

tas? Why are there 8,000 Cubans in Nicaragua? If they represent the people, why don't Sandinistas allow really free elections like several other Latin American countries? Why does Qaddafi send money to Nicaragua? Why did the Sandinistas send arms to El Salvadoran guerrillas?

The meeting ended in an uproar as they leaped from their seats to shake their fists and shout revolutionary slogans. "Death to Contras" and "Death to Samosa." Death and vengeance was the final translation of their message. I left the meeting in that state of special grace granted those who succeed without trying.

*Gary Burleson writes from Little River, California.*

## Letter From the Lower Right

*by John Shelton Reed*

### *Monumental Folly*

The other day I got a "Dear Friend" letter from Malcolm Forbes asking for a contribution to the Reagan Presidential Library. It raises all sorts of questions. For instance, does Malcolm Forbes really think of me as a friend? Where has he been all this time? A friend in need is a friend indeed, Mr. Forbes, and I've got two daughters to send to college: How about if I contribute to your foundation and you kick into mine? Shall we say 5 percent of annual income?

But leave aside the fact that my new friend could build this edifice from his pocket change, if he really thinks we need it. Let's ask a fundamental question that the letter doesn't really address: Why in heaven's name should there be a Reagan Presidential Library?

Well (I hear you say), Kennedy has a library, Johnson has one, and Nixon, even Carter. True, all true. If Reagan had no library, he would not be in the company of these worthies. He would be libraryless with the likes of Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln, men to whom the idea of a presidential library somehow didn't occur. (Can you imagine John Adams'

pals hustling funds by direct mail?)

Ah, but (as Forbes's letter puts it) "Think what rich repositories for history and sources of perspective we'd have if there had been libraries for our earliest Presidents! They would be treasuries valuable beyond measure." Yeah. Think what prodigies of scholarship we would witness at the Martin Van Buren Presidential Library, the Millard Fillmore Presidential Library, the William Henry Harrison Presidential Library, the—well, you get the idea.

There are many reasons to oppose this well-meant but ill-considered enterprise. There is, in the first place, the libertarian argument—obvious (as usual), but overlooked (also as usual). The \$45 million to buy the land and build the building is to be raised from private contributions, more or less voluntary, but that's just the beginning. The annual budget to operate this show is bound to be well up in seven figures, probably eight—not chicken-feed, outside the Beltway—and that money will come from the public coffers. From you and me, that is. Like it or not. Forever.

Why are presidential libraries thought to be an appropriate use of public monies and open space? They serve no useful scholarly purpose. What could possibly be in an Andrew Johnson Presidential Library in Greenville, Tennessee, that is not more conveniently available somewhere else under the present dispensation? Future historians studying our times will already have to check in at presidential libraries in Boston, Austin, San Clemente, Atlanta, and—where is the Ford Library, anyway? Grand Rapids? Aspen? I guess I could look it up. (If there isn't one, I'll take back every mean thing I've ever said about the man.) Adding Palo Alto to the list wouldn't hurt much—just another few hundred bucks on the historian's NEH grant. But it wouldn't help either.

Of course, we shouldn't think of these libraries as simple repositories. They are, above all, monuments to presidential ego. And that is disturbing. Maybe our Presidents have always thought of themselves as demigods entitled to pyramids maintained at public expense, but, if so, they kept their opinions on this matter to them-

selves for the republic's first century and a half. A healthy public opinion would have hooted them down. Where did we go wrong? Whatever happened to republican simplicity?

There is also the otherwise delightful fact that Presidents come and go every four years, or eight. If each President gets a library (and the nation survives), in a couple of hundred years the countryside will be littered with these structures, each with its complement of chantry priests and lay brothers. And the whole creaking, groaning apparatus will be supported by levies on the toil of an urban peasantry too ignorant to reflect that the system swept away at the Reformation only took 10 percent.

Moreover, obviously, not every President will deserve a monument. In 50 years, our grandchildren will wonder why we bothered to memorialize some of those we already have. We shouldn't rush into these things, as any graduate of Warren G. Harding High School could tell you. I like Teddy Roosevelt, but he does look a little silly on Mount Rushmore, and "Cape Kennedy" was quietly dropped when it became indelicate to refer to the Kennedys and water in the same breath.

I don't mean to pick on Ronald Reagan. In this, he's just acting like a typical modern President. But he disappoints me when he acts that way, because sometimes I've almost believed that he isn't one. I would rejoice—many Americans would rejoice—if he would drop Malcolm Forbes a note. "Dear Friend," he could say: "Thank you for your efforts to build a library to house my papers, but I've decided to put them in the Library of Congress, where related materials will be more conveniently available. A businessman like you will recognize the significant economies of scale in putting them there, too, and I like to cut the costs of government when I can. I know the library was meant to be a monument as well, but that's not an appropriate use of tax money. Why don't you take what you've raised and buy some small arms for the Contras?"

I say Ronald Reagan ought to write this letter. Do you think he will?

*John Shelton Reed is a semi-pro curmudgeon who writes from Chapel Hill, North Carolina.*



## SCREEN

### Making Love

by Katherine Dalton

**Making Mr. Right**; directed by Susan Seidelman; written by Floyd Byars and Laurie Frank; Orion Pictures.

Perhaps it's living in New York that makes me like *Making Mr. Right*. Susan Seidelman's latest (she did *Desperately Seeking Susan* with Madonna, remember) is just one step up from farce: a lighthearted comedy of manners and sexual politics. As in many of the best Restoration comedies it does not otherwise resemble, the men are buffoons. In other words, it's a movie from a decidedly feminine point of view. It is actually unusual in being a movie for the *Cosmo* reader—the young, single, urban, double Y's. What was the last movie targeted so specifically at a female audience? *The Turning Point*? *Desert Hearts*?

Yes, all women know that millions of men are responsible citizens, loving fathers, husbands, and friends. All women also know that millions are not. As a young, urban, unattached female (if not quite a *Cosmo* reader), I find it easy to understand why men are the primary target in a movie that, to be fair, also lampoons Jews, Indians, Miami Cubans, the PR business, soaps, weddings, and several very distinct types of females. Perhaps all the man-bashing has only to do with the exigencies of plot. As the title suggests, our heroine, Frankie Stone, falls in love with an android, and a woman is not likely to fall for an android, unless she has been burned thrice too many

times by the real thing.

As the movie opens we see Frankie (Ann Magnuson, the performance artist, plays it straight here) waking up on the couch where she has fallen asleep in front of the TV. She's been waiting for Congressman Steve Marcus (Ben Masters), who has spent the entire night at the Little Miss Havana beauty pageant, hugging the contestants and drumming up votes for what he hopes will be his reelection. Understandably, his early-morning arrival with a stolen centerpiece for a forgive-me-darling bouquet doesn't quite cut the mustard.

Frankie wants it to be easy come, easy go, but it isn't. Since she's not just his girlfriend but also his image consultant, she can afford the satisfaction of not only slamming the door in his face but also of dropping him as a client and sending out the final bill. Nevertheless, however distracting her job and red convertible, she cannot escape the daily pressures from Mom, Sis, friends, and the biological clock to find Mr. Right, or at least Mr. Tolerable. Not that anybody else in the Marcus cheering section has been blessedly happy. Mom threw Dad the lout out; Frankie's friend Trish has been dumped by her soap star husband for Susan Anton; only Frankie's green-haired sister seems content—and she's marrying a Miami Cuban busboy. Still, none of them can understand how Frankie could let Steve slip through her fingers. After all, says Trish, whatever his faults or shortcomings, "he earns his own keep," and that can't be said of all of them.

After dropping Steve as a client, Frankie has time on her hands, and she finds herself asked to represent the Chemtech Corporation's latest invention—a remarkably human-looking android named Ulysses (John

Malkovich). She is to polish up his social graces and get him on the Johnny Carson show, but it gets more complicated than that. For unpolished or not and made (as he is) in the image of his snide creator, Dr. Jeff Peters (also played by Malkovich), Ulysses has all the charm his parent lacks. He promptly falls in love with Frankie.

It's a predictable plot. Seidelman is probably never going to make her name as one of Hollywood's great innovators. But while there are no large artistic leaps in this production, a great deal of attention has been paid to detail. The script is tight; it has no large holes in its logic, once you accept the fact that an android can look and act human, and we've suspended that much belief for a thousand other movies. The "60's retro" look Seidelman created, carried through from Frankie's headscarf and red convertible to the music, makes the movie nicely stylized and centered in a specific place, Miami, rather than (as is usually the case) floundering around in what could be any 80's town in any state in the union.

There are several excellent performances. Seidelman has raided Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre not only for a very good hero/nerd in Malkovich, but for two superb supporting actresses as well. Glenn Headly as baby-voiced Trish on the rebound is wonderful, and Laurie Metcalf as Sandy is even better. Metcalf is so compact and determined and pushily desperate to get the misanthropic Jeff Peters out on a date as to be both moving and irritating at the same time—a difficult combination. All of them show up Magnuson, who, while never actively bad, is never actively good, either.

As a movie, *Making Mr. Right* is a foreseeable product of what is still the