



Leo is grim. He is not moved by my summary of Sciascia's musings. "They did everything they could," he repeats.

They all did everything they could to save the olive trees of Chianti in the great freeze of February 1985, and yet the sudden and unprecedented blast of cold weather blighted almost a third of the trees, nearly half if the tally is made for all of Tuscany. Over the past two years, the desiccated trees have been mercilessly pruned, and frequent travelers have observed that the entire landscape of the province, with its slopes of pale green contrasting with the darker shades of cypress and umbrella pine, is now disturbingly different. But this autumn's crop should be better. Leo presents me with a big bottle of last year's oil to take back to England, and I am appreciative beyond measure.

This is the oil that turns an indifferent amateur into a great cook by the sheer fact of its presence on his kitchen shelf: not the mild Ligurian, not even the golden Sardinian or the delicate, pale Abruzzi, but this green, sharp Tuscan affair. A neighbor of Leo's still makes it the old way, by crushing the olives in a trough with a large rolling stone, but most owners around here send their crops to a hydraulic press. Still, it is all local oil, and the customary classifications of virginity (according to acidic content: *vergine*, *fino vergine*, *soprafino vergine*, and this, completely neutral *extra vergine* of the first pressing) seems cynical, rude.

We drift on to another subject. Leo is telling me his impressions of the Sharon trial in New York, which he had attended as an observer. "He knew every building in Beirut," says Leo, his eyes glistening. "Every house and every street." This is, then, the happy opposite of the Moro affair, I keep thinking, a success story in democracy. Somehow it all fits in, then, somehow it all comes down to streets and houses, to open and closed doors, to the savage pruning of olives.

But the time is nearly two in the morning, and we must go to bed. We turn off the lights in the library. The volumes of Guglielmo Ferrero are plunged into darkness. Ascending the stairs, I prepare for a sleepless night.

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On 'The Reagan Court'

The Cultural Revolutions, page 6, July *Chronicles*, brings up the matter of Thurgood Marshall, which in view of the current alignments being formed regarding the pending Supreme Court appointment is worth examining.

Marshall's background: 1933 graduated Howard University Law School; 1934 with Baltimore NAACP; 1936 joined national staff NAACP; 1938 chief legal counsel NAACP; 1940 director-counsel NAACP legal defense and educational fund; 1961 appointed to 2nd Circuit; 1965 appointed Solicitor General; 1967 appointed Supreme Court. It would be stretching the mind beyond the limit to imagine a lawyer with, say, the John Birch Society, for 27 years, being appointed to the Supreme Court.

An interesting sidelight. The leadoff national TV news (June 29) on two networks and *Nightline* had to do with the situation in Korea. CBS led off with the Court, including much from Joe Biden, and discussed the seriousness of the matter for a full five minutes, followed by in-depth coverage of home sales, air pollution, and the AIDS donor in LA for six minutes. Then a break and on to Korea.

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On 'The 1987 Jefferson Lecture'

The editorial in the August issue of *Chronicles* concerning the Jefferson lectureship for 1988 was both judicious and informative; nonetheless, some of the points made require further clarification. The question for conservatives on the council, as far as I can ascertain, was not one of choosing between Russell Kirk and Robert Nisbet. Both candidates were entirely ac-

ceptable, and conservative members were hoping to confer the lectureship on Kirk and Nisbet in successive years.

Unfortunately, some members of the council treated one of these two architects of postwar intellectual conservatism with undeserved contempt. Indeed the ridicule heaped on Dr. Kirk was so implausible that one might never have associated it with the author of the fine essay on Ralph Ellison in *Chronicles* (August 1987), let alone with the father of *The Conservative Mind*. The circumstances and intemperateness of these attacks led some to speculate that those who leveled them were going after others besides Dr. Kirk. Members of the council were known to be disparaging Kirk even before the meeting convened to elect the Jefferson lecturer. Moreover, it was possible and certainly defensible to vote for Professor Nisbet without vilifying the other recipient of the 1985 Ingersoll Prizes. The invectives against Kirk were taken, rightly or wrongly, as veiled attacks on his considerable following in the Old Right. Significantly, some of those who spoke against him were also involved in the character assassination of M.E. Bradford when that honorable gentleman came up for consideration as NEH Director.

None of these remarks is intended to discredit the outcome of the recent vote for the Jefferson lecturer. Like your editorialist, I was delighted by the choice of Robert Nisbet but saddened by the growing ugliness of conservative wars. The disparagement of Russell Kirk is only the most recent illustration of spiteful squabbling on what for want of a better term must be called the Intellectual Right. That the NEH has been used by one side to advance its members, while humiliating its opponents, will not bring conservative wars to an end. Ironically, those in this confrontation who have raised civility and democracy to religious virtues have been the rudest and most arrogant.

Paul Gottfried, Editor
Modern Thought
The World & I



SCREEN

Full Force

by Katherine Dalton

Full Metal Jacket; directed by Stanley Kubrick; screenplay by Kubrick, Michael Herr, and Gustav Hasford; based on the novel *The Short-Timers* by Hasford; Warner Bros.

Funny, that a film about "Vietnam as it really was," as *Platoon* was touted, should fall so wide of any mark of merit, and that Vietnam films with a surreal twist—*Apocalypse Now* and Kubrick's latest, *Full Metal Jacket*—should be so much more interesting. If only Kubrick had stuck with the movie he started with, instead of switching gears entirely after the first third, we might have really had something here; another Kubrickian warped reality, to be sure, but nonetheless fascinating for that.

Full Metal Jacket traces the fate of a young man (dubbed Private Joker by his sergeant) from training at Parris Island, South Carolina, through the Tet offensive. Joker (Matthew Modine) is the central character of this movie, but only slowly and only after about a half hour's worth of film do we really begin to focus on him. Up to that

point the screen is dominated by the coarse running commentary and orders from Gunnery Sergeant Hartman, played wonderfully by Lee Emery.

Hartman is molding a bunch of soft kids into killers. It's that plain and that simple, and all cards are on the barrel. He will use any tactic that works—intimidation, force, physical abuse, peer pressure. There is no malice in him, but that only makes him that much more awful to watch. "I do not look down on niggers," he hollers, and rattles through a list of racial slurs. "You are all equally worthless here." "Make your war face," he yells at Joker; "Make your war face—you don't scare me; work on it." "You are so ugly," he tells another, "you could be a piece of modern art." It is terrible, but as delivered by Emery (a former sergeant in real life who actually wrote many of his own lines) it is also very funny. Right from the start the audience is giggling, and so is the recruit Hartman dubs Private Gomer Pyle, until Hartman takes him by the neck and chokes the smile off his face, and ours. Marines, as Hartman tells his charges, are not to think even of dying without permission.

It is all horrible and beautifully done. Kubrick descends slowly from the funny into the frightening, and from the frightening into hell. Seeing Pyle trying to maneuver his fat self through a seemingly endless obstacle course, with a screaming Hartman perched at every turn, is still funny. Watching the recruits lined up in a double row on Christmas Day singing Happy Birthday Dear Jesus is disturbing, but still funny. One afternoon Hartman mentions Charles Whitman and Lee Harvey Oswald. Whitman, he reminds the recruits, was the sniper at the University of Texas who picked people off from a distance of 400 yards, and Oswald plugged Kennedy in a moving car from 250 feet. "Where do you boys think these men learned how to shoot?" Hartman bellows. Even this is funny, still.

But in an effort to motivate Pyle, Hartman takes to punishing the rest of the group every time Pyle makes a mistake, which is often. One night, when everyone's had it, the recruits gag Pyle and beat him up. After this, Pyle takes to talking to his gun; but he gets motivated. He turns out to be an excellent shot, and he starts getting everything else right, as well.

The night before graduation, Joker, on fire watch, finds Pyle in the head with his rifle loaded: full metal jacket. Hartman hears them and storms in, professionally furious as usual. Though the tension is high it's just the same thing all over again, Hartman yelling and Pyle taking it, half sick and half funny, until Pyle shoots the sergeant full in the chest, then sticks the barrel in his own mouth and rips the back of his head off.

It is perfect, concise, horrible, hell; a minimovie complete. You get the message loud and clear, and there's nothing banal about it. Why, then, does Kubrick press on with the much more traditional second half to his story? Which is banal? Which effectively ruins the first part?

Kubrick's characters are almost always done well, but they are, almost always, upstaged by the movie itself. Who remembers the names of any of the astronauts in 2001? You remember Hal, though, and that spinning-through-time death sequence. Putting small men into a larger-than-life movie is practically a Kubrick trademark. It is the same here. Though by this time in *Full Metal Jacket* we can distinguish Joker from the rest (after boot camp he's allowed to grow his hair back, which helps), he still seems an odd choice for a main character. There's just not that much to him. We like Joker for standing up to Hartman—once, on a religious question—and dislike him for joining in to beat up poor dumb Pyle. We can see he's a cynic, doing a barely passable John Wayne imitation. Otherwise, what is there? To compare him with the characters in *Platoon*, Joker is not, like

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