

"Just their teacher," I said. She asked me what I taught, and when she learned it was about film, she told me that her "...ex-ex-ex husband..." was a famous producer. She told me the films her ex ("...and I do mean ex...") had produced. They were famous films, but I'm almost certain that another friend named Arnold Koppelson produced them.

Plus, she said, "...he's producing a health spa and a resort in the

Philippines..." She told me several more times that he was her ex, and then she asked me if I lived nearby.

"On the slum part of Malibu Road," I said.

"Well, I live in the Colony, and maybe you'd like to come over for a drink."

It was quarter of two in the morning. "Thanks," I said. "We'll do it another time."

She preceded me down Malibu Road

in her jeep. Surprise! She didn't live in the Colony at all, but in a far more modest home, certainly worth no more than two million dollars. So I was right to go home alone after all.

In my grocery bag the clerk had stuffed a flyer for something called "Global Cooperation for a Better World." It advertised a national premiere event at UCLA, without specifying what it was.

On the flyer was a list of sponsors, and I'm not kidding, on the list were

Fred Segal, a noted couturier to the young, rich, and tasteless here, Soleil Moon Frye, the star of a TV show called "Punky Brewster," Mother Teresa, Jimmy Carter, Lloyd Bridges, and Jack Lemmon.

Just as I was falling asleep, the phone rang. It was Mimi, calling from La Jolla. "I saw these incredibly cute shoes, only they're flats, and I just wondered what you think about flats..."

It was a normal day. □

## THE TALKIES



### WOMEN AND MORE WOMEN

by Bruce Bawer

Based loosely on a real event, *The Accused* tells the story of a young waitress named Sarah Tobias (Jodie Foster), who one night walks into The Mill, a white-trash bar in Washington state, and finds herself being raped by three strange men on a pinball machine. Sarah's not the most respectable type—she lives in a trailer with a dope dealer, talks tough, dresses provocatively, and was drinking and smoking pot at the time of the rape—and so the prosecuting attorney, deputy D.A. Kathryn Murphy (Kelly McGillis), decides that rape convictions will be hard to secure and makes an out-of-court settlement at a reduced charge. Sarah—who wanted the crime officially recognized as a rape, and herself certified as a victim—is furious, and feels betrayed by Kathryn. So frustrated is she that when she is taunted in a shopping-mall parking lot by one of the bar patrons who witnessed her shame and who urged the rapists on, she rams his pickup with her car, sending both of them to the hospital. Kathryn feels that this development is her fault, and consequently puts her career in jeopardy by bringing a precedent-setting suit: she takes three of the rape witnesses to court on a charge of egging the rapists on. Finally, Sarah gets a chance to tell her story and to be recognized as a victim.

In many ways this is a very conventional movie. The formula could hardly be more familiar: we open with a crime and end with a trial, and in be-

tween we watch the victim and prosecutor work their way through mutual suspicion and learn gradually to trust and understand one another. There is little doubt as to what the final verdict will be. If the film nonetheless feels vivid and original, and even quite powerful at some points, it is because Tom Topor has written a solid script, Jonathan Kaplan has directed it expertly, and the cast—especially Miss Foster—has enacted it with wit and sensitivity. Sarah's story feels *real*.

This naturalism is even more of a triumph because the film, though it

doesn't come across as a shrill tract in sexual politics, has a strong polemical bent. When you think about it afterward you're surprised to realize how effectively you've been manipulated. Indeed, it may not be till you try to describe *The Accused* to a friend, and realize that it is next to impossible to do so without dipping into feminist rhetoric ("victimization," "sisterhood," "solidarity," "consciousness raising," etc.), that you'll see how subtly the filmmakers have faked you into buying a nightmarish view of the relations between men and women—relations

which, though the director and writer are both men, are observed entirely from the women's perspective. Men are regarded here less as opponents in some frothy Tracy-and-Hepburn-style battle of the sexes than as threatening figures who, whether friends or lovers or strangers, could at any moment turn into attackers. Every man, in short, is a potential rapist. Even Kathryn's fellow lawyers at the D.A.'s office talk about Sarah's case in a manner that is subtly but chillingly reminiscent of the ignorant, aggressive creeps at The Mill. The film seeks to show, in incidental ways, how men's images of women are fed by everything around them: at The Mill, in the distant background, we see a close-up of a sexy pair of lips on a TV commercial; the pinball machine itself is called SLAM DUNK and is illustrated by a picture of a curvaceous blonde stuffed into a basketball hoop. And the director slips in images of violent sports (Kathryn and her fellow lawyers discuss legal strategy at a hockey game, where the men explode with excitement when something savage happens on the ice; the TV at The Mill broadcasts a boxing match), as if to imply a connection between men's enjoyment of these sports and the inclination to commit an act of rape.

The idea here is that it's women against men, and Kathryn's big achievement is her recognition, finally, that her principal bond is not to her fellow lawyers (all male) at the D.A.'s office but to her fellow woman, Sarah. When at the beginning of the film she is assailed for her insensitivity by Sarah's rape counselor, Kathryn barks:



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"I'm not a rape counselor. I'm a prosecutor and I have to make a rape case." By the end of the film she's realized that, hey, it's part of *every* woman's obligation to be a kind of rape counselor. *The Accused* offers women the opportunity to say to themselves, "Men! They're horrible!", and it offers men who have never committed, contemplated, or encouraged rape the opportunity to enjoy their moral superiority to the vermin who attack Sarah. The film's offense is that, in the course of indicting men who regard women as mere hunks of flesh, it ends up suggesting that most men are themselves sexist beasts.

(P.S. to Mr. Kaplan: Next time you direct a film in Canada that's supposed to be set in the U.S., don't show a sign in the background which reads *Media Centre*.)

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"Can a court tell us how we should raise our children?"

The trailer for Diane Keaton's new film, *The Good Mother*, based on the 1986 novel by Sue Miller, implies that this question—read in voice-over by a deep, solemn male voice—has something to do with the content of the film. But the question that this movie actually addresses is: "Should a man who couldn't give his ex-wife an orgasm be allowed to have custody of their six-year-old daughter?"

Let me explain. The daughter in question is Molly (Asia Vieira), your typical cute, bright movie kid. Her mother is Anna Dunlop (Miss Keaton), a piano teacher and lab assistant who lives with Molly on the second floor of a small, shabby house in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her father is Brian Dunlop (James Naughton), a sober, affluent businessman who lives in D.C. and of whom we get the briefest of glimpses—just enough to support Anna's contention that he's a prude. Anna herself, mind you, was once like Brian—she was, she tells us in voice-

over while we watch scenes of her own childhood, a "shy" girl, a "conformist." But the influence of her cigarette-smoking, boy-chasing Aunt Babe—a teenager who dismissed Anna's conventional parents and grandparents as "assholes"—was critical. "In her presence," Anna tells us, "it just seemed as if everything was possible. . . . I wanted to be like her, wanted to take risks and be passionate." And yet, presumably in thrall to her own conventional impulses, she married Brian, and stayed married for seven years. "Sex between us was nothing," Anna says. What's worse, Brian—the wimp!—didn't *realize* it was nothing. They divorced, and Anna built her life around Molly, whom she adores.

So the situation stands until Anna meets Leo Cutter (Liam Neeson), a passionate, earthy Irish sculptor whose apartment is full of pieces with names like "Celtic Twilight" and "Drunken Boat." (Remember Alan Bates in *An Unmarried Woman*? Same idea.) Their first time in bed, Anna confesses, "I don't think I'm very good at it." "We can fix that," Leo says generously, and proceeds to give Anna her first orgasm. They fall in love, and he becomes a fixture around Anna's house and a friend to Molly. But this happy menage self-destructs when Brian refuses to return Molly (the child having been shipped off to D.C. to visit him and his new wife) and sues for custody on the grounds that Leo—in accordance with Anna's "relaxed and natural" household rules about nudity and such—has permitted Molly to touch his genitals.

Yes, another movie that ends up in court. "I tried to raise Molly freely," Anna tells her lawyer, Mr. Muth (Jason Robards). "I didn't want her to be ashamed of her body and think of it as something to hide. . . . We had been naked around her, it's true, but it was all part of this world Leo had opened up to me where I was beautiful and he was beautiful and Molly was part of our life and our love." Anna emphasizes to Mr. Muth that she was frigid with Brian but not with Leo, and that this revolutionary sexual breakthrough "was good for Molly."

This last comment is typical of Anna. The truth is that while Anna thinks she's interested in what's good for her little girl—and while the director (Leonard Nimoy, of all people) and screenwriter (Michael Bortman) seem to think so too—the girl's well-being consistently takes second place to Anna's karma. When Molly's taken away, Anna's upset not for Molly's sake but for her own; the child is an integral part of the life she's made for herself, the identity she's forged. Molly, as she's told Leo, is her "commitment"—the point being not that she feels an innate, ineradicable sense of obligation to the

child, but rather that Molly has come in handy as an organizing principle in her life, and that she has accordingly made a conscious decision to make Molly's needs a priority. But after the court decision goes against her, and Molly seems miserable living with her father, Anna rejects her lawyer's advice to use this misery as the basis for an appeal: "I didn't want to use her misery, I wanted to end it." The logic here is striking; Anna seems to be admitting that she's been "using" Molly all along, that her legal attempt to recover custody did not represent an attempt to end Molly's misery but to preserve her own happy little world of orgasms and purposeful motherhood.

In any case, by the end of the film it is extremely clear that Molly is not the point—if in fact she ever really was. Shorn of both daughter and lover, Anna tells her grandmother, "I'm starting all over again." Molly might just as well be a piece of community property whose loss she has to accept in order to (in the popular phrase) get on with her life. What preoccupies her, at the end, is not whether Molly has the best of all possible family lives but whether she herself is a "good mother." As a wise critic wrote in a review of Sue Miller's novel a couple of years ago, "Anna seems less concerned about what happened to Molly while in her care, and about how it may have affected the child emotionally, than with the question of how the whole sordid incident reflects on *her*. (Thus the book's title.)"

Yet the movie is considerably easier to take than the novel. Anna's grandmother (beautifully played by the radiant Teresa Wright) is more congenial here, Leo is less slimy and obnoxious (in the book he collects pornographic pictures and is "fascinated with the inability of painting, print, to convey a sense of the pornographic in the way photography did"), and Anna herself (mainly because she's played by our Diane) is more sympathetic. In the novel, Anna was pretty humorless; Keaton has eliminated that problem, though she doesn't do much to convince us that Anna is an especially loving mother. In the scenes between her and Molly, which are meant to establish the closeness of their bond, the child might just as well be a favorite niece, for all the intimacy that the scenes communicate. It should destroy us when Molly is taken from Anna; it doesn't. In fact, there's very little warmth in *The Good Mother*; only Elmer Bernstein (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Great Santini*), who wrote the musical score, seems to have understood completely what this story required of him. □

<sup>1</sup>My review of Sue Miller's novel has been reprinted in my new book, *Diminishing Fictions* (Graywolf Press, \$18.95).



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# BOOK REVIEWS

In the opening scene of Irina Ratushinskaya's memoir, she is being taken to her husband's Kiev apartment in a KGB black Volga. Right away, we know we are dealing with a hardened *zek* ("prisoner," from the Russian *zaklyuchennyi*): she does not allow herself a speck of euphoria at being told she is released. Not until she crosses the threshold of her home; not until the KGB man is gone.

She has reason to be apprehensive: only three months earlier, the KGB staged a sham release, trying to get her to sign a clemency plea. So for now, she concentrates on the October scenery, the turning leaves, the buildings that went up while she was away. She plays the Tchaikovsky First Concerto in her head, as she maintains a polite exchange with the KGB man: modern sculpture, Bulgakov, the anti-alcohol campaign. Then they arrive, and it all comes true: the apartment, Mama, nieces, the husband is on his way, the family dog is leaping in the air. Miss Ratushinskaya politely thanks the KGB man for the lift and offers him a cup of coffee. And, just as politely, he declines. "He really leaves. I hope that a few transgressions will be forgiven him, come Judgment Day, for declining this cup of coffee."

There, in a nutshell, are the main features of Miss Ratushinskaya's book: cool, unblinking tenacity, achieved through the 24-hour-a-day escape into the depths of her self; and an overwhelming Christian desire that God find something in her torturers' files to forgive them.

In 1983 Miss Ratushinskaya, a 28-year-old poet, was arrested by the Soviet authorities. She was charged with "anti-Soviet agitation" and sentenced to seven years of hard labor plus five years of exile. In 1986, on the eve of the Reykjavik summit, she was released, put on a plane, and flown to London. Her memoir, *Grey Is the Color of Hope*, covers in minute detail all that happened to her in these three-and-a-half years.

Chronologically, Miss Ratushinskaya's memoir begins with the day she departs for the camp and ends with the homecoming: not a word of the events that led to the arrest. The strict linear format may be intentional, or it may

## GREY IS THE COLOR OF HOPE

Irina Ratushinskaya/Alfred A. Knopf/\$18.95

David Gurevich

stem from the illusion, often found among dissidents, that the world is well informed of their struggle. Those less prone to take things on faith will want more details of her activities; in that sense, she is preaching to the converted. Yet those willing to suspend doubt—the majority, I suspect—will find her concentrated, sometimes claustrophobic approach extremely effective.

Miss Ratushinskaya does not attempt to place her experience in a historical context by cramming it with references to her predecessors, from Dostoevsky on. The one memorable exception is Solzhenitsyn. On her way to the camp, she is put into a *Stolypin* (freight car) and issued her ration of bread and herring. She gratefully remembers Solzhenitsyn's advice in *The Gulag Archipelago* not to eat the fish, as it would cause unbearable thirst. This is a side of a literary master-

piece that we seldom think about: it can be used as a survival manual, too.

In the Mordovian camp of Barashevo, Miss Ratushinskaya finds herself, together with half a dozen other "politicals," in a tiny subdivision they call the "Small Zone," away from the "regular" criminals (the translator does not make it clear that *zona* is a standard Russian term for camp). Life in the Small Zone is without physical comforts, which is to be expected in a camp. One might get used to the diet of *skilly* (watery gruel); to the paper-thin prison uniform in the brutal Mordovian winter; to the routine of sewing seventy pairs of industrial gloves ("productive activity") per prisoner per day. But much harder to endure is the authorities' constant warfare against the *zeks*. As Lt. Podust (nicknamed "Ilse Koch," after the infamous SS guard at the Ravensbruck camp) explains:

"It's not my job to prove to you that you are wrong. I don't have the education or the words for that. My job here is much easier: to make your life here so miserable you'll never want to come back." And later, dismayed at accusations of sadism: "I don't make you lick my boots as though you were common criminals."

Camp life is never boring. For example, the authorities claim that inmates are entitled to a fixed ration of salt. Thus every bit of food comes oversalted, which leads, in the absence of other nutrients, to body swelling. The inmate is entitled to thirty-three grams of meat and forty-five grams of fish a day (cooked), but no weight scales are allowed, apparently with good reason. Inmates fight back, returning the oversalted food and filing complaints.

Is there any point in complaining? Yes and no: nobody reads complaints per se, but if they turn into a flood, the camp authorities may be accused of "insufficient re-education effort." An occasional point is won: *skilly* without maggots, for example, or even an allowed family visit.

The law provides for only three visits a year, and more are canceled than allowed. But when one does come to pass, the whole barracks takes part in preening you up, a ceremony described in the detail normally reserved for wedding preparations. The prize: two hours across the table, with the guard between the two of you to prevent touching or talking on a "security-related" subject. If your husband is a human-rights activist, and you're a *zek*, this means you have to use code for just about everything. What a goldmine two hours of allusions and suppressed feelings would be for a heated poetic imagination! But the poet stands back, and the hardened *zek* takes over; Miss Ratushinskaya holds herself in control: "or I'll start howling my eyes out." When it is time to part, "this is no embrace, it is a spasm of pain." And yet, even in the midst of this torment, she gets to notice the tear in the matron's eye, as the latter looks away to allow them the last-minute hug.

But more often, visits are canceled under any pretext—wearing a cross; singing psalms (prisoners have to pretend they're pop songs); walking with their hair uncovered—and the battle rages on: inmates go on strike, or on hunger strike. The latter, especially the



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