

## ARTS &amp; LETTERS

*Colley Cibber (1671–1757), a London playwright who played fop roles on stage, was also a fop in real life.*



correct way to take snuff.

At first, fops were objects of disdain. An essayist in *The Gentleman's Magazine* asked whether "any thing that is Noble or Brave can be expected from such Creatures, who, if they are not women, are at least hermaphrodites?" But as table manners, civility, and sanitation took on more importance towards the end of the 17th century, fops appeared in a different light. Once mere foils for rakish heroes, they became well-rounded characters sympathetically portrayed. For example, the dandy Clodio married an attractive heroine in Cibber's *The Fop's Fortune* (1700) without the customary repudiation of his foppish ways. While audiences might still laugh at the fop, they did not despise him.

Fops disappeared from the casts of new plays during the 18th century, yet the qualities they embodied reappeared in far more admirable characters in the sentimental stage dramas of the latter half of the century. Indeed, says Staves, "the so-called effeminacy of these old fops was an early if imperfect attempt at the refinement, civility, and sensitivity most of us would now say are desirable masculine [qualities]."

### *Of Art Films and Plastic Sharks*

"Fassbinder and the Bloomingdale's Factor" by Richard Grenier, in *Commentary* (Oct. 1982), American Jewish Committee, 165 East 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

Americans who regularly see foreign movies seem to believe that Europeans produce more intelligent, sensitive, and somehow "better" films than Hollywood does. Grenier, *Commentary's* movie critic, notes that

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U.S. viewers have unrealistic notions about the international film industry.

Only a tiny selection of foreign movies is distributed in this country. (Such "art films" accounted for one-half of one percent of U.S. film industry income in 1981.) Far more typical of the European cinema, Grenier says, are cops-and-robbers and adventure movies.

Indeed, across Europe, *American* films are most widely admired. Clint Eastwood, Paul Newman, and Robert Redford grace marquees all over Europe. In West Germany, Hollywood productions accounted for 55 percent of film revenues during 1980.

What accounts for the sophisticated American moviegoer's attitude toward European cinema? Grenier cites both the "Bloomingdale's factor"—the idea, inspired by designer imports featured at Manhattan's swank East Side department store, that "foreign is better"—and the biases of American critics.

He points to the critical praise lavished upon West Germany's Rainer Werner Fassbinder, director of *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979), *Lili Marleen* (1981), and some 40 other films, who died at age 36 in June 1982 of drug and alcohol abuse. Fassbinder and his *Neue Welle* (New Wave) cinema colleagues produced spectacular box-office failures at home, surviving only through Bonn's generous movie subsidy program, which sometimes even pays theater-owners to show films. Grenier describes Fassbinder's screen oeuvre as "an institutionalized amateur night"; the director did not even view the "rushes" of the scenes shot each day to take stock of his work.

Yet Fassbinder reigned on the international film festival circuit during the 1970s. In the United States, he rose to cult status among cosmopolitan moviegoers. The reason, Grenier suggests, was the "counter-culture flavor"—antimaterialistic, antibourgeois—of his works, which stamped them as "high art" in the eyes of the cinema elite.

Financial success in the film industry, muses Grenier, is a matter of sheer caprice, as the makers of *Jaws* (1975) can attest. They feared the public would never accept a plastic shark.

**OTHER NATIONS***Moscow's Sour Investments*

"Soviet Investment Policy: Unresolved Problems" by Boris Rumer, in *Problems of Communism* (Sept.-Oct. 1982), Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

Beginning in 1965, the Soviet Union adopted three ambitious five-year plans for economic growth; all three failed to meet Kremlin targets. The latest plan, unveiled in November 1981, is far more modest, but