

a brotherly pat on the backside as he leaves. The Dada's death, Kath's battering by Sloane, the rapacious pursuit of Sloane and his eventual bondage to them are all forgotten. The past is obliterated by pleasantries. Kath sits back on the sofa and pops a candy into her mouth as the curtain falls. Evil to Orton was indifference to suffering, a moral stupor that extended to the corrupting power of language.

Tillinger's exceptional production cuts some of Orton's good jokes but is true to his ambitious antic intentions. *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* belongs to the great tradition of English comedies of manners. Orton wanted not merely to satirize the manners of postwar England but to show how they negotiate a truce with reality. His theatrical voice is unique. His method is irresistible. He corrupts an audience with pleasure. Tillinger's *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* establishes Orton's genius on the American stage. American theater has a lot to learn from Orton. It is not enough to entertain ideas on stage; you have to entertain people. This production does both. □

## FILMS.

### RICHARD ELMAN

#### The Uprising

Certain moments during Peter Lilienthal's quasi-documentary reconstruction of the Nicaraguan people's 1979 uprising in León were as startling to me as my own memories of the revolution. Not the story line, of divided loyalties within a poor Nicaraguan family—that was closer to leftish melodrama. Nor did I recognize anyone from among the large cast of Nicaraguan nonprofessionals, many of whom, according to a press handout, had participated in similar events only months before the filming commenced.

The moments of "memory" I experienced, again and again, came from the accurate use of fragments from Nicaraguan life in the last days of Anastasio Somoza: Sandinists in base-

ball caps (a uniform of the revolt), the white flags jutting out of peoples' doorways, things of that sort. In one of the film's most powerful scenes a procession of middle-aged women, dressed mostly in black and accompanied by a young priest in a white soutane, petition before the National Guard *cuartel* for the release of their sons from military service, only to be dispersed by the captain, who looks amazingly like the young Somoza. Rudely he reminds them that they should give homage to "the mother of all the mothers, the mother country."

I often saw such women waiting patiently at *cuartels* for their sons who were soldiers, or prisoners, or corpses; and when the war was over, I saw these mothers petitioning before the war crimes tribunals for the release of their sons awaiting trial.

"*Patria libre, patria muerte!*" cry the Sandinists in the film when they attack with arms. I heard that cry often from the *muchachos* in the streets, although it wasn't always the case that their efforts were as successful as depicted here. Too often confused and armed with nothing more than .22s and pistols, the young began their fight against a fully equipped modern army.

Lilienthal's cameras frequently dwell on the walls of León's homes, pockmarked by explosions and scrawled with revolutionary slogans, and his film is intercut with actual footage from the last days of the struggle. The mix is often powerful, like re-experiencing the onset of a bad dream: the low-flying Piper Cub that announces from its loudspeakers that León will shortly be "purged," and then, seconds later, the appearance of one of those twin-tailed Spanish jets as it releases 500-pound bombs on the adobe hovels of the city.

The sudden cut to a truckload of well-armed elite National Guard troops in their camouflage dress is especially chilling. Whenever they appeared in any Nicaraguan city, the street people would cry out, "*Ahi viene La Guardia,*" as they scattered for cover. Lilienthal includes that kind of moment, and also the loud footfalls of the soldiers' boots as they positioned themselves along a street.

I came to admire and love the Nicaraguan people for their courage and warmth during a time of agony, and the sight of those faces along the cobbled streets of a city I knew fairly well touched me. They are all here: the

priests and shopkeepers who supported the revolutionary cause, the brave boys and girls of the Red Cross who were sometimes slaughtered as if they were combatants. But there are aspects of the film that seem off the mark.

Lilienthal's protagonist, Agustín, for example, who has joined Somoza's National Guard to alleviate the poverty of his family, seems less like a Nicaraguan and more like the traditional representative of the "good German" under National Socialism. When he returns on a weekend pass to his family's fairly commodious house with its patio, I was startled. Such homes exist in León, of course, but they are not the dwellings of the Nicaraguan masses.

When Agustín deserts, after watching a massacre of radical students inside León's main cathedral (in reality, of course, young people who were non-political were also massacred), the Sandinists allow him to join them at once. In a scene like this, Lilienthal, who is a German film maker and a colleague of Werner Fassbinder's, seems to have one eye on European politics, to the detriment of Nicaraguan reality. "The people and the front are one," Nicaraguans used to say (it rhymes in Spanish), but not everybody could just pick up a gun and fight. The Sandinists learned that lesson at some cost to themselves. Eventually they reserved their best weapons for those who had been in the hills with them and had received some training (see their own film, *Patria Libre*). Still, errors were made, lives wasted, and some of those who died then were neither Sandinists nor Somocists. They were just Nicaraguans who found themselves trying to live in the middle of the carnage.

If Lilienthal doesn't bother to make us see this aspect of the revolution, that's because he is bent on celebrating the people's victory in the hope that it will be contagious elsewhere in Latin America. But things do not need to be made to look any more insidious than they were already. Why, then, does Lilienthal, in one of his rare attempts at characterization, show a National Guard captain making a pass at Agustín? Is a soldier in Somoza's army any more or less evil because of his sexual inclinations? *The Uprising* oversimplifies many of the complexities of Nicaragua during the revolution, although it does humanize the slogans of a people's victory by giving us pieces of reality—faces, houses, clothing, streets. □

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