

ing as "reform." It is also a subtle, determined, and ill-advised effort to redirect the entire course of American strategic thinking. Concretely, the reformers' strategic perspective has manifested itself through a primary reliance on a single strategy, service, or theater in the event of a war, very much in the way they now intend to place primary reliance on a single JCS Chairman. The result could mean a realignment in our present defense posture. Reformers want to put a disproportionate emphasis on NATO's central front at the expense of our other regional interests in the Middle East or Southeast Asia. If they get their way, a drastic shift in resource allocation could occur away from our maritime divisions in favor of our conventional air and land defenses in Western Europe. And because the Army and Air Force will now enjoy even greater influence, it is not inconceivable that a newly empowered JCS Chairman will come from one of these services, ready to influence policy in this direction. So much for the suppression of parochial biases!

The whole question of impartiality aside, however, such a shift would create a strategic orientation that

would speak not to our strengths but to our weaknesses. The United States is not, first and foremost, a land power but a sea power isolated by oceans from Europe and Asia. And while this distance can provide an important, even decisive military advantage, it does not offer absolute protection. All of it hinges on the balance of naval strength. It therefore makes no sense for us to talk about winning a war in Western Europe, or anywhere else for that matter, if our Navy cannot even sustain a working command of the major sea lines of communication. This is not to suggest that we could, even through decisive battle, defeat the Soviet Union strictly with sea power. But our Navy would—at minimum—have to win *its* war, which would mean guaranteeing a measure of sea control whenever and wherever the Western alliance would need it.

This is not a piece of military ideology, it is a geo-political fact. In the event of war in either Europe or the Pacific, our naval forces would have to move forward globally in order to drive Soviet submarines back toward their coast (and away from the sea lanes along which American troops and supplies might travel), while computer-based naval defense systems could engage hundreds of enemy ships,

planes, and missiles. These capabilities make it possible to strike decisively at Soviet sea and air power, but they must also be sustained and this requires a Navy with a strong enough voice in Washington to make itself heard.

The Soviets know all too well how important it is for us to command the seas, and have responded accordingly. Today, although we continue to enjoy a narrow margin of overall superiority in naval tonnage, the Soviets have almost three times as many ships. Since 1970, the Soviets have introduced thirteen new classes of submarines, new battle cruisers, aircraft carriers, and strike bombers. Their buildup shows no signs of abating and will only help to ease the limitations their geography imposes on their ability to project power—limits partially surmounted by Soviet basing facilities in North Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, not to mention Cuba and possibly Nicaragua.

Such a growing and considerable threat will require us to think long and hard about how we are going to maintain a competitive military edge in the future, especially as the changing world economy, and with it a growing Pacific Basin, begins to redefine our

strategic interests for us. As David Aikman has pointed out in his recent book, *Pacific Rim*:

... the Pacific challenge has nevertheless emphatically arrived on America's doorstep and is growing increasingly impatient to be addressed. ... At stake is the future peaceful and economically successful development of some 60 percent of the population of the world. ... Also at stake is American resolve in facing up to—and if necessary, facing down—a conspicuously growing effort by the Soviet Union to expand its strategic and political influence in the Pacific Ocean.

Clearly, this new region will soon begin to compete with our other defense obligations around the world. This doesn't mean that we should turn a blind eye to our European responsibilities, but it does mean that even in a time of budget cuts we must develop greater global "reach," the kind our maritime forces can provide. To meet this challenge our Navy and Marines may not need more influence than our other services (although some say they do) but they certainly cannot afford to have less. A centralized JCS that can potentially restrict our flexibility and tie the hands of our Navy is not the answer. □

¹Little, Brown and Co., \$8.95 paper.

THE TALKIES



LIFE WITH FATHER

by Bruce Bawer

The new film *The Mosquito Coast*, which is based upon the best-selling 1982 novel by Paul Theroux, tells the strange, captivating, and ultimately horrific story of a fanatical visionary named Allie Fox (Harrison Ford), an inventor and Harvard dropout who, disgusted with America, uproots his wife and four children from their rural Massachusetts home and moves them to a remote river settlement in the Mosquitia district of Honduras.

Allie's litany of grievances against the U.S. is a hodgepodge of familiar left- and right-wing gripes, and he con-

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tinually lectures everyone around him—especially his sensitive, level-headed thirteen-year-old son, Charlie (River Phoenix), the narrator—to the effect that America has become a nation of mindless consumers, that the dollar is worth only twenty cents, that American kids are all drug addicts and murderers, that we're selling our country out by buying foreign-made products, that TV is numbing our minds, junk food is rotting our bodies, and aerosol cheese spread is destroying the ozone layer. "I'm the last man!" Allie proclaims, and his obsessive determination to create a new life for his family in the tropical wilderness away from Holiday Inns, Fudgesicles, Twinkies, and Duraflame logs makes him at once funny and frightening.

Paradoxically, it also makes him a

grotesque parody of the traditional foursquare American individualist—an arrogant, self-reliant, jeremiad-happy New Man obnoxiously proud of his "know-how" and his New England thrift, devoted to the invention of labor-saving gadgets, eager to construct a City on a Hill, cockily certain that all problems can be fixed, all burdens lifted. At bottom, indeed, Allie's real gripe against America is that its civilization is already in place; there's no wilderness to conquer, no way for him to build a New World of his own.

So it is that Allie drags his clan to the village of Jeronimo in the Honduran jungle, a place as primitive as Plymouth Rock must have been when William Bradford first climbed off the boat, and begins to transform it. But because he is reckless and headstrong

and absolutely incapable of compromise—and mostly because, as soon becomes apparent, he is out-and-out insane—Allie leads his family into disaster. The novel's nightmarish vision of their fate recalled Joseph Conrad; its strengths—aside from its memorable portrait of Allie Fox—were a richly detailed depiction of the Central American milieu, an excellently paced and suspenseful narrative (which gradually assumed an almost mythic power), and a touching delineation of Charlie's feelings—of love and hate, resentment and worship—for his tyrannical, godlike father. As a matter of fact, the novel was most effective not as a tragic fable about the futility of challenging God's power or the folly of visionary excess, or (as some reviewers vigorously maintained) as a cautionary

tale about the consequences of unrestrained American individualism, meliorism, or colonialism (after all, Allie's most ruinous escapades are the consequence not simply of too much American-style zeal and determination but of *madness*). Rather, the novel succeeded most decidedly as an allegory about fathers and sons—about the way fathers dominate their young sons with threats, promises, lies, and the con-

struction of personal mystiques, and about the way sons yearn for their fathers' approval, secretly and guiltily long for their fathers' death, and, upon learning ultimately that their fathers are not all-knowing and omnipotent gods, feel the world opening up to them, and become more able to understand, to forgive, and to love.

On the whole, the film—which was directed by the Australian Peter Weir

(*The Last Wave*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *Witness*) and written by Paul Schrader (*Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*)—is extremely faithful to the novel, achieves much the same effects, and shares its main weaknesses. John Seale's cinematography excellently captures the primitive lushness of the jungle (the film was shot entirely on location in the U.S. and Belize), and Thom Noble's editing accentuates the

frenetic pace of Charlie's life with father. The actors in the principal roles, moreover, are strikingly good. Harrison Ford captures to perfection Allie Fox's energy, wit, and charisma, and the increasing rashness and illogic with which he tyrannizes his family; River Phoenix, as the quietly decent, loyal, and brave Charlie, turns in a performance of extraordinary sensitivity and intelligence. (One is particularly impressed by his handling of the voice-over narration, with which a less gifted young actor could singlehandedly have wrecked the film.) Though her character, as in the novel, remains largely undefined, Helen Mirren, as Mother, has a very strong presence, which, alas, only makes one wonder all the more why this seemingly sensible woman permits Allie to torment and endanger her children.

Yet there are differences in tone and emphasis between Theroux's *Mosquito Coast* and Weir's. In the film, for example, Charlie plays a somewhat less active part than in the novel; among other things, Weir drastically de-emphasizes Charlie's role in saving his family during the destruction of Jeronimo, and has eliminated entirely Allie's fierce resentment of the boy afterwards. And where the novel drew a sharp contrast between Allie's compulsion to change Jeronimo and the real harmony with nature enjoyed by Charlie and his native playmates (who, while Allie remade Jeronimo in the image of an American town, gamboled half-naked in a jungle clearing they called "The Acre"), the film fails to point up this contrast; in the film, the sequence concerning the Acre is brief and confused, and the intended antithesis doesn't come off.

In the film, furthermore, the initial humor and humanity of Allie's personality are brought to the forefront; the script eliminates instances of his thoughtless cruelty to Charlie but carefully retains episodes that present Allie's funnier, more sympathetic side. When the family leaves Baltimore harbor, for example, Allie, one of whose gripes is the phony friendliness of store clerks, shouts sarcastically, "Goodbye, America—and have a nice day!" And when the Reverend Spellgood (Andre Gregory)—a missionary who is the local representative of Allie's chief rival, God, and is therefore Allie's principal antagonist in Honduras—tries to win this maverick over to the Lord with a copy of the "Blue Jeans Bible," Allie (who is extremely well versed in Scripture) holds up the dungaree-bound Good Book and says, "Look, kids, just what I've been warning you about!" Allie despises missionaries because, as he explains, they teach the natives to

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tolerate poverty and to bear their burdens stoically; he believes, on the contrary, that everything can be changed for the better, that—at least with him at the helm—the poor natives can markedly improve upon the miserable circumstances that an inefficient and uncooperative Maker has forced upon them.

For a while, anyhow, Allie seems marvelously successful in his attempt to improve upon God's handiwork. He turns the shabby little clearing of Jeronimo into a pretty town with sanitary huts, productive and mosquito-free gardens, and a happy, hard-working native population. (And even air conditioning.) The perverse symbol of his audacious challenge to God is a huge, fire-powered ice machine called Fatboy, which towers over the huts of Jeronimo and looks rather like a church. "Ice is civilization," says Allie; he is determined to bring ice not only to the town's natives but (when they begin to take it for granted) to a tribe of "pure people" in the mountains who have supposedly never seen a white man or ice and who he hopes will, as Charlie tells us in his narration, "see his ice as a jewel and be amazed."

Yet by the time Allie and Charlie and their companions reach the mountain

settlement with their block of ice, it has melted away; and this event marks the turning point in Allie's fortunes. Soon Jeronimo is invaded by three evil-looking gunmen, and the town is destroyed by fire, the river polluted with ammonium hydroxide from Fatboy, the native population fled into the arms of the Reverend Spellgood downriver. As the town burns, Allie howls in horror, and one is reminded of the scream at the climax of *Heart of Darkness*. But he is not demoralized for long. "I'm happy," he says. "We're free."

The fact is that Allie can't tolerate a stable, prosperous society of the sort that Jeronimo was fast becoming. Like many American protagonists before him—Natty Bumppo, Huck Finn, Sal Paradise—he is forever restless; he wants to tame a primitive landscape and create a civilization, but he doesn't want to live there. So, abandoning the ruins of Jeronimo and disregarding the warning of the family's native friend, Mr. Haddy (Conrad Roberts), that the rainy season will do them in, Allie takes his family to the coast and—all their money and supplies having been lost in the destruction of Jeronimo—eagerly improvises clothes and a dwelling from the rubble scattered on the beach.

His children, who don't like their sub-native standard of living, want to

return to America, but Allie lies to them, saying that they can't go back "because it's not there anymore—cataclysm—millions of Americans burned to a crisp!" In his mind, he's magnified the disaster of Jeronimo into a nuclear holocaust. And he refuses to put into any port, for that would be admitting defeat: "If it's on a map I can't use it." His failure with Jeronimo has only made him more fanatical, more of a megalomaniacal visionary; he seems to see himself now not as a seventeenth-century Pilgrim, bringing civilization to a wilderness, but as a new Adam whose goal is to recapture Eden on Earth. He tells his family, "Living in harmony with nature—that's my vision. And anybody without vision has no place here." But he is incapable of living in harmony with nature, because he is unwilling to learn anything from the natives who have been living in harmony with nature for generations.

To be sure, as Mr. Haddy predicted, the rains come and almost wash the Foxes out to sea; fortunately, however, their makeshift log-and-tarp house floats (its "hull" is marked with the Conradian word Victory) and they manage to get it back on the river and to go upstream. The family is filthy and ragged by this point, and there's no

food ("I don't know when we'll eat next," Allie says with a demented smile), but it is not till he dives into the river and fails to surface for a minute or so that Mother finally breaks down and screams, "I can't stand this!"

The film's politics are somewhat contradictory, to say the least. While ridiculing the folly of which self-declared visionaries and idealists are capable, it patently intends to present Allie as an emblem of a pushy, parochial America—one that seeks to impose its values and technology upon the Third World, one that talks, talks, talks but refuses ever to listen, learn, or understand. But Allie is too erratic and inane a figure to bear convincingly the weight of such inconsistent (and, frankly, silly) political symbology. Consequently, it is all to the good that the emphasis at the close of the film is not upon political thematics or even upon the tragedy (if tragedy it be) of Allie Fox, but upon the archetypal relationship between Allie and Charlie—who, like Nick Carraway at the end of *The Great Gatsby*, emerges from the shadows of a strange, obsessive self-exile to become the real hero of the piece. Despite its paradoxical politics, then, *The Mosquito Coast* works marvelously as an allegory about the paradoxical bonds between fathers and sons. □

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TRAVAILS WITH ARNAUD

by Taki

The summer of 1967 was a bad time for me. My first wife had suddenly arrived from Paris and had more or less caught me *in flagrante* with what was still *de riguer* back then for any self-respecting Greek male,

Taki Theodoracopulos is the European editor of The American Spectator.

namely my mistress. Although well versed in Latin men's ways, Cristina nevertheless took it rather badly, and remained angry for the rest of the summer. (Perhaps the fact that the mistress was much older, and not anywhere near as beautiful as the wife, had something to do with it.)

Worse, I had broken my arm in

karate competition, and could only splash around in the shallow end of my pool, not to mention that my father had once again cut me off.

The only positive note of that disastrous summer was the Greek political situation. Those infamous colonels had overthrown a provisional government in a bloodless coup, and the present Greek ayatollah was in the slammer. Just about the time the colonels gave Andreas Papadoc a first-class, one-way ticket to Canada, my old man decided to give me one last chance and sent me to his New York office in charge of paper clips.

Things, however, did not work out. America was going through as bad a time as I was. Lyndon Johnson was in the White House, and worse, Ramsey Clark was attorney general. Abbie Hoffman, the convicted drug dealer, was the *numero uno* existential hero of American youth—and of the press—while Timothy Leary was openly preaching for the people to turn on, tune in, and drop out.

Needless to say, I returned almost at once to the birthplace of selective democracy, preferring the authoritarian dictatorship of dumb but well-meaning colonels to the one the great unwashed flim-flam artists of the left were imposing upon an unaware Uncle Sam.

No sooner had I landed than I was informed by my wife and father that if I didn't mend my ways by September I would find myself a bachelor, and a poor one at that.

The problem was that even if I wanted to change—which I didn't—I was as qualified for useful employment as, say, a member of Britain's Royal House of Windsor. So I sailed around the Greek islands, having one last good fling. Not surprisingly, when September arrived I had nothing to show for it except an enlarged liver, and sailed back to Athens to face the music once and for all. Or better yet, to wait for the proverbial knife to fall.

Twenty years later, I am still waiting. Mind you, the wife even-

tually took a walk, but for the opposite reasons. She left when I finally decided to go to work. It all happened very quickly. A friend of mine, Nico Farmakis, the first and most disastrous minister of information for the colonels, asked me to a dinner for a visiting American journalist. I remember the festivities well. Cristina and I arrived late, the King and Queen of Greece were at the next table and commented on our tardiness, Farmakis danced ceaselessly with my wife, and I chatted non-stop with Arnaud de Borchgrave, then chief foreign correspondent for *Newsweek* (and today better known as the suave editor of the *Washington Times* and a rising star on "The McLaughlin Group").

Although at first Arnaud gave me the impression that there was no more to his life than the insouciant pursuit of the perfect tan—he did have the most magnificent one I'd ever seen, even better than on those aerobic airheads of Hollywood—I soon found out how wrong some first impressions can be. He probed and asked endless questions, and even got me to take him over to meet the King. He also went through my address book and took out every name that could be of use to him one day. He was very skeptical about the colonels. "Bringing back Christian ethics is fine," he said, "but you've got to have more than just an old-fashioned creed."

Arnaud had just finished doing a Greek story and was off to Rome early in the morning. He said he'd call me when he returned, which, in view of the world media's hatred of the colonels, would be in no time. He was the first to leave, Cristina and I the last.

On my way back to our seaside villa, I told my wife how much I enjoyed meeting someone whose major preoccupation was not designer clothes. Cristina looked blank. When I told her Arnaud was a writer, she said, "Oh, is that what he does."

Back in those good old days, Aristotle Onassis owned Olympic Airways and his friends were well taken care of. (For some strange reason the company

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