he spits in Bonnie’s face, and Clyde’s rage becomes his most outspoken challenge to law and order. Hamer is treated as a force, a more terrifying version of Brando’s sheriff in The Chase, a human god in khaki, indomitable and vengeful. (In reality, Hamer’s frustrations were more complex: an ex-Texas Ranger, he was embittered and nonheroic. He became obsessed by the elusiveness of the Barrow gang and vowed to destroy them because of their wanton murders of police officers. The episode in the film never happened because Hamer never caught up with Bonnie and Clyde until the final ambush, when no words were exchanged.)

Some very pleasant sequences: Bonnie and Clyde kidnap two lovers and take them for a joyride, expressing the bandits’ loneliness and deeply felt need to be involved with “Jus’ folks”—there is great warmth in this episode, despite Penn’s tendency to let the man (Gene Wilder) overplay his polite apprehensions. When the bandits meet C. W. Moss’s father (Dub Taylor), the film offers another fine character: a bully with a streak of homespun geniality, he is not as starstruck by Bonnie and Clyde as his son, and he becomes the grizzled Judas of this tale.

The dénouement is touched with a grotesque, visual poetry. Bonnie and Clyde have solved their sexual incompatibility. (This aspect of the film is unduly sensationalistic and contrived—in reality, Bonnie loved another member of the gang, not shown in the film, and actually, she was simply not Clyde’s kind of woman. The implied homosexuality of Clyde is also of dubious origin and clumsily handled in terms of clarifying his personality.) They have gained national attention through their crimes and Bonnie’s doggerel verse in the newspapers, and on their last ride together, they are like any fresh, country-healthy couple. When Hamer’s posse riddles their car with bullets, the twitchings of death are punctuated by a slow-camera glance at Bonnie’s blond hair cascading in an arc, and of Clyde rolling gently across the ground. This is not too much blood, and deep silence settles at the death of a legend.

Again, one must turn to reality: Bonnie and Clyde were ready for an ambush when they were killed on that country road in Louisiana, for both of them died holding guns. Bonnie had a machine gun in her lap, and Clyde was clutching a sawed-off shotgun as he drove. He had $507 on him and one lens was shot out of his colored glasses; Bonnie was wearing a red dress, red shoes, and a red-and-white hat, and it was discovered that she had a tattoo on her thigh. Over 167 bullets were pumped into the car, and nestled among the guns and ammunition in the back seat was a saxophone and some sheet music.

The legend clashes gently and movingly with the real. Arthur Penn’s backward glance is filled with beauty and affection for an era, and there is so much talent involved in this film that his Bonnie and Clyde will remain an outstanding piece of cinema art, recreating social history in terms of today’s acceptable myths. Above all, the mystery of Clyde Barrow and his woman accomplice remains intact. Warren Beatty has become an actor of undeniable importance with his performance here (an indelible moment, when, feelings hurt by Bonnie’s sharp tongue, he stands in a field with arms raised against his chest, fists ineffectually clenched), but one still wonders about Bonnie’s tattoo, and the lost stories of Clyde’s saxophone, sounding old tunes in those lonely Texas nights, ages ago.

—ALBERT JOHNSON

FUNNYMAN


The film that Funnyman calls most to mind is Godard’s Masculin/Feminin; it is Korty’s Funny/Sad. Like the French movie, its characters live in that hazardous zone between straight acting and straight existing. (Originally Korty planned to call the film The Act.) The central figure, Perry, is not only played by Peter Bonerz; to reverse the advertising slogans, he is Peter Bonerz. That is to say, the basic strategy of the script, which Korty
and Bonerz worked out jointly, was to capture Bonerz’s own existence within a framework of lightly dramatized episodes. Bonerz is a formidable character: inventive, charming, insecure, marvelously skillful at the offhand interpersonal turns that made him a leading performer in San Francisco’s improvisational satire club, “The Committee.” He is also an actor, and hence either less than human or doubly human. He travels with his internal coach, the interior director who calls his scenes, even his most intimate ones. He can’t stop acting; yet acting is his life, even when he becomes restive or even positively sick of it. His mixture of savoir faire, edginess, wryness, self-consciousness, is constantly turned to brilliant account, as in the ad-agency scene when he over-eagerly accepts criticisms of his commercials. This comic channelling of agony is characteristic of the film's cool, ironic, yet humane assessment of the human condition.

Funnyman is a loosely structured chronicle of Perry’s efforts to find himself—a series of often funny, often sad, sometimes sexy misadventures. He breaks up with his longstanding girlfriend, seduces a pretty but dumb secretary, is seduced by a pretty young dynamo on a rice diet. He wearily tries to make some money by inventing TV commercials. He attempts to escape the theatrical conventions of the club with an evening of his own devising; it doesn’t work. All this is narrated deftly, good-humor- edly. Handling his own camera as well as directing, Korty works closer to the characters, and relies more for his effects on cutting and score, than do most dialogue films in this country. In an excruciating windswept-barbecue scene, he is not afraid to employ a broadly comic device by cutting back and forth pointedly between men’s talk and women’s. In some of the film’s funniest scenes, those between Perry and the animator he collaborates with on the commercials, Korty’s photography creates a glumly magical world of glowing animation table, transmogrified gin bottle, hanging wires, gleaming reflections; the squeak of cleaning tissue becomes a mordant comment on commercial “creativity.” The breakfast scene with the secretary is, like the best of Mike and Elaine, a hilariously biting view of contemporary relations between the sexes, but it would not be comic without Korty’s gently disenchanted camerawork and David Schickele’s astute editing.

The method is, clearly, a demanding one, and most of all on the structural side. Since the film concerns a person’s relation with himself, Perry has used Perry’s narrating voice to establish a tone and continuity (mistakenly, I think, he has also put the girl’s voice on the track near the end). Funnyman begins with a leisurely dying fall, as Perry increasingly realizes that things are not well. It takes a brief, shaky, upward jump as he prepares his show, and then a sickening slide downward. This much of the film has the unnerving, almost embarrassing actuality of cinéma-vérité; the characters, the events, and the style all reinforce one another. From his crisis onward, as Perry leaves the city to collect himself in a nearby beach town, there is a certain creeping dramaturgy in the film—as was necessary, no doubt, if the film was to end rather than simply stop. (Godard resolved his similar problem in Masculin/Féminin with one of his handy off-screen strokes of fate.) Perry meets a beautiful, soulful girl; she shakes him up by her refusal to fall for his usual games; but she goes back to the city with him. Her seriousness has made him study serious drama (Faust!) but she stays with him at the very end, paradoxically, because of accidentally hearing one of his brain storming tapes for the commercials. The trouble is that the confrontation with the girl is sketchy
and lacks the electricity of the personal interaction in the body of the film. Hence the lyrical treatment of the girl and her life at Bolinas, although very beautiful, seems to come from Korty rather than through Perry.

Even with this deficiency in its ending, *Funnyman* is the nearest an American has yet come to the astonishing balance of actors and form that Godard has sometimes achieved. The contribution of Bonerz also reminds us that our small satirical theaters are now our only visible source of new comic talent; Bonerz and Alan Arkin are the funniest new actors to have graced the screen since Jack Lemmon.

—ERNEST CALLENBACH

### TO SIR, WITH LOVE

**Director and producer:** James Clavell. **Script by** Clavell from the novel by E. R. Braithwaite. **Photography:** Paul Beeson. **Music:** Ron Grainer.

James Clavell's *To Sir, with Love* is such a foolish, offensively simple-minded movie that it wouldn’t be worth mentioning if it didn’t mutilate an “important” subject—teaching the unteachable. The film takes place in a school in the London dock district; the kids are tough, from poor homes, mostly dropouts or rejects from other schools. To the new teacher the problems seem stupefying. Nothing he has been told to teach them is remotely related to what interests them; none of it concerns the world they’ve actually seen. The gimmick is that he’s a Negro, so he’s got the color barrier to face, as well as the generational barrier.

But he wins them over easily. He throws away the textbooks and decides to talk about “life, death, love, sex, rebellion. . . .” When I heard that list, I groaned, but the movie doesn’t bother trying to show what any of the discussions would sound like. Sir’s educational bombshell, as far as I could tell, involves his taking the class to the museum one day, and dribbling a few platitudes now and again: “Forgiveness is the gift of God”; “No man likes a slug for long”; “I think you should fight for what you believe.” Since he never gets beyond the introductory sentences, we have to accept a lot on faith. And the pretense that those milky aphorisms will make gentlemen of hoodlums may be what suburban audiences want to hear—but can even they believe it? Sidney Poitier, of course, is the suburban audience’s dream of a well-adjusted Negro; it’s another of his sweet, saintly, sexless performances. Sir tells the kids that his background is like theirs, but Poitier doesn’t look as if he’s ever been outside the Establishment. He gets angry once, but he’s outrageously prissy even then—he has no desires, no passions, no weaknesses. I still believe that Poitier’s a good actor, but he can’t keep playing these inhuman parts without compromising himself irrevocably.

Sir’s smooth conversion of the entire class is an insult to anyone who’s ever taught. He has a little resistance, for a while, from the chief hood, but he gives the kid one punch in the stomach, and the next day the boy has combed his hair, washed his clothes, and he winks at Sir from the back row. At the end they’ve all reformed, and are eager to work at the terrible jobs society will provide for them; they write a song to Sir and give him a present and some tears at the farewell party. The music isn’t bad in this movie, but little else sounds genuine. It’s a heartwarming movie for people who want to think that the harshest problems of the world are just waiting to be oozed away by Sir’s gentle-firm cooing of Sunday school treacle.

Robert Mulligan’s *Up the Down Staircase* isn’t really a good movie either, but it’s so much better than *To Sir with Love* that it’s monstrous to link them. This schoolteacher, Sylvia Barrett (Sandy Dennis), doesn’t convert the whole class; the happy ending comes when she reaches one student. The scenes between Miss Barrett and her class hood are excruciating, because she never gets through to him. There are no songs or farewell parties.