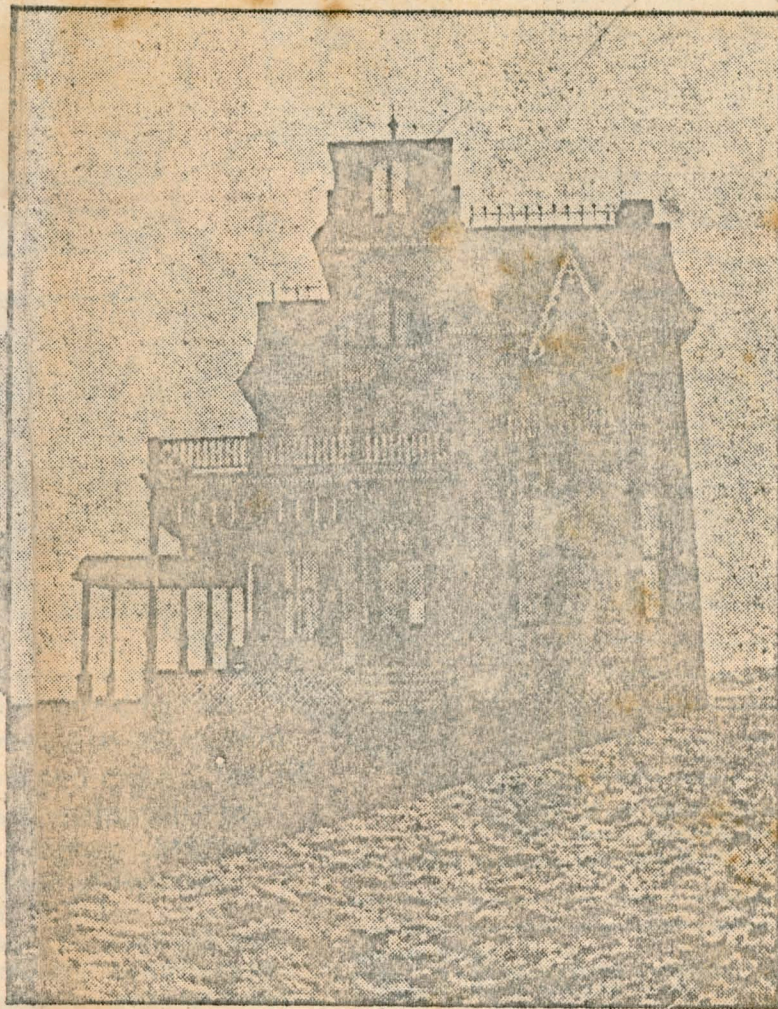
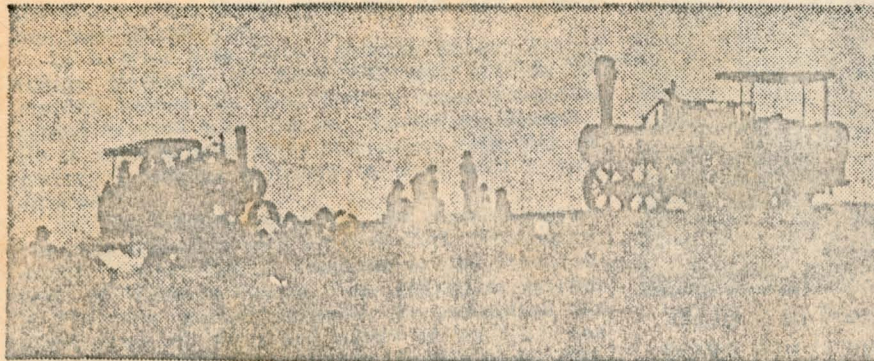


# THE CHIEF



He's a cinematographer.  
Don't you dare call him  
a cameraman!

By KATHLEEN CARROLL

Movie Critic of The News

**A**N ORNATE VICTORIAN mansion crowns a distant hill, looking impossibly out of place in the middle of the Texas Panhandle. Mist-covered wheat glimmers bright gold in the early morning sunshine. An invasion force of tractors grinds through the fields, momentarily defiling the natural beauty of this wondrous stretch of land. A frilly white parasol lies on the ground, a forlorn and foreboding sight.

"Days of Heaven" is a cornucopia stuffed with

nificant that long after one has forgotten director Terrence Malick's banal script and the stilted performances, these and other images remain fixed in the mind.

Watching the movie, one has the desire to freeze each frame so as to have time to linger over and truly appreciate the breathtaking panoramas. Perhaps, it is, as one wag put it, a pity that "Days of Heaven" can't be placed on a coffee table.

Still, it is not the only recent movie where the total "look" seems more important than plot substance. In "Comes a Horseman," Colorado's Wet Mountain valley becomes almost a full-fledged character. It is photographed with such reverence and such loving care. The skies are gray and the land itself is that emerald green color that is usually seen only in Ire-

land. The very sight of oil profiteers blasting away at its serene surface is enough to make one wince in pain.

Ingmar Bergman's "Autumn Sonata" is if anything made more memorable because of the tightly framed, incredibly penetrating closeups of a pinched-faced Liv Ullmann and the lined, but still radiantly lovely face of Ingrid Bergman. The visual atmosphere is purposely gloomy and stark so nothing detracts from the highly emotional showdown between these two superb actresses.

If the movies of the last three months indicate anything at all (aside from the paucity of good scripts), it is that the cinematographer is playing an increasingly important role in the collaborative pro-

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# The Chief

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cess of moviemaking. Men like Nestor Almendros (he is responsible for "the look" not only of "Days of Heaven," but of Eric Rohmer's "Percival"), Gordon Willis ("Comes a Horseman" and "Interiors"), and Sven Nyquist ("Autumn Sonata") are already being treated like superstars.

At the location site of his newest movie, the ground floor of Bloomingdale's, Woody Allen (who claims that he picked this spot because it's his favorite place for girl watching) patiently waits for Gordon Willis to set up the lighting, smiling at him with open admiration. Willis is clearly in control for the moment and Woody jokes that his crew ignores him most of the time.

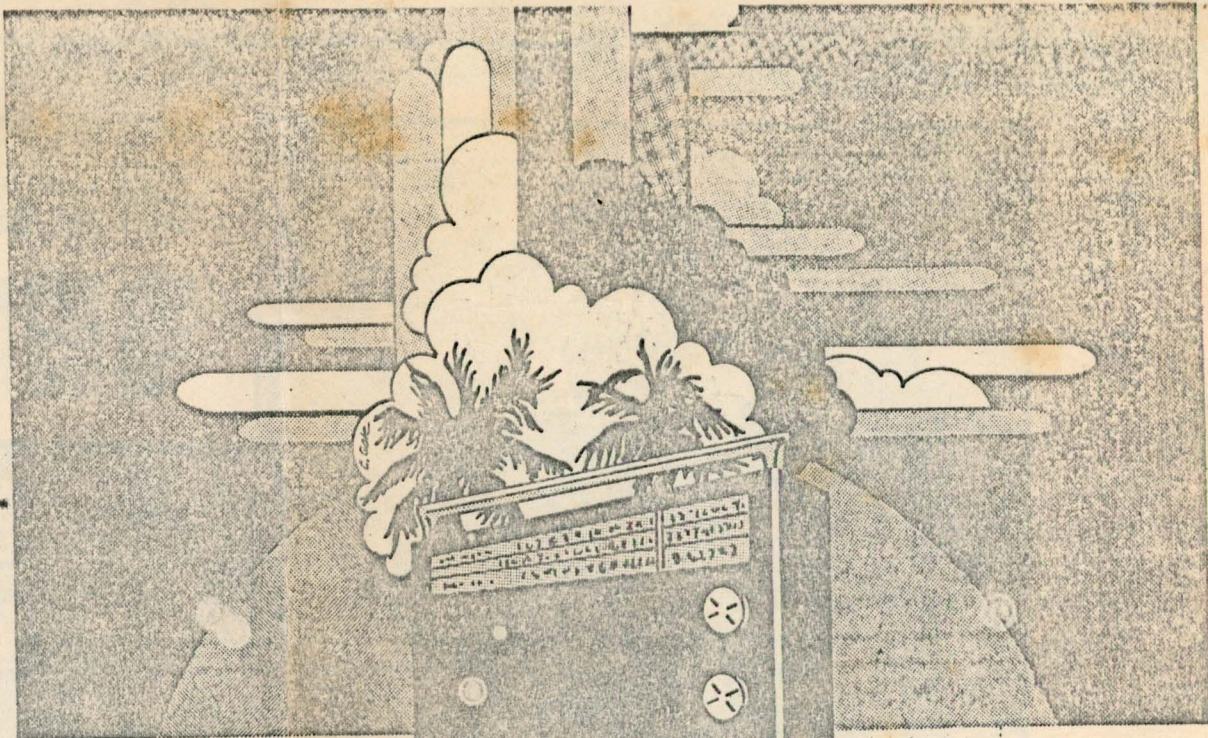
In a West Side bistro, director Robert Benton speaks glowingly of Almendros and of how he couldn't believe his good fortune when Almendros agreed to work with him on "Kramer vs. Kramer." He is even happier when Almendros tells this reporter, "I will go anywhere to work with a good director."

But the ultimate proof that the cinematographer has truly arrived is what my New York Times counterpart, Vincent Canby, describes as the "beatification" of Willis in one of those exhaustive profiles in The New Yorker magazine. To understand the glorification of Willis and others of his kind, one must know a little bit about the function of the cinematographer.

First of all, a cinematographer does not operate the camera. That is strictly the cameraman's job. What he does do is to help the director design the picture, to impose a particular style or visual atmosphere by working with certain color tones, contrasts and shapes. (Willis himself prefers to work with subdued colors as witnessed by his impressive contributions to both "The Godfather" and "The Godfather Part II.") It is he who fleshes out the director's dream, enhances his vision and, in many cases, improves upon it, all of which means that he and the director must be able to work in close tandem and to feed off each other's imaginations.

The newly exalted positions of these three brilliantly gifted men Almendros, Willis and Nyquist, is somewhat disturbing, however. Ideally, the way a movie is photographed should hardly be noticed at all and the camerawork should never call attention to itself.

The fact that everyone is paying more attention these days to the photography is all too sadly due to the fact that the majority of today's movies have little or nothing to say and the cinematographers are forced to try to compensate for that lack.



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