



## SCREEN

### A Film Vacuum

by Stephen Macaulay

*Falling in Love*; Directed by Ulu Grosbard; Written by Michael Cristofer; Paramount Pictures.

Anyone who believes that an actor or an actress "makes" a film should sit through *Falling in Love*. Twice. Once for Robert De Niro. Once for Meryl Streep. Those two, certainly, are among the finest American players in the cinema. De Niro, whose eyes can shift from laughter to concern in an instant, and Streep, who is able to make the trip from innocence to experience and back, are, quite simply, the two leading performers of their generation—if only for their scenes together in *The Deer Hunter*.

In *Falling in Love* De Niro plays a contractor who builds high rises in New York City—an honest, down-to-earth guy. Streep is a free-lance commercial artist who does pastel renderings fit only for menu covers in fern bars that specialize in spritzers. He is married and the father of two. She is also married but childless; she and her husband lost a baby soon after birth. Both families live in the suburbs—but not the cookie-cutter variety.

Writer Michael Cristofer and director Ulu Grosbard must get Frank and Molly together. They do so through contrivance after contrivance. The implausibility breeds impatience. Given the obvious outcome—the title is, after all, *Falling in Love*—the amazing thing is that the relationship that Cristofer and Grosbard create is as lifeless as a paragraph from a physics textbook. There is no passion. To be sure, two attractive people can meet and find themselves attracted to one another, but they have—or should have—a long way to go between that meeting and the unceremonious dumping of their respective spouses. There must be changes, transforma-

tions. Yet in *Falling in Love* Frank and Molly have a free-fall in a vacuum: no resistance, no friction. What is the point? is the question that never gets answered, along with the more rudimentary one, Why?

The only remarkable thing about *Falling in Love* is that although its vector is aimed straight at adultery, the characters have scruples of a sort. By the time they get around to kissing, one is ready to applaud for the sake of shaking off the numbness. And there is no skin. None—which goes to show there can be something in nothing. And nothing is what *Falling in Love* surely is—De Niro and Streep notwithstanding. ☞

### Macho Machines and Female Role Models: *The Terminator*

by E. Christian Kopff

*The Terminator*. Directed by James Cameron; Written by James Cameron and Gale Anne Hurd; Orion.

The Terminator is a machine, designed by other machines to hunt down and kill human beings. At first, one feels the same way about the movie *Terminator* itself: it is perfectly constructed to excite, frighten, dazzle, and arouse other appropriate emotions in the average American movie audience (which nowadays seems to be half teenager and a quarter young adult). After the initial thrill or shock wears off, however, the viewer begins to realize that the movie is not only skillfully crafted popular entertainment, it also conveys clearly—and not without subtlety—some important points of popular morality.

Since most of America has seen it by now, I will not be spoiling anyone's

fun if I talk about the plot—a sort of spin-off of *War Games*, in which Norad's computer threatens to start World War III on its own in order to teach erring mankind a lesson. In *The Terminator*, the machines of the future provoke nuclear war in order to destroy mankind. When they are only partially successful, they turn to other devices to accomplish their nefarious end (among them cyborgs, machines that look like humans). Eventually, however, a leader appears among men—one John Connor—who rouses the human survivors to a successful resistance against the machines. The machines have only one hope. They send their latest model human destroyer, the Terminator (played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, world-class body builder and star of the *Conan* movies) into the past in order to destroy John Connor's mother before she can bear him. The humans also get one man, Kyle, through before destroying the time machine. In the world of 1984's Los Angeles these two—marvelously programmed cyborg and brave and determined human—wander, seeking Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton), one to kill, the other to save her.

Sarah Connor, as it turns out, is a silly contemporary American girl, working as a (lousy) waitress in a fast-food joint and living for her weekend dates with equally silly young men with fast cars. (When one of them stands her up, her indignant roommate tells her, "He can't do that to you, even if he does own a Porsche!") Then one horrible, ordinary Friday all the other Sarah Connors in L.A. start dying violent deaths, one after the other. And she realizes that she is being followed.

There ensue all the car crashes and shootings and blowing up of cars, buildings, and human beings (in order of moral significance) that any teenager could desire. The tension never lets up, and each time our hero from the future blows Schwarzenegger away, he gets up and starts chasing Sarah again.

If you are into scary, this is one radical flick.

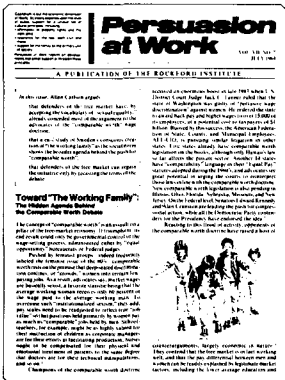
The movie's promoters have wisely chosen to sell it as an Arnold Schwarzenegger vehicle, and so it has been reviewed and so praised as good of its lowly kind. The good thing about movie reviewers is that if you don't tell them what a movie is about, they will never guess on their own. I say this because the movie is not about Arnold Schwarzenegger, as wonderfully well-cast as he is as a creature that looks human only on first glance. (Did you know that machines have Austrian accents?) The movie is about how one frivolous, not very smart or very chaste American girl of 1984 learns how to become a woman. I mean that last word in its full intensity, since a number of films in the last few years have had an apparently similar theme, from *Private Benjamin* and *Alien* to the last two *Dirty Harry*s and even, as a subplot, *Red Dawn*. In each of these movies, however, the women learn to survive and triumph in a man's world of violence and power by mastering men's violent skills and attitudes. But in *The Terminator* Sarah Connor learns how to be a woman by making real love to a real man, by bearing his child and bringing that child up to be a survivor and a leader.

The two mandatory sex scenes make the point emphatically. In the first, Sarah's roommate and her boyfriend make "passionate" love, while she listens to her radio with her earphones, rocking and rolling in both meanings of that term. Sarah and Kyle's decision to make love comes after fighting and learning together and in full consciousness that they are begetting the future leader of their race. The first scene is funny in the best traditions of current teenage exploitation movies; the second is serious, even solemn.

Although this is a movie about *Bildung*, education, the actual learning is played down; we are left to infer it. When Kyle must leave Sarah for a while, he gives her a gun. She puts it aside with disgust and proceeds to make a reckless telephone call that will lead the Terminator straight to them. But by the end, the pregnant Sarah is leaving the city to drive into the mountains, cradling her gun and telling to a tape recorder what her son will need to know to accomplish his mis-

# Persuasion at Work

The "Pro-Business" Resource



At last, those concerned about the future of business in America have a resource that they can depend on for directions, thoughts, points of view, and pure information.

Its name: *Persuasion at Work*. Its purpose: to help regain the initiative in the battle against anticapitalistic forces.

An early warning system for American business

Each month, *Persuasion at Work* offers timely commentary on controversial political, social, and cultural issues that are firmly rooted in the pro-business ethos. *National Review* calls our efforts "an almanac of political weather for American business."

Like our current subscribers, you will benefit from reading our timely monthly reports on issues of concern to you, your family, and your business. *Persuasion at Work* is an invaluable resource for those wanting an informed perspective on the important intersection of business and culture.

Recent issues of our newsletter have investigated the hidden agendas behind the comparable worth debate, "industrial policy," family breakdown, the new environmentalism, "suburb bashing," and the war over PACs.

Special "bonus" introductory offer

Subscribe to *Persuasion at Work* through this offer and we will send you a copy of "Corporate Responsibility: The Viability of Capitalism in an Era of Militant Demands" as a special bonus. Just \$12 for twelve monthly issues and a bonus copy of "Corporate Responsibility." Simply return the subscription coupon below, and we'll see that your subscription begins with the next monthly issue.

Please enroll me as a subscriber to *Persuasion at Work*, and send me a "bonus" copy of "Corporate Responsibility."

☐ Enclosed is my check for:

☐ A one-year subscription (12 issues) at \$12

☐ A two-year subscription (24 issues) at \$22

☐ Please bill me

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**U.S. Dollars Only**

*The Rockford Institute/P.O. Box 800/Rockford/Illinois/61105*

sion in the future. Sigourney Weaver in *Alien*, to mention another successful sci-fi flick, also triumphs over non-human violence, but basically as a woman who learns how to be Captain Kirk. In *Terminator*, Linda Hamilton triumphs over the nonhuman and in the process learns what it means to be a woman, with a woman's duties and capacities and a woman's role. *Terminator*

is one of the most explicitly reactionary films of the past decade. When are they going to notice?

A few hours passed viewing a recent prestige film, *Falling in Love*, provokes another thought. Robert De Niro and Meryl Streep put on *tour de force* performances as two middle-class suburbanites who develop an obsessive passion for one another that destroys

their marriages and their personal lives. The perfection of the actors' technique only underlines the moral obtuseness of these two destructive middle-aged adolescents.

Traditionally, popular art was meant to be and was proud to be pure entertainment. If you want to send a message, call Western Union, quipped one Hollywood mogul. High art, on the other hand, tried to unite the *utile* and the *dulce*, to use Horace's terms, to mingle pleasure and instruction. We have reversed all that. The expensive films with big name stars are now exercises in technique, which is the politest I can get about *Falling in Love*. Vulgar art, the films of Eastwood and John Milius, for instance, or *The A Team* and *Magnum*, teach courage and patriotism and what it means to be a man or a woman.

"When the cities lie at the monster's feet, there are left the mountains," I thought with Robinson Jeffers, as Sarah Connor drives off at the end of *Terminator*. The treason of the cultural elite is consummated. When the citadels of high culture have fallen to frivolity and obscenity, there is still, what? Mr. T. Tom Selleck. Clint Eastwood. And, yes, *The Terminator*. ☺

E. Christian Kopff is professor of classics at the University of Colorado and an editor of *Classic Journal*.

## Inventing the News

by Herbert London

***The Killing Fields*; Directed by Roland Joffe; Enigma Productions.**

Any resemblance between *The Killing Fields* and events in Cambodia during the 1975 holocaust is purely coincidental. What we see on the screen is more often than not a figment of Sydney Schanberg's well-developed imagination. This film adaptation of Schanberg's *New York Times Magazine* story (January 20, 1980) about the war in Cambodia and his relationship with his Cambodian assistant, Dith Pran, is supposed to recount the bloody victory of the Communist Khmer Rouge forces and the systematic destruction of the national soul.

Mr. Schanberg believes that it is the

United States and its misguided Southeast Asia policy that is responsible for the holocaust in Cambodia. Somehow, the American intrusion into Cambodian territory gets identified with the barbarity of Pol Pot's army of thugs. Repeatedly, "Schanberg" puts the blame on Nixon because he violated Cambodian neutrality in 1970. What he ignores is the North Vietnamese role: the words "communist invasion" and "North Vietnam" are not used in the script at all. Moreover, our first introduction to an American soldier is a major engaged in covering up an inadvertent bombing in a populated Cambodian region. Schanberg never mentions the fact that, from the outset of the war, the Vietcong and North Vietnamese used Cambodian neutrality for their own purposes, or that Pol Pot and his followers were trained in terror tactics by their communist brethren.

When President Nixon's face appears on the screen to defend a doctrine of taking the war to enemy sanctuaries, tears well in "Schanberg's" eyes as he (presumably) recalls his friends in Pnom Penh being slaughtered by the Khmer Rouge. We can only wonder whether Schanberg was more angry at Nixon or the actual killers.

The *New York Times* argues that reporters like Schanberg are to be commended for calling attention to this "unhappy chapter in the history of recent United States diplomacy in Southeast Asia," but overlooks the part played by reporters like Schanberg in helping to produce this unhappy chapter in our history. Schanberg, Neil Sheehan, Seymour Hersh, and David Halberstam were honored by the press corps for excoriating American policies, but most people did not know that the reporters were actually making policy. By distorting events, they managed to create a popular antiwar, anti-Johnson, and anti-Nixon movement. That movement led to the congressional decision to cut our losses and leave Southeast Asia. With no opposition in its way, the Khmer Rouge made their self-proclaimed Kampuchea into an open graveyard.

Like Schanberg's reporting, *The Killing Fields* is more a work of fiction than a work of journalism—a deft manipulation of the facts to make the

Vietnam War conform to Mr. Schanberg's prejudices. This subjective reportage is what is now known as the "new journalism." But there is nothing new about journalists who get rich by tailoring the news. ☺

Herbert London is dean of the Gallatin Division of New York University.

## Humor and Intelligence

***Comfort and Joy*; Written and Directed by Bill Forsyth; a Universal Release.**

At one point in *Comfort and Joy*, Alan Bird, a Glasgow disc jockey/radio personality who immersed himself in a feud between Mr. Bunny and Mr. McCool, two mobile ice cream vending companies, makes an attempt at reconciling the warring parties (reminiscent of rival Chicago bootleggers of the 1920's) by appealing to a sense of proportion. After all, he points out, the issue is ice cream, which isn't, in the larger context of things, particularly important. Instead of making a metaphysical rebuttal, the ice cream man simply asks Bird what greater contribution a DJ makes to humanity.

Alan Bird eventually discovers that his broadcast antics do make a contribution to something beyond advertiser revenues: he meets an elderly woman in a hospital who tells him that he brings a smile into her life every morning. What more could he desire? Similarly, ice cream brings joy into people's lives. It may not be the sort of joy that induces raptures or finds outlet in lyric poetry, but it can provide a moment or two of solace in a world dominated by disaster.

Bill Forsyth's film will never attain the status of a classic—and even Academy Award nomination is doubtful—but like his previous films, *Gregory's Girl* and *Local Hero*, it is sufficiently refreshing to be a minor consolation. Perhaps that doesn't seem like a lot to expect from a film, but in the greater realm of filmdom, it is a tremendous task that Forsyth performs with wit, humor, and intelligence. ☺