

REFLECTIONS

SURVIVING

WHAT meaning can we find in the new motion picture "Seven Beauties" and in the critical response to it? Each generation must cope with its own history. The most difficult part of this is coming to terms with traumatic events; for the present generation, these events are the Vietnam war and all that has followed. But in some fashion the members of each generation must also master the crucial problems in the lives of their parents; and for the older generation the traumatic events were the Second World War and the universe of the concentration camps. (Not that the latter is not still present history in important parts of the world.) Although the attempt never works, the easiest way to try to cope with the world of one's parents is to practice indifference to it—to adopt the attitude that one must live one's own life and cannot relive that of one's parents. Thus, Israeli youth do not want to hear about the Holocaust; they feel that they cannot bear the burdens of their parents in addition to their own.

Thirty years makes a difference, but does that mean that the unimaginable abomination—the unspeakable horror of yesteryear—has today become a suitable topic for a farce? And, if so, what does this tell about us, the observers and onetime participants, who accept it? Not to want to know about concentration camps is one thing, but to turn one into the setting for "death-house comedy" (*Time's* apposite description) is something different. Just because the comedy in "Seven Beauties" is macabre, grotesque black comedy, it succeeds in neutralizing the horror that, although clearly shown, becomes through this juxtaposition the *frisson* that makes the comedy more effective.

A survivor of the camps is hardly the right person to appreciate the "raucous" humor (as one reviewer described the mood of the film) of seeing prisoners who have been hanged or have hanged themselves in desperation, who suffocate in the mire of feces in an open latrine, who are slaughtered in other ways; or the "winning . . . shabby, transparent charm" (same reviewer) of the rapist whose pretended love for the murderous camp commander, a woman, is rewarded by promotion to *Kapo*, or prison foreman, and who, with only the slightest hesitation, selects six prisoners at random to be killed to fulfill the terms of the

deal he has made with her. Old men should not invoke their by now ancient concerns and try to impose them on the different perspectives of those in a new generation, who feel they must interpret the past not in its own terms but in theirs. Why spoil the enjoyment of those for whom the gas chambers are a hoary tale, vaguely remembered, best forgotten? Out of such considerations, I would have kept silent but for my conviction that this film and, more important, most of the public reaction to it interpret survivorship falsely, in terms both of the past and of the present.

In its own way, "Seven Beauties" is a work of art, and an artist has every right—in fact, it is his artistic obligation—to give body to his vision of the world in which we live, so as to enrich our understanding of and refine our sensitivity to the human condition, which is, of course, our own. If the artist uses irony to achieve his goal, he presents his vision as if seen in a mirror that distorts, to make us aware of what would otherwise escape us, to force us to respond to that which we would rather avoid. Is "Seven Beauties," then, a film using mocking irony to enrich us? Or is it entertainment using horrible props to take us more effectively on a ride so engrossing and emotionally exhausting that we are fooled into believing, because of the strength of our feelings, that we have gained in consciousness?

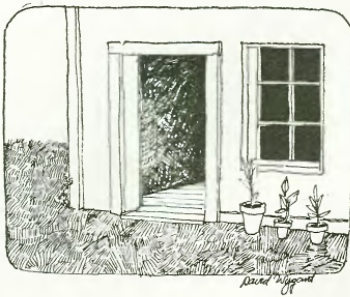
If the film is to be taken for mere entertainment, I must state my disgust that the abomination of genocide and the tortures and degradations of the concentration camp are used as a special, uniquely macabre titillation to enhance its effectiveness. But I believe that Lina Wertmüller, the director, had more in mind, even though at certain moments the opportunities her story offered for sophisticated death-house comedy may have carried her away. On the basis of this film as well as her others, I believe she is serious

about her art and about her views of life, politics, human beings, and the relation between sex and politics.

I also believe that "Seven Beauties" is a somewhat uneasy, indirect, camouflaged—and therefore more dangerous, because more easily accepted and hence more effective—justification for accepting the world that produced concentration camps; it is a self-justification for those who readily accepted that world under these conditions and profited from it. But it is also a self-justification for those who today do not wish to consider the problems that that world posed, and instead settle for the easy solution of a completely empty survivorship; it is a self-justification for those who try to evade the predicaments of the world of the present, of which concentration camps in their Russian form are still very much a part, and who do not wish to struggle with the difficult issue of finding alternatives to such a world.

Strong objections were raised to "Seven Beauties" by Pauline Kael, in *The New Yorker*, and also by Russell Baker, in the *Times*. Baker correctly said that "it has been ecstatically reviewed by New York movie critics" (including Vincent Canby, of the *Times*). John Simon called it "a masterpiece" in a long evaluation in *New York*, and it received rave reviews in *Time* and *Newsweek*. This was not the reaction of reviewers only; in my experience, the vast majority of those who saw the film were deeply impressed by it. More important, it seemed to shape their views about matters they had been little familiar with before, including the all-important issue of survivorship.

This is sufficient reason to take the film seriously, whatever Wertmüller's motives in making it may have been—offering questionable entertainment, justifying the acceptance of Fascism, or rousing us to deeper consideration of the world we live in. The generally positive response to "Seven Beauties" suggests to me that one generation after the Nuremberg trials any justification of survivorship under Fascism seems to have become acceptable, and not just in Italy—where such acceptance can be easily understood—but also in the United States. However, I am discouraged equally by the overwhelmingly uncritical acceptance of this film and by the much rarer rejection of it by those who, in my opinion, did not take it and the reaction to it seriously



enough. In a review of Wertmüller's recent films titled "All Mixed Up," in *The New York Review of Books*, Michael Wood refers to her as having "a stunning visual intelligence accompanied by a great confusion of mind." And "Seven Beauties" is confused—or, at least, confusing. How, then, is one to explain the critical acclaim it received, and the audience reaction to it? Should one assume that those who respond positively to it suffer from a parallel confusion? This may very well be the case.

It is risky to assess the director's state of mind from her film and that of its viewers from their reaction to it. But my impression is that the confusion might well be the consequence of Wertmüller's consciously holding and wishing to express certain values, ideas, and attitudes while simultaneously giving body to opposite ones—owing to overriding unconscious desires. For example, I believe that consciously Wertmüller rejects Fascism, machismo, and the world of the concentration camps but that unconsciously she is fascinated by their power, brutality, amorality—their rape of man. In "Seven Beauties," the horror of the concentration camp—and all it stands for—is very much a part of this fascination. Consciously Wertmüller wishes to believe in the goodness of man, symbolized in the anarchist Pedro, the

unpolitical Francesco, and the Socialist whom we encounter on his way to spend twenty-eight years in prison for believing in the freedom and dignity of man, but unconsciously she ridicules all three for their inefficiency. Goodness is weak, and fails; only evil triumphs.

Wertmüller's fascination with the rape of man is most clearly shown in the two scenes that are essentially rape scenes—her protagonist, Pasqualino, in an asylum with a bound patient, and the loathsome female commander demanding that Pasqualino perform sexually or die. Nobody who is not fascinated by rape would dwell on these scenes, much less make one of them the centerpiece of the film. Both Pasqualino's act of rape and his being raped impress on us that this is what makes for survival. If survival justifies rape in both its active and its passive forms, then it justifies practically any other evil.

It is not the film's unconscious fascination with the concentration-camp world that concerns me mainly but the fact that the film fascinates many members of the American cultural élite. This fascination also has its expression in the fact that accounts of Nazism written by one of the Nuremberg criminals—Albert Speer—are best-sellers not only in Germany but in the United States. Nothing could be more dan-

gerous than if disappointment with the obvious shortcomings of the free world and life in it should lead to an unconscious fascination with the world of totalitarianism—a fascination that could easily change into a conscious acceptance.

Thinking about "Seven Beauties" brought back memories of audience reactions to Rolf Hochhuth's play "The Deputy," which deals seriously with the world of the concentration camps and the moral problems it poses—problems that "Seven Beauties" mocks. I saw "The Deputy" both in the United States and in Germany. In the United States, the audience was deeply moved, and left the theatre with the conviction that the only moral position possible was that of the hero: to take a firm stand against evil, even if it means risking one's life, although, out of anxiety, most people, including oneself, may not act in accordance with such a demanding moral obligation. Americans were profoundly disgusted or depressed and disheartened by a Pope's shirking his responsibility to speak out against genocide. In Germany, I met with an entirely different reaction to this play: the theatregoers were pleased with it and relieved by what they experienced as its message. They felt fully justified by the play. It showed that those who tried to fight evil perished, and that even the Pope acquiesced, and this proved to the members of the audience that they had been right not to pay any attention to the concentration camps that existed in their midst. The reaction of the German theatregoers was easy to determine, because their interpretation of the play was important to them, and so they loudly reassured one another. The gist of what they said was "The play proves that it would have been pointless to worry about the camps, because worrying would not have helped; even the Pope could do nothing. One would only have risked one's life stupidly." This was their reaction despite the fact that the play's message was that the Pope—and others—should have and could have done something to stop the evil. It concerns me deeply to note that "Seven Beauties" left American audiences with a reaction all too similar to the Germans' reaction to "The Deputy." These audiences seem to accept the completely erroneous implication that to survive in the camps one had to act as if one were vermin, as Pasqualino does in the film, but in fact the exact opposite was true: while moral convictions and acting on them did not guarantee survival—nothing did, and most prisoners perished—these



things were nevertheless important ingredients of survival.

Thus, what is crucial about this film is not Wertmüller's intentions in making it—not even the welcome demonstration to her fellow-Italians that to oppose Fascism, while virtuous, would have been pointless, because it would have been completely ineffective—but that it justifies evil by implanting a smug conviction that nothing could have made any difference and, by implication, that nothing would make any difference today. Most disturbing are the reactions of the audiences—how the film shapes their views of the world of the concentration camps, of Fascism, of the survivors of the Holocaust. Having been an inmate of German concentration camps and one of the all too few fortunate survivors, I cannot claim disinterested objectivity in the questions that the film poses. Having wrestled with the problems of survivorship, I cannot remain indifferent to the views that this film presents, particularly since it presents them so effectively.

Whatever Wertmüller's intentions, her film deals with the most important problems of our time, of all times: survival; good and evil; and man's attitudes toward a life in which good and evil coexist side by side, when religion no longer offers guidance for dealing with this duality. The late Hannah Arendt, in her book on the Eichmann trial and, with it, the concentration camps, stressed the utter banality of evil. I agree with her thesis. But what must concern us primarily is that evil is evil; we must not permit its banality to detract from this fact, as "Seven Beauties" does, for the film's central figure is banality personified.

Not that in this film evil as such is denied; far from it. It could not be denied in concentration-camp scenes. If it were, we would be revolted, and the film would lose its effectiveness. But in this film the senseless banality of evil is so forcibly impressed on us, and is so inextricably interwoven with the comic, that evil loses nearly all its impact. While the horrors of war, Fascism, and the concentration camp are clearly and overtly presented, covertly they are much more effectively denied, because what we watch is a farce played



"Carter must be winning me over. I can no longer remember exactly what issues I used to feel so strongly about."

in a charnel house, and, furthermore, because survival despite evil and survival through doing evil seem to be in the end all important, regardless of the form that either the evil or the survival takes.

All those in "Seven Beauties" who are good, who have human dignity, perish. This in itself would not invalidate the questions the film raises. We know that in real life those who prevail, like Pasqualino, often do not hesitate to take ruthless advantage of others—that they care only about their petty selfishness, and not at all about good and evil. And we are well aware that the good often fail, are taken advantage of, perish. But in this film we are made to feel that human dignity is a sham, because when we encounter its assertion in the concentration camp we are first much taken by it, but then are given to understand that it is senseless. This is not because those who act with dignity are destroyed or destroy

themselves but because their destruction happens in a ridiculous way.

From its start, the film presents good and evil to us, but makes it as nearly impossible for us to truly embrace goodness as to fully reject evil. Before the film's story begins, we are shown a series of newsreels of Fascism: demonstrations, marches, Mussolini exhorting the masses, Mussolini shaking Hitler's hand; war, the bombing and destruction of cities, the killing and maiming of people. Though all this is presented as horrible, we are entertained by an amusing, mocking cabaret song accompanying the newsreel scenes. And Mussolini and Hitler are also presented partly as comic figures—an approach that is supported by the song, in which all the contradictions of life are accepted at the same time. The song says "Oh yeah" equally to "the ones who have never had a fatal accident" and to "the ones who have had one." And though most of the lyrics and the

singing bitingly reject the world of Fascism we see on the screen, they are also funny, and this quality simultaneously adds to the rejection and takes the sting of true seriousness out of it.

We see Mussolini in all his bombast and Hitler with his funny mustache as we hear the words of the song: "The ones who should have been shot in the cradle, pow! Oh yeah." Then, "The ones who say follow me to success, but kill me if I fail, so to speak, oh yeah. . . . The ones who say we Italians are the greatest he-men on earth, oh yeah." The song is mockingly comic rather than tragic, and so robs the scenes of war and destruction of much of their impact. And Mussolini and Hitler are so pompous that we cannot take them seriously.

Hitler is shown here as the man with the funny mustache, as he was in Chaplin's film "The Great Dictator." But that film antedated Auschwitz and Treblinka. Chaplin made us laugh at what we should have taken dead seriously. To laugh at Hitler was one way to live with him, but the most dangerous, the most destructive way. Because so many people thought they did not have to take seriously the ideas Hitler presented in his grandiose speeches, he was able to make our world a shambles. Because they laughed at this silly man with his funny mustache, they were caught utterly unprepared for their fate; if they had taken him seriously they might have saved themselves. Laughter can be freeing, but it can also induce a false sense of security when one is in greatest danger. The newsreels and the song accompanying them in "Seven Beauties" take us back to the period when we thought that we did not need to take Hitler and Mussolini seriously. But the war scenes show us at the same time what happened because we didn't take these men seriously. This is a contradiction that runs all through the film. Has the time really come when we should feel that the men responsible for the murder of millions are figures to be laughed at?

The film's irony, its farcical scenes, its contradictions prevent us from taking seriously the concentration-camp world it so gruesomely presents. *Time* says that the film is "liberating." By making us laugh at Fascism, the concentration camp, the Holocaust, it does show us one way to become liberated from this burden—something that many people desire, particularly those who lived contentedly under Fascism and those others who do not wish to be haunted by its memories. But is this a liberation that enhances our life

DOLLS

They are so like
Us, frozen in a bald passion
Or absent
Gaze, like the cows whose lashes
Sag beneath their frail sacks of ice.
Your eyes are white with fever, a long
Sickness. When you are asleep,
Dreaming of another country, the wheat's
Pale surface sliding
In the wind, you are walking in every breath
Away from me. I gave you a stone doll,
Its face a dry apple, wizened, yet untroubled.
It taught us the arrogance of silence,
How stone and God reward us, how dolls give us
Nothing. Look at your cane,
Look how even the touch that wears it away
Draws up a shine, as the handle
Gives to the hand. As a girl, you boiled
Your dolls, to keep them clean, presentable;
You'd stir them in enormous pots,
As the arms and legs bent to those incredible
Postures you preferred, not that ordinary, human
Pose. How would you like me?—
Leaning back, reading aloud from a delirious
Book? Or sprawled across your bed,
As if I'd been tossed off a high building
Into the street,
A lesson from a young government to its people?
When you are asleep, walking the fields of another
Country, a series of shadows slowly falling
Away, marking a way,
The sky leaning like a curious girl above a new
Sister, your face a doll's deliberate
Ache of white, you walk along that grove of madness,
Where your mother waits. Hungry, very still.
When you are asleep, dreaming of another country,
This is the country.

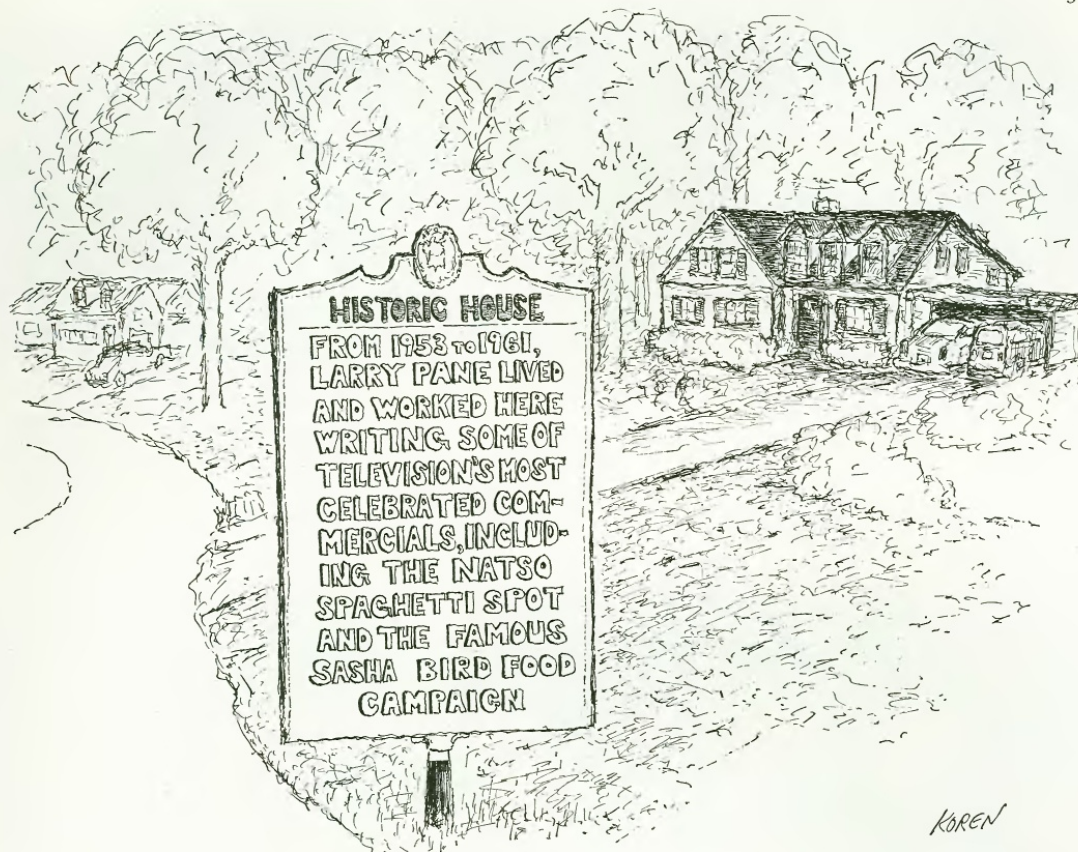
—DAVID ST. JOHN

or one that debases it? Wertmüller's film suggests the latter, just as at its end her hero, *the* survivor, remains an empty shell. Pasqualino is not a person whose experiences have added to his depth; understanding, compassion, the ability to feel guilty, all of which were lacking in him before, continue to be lacking in him, despite world-shaking experiences that one feels should have changed him completely. It is this depiction of the survivor that robs survivorship of all meaning. It makes seeing the film an experience that degrades.

AS the story begins, we see two Italian soldiers, Pasqualino and Francesco, who have deserted from the



Italian Army. They meet by chance in a German forest. Pasqualino, concerned only with what is personally advantageous, has robbed a dead soldier of his bandages and put them on himself, enabling him to pretend that he is seriously wounded and thus to make his escape. Francesco, having previously saved his men from being sent to Stalingrad by getting them trucks to escape in, is now himself fleeing from being court-martialed. From a distance, the two watch a group of Jews being lined up and shot by German soldiers. This sight makes Francesco speak of feeling guilt over having played along with Fascism when he should have fought it. Pasqualino's response is that to have fought it would have been pointless suicide. Francesco denies this, asserting that it would not have been useless—that he should have taken the risks involved. He accuses himself of having killed, without reason, innocent people he did not even know during the war. Pasqualino replies



that he himself has killed for a reason.

With this remark, the scene shifts to prewar Naples, and we see the killing. We watch Concettina, Pasqualino's ridiculously fat sister, make a fool of herself as the cheapest type of vaudeville singer—as he will soon make a fool of himself, first in bungling the murder of Totonno, the pimp who made Concettina into a whore and promised to marry her (or so she claims, to pacify her vociferously outraged brother), and then in disposing of the corpse. In reality, Concettina was eager to exchange her life of squalor in a mattress factory for the life of a whore. Pasqualino browbeats his sister, then shoots Totonno while the pimp is half asleep. He commits the murder supposedly to save his honor and that of his family but actually to gain the respect of Don Raffaele, his gangster boss—who, however, knows how useless Pasqualino is. He orders Pasqualino to dispose of the body, and Pasqualino does so most clumsily. All this Pasqualino undertakes in order to be able to continue his easy life under the protection of the Mafioso boss—a life based on the exploitation of his hardworking mother, who adores him,

her only son, and of his seven fat, ugly sisters, the film's "seven beauties."

In Francesco and Pasqualino, not only good and evil are contrasted but also guilt resulting from indecision and absence of guilt even in the face of brutal murder. Francesco's guilt over having acquiesced in Fascism stands in stark contrast to Pasqualino's acceptance of it. By grandiloquently asserting—like Mussolini—that it is right to kill to gain respect, Pasqualino denies that he has any cause to feel guilty. Yet to be able to choose good over evil and to feel guilty if one has failed to do so is decisive both for preserving our humanity and for giving meaning to survival, and in the movie these problems of guilt and choice are presented repeatedly, mainly in the contrast between Francesco and Pasqualino. In the crucial last scene between them, in the concentration camp, Francesco objects to Pasqualino's sending others to their death to save himself, but Pasqualino nevertheless does so. Francesco revolts, although he knows that in doing so he risks his life. Then Pasqualino, to save himself, fatally shoots Francesco. Francesco demonstrates the crucial problem of the survivor: guilt, arising

from the ability to know that one must not acquiesce in the evils of a concentration-camp world, must not buy one's own life at the expense of the lives of others—even though fear may force one to act against this knowledge. Pasqualino does not suffer guilt, although he kills to gain prestige, sends others to their death, and acquiesces in his own rape to save his skin. At least, we are led to believe that this is how he manages to survive.

The dangerous seductiveness of "Seven Beauties" lies in its presenting this problem of the survivor clearly but denying its validity. By means of the movie's clever artistry, the problem is made to seem immaterial, because survival alone counts—nothing else. It is not just that "Seven Beauties" denies the crucial importance of coping with one's guilt in achieving survival but that it falsely asserts the overweening importance of survival as such, no matter what—as if the problem and survival were not inextricably connected.

AT the same time that "Seven Beauties" opened in New York and was widely acclaimed, long excerpts from "The Survivor"—a new



"The Schoonover sisters' cotton batting is loose."

book on the concentration camps, by Terrence Des Pres, a professor of English at Colgate University—were published in such different magazines as *Harper's*, *Dissent*, and *Moment*. This is another indication that a new generation is trying to come to terms in its own way with what used to be called the concentration-camp world. For many people, the millions who were murdered no longer arouse much interest; they seem to have been forgotten; they no longer count. Maybe this attitude is inevitable; our business is with the living, not the dead. But I believe that it is another matter when the horrors of the camps are used and their history is misconstrued to propagate a questionable message: Survival is all, it does not matter how, why, what for. This questionable approach also implies that it is both wrong and silly

to feel guilty about anything one may have done to survive such an experience. By quite different routes, Professor Des Pres, in his book, and Wertmüller, in "Seven Beauties," arrive at parallel conclusions about what is required for survival in a world dominated by the concentration camp or standing under its spectre. According to them, the main lesson of survivorship is: All that matters, the only thing that is really important, is life in its crudest, merely biological form.

Presenting a small segment of truth and claiming that it is the entire spectrum can be a much greater distortion than an outright lie. A lie is much easier to recognize as a distortion, since our critical abilities have not been put to sleep by having been fed some small segment of truth. The filmmaker and the writer, to make palatable their

wrongful distortions of what is entailed in survivorship, weave misleading myths around the truism that one must remain alive. Saying what everybody knows and nobody has ever doubted hardly justifies a film or a book about survival in the concentration-camp world. If a presentation of what is involved in survival is to have any meaning, it cannot restrict itself to stating simply that unless one remains alive one does not survive. It must tell what else is needed: what one must be, do, feel; what attitudes, what conditions are required for achieving survival under concentration-camp conditions.

The kernel of significant truth in the truism that survival is based on staying alive is that in the concentration camp staying alive required a powerful determination. Once one lost it—gave in to the omnipresent despair and let it dominate the wish to live—one was doomed. But Professor Des Pres and Lina Wertmüller go way beyond this. Des Pres states that the lesson to be learned from survivorship is that man's true obligation is "to embrace life without reserve," which must, by definition, entail doing so in all ways, even those which up to now have been unacceptable.

Des Pres leads up to this dictum by saying that we must "live beyond the compulsions of culture" and "by the body's crude claims." Wertmüller's film gives these principles visible form and symbolic expression. Pasqualino embraces life without reserve as he accepts without compunction Fascism, murder, rape. He lives beyond the compulsions of culture as he rapes a mental patient who is helplessly tied down, and as he hands over other prisoners to be deprived of their lives to secure his. By voluntarily managing an erection in intercourse with a ruthless killer, he survives by the body's crudest claims. All this is made more obvious because

we watch it in direct connection with seeing Pedro and Francesco perish just because they transcend the body's crude claims to keep on living, at no matter what price; just because they adhere to basic moral principles—which can be viewed as mere “compulsions of culture” if one wishes to deny the importance of morality.

The facts of the concentration camp are exactly the opposite of what Professor Des Pres says and what “Seven Beauties” depicts. Those who had the best chance for survival in the concentration camps—minimal as it was—were like Pedro and Francesco: they tried as much as was feasible to continue to live by what Professor Des Pres calls the compulsions of culture, and, despite the omnipresent crude claims of the body in a situation of utter physical exhaustion and starvation, nevertheless tried to exercise some small moral restraint over the body's cruder demands. Those who, like Pasqualino, made common cause with the enemy, the camp commander, thus sacrificing the lives of others to gain advantages for themselves, were not likely to remain alive.

The prisoners, to survive, had to help one another. While this is not shown in the film, it was so obviously the reality of the camps that Professor Des Pres cites many examples of prisoners' helping others, in line with what they viewed as their moral obligation—sharing some morsel of food, performing some extra hard labor that others were incapable of, protecting others at the risk of their own lives. But Des Pres then misrepresents the motives of this behavior. It is true that some prisoners lived by the principles he formulates, and to which “Seven Beauties” gives visual expression. That is why, in reference to them, there was a camp saying—“The prisoners are the prisoner's worst enemy.” Not because such prisoners were more cruel and vicious than the S.S.—although a very few were, to gain favor with the S.S.—but because if one received help from other prisoners one had a chance to survive, while without it one did not. Therefore, fellow-prisoners or prison foremen who did not give help where this was possible seemed to be the worst enemies, because something could rightly be expected of them.

Thus, while it does not accord with the reality of what was likely to happen

in the camps, there is some psychological validity to Pedro's act of suicide in direct consequence of Pasqualino's betrayal of his fellow-prisoners. Francesco is reacting to the same betrayal when he provokes the S.S. by calling to the prisoners to revolt. Emotionally, disappointment in fellow-prisoners was extremely hard to take, because one expected more and better of them than of the guards, whose vilest one learned to take for granted, much as one hated them for it. In reality, nearly all prisoners made common cause against the S.S. most of the time. Many times, prisoners supported one another in small ways that, given the desperate conditions under which they lived, took on large dimensions. In supporting one another, the prisoners did not live “by the body's crude claims,” nor did they “live beyond the compulsions of culture,” nor did they “embrace life without reserve.” On the contrary, such behavior, far from facilitating survival, actually endangered it.

The principles that Wertmüller and Des Pres present to us as guidelines for survival were in fact those by which the Nazis, and particularly the S.S., lived, or at least tried to live. They subscribed to the philosophy that one must “live beyond the compulsions of culture”—witness Goebbels' infamous statement “When I hear the word ‘culture,’ I draw my gun.” With their racist doctrines, such as the overriding importance of “pure Aryan blood,” and in many other ways, they glorified living “by the body's crude claims.”

In theory, it might just be possible to claim that the validity of Nazi doctrine is what survivorship proves—so many Nazis and Fascists did manage to survive the war rather well. But I am convinced that survivorship, if it proves anything at all, proves nothing like the validity of Fascism. When a large

and significant segment of those who speak for the American intellectual establishment seems ready to accept the most basic principles of Nazi doctrine and to believe the suggestion—presented in carefully camouflaged but convincing forms in “Seven Beauties” and Des Pres' critically celebrated book—that survivorship supports the validity of those principles, then a survivor must speak up to say that this is an outrageous distortion.

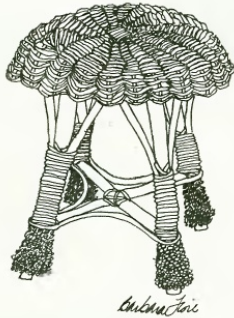
The harsh and unpleasant fact of

the concentration camp is that survival has little to do with what the prisoner does or does not do. For the overwhelming majority of victims, survival depends on being set free either by the powers who rule the camps or—what is much more reliable and desirable—by outside forces that destroy the concentration-camp world by defeating those who rule it. Even Solzhenitsyn, who demonstrated the greatest moral courage, the most remarkable ability to survive under unspeakably horrible conditions—to the extent that he has rightly come to stand for all survivors—would not have survived if he had not been set free by those who rule the Gulag Archipelago. He could not have spoken up if there had not been an outside world, independent of the world of the concentration camps, that exerted the powerful pressure that permitted him to do so.

The completely misleading distortion in “Seven Beauties” and the articles excerpted from Des Pres' book is the pretense that what the survivors *did* made their survival possible. For the fictional Pasqualino as much as for the real prisoners Professor Des Pres discusses in his writings it was the Allied victory (or, in some instances, its imminence) that permitted survival. Until the Nazi governmental and war machinery were thrown into nearly complete disarray by Allied bombings and by defeat in the field (notably after Stalingrad) not more than a dozen or so of the many millions of concentration-camp prisoners managed to survive by their own efforts—that is, to escape from the camps and get away with it before the Allied forces triumphed. All others, including me, survived because the S.S. chose to set them free, and for no other reason.

If one wishes to speak in a sensible way about survival, one has to divide it into two aspects that have little to do with each other. The first aspect is liberation, and this depends not at all on the prisoner but on the arbitrary decisions of the jailers, or on what seems politically expedient to them, or on their being defeated by outside forces. The second is what the prisoner can do to remain alive until the moment when, by chance or luck, he is liberated. But whatever he does is of no avail if he is not set free.

Important and fascinating as the problem is of what the prisoner can do even under the unbelievably oppressive conditions of the concentration camp, much as it can teach us about the human condition, it has little relevance to the question of survivorship unless



we always keep in mind that survival demands first and foremost the destruction of the concentration-camp world and the arrangement of things so that no new concentration-camp world can come into being. Any discussion of survivorship is dangerously misleading if it gives the impression that the main question is what the prisoner can do, for this is insignificant compared to the need to defeat politically or militarily those who maintain the camps—something that the prisoners, of course, cannot do.

This unpleasant truth about the prisoners' helplessness to survive unless they are liberated is ignored by the film and the articles, which try to replace it with the comfortable belief that the prisoners managed to survive on their own. It is what people seem to wish to believe thirty years later about the German camps, if one can trust the response to the film and the articles. Moreover, it can permit us to forget about Russian and other concentration camps of today—and the wish to do this may have fathered the film and the articles, and may explain their ready acceptance.

"Seven Beauties" does permit the thoughtful viewer at least a tiny glimpse of this truth, for Pasqualino reappears in freedom only after Naples has been occupied by Allied soldiers. But the film denies the truth about the causes of Pasqualino's liberation by impressing on us that it was his managing an erection and his killing other prisoners—including his friend Francesco—that secured his survival. The film further denies reality by indicating that there is no worthwhile difference between the world of the concentration camp and that which Pasqualino enters after leaving the camp. Survival in the camp, we are shown, depended on whoring, and liberated Naples is shown in the film to be nothing but a huge whorehouse, with the Allied soldiers as the whoremasters.

That this is the impression Wertmüller's film gives is attested to by what John Simon writes about it. Pasqualino pleads insanity to escape death for the murder of Totunno and is placed in an insane asylum, where he commits the rape. Speaking about Pasqualino's having got his release from the madhouse by volunteering to join the Italian Army, Simon writes that from this "madhouse full of tragicomic adventures"—referring to rape as a tragicomic adventure—"one can be rescued only by transfer into a worse madhouse: the army."

The army as madhouse seems to



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have become a fashionable cliché. In a film about life under Fascism, about the concentration camp, about survival, one might rightly ask: Which army? The all too efficient Nazi army, which we have seen killing prisoners, exterminating Jews, and which as long as it existed maintained a world of concentration camps? Or the army whose victory the prisoners prayed for and dreamed about, since they knew that it was their only hope for survival? This army without whose victory Hitler and Mussolini and their successors would now rule most of the world, making the German concentration camps part of the present—is this army a worse madhouse?

But in terms of "Seven Beauties" what Simon writes is not far off the mark. In this film, we are given to understand that under Mussolini only a few Neapolitans were whores—hence Pasqualino's outrage when his sister Concettina became one. We are shown that all Pasqualino's sisters have become whores because of the Allied Army. So Fascism is evil, but in this film the Allied victory has not liberated the camps that play such a central role in it; instead, it has turned the whole world into a bordello. One can understand why the many millions of Italians who were quite satisfied with Fascism would like to view the Second World War this way, since it would justify their acceptance of Fascism and its evils. But one cannot help wondering for what strange reasons American intellectuals have embraced this view of things.

Professor Des Pres, as an American speaking to Americans, uses other methods to obfuscate the fact that only the Allied victory liberated the concentration-camp prisoners and hence permitted the survival of so many. He does so, first, by not mentioning this basic fact of survival, and, second, by giving the impression that the prisoners, entirely on their own, were able to defeat those who kept them imprisoned. Political reality seems to count for little in a supposedly scholarly discussion of what is involved in survival. Professor Des Pres, particularly in his *Dissent* article, also uses other props to buttress his theories. Among them are a claim that those driven to their death are accused of going "to their death like sheep," and that those who survived are accused of being "tainted with something called 'survival guilt.'" Yet he fails to present evidence that these claims were ever made in a critical manner. I believe that Des Pres erects straw men in order to knock them down, and in

this way to convince us of the validity of his spurious conclusions. That the victims of the gas chambers “went to their death like sheep” is a scandalous use of a cliché, not only incredibly callous but utterly false. Nobody who knew the camps and thought about them could possibly give credence to it. As early as 1943—long before the liberation of the camps, long before their existence was officially acknowledged in this country or was at all widely known—I wrote about the temporary personality changes that occurred in the prisoners and the far-reaching adjustments they made. Sheep cannot produce personality changes in themselves; these can be effected only by thinking and feeling human beings, and adjustments can be so far-reaching only because the people involved feel so deeply.

It is also untrue that the S.S. drove the prisoners as if they were sheep to their death—or, if they let them live for a time, to their barracks, to work, or, as we see in the film, to the deadly roll calls. The analogy is false, because prisoners were of no value to the S.S., while sheep are of considerable economic value to those who herd them. Sheep do not know that they are being driven to the slaughter. The prisoners, after their transport, after parents had been separated from children, husbands from wives, knew how desperate their fate was, although many who were taken directly to the gas chambers did not know exactly what was in store, for the S.S. wished to keep them in the dark, and they were given to understand that the gas chambers were shower rooms. But the vast majority of prisoners nevertheless walked passively as they were directed, knowing more or less what was going on—and this raises more serious problems about man’s behavior when his will to resist has been completely broken. This is a problem that Professor Des Pres does not discuss. He can afford to neglect it by paying attention only to the survivors. But I believe that the survivors’ problems and the problems of those who did not survive are most intricately interwoven. So is the problem of the prisoners who knew that these newcomers were being driven to their death and did not shout out to them not to permit it—to resist. However, those who would have given the warning and those who would have heeded it would all have been immediately killed.

We see Pedro and Francesco call out such warnings in “Seven Beauties,” and also see them die because of it. It is one of the innumerable contradictions of “Seven Beauties”

that it shows the prisoners as utterly passive, permitting themselves to be herded to the roll call—an impression that is reinforced by the guards’ using dogs to help herd them—yet shows Pedro and Francesco heroically resisting such degradation and trying to rouse all the other prisoners to do the same. The picture that the film renders of the prisoners is wrong, because it shows only heroic resistance that fails to benefit anybody; helpless passivity; and, in Pasqualino, the saving of oneself by siding with the enemy.

The reality of the camps was entirely different. To stay alive, prisoners had to try at all times to be active in their own behalf, and this is something that Professor Des Pres rightly stresses; as a matter of fact, it is what his whole argument is about. In “Seven Beauties” we see prisoners, whether in the barracks or during the roll call, helplessly and passively awaiting their fate. Yet in reality, even while seemingly standing passively at attention, prisoners, to survive, had to engage in protective behavior. Those endless roll calls were physically and morally so destructive that one could survive them only by responding with determination to their destructive impact, through action when this was possible and, when it was not, then at least in one’s mind—and this was true for practically everything else that made up the prisoners’ lives. Like the many thousands of others who experienced it and survived, I remember vividly a bitter-cold winter night at Buchenwald when the prisoners had to stand at attention for almost the entire night as punishment because some prisoners had tried to escape. (They did not make it, and were publicly hanged; from the beginning of the German concentration camps, in 1933, until the forties, only three prisoners managed to escape and survive, and they only because they were helped by S.S. friends.) Roll call was taken with the prisoners standing ten rows deep. Those in the front row were doubly exposed—to the ice-cold wind and to the mistreatment of the guards—while those in the other rows were somewhat protected from both. Soon the prisoners, with the connivance of indifferent prisoner foremen, or under the direction of responsible foremen, took turns standing in the front row, so that this extra hardship was shared by all but the extremely weak and old, who were exempted.

The S.S. soon observed what went

on, but most—though not all, some S.S. men being more vicious than the average—pretended not to see, as long as the prisoners changed places only when the S.S. men did not seem to be looking in their direction. The reason was that among the values of the S.S. was an appreciation not of mutual help but of an esprit de corps, at least up to the time Germany’s defeat became clear to them. While they tried overtly to break such a spirit in the prisoners, covertly they had

some grudging admiration for it, and utterly despised the prisoners who did not act in accordance with it. Thus, the total passivity of the prisoners in “Seven Beauties” is one of the many devices that the film uses to indicate that in

order to survive one had to play entirely along with the oppressors, when actually the opposite was true.

To survive, one had to want to survive for a purpose. One of the simplest ideas that prisoners hung on to—for life, because the thought gave them the strength to endure—was revenge. This was an idea not available to Pasqualino, because a little murderer like him could hardly believe that one day he would take revenge on the big murderers. An idea that sustained many, even in the worst moments, was that of bearing witness—telling the world of the abomination, so that it could be prevented from ever happening again. Some wanted to stay alive for those whom they loved. Some were sustained by thoughts of the better world they would create, their eyes having been opened to what was really important by the infernal experiences they had lived through. Only active thought could prevent a prisoner from becoming one of the walking dead (*Muselmänner*) whom he saw all around him—one of those who were doomed because they had given up thought and hope. By showing the prisoner who had thoughts of a better world committing suicide, like Pedro, and having Pasqualino, who had no thought whatever of creating a better world, survive, “Seven Beauties” falsifies what survival was all about.

In order to further convince the reader of what the prisoners could accomplish in defeating the rulers of the camp, Des Pres refers to the prisoners’ having been likened not only to sheep but to monsters—a simile entirely of his invention. In the vast literature on the camps, nobody else has referred to the prisoners as monsters. Des Pres writes, in his *Dissent* article, “But they



were neither sheep nor monsters who burned down Treblinka and Sobibor, who blew up the crematorium at Auschwitz, who succeeded in taking command of Buchenwald during the war's last days." Here the impression is created that the prisoners, all by themselves, were able to achieve their survival, and this is completely untrue. Whatever little open resistance there was in any camp, it led to survival only when the Allied Armies had already reached the immediate vicinity; otherwise, the result was always death. The few instances of active fighting back—incredibly few, given the millions of prisoners involved—are therefore immaterial to the question of survivorship; witness the absence of active fighting back among the millions who went through the Russian camps and those who died there.

The statement about the "taking command of Buchenwald" by prisoners "during the war's last days" is partly correct, because the event referred to did occur—on April 11, 1945, which was indeed one of the last days of the war in Germany. But as far as the prisoners' taking command is concerned, it was a non-event that Des Pres has made to appear an event of the greatest import. What actually happened has often been described accurately, but it has more often been turned into a myth, given permanent form by the Buchenwald plaque, which through fictional stories glorifies Ernst Thälmann, the leader of the German Communists, as having provided the impetus for resistance with which he had nothing whatever to do. What happened was that when two American tank columns had reached the immediate vicinity of Buchenwald, the camp commander, to save his life, turned the camp over to the S.S.-appointed top prisoner of the camp and ran away with the rest of the S.S. Only then did the prisoners "take command." Within three hours of the commander's departure, the first American motorized vehicles entered the camp.

Christopher Burney has given a completely trustworthy account in "The Dungeon Democracy." It is a report with which Professor Des Pres should be familiar, because we are told, in an introductory note to the *Harper's* article, that he "studied the entire record compiled by those people who survived the camps"—a formidable achievement, because the literature is vast and exists in many languages, most

of it not translated and much of it not yet printed but available only in manuscript or on microfilm. In any event, "The Dungeon Democracy" was written in English and printed in 1946, almost immediately after the liberation. Burney, who was an English prisoner at Buchenwald, writes, "April 11th. Pister [the camp commander] called the *Lagerälteste I* [the chief prison trusty, appointed to this post by the S.S.] and Fritz Edelmann and said: 'I am leaving now. You will be Commandants of this camp and



will hand it over to the Americans for me.' . . . Throughout the morning there was machine-gun and artillery fire quite close, and we saw groups of German artillery and infantry with-

drawing along the plain. At about midday the S.S. sentries left their posts and disappeared. Two hours later, when the coast was well clear, daring prisoners hoisted the white flag . . . and [we] . . . saw them taking the hidden weapons from the 'secret' dump. They were very childish, forming bands of different nationalities and marching about looking as if they had defeated the entire Wehrmacht." This, years later, has been turned into the myth that the prisoners took command of the camp by defeating the S.S.

C.-J. Odic, as prisoner-physician, was in an excellent position to observe all that went on. In "Demain Buchenwald," published in France in 1972, he deflates the myths of Buchenwald's liberation. After stressing the fact that plans and some serious preparations by the prisoners for action were made only after the S.S. men operating the camp had been thrown into nearly complete disarray by the devastating Allied air raid on August 24, 1944, he says that these plans were never executed. The camps were liberated by two tank columns, he writes, and he continues (my translation):

This was all. The Battle of Buchenwald had been won. We were free. Soldiers had crossed the Atlantic to achieve it. All that remained was to create the myth. The camp suddenly crawled with ancient heroes. . . . They demonstrated that they had not lost their keen sense of opportunity: it was they who had conquered Buchenwald. The newspapers believed this story. . . . Our fate deserves to be treated more seriously.

There is the myth of the eight hundred guns; there is the myth of a camp that liberated itself, and did it before the arrival of American columns. In front of them marched a hero. . . . In Paris he is French, in Warsaw he is Polish, in

Germany a member of the future Reichstag. . . .

What gives the claims [that the prisoners liberated the camp] the lie is that there were neither killed nor wounded prisoners. [Dr. Odic knew, because on liberation he was immediately made physician in charge of the hospital services.] The mass that rushed to the tower [from which the S.S. had controlled the camp] ahead of the Americans did not have to fight; the tower was deserted, and so were the other positions of the S.S. The S.S. suffered no attack, whether from the rear or the flanks. . . . Is it necessary to ascribe to us a role that we have not played? Was our elation at being liberated not sufficient? . . . The American Army conducts a raid across Thuringia. It advances. It occupies Buchenwald. It restores to the thousands of patriots that it delivers the right to be human.

THE issue of guilt is closely connected with that of morality. In a world that has no place for morality, no guilt can exist. According to Professor Des Pres, "the survivor's special importance" is that "he is the first of civilized men to live beyond the compulsions of culture," and thus "is evidence that men and women are now strong enough, mature enough, awake enough, to face death without mediation, and therefore to embrace life without reserve." It is hard to know exactly what is meant by the phrases "face death without mediation" and "embrace life without reserve." But it is a well-known fact of the concentration camps that those who had strong religious and moral convictions managed life there much better than the rest. Their beliefs, including belief in an afterlife, gave them a strength to endure which was far above that of most others. Deeply religious persons often helped others, and some voluntarily sacrificed themselves—many more of them than of the average prisoners. For example, the Franciscan priest Maximilian Kolbe, the original of the hero of "The Deputy," asked for and took the place of a prisoner who was to be killed. The prisoner survived.

It will be startling news to most survivors that they are "strong enough, mature enough, awake enough . . . to embrace life without reserve," since only a pitifully small number of those who entered the German camps survived. What about the many millions who perished? Were they "awake enough . . . to embrace life without reserve" as they were driven into the gas chambers? Would they not have much preferred some mediation if it could have stood between them and death, or could even have taken some of the horror out of their dying? What

about the many survivors who were completely broken by their experience, so that years of the best psychiatric care could not help them cope with their memories, which continued to haunt them in their deep and often suicidal depression? Do they "embrace life without reserve"? Do the psychotic breakdowns and severe neuroses of many survivors deserve no attention? What of the horrible nightmares about the camps which every so often awaken me today, thirty-five years later, despite a most rewarding life, and which every survivor I have asked has also experienced.

Hermann Langbein, in "Menschen in Auschwitz," published in 1972, which is the most complete account of Auschwitz that has been published, sums it up by saying (my translation), "Even if the life of many former Auschwitz prisoners proceeds normally during the day, theirs is different from that of all others: there remains the night, the dreams." Langbein presents example after example of survivors who continue to be deeply disturbed. One can only wonder at the audacity of Professor Des Pres in speaking about survivors' embracing life without reserve when one recalls the many who, because of what happened to them or their parents or children in the camps, have never been able to live anything like a normal life. And what of those survivors who were maimed, castrated, sterilized? Those who immediately begin to cry helplessly when they are reminded of the camps? The children who, having spent time in the camps, needed psychiatric treatment for years before at least some of them were ready to try to cope with life?

Des Pres' conclusions about survivors' embracing life without reserve and having learned to live by the body's crude claims are particularly startling, because he writes at length about prisoners who helped others—that is, who acted normally, although in doing so they risked their lives. Despite his insistence on the unselfish behavior of many survivors, he objects to the idea of guilt, the pangs of which are a most powerful motivation for moral behavior—much stronger than any fear of disapproval by others. Des Pres writes that the average survivor should not and does not feel guilty, since guilt is one of the most significant "compulsions of culture," of which Professor Des Pres claims that the survivor has freed himself. By asserting that the average survivor is not guilty—and nobody in his senses has ever claimed he was guilty—Des Pres obfuscates the

real issue, which is that the survivor as a thinking being knows very well that he is not guilty, as I, for one, know about myself, but that this does not change the fact that the humanity of such a person, as a feeling being, requires that he feel guilty, and he does. This is a most significant aspect of survivorship.

One cannot survive the concentration camp without feeling guilty that one was so incredibly lucky when millions perished, many of them in front of one's eyes. Professor Robert Jay Lifton, of Yale, has demonstrated that the same phenomenon exists for the survivors of Hiroshima, and there the catastrophe was short-lived—although its consequences will last a lifetime. But in the camps one was forced, day after day, for years, to watch the destruction of others, feeling—against one's better judgment—that one should have intervened, feeling guilty for not having done so, and, most of all, feeling guilty for having often felt glad that it was not oneself who perished, since one knew that one had no right to expect that one would be the person spared. Langbein presents abundant evidence for the guilt feelings of survivors, as can every psychiatrist who has worked with them. Elie Wiesel, whom Profes-

sor Des Pres quotes with approval in other contexts, wrote "I live and therefore I am guilty. I am still here, because a friend, a comrade, an unknown died in my place." Wertmüller, by showing Pasqualino—who had no guilt feelings even before his concentration-camp experience—as being completely free of them after his liberation, deprives his experience and his survivorship of all meaning. At the same time, this makes her image of the survivor untrue.

PROFESSOR DES PRES states explicitly that survivorship teaches us to live by the body's crude claims, beyond the compulsions of culture. "Seven Beauties," through the events we watch, implicitly tries to convince us of the validity of this statement. Just after the first encounter between Pasqualino and Francesco, they see Jews being murdered, and their conversation about guilt or its absence is followed by flashbacks showing Pasqualino's murder of Totonno. From this, we return to Pasqualino in Germany, where neither the Jews' murder nor the memory of Totonno's spoils his appetite or his humor. In a hilarious scene, he enters an isolated German house in the forest and steals food as he banters with a speech-



"We love you."

less old woman. He is hungry, and he does not allow his memories to diminish his enjoyment—not just of the food but of how he again has managed to put something over on someone else for his own benefit.

When he brings some of the stolen food to Francesco, they are caught by a German patrol. Next, we see images of the horrors of the concentration camp: prisoners hanged, stacks of corpses, prisoners dragged away to the gas chambers, the vicious guards directed by the even more vicious female camp commander. Pasqualino and Francesco are befriended by Pedro, the anarchist, who failed in attempts to kill Mussolini, Hitler, and Salazar because he made dud bombs; one guesses that this, in turn, was because a man who loves men is not good at killing them, for even in the camp Pedro believes in man—in the new man, who will discover harmony within himself. When Pasqualino sees all around him prisoners mistreated and murdered, he decides to seduce the camp commander to save himself—obviously a ridiculous idea.

Another flashback now occurs—from the horrors of the concentration camp to Naples again, when the Mafia boss Don Raffaele tells Pasqualino he must get rid of the body of Totonno. In a macabre but comic scene, Pasqualino cuts the body into pieces and, in a whole series of funny scenes, disposes of the three suitcases into which he has packed parts of the body. Thereafter, comic and macabre scenes follow each other in quick succession, including a hilarious trial, in which Pasqualino gets off the murder charge and is sent to the insane asylum. There he rapes the woman who is tied down, possibly for or after shock treatment. He is discovered, himself put in restraints, and given shock treatment, and then is offered the chance to volunteer for the Army. He gladly accepts. The scene moves back to the concentration camp and to the central event of the film, to which everything else has led up: the sexual encounter between Pasqualino and the camp commander—a convincing demonstration of how far he is ready to go to survive. The suicide of Pedro and Pasqualino's shooting of Francesco are the direct consequences of what happens between the commander and Pasqualino.

The movie is full of vague references that tease us by arousing our curiosity about their meaning: allusions to real and fictional characters and situations which hold out the promise of helping us understand better, to give

greater depth to what we see on the screen, and which arouse deep feelings in us—but we never find out what these really mean. For example, the camp commander seems modelled on Ilse Koch, the infamous wife of the equally infamous commander of Buchenwald—a couple whose nefarious deeds were too much even for the Nazis, who brought them to trial. Of course, there could really be no female camp commanders, given the Nazi view of the male and female roles in society. Ilse Koch's power to destroy was based entirely on her husband's unlimited power as commander of the camp.

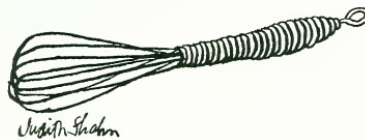
Unlike Ilse Koch, the commander in "Seven Beauties" is apparently a very unhappy woman of considerable depth, who is a connoisseur of the finer things of life: several times we see a famous picture in a prominent place in her room. Is the purpose of presenting her this way to make us realize that even so vile a Nazi could be, under all the incredible brutality, a good person, with fine aesthetic appreciation, just doing with disgust her hated duties when she would much rather attend to better things—as Rudolf Franz Hoess, the commander of Auschwitz, wished us to believe? Is the purpose of repeatedly showing this painting to demonstrate that the Fascists had as much in their favor as we are shown was to be held against them? Or is it to demonstrate that in them, as in the rest of us, good and bad were equally mixed, and that we have no cause to see them as more vile than those they murdered? Or is the purpose to remind us that the Nazis raped art as they did people, despoiling the great museums of the world? But if that is it, then the choice of the painting—Bronzino's "Venus, Cupid, Folly, and Time"—is wrong, since that painting remained in the possession of the National Gallery, in London, throughout the war. The painting has rightly been called a haunting work of art and a picture of singular beauty. It shows Venus seducing her son Cupid, so that out of love for her he will destroy Psyche, the soul—as the commander destroys Pasqualino's soul by forcing him to kill at her bidding. Is the picture given such prominent place, then, to remind us that the pleasures of love

are futile while the evil of it is real? In one of the figures of the painting, we see what Erwin Panofsky, the German art historian, called "the most sophisticated symbol of perverted duplicity ever devised by an artist." In many ways, the Bronzino picture is one of treacherous duplicity, as is what we watch happening between Pasqualino and the commander. Is that its meaning? There is no doubt in our mind that Pasqualino, as much as the commander, acts with duplicity; we do not need the picture to tell us this. Is its purpose, then, simply to underline the idea that survival requires not only raping, whoring, and killing but also extreme duplicity?

We detect another allusion in the movie when the camp commander strikes a pose well known as one of Marlene Dietrich's in "The Blue Angel." That German film, released in 1930, was, in a way, a forecast of Germany's disintegration. Is that what the commander's pose should make us think of? Or is it that in "The Blue Angel," too, a woman utterly destroys a man who supposedly believes in "honor" and in being "respected" but who is no good?

A female camp commander was needed in the film—and so, contrary to the facts, one was used—to make its essential point about survival. True, there can be no survival of the species without sex. But if sex is engaged in with a partner one loathes and for no other reason than survival, if it is also the worst possible degradation of oneself and the worst possible exploitation of the sexual partner, then such survival is not worth having. We have been well prepared for this conclusion in "Seven Beauties," because earlier in the film we have been shown sex as exploitation and in no other form. Pasqualino's sister was sexually exploited by the pimp Totonno. Not interested at all in his sister but only in his "honor," Pasqualino exploits his sister's sexual misadventure to establish his reputation. His sister exploits sex to earn money to pay Pasqualino's lawyer. Pasqualino sexually exploits a mental patient while she is in restraints. Little wonder that in the camp he decides, in line with his past life, that his only chance for survival is to exploit sex. He pretends to love the camp commander he fears and hates.

The commander, for her part, realizes that by sexually exploiting a man whom she utterly loathes she can destroy him much more effectively as man and human being than she could by merely killing him. The men of





the S.S., though vile, were not stupid. They knew that the prisoners hated them and would have liked nothing better than to kill them. Not for a moment did an officer—to say nothing of a camp commander—believe that a prisoner could love him. The female commander says to Pasqualino, “Your thirst for life disgusts me. Your love is disgusting to me. In Paris, a Greek made love to a goose; he did this to eat, to live.” And, moments later, “You found strength for an erection. That’s why you’ll survive, and win in the end.” This erection, brought about solely by the wish to survive, becomes not only the means of survival in “Seven Beauties” but also the symbol of what survival is all about.

Living in accordance with the body’s crude claims is what makes life worth living, or, at least, what makes survival possible—this is the lesson that Pasqualino’s story teaches. He survives because he manages intercourse, and because he kills—both indirectly, by handing over six randomly chosen prisoners to be killed when he is ordered to do so, and directly, by shooting Francesco. He does survive by committing these acts, yet it is not the concentration-camp conditions that basically impel him to commit them: he has been living the same way all along—he killed Totonno without a thought in order to continue in Don Raffaele’s good graces, and with relish raped a mental patient who resisted as strongly as she could. Thus, it was not just fear for his life that led him to do those evil deeds that the film suggests were necessary for survival; to satisfy the body’s crude

claims, at greatest expense to others—this principle has guided his actions all along.

Here, however, the film is true to the realities of the concentration camp in a certain way: prisoners did not suddenly begin to behave in the camps altogether differently from the way they had behaved in freedom. The extreme conditions of the camps brought out in often exaggerated form the values by which the prisoners had lived, but rarely changed them. One was forced to do things one would not normally do, but internally there were always limitations derived from previous behavior patterns. The amoral persons in most cases acted as amorally as before, or worse. Decent ones tried to remain decent—at least, as much as possible. That is why Pedro is shown continuing to fight for human dignity and freedom, even if it costs him his life, and why Francesco continues to say no, as he asserted before he came to the concentration camp that it is necessary for man to do, and so is killed by Pasqualino, who never says no, regardless of the consequences.

Pasqualino’s experiences seem to teach that one lives only by or for sex. But this sex for which he lives all through the film is shown as utterly ugly—as giving, at best, the crudest bodily satisfaction. There is never any love, respect, tenderness for the partner. On the contrary, Concettina, who becomes a whore, is repellent in her ugliness; there is nothing appealing in her love for Totonno. We see Pasqualino twice using a woman for sex with total disregard for her feelings, and we

see the camp commander showing utter contempt for his.

This film, by truthfully suggesting that people remain more or less the same even under concentration-camp conditions, but also by showing the camp in all its gruesomeness, in all its brutality and horror, and then showing life outside the camp as being equally gruesome, brutal, and horrible, posits the argument that there is not much reason to get excited about the concentration-camp world or the Nazis and Fascists; after all, there is little difference between genocide and everyday life. Murder and rape are shown as omnipresent; even if somebody is tried for murder, the trial is nothing but a farce, for this is how Pasqualino’s trial is depicted. By condemning the concentration camp but also condemning life outside it, the film implies that there is no cause to condemn the world of concentration-camp totalitarianism: it appears as little (or as much) justified as life in general.

This disturbing debasement of life, inside and outside the concentration camp, is achieved in “Seven Beauties” through extremely clever and effective psychological play on our emotions. From the film’s beginning, with the newsreels of Fascism and war, and the song accompanying them, scenes come in rapid succession, without any transition that would permit us to readjust emotionally. The most horrible aspects of reality are grippingly presented, to be followed immediately by an entirely different scene that, without at all denying what we just went through, loosens the grip in which the preceding

scene has held us, and turns our emotional reaction into an opposite one. The series of flashbacks and returns to the present permits these many fluctuations. We experience horror, then something grotesquely comic or funny, then scenes of brutality, then farcical humor again. With this technique, the horror becomes background for the comic scene, and the comic scene wipes out not the fact of the horror but its emotional impact, with the result that the horror adds, by contrast, to the effectiveness of the comic experience. Such quick manipulation of our emotions makes it impossible for us to go on taking seriously our emotional reaction to what we see on the screen, even though we do go on responding to it; it all changes too often, too radically, too rapidly. The film induces us to commit ourselves to not taking any event or situation seriously—not even one that would ordinarily upset us greatly or move us deeply.

For example, Pasqualino is confronted with the problem of how to dispose of the corpse of the man he has killed. Don Raffaele gives him hints. Grandiloquently, he tells Pasqualino that Naples is the land of imagination—echoing Mussolini's statements about Italians. To emphasize the similarity to Mussolini, the film shows Don Raffaele against the background of an empty heroic piece of sculpture. With exaggerated Mafioso pride, he tells Pasqualino that the Neapolitans invented cement shoes, and that those of Chicago and New York are but cheap imitations—that the Neapolitans invented the oversized coffin, so that at a funeral nobody knows how many corpses are being buried. Then we see in a comic scene a corpse put into a coffin that is already occupied. Don Raffaele tells Pasqualino that there used to be five hundred skeletons in an old bone house, and now there are more than five thousand—and we watch as new skeletons are added to old ones. All this is macabre and very funny, because of the comic-strip manner in which these grotesque ideas are presented.

The comic scene between Don Raffaele and Pasqualino dilutes the reaction we have when we watch a scene in the concentration camp where naked corpses of prisoners are stacked, and new ones added, like the skeletons in the bone house. And, having accepted the idea that this is farce, we cannot quite free ourselves of the merriment we experienced in watching the bone-

house scene when, moments later, we see killings in the camps. We recognize that we have been induced to see one as leading to the other, but, having formulated a gallows-humor attitude toward stacked skeletons, we cannot easily switch to the utter revulsion that, without comic preparation, the concentration-camp corpses would normally evoke. If we do experience revulsion at this scene, we come to mistrust our emotions, as we now realize that our previous attitude of amusement was terribly wrong. But if so, how can we trust our present feeling of revulsion? Might it not turn out to be equally in error?

This technique of confusion would not work so well if it happened only once, but it happens many times in this film—probably more often than I can recall after having seen the movie only twice. The technique is used in all the crucial events of the film—in another instance, the killing of Totonno by Pasqualino. We have no sympathy for Totonno, who promised to make Concettina into an artist and to marry her but instead had her become an occupant of his whorehouse. His overbearing, arrogant manner has also turned us against him. His being murdered, therefore, leaves us indifferent, and the chopping up of his corpse and its disposal in three suitcases, their being sniffed and barked at by a blind man's dog, and their being taken to the railway station and dispatched as a "shipment of provolone" are all comic scenes. Thus, we have formed an attitude toward murder which we recognize as all wrong when we see murder in the concentration camp. But how can we change our feelings about murder so fast, and, if we can, which is the valid feeling?

WHAT is true for the most impressive events of the film also holds true for its most important figures. Although we know better, we cannot help having some liking for Pasqualino, because he is so well and charmingly portrayed by Giancarlo Giannini as the prototypical "little man," who will be a Fascist under Fascism, a Communist under Communism, and a democrat in a democracy. But this portrait of the little man, which the film makes us believe in, is a lie. The world's little men do not rape or kill—not under Fascism or Communism or in a democracy. These little men do not think of or manage an erection and intercourse with an absolutely abhorrent woman, even if their lives are at stake.

The little man is banal, but he is not evil. Contrary to some popular notions, evil is neither romantic nor tragic; more often than not it is banal. But because evil is usually banal and so is the little man, the little man's banality does not make him evil, as the film wishes us to believe. This film views the average man with the arrogance of intellectual superiority.

Shorn of the persuasiveness of Giannini's acting and the skillful *mise en scène*, Pasqualino is a bad person, and his villainy is by no means reduced by his banality and pettiness. His dullness is just barely hidden behind a suave verbosity; he is a smooth Neapolitan who speaks only platitudes. He has no idea in his head beyond how to exploit others and how to take advantage of the moment; the ultimate consequences of his actions for others, or even for himself, do not concern him. He is unable to love anybody but himself and does not love even himself very well. When he is confronted with evil of real magnitude, he lacks all comprehension of it; hence he views the camp commander as an ordinary petty villain like himself, whom his most elementary tricks will seduce. We are made to like this man at one moment and despise him the next; the result is that we again feel we cannot trust our reactions, and we therefore permit ourselves to be carried away by what the film wishes us to believe.

On first seeing Pasqualino on the screen, we rather like him, discovering only later what a mean scoundrel he is. We are immediately revolted by the commander, a ruthless and sadistic killer, apt boss of a pack of murderous guards and their man-eating dogs. The more we see of Pasqualino, the emptier he becomes as a person, while the opposite is true for the commander. The closer she gets to being a woman, the more grotesque this mass of flesh becomes, but also the more human, and the greater depth she reveals, not least because of the way she is acted by Shirley Stoler. She is not only shown imprisoned in her body but shown to feel it and to suffer from it. Her being disgusted by Pasqualino and his lie of loving her—which she, knowing how repulsive she is, does not believe for a moment—is but a small reflection of her disgust with herself. If she were a real person, one might think that her keeping constantly within her view Bronzino's painting, in which Venus is beauty incarnate, is to remind herself at all times of how ugly she is. We see her drinking champagne, and we feel that she drinks not to make herself for-



get what she does to the prisoners but, rather, to induce a stupor so that she will not feel her utter failure as a woman. When she compares Pasqualino to a man who, to earn money, had sex with a goose, she compares herself to this stupid animal. When she says that Pasqualino, because he managed an erection, will survive and win in the end, while she is doomed, her dreams unattainable, she implies that, unlike Pasqualino, she is unable to have sex without the appropriate feelings, and that since she knows that no man can have these in relation to her, she feels doubly doomed.

The result of all this is that, while the commander remains loathsome, there are moments when we cannot help feeling sympathy—if not for her, then for her misery—so imprisoned is she in her hated self, as she seems imprisoned in her uniform and her role of killer. We have come to sense that her being dead to the feelings of the prisoners is but a reflection of her being dead as a human being. She has made herself dead to all feelings to keep from being destroyed by the realization of how ugly and unlovable she is.

But this portrayal of a concentration-camp commander is no less a lie than the portrayal of Pasqualino as a sometimes charming but always utterly unimportant little man. If any one thing characterized the rulers of the concentration camps, it was their inability to reflect on themselves, to see themselves for what they were. Had they been able to recognize themselves as they really were—which the camp commander in this film is shown as being able to do—they could not have carried on for a moment. In reality, the concentration-camp commanders had strong convictions about the importance of the work they were doing—incredible though this may seem, given what the work consisted of. Least of all did they feel doomed—that is, not until the time Allied troops actually reached the camps. As a matter of fact, far from feeling doomed, they showed much greater determination to survive and ingenuity in doing so than Pasqualino does. How else could so many of them have managed to escape being caught and to establish themselves contentedly in some far-away Latin-American country, or even at home, in Germany or Austria? When it comes to

staying alive no matter what, it is not the Pasqualinos of this world but the former S.S. members who win the prize.

Even if we knew nothing about the concentration camps except what "Seven Beauties" shows us, we would be sure to sense that the portrayal of the commander, convincing though it might seem, could not be true. Somebody with so much insight into herself could not behave toward the prisoners as we see her do. So in regard to her, too, we become confused in our feelings by the film. Overall, unless one comes to distrust the film's story completely—and, if one can believe the reviewers, few do—then one distrusts one's feelings and is swept into the film's version of truth.

ON thinking about this film after having seen it, we may well have strong reservations about how our emotions have been manipulated. But we cannot help admiring the consummate artistry with which we have been made to ride with furious speed the roller coaster of our ambivalent emotions as our feelings for the main characters change, and as comic humor is extracted out of abomination. Pasqualino's being raped psychologically by the camp commander, for example, parallels his earlier physical raping of the patient, who, in her bonds, was as helpless in relation to him as he is in

relation to the camp commander. Both scenes are horrid, but both have their definitely comic aspects, and these are so marked in the first rape scene that when we are watching the second scene we still feel the aftereffects of our reactions to the first. These two scenes of forced intercourse, outside and within the camp, are part of Wertmüller's statement about the close parallels between the normal world and what goes on in the camps—a parallelism that seduces us into thinking that the camps were not extraordinary. If they were not, we could have lived then with the concept of them, and could live comfortably with the memory of them now—and that would mean that we did not need to correct radically our view of ourselves and our world because the concentration camps existed and exist.

In the film, one rape scene negates the other, even as Wertmüller stresses their inherent identity. For example, before Pasqualino rapes the mental patient, he lifts her nightgown and looks at her genitals with sexual excitement, and these moments of the scene, though both horrible and comic, give us a sense of his vitality, of the strength of his sexual desires. Before the camp commandant has intercourse with Pasqualino—an act that, given their difference in size and power, is like linking a huge, impassive female animal to a tiny male who is destroyed by her—she lifts Pasqualino's jacket and looks at her victim's genitals, as he did with his victim. But she does so with disgust, with feelings of doom—exactly the opposite of vitality and sexual desire. This detail of lifting up the clothes and looking at the partner's genitals binds the two scenes together and at the same time makes them opposites. Thus, the scenes reinforce each other and also cancel each other out. What we experienced as comic before we now experience as depressing. Once more, we cannot trust our feelings; they have led us astray.

Even the deaths of Pedro and Francesco have their comic moments. Pedro, unable any longer to stand the degradation of the camp and the betrayal of his fellow-men (by Pasqualino's choosing which ones are to be killed), jumps into the open cesspool of the latrine while other prison-



ers are defecating into it. But his death, because of the way it is acted, has a liberating, almost a joyous feeling. And asserting one's human dignity by shouting, "Brothers, I go to jump into the shit!" and suffocating oneself in feces has a comic quality that is nearly as strong as its morbidity. This comic quality, however, does not exist for those who—like me—witnessed in the camps prisoners dying in this way not by committing suicide but by being pushed by the S.S. into the latrines, where they suffocated. One can only be revolted to see thirty years later the most horrid and degrading murder made to look as if it were a liberating act—the vilest death made to look comic. Suicides in the camps were easy and frequent. All one had to do to die was to give up trying hard to remain alive. Or one could run into the electrically charged fence; nearly always it killed immediately, and if it didn't the guards in the towers that overlooked the camp shot any prisoner who looked as if he were trying to escape.

Francesco, revolted by Pasqualino's sacrifice of the other prisoners to buy his survival and secure his promotion to prison foreman, or *Kapo*, and challenged by Pedro's assertion of his human dignity, also rebels. Pasqualino is handed a gun and is ordered to shoot Francesco. At first, he hesitates, but finally he does shoot when Francesco asks him to, saying that fear will make him defecate in his pants. Asking to be killed to prevent one from soiling one's pants, while it has some psychologically valid undertones, is nevertheless comic. The most tragic assertions of human dignity, even at the price of death, are thus reduced to jumping into feces and a comic avoidance of a pants accident.

This scene, like nearly everything else in the film, is completely untrue to the reality of the camps. No S.S. man would be so stupid as to hand a prisoner a loaded gun and order him to shoot another prisoner. The S.S. man would know that in doing so he was signing his own death warrant and probably that of a few other S.S. men. A prisoner who took a gun from the hands of the S.S. to kill a friend and did so would have known that he could not survive, and since he was sure to be killed, would have concluded he could at least take some S.S. men with him, and would have done so.

But this distortion of the reality of the camps is small compared to that

which shows that Pasqualino was helped to survive by sacrificing other prisoners wantonly, and killing even his best friend. A Pasqualino would not have survived on the strength of managing an erection or being in cahoots with the commander. Such things would have done him no good—would, at best, have bought him a short reprieve, as it did for the many *Sonderkommandos*, or Special Detachments, of prisoners who did the bidding of the S.S. by working in the gas chambers and crematoriums and were all killed by the S.S. after about four months.

Pasqualino as we see him in the film after his encounter with the commander and his "promotion" would have survived but a few days at most in a real camp. If the S.S. had not seen to it, the prisoners would have: a *Kapo* who had no moral, human, or political convictions, who did not hesitate to hand over prisoners to be exterminated, and who killed one himself was far too dangerous to the rest of the prisoners to be permitted to live. To quote only one witness (Langbein): "When a prisoner became a collaborator of the S.S. he had to expect to be subjected to the merciless revenge of his fellow-prisoners." Nothing in the film gives the impression that this commander would have made special efforts to protect Pasqualino, whom she considered a "worm" against the rage and retribution of his fellow-prisoners. While it was practically impossible for prisoners to make sure that another prisoner would survive, it was incredibly easy to kill one. There were innumerable ways to get rid of him, of which denunciation to the S.S. was the simplest. Even a *Kapo* could not survive without breaking rules, and if he was denounced for this he was likely to be killed. Also, there was always jealousy within the S.S. If a prisoner was a favorite of one S.S. man, this



fact did not endear him to the other S.S. men. So if a favored prisoner was denounced to an S.S. man who disliked the man who favored him, the prisoner would be, in the camp jargon, "finished off." There were also many other ways to do away with a prisoner who had betrayed his fellows. He could be killed during the night, when there were hundreds against one. Even if he had been a favorite of the S.S. men, they ignored the killing. One prisoner less did not matter.

I mentioned before that the S.S. men had a certain esprit de corps, deviant and even perverted as it often

was, and that they admired esprit de corps. When they ordered one prisoner to kill another—for example, by burying him alive—they always threatened to kill him if he disobeyed the order, but they did not necessarily carry out this threat. There were instances in which a prisoner refused to kill another and both were let go for the time being. And there were instances in which a prisoner began to obey such an order and then the S.S. ordered the two to change places: the one who was originally to be killed became the murderer of the one who was to be the executioner. If a prisoner killed another as he had been ordered, the S.S. despised him for being a traitor to his comrade and usually finished him off soon. If Pasqualino had indeed survived, it would have been only because the camp was liberated within a short time after his encounter with the camp commander.

IN one of the film's sudden changes of scene from the most grotesque to the most awesome, we are transported from the concentration camp and Pasqualino's killing of Francesco to liberated Naples—destroyed by war but teeming with life like one huge bordello. Not just Concettina but all her sisters, and all the women of Naples, have now become whores, and all American soldiers are but whoremasters. The whoring seven sisters now live in sleazy affluence, where before they had lived in "honest" poverty.

Then we hear the shout "Pasqualino's back!" A sweet little street singer whom he befriended before he murdered Totunno and who has been in love with Pasqualino all along comes to meet him. If this were a medieval morality play, she might save his soul because befriending her was his only decent, unselfish act. But "Seven Beauties" is not a morality play, and has nothing to do with man's possible salvation. So Pasqualino, without any special feeling, sees that she, too, has become a whore. The implied moral is that those who overcome Fascism—in this case, the Americans—degrade even good human beings like this girl as effectively as the S.S. degraded prisoners in the camps.

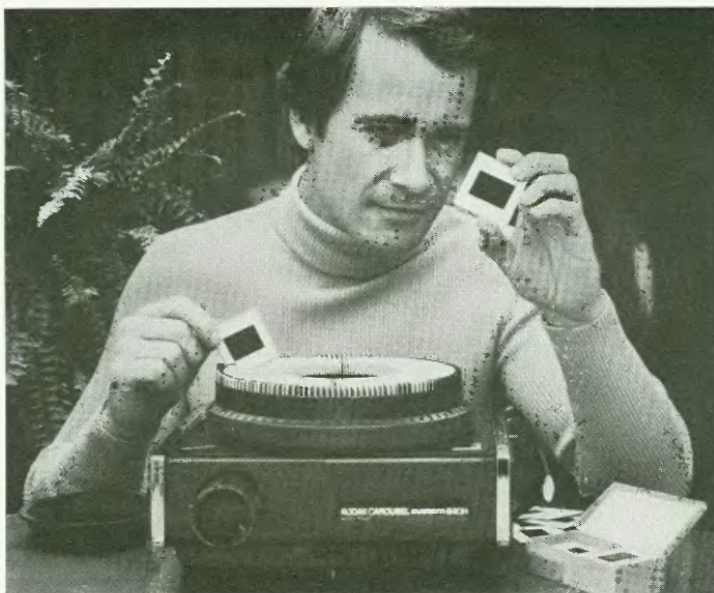
I asked a relatively small but random sample of intelligent viewers of the film—all of them under forty—who were deeply impressed by it how they thought Pasqualino had survived. They all said he survived because of his will to live—his vitality—as the film wishes us to believe. Not one of these highly intelligent, college-educated, otherwise

well-informed people spontaneously said that Pasqualino survived because the camps were liberated by the Allied Armies. And it is difficult for someone seeing this film to realize that these "whoring soldiers" risked their lives and liberated Europe. Thus, the film, made by an Italian woman who says she is a Socialist, conveys the message that those Americans who fought Fascism were as bad as what they defeated. It also conveys the message of a Fascist machismo: managing an erection assures survival, even in the concentration camp.

Shall we then conclude that Fascism was not really bad, because under it—as we have seen earlier in the film—only a very few women were whores, whereas afterward all were? Before, Naples was an intact city; now we see it in ruins, like its women. Would it, then, not have been better if all these whoremongering soldiers had not come to Europe—and had not done away with the concentration camps, the horrors of which we have just been shown? Or does Wertmüller mean to say that nothing makes any difference—Hitler or the end of Hitler, concentration camps or the liberation of concentration camps? Did she shock us with the horrors of the camps only to tell us that nothing makes any difference? Or was it all done to entertain us? Then how disgusting it is to use genocide to amuse.

Maybe we can find an answer in the film's ending. Pasqualino asks the girl who loves him, "Did you make money?" She nods, and he says, "Good, now quit and we'll get married. No time to lose. I want kids, lots, twenty-five, thirty. We've got to defend ourselves. See all those people? Soon we'll be killing each other for an apple. There's got to be lots of us to defend ourselves. Do you understand?" To which she can only answer helplessly, "I've always loved you." Pasqualino, the survivor, is his old selfish, stupid self, untouched by his concentration-camp experience, ready to fight others for his advantage, intent on what he wants, with no thought for what she who has waited so patiently for him might want for herself or for the two of them. His plans for their future are the film's final, coarse irony, because he asks her, "Understand?" when he understands nothing.

I have questioned whether this film urges us to embrace life or tells us that life is meaningless. Pasqualino's nihilistic vision of a battle of all against all for the survival of the strongest is a Fascist vision, a complete perversion



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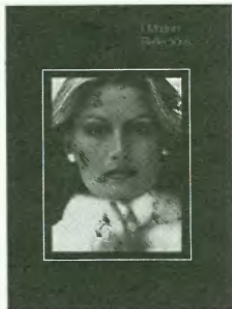


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of Pedro's deeply significant admonition to Pasqualino in the concentration camp. In that scene, Pasqualino spoke about wanting to live and have children. Pedro objected, warning him of the dangers of overpopulation, saying that soon the world would be as crowded as the prisoners were in the barracks, and that people would kill for a slice of bread. Maybe not to the uninformed viewer but to anybody who knew the camps, to the survivor, Pedro's warning is movingly significant and hopeful, as he makes clear when he adds that "a new man... must be born. A civilized man. A new man who can rediscover harmony within himself." A man who can live in harmony with others must come into being to restore rightness to the world.

The prisoner, cramped into an unimaginably small space, could not so much as lie down without taking away some of the space of the prisoners who lay next to him; still, they managed. Although they were starving, they did not fight each other for the slice of bread they so desperately needed to stay alive; some even shared it. (The greatest crime in the camps was stealing another prisoner's piece of bread; for this the other prisoners exacted the most severe punishment, as they had to if they wanted to live. But it hardly ever happened.) Thus, Pedro's message contains the true lesson of the concentration camp: from having not enough space to lie down at night, from living in starvation, the survivor ought to have learned that even under such conditions, or particularly under such conditions, one can discover a life of harmony which permits one to make do, to get along with others, and to live in harmony also with oneself.

The last exchange in the film is between Pasqualino and his mother, who, happy that he is back, tells him not to think about what has happened to him: what's past is past; all that counts is that he is alive. His reply, at the very end of the film, is his nonchalant "Yes. I'm alive." Pedro's warning about a world where man eats man and only the strongest and most aggressive survive—as Fascism has taught—is taken for a prediction; his hopes for a better future of true humanity, for which he lived and died, are forgotten. Pasqualino survives, but without feeling, and without any purpose other than propagating himself. He does not feel guilty for Pedro's death, which he brought about; or for having said yes to Fascism; or for having killed Francesco and butchered Totonno. What more

impressive demonstration could there be that only the ability to feel guilty makes us human, particularly if, objectively seen, one is not. It is the true survivor's feeling of guilt that separates him from those who applaud the film. Those who see survival as a mere staying alive wash their hands of the true survivor.

In a recent article on current attitudes toward the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel wrote:

Novelists made free use of it in their work, scholars used it to prove their theories [and filmmakers to entertain and to gain public acclaim]. In so doing they cheapened the Holocaust; they drained it of its substance. The Holocaust was now a hot topic, fashionable, guaranteed to gain attention and to achieve instant success...

The survivors don't count; they never did. They are best forgotten. Don't you see? They are an embarrassment. If only they weren't there, it would be so much easier.

From the beginning of time, those who have borne witness have been an embarrassment. To those who have been carried away by Wertmüller's film, or by Des Pres' writings, what I have written here has perhaps caused embarrassment. Survivors won't be around much longer, but while they are, they cannot help objecting—not to their being forgotten, not to the world's going on as usual, but to their being used to bear witness to the opposite of the truth.

Our experience did not teach us that life is meaningless, that the world of the living is but a warehouse, that one ought to live by the body's crude claims, disregarding the compulsions of culture. It taught us that, miserable though the world in which we live may be, the difference between it and the world of the concentration camps is as great as that between night and day, hell and salvation, death and life. It taught us that there is meaning to life, difficult though that meaning may be to fathom—a much deeper meaning than we had thought possible before we became survivors. And our feeling of guilt for having been so lucky as to survive the hell of the concentration camp is a most significant part of this meaning—testimony to a humanity that not even the abomination of the concentration camp can destroy.

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