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## A Thinking Man's Movie?

The film, *On the Beach*, which was unveiled 17 December in 18 cities covering all continents except Antarctica, concludes with close-ups of new-love found (Gregory Peck and Ava Gardner) and abiding-love reaffirmed (Anthony Perkins and Donna Anderson, a newcomer), but it does not have a happy ending. In fact, it ends with nothing less than the atomic death of the world. Based on Nevil Shute's best-selling novel, the film was produced and directed by Stanley Kramer, who has a reputation for tackling controversial subjects. A group of Americans, Australians, and Britons await in Australia the fatal radiation resulting from a nuclear war that has wiped out the rest of mankind.

What the story does is explore how people would behave during the final months of existence in the last niche of life on earth. Its finding is that people would behave much as they have always behaved. They would continue working at their places of employment; they would go away for the weekend if such was their custom. Even when lining up at government stations to receive suicide pills to hasten death, once the first symptoms of radiation sickness appeared, they would conduct themselves in orderly fashion.

The story does not pretend to explain how a group of nations came to oppose each other with automatic weapons of total destruction, although, at one point, a scientist (Fred Astaire, also, in a sense, a newcomer) says the immediate cause of war probably was an accident: someone misread a dial. Nor does the story seek to fix responsibility among scientists, government leaders, or ordinary people for the circumstances that made such an accident possible.

Not so long ago George Orwell presented us with a rather different look into the future. Such is the pace of events, however, that where the theme of *1984* is the end of man spiritually, the theme of *On the Beach* is the end of man physically—and the date of this happening is moved closer by a generation. And where *1984* is a plea to take the care necessary to preserve freedom, *On the Beach* is a plea to take the care necessary to survive.

The message of the film comes through. In the course of two hours and 13 minutes the audience attends to such ideas as that of a city deserted because all of its inhabitants are dead in their beds, and of a baby that must be fed and changed until the day when it gets a suicide pill of the dose recommended for infants. These ideas are powerful and the viewer is much affected, yet he leaves the theater with the feeling that he has been moved more by what he has brought to the film than by what the performance itself accomplished.

Staged against a background of atomic death, but making no real connection with it, are the postures and attitudes that have been recorded on celluloid so many times before. The scene is new but the action is familiar. Gregory Peck, the commander of a nuclear submarine, and Ava Gardner, a woman of the world, meet, are attracted, love, then must part. When last we see them, Mr. Peck is taking his ship to sea, noble yet sexy, while watching from the shore, Miss Gardner is fighting back the tears, sexy yet noble.—J.T.