

## Polynesian Postcards from Dr. Freud

***The Bounty*; Directed by Roger Donaldson; Screenplay by Robert Bolt; Orion Pictures.**

by Stephen Macaulay

A number of people in the movie reviewing business are busy commenting on whether the team of Anthony Hopkins and Mel Gibson in 1984 measures up to Charles Laughton and Clark Gable in 1935 and/or Trevor Howard and Marlon Brando in 1962. This smacks of handicapping midget tag-team wrestling matches, so let's ignore that whole issue. A more provocative matter is whether anyone—besides Messrs. Hopkins, Gibson, director Roger Donaldson, screenwriter Robert Bolt, and, last but certainly not least, moneyman Dino DeLaurentis—needs another go through of the bad times on the *H.M.S. Bounty*. A full-page ad for the latest version includes the line "After 200 years, the truth behind the legend," which is slightly disingenuous, given that the mutiny took place in 1787. However, let that pass, too. The gist of the statement implies (A) the previous films on the subject weren't the *real thing* and (B) people in 1984 want the nitty gritty—or that *someone*, besides the before-mentioned figures, cares. As for point A, it's true that the '35 and '62 movies were based on a set of adventure books while the latest is based on *Captain Bligh and Mr. Christian*, a 1972 revisionist history by Richard Hough that, apparently, makes William Bligh's surname something other than metonymy for "bastard captain." Since the British navy didn't clap Bligh in irons and break his sword (or whatever they did) for the contemps surrounding the appropriation of his ship, it's probably true that Bligh wasn't as awful as previously depicted and was simply as unpopular as all supervisors are at any given point in time—though most bosses don't have their subordinates spend a month in the middle of a deadly maelstrom. Making

coffee or running errands are the contemporary complaints. And while on the subject of the contemporary scene, point B can be addressed: people aren't concerned with historical exactitude but with the style of the leading men, which is why so much ink has been invested in comparisons. When it comes to accuracy, let's face it: it's hard to imagine that the bona fide Mr. Christian was as handsome as his 20th-century Australian interpreter—but now I'm getting into the midget wrestling ring.

"Call me Fletch." Had *The Bounty* been made as a first-person recounting rather than through flashbacks from Bligh's point of view (which leaves some questions of cinematic veracity ["the truth" says the ad] hanging in mid-air: where did the post-mutiny scenes showing the *Bounty* come from?), this would have made a resonant opening line. The character is generally designated "Mr. Christian" and intimately addressed as "Fletcher," but the diminutive "Fletch" captures more of the sense of the man—the *young* man. When Fletch appears on the screen for the first time, he is in a London club, betting, along with his soused pals, about whether one of their colleagues, who is comatose, is merely in his cups or dead. All are having a boisterously good time. Had Fletch's friend William Bligh not arrived and taken him away from the revels with an offer that would put Fletch on a cruise on the ocean as an officer, it's likely that Fletch and his cronies would have left the club and gone cruising for some wenches. Although the guys would have had to use a carriage instead of a Z-28 Camaro for transportation, their ends wouldn't be any different than those sought by yuppies who hang out in fern bars.

Being well-set and unencumbered, it's not surprising that Fletch signed on the *Bounty*. When the ship entered the harbor at Tahiti, he must have felt as if he had died and gone to rake's heaven: hundreds of savage, bronzed teenage

girls without whalebone corsets or a touch of cellulite were there, *anxious* to greet the sailors. It's hard to overstate the shock that this must have caused to the libido of Fletch. Those of us who spent our Wonder years with copies of *National Geographic* know that most of the natural beauties shown therein were, by and large, *very* large, the products of too much starchy poi or something. It was almost as if only chance brought an occasional native into the frame who didn't weigh in at 15 stone. *The Bounty* required no *Star Wars*-style special effects; the money must have been used for selecting and securing these lissome extras. Before this starts sounding like notes on mud wrestling, let me simply state that Fletch had arrived at a place in the late 18th century that a late-20th-century Club Med hasn't topped.

Lieutenant (yes, not Capt.) Bligh was a career naval man (who went to sea at age 12) and he had a wife. He had been to Tahiti before, so his blood pressure probably didn't rise quite as high as that of Fletch when the *Bounty* pulled in to the harbor. Bligh had a sense of duty: to his command, to his wife, and to what he—and many others of his time—perceived as his civilization (and all that it entails). The Bligh in *The Bounty* is not presented—at least not initially—as some sort of hard-nobbed stick in the mud, but as a man who has a sense of humor, an understanding of the weaknesses of the flesh, and an appreciation of a higher authority. While Fletch is out cavorting and going native Bligh is not organizing a one-man antilibertine league.

But the movie breaks down primarily because writer Bolt and director Donaldson are unable to come to grips with the fact that Bligh must have been motivated by and subservient to duty. Instead, implicit—overtly implicit, if something can be so—in the film is the idea that Bligh was driven to be nasty because of homosexual desires. As Fletch's fires blaze in the

tropical sunshine. Bligh does a slow, superhot burn. We see Fletch and his belusted splashing in the Pacific, then a quick cut to Bligh in his cabin sweating, wearing a glazed look, while the electronic music pounds like something in a commercial for an analgesic. Then it's Fletch between the sheets . . . Bligh sweating and pounding . . . Fletch playing a percussion instrument while his babe struts her stuff . . . Bligh's cabin becomes more confining . . . and so on. Bligh is driven to taking what are presented as

Caligulaian measures: he insists that shore leave end and that preparations are made to get underway. Then, abomination of abominations, he actually forces the men to resume their mission, which wouldn't have been all that bad, since the next stop was the Caribbean. It *seems* as if Bligh gave the odious orders because he desired Fletch, and lest the psychological disorder of Bligh is overlooked, the lieutenant begins having a filth fixation (manifested by his demands that the decks be swabbed clean), becomes what some paperback

Freudians might call an anal-oriented personality. Admittedly, Fletch is shown as being somewhat out of sorts when he decides to take command of the *Bounty* in order to pick up where he left off with his bathing beauty, but his impulses are presented as being "natural" and therefore with-it, while Bligh's are "civilized" and consequently square, bogue, or whatever a sense of obligation was designated by the 18th-century coffeehouse cads. While *The Bounty* may, unlike its predecessors, be a blow for the name of Bligh, it is a back-handed blow that he takes on the chin. Manfully. □

## Notables

### *Of Skepticism, Saktism, and Sensualism*

For centuries the West has marveled at the sheer opulence of Far Eastern goods: the exotic spices, the rich silks, the intricate tapestries, and the fabulously carved woods, jades, and ivories. But, having once acquired its major religious traditions from the Westernmost of Asian lands, Westerners were unimpressed by the other Asian patterns of belief and conduct—Hindu, Islamic, Taoist, Confucian, Buddhist, and Shinto. Hence, while eagerly importing the material goods of the East, the West governed the consumption of those goods within a Judeo-Christian understanding not found in Asia, defining the temporal creation as a limited but real blessing, not an illusory *maya*, and inculcating a religious devotion in which the worshiper demonstrated love for God through service to fellow mortals, including unbelievers. Indeed, in return for the Orient's fabrics and fragrances, Westerners long did all they could to export not only their superior methods of industry and agriculture but also their approach to God, which they likewise regarded as incalculably superior.

However, for at least a century Western elites have offered little in return for Eastern fragrances and fabrics except technology and skepticism. Only this collapse of Western religion could have made the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, a richly textured 12th-century Persian

poem filled with themes of doubt, hedonism, pessimism, and world-weariness, far more popular in Edward Fitzgerald's 1859 English translation than it ever was in original. Similarly, only a failure of Western faith could ever have given the sensual Arab-Oriental fiction of Salman Rushdie its phenomenally favorable reception among American and British sophisticates. In his latest work, *Shame* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York), Mr. Rushdie has followed in Fitzgerald-Khayyám's footsteps, as he himself announces in an early chapter. The name of his protagonist is Omar Khayyám Shakil, and two of his major themes are the Khayyamian ones of the nonexistence of God (Islamic as well as Christian) and the concomitant repudiation of all "puritanical" restraints upon sensual indulgence. But whereas the atheistic epicureanism of Fitzgerald-Khayyám was bitterly languid, Rushdie's wild, complex, and mesmerizing fantasy is informed by a deracinated sense of *Sharam*, "Shame," expressed through violent, destructive, and demonic energy, most fully personified in the fantastic, bloodthirsty woman-Beast who becomes Omar Khayyám's wife. This is Shiva without Vishnu. One hopes that Year's vision of a brutal monster "slouching toward Bethlehem to be born" was an empty prophecy, while a sensible observer can only be scornfully contemptuous of the many New York critics who are, without a rational sense of shame, now making straight the way before Rushdie's Beast. □

## Lightness & Lard

***Les Compères*: A film by Francis Veber; European International Distributors, Ltd.**

Perhaps it was in retaliation for those fried potatoes that are served up in little bags and cartons at McDonald's that they did it, that they performed an act which is so horribly outlandish. The French, those in question, have always been a very proud people; nowadays, the word *French* in English seems to be nothing more than a prefix for the word *fries*, and all because of the activities that go on below the golden arches that have sprouted up throughout the nominally civilized world. What an insult to a people who were once most concerned with linguistic purity. So, in response, it seems, the French recently awarded Jerry Lewis—comedian, actor, writer, director, and star of readily forgotten films including *Cinderella*, *The Patsy*, and *Boeing Boeing*—the Legion of Honor. While the French, at least according to American news reports, genuinely admire Jerry, it is inconceivable that they are sincere; there must be a method to their madness. The extraordinarily high honor was, no doubt, bestowed on Jerry so that Americans would be *forced* to respect the man for his cinematic cutups, not simply his charitable ac-

part of American policy in dealing with troubled Caribbean and Latin countries. But since 1934 an ominous new force has militantly made itself felt in the Western Hemisphere. The American army may not be the best instrument to make our neigh-

bors into ideal parliamentary states, but without military measures it will be perilously difficult to prevent the Soviet Union from extracting the total subservience of yet more millions of people to communist imperialism. □

## WASTE OF MONEY

### Regressive Progress

**David Ritchie: *The Binary Brain: Artificial Intelligence in the Age of Electronics***; Little, Brown; Boston.

**Barbara Bartholomew: *The Great Gradepoint Mystery***; Macmillan; New York.

**Ian McMahan: *The Fox's Lair***; Macmillan; New York.

One of the current "Taoist" physicists who is busy constructing grand unified nonsense for that portion of the thinking public that has nothing better to worry about wonders whether mountains aren't alive. Although it seems patently clear to any human being whose senses are in reasonable working order that a Rocky isn't a raccoon, said mystical Ph.D. posits that the lifespan of the geological mass is so enormous that a pitifully finite member of our species can't comprehend the life form. Maybe he's right; maybe all owners of pet rocks ought to retrieve them from the bottoms of their junk drawers and give those little guys a good airing. Once that mission of mercy is completed, they can begin to be concerned with the life that may be aborning in the memory of their local computer.

David Ritchie, in *The Binary Brain*, provides a PBS-style (i.e., a touch of information here, an anecdote there) examination of

the ascent of man that he parallels with the development of computer technology. In some cases, the two overlap, as when he figures the human brain as "the wet computer." Ritchie is a wild-eyed proponent of technological progress; his enthusiasm is such that he can't even see that he is contradicting himself. For example, Ritchie is looking beyond the stage when there's bona fide artificial intelligence (AI), which seems to him to be right around the corner, to the not-too-distant time when there will be a sort of man-computer interface. Yet he quotes Dr. Nils Nilsson, a leading AI researcher at SRI International, as saying, "The press is implying that AI is much farther along than it really is. It's all very heady to read those articles, but I feel that we're not on the verge of all these wonders." It's headache-provoking to read books that consider with glee the prospect of having "biochip memory chips" stuck on the frontal lobe of one's brain.

What is unusual about the computer industry as compared with other industries is that it is dominated by people who are fairly young. John Sculley, president of Apple Computer, Inc., recently stated that the average age of an Apple employee is 28. Last year, entry to a computer

software trade show called "Softcon" was restricted to those 21 or older; this year, the minimum age for visitors was 16. Noting the burgeoning crop of Cabbage Patch Computerites, Macmillan has launched a series of "Microkid Mysteries" (including *The Great Gradepoint Mystery* and *The Fox's Lair*) for 9 to 12-year-olds. One fears that the readers of these books will develop personalities that make Mr. Ritchie's seem stable. The young hero's best pal is ALEC—Access Linkage to Electronic Computer. ALEC was created as a result of a few mismatched circuits in a bank of computers. According to the stories, "ALEC

had no existence except in those circuits, but he was no less real than that"; moreover, he is described as "a personality." The child turns on both family and friends by keeping quiet about ALEC; "He," the circuits, that is, "was terrified that someone would find out about him, try to study him, and accidentally wipe him out." So instead of teaching the readers about honesty and responsibility, the books teach subterfuge and the value of machines over human beings. It isn't hard to imagine such Microkids lining up for their "biochip memory chips." Makes one wonder about whether the Luddites were entirely wrong. □

### UFO Marxians

**Robert B. Everhart: *Reading, writing and resistance: Adolescence and labor in a junior high school***; Routledge & Kegan Paul; Boston.

**Sidney L. Harring: *Policing a Class Society: The Experience of American Cities, 1865-1915***; Rutgers University Press; New Brunswick, NJ.

**Bert Cochran: *Welfare Capitalism—and After***; Schocken Books; New York.

Reportedly, when Galileo first used his telescope to challenge the prevailing Ptolemaic cosmology, some leading academicians simply refused to look through the new device. They did not need to, they said. They had already read Ptolemy and therefore knew what *should* be in the heavens. The reader gets the impression that similar theory-bound scholars are at work in these three books, written beneath the blinding spell of Marxist dogmas which are as empirically indefensible in 1984 as the theory of the crystalline spheres was in 1632. The course of mod-

ern world history has been remarkably cruel to Marx's prophecies concerning the course of class warfare and the inevitable emergence of proletarian paradises. Indeed, Marxists can hardly decide which is more embarrassing: the persistent vitality of capitalism in the West or the doleful failure of communism in the East. So Marxism remains a theory in search of an incarnation, its advocates desperately scrambling in search of an obscure fact or two to tack on to their faith and averting their eyes from the obvious contradictions on every hand.

*Reading, writing and resistance* illustrates to just what absurd lengths Marxists are driven to find supportive data. Here the learned Marxist professor Robert Everhart implausibly argues that such junior high activities as "goofing off" and "bugging the teacher" constitute significant manifestations of "the estranged nature of labor" in contemporary "capitalist society." Spitwad-throwers of the world, unite.

Less juvenile but not much less absurd is Sidney L. Harring's contention in *Policing a Class*