

Dave Walter and Don Ernsberger are stuck in the '60s, not only as ex-Randians but as ex-YAFers, the defining moment of their lives coming when they helped lead the libertarian wing out of the Young Americans for Freedom in 1969. The Society for Individual Liberty which they then established was, throughout its existence, a continuing exercise in instant nostalgia, a longing for the glory days of 1969 when they were, for the first and last time, Big Shots, makers of history.

And now Walter and Ernsberger are running the Libertarian Party as a YAF-type, mailing list, scam operation, scrambling for dwindling resources to maintain an organization that yields a close-to-zero output.

Look, I am the last one to knock nostalgia and historical memory; they are extremely important. But come on, guys: enough's enough. There's an exciting world out there. Get real! ●

## Arts and Movies

by Mr. First Nighter

*Metropolitan*, directed and written by Whit Stillman.

Social realism, we sometimes forget, does not have to be about the poor, the underclass, or upwardly mobile immigrants. Social realism, even in New York City, can be about the glamorous, wealthy, preppe Upper East Side. In this lovely gem of a movie, this low-budget "sleeper," Whit Stillman, in his first film, brings us a sweet, affectionate, autobiographical valentine about WASP preppe youth in New York. Not

since George Roy Hill's wonderful and hilarious *The World of Henry Orient* (1964) has the preppe/deb life been so perceptively and admirably portrayed.

Realistically but affectionately, Stillman shows us a slice of life during Christmas week, when the life of these college freshmen and sophomores is one continuous round of expansive deb parties followed by all-night flirtations and bull-sessions. As one reviewer marvelled: these people speak in whole sentences! Yes indeed, they are articulate, concerned about ideologies, the future of their class (or whether it should have a future!), about their own lives, and the intellectuals among them about literature and culture. All this recalls the days not only of my own youth, but also of all generations of youth until the cultural cataclysm of the late 1960s. But the most heartwarming aspect of this sketch of college youth today is the sweetness and fundamental innocence of these young people. The one girl in the group who sleeps around is known to one and all as "the slut," and it is gloriously as if the various phases of the Sexual Revolution had never happened. The Old Culture still lives! and this fact gives all of us hope for the future of America.

Not, of course, that the Old Culture is or was problem-free. Many of these young people come from broken if upper-class homes, and suffer from paternal-and-step-mother rejection. But they cope with these problems as best they can, with sweetness, determination, and wit. The amiable, earnest, and artless hero, living in relative penury on the declassé West Side (the only spot in the film that looks—realistically—grubby),

is a particularly touching case of such rejection.

The hero, by the way, begins this Christmas week as a seemingly dedicated Fourierite socialist, but at the end of the week and the film, agrees with his newfound friend: "Who wants to live on a farm with a bunch of other people, anyway?"

The photography is superb: never has the Upper East Side looked so sparkling and glamorous; the only analogue is those wonderful Art Deco Park Avenue apartments of 1930s movies, replete with 50-foot ballrooms, alluring gowns, seltzer bottles on the sideboard, and Fred and Ginger doing a turn. Here was a New York that served as a beacon and a Mecca for decades of American youth. The 30s effect is enhanced by the camera direction. Stillman writes that a low budget required him to go back to the stationary cameras of that Golden Age, and to do so without the self-conscious preening swoops and zooms of modern cinematography, gimmicks that mainly serve to call attention to the camera itself rather than to the life and the action on the screen. Budget or no, the technique fits extremely well and becomes part of the overall magic of this movie.

If you want to imbibe some hope about the future of American youth and culture, rush to see this film before it disappears amidst the welter of contemporary glitz, grunt and gore. And who knows, one muses on leaving *Metropolitan*, maybe even New York City, that once wonderful Babylon-on-the-Hudson, can one day be brought back to life.

—M. N. R.