

Lynch Town

Nowhere in **THE CHASE** is the dogged pursuit of surface significance more apparent than at the end, when a corrupt Texas town has finally settled down after an orgiastic night of lawlessness. The enlightened sheriff, Marlon Brando, has brought in his quarry, Robert Redford, a decent and troubled boy named Bubber whose escape from prison gave the town a bogus excuse for its rampage.

As Brando and Redford stagger up the town-hall steps at dawn and it seems as if justice may finally be done, a citizen steps forward with a gun in his hand and executes the prisoner on the spot. Director Arthur Penn has staged the moment deliberately as a Ruby-Oswald tableau. He clearly intends it to be a terminal comment on violence begot by violence.

Truncated: But what, exactly, is this comment? Where is the parallel? Is it supposed to represent law à la Texas? Is it supposed to suggest that Oswald, too, was innocent? Or was it conceived as an all-purpose symbol that sensitive people would immediately associate with mob violence, lynchings, prejudice and the forces of anarchy that always lurk within a democracy? Whatever the intention, the result is a truncated climax with a wholly gratuitous resemblance to transcendent reality.

"The Chase" constantly fobs off sensationalism for significance. See the

naughty wife-switchers and two-bit bawds in action? It may look like "Peyton Place" but it is actually a study of decaying folkways in the contemporary West. "Folks don't seem to think much of married people changin' partners these days," says wise old Henry Hull, whom Penn propels on a stroll through the streets like some stage manager in search of "Our Town."

See the bullies beating up Brando? It may look like just another Heinz catsup knockabout with Brando playing patsy again, but it is actually a demonstration of how justice can be punned in a town sold out by greed.

Blubbing: Schizoid in purpose—tease the masses and please the egg-heads—"The Chase" is also schizoid in technique. A few performances are very good: James Fox's wealthy young blade Brando's sheriff, Redford's lonely long-distance runner, Robert Duvall's timorous husband. A few are more or less adequate: Janice Rule's town tease, Angie Dickinson's sheriff's wife. A few are horrid, or horridly directed: Jane Fonda's tart with a sub-deb accent, E.G. Marshall's purblind banker, Martha Hyer's lush and Miriam Hopkins' blubbing Bubber's mother.

Penn indulges his fondness for automobile junkyards, nocturnal apocalypses and strolling narrators, all of which he previously essayed in "Mickey One," yet rarely manages to catch any feeling of period or place as an antidote to the antiseptic settings of the studio back lot. Lillian Hellman's screenplay, derived from a novel and a play by Horton Foote, exhumes a whole potter's field of banalities such as the sweet old Negro plowman saying: "A man born to love a farm, he ain' got no place to go when it's gone." The worst of Miss Hellman's script, in concert with the worst of Penn's direction, yields scene after scene that seems to speak volumes when it is only whispering sour nothings.