

wonder if its editors ever made the pilgrimage here after they moved to new digs.

When you tire of the past, make the pilgrimage across the street for the future, to the Royalton.

Until quite recently, the Royalton was a rat's nest. Literally—I know two people who heard vermin rustling in the walls when they stayed there. Then the place was turned over to the Belgian designer Philippe Starck for a makeover. The new improved Royalton opened in October 1988.

The next time someone tells you the eighties were years of pointless greed, point to this place. Yes, style is not everything, and a lot of people in the eighties spent too much of their time on it, but in periods of high style there is at least a chance that some of the effusions of the moment will be genuinely stylish. This is one of them.

Starck achieved it by maniacal attention to detail. The details begin before the moment you enter the door. The door is flanked by two solemn pillars, like a bank's or a library's; the door itself is dark, solid wood, as if it belonged to a speakeasy. Inside, the lobby is long and narrow, like a corridor in an ocean liner. Every decoration, from bannisters to bud vases, has the shape of a rounded point, or a pointed curve. Easter lilies preen on the walls like vogueurs. The runner is imperial blue, with a border of white, possibly animate, figures. The bar at the back has an undulating footrest and a blue neon stripe running down the stone top. At one end is a green, bottom-lit basin full of marbles. The bellboys wear black shirts and jackets, and of course no neckties. They all hope to be in *Playbill*. Drink of choice? White wine. The buzz here comes from the furniture.

Since this is a hotel, most of the guests are the opposite of *soigné*. But many of the young women wear slips as blouses; the year before, they were at the Coffee Shop in tube dresses. I once saw three buds chaperoned by a young man wearing a tail coat, an earring, and a ponytail. There was a rumor that someone on the staff, later reprimanded, once asked some Hasids who had dropped in from the nearby diamond district to leave because their eighteenth-century Polish garb clashed with

the decor. At least they would have been wearing the right colors. The men's room urinal is worth a detour. If you're a woman, get your escort to guard the door for you so you can look.

I have checked my wife into the Royalton, too, to celebrate an anniversary. I couldn't make the trick a surprise the second time around, but the staff compensated by writing HAPPY ANNIVERSARY in chocolate around the rim of her dessert plate. The sink in our

room was conical, and the pencil on the nightstand had a black eraser. Compared to our night at the Algonquin, it was like visiting a not-parallel universe. Only we were the same—and New York, which can supply two perfect-of-their kind, but completely different, rentable stage sets, across the street from each other, like bookends. The ability to do so may not be as important as schools without criminals or subways without beggars, but it is something. □

THE TALKIES



Family Value

by James Bowman

Hollywood always looks its worst at election time. This year we have to endure not only the nauseating spectacle of rich movie stars congratulating themselves for rallying around the people's party and ludicrous caricatures of the right in films like *Bob Roberts* or *Sneakers*, but also shrill, self-righteous cries of outrage from those whose "values" have been criticized by the Vice President.

Interestingly, it is only black films, like *South Central* by Steve Anderson, that are allowed to stand out from the "cultural elite" and stand up for traditional families and their values with a completely straight face. I hope you will not think me uncharitable for thinking so, but I guess that this is liberal condescension. Anderson's film effectively illustrates Dan Quayle's thesis about absent fathers, but it can scarcely expect to interrupt the general mirth over Murphy Brown's clever rejoinders to Quayle—because it's about black people and so doesn't count.

James Bowman, *The American Spectator's* movie critic, is the American editor of the Times Literary Supplement.

Like so many others of its genre, *South Central* suffers from being too preachy. It is on the right side, but its being on any side robs it of subtlety and a needful artistic detachment. Woody Allen, on the other hand, is on the wrong side (we have no less an authority than Newt Gingrich to tell us so), but his new picture, *Husbands and Wives*, is the nearest thing he has had to an artistic success in years. Allen plays Gabe Roth, a creative writing teacher at Columbia, who *refuses* an affair with a young girl of 21 (Juliette Lewis)—because, as he says, he knows how it is going to come out.

Allen, it seems, is wiser in art than he is in life. He is wiser, too, than his friend Jack (Sydney Pollock), a man who is, like most people in love, too thick-witted and self-deceiving to see how his infatuation with an airheaded aerobics instructor (Lysette Anthony) is going to come out. Yet it is precisely because Jack cannot see that far ahead that his marriage to Sally (Judy Davis) is salvageable. Just as the infatuation that he thought was love could evaporate, so the love that he thought dead could be revived. Sort of. →

Gabe and his wife, Judy (Mia Farrow), do not have that consolation. They kill their marriage deliberately, clear-sightedly, and in cold blood. It is a horrible thing to watch and, as in Shakespearean tragedy ("Trust me, it's *Lear*," says Pollock to the aerobics instructor. "Shakespeare never wrote about a King Leo"), the horror is intensified by the humor that surrounds it. At the beginning of the film Jack and Sally, trying to be cool and sophisticated about their breakup, tell Gabe and Judy: "Don't turn this into a tragedy: it's a very positive step for both of us." The irony is that it turns out to be a positive step for them because it brings them back together, while it precipitates for Gabe and Judy the events that end in tragedy for their own marriage.

Jack and Sally are decoys; they make it all seem funny. Their split-up, their disastrous attempts at "starting over" and, finally, their lapse into reunion are pure farce, and Allen's comic talent has not been so well-displayed in years. It is worth the price of admission just to see Judy Davis's first date after the breakup—when she transfers all her rage at her husband to a poor, inoffensive man from work who proposes to take her to *Don Giovanni*: "F---ing Don Juans!" she says, "They should all have their d---s cut off!" Like all farces, Jack's and Sally's has the kind of happy ending that is not really happy at all but that convention demands we see as such. The philanderer is back with the old battle-axe, and we must pretend to believe that all will now be well.

Their compromise with the dissatisfactions of middle age for the sake of "companionship" has something of the inevitability of aging and dissatisfaction themselves. But it is not a compromise available to Gabe, who has a kind of emotional death wish, or Judy, who decides that she wants someone else (Liam Neeson) and ruthlessly sets out to get him. It is here that Allen's clear-sightedness deserts him. The women in the film are all predatory, the men all

victims. Sally is amusingly impossible, but Judy is deadly because she masks her iron resolution to get what she wants with placidity and complaisance. She destroys the marriage almost single-handedly while Gabe is if anything rather too good and noble. This smacks of self-justification and rather spoils the ending of what is, nevertheless, Allen's best film in a decade.

Who would get married? *Singles* purports to be about dating, but dating is the backdrop rather than the theme of the film. Although its title and its narrative style both suggest a large cast of social units

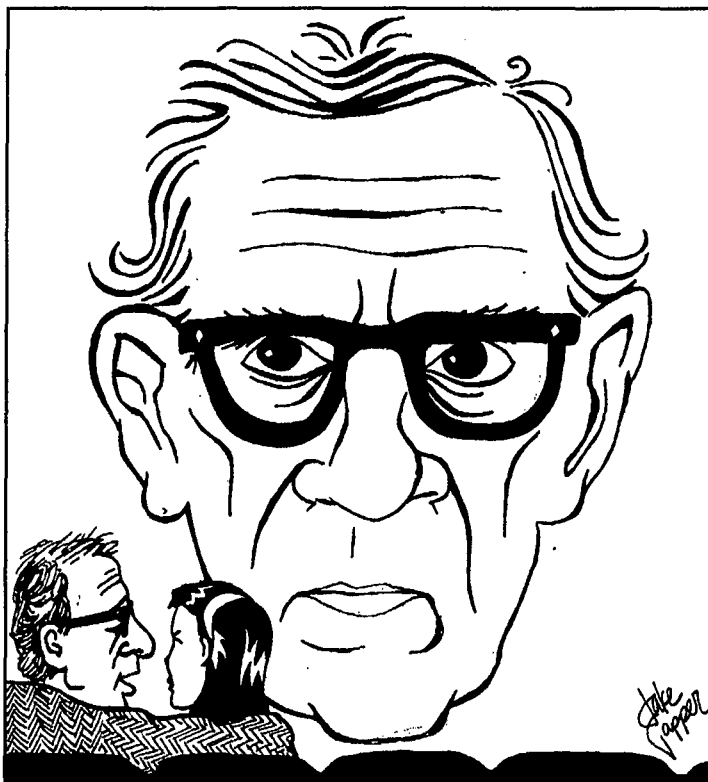
ing: "I think not having an act is your act." He retires, abashed, and says, "Thank you." And of course she is right. The games are part of the courtship ritual, which does not happen without them. The oldest game of all is to stop playing, which is ultimately what Miss Fonda tries. Of course this makes her more interesting, which increases her value to Dillon which gets her back into the game. It's like watching the operation of the laws of supply and demand—or gravity.

And it is because sexual reality, like economic or physical reality, is so inexorable that all our attempts to soften or evade it have such a huge potential for comedy. Cameron Crowe, the director, recognizes this in his funniest vignettes as well as his conception of the film as a whole. Getting everybody over the delusion that there is a simpler, less undignified way to live is an affirmation of our common humanity by means of comedy.

Nobody produces such comic epiphanies more reliably or more movingly than the director of my Movie of the Month, Eric Rohmer. Gene Hackman, representing the so-called "élite" that can't imagine why anyone would want to go to a movie in which no heads explode and no flesh is exposed, remarks in some forgettable shoot-'em-up or other that watching a Rohmer film is like watching paint dry. I guess that depends,

Gene, on whether you're watching the paint or what is painted. And what is painted on a Rohmer canvas is the most incredibly intricate and delicate dissection of the human heart since Mr. Gray revealed to the world *his Anatomy*.

I am afraid that *A Tale of Springtime*, Rohmer's latest film to reach the U.S., may already have vacated your local Multiplex—it was in and out of mine in the second week of September—but it is worth a lot of seeking out if you can find it. In it Jeanne (Anne Teyssedre), a young philosophy teacher, meets Natasha (Florence Darel), a girl of 18, at a party. They



in search of dates or mates, it is really about two couples—Campbell Scott and Kyra Sedgwick, Matt Dillon and Bridget Fonda—and their trials and vicissitudes on the road to holy matrimony. Like life itself, the film seems to be about looking for a good time when it is really about forming commitments.

This is what seems to dawn on Campbell Scott when he announces at the outset that he is "tired of all the games." Who isn't? But on his first meeting with Miss Sedgwick, when he tries out his pretentious schtick about having an act or being himself, she memorably puts him in his place by say-

strike up a friendship and Natasha invites her to stay over at the flat where she ostensibly lives with her father—though her father is always at his girlfriend's place.

Now you've got to watch carefully. Some reviewers seem to think that the plot of the film has to do with Natasha's attempt to fix Jeanne up with her father, Igor (Hugues Quester), because she hates his current girlfriend, Eve (Eloise Bennett). That is what Jeanne comes to believe, certainly, but we do not know whether or not it is true. And it is the truth or falsity of Jeanne-the-philosopher's knowledge, and how that knowledge relates to real life and love, that the film is about.

Essays in epistemology do not always make for the best cinema, as Gene Hackman has probably observed somewhere. But if anyone can do it, Rohmer can. Jeanne talks convincingly over dinner about Kant and Husserl and the synthetic a priori while across the table the by-play between Eve and Natasha reveals how much they hate each other. All this is very funny but serious at the same time.

Natasha tells Jeanne of a necklace of her grandmother's that her father had been planning to give to her on her 18th birthday. Before that, however, he had let Eve wear it to a party, which naturally infuriated Natasha. Eve had given the necklace back to Igor who had put it in his pocket—but then it had suddenly disappeared. The logical explanation is that it fell out of the pocket when Igor, who had forgotten it was there, hung the trousers up, but it is not on the closet floor either. In the circumstances of hostility between Eve and Natasha, it becomes natural that Natasha should suspect that Eve has taken it and Eve should suspect that Natasha has hidden it in order to throw suspicion on her.

Jeanne, caught in the middle, naturally suspends judgment. She quite likes Eve and is very upset when Natasha provokes fights with her. As she begins to see how obsessive Natasha is on the subject of Eve, she also begins to share Eve's suspicion that Natasha is capable of having hidden the necklace. She is also convinced, through a chain of circumstances, that Natasha is scheming to push her and Igor together. Natasha

vehemently denies it, and this is where the film goes down to its nub: Can the philosopher and rationalist understand the need for trust? Does love, or friendship, mean that you've got to believe in spite of evidence?

It's not even as if it matters very much if Natasha has tried to make a match between Jeanne and Igor. Jeanne tells her that she doesn't mind, even finds it charming, but Natasha with all the fierce pride of youth sees when she is being patronized. She correctly divines that Jeanne has come to believe, on the basis of having observed her hatred of Eve, not only that she has been matchmaking but also that she has hidden the necklace. Her little 18-year-old heart is broken to think that her friend cannot trust her, no more than her father or the despised Eve can. "No one believes me," she wails, and we are ready to patronize her too when suddenly Jeanne finds the necklace in a shoe, where it obviously fell from Igor's pocket.

At once everything looks different, and it is the philosopher who is in tears. The synthetic a priori is not just a Kantian paradox, the elusive proposition that is both empirical and true by definition, but a kind of metaphor for the inner certainties about people according to which very orderly and logical people like Jeanne live their lives. Jeanne is ashamed of her suspicions, but the tears go deeper than that. Natasha, never more childlike than when she quickly forgets her own tears in delight at finding the necklace, bears no ill-will and innocently asks her newly restored friend: "Do you think they'll believe us?" Jeanne replies that maybe Eve won't, but her father surely will.

The irony in that line falls with the delicacy of a snowflake in a deserted forest, but it says more about families and what holds them together or pulls them apart than most other treatments of the subject could manage with two hours of concentrated effort. There is much more in this film than I have space to discuss, and much more than what it has to say about the delicate ties of love and trust that keep families together. But, like all great art, it has the power to cut through the political cant on the subject—to reveal both what is so important about families and how little governments can have to do with it. □

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I have heretofore refused to review friends' books, for how could I publicly excoriate a friend if I hated his work? And how could any reader take seriously words of praise for a pal? Good reasons, it always seemed, but I've agreed to break my own rule in this case. I'm doing so because there aren't very many people who have gone through the kind of ordeal that the author of this book describes. Since I have

had my own extensive dealings with the Office of the Independent Counsel (the Special Prosecutor), and since I, like Elliott Abrams, have had a taste of Ordeal by Scandal, I think I'm in a particularly good position to evaluate what my friend Elliott Abrams has to say. With that excuse, here's the consumer warning: Elliott is a friend of long standing, back to the days when I first came to Washington and he was working for Daniel Patrick Moynihan. His wife, Rachel, is one of my wife's very best friends. His in-laws are both editors of mine, and friends as well. We gave money to his defense fund, and wished we could have given more.

Now for the substance. This is a very important book, one that should be given to anyone thinking of a career in what used to be called "public service." *Undue Process* is a gripping account of what it is like to be in the jaws of the Special Prosecutor—that modern version of the Star Chamber presided over by Judge Lawrence Walsh and his junior Savonarola, Craig Gillen. In telling the tale, Elliott Abrams takes us through all the Kafkaesque discussions with his team of lawyers, their bizarre shadow-boxing with the Walsh mob as they try to decide whether to plea-bargain (without even knowing the charges!), and the ultimate decision to plead guilty to two misdemeanors that no self-respecting prosecutor would ever have taken to trial. If only

Michael Ledeen is resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and the author of Perilous Statecraft: An Insider's Account of the Iran-Contra Affair (Charles Scribner's Sons).

UNDUE PROCESS:
A STORY OF HOW POLITICAL DIFFERENCES
ARE TURNED INTO CRIMES

Elliott Abrams

The Free Press/250 pages/\$22.95

reviewed by MICHAEL LEDEEN

for that, *Undue Process* would be a valuable contribution to public understanding of our political and judicial systems. But what makes this book so precious is that it provides us with the first full account of what Ordeal by Scandal does to a man and his family, something that the other "scandal" books haven't dealt with adequately, if at all. And finally, it contains an unforgettable, blood-curdling chapter on how, worn down by the ordeal, momentarily broken in spirit and intellectually disoriented, Elliott convinced himself that his enemies were his friends, and that the only way to gain redemption was to collaborate with Walsh and Gillen at the expense of his friends and colleagues. He did not—but that such a strong person could have become so confused demonstrates the intensity of his ordeal.

We needed this book because with very rare exceptions the debate about the Special Prosecutor has been either so abstract, or so politicized, that the human effects were ignored. It was usually dealt with as if it were a kind of legal/political Olympics, with Walsh trying to outscore the Reagan guys. *Undue Process* brings our attention to the children of the accused, the parents of the accused, the wives. These are the people who suffer the most, for they are subjected to the stress, the social ostracism, the unthinking and the deliberately cruel remark, and they develop the same rage as those involved in the process, but they cannot strike back. At least, in some weird and distorted way, the victim gets at least the semblance of a fight because he sits in front of his accusers and

does some intellectual sparring.

So, while it's depressing and infuriating and frustrating, it's also a bit exciting and, as Abrams shows us so well, it's even quite interesting. After all, the actions that Judge Walsh calls "crimes" have never before been so considered, so his prey constitute sacrificial trailblazers of sorts. But the family can only sit at home, or go to work or school, and wait it

out, or—at best—attend meetings with the accused's lawyers, and that is why the ordeal is much, much tougher on the family than on the victim himself. The Abrams family is a solid one—indeed, the best observations come from Rachel and the children—but even so the process took a terrible toll on them, as it did on every family caught in the grips of the Special Prosecutor. I will never forget the day my daughter came home from school, badly shaken because one of her teachers had leered at her and demanded, "Well, is your father guilty?" The rage that a parent experiences in such circumstances has rarely been so well expressed as in a letter from Rachel Abrams to a friend, beginning: "I am sitting here going mad, crawling out of my skin, feeling this worm of rage turning, turning inside me, and I don't know what to do with it."

For those interested in the more formalistic aspects of Ordeal by Scandal, there are many pages—and, grim news, they make up the bulk of the book—dealing with lawyers. Discussions and arguments with lawyers, the cost of lawyers, the odd language and bizarre reasoning of lawyers, and the rather dubious ethical and moral standards of lawyers, particularly Walsh's lawyers. It is they who have turned Washington into Kaffaland, and almost all the important moves in these Ordeals by Scandal are made by them, not by the victims, even though it is the victims' reputations, careers, and freedom that are actually at stake. Even corporate executives—who have altogether too much to do with lawyers in their work—cannot imagine the