

AUCTIONS AT SWANN

January 11 at 10:30 a.m.

LITERATURE, SETS & BINDINGS

19th-CENTURY LITERATURE
EXTRA-ILLUSTRATED BOOKS
CHILDREN'S BOOKS
COOKERY • FORE-EDGE PAINTINGS

Catalogue \$7

January 18 at 10:30 a.m.

EARLY PRINTED BOOKS

BIBLES • THEOLOGY • HERALDRY
FRENCH BOOKS • SCIENCE • OCCULT

Catalogue \$7

January 25 at 10:30 a.m.

MODERN LITERATURE

MODERN FIRSTS • LITERARY LETTERS
IRISH RENAISSANCE

Catalogue \$7

For information and our Newsletter, please call Swann
at (212) 254-4710, ext. 19

SWANN GALLERIES

104 East 25 Street, New York, N.Y. 10010

Handmade Sterling Silver



Onslow

Five pc. dinner setting—\$685

Keeping an artistic tradition alive,
our workshop has been producing
outstanding sterling silver flatware
by hand for over 400 years.

Now, as then, our high standards
remain uncompromised.

We invite you to see our
flatware, to compare its quality, and
to learn why our 18 patterns deserve
your consideration.

James Robinson

15 East 57th Street, New York, New York 10022

(212) 752-6166

Catalogue \$3.00



THE NEW YORKER

TABLE OF CONTENTS

JANUARY 8, 1990

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN	4
THE TALK OF THE TOWN	25
"FOUR POEMS"	Nina Cassian 30
"ROOM TEMPERATURE"	Nicholson Baker 31
"ABSTRACTION" (POEM)	Eric Pankey 38
A REPORTER AT LARGE (SYRIA)	Milton Viorst 40
THE WORLD OF BUSINESS	Connie Bruck 66
"SOFT FRUIT" (POEM)	Mairi MacInnes 70
THE CURRENT CINEMA	Pauline Kael 90
BOOKS	Edmund Morris 94
BRIEFLY NOTED	99

COVER: *Eugène Mihaesco*

DRAWINGS: *Ed Fisher, George Booth, Lee Lorenz, Sidney Harris, Glen Baxter, Robert Weber, Peter Steiner, Roz Chast, Donald Reilly, Victoria Roberts, Leo Cullum, Tom Funk, James Stevenson, Arnie Levin, Tom Cheney, William Hamilton, Danny Shanahan, Michael Maslin, Bernard Schoenbaum, Charles Barsotti*

THE NEW YORKER

25 WEST 43RD STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10036

(212) 840-3800

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE

To inquire about a subscription or to change an address, please write to The New Yorker, Box 56447, Boulder, Colorado 80322, or telephone 1-800 825-2510 (in Colorado 303 447-9330). For a change of address, subscribers should give four weeks' notice. If possible, please send the address label from a recent issue.

THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028-792X), published weekly by The New Yorker Magazine, Inc., 25 W. 43rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10036; Steven T. Florio, president and chief executive officer; Stuart H. Jason, vice-president and treasurer; Ruth A. Diem, vice-president and human resources director; Frank Mustacato, vice-president and circulation director; Virginia L. Jespersen, vice-president and business manager; Lynn Guthrie Heiler, vice-president and advertising director; Matthew D. Roberts, vice-president and marketing director. Branch advertising offices: 111 East Wacker Drive, Chicago, Ill. 60601; 41 Osgood Place, San Francisco, Calif. 94133; Suite 1460, 5900 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90036; 67½ Chestnut St., Boston, Mass. 02108; 19 South Audley St., London, W1Y 5DN. Metropolitan Publishers Representatives: 3017 Piedmont Road, NE, Atlanta, Ga. 30305; 2500 So. Dixie Highway, Miami, Fla. 33133; 3016 Mason Place, Tampa, Fla. 33629; 3 Church St., Suite 503, Toronto, Canada, M5E 1M2. Carol Orr & Co., Publishers Representative: 3300 Oak Lawn, Suite 500, Dallas, Tx. 75219. Vol. LXV, No. 47, January 8, 1990. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Authorized as second-class mail by the Post Office Department, Ottawa, Canada, and for payment of postage in cash. © 1990 by The New Yorker Magazine, Inc., in the United States and Canada. All rights reserved. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of The New Yorker. The magazine's name, logo, and various titles and headings herein have been registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Printed in U.S.A. Subscription rates: In U.S. and possessions, one year, \$32.00; two years, \$52.00. In Canada, one year, \$50.00. Other foreign, one year, \$56.00, payable in advance.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The New Yorker, Box 56447, Boulder, Colorado 80322.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

Melodrama/Cartoon/Mess

A FEW years ago, the TV news was dominated by images of the big, square head of John Demjanjuk, the Ukrainian immigrant who, after decades as a Cleveland autoworker, was accused of being Ivan the Terrible of Treblinka. We watched as aged victims swore that Demjanjuk was their torturer, and we listened as he protested that it was all a case of mistaken identity, with papers rigged against him by the Soviet bloc. The new Costa-Gavras movie, "Music Box," presents us with a fictional case based on Demjanjuk, and it has that same kind of fascination. Can the witnesses who testify against the retired Chicago steelworker Mike Laszlo (Armin Mueller-Stahl) be mistaken, or was he, in his youth, the monster they describe? Jessica Lange plays Laszlo's daughter, Ann Talbot, who is a lawyer and is defending him at a hearing that could cost him his citizenship; if he loses, he'll be sent back to Hungary, where the Communist government is waiting to try him for war crimes. Ann believes that the case was instigated because her father has been active in demonstrations against Hungarian dignitaries who have come on visits to the United States, and she may be right about that. But is there another man hidden inside the kindly father she has always known?

The emotional core of the movie is that during the trial, as the Second World War victims give their accounts of what the sadistic young police officer did to them, Ann begins to lose faith in her father's innocence. She's a skilled attorney, and she presses on, but everything she has believed about the up-right, honorable widower who raised her shifts and crumbles.

When the cast and the script are right for Costa-Gavras—as they are here—he has the knack of giving tempo and urgency to courtroom scenes. Others try for it; he really does it. This melodrama has the pull of a thriller. Shot in and around Chicago and in Budapest, it has no flashbacks and none of the usual shock apparatus of movies about wartime atrocities: the impact of "Music Box" comes from the testimony (and behavior) of the elderly witnesses. We take in what

they're saying, and we watch Ann taking it in. Costa-Gavras provides a low-key, controlled atmosphere, and Jessica Lange fills it with passion that's begging for release. In a recent interview, she was quoted as saying, "I love the sound of the cello." That's her emotional sound in this role: intelligent, searching, womanly.

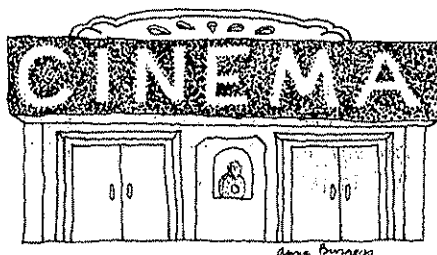
Everyone I know wishes we could see Lange in more fluffy-blond comedy roles. (We long for another "Tootsie.") But she has been developing a deeper range. Her character here doesn't have the dimensions of her Frances Farmer, but within the limits of a melodrama she verges on the astounding. Lange is one of those star performers—Diane Keaton is another—whose characters don't necessarily come on as stars. Ann Talbot is a brunette in plain business suits, and her being slightly worn makes her beauty more accessible. Her curly hair suggests a bad perm; it sticks out in funny ways and has no shine, no highlights. (It's as if there were no hairdresser on the set.) Ann is a busy woman with other things to think about, and we get to see the workings of her mind. The competitive smartness of the opposing lawyers is always part of the drama of good courtroom movies, and Ann, working against a rather surly government attorney (Frederic Forrest), springs traps with crisp efficiency.

Costa-Gavras is a remarkably lucid storyteller. He doesn't dawdle, and you have to pay close attention to the courtroom evidence: things are planted very fast, and if you're not on your toes you'll lose out when the payoffs come. There's an excitement in this tightly constructed narrative: it builds, and the complications draw it even tighter. But you're conscious of how the film is setting you up; the screenwriter, Joe Eszterhas (who's the son of Hungarian refugees), lays things out almost too

professionally. His commercialism can be like cold water in the face, after you've watched a procession of wonderfully varied character actors putting a lifetime of training into a few minutes of testimony. (Two of the most moving are Sol Frieder, as Istvan Boday, a bald old man with a goatee, who describes the murder of his family on the banks of the Danube, and Elzbieta Czyzewska, as a precise, closed-faced woman who describes how she was raped.) Eszterhas uses historical crimes very astutely, but he forces them into an entertainment package alongside old-Hollywood devices. The final plot developments (after the music box makes its appearance) are overextended, and they feel fake. The focus of the material goes wrong: what we're watching is suddenly too much about Ann's suffering—movie-star suffering.

Costa-Gavras seems to have little pockets of innocence about how Americans live. There is nothing here as far out of kilter as a lot of the stuff in "Betrayed" was, but a weirdly misconceived black character, Georgine (Cheryl Lynn Bruce), who's some sort of crack legal investigator, floats around and seems to function as Ann's all-purpose aide. (In one scene, she turns up in African robes; she outdresses her boss.) But Costa-Gavras has his wits about him in the key relationships. The German actor Armin Mueller-Stahl keeps the father from becoming too easy for the audience to decipher: he's a formal, Old World father—you never feel you know him. (So you understand his daughter's not knowing him.) And the film balances the daughter's smart toughness in her cross-examinations with the father's handsome, cold-blue-eyed righteousness. I expected Costa-Gavras and Eszterhas to show us some connection between the father's mental dexterity and the daughter's choice of career, but maybe we were meant to pick that up for ourselves. What counts is the Old World, New World texture that Jessica Lange brings to toughness. Her beautiful throatiness counts. She has the will and the technique to take a role that's really no more than a function of melodrama and turn this movie into a cello concerto.

I'VE heard it said that Michael Moore's muckraking documentary "Roger & Me" is scathing and



Voltairean. I've read that Michael Moore is "a satirist of the Reagan period equal in talent to Mencken and [Sinclair] Lewis," and "an irrepressible new humorist in the tradition of Mark Twain and Artemus Ward." But the film I saw was shallow and facetious, a piece of gonzo demagoguery that made me feel cheap for laughing.

Roger is Roger Smith, the chairman of General Motors, who, in Moore's account, closed eleven GM plants in Flint, Michigan, in 1986 (despite big profits), laid off thirty thousand workers, and set up plants in Mexico, where the wage rate was seventy cents an hour. In the film, he's directly responsible for bringing about the city's (unconvincingly speedy) deterioration. Flint, GM's birthplace, is also Michael Moore's home town, and Moore, a journalist, previously inexperienced in film, set out, with a camera crew, ostensibly to persuade Roger Smith to come to Flint and see the human results of his policies. This mock mission is the peg that Moore hangs the picture on: he pursues Roger Smith over a span of two and a half years, from February, 1987, to August, 1989. Moore, who directed, produced, and wrote the film, and is its star, has defined his approach: "I knew the theme would be 'looking for Roger' and showing what was happening in Flint during this time period."

What happens is that Moore, a big, shambling joker in windbreaker and baseball cap, narrates his analysis of the ironies and idiocies of what's going on, and deadpans his way through interviews with an assortment of unlikely people, who are used as stooges, as filler. He asks them broad questions about the high rate of unemployment and the soaring crime rate, and their responses make them look like phonies or stupes; those who try to block his path or duck his queries appear to be flunkies. Low-level GM public-relations people make squirmy, evasive statements; elderly women on a golf course are confused as to what's



"Sorry we're late, but that's our style."

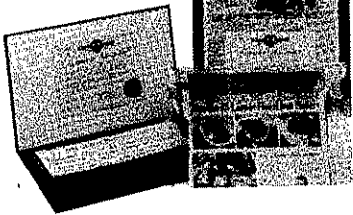
wanted of them; visiting entertainers are cheery and optimistic; Miss Michigan, who is about to take part in the Miss America Pageant, tries to look concerned and smiles her prettiest. What does Moore expect? Why are these people being made targets for the audience's laughter? The camera makes brutal fun of a woman who's trying to earn money as an Amway color consultant, and it stares blankly at a woman who's supplementing her government checks by raising rabbits. (For a minute or two, we seem to be watching an Errol Morris movie.) Moore's final jab is at a woman with a Jewish name, whose job promoting the attractions of the city has been eliminated. He asks her what she's going to do next. When she says she's going to Tel Aviv, Moore seems to be drawing the conclusion that the rats are deserting the ship; something distasteful hovers over the closing credits.

Moore is the only one the movie takes straight. (Almost everybody else is a fun-house case.) This standup crusader appears to be the only person in town who's awake to the destruction of what used to be a thriving community. And we in the audience are expected to identify with his puckish san-

ity. The way he tells it, the people who run the town are incompetent twerps. (That's always popular with movie audiences.) He reports that the civic leaders have been thinking about solutions for the decay of the city and have come up with lamebrained fantasy schemes to attract tourism: a Hyatt Regency hotel and convention center; AutoWorld, a theme park; the Water Street Pavilion, a mall. The three projects are actually built; roughly a hundred and fifty million dollars is poured in, and all three are fiascoes.

I had stopped believing what Moore was saying very early; he was just too glib. Later, when he told us about the tourist schemes, I began to feel I was watching a film version of the thirties best-seller "A Short Introduction to the History of Human Stupidity," and I began to wonder how so much of what was being reported had actually taken place in the two and a half years of shooting the film. So I wasn't surprised when I read Harlan Jacobson's article in the November-December, 1989, *Film Comment* and learned that Moore had compressed the events of many years and fiddled with the time sequence. For example, the eleven plant closings announced in 1986 were

Give him the actual newspaper printed the day he was born



FREE
Catalog
Upon
Request

Now you can purchase a well-preserved, **authentic** edition of an original newspaper printed as long ago as 1880. Not reproductions or just front pages, these are **COMPLETE, ACTUAL** newspapers from major cities across America. Every page is a time capsule in itself, preserving a day in the life of the nation, a city, and someone special.

Historic newspapers make thoughtful, one-of-a-kind gifts for **birthdays, holidays, business functions** and other special occasions.

Newspaper in Clear Vinyl Portfolio \$34.50*

Newspaper in Personalized Presentation Case \$65.00**

(Enclose name of recipient to be embossed in gold.)

Newspaper in Classic, Gold-Leaf Frame \$89.50***

It's the ORIGINAL EDITION! Not a reprint.

Ideal Gift for Valentine's Day

We're Old News!

ORDER TOLL-FREE
1-800-221-3221, Ext. 183
In N.J. 1-201-381-2332 Ext. 183

By mail: Historic Newspaper Archives

Dept. 83, 1582 Hart St., Rahway, N.J. 07065

*Add \$3.95 UPS. **Add \$4.95 UPS. ***Add \$6.95 UPS.

• UPS charges for Continental U.S.A. only •

Major Credit Cards accepted. (N.J. residents add 6% sales tax.) Sunday paper (main section only). Historical dates priced higher.



If a family member should require extended care for a psychiatric illness, you may want to consider the Greystone Program as an alternative to hospitalization. Since 1980, we have been providing services for a small group of residents in a warm, distinctive setting within our arboretum-like campus. The Greystone Program emphasizes personalized care in the Quaker tradition of respect for the individual. For more information, call (215) 831-4779 or write Barbara Hines, R.N., M.S.N., The Greystone Program at Friends Hospital, 4809 Roosevelt Boulevard, Philadelphia, PA 19124.

YOUR HEARTS DESIRE



Heart Beat Pin
in Sterling \$35.
\$3 Shipping, Check or M.O.
Brochure Available

JAY LANE
JCH-DEEGAN DESIGNS
22 OVERHILL ROAD
PROVIDENCE, RI 02906
401-831-6046

OARSMANSHIP

The perfect sport. At America's premier sculling school in Palm Beach county. Instruction at all levels. Come to find your stroke or perfect it. Call or write for a free brochure.

THE FLORIDA ROWING CENTER
1140 Fifth Avenue N.Y., NY 10128 (212) 996-1196

in four states; the thirty thousand jobs were lost in Flint over a period of a dozen years; and the tourist attractions were constructed and failed well before the 1986 shutdowns that they are said to be a response to. Or let's take a smaller example of Moore at play. We're told that Ronald Reagan visited the devastated city, and we hear about what we assume is the President's response to the crisis. He had a pizza with twelve unemployed workers and advised them to move to Texas; we're told that during lunch the cash register was lifted from the pizza parlor. That's good for a few more laughs. But Reagan visited the city in 1980, when he wasn't yet President—he was a candidate. And the cash register had been taken two days earlier.

Whatever the reasons for the GM shutdowns, the company had a moral and financial responsibility to join with government agencies and the United Automobile Workers in arranging for the laid-off workers to reenter the labor force. Moore doesn't get into this—at least, not directly. Possibly he thought that he'd lose the audience's attention if he did. Maybe he thought that it was implicit in the gimmick of his wanting to show Roger the damage the company has done, but it's almost perverse of him to pretend that what's happened is all Roger Smith's fault, and to tell the story in cartoon form.

The movie is an aw-shucks, cracker-barrel pastiche. In Moore's jocular pursuit of Roger, he chases gags and improvises his own version of history. He comes on in a give-'em-hell style, but he breaks faith with the audience. The picture is like the work of a slick ad exec. It does something that is humanly very offensive: "Roger & Me" uses its leftism as a superior attitude. Members of the audience can laugh at ordinary working people and still feel that they're taking a politically correct position.

WAS there no one among Steven Spielberg's associates with the intellectual stature to convince him that his having cried at "A Guy Named Joe" when he was twelve was not a good enough reason for him to remake it? True, there are flukes, and his remake, "Always," might have worked at the box office and been acclaimed. But it could have worked only as a piece of gloppy, down-home mysticism—something unworthy of Spiel-

berg's talent—or as a comedy about what the movie had once meant to him. Actually, it may be a sign of his mental health that he couldn't put much conviction into it. The 1943 picture—a Second World War morale booster about a flier (Spencer Tracy) who returns from death to watch unseen over the woman he loves (Irene Dunne) and encourage her romance with a younger flier (Van Johnson)—has been transposed to the present-day wilderness-fire-fighting service. Spielberg has caught the surface mechanics of forties movies. But he seems to have no grasp of how they worked—of the simplicity that made them affecting. He starts out with too much danger in one episode after another, and he overcooks everything, in a fast, stressful style. All he seems to want to do in each scene is get an audience reaction.

Balanchine had a simple explanation for his choreographic genius with dancers: I give them what they do best. Spielberg gives his stars, Richard Dreyfuss and Holly Hunter, nothing of what they do best. Dreyfuss, a put-on artist, is just too light for his role as a daredevil hero; his transitions are too facile. He has been made creamy-skinned and is photographed romantically, but he has no heroic presence. And when he and Holly Hunter sit in the bar at the airbase (where the heroine works, too) looking into each other's eyes longingly, there's nothing happening. (Spielberg has piled modern movie conventions right onto earlier conventions. After the tender thirties-forties scenes, the two characters go back to her place and sleep together, as they've apparently been doing all along.) Holly Hunter is a quick and direct actress, who comes at us with an excess of personality. Spielberg puts her in endless closeups, and there's not enough going on underneath. Photographed unflatteringly, she has so little color in her anxious face and she's so twisted with emotion that she begins to seem like a brown twig. A bland, glassy-faced new actor, Brad Johnson, is the shy pilot who succeeds the Dreyfuss character in the heroine's affections. Commenting on how handsome he is, she says he's like something she won in a raffle. But what you win in a raffle is a turkey.

There is one sequence in the movie that works: Hunter dances alone, thinking of her dead lover, and his ghost dances with her—of course,

without touching. Almost everything else seems grandiloquent, rushed, confusing. The very first shot is of two fishermen in a boat on a lake: a plane, swooping off, comes right at them, and they dive into the water. Was the pilot a lunatic? Did the fishermen drown? Basically, it's just a visual gag. Probably Spielberg wanted to see if he could do his own version of the crop-dusting scene from "North by Northwest." Dreyfuss gives Hunter a white evening dress, and when she puts it on, the dirty-faced men in the airbase bar are awed by her "girl clothes"; crowds of men part for her, as if she were a miraculous vision, and the firefighters line up in the washroom to get the grease off their hands so they can take turns dancing with her, to "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes." It's a fantasy sequence in a wartime musical, except that it's rhythmless and all wrong. There are at least a battalion's worth of firefighters in the scene; we know that these men wouldn't be covered with grease when they sit drinking beer at night; and the white dress is a fright, though it hugs Hunter's breasts and can help to sell the movie. Everything seems off. One moment, Brad Johnson is the goofus who can't follow orders; the next, he's the top flying ace. There's nothing in between. (This guy is a real find: you look at him and you want to know, "Does he sing?")

Audrey Hepburn, who plays Dreyfuss's supervisory angel, delivers transcendental inanities in the cadences that have stoned audiences at the Academy Awards and other film-industry shebangs; people see her, rise to their feet, and applaud. She's become a ceremonial icon, ravishing and hollow. Where has the actress gone—the one who gave a magnificent performance in "The Nun's Story"? There's no hint of her in this self-parody. But then, what Spielberg wants is the glowing goddess. John Goodman appears as Dreyfuss's best friend, and is turned into a fat-jolly-buddy icon. He saves himself from darlingness, but just barely.

Now that Spielberg is no longer twelve, hasn't he noticed that there's a voyeuristic queasiness in the idea of playing Cupid to the girl you loved and lost, and fixing her up with the next guy? In 1943, it was the finality of death that was being repressed. What the New Age hell is being repressed now?

—PAULINE KAEI

Direct From

The New Yorker

Reader Services

To hear personalized information about quality products and services offered in the pages of *The New Yorker*, call:

1 . 800 . 2 t i l l e y



30075



Test Drive Program



30016



30048

◆ THE WIGWAM
Arizona's Golf Resort



30054

I ♥ NY

Winter Vacations



30045

THE MARK



A New York Hotel.



30065

ADVERTISEMENT