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What a woman can do to a man

Roth's latest explores the duplicitous woman

by John Wesley Pilgrim Staff Writer

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The Daily Tar Heel

Philip Roth's latest book is one case history of what a woman can do to a man or what a man can let a woman do to him. Although it takes a bit of idealism and romantic illusion as well as a belief in honor, integrity, and moral responsibility for a man to be vulnerable these days to the devastating phenomenon known as the duplicitous woman, that is precisely the situation in My Life as a Man. At the very least Roth's book makes all too clear the truth of the old dictum that man can't live with woman and can't live without. That may be putting old wine in a new bottle, but there's nothing wrong with that if the old wine is still good. Due to the popularity of Philip Roth, this book could wake up a lot of people.

> Southern Novels You hadn't hoped to see again.

*The Old Book Corner 137 A East Rosemary Street Opposite Town Parking Lots Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514



The book deals with the promise and fuin of the writer Peter Tarnopol, whose tranquil world of literature is shattered by a woman. Through the voice of a fictional alter-ego Tarnapol says "it seems that literature too strongly influences my ideas about life, or that 1 am able to make no connection at all between its wisdom and my existence."

The sensitive Tarnopol has an ethical code derived from a pantheon of literary characters with exemplary integrity and morality. Despite a blue million literary examples, he finds that his code is no match for his psychotic wife, Maureen. Their marriage, brought about by her deception, begun in hatred and ended only by her death, becomes the greatest and most eternal influence upon him. Maureen writes in her diary"I could be his Muse, if only he'd let me." No matter what he wills, he does become his Muse, and through the useful fictions of the first part of the book and the autobiographical narrative, Tarnopol tries to exorcise the poisonous spirit



which has so consumed him. The reasoning of his psychoanalyst Spielvogel—the same Spielvogel in *Portnoy's Complaint*—is not that Tarnopol's education had ill-prepared him for such a tormenting personal life, but that the basic problem is located in his great narcissism. The answer perhaps lies in a combination of the two.

On picking up another Philip Roth book, the first anticipations are humor, an over-riding Jewish consciousness, a concern with sex, outstanding dialogue and a possible neurotic character or two. These concerns are all present, in controlled and undominating proportions, but never before has Roth dealt with a character so compassionately. And every compassionate reader will feel for this remorseful character, guilt-ridden though there is no cause for his guilt. The reader sincerely wishes Tarnopol could laugh at his mistakes, for sorrow is much easier to bear when you can laugh at it; indeed, it is often the only way you can bear it. The book is not high art and complex; the chronology is whirligig, but the narratives are literal, sustained by the wit in the dialogue and the genuineness of the suffering. And if suffering breeds character, this book shows that it can also destroy character. Yet, there is not an unqualified sympathy for Tarnopol, though his weakness for romantic illusions is understandable. At one point of awareness, Tarnopol tells Spielvogel that "it isn't that women mean too little

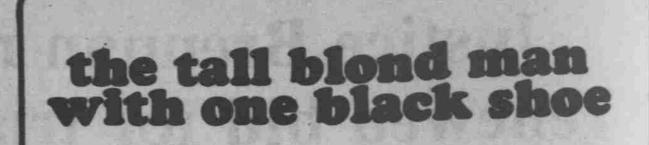
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to me—what's caused the trouble is that they mean so much. The testing ground, not for potency, but virtue! Believe, me, if I'd listened to my prick instead of my upper organs, I would never have gotten into this mess to begin with."

He likens his plight to tragedy, but constantly sees it as more truly the melodrama of soap-opera. The process of disillusionment is one that creates a parallel in his inability to remedy his calamity and an inability even to write about it. For a while, thus, he cannot even lay claim to a resignation such as "I have a felicitous expression of discontent: I have only words to play with!" Only after the death of his wife, and his subsequent retreat from the harsh world to a secluded artist colony, can he deal successfully with recounting his trauma. Tarnopol writes, "Literature got me into this and literature is gonna have to get me out. My writing is all I've got now, and though it happens not to have my life easy for me either in the years since my auspicious debut, it is really all I trust."

Without trust the world can be intolerable. Whatever the genre, tragedy or soap-opera, suffering is suffering, and if you can feel sorry for others you perhaps have the right to feel sorry for yourself. Peter Tarnopol earned that right. And by reading this book, a person may be surprised to discover himself doing two things: not condemning Tarnopol for having ideals, and finding out just how sympathetic one can feel for a fictional character.





In 'The Tall Blond Man With One Black Shoe' a French violinist is the innocent victim of circumstance. Praised by critics everywhere for its unrelenting hilarity, the film chronicles the musician's experiences after inepty falling into a whirlpool of espionage and intrigue. The Alternative Cinema offering is scheduled for this weekend in Greenlaw Auditorium.

First ever, held in Chapel Hill Regional poets' conference

A first in the history of Southern poetry is scheduled to occur this weekend when four noted poets and a host of enthusiasts gather at the Bruce Dickerson farm just outside of Chapel Hill. Tonight marks the beginning of the first regional poets' conference in the South and a tremendous opportunity for Chapel Hill's amateur and professional poets alike to assimilate a variety of styles. Norman Moser, editor of the literary magazine Illuminations and a poet under grant of the National Endowment for the Arts, will initiate a structured recitation format at 8 p.m. tonight showcasing the visiting poets-Judy Hogan, Julia Fields, Gerald Barrax, and Moser himself. Hogan is co-editor of the Thorp Springs Press and Hyperion magazine while Barrax and Fields are noted black poets from Raleigh. After the recitation, Moser plans to offer an opportunity for the amateurs to participate in an open reading. The visiting poets will reclaim the floor thereafter, but will attempt, says Moser, to maintain the sense of spontaneity of an unrehearsed, round-robin reading. This finale is intended to establish a continuity in an otherwise amorphous mixture of styles. To achieve the effect, each reader in the group will respond to the theme set by the reader

before him. Mr. Moser will read a selection of his choosing to extemporize the initial theme, and the process will continue in a

But tonight's program is only the highlight of a full weekend of

activities sponsored by the 530-member Committee of Small

Magazine Editors and Publishers. Another open reading is

scheduled for Saturday at 8 p.m. Three seminars of possible interest

to students, "Third World Poetry," "Women's Movement," and

"Prison Writing and Publishing," will be offered on Saturday. The

remainder of the conference, extending through Sunday afternoon,

consists of professional workershops. Only the open readings are

free to the public; however, persons interested in registering for the

entire conference can contact Judy Hogan, the conference director,

at the University Motor Inn or at the Dickerson farm off Highway

The First Committee of Small Magazine Editors and Publishers

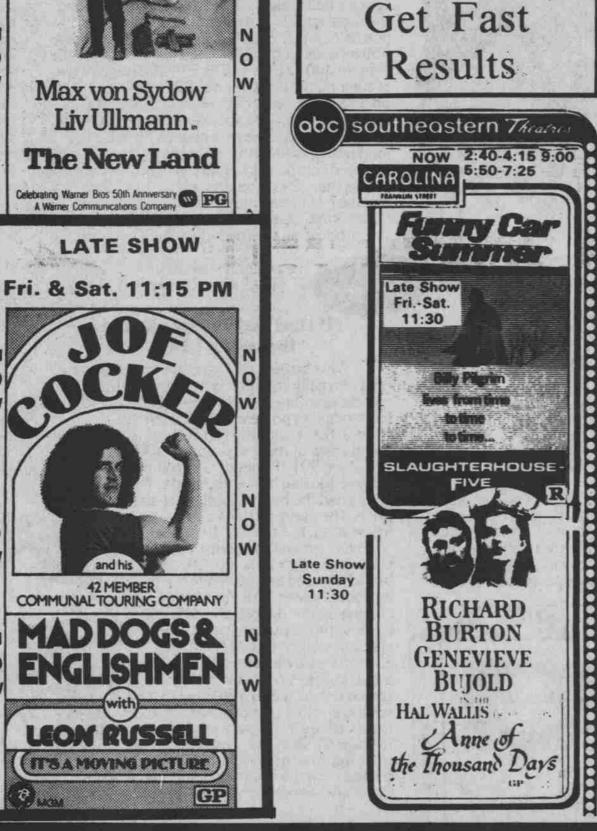
and Southern Poets conference probably won't set any

monumental precedents. It might, however, bring to Chapel Hill an

opportunity and atmosphere for people to broaden their poetic

capabilities and enjoy themselves in the process.

circular rotation until the group or the topic is exhausted.



KALEIDOSCOPE

"The Tail Blond Man With One Black Shoe"—An innocuous French violinist is the innocent victim of circumstance in this hectic comedy of intrigue, infidelity and innuendo. Penelope Gilliatt wrote that it was "a funny movie," and Metromedia's critic went one further, calling it "a funny, funny movie." It played briefly in Chapel Hill this summer, but in an ineptly dubbed English version. This is the original French, with subtities. (Today at 7 and 9:30 p.m., Saturday at 2, 7 and 9:30 p.m., Greenlaw Auditorium, \$1.50, the Alternative Cinema.)

Cinema

"Closely Watched Trains"—The adolescent travails of a railroad employee during World War II provide the tender and ironic motif for this Czech film. The movie was part of that country's "new wave" of the mid-60s, squeiched by Brezhnev's tanks, but the seed was planted and considerable talent emerged. This was one of the most popular imports, largely because of the beguiling performance of the boy-protagonist. (Today at 6:30 and 9 p.m., Great Hall, Union Free Flick.)

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"Touch of Evil"—More than a touch, and quite sinister, too. Orson Welles is a grossly overweight, leering sheriff in a Mexican border town, but it's not a Western. Welles directed, too, and he makes this repellant character a fascinating one. Murder involves Janet Leigh and Mariene Dietrich, and it's a nice melodrama steeped in corruption and 'decay. (Saturday at 6:30 and 9 p.m., Great Hall, Union Free Flick.)

"Variety"—Emil Jannings goes berserk over the love of a beautiful and flirtatious circus performer, played by Lya da Putti, in this German expressionist classic from that country's phenomenal decade of filmmaking, the Twenties. It was the rich silent performances by Jannings in this and in "The Last Laugh" which prompted Hollywood to import him; once here, he won the first Oscar. (Sunday at 7 and 9:30 p.m., Greenlaw Auditorium, \$1.50 or subscription, Chapel Hill Film Friends.)

"The Heartbreak Kid"—Elaine May directed her daughter Jeannie Berlin, along with Cybill Shepherd and Charles Grodin, in this daffy comedy of a short-lived marriage which ends with the ultimate morning-after joke: the groom falls in love with another woman while on his honeymoon. Music includes "Close to You" and the Coca Cola song, and they, like most everything here, are just perfect. (Sunday at 7 and 9:30 p.m., Great Hall, by subscription only, Super Sunday, Union Free Flick.)

