

energy independence, might that not encourage them to meddle in the Persian Gulf, which can only cause us potentially fatal problems? The point of all this, is that we need a presidential decision about the basic question, rather than a patchwork of ad hoc decisions, case by case.

Now let's go back to the *Globe*. What is the overall context of the editorial? Is it the strategic balance? The question of Russian energy policies? Not at all; it's the NSC-State conflict. For the *Globe* editorial-

ists, a recent decision to withhold some high-technology items from the Russians testifies to the nincompoopery of Mr. Brzezinski. This sort of personalization of serious problems ill serves us. And I like to think that the demon in charge of typos punished the *Globe* with this memorable last line: "And that is something Roland Reagan might want to keep in mind. . . ."

New York Times *Department*: The *Times*, in its endless campaign to persuade its readers of benign Rus-

sian intentions, dropped a little box onto page 27 on the 7th of December. It's a peculiar "news story": "Does the Soviet Union's doctrine contemplate fighting, and winning, a limited nuclear war, as some Western specialists contend?" A Soviet military expert who consented to be interviewed on the subject said Moscow's doctrine did not. The Russian expert is a retired general named Milshtein, and in a long interview published in September he said that the latest Soviet doctrine, as reflected in the

thoughts of a certain Ogarkov, was not in keeping with the earlier statements of General Sokolov, who had called for a war-winning nuclear strategy. What the *Times* did not say was that Professor Richard Pipes of Harvard University had written in to advise the *Times* editorial board that Ogarkov himself, in the latest edition of the Russian Military Encyclopedia, had advocated a war-winning nuclear doctrine. All the news that's fit to print, or all the news we want to print? Boycott the *Times*. □



THE TALKIES

ROBERT REDFORD'S FEELINGS

by John Podhoretz

Lake Forest, Illinois: front lawns, stately manses, red leaves blowing prettily across beautifully paved driveways, dark Mercedes-Benzes in those driveways. The sound of Pachelbel's Canon in D, first on a piano, then sung by a chorus in fine voice. Close-up on a nervous boy's face in the chorus, singing: Hallelujah. With this, dear readers, we enter into the country of *Ordinary People*, a country of WASPs and their \$500,000 houses, their very attractive wives and very tall husbands. But there is hidden tragedy here, tragedy we can see clearly on that nervous boy's face. Conrad Jarrett (for such is the boy's name) can do little but sing; he has no appetite, is consumed with some mysterious guilt, has recently returned from an extended stay at some "hospital," and has odd scars on his wrists, which he covers all the time with heavy sweaters. Conrad is not a well fellow.

There is another problem in the Jarrett household: Conrad's mother, Beth, who is unable to talk to her son, and who seems to harbor some sort of hatred for him. She mildly tosses into a noisy garbage disposal a couple of pieces of French toast which Conrad says he does not feel like eating. She does not want him to see Dr. Berger, his kindly Jewish psychiatrist. She is short-tempered and unfriendly with her son. She nearly has a fit when she learns that Conrad has dropped off the high-school swim team.

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Her husband, Conrad's father Calvin, is a milquetoast—albeit a highly successful milquetoast. He seems to love his son, but cannot talk to him any more than his wife can, even though *he* tries. He does not know whose side to take in mother-son fights. He knows there is an evil pawing at his family, but cannot say what it is, or will not say. He repeatedly says he loves his wife, loves his son, but cannot satisfy either.

What is the tragedy that has occurred? It turns out that Bucky, Conrad's older brother, died in a boating accident about a year before the movie's action begins. Bucky, we learn, is the child Beth really loved, and she has blamed Conrad ever since for his brother's death (Conrad was with Bucky when the accident took place). Conrad, too, feels guilty—so guilty, in fact, that he attempted to commit suicide a little while after his brother's death, and was then himself committed to a psychiatric hospital. Upon his return home, he is fine on the outside, but on the inside what sinister self-immolating forces are at work we can only guess. Dr. Berger, Conrad's psychiatrist, tells him to feel, feel, feel ("I don't put much stock in dreams," he tells Conrad in the manner of a borscht-belt comic, as if spending precious time on dreams would distract the patient from the true issue, that of feeling), but Conrad is unable to express those feelings, even when his mother tells him she wishes he had died instead of Bucky. Clearly, all's not right with

these three ordinary people, and anxiously we await the murder of Beth, or the suicide of Conrad, or both.

Ordinary People is the first film to be directed by Robert Redford, America's reigning movie star and the WASP golden boy of every teenage girl's dreams. What Redford and his scenarist, Alvin Sargent (author of two of the most abhorrent films of the 1970s, *Bobby Deerfield*, and *Julia*, for which he won an Oscar) have fashioned out of Judith Guest's best-selling novel is as blatant a story of good (Conrad and, to a lesser extent, Calvin) and evil (Beth) as that silent film classic, *The Perils of Pauline*, in which the villain tied beautiful Pauline to the railroad tracks. They have Freudized it up (in a flashback, Beth touches Bucky in an odd, suggestive way), they have made it elegant by setting it in the homes of the wealthy, and have made it more "sophisticated" by adding pointed touches of social commentary (a cocktail party sequence, in which the talk is all of stock-market figures and portfolios, presents us with many, many Beths, all of them most assuredly doing to their children what Beth is doing to hers, and not a one of them is interested in a single vital issue such as Redford's favorite, solar energy). But still the movie comes out melodrama.

And a particularly virulent piece of melodrama it is. For the issue here is not love scorned, as it was in its predecessor, *The Perils of Pauline*,

but is a mother's hatred of her child—an ugly and almost unbelievable subject at best. Beth never went to see Conrad all those months when he was in the hospital, Beth wishes Conrad dead, Beth cannot even bear to pose for a family photograph with Conrad. She stiffens and gazes straight ahead in astonishment when, under Dr. Berger's guidance, Conrad hugs his mother, trying to love her for what she is. Beth is pure evil, but Conrad is a saint, in no way at all to blame for his brother's death, holding his difficulties in so as not to trouble anyone, even giving his mother all the benefit of the doubt that the monster does not deserve. What will save Conrad? Simple: Beth's death, or better yet, her spiritual death, her banishment from the house she loves and from the secure life she has so long struggled for. And this is precisely what happens: Calvin, after 21 years of marriage, finally discovers that his wife is "not a feeling person," tells her this, and so away she goes in a taxi while Calvin and Conrad hug each other on the back patio, saying "I love you."

The praise the movie has received (four stars from those critics who award stars, raves from everyone else with the honorable exception of Pauline Kael, in the *New Yorker*) is the easily anticipated praise that any actor receives if he makes a suitably artsy, and politically correct, debut as a director. Redford has done both. There is no music in the film, a sure

sign of serious intent, except for that brief moment at the beginning. The film is slow-paced, so that we can savor every golden word about "feeling" and the lack thereof. And, most important of all, it portrays the rich as characterless, heartless, empty, awful people, concerned only with interior decoration and cleanliness. Mr. Redford, WASP of Sun Valley, Idaho, and the Upper East Side of Manhattan, of course has nothing in common with these WASPs, since he cares about social issues (as the star of such films as *All the President's*

Men and Brubaker and narrator of TV documentaries on the environment) and feeling and *still* pulls down \$3 million per picture.

What is it that the movie critics want? Is it the kind of "important study of the family today" that they say *Ordinary People* is or is it the black-and-white morality play, with suitable socialist commentary, that it really is? For these critics, Mary Tyler Moore's superb performance as Beth (which is, if you care to look closely, and I do not blame you if you don't want to, an unerringly exact

depiction of a certain kind of efficient, cold woman) is nothing next to Timothy Hutton's hysterical portrayal of Conrad as the son not of Calvin Jarrett, but of Anthony Perkins.

Conrad is slightly deranged, and why? Because of his mother. The pre-adolescent fantasy of every child, that he is adopted and that his mother has tied up his real parents in the front closet, comes blissfully true. She will not feel, she cannot feel. The dispassionate viewer of *Ordinary People* understands why this is: Her

husband (played in the dullest possible way by Donald Sutherland) is a weakling whom she controls with the slightest twist of her finger, and her son is a martyred loon. She is, perversely, more likable than Conrad or Calvin, and one hopes that now, rid of these two feeling types, she will be able to get in a peaceful round of her favorite game, golf.

Fitzgerald said: *The rich are different from you and me.* Redford and Sargent modify Hemingway's celebrated answer, and reply: *Yes, they are more evil.* □



EMINENTOES

ABBIE'S ROAD TO STARDUST

by Tod Lindberg

Abbie Hoffman, the famous yippie, was arrested (not for the first time) in 1973 for allegedly attempting to sell some three pounds of cocaine to undercover policemen in New York. Governor Rockefeller's stiff drug laws had just gone into effect, and the penalty for such a crime was a prison sentence of fifteen years to life. In early 1974, Hoffman jumped bail—he became a fugitive, he went "underground." This was not the underground of David Janssen in "The Fugitive"; on the contrary, Hoffman travelled to Mexico and Europe, published a book (and threw a party for it in New York), wrote a couple dozen articles which appeared in various semi-reputable magazines, granted interviews in print and even on television, and wrote his newly published autobiography, *Soon to be a Major Motion Picture*.^{*} In spite of all of the fun he was having, he was mindful to keep an eye out for the authorities, though as it turned out the authorities were not really there.

In September of last year word that Hoffman was going to come up from the underground (such as it was) appeared in the newspapers with quite a splash. The actual surrender made an even bigger splash. On the day he gave himself up, ABC's news-magazine program "20/20" ran an interview Barbara Walters had done

^{*}Putnam, \$13.95.

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with Hoffman earlier that week. The network news programs featured Hoffman prominently that evening. He held a press conference at the office of the publisher of his autobiography—the date he turned himself in and the publication date of the book having coincided. Abbie Hoffman's surrender, then, was a media event, and everyone, including the media, recognized it as such.

The press turned most of its attention to the last few years of Hoffman's life "underground." During that time, Hoffman had lived under the alias of Barry Freed on an island in the Saint Lawrence River. When a proposal came up to dredge the river and remove some of the smallest islands to allow for wintertime navigation, Freed/Hoffman became an activist again. He joined and became the public relations director of a "Save the River Committee" because, as he explained to the press, the provisions necessary for wintertime navigation would irreparably damage the ecology of the river. He gave interviews to local papers and television stations, he spoke to Rotary Clubs, and he was instrumental to the success of the Save the River Committee. For all his efforts, Freed/Hoffman was appointed to the Great Lakes Basin Commission, a government organization. He received a letter from Governor Hugh Carey of New York, praising him for his "keen public spirit." He testified before a Senate subcommittee chaired by New York's Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and, sporting his late 1970s disguise of

short hair, full beard, and nose job, he even posed for a picture with the smiling senator. Immediately after the news of his surrender broke, a man named Tom Englehart, head of the river committee, was quoted in the *Christian Science Monitor*: "I never met Abbie Hoffman. I met a very aggressive Barry Freed" who was "very friendly and had lots of energy."

Hoffman, of course, was not the first counterculture figure of the 1960s to find a new home in the various environmental and anti-nuclear causes of the 1970s. Banding together probably saved those of his ilk from having to answer for their earlier politics. None has had to make apologies along the lines of Jerry Rubin's *Growing (Up) at 37*. In fact, Abbie Hoffman has had the easiest time of it—his "Barry Freed" had a clean slate. And he found in the river committee a friendly and unquestioning circle, one in which the issue was the cause of the moment, not the actions of the past.

There is no need to recall the futility and stupidity of those actions; this for all its importance somehow misses the point when the subject is Abbie Hoffman. Unlike Tom Hayden and his earnest followers in the SDS, for example, Hoffman always seemed more a jokester. This was certainly evident in the Hoffman of the 1960s, and the emphasis then, and especially now, has been on the character and his style.

This emphasis is by no means unique to descriptions of Abbie Hoffman; it is rather a growing trend in the depiction of all hippies, yippies, and zippies. An excellent representation of the hippie as folk character is found in Miloš Forman's version of *Hair* (1979). Look at these wonderful free spirits, singing and dancing and frolicking in Central Park. Look how they take a backward farm boy and initiate him into the wonders of drugs and love. They're not revolutionaries, just people having a good time. When the hippie tribe crashes and breaks up a suburban upper class "deb" party, it is not the poor communards rising up against the capitalist oppressors; rather, it is a fun-loving crew breathing a little life into some hopelessly stuffed shirts. (To his credit, Forman's movie is not wholly unambiguous; he has given us enough subtext to suggest that the hippies are not such great guys after all. One of them, for example, has abandoned his fiancée and son.) The characters are easygoing and, one gets the impression, fun to be around. Almost all of the unpleasantness which might arise from a consideration of the motives of the characters is played down or ignored. No action really means anything; people simply are.

Hoffman's account of the 1960s in *Soon to be a Major Motion Picture* conforms to this mold. He writes as though he had been and even still is merely a fun-loving kid on a romp. The first truly noteworthy event of his hippie life was the ruckus he and