

obligated to enter the military if activated during a national emergency. Members would receive a modest financial stipend, perhaps \$100 annually, and would be invited to become part of the "military family" through involvement with the active forces, reserves, and service associations.

The RVF could provide an initial screening of volunteers' skills—such as knowledge of a foreign language or experience as a mechanic—to allow earlier induction of individuals who might meet a special need of the services. After developing a post-M-day

registration plan to meet the Army's manpower requirements once the RVF is exhausted, the Selective Service would be placed in "deep standby," with only enough employees necessary to administer the RVF. Much of the Service's budget (\$26.1 million in 1986) could be eliminated.

An RVF would offer the military a better source of emergency manpower than does the current system. Not only could RVF members help fill unique mobilization shortages, but these soldiers would automatically report once called up. Today potential draftees

have to be classified and their claims for exemptions and "conscientious objector" status heard; Selective Service would have to issue 600,000 draft notices to assure 100,000 inductions.

Are there 150,000 young men ready to serve in the event of an emergency? Almost certainly yes. Not only did the number of recruits jump sharply after the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon, but draft registrations also rose. Indeed, more young men also signed up after the invasion of Grenada and the Soviet downing of the Korean airliner. This phenomenon, said former

Selective Service Director Thomas Turnage, "tells me that the young men of today love their country. They want to do their part in preserving their society."

With leading Democrats calling for a return to the draft, there would be no better way for the Administration to demonstrate its commitment to the volunteer military than to abolish registration. It's time to raise America's entire armed forces in a manner consistent with our fundamental principles of freedom, which the military is charged with defending. □

## THE TALKIES



### KUBRICK GOES TO WAR

by Bruce Bawer

No main title, no establishing shot: at the beginning of *Full Metal Jacket* Stanley Kubrick takes us straight from a dark screen into the stunningly bright interior of a Marine Corps boot camp barracks on Parris Island, South Carolina, where a steely-eyed drill instructor—seen in frightening close-up—is busy delivering a blistering welcoming address to his newly arrived young charges. What Kubrick's doing to us here is essentially equivalent to what the D.I. is doing to his soldiers: he's attempting to shock us into paying attention to him, into heeding with awe and humility his view of the world. One's reaction to this opening sequence—which is succeeded by a number of episodes that further illustrate the D.I.'s tyranny over his men—embodies an interesting contradiction. On the one hand, the sequence has a very realistic feel; on the other, the only reason one knows immediately what's happening here is that one has seen other military movies, and the part where the cold-blooded, insulting boot-camp D.I. introduces himself to the new men is of course one of the all-time military-movie clichés.

This sort of thing happens throughout *Full Metal Jacket*. In sequence after sequence, Kubrick combines graphic realism—and a masterly sense of pacing (within the sequence, at any rate)—with motifs that were already old hat when Kubrick made *Paths of*

*Glory* in 1958. For example, when a squad of Marines, picking its way through the ruins of a Vietnamese city, finds itself being shot at by a sniper, the viewer knows immediately that the sniper will turn out to be either a woman or a child; similarly, when one of those Marines, in the course of inspecting a bombed-out building, happens upon a child's doll, one knows that he will touch the doll, and that it will explode.

The movie divides—somewhat before the halfway point—into two sections, each of which is structured in the manner of a short story and, accordingly, builds to its own climax. The first is set entirely on Parris Island; it is concerned with the effects of the D.I.'s rhetoric upon platoon number 3092, in particular upon a soldier named Lawrence, whom the D.I. singles out for special abuse. The second is set in Nam at the time of the Tet offensive. The two sections are bound together not by plot but, principally, by the fact that in both

of them the point-of-view figure—who now and again provides bits of mostly gratuitous narration—is a soldier known as Private Joker (Matthew Modine). Though he is the central character in this film, we don't get to know Joker very well; all we know, really, is that he is a decent person, a writer, and a wise guy—a rather cocky sort who manifestly fancies himself an intellectual. In Nam—where he works as a reporter for *Stars and Stripes*—Joker habitually wears both a peace button and a helmet on which he has scrawled the slogan "BORN TO KILL." When an officer notices the contradiction and asks him to explain, Joker replies, "I think I was trying to suggest something about the duality of man—the Jungian thing, sir."

Joker is not the only person in the movie who is profoundly cognizant of the duality of man. On the contrary, if there is anything original about Kubrick's characterization of the D.I., it resides in the emphasis that he places upon the D.I.'s intuitive awareness of this duality, of man's innate capacity to make both love and war. For it seems to be the D.I.'s goal, during the eight weeks of training at Parris Island, to convert (as fully as possible) his charges' hunger for love into a thirst for blood. Hence he continually compares killing to sexual intercourse, and likens rifles to male members or to women. Holding up a rifle, the D.I. tells his men, "You're married to this

piece—this weapon of iron and wood"; he teaches them to chant: "I don't want no teenage queen; I just want my M-14."

The D.I.'s speeches are obsessively sexual. He taunts his men by calling them women or implying that they are homosexuals or masturbators; the last thing he says to them at bedtime is "Good night, ladies," and the first thing he says in the morning is "Drop your cocks and grab your socks." (One is frequently reminded, by the way, of the D.I. portrayed by Louis Gossett in *An Officer and a Gentleman*—and indeed, one of Gossett's lines reappears in this film's opening sequence. When the D.I. asks a soldier where he's from, the answer is Texas, and the D.I. says, "Only queers and steers come from Texas.") He tries to tap not only his soldiers' sex drives, furthermore, but also their religious instincts, telling them that "God has a hard-on for Marines because we kill everything we see. . . . We keep Heaven packed with fresh souls." In short, the D.I. tries to turn the platoon into a collection of murderers. The Marine Corps, he informs them, "does not want robots—the Marine Corps wants killers." He declares that Lee Harvey Oswald and Charles Whitman (of the University of Texas massacre), who were both Marines, "showed what a motivated Marine and his rifle can do." He trains his men to answer the question "What do we do for a living, ladies?" with the words, "Kill kill kill, sir."

If the D.I. bears down particularly



Bruce Bawer is The American Spectator's movie reviewer.

hard on Private Lawrence—a corpulent, simple-minded soldier whom he dubs “Gomer Pyle”—it is because Lawrence seems to be the member of the platoon least likely to turn into an effective killer. He’s a wimp: he can’t get through the obstacle courses, he hides doughnuts in his footlocker. Yet after he has been tormented enough by the D.I.—and by his fellow privates as well, who resent the punishments that the D.I. inflicts upon them on account of Lawrence’s failings—the fat, pathetic isolato develops a pathological attachment to his rifle (which he talks to, and names Charlene), eventually becoming the best shot in the platoon. The D.I. congratulates Lawrence for his turnaround. But on the night before the platoon is to leave Parris Island, Lawrence—with a frightfully insane look in his eye—picks up Charlene, blasts a huge hole through the D.I.’s midriff, then shoves the gun’s barrel in his own mouth and blows off the top of his head. So ends the first section of the film.

It is a breathtaking fade-out, but it is also decidedly melodramatic, and—in the final analysis—not only dramatically unnecessary but actually harmful to Kubrick’s thematic intention, which apparently is, in part, to convince us that we live in “a world of shit.” Kubrick plainly wants it to be assumed that the story he tells of these particular Marines is in some way representative of the military experience; for him to conclude the first section of the film the way he does, however, is to suggest that his film presents an exaggerated, even a romantic, view of its subject. How many Marines, after all, kill their drill instructors and then commit suicide?

The more one thinks about it, in fact, the less plausible the whole story of Lawrence and the D.I. begins to seem. For one thing, would a young man who was this fat, this slow-witted, and this psychologically disturbed be admitted into the Marines in the first place? Was any D.I., moreover, ever as thoroughly inhuman as this one? For Kubrick doesn’t show us any side of the man other than his kill-kill-kill persona. Though he is one of the film’s major characters, we don’t know where he is from, how he became this way, what his personal life consists of (but then, this is more or less true of Joker as well); he comes across less as a human being than as a conception of evil in the shape of a man, a symbolically charged Kubrickian variation on a military-movie stereotype.

The second section of the film finds Joker in different surroundings and with a different supporting cast (the two main members of the previous

supporting cast having been dispatched through the agency of Charlene). He and his photographer sidekick “Rafterman” are preparing to cover Ann-Margret’s forthcoming visit to Nam when the Tet Offensive takes place. The results of the offensive are devastating. “It’s a huge shit sandwich,” Joker’s editor tells a meeting of his staff, “and we’re all gonna have to take a bite.” (Joker’s typically sardonic response: “Does this mean Ann-Margret’s not coming?”) Joker and Rafterman are sent to cover the fighting, and much of the rest of the movie consists of a sort of filmic equivalent of the article that one might imagine Joker writing. We are shown the bodies of a score of Vietnamese civilians murdered by North Vietnamese soldiers, shown a whore plying her wares among the American soldiery (“Sucky sucky?”) and a thief snatching Rafterman’s camera.

But mostly we’re presented with vignettes of various types of American soldiers: the complacent, the thoughtful, the committed, the angry, the jaded. One soldier explains that “we are here to help the Vietnamese because inside every gook is an American trying to get out.” Another says, “You think we waste gooks for freedom? If I’m gonna [kill] for a word, my word is poontang.” And yet another complains, “We’re supposed to be helping these people and they shit on us every chance they get.” Every so often we come across a Xerox copy of Lawrence or the D.I. For instance, there’s a soldier who brags about killing women and children, laughs crazily, and screams, “Ain’t war hell?” all the while emptying his machine gun into a jungle from a speeding helicopter. And there’s an officer who, after a skirmish with the VC, announces in a tone eerily reminiscent of the D.I. that “these people we wasted here today are the finest human beings in the world.”

In order to provide a believable context for some of this speechifying, Kubrick shows a number of soldiers being interviewed by TV news reporters; it’s a weak device, and Kubrick doesn’t bring enough fresh insight to it to justify its employment here. He merely has the soldiers talk into the camera, each of them offering a different view of the war. (“I wanted to be the first kid on my block with a confirmed kill,” says Joker, a smirk on his face.) Some of this material is effective, but much of it is familiar, and the fake-documentary style is unsatisfying.

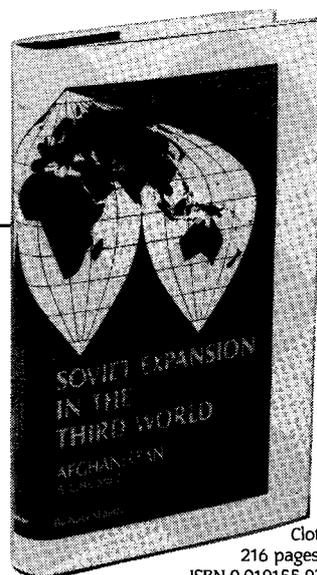
Much of the latter section of the film, in fact, is unsatisfying. We’re constantly waiting for a plot to develop, and waiting as well for some indication of how the second part of the movie is supposed to tie in with the

first part. (We might as well be waiting for Godot.) We’re constantly aware, too, of Kubrick sitting by the camera and pulling the strings. The ironies are invariably heavyhanded and unoriginal: for example, a soldier is killed while waiting for his discharge papers to come through. And Joker’s somber narration (e.g., “The dead only know one thing: it is better to be alive”) is often as facile and tired as his jokes. The last sequence in the film—in which a squad of soldiers, Joker among them, is attacked by a lone sniper—is perhaps the strongest; it is splendidly photographed and paced. But even this sequence—down to the last moments with the dying sniper (“What’s she saying?” “She’s praying”)—is too familiar, too reminiscent of a hundred other war movies, and not especially good ones, either.

What is really missing from *Full Metal Jacket*—for all the grandeur of Kubrick’s directorial style, in particular those blatantly symmetrical, eerily

serene shots of barracks and corridors and such—is a strong shaping vision. There is, to be sure, something of a resolution at the end of the film; Joker is finally presented with a situation that he cannot bring himself to joke about, and is forced to become the killer that the facetiously inscribed slogan on his helmet proclaims him to be. But since one does not identify with this one-dimensional smart aleck anyway, the crisis that he undergoes—the “lesson,” as it were, that he learns—has very little resonance. So uncertainly shaped is the film, in fact, that on the night I saw it, the audience began murmuring with surprise when the closing credits began rolling. “Is that it?” one voice cried out. In a way, I suppose it was a tribute to Kubrick’s artistry that they wanted *more*; the film had, after all, been visually striking, and at times quite gripping. But in the end it added up to little more than an assortment of memorable images and forgettable platitudes. □

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# AMONG THE INTELLECTUALOIDS

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## ROMANCING THE SELF: AYN RAND

by Kent Owen

Five years after her death, Ayn Rand's shadow still falls across the landscape of American semi-popular culture—perhaps beyond the length her height commands. It's hard to gauge her influence because that terrain is uneven and spooked by mirages. What looks firm and sturdy is often porous and flimsy. Spanning big-sellers, trendy movies, wellness regimens, money-making schemes, spirituose enthusiasms, and a range of self-propelled velleities, the semi-popular world is what self-improving, leisurely mental Americans go for. Like semi-classical music, it is rarely fatal, but does tend to stunt one's growth.

Rand's books, particularly *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, startle readers bolt-upright: See here, they declare, the gifted and the talented, the brightest and the best are held hostage by cunning mediocrities, woolly-witted sentimentalists, and bogus humanitarians. Though life be unfair, it's rendered even unfairer by envious utopians who contrive to handicap every able-minded creator and producer for the sake of the poor, luckless, and afflicted. Through the exploitation of the losers, the malevolent bring down the winners, redistributing whatever goods society has to offer. Thus are vital juices sapped and sucked away through the leechery of entitlements. All in the name of justice and humanity, of course. All through the overthrow of man's greatest faculty, Reason. All because the manipulating self-haters cannot stand to live in a world uplifted by proud, independent, useful creators and producers who revel in the glory of rational self-interest.

Bully for Ayn Rand, you say. Thank heavens, she's got the gumption to say loud and clear what needs to be said. She's right, you know: here are crypto-collectivists with their bowels in an uproar at the mere mention of bankrupt farmers, laid-off factory workers, "out-placed" employees, hooligans, welfare mothers, and whole shelters full

of the misbegotten and misfitted. How delightful to have your meanest prejudices justified so lucidly. Doesn't it feel terrific to confess that Ayn Rand gives a lift to anyone who is sick and tired of coerced compassion and compulsory charity? Could it be that *Schadenfreude* is the source of her persisting appeal?

Yes, her clear, bitter words lend themselves, like collaborators, to extreme constructions. But there is something other than deep-rooted selfishness that holds her readers—something like the self's struggle to summon its powers against the evils that challenge its advance. For despite her intention to make novels of ideas, Ayn Rand reworked the literary tradition of the Romantic Hero, the modern Prometheus confronting his destiny. But in place of invincible will and passion, *The Fountainhead's* Howard Roark and *Atlas Shrugged's* Hank Reardon draw their masterful force from Reason, that Randian philosopher's stone supercharged beyond the sanest dreams of Bertrand Russell.

Thrilling stuff, this recounting of the solitary, accursed hero's exploits; through it all his stainless integrity gives off an undimming gleam, by which lesser men may someday find their own way. Come to think of it, these are the



same makings that novelists have stuffed into their wares since the days of Ann Radcliffe and the Bronte sisters down to the Harlequinists. Reason be hanged: what Ayn Rand uses to ensorcel is nothing less than Gothicism, that fictive architecture of haunted castles, ruined monasteries, and moon-struck manors. Presto chango: they are rebuilt as skyscrapers, corporate cantonments, public housing projects, urban sprawlings ridden by terror. And instead of the stock company of demonic monks, mad alchemists, tormented princes, and damsels at risk, she substitutes megalomaniacal tycoons, epicene intellectuals, blasé playboys, and uppity heiresses. The fate-stricken heroes of Byron and Hugo give way to Rand's engineers, entrepreneurs, and technocrats.

*Infra dig* as this bag of tricks may be, that old Gothic magic is hard to ward off. When the rationalism of the Enlightenment became stuffy and acrid, bored readers sought the shuddersome pleasures roused by spectral romances. Nowadays it works much the same, whether in the incessant productions of Joyce Carol Oates or the ejaculations of Stephen, Sidney, Jackie, Harold, and Barbara What're-Their-Names. But it's more than passing strange that the one writer who styled herself high priestess to the Cult of Reason should have trafficked so wantonly with the enemy.

However else one may regard Ayn Rand, there's no denying that she was mad about Reason. At least she thought she was. Few *philosophers* were so smitten by the mechanics of ratiocination. Or bothered to expend so many caressing words on the subject. The former Alice Rosenbaum, late of St. Petersburg, devoted herself to the construction of "objectivism," her own philosophy of rational self-interest. Since 1943 when *The Fountainhead* was published by Bobbs-Merrill of Indianapolis, twenty million copies of her books have been sold throughout the world, making her one of the century's better vended thinkers. Beyond the fact

of sheer numbers she has attracted legions of loyal readers who cherish the books as the authoritative and definitive source of economic, social, political, moral, and psychological wisdom. To this day, there are Ayn Rand study groups who gloss the sacred texts to discern innermost meanings; Ayn Rand essay contests for high school pupils who aspire to explain the cosmic significance of objectivism to those without the law; and for all one knows, Ayn Rand investment clubs, chain-letters, real estate seminars, singles bars, and self-realization retreats. In sum, Ayn Rand has become in death larger than life through the American gift for commercial aggrandizement.

Over the last forty years, one could count on flushing a covey of Randians from any high school or college debating team, sci-fi club, junior over-achievement society, or clique of the self-consciously bright such as *MENSA* or The Baker Street Irregulars. (By the way, Sherlock Holmes with his deductive faculties grinding away could be the prototypical Randian hero, except for the spells of moodiness and a cocaine habit.) Today's bumper crop of gifted and talented must regard her as a tutelary goddess, as do the self-absorbed careerists whose ambitions and desires propel them upward, if not onward. In particular, those glib anti-nomians who follow the libertarian gleam are usually sent off in that direction by the Sphinx's riddle, "Who is John Galt?"

One suspects that among the ranks of the LaRouchies are cadres of one-time Randians, who view American society as a gigantic conspiracy run by irrationalists, plutocratic fops, and mystagogues. If one extends the logic of objectivism to the nearest extreme, one is bound to conclude that statism, collectivism, and altruism are all attached to the same Hydra. There is a palpable pattern here to a grand design that can mean only one thing: The goblins will get you if you don't watch out. Who, indeed, is John Galt?

No doubt Ayn Rand would have been appalled by such goings on.

Kent Owen is Indiana editor of *The American Spectator*.