

ture and movies about athletics have always been concerned with being stronger, faster, more agile, and how these properties may serve simple goals and feelings—ambition, success, pride, patriotism, financial enrichment. Not this time. One of the runners is Harold Abrahams, son of wealthy Jews from Eastern Europe. He is a first-generation

osophy, setting it apart from any other religion or system of thought. So Liddell gives Him the toil of his will and the efforts of his muscles and is gratified by His giving him victories.

Abrahams and Liddell ran in an era when sport was something more than winning, money and sleazy celebrity. It was a school of civility, ennobling

*"Chariots of Fire strikes me as the most reactionary film I've seen in some time."*

—Michael H. Seitz  
*The Progressive*

Britisher who worships Anglo-Saxon tradition, British culture, the majesty of Britishness. He is obsessed by elusive injustice. Not that anti-Semitism has any existential meaning for him, for by that time it had been banished from the British civilization, yet Abrahams feels that he—as a Jew—is perceived as something other than he wishes to be and deserves to be. He is able to attend Cambridge University, but he has to grapple with his problem at each step. His solution is to run against prejudice, against the shiftiness of his ideal—which is a blemish on the otherwise superb face of his view of Englishness. He must outrun the feeling of measured outrage which constantly invades him, but the nebulous nature of the overtones and innuendoes that torment him are inescapable. He can never simply win or lose because his conflict is with the subtler shades of human dispositions.

The other man, a Scottish divinity student and missionary, Eric Liddell, runs because he is a true believer, a model Christian, a devout man of sublime religious sentiments, a Scottish romantic. He feels that God likes him when he runs. It sounds trite, but it conceals a deep truth of disarming pulchritude, for what he has in mind and tries to express is that God approves of the ultimate human effort to achieve some magnitude, that such exertion beautifies humanness itself—which is, in point of fact, one of the most intrinsic tenets of the Judeo-Christian phil-

emotions, fairness, gentlemanliness and comity. To make this point, the movie assembles an astounding wealth of visual accessories which in turn support its central directive—to convey the long-forgotten truth that the quality of existential details is interconnected with the quality of characters, emotions, attitudes, impulses. Personalized decency is somehow more believable amid the paraphernalia of British culture at its finest. The paneling of Cambridge University's refectory, the Scottish tweeds, the women's art-déco fashions, the faces which represent normal people all tell something about form, which becomes substance, and about the very notion of quality—the key value of Western civilization.

The unintentional irony of the movie is in its timing, in the misdirected nostalgia—the grandeur of the English ethos defended by a Jew, who is a bit pretentious in his quest for acceptance of his genuine worth, and by a slightly corny but righteous Christian, whose passionate faith might make the world better. These are perhaps two of the most extinct moral propositions of today's England—where Cambridge means the university of Kim Philby and Anthony Blount, where culture means The Rolling Stones and punk rock, where politics means comrade Viscount Tony Benn and where sport means eager participation in the Moscow Olympics. The former empire—whose most recent glimpse of cultural glory came from the Beatles—has a long way to go to salvage its own spirit. Both

the Christian and the Jew in *Chariots of Fire* believe in something—and belief in anything is a long-forgotten human condition in the Piccadilly Circus neighborhood. But if England can still come up with a movie like this, a movie which challenges the universal "yecch!" of the Western cultural malaise, perhaps not everything is in ruin. Perhaps the shattered pieces of former British splendor can, here and there, fall into place and challenge the forces of seedy naturalism and abomination that occupy our realm of images and imagination. This movie somehow touches the raw nerve of latent human longings. By doing this, it can have a salutary impact on the desperate, the jaded, the disoriented who crowd the darkness of the movie houses of the Western world.

—Eric Shapero

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*Gallipoli*; Directed by Peter Weir; Screenplay by David Williamson; Based on a story by Peter Weir; Paramount Pictures.

*'Breaker' Morant*; Directed by Bruce Beresford; Adapted from a play by Kenneth G. Ross; A New World-Quartet/Films Inc. release.

*True Confessions*; Directed by Ulu Grosbard; Screenplay by John Gregory Dunne and Joan Didion; Based on a novel by John Gregory Dunne; United Artists.

*The French Lieutenant's Woman*; Directed by Karel Reisz; Screenplay by Harold Pinter; Based on a novel by John Fowles; United Artists.

by Gary S. Vasilash

*Gallipoli*, as practically everyone seems to know, was almost then-British First Lord of the Admiralty Winston

Mr. Vasilash is associate editor of Manufacturing Engineering.

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## Let Poland Be Poland

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Churchill's undoing. Basil Liddell Hart, in *Churchill Revised*, dryly notes, "Over the Dardanelles, his tendency to 'rush his fences' became still more evident and the vision apparent in his conception was marred partly by his own fault in overlooking practical difficulties and logistical needs." Which is just one way of saying that Churchill should have made sure that he had adequate troop strength vis-à-vis the Turks before he acted in what sounds like a halfhearted British attempt against the Dardanelles. Peter Weir's film *Gallipoli* graphically presents another way of making that statement, one that is written in the blood of innocents.

As the film unfolds, one comes to know and admire two young Australians, Archie and Frank, who both volunteer for a baptism by fire at Gallipoli. Archie is 18, legally too young to join up, but he wants to fight for the British Empire; he feels that it is right. Frank joins for sounder reasons: if the semioutcast Irish youth becomes an officer in the Light Horse, his financial and amorous relationships will both be improved. It's obvious that things aren't going to turn out well for the two. Still, the movie is able to engender a feeling of identification with at least one of the two—either the idealist or the pragmatist—so that the fairly predictable ending doesn't evoke a yawn. Indeed, the Australian troops, pawns of a British commander who doesn't have the slightest idea of what is actually going on, are sent out of the trenches to die like men for their homeland and their families. They are moral men, and it hurts to see them lost as a result of overlooked "practical difficulties and logistical needs." Whether this is the sense of war, every war, all wars in history, remains debatable, and, in all fairness, it must be said that the Australian director does not go for a cheap ideological exclamation mark.

There is also predictable death at the end of *'Breaker' Morant*, and once again, it is because the British felt that

they could use the lives of Australians like children use toys—at least that's what Bruce Beresford seems to be saying. Three Australian soldiers, who felt they were doing their duty in the Boer War, are shown undergoing a court martial, which turns out to be nothing but a kangaroo court. One feels a bitter disgust for Kitchener of Khartoum, as convoluted foreign-policy considerations take the place of elemental justice.

Still, the men sentenced to hard labor, or to death, continue to be sentimental about their country; they feel that what they did was best for Australia, even if they were abused by the Empire. One of them writes a final letter to his wife as his coffin is being built on the other side of the stockade wall. "God Bless Australia," he pens on the folded missive. In any recent American film, these words would be intended as either sarcastic or stupid; here they sound sincere.

In both of these films Australia is shown as a country with its heart in the right place, but one which is under the control of an Empire that still treats it as a place to ship convicts. Quite a difference from the modish American exertions that show America's fighting men as spaced-out foot soldiers commanded by lunatic officers.

America has always been a Protestant country, and, as such, there has in America always been a general suspi-



cion of the Catholic Church, the election of John Kennedy notwithstanding. After all, priests wear all sorts of unusual garb, clouds of incense hover like spirits amid the statuary and frescoes, and everybody knows that the Pope controls everything (and perhaps even more). Until John Paul II, many non-Catholics felt it perfectly proper to bring up the corruption of the Church in the days of the Medici whenever the papacy was discussed. A few years ago, Sally Field starred in a television show, "The Flying Nun," which was based on what was supposed to be perceived as the absurd habit she wore, one which, taking her weight and prevailing atmospheric conditions into account, became aerodynamically efficient. "Silly Catholics!" the trivial but symptomatic show seemed to say. And, as we may recall, before the attempt on his life, John Paul II was often presented in the American media as the Skiing Pope. But many Americans would rather dwell on what they know is the seamy side of the Church, something which is thought to be pervasive at the lower levels, now that the days of centralized Popish Plots are past. The John Cardinal Cody "scandal" is a case in point: innuendo was light-years ahead of information.

*True Confessions* is a contribution to the cult of fascination with the "dark side" of the Church. "How amusing it is to see a priest dead in a whorehouse!" we are supposed to think. "Sicily is practically right next door to the Vatican, so is it any wonder that the Church is hand-in-hand with criminal types?" we are supposed to extrapolate. Thus, *True Confessions* becomes *Chinatown* with a twist. A corrupt big businessman is replaced by corrupt, nominally Catholic, big businessmen.

An honest priest gets packed off to the California desert. An aggressive young priest—finally—gets religion and follows. And what of the corrupt big businessmen, what about their mutually beneficial contributions to the Church? No need to answer, for, of course, everybody knows . . . .

Art, of course, is an illusion, though many frequently overlook that fact and treat it as a direct representation of reality. Increasingly, modern novelists are calling attention to their form so that people will recognize fiction as fiction. Some, like John Fowles, do it well by masterfully manipulating time, while others take a more heavy-handed approach and spill type all over the page.

A question that film-makers interested in doing the same thing might pose to themselves is: How does one make a serious film that says something about the nature of acting, one that calls attention to itself as a work of art, but which doesn't collapse under the weight of undue seriousness or have the substance of a trivial bubble? The filmed version of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is an answer to that question. The film functions both as an entertainment and as a commentary on acting.

When the film opens, Meryl Streep, famous Hollywood actress, is shown being prepped, getting ready to walk out on the Cobb at Lyme Bay as Sarah, "the

French lieutenant's woman." It almost seems as if this is not the actual start of the film, but rather a short preview, "The Making of . . ." But then the action begins, and the actress becomes a character. We forget about the opening until we see Charles Smithson answer a telephone—in 1867?—which makes us aware that he is actually Jeremy Irons, an actor, whom we might remember seeing in the British television adaptation of *Brideshead Revisited*.

Back and forth the film goes, but in a manner more complex than a play within a play. That is, there's a real actress performing as an actress, who plays the role of a fictional character who is based on a character in a novel, a fictional character who pretends to be something that she isn't—which is at least five levels. Yet an average filmgoer, one who simply wants to see a modern Victorian melodrama (i.e. one in which the so-called prudes are shown to be as licentious as goats), can watch the film without being unduly disturbed by the Chinese-box effect. □

his "Third String Quartet" in which he speaks of "turning away from . . . the cultural pathology of my own time." That pathology is characterized by a wholesale rejection of the past and the "pursuit of the one-idea, uni-dimensional work and gesture which seems to have dominated the esthetics of art in the 20th century."

What are the origins of this pathology? The answer is adumbrated in the opening *New York Times* question as to the necessity of the 12-tone revolution. The fact is that the 12-tone revolution was thought to be necessary not because it was needed, but because it was historically inevitable (due to the supposed exhaustion of the tonal system). In other words, this cultural pathology was rooted in modern ideology and translated into a musical dialectic which turns into strong hints of gnosticism, as in Schoenberg's own case. There is certainly such a thing as ideology in music, and to no one's surprise, its influence has been reductionist. Like anything else that can be affected by ideology, music has suffered from what Eric Voegelin calls "a loss of reality." The loss was purposeful. The source of much "originality" in modern art has become not creation but destruction, a process of taking away what has been given—not only by tradition but by nature itself. Of course the principal premise of modern ideology is that wholesale destruction is necessary for the development of the truly new. We were thus given in music a second-hand, or ersatz, reality which operated according to its own self-invented and independent rules divorced from the very nature of sound. In their attempt to discredit tonality as a matter of mere convention, the 12-toners subjected audiences to all manner of manufactured and systematized noises. The audiences fled—in spite of the critics' barbs that they were musical rubes. Abandoned by and eventually unconcerned about their audience, the dodecaphonists shed any remaining restraints on their sterile hermeticism and sank into total incom-

## MUSIC

### Against Atonality

by Robert R. Reilly

"What if, we may ask now, the 12-tone revolution was not really necessary and it has taken us half a century to find that out?" When such a question as this appears in the *New York Times* "Arts and Leisure" section (12/9/79), one may safely assume that the academic stranglehold of the dodecaphonic disciples of Schoenberg et al. has been broken. It was a stranglehold that nearly suffocated modern music; rather, it

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was almost modern music's suicide. This suicide was attempted by a systematic fragmentation of the language of music, the same fragmentation that is easily discernable in so much modern painting and sculpture, wherein a single component or ingredient of art is elevated into its own autonomous, isolated whole.

After a half-century's drubbing, melodic thought and tonal structure are once again emerging in music, at first painfully, slowly, cautiously, as if from a coma induced by a terrible beating, but now almost ebulliently. I know of no better prescription for this recovery than George Rochberg's essay on