

are like those wild dreams which seem utterly ridiculous when recalled in the light of the morning. Still, they are unaccountably depressing. *Under the Weather* is comic and disturbing.

Part 1, "the weather picture in the Northeast," is about a middle-aged drug salesman—he has a Bachelor of Science degree—who induces a heart attack in himself to avoid marrying his old sweetheart, now widowed. We are uncertain that this is truly his motive, but it would seem so. Though overabundantly fleshed and no longer young, Flora Sharkey makes the impression of an eminently suitable mate for the complacently ailing (or hypochondriac) Harry Faufill. She is eager, enthusiastic, energetic and hysterically helpful. Despite all this, Faufill wants out and so arranges for his collapse. Laughter and puzzlement!

Part 2, "the weather in the Southeast," presents Solomon Ithimar, a top-secret atomic scientist on his way to a cosmically significant conference in Geneva. He stops off at a third-rate Miami hotel to see a childhood flame with whom he has since had no contact, she is a respectably married Jewish matron, Marcella Vankuchen. To what end? The memory which has sustained him through his rise from butcher's son to nuclear eminence was the sight vouchsafed him by Marcella during their pre-adolescent sex games of a tiny wen located in the region of her genitals. Nothing since that first intimacy has ever so stirred him. The great man pleads in an ecstasy of anticipation and in fear of rejection for permission to behold the magic spot once again and thus regain his capacity for pure elation.

If I am circuitous in stating this circumstance it is probably because Ithimar, like so many mental giants, is given to protracted verbal ejaculations. One is not sure if this logorrhea is simply a form of humor cultivated by Bellow to mock intellectuals whose tensions manifest themselves through an enormous spill of words (he uses the device in several of his novels), or if it is a kind of artful padding—the rhetoric of comedy—to compensate for a lack of characterization through developed action. In any case, what makes this episode memorable is the dry nervous squiggle of the impotent Big Brain whom Bellow, very ably abetted by Harry Towb as Ithimar, caricatures. I should add that the type has become familiar to me through much frequentation of literary parties. On that account alone these events are seldom pleasant experiences. Some of their uneasiness rubs off on this part of *Under the Weather*.

Part 3, "the weather picture for the Midwest," is the most telling. Hilda, a prostitute of Polish origin, begs Pennington, an octogenarian millionaire whom

she has been serving in monthly installments over the years, to set her sister up in a dress shop. This skit is notable for its exposure of a not uncommon male attitude toward sex. It is crudely functional. Hilda is a domestic personality; she is patient, understanding and in her own way faithful. Pennington pays for her services but resents the intrusion of sentiment or any recognition of her except as an instrument of his need.

Do the three parts of the evening purport to be pencil sketches of grotesque aspects of American masculinity? The gamut runs from fear through employment of neurotic surrogates to cold and unfeeling possession as a touchstone of power. Since the plays on the whole are unpretentious, one cannot be sure that this is the plan. The effect is of a writer of complex talent still insecure in handling a medium to which he is not accustomed. He appears to be expressing fringe facets of his moral and psychosomatic self. We might describe the process metaphorically as that of an artist who took to depicting special portions of his anatomy—the tips of his fingers, the points of his elbows, the space between his toes—rather than his essential being. The result stimulates curiosity without being gratifying.

While Harry Towb in the three roles is offered the opportunity of altering his mask from asinine burgher, to jittery genius, to ludicrously superannuated powerhouse, Shelley Winters is for the most part effectively consigned to the role of feminine victim. It is her most satisfying

stage performance to date. She gasps, sighs and moans in a mellifluous monotone which is at once humorous and touching.

The line of Arthur Storch's direction seems too close to "realism" and thus fails to capture the peculiar elements of "fantasy" which are woven into Bellow's writing. But his task has not been an easy one. I believe *Under the Weather* might fare better, commercially as well as artistically, somewhere or anywhere off Broadway. The New York midtown framework is damaging to such enterprises.

It so happens that goon writing, acting and direction are immediately available for observation in *How's the World Treating You?* by Roger Milner at the Music Box. Peter Bayliss and, much more startlingly as well as brilliantly, Patricia Routledge, are there on display in a variety of madly eccentric patterns and postures. Hardly any of our American actresses are capable of the kind of virtuosity in comic distortion of which Miss Routledge is a master. The mode seems to be an English specialty.

The trouble is that the evening is much too long for its special attraction: each act alone would be sufficient. Then, too, the quips and images are so thoroughly British (*Punch* to the nth degree) that most of our playgoers probably find them as weirdly foreign as an "in" joke of the Hottentot social register. The coin has no currency here.

ART / Max Kozloff

It occasionally happens that one is reluctantly forced to describe an intriguing work of art by what it is not. Similarities that it may have with other art, or simply the already known, have to be stripped away because they ring false. Confusing this issue, a pictorial apparatus may not altogether account for an effect. Or a formal element may not do what it had previously, in other circumstances, not hesitated to do. Parts, in this instance, resist adding up to a whole, although a whole there certainly is. And all this can grow under the aegis of some obscure negation that has yet the peculiar grace *not* to be malign. Such, I would say, is roughly the situation with the current pictures of Agnes Marun, at the Robert Elkon Gallery.

For example, they are ostensibly field paintings, worked all over, which nevertheless ask to be "read" as is type face. In addition, their oyster or buff white

façades, each 6 x 6 feet, somehow suggest an errant tonality, and an induced colorism. They are flat pictures, too, that still get back rapidly into space without so much as even a token value change. Martin's work, then, is not geometric; it is not reductionist in the usual sense, neither does it purvey a serial or a single image. So far, this is easily enough observed. But it still leaves unexplained those diverse presences on the walls which finally bow out from being even paintings—since paintings are materialized by pigment, rather than as here given face mostly by pencil.

Large canvases drawn upon as if to resemble magnified graphs are what physically meet the eye. Uninflected, incessant horizontal rulings are met by somewhat weaker or less frequent vertical ones, evenly spaced. On certain canvases, a mid-key ground relieves white tracings, like a solarized print. Mechanistic-

cally straight, the lines, fine tipped as they are, flake or granulate minutely over the acrylic primed cotton. Further, the micro-intervals of these works seem to contract upon examination. They hover on the verge of becoming tone, but never lose their porosity. Moreover, one sees through variously regulated meshes that are translucent without being luminous, gridded without being discretely structured. Less noticeably, these pictures conceptually pair with one another, in the manner of alter egos. The same checker pattern is grounded by gray and eggshell in two separate instances; and a channel sequence whitens where it remains bare in the pendant. It is like stepping in and out of the shade, or better, half-light.

One might be tempted to dismiss this self-contained display as "sensitive," were it not uttered in deliberately matter-of-fact language. Still less should it be called monotonous, since it yields the most differentiated sensations. In the quietest way, the pictures invoke a kind of visual raveling that tautens their unstressed webbing. Largely this is because, as energy flows everywhere and nowhere at the same time, the eye requires, or plucks at, a focus, just as an organism exhibits a tropism. But this is no primitive experience. I was aware not merely of the impoverished materials but of their diffident, and elegant, seizure of my attention. It is an indication of how ramified is this art that its sensuality exists more richly and vividly as a psychological state than as physical fact. One is beguiled into unforeseen expectancies, of landscape, for example, or sky, because there is no alternative to viewing Agnes Martin's canvases as screens for unfigured seeing. Here emerges the crux of her work for, without giving the beholder the faintest nuance or pictorial transition, it conjures an atmosphere and a rather airy one at that. This is all the more startling because the tacitly of each work arises from nothing more than the physically even-pressured meeting of pencil and canvas. All other shaping or activity is banished to the choice of framework which remains ultimately an intellectual conception. The show stands mid-point, therefore, between the sensibility of the early fifties, with its loosely structured and empathetic recall of the outer world, and the "computerized" pictorial systems of today. It is a condition perhaps emphasized by the fact that the artist herself is of the middle generation. I am reminded by this exhibition of Valéry's remarks on the paintings of Berthe Morisot: "Made up of nothing, they multiply that nothing, a suspicion of mist or swans, with a supreme tactile

art, the skill of a brush that scarcely feathers the surface. But that featheriness conveys all . . . the great gift . . . for reducing matter to a minimum and thus giving the strongest possible impression of an act of mind. . . ."

The Lucas Samaras exhibition at the Pace Gallery delights me with the knowledge that art can be a proper receptacle for all those impulses which in social life would be abashing or atrocious. The work simultaneously represents the degree to which the artist can purge himself of his fantasies (or outright sublimate them), and creates the distance necessary for his public to see them as in a sense ordered, and unthreatening. How gentle, in fact, it all seems, now that it is possible to view these images in the light of artistic metaphor.

It has already been noted that his prickly objects enact some aboriginal defense which may also maim, puncture or slice. They are the porcupines of modern art. Yet Samaras hardly considers himself a practitioner of standoffishness: "the manner in which art objects are made are [*sic*] erotic gestures. The Greek word lick and sculpt is the same. Artistic-creation-eroticism may be a substitute for genital-biological-creation-eroticism, however the eroticism is experienced in the brain in either case. . . . The erotic isn't connected with life and death . . . it is continuous. . . . Narcissism is making one's body into art." It apparently also means making one's house into art, and each of its furnishing or articles into reliquaries of one's own eroticism. From his words, one would never guess that Samaras has a St. Sebastian complex, and that he equates the erotic with the enthralling nightmare of self-impalement. But it hardly ends even here: "To be an artist is to be god (an ambi-sexual one, no doubt), and I don't know anything more erotic than that." The Pace show is a veritable cosmos of open nerve ends, of touchy, tacky, tingly glamour germinating everywhere from the inanimate. Indeed, one of his typical fancies is to figuratively X-ray himself (in drawings), preferably his colon and spine, seen under a spangled, celestial milky way.

This iconography is paraphiliac and callow in about equal measure. Many would even consider it juvenile, which hardly invalidates it as a basis for creating art. Perhaps the most remarkable illustration of the effect to which Samaras can put it is his new 8-foot-high room, its walls, floors and ceilings completely covered with mirrored panels. It will most literally expand the consciousness of any who enters it, repeating or showing him off from "impossible" worm's eye, or overhead multiple views in a gaudy dis-


play of omniscience. In terms of creative process, the artist can be imagined giddily incarcerating himself in such a chamber—of the mind.

If solipsism is the watchword that unites his boxes with their hypodermics, his pin-covered leaning chairs, his colored yarn whorls, bent forks, and razor-blade cocktails, Samaras also joins an eccentric tradition in American art. His work stands, it seems to me, between the nostalgic jewel cases of Joseph Cornell, and the bone-chain-glass-eye aggregations of Alfonso Ossorio. But he is not as poetic as the first, nor anywhere near as brutish as the second. There is a rather calculated effeminacy about his effects that allies him, at times, with the chiffon-swathed, yet ghastly ashes and pearl concoctions of Bruce Conner.

But such a comparison, oddly enough, makes him look only the more detached. The further one studies a Samaras assemblage, the more convincing does it appear as an abstract, even decorative, object. But I hasten to add that this abstraction seems to arise out of its own obsessive elaboration of patterns, opposed to any haison with the current repeating formats of abstract art. Then too, Samaras' *horror vacui* has pointillist connotations:

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pinheads serve as color molecules or breakups of chromatic grounds—all delicately reiterated. His earlier fascination with the optical changes made by overlaps of colored plastics is another aspect of that decorative instinct which is yet tinged with a slightly panic groping toward infinity.

In the end, Samaras accomplishes with ease the transfer of banal and repulsive materials into an uncanny glitter. It is a situation for which the Surrealist deriva-

tions of his works do not, in themselves, give account. Some larger impulse within seems to have carried him past preciosity: a creative principle to which all motifs are subsumed. Whether it be in the dainty homeliness of his execution, his capacity to change scale from very small to grand, or in the menagerie of his sensations, one perceives a prodigal imagination. It feeds upon itself, but in doing so, grinds up, or rather pulverizes, the psycho-sexual alarms that can also be found within ourselves.

structured. The first third at least of its running time is devoted to the attempts of three middle-aged soldiers to pick up a trio of factory girls in a provincial dance hall. This provides a certain amount of feckless merriment, but it goes on much too long for patience or plausibility, and it has only the most tenuous connection with the main story, which is of a love affair between one of the girls and the piano player from Prague who is on the platform that evening.

The heart of this tale, which amounts to little more than a short, is that the heroine is as direct in action as she is naive in spirit. Some time during the night, her musical seducer (he employs the "I can feel you don't trust me" technique, which is still apparently new to the girls of the Czech hinterland) says she must come to Prague some day, and advances his purpose still further by giving her the address of the flat he shares with his parents. So a quick hitchhike later, the parents are confronted late in the night with what looks to them very much like a stray cat. When the boy comes home after being outwitted by a Prague girl who understands piano players, the family goes into a slapstick round of mutual recriminations that ends with the three of them thrashing about in one bed and the girl weeping her eyes out on the other side of the door. We are told in a sequel that everything works out splendidly, a prognosis I didn't for a moment believe after catching a glimpse of the hero's taste in Prague girls.

This is life, defined and performed at the level of television romance (and photographed with the camera 6 inches from everyone's nose). I like it well enough, but I'm surprised that we need to import it.

FILMS/Robert Hatch

Chusingura is the finest movie spectacle I have ever seen. These gargantuan epics are not my idea of how best to use the screen, but this tale of Japan's forty-seven samurai martyrs to honor is the only picture of the sort that I have ever sat through in willing captivity or could contemplate seeing again.

Partly, the acceptance stems from the exoticism of the work. A legend of 18th-century Japan inevitably contains more novelty and pleasant surprise than can be expected in accounts of Genesis, Lawrence of Arabia, or the Winning of the West, as imagined by our commercial film makers. But partly the film's lure is intrinsic. It is in the first place extraordinarily and unfailingly beautiful in its sites and settings. Hiroshi Inagaki, the director, does not fall into the frequent Western fallacy of bringing legend down to earth, he sets his tale against a background painstakingly designed to ravish the eyes. Beyond that, the film is performed in a mannered and polished style that maintains an edge of elegance and control in the sprawl of plot. *Chusingura* is pageantry and dance, ceremony and tourney, it is never happenstance.

For a Japanese, the film may be an occasion of patriotism, even of piety, but Western viewers do best, I think, to sink into it passively, as into a reverie. It is so long (three and a half hours) and moves with such deliberation from one fist of violence to the next, that if you try to participate in its narrative you will find yourself stumbling ahead of the action. Moreover, the motivations of the work make to Western minds a kind of dream sense. The emotions—pride, loyalty, greed, vengeance—are familiar enough, but with us they are balanced, negotiated and transposed according to different formulas. Not even in feudalism or the code of chivalry can one find satisfying parallels to the behavior of these warrior lords and their ladies. What the protagonists do is clear and

consistent enough, but I think it would be impossible except in a dream for an Occidental to "feel" them doing it.

So for us *Chusingura* is inevitably a partial experience. It offers visual pleasure at a superb level of restrained taste and provides teasing insights into the springs of a complex and remote psychology. But for all its redundant and implacable violence, it does not offer us the satisfying resolution of tragedy or the exhilaration of participation in heroic affairs that presumably its countrymen can derive from it. It becomes clearer all the time, I think, that world brotherhood, if it ever comes, will rest on mutual trust and tolerance at least as much as on shared understanding.

The Czech film, *Loves of a Blonde*, was apparently the darling of the New York Film Festival, and it is indisputably an endearing film. The trouble with it is that it is easier to like than to admire, less art than artless.

For one thing, it is curiously ill-con-

THE COWGIRL BALL

for Gene Autry

*When you jumped into the snowy wagon headed
for the Cowgirl Ball your mommy pinched herself
and spoke in measured syllables
"Yas yas, I regonice you by your farmer cheese smell,
Yas, I regonice you by your tacky nose."
Guessing her mind, you offered
up a pail of blue cats to make her sick and
you gave her an "aeroplane surprise"
A daisy mugging by the roadside got a coat of old
dust for its trouble. You had no time for nature
studies, you were off to the Cowgirl Ball!
The opening ceremony was me
Firing a raft cannon to provide the merry-makers
with a chance to speculate on how fast I would leave
the lake backwards.*

MICHAEL SILVERTON

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