world, to hold to." The Murphys were sensitive people; yet their only accomplishment was to know people of accomplishment. —ANDREA BARNET

### Difficult Women

by David Plante  
Atheneum, 192 pp., \$9.95

Had Plante remained aloof, purely the narrator of this startling memoir of three difficult women — Jean Rhys, Sonia Orwell and Germaine Greer — the intimacy of some of his details would have at moments been compromising; he would have been guilty of voyeurism. However, because he is unflinchingly candid about his own uncertain role in each of these relationships, a role that is completely passive, potentially parasitic and insecure, he does not exempt himself from the critical scrutiny to which he subjects his three friends. Instead he includes himself as a character, recreating several boozy London winters spent assisting Rhys in the completion of her autobiography, a tense two-week holiday with Orwell in Italy, and a road trip to New Mexico with Greer. Even in the most indecorous moments — pulling Rhys, drunk, out of the toilet after she has fallen in; watching Greer chop up testicle for her cat; enduring Orwell as she victimizes an innocent dinner guest — he refrains from waving a self-righteous finger. Instead he questions his own motivations in spending so much time with these three mercurial women: Is it cheap literary curiosity, he asks? Guilt for some breach in the past? Escape from himself?

All this could be terribly self-indulgent and circular, but it is not.

This is because Plante raises these psychological portraits to the narrative pitch of fiction. He brings each to life with a dramatic precision that is formidable. —ANDREA BARNET

### The Only Living Witness

by Stephen G. Michaud and Hugh Aynesworth  
The Linden Press/Simon & Schuster, 464 pages, \$15.95

In the summer of 1979 Theodore Robert Bundy was given the death penalty for the brutal slaying of two Florida co-eds. For Bundy, these sorority house killings were the culmination of a four-year murder rampage which left at least twenty women dead and many more physically and psychologically maimed. The sensational trial was widely publicized, spawning a Bundy "mystique" which has been the subject of four books and numerous articles, all trying to grasp the essential nature of "a depravity off the scale of human understanding."

Stephen Michaud and Hugh Aynesworth have come closest to penetrating the enigma of Ted Bundy through first-rate investigative reporting and by enlisting the mass-murderer to "speculate" on the methods and motivations of the psychopathic killer. What unfolds is Bundy's third-person account of his own experience, including a preoccupation with violent pornography and voyeurism, his disdain for authority, a chilling description of his "hunts" for victims, and his complete lack of remorse after their "possession," Bundy's euphemism for murder.

Bundy's astounding ability to rationalize his behavior enabled him to maintain a mask of respectability so convincing that friends and acquaintances continued to vouch for his innocence in spite of the overwhelming evidence against him; the police dismissed him as a suspect repeatedly before Bundy virtually invited them to apprehend him. The authors emphasize that this is the most terrifying aspect of his story, that society "is essentially defenseless against the intelligent, dedicated killer."

They have written with gut-wrenching immediacy and yet readily

admit they can "only say what it was like, not what it was." Though the unspeakable "entity" inhabiting Ted Bundy's body has revealed itself, it remains unknowable, disturbing, and bizarrely fascinating.

—CAROL VERDERESE

### Lost Honor

by John Dean  
Stratford Press, 360 pp., \$15.95

John Dean appears on the cover as the eternal preppie: a man who has passed the bar, worked at the White House, been sent up the river and *still* wears his sweater with the sleeves tied around the front of his neck. But Dean has learned a lot since law school; he has learned about regaining honor by somberly examining his guilt in public and about dropping the tastiest plum he has to offer (in this case, the possible identity of Deep Throat) in a book's early chapter and picking it back up again in the last 90 pages.

By now everyone knows Dean's research has led him to the conclusion that Alexander M. Haig, Jr. was Bob Woodward's main man. Inconclusive? Yes. Frivolous? Perhaps. But this is the book's most interesting section and the only part where Dean's style becomes something other than lumbering and self-conscious.

*Lost Honor* contains less factual documentation and more personal reflection than did *Blind Ambition*, and its *raison d'être* is more shady. If you like John Dean, if you find his personality fascinating—apart from the unique role it played in Watergate—then you might enjoy *Lost Honor*. If not, you'll probably be bored or even uncomfortable when you share John's first marijuana cigarette and his subsequent revelations about how the toaster far exceeds the waffle iron for raw ingenuity.

Dean—along with other ex-colleagues—has been attacked for profiting monetarily from his involvement in scandal. But those are the rules of the game; as long as the public's interest holds, these men will go on lecturing and debating and writing. And it can only be healthy for us to learn the innermost thoughts

of those whose actions were not so long ago shrouded in the secrecy of "national security." Isn't it fun to see G. Gordon Liddy on "Late Night With David Letterman"? But for the many who find this trend annoying, it should be comforting to know that John Dean almost certainly does not have a third Watergate book up his sleeve.

—LAURIE WINER

### 5001 Nights at the Movies

by Pauline Kael

Holt Rinehart Winston, 676 pp., \$25

It has been said that Pauline Kael is more fun to read than most of the movies she reviews are to watch. I don't think she would approve of that sentiment, which seems somehow beside the point. But her writing is always evocative and supremely witty. She can conjure up an image she's seen on the screen with as much skill as the filmmaker who put it there. She can examine a performance with a satirist's eye, bringing out the

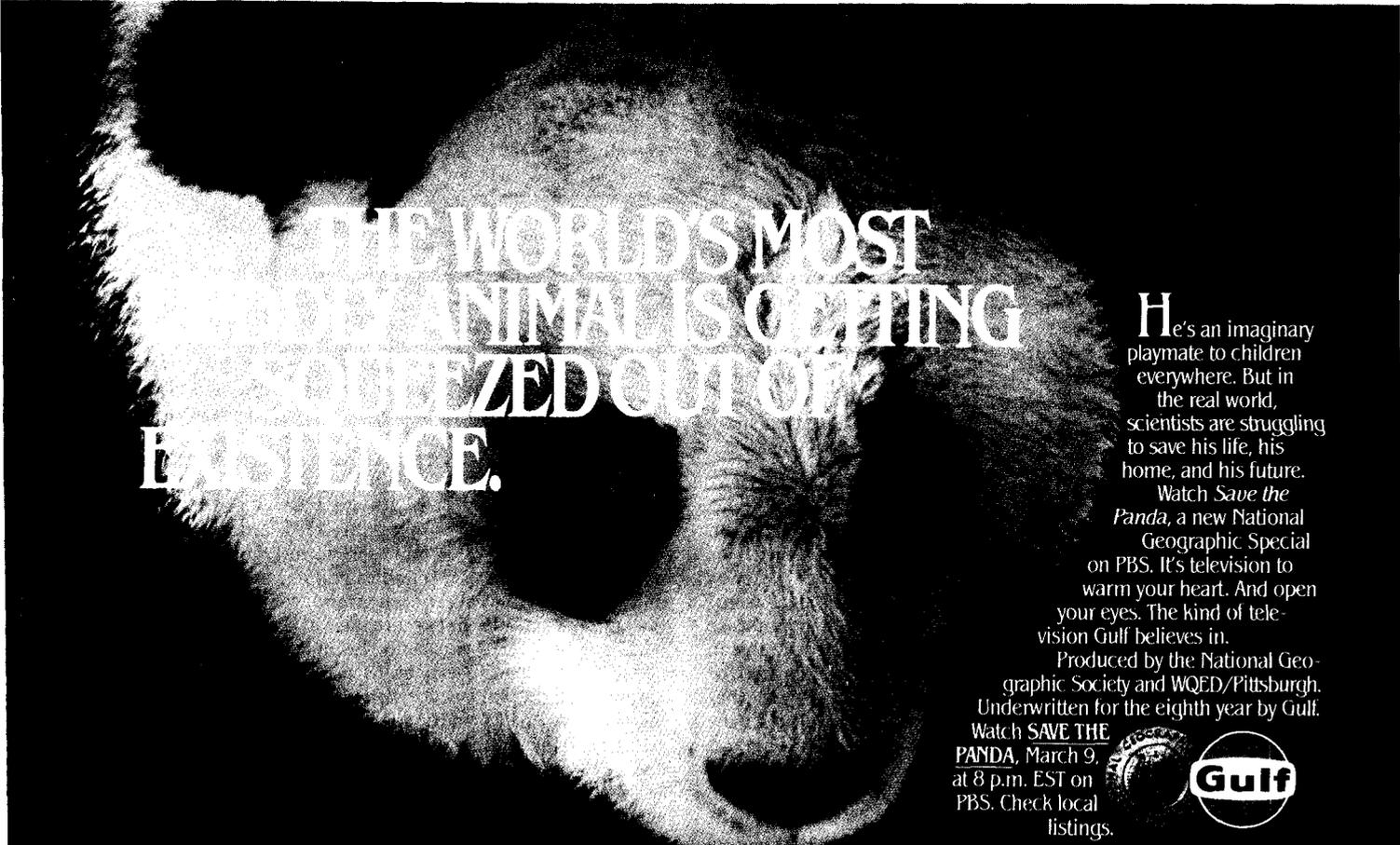
ridiculous lying just under the surface. If you've ever seen Nicol Williamson's Hamlet, then you'll appreciate her sentence, "He stares so much that he's in danger of wearing out his eyeballs." Her tastes and appetites are wide-ranging. She favors no one genre over another; if it's well done she can celebrate any type of film. (Some of her critics belittle this anti-elitism and claim that her tastes are bizarre.) She is never intimidated by the cinema's sacred cows, so that Bergman's *Autumn Sonata* is "grueling and unconvincing" and Fellini's *Juliet of the Spirits* is "a look at a mousy wife's fantasy life; her unconscious seems to be stuffed with leftover decor from M-G-M musicals."

But when Kael loves a film, as she unapologetically did Brian DePalma's *Blow Out*, she sings its praises so joyfully that one feels uplifted simply by her pleasure. Her writing is visceral and specific, yet it also has a casual just-hanging-around-talking-about-movies pace,

which leaves room for her sharp-edged humor to wind up and find its target. She is a champion of the immediate and innovative and true, and she is repulsed by pomposity above all else. More than any other reviewer, she is misread, dumped on and adored, but her writing does exactly what popular criticism should do: It incites people to think and to argue about what movies make them feel. Even those who say they can't stand her go on reading her year after year in *The New Yorker*.

These reviews, most of them pared down from longer ones, appeared originally in *The New Yorker* and cover films from the 1920s to the 1980s. Because they are short and because there are a goodly number of them, this book can and probably will be used as a reference text. But it compares to other reference texts (such as the committee-written *Oxford Companion to Film*) as *The Gold Rush* compares to an industrial film on mining.

—LAURIE WINER



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