

help to help us out when we need a scribe."

Bernard came back to his office just as Kazam was beginning to tell me that the *patron* was like a father to him, and that he did not understand the fighting in Algeria. We stopped our "interview" because the *patron* needed to work at his desk, and Kazam had to prepare for his trip.

"Allah respects a man like Kazam" Bernard said to me after the door closed. "He has real guts, and if he told you he did not understand what is going on in Algeria, it is not because he has not tasted some of the trouble right here in Paris." I learned that Kazam had taken the risk of being knifed by other Algerians in Paris because he would not participate in a sympathy strike for an Islamic fraternal organization protesting the Algerian war.

"Kazam refused to budge from his post even when he received warnings," his boss said. Every year he was posted to guard the plant when it shut down for the three-week vacation. Bernard had asked him: "If your comrades tell you to go on strike during the vacation, when you are alone with the factory, what will you do, Kazam?"

The Arab had assured him he would not leave the plant unprotected, that he would be on guard despite the threats. According to Bernard, Kazam did indeed watch faithfully and said his prayers daily.

Four years later, I found Bernard again in Paris, helping France celebrate, in splendid solitude, her *grandeur*. The February 13th bomb had exploded in the Sahara. An Air France plane putting me down at Orly had flown low over the vast atomic energy research plant, and a Frenchman in the next seat had proudly pointed it out to me, with no word about nearby Versailles.

"*Tant mieux*," Bernard said of that, when we met. "Allah loves strong men."

I did not learn until later that Kazam had been killed fighting the French in his olive orchard near Constantine. He had never returned to Bernard's factory.

HIROSHIMA IN AMERICA

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The film "Hiroshima, Mon Amour," which is getting a good deal of attention in this country, deserves to be viewed—and reviewed—from a number of perspectives. But I have noticed that reviewers have

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all tended *not* to explore its moral substance, what the vernacular would call its "message." This is remarkable when a film's message is expressed as urgently as this one's is, and even more remarkable when it is expressed with success *cinematically*, when it is perfectly fused with a web of images and sounds. Here is a film that contradicts the widely-held assumption that messages and good esthetics are incompatible.

A composite of most of the American magazine reviews would tell us something like this. ACTING: first-rate. The performance of Emmanuelle Rive in the role of a French actress participating in a film shot in the rebuilt Hiroshima was considered "remarkable," while that of Eiji Okada in the role of her lover, a Japanese architect, was called "commendable." DIRECTION: even more praiseworthy. One reviewer wrote, "Although these lead roles are portrayed with unusual sensitivity and strength . . . 'Hiroshima, Mon Amour' is distinctly a director's picture. Almost as important as the two actors portraying the lovers are the buildings (both exteriors and interiors) and the streets of Hiroshima and Nevers which Alain Resnais uses so effectively, with the help of the sound track, to bring time past and time present together" (Philip T. Hartung, *Commonweal*). The fusion of IMAGE AND SOUND was praised by several reviewers as "lyrical." "The story [is] told through the sensitive camera, the voices of the woman and man, through the music of the sound track, and through the faces and gestures of the principal actors" (Hollis Alpert, *Saturday Review*). Consensus: an artistically effective movie, neither seminar nor symposium. (I have not seen Dwight Macdonald's review in *Esquire* at this writing, by the way.)

Turning from evaluation to interpretation, several kinds of analyses are reflected in the reviews. One takes the intrinsic-symbolic line. Since this movie deals with a love affair whose "shots" are interspersed with scenes from the bombed Hiroshima, love-and-death seems to be the theme: the destructive power of illicit love, the eruption of sex and the violence done to Hiroshima, the fact that this intense affair can last only one night and takes place in a doomed city, all these combine in a powerful double perspective. It is also pointed out that the fragmentary style of the movie, the frequent flashbacks and the monologic nature of the speaking script, approximate the stream of consciousness (Moira Walsh, *America*).

Another group is more psychoanalytical. The first affair, French girl and German soldier, ended when she found him fatally wounded and spent the night with his cooling body. The people of her town, Nevers, shaved her head the next morning. These traumatic experiences—violation of the taboo, death of the first love, and the tribe's ostracism—sent her into months of insanity. In the present affair, she finds the Japanese lover painfully reminiscent of the German (she "slips" and calls him by the German's name). "The re-enactment and recollection of her first lover presumably have a therapeutic effect. A torrent of emotion bursts from dykes vigilantly guarded for fifteen years, and at the end we are entitled to suppose—the picture has become increasingly dream-like—that she will return to Paris in a far health-

ier state" (Robert Hatch, *The Nation*). The Japanese involved in this fruitless and tortuous affair is, as another reviewer points out, a masochist by nature.

All these comments are, of course, quite legitimate and relevant. But what about the message? To be fair, all reviewers did mention that this is a pacifist or anti-A-bomb movie, as one might have guessed from the title; but most of them did not bother to report what it is the movie has to say about pacifism or the bomb. After all, pacifism is a vague label, and the bomb gets into almost any discussion of contemporary events. John McCarten, in the *New Yorker*, did go so far as to tell us that the director "is a pacifist, all right, yet in his appeal for peace he sees to it that his camera, rather than his sound, establishes his points," but he did not say what those points are. Reporting extensively on the movie in "A Letter from Paris," Genêt (the *New Yorker*) takes the sociologistic way out of discussing the message: instead of recounting it, she accounts for it by a sociopolitical placing of the director and writer.

"Hiroshima, Mon Amour," is a film of pacifism—a pacifism that stems, basically, from the two politically experienced brains that produced it, turning it into artistry. Whatever director Resnais's precise political attachments may be, he is clearly angry in a world of constantly increasing atomic bombs. The well known novelist Mlle. Marguerite Duras, who wrote the film scenario and dialogue, was, she declared in a recent interview, a Communist Party member until she was thrown out for the heresy of her views on Budapest, and she is certainly anti-bomb where the American devastation of Hiroshima is concerned.

Mlle. Duras might just be anti-bomb, whoever is concerned; her Budapest heresy could be an indicator of that. But what's the difference? The background of an author can explain in part the sources of his "position," but what is the position?

One reviewer, Hollis Alpert, did approach the where, when, and how of pacifism in the movie: "It is pervaded by a profoundly pacifist feeling, for the individual German soldier no longer seems the enemy he once was, nor does the Japanese of the present . . . What is to be hated now are the blistering forces that sear and destroy life, that collect individual human lives into ranks of enemies." The other reviewer audacious enough to refer to the didactic point was Madelein Chapsal in *The Reporter*, who states the film's intention: "to remind us that we are both the victims and the masters of war." She finds the "ultimate meaning . . . all in the title: Love must concern itself with its extreme opposite, the hatefulness of war."

The message of "Hiroshima, Mon Amour" does not lie in the conventional theme of love and death, it seems to me. This is not one of a thousand movies about love and war and romantic in its view of both. The scene is the rebuilt Hiroshima; missing are the shots of bombardment, trenches, rushing ambulances and combat which furnish the usual settings for love-in-war movies, from "A Farewell to Arms" to "The Young Lions." This

is a "story" of the hatred and love which cause wars, rather than the love and hatred affected by war, rather than a girl, a boy, and war as an interfering villain. This movie assumes that we know that an atomic bomb has horrible effects. The horror scenes occur at the beginning of the movie and are used to set an emotional tone and to create a sense of immediacy that will impel us to reexamine old sentiments.

The message is stated not through the usual fable or character development, but by a rapid switching of perspectives. At the beginning we meet what by society's standards is a "bad girl." We learn that she and her lover are happily married, but not to each other, and that he picked her up in a bar the preceding evening; when the movie opens with a close-up of their nude embrace, she has yet to ask his name. When the embrace is relaxed we suddenly learn that she is Caucasian and he Japanese, and the affair is what one reviewer called "miscegenation." Thus, the woman has violated many mores: those of family, nation, and race. Yet from the very beginning we feel attracted to her, for her looks are pleasant, though not striking, not sexy; she looks healthy and faintly familiar, neither blonde nor very young. From its beginning the movie teaches us not to dislike her.

Gradually we are made to share the heroine's recollected pain. She was eighteen when she loved a German soldier; it was her first love; with each other, the lovers were oblivious to the war; after his death she spent months in her parents' cellar in mindless grief. It is chiefly the cellar scenes, the longest and most painful in their detail, which change the viewer's feeling for the girl. Maybe she is not bad. Maybe there is love which surpasses national loyalties. And maybe—the camera returns to Hiroshima—nationalism created the bomb. With the shift in our sentiments toward the girl, our sentiments about nations are unsettled. We are urged to reexamine old loyalties. This change in sentiment is the only dynamic, the only genuine "story" in the movie.

"Hiroshima, Mon Amour" suggests that national biases and stereotypes are of the same class as racial prejudices. Both are in-group loyalties based on violent hatred toward outsiders. The film indicts codes which censor racial judgments but glorify national distinctions. The racial and the national construct the same kind of boundary, a boundary which produces Hiroshimas, a boundary which can only be overcome with unrestrained and unconventional love. The world in which such love—love which transcends such boundaries—is hopeless and illicit, is the world which gave us Hiroshima.

Herein lies the answer to what some reviewers considered the riddle of the movie. When the movie opens he says to her, "Still, you know nothing of Hiroshima." She reports the horror she has seen in pictures and in the museum devoted to the city blasted with radioactive fire, but he is not convinced. Again and again he repeats, "Still, you know *nothing* of Hiroshima." Then she reveals her first affair and her exposure to hatred in her own Nevers, and he realizes that she does know, for she has experienced the deeper sources of Hiroshima, not the external scars but the kind of emotions which

exploded the bomb. At the close of the movie she murmurs, "Your name is Hiroshima." This time he does not repeat his line, but offers recognition of her knowledge: he replies, "And your name is Nevers." Each knows the lesson so well that each is the very knowledge.

Movie reviewers seem to be limited in imagination when they complain that the movie has a psychological but not a chronological sequence, a stream of consciousness instead of a plot, and assert that it is too fragmentary. In fact, this form of expression, making use of the cinema's almost unlimited ability to shift scenes, is especially well-suited to the message. The director wishes to prevent involvement of an elementary sort, to keep us from thinking about this affair as an isolated event of a woman, a man, and a night. It is through the rapid succession of flashbacks and interspersed shots that he projects the French-German affair on the Caucasian-Japanese affair and expands both with scenes of the bombed Hiroshima so as to build the association between inter-racial hatred, international hatred, and Hiroshima.

The dynamic of the movie is not, and should not be, that of the development of an affair, but that of our feelings toward the heroine. We begin—depending on our degree of liberation from conventional norms and prejudices—by feeling surprise or dismay; we end by understanding, sympathizing, perhaps even hoping. This movie asserts that the day when such transcending love is no longer hopeless will be the day Hiroshima ceases to be a symbol of what we may expect of the future. At a time when film criticism tends to ignore messages, and to assume *a priori* that a message and artistry are necessarily incompatible, "Hiroshima, Mon Amour" deserves the closest attention. So does its message.