

arts

Film hunts down the core of America

"Deerhunter"
written by Michael Cimino
review by Dave Samuel

The *Deerhunter* is certainly one of the most serious and perhaps one of the best films of the decade. It deals with issues; the nature of the bond between men, and the fascination of death and killing have been of central importance to American art, and, particularly to the American novel.

Contrary to the label which has often been attached to it, *The Deerhunter* is not really a Vietnam film. It doesn't explain or directly comment upon the actual situation which existed in Vietnam or the reasons for US involvement there.

We see the war only as it affects three steelworkers from an ethnic industrial town in Pennsylvania. We are shown what the war means to them before they are sent into it, the effects of the actual immersion in it, and the changes wrought upon those who come home. The first hour of *The Deerhunter*, is spent exploring the ethnic, blue collar milieu which has shaped the three men. The working site itself has a rugged harsh beauty to it, and when the men are off shift there is a genuine camaraderie and closeness. In the tavern after work, there's the familiar familiarity, and buddy-buddy horseplay found so often in American beer commercials.

There is a strong undercurrent of attraction between the men which is much more than mere friendship; it isn't homosexuality in any common sense of the word but a sensual exchange which draws them closer to each other than they are to any of the women in the film. All in all, the blue collar work scene is shown sympathetically, not, as from the intellectuals' perspective, as some sort of industrial wasteland.

The slavish ethnic community itself is in some ways brutal, but still vigorous and healthy. Cimino shows a *tour de force* wedding during which all of the participants let down their hair. It is made perfectly clear that the attitude of the men towards the women is degraded. We also see the development of the relationships between the two male principals, Robert De Niro and Christopher Walken.

De Niro holds himself apart from the others; he's a loner, especially as a hunter, where his ideal is to hunt with the one perfect shot. De Niro reminds one of the cold professional killer, the hired gun of the film genre. The others joke about his lack of feeling for women. He's the one who is most fascinated with the notion of going to Vietnam, and presumably,

Christopher Walken is the only person De Niro is attracted to. Walken is a very handsome actor, partially in the same way, so that the touch of homoeroticism between these two is particularly noticeable. He's the most sensitive of any male in the film. He responds lovingly to women, especially to Meryl Streep, a girl who he intends to marry when he returns



from Vietnam.

The action scenes are among the most powerful ever filmed. Cimino's Vietnam is a crucible which melts men down, destroying some and hardening others. When the three are captured by the Vietcong they are forced to play a form of Russian roulette in which spectators bet on which of two participants will blow his brains out first. Apparently this game actually was played among prisoners in Vietnam. The face to face encounter with death transforms both Walken and De Niro, one toward death, the other, life.

The final scenes of the movie, when De Niro has returned home, are remarkably touching reminders of the dislocation the war must have caused in thousands of American lives. One is reminded too that organic,

blood tied communities still live in America despite the massive suburban sprawl.

The Deerhunters is in fact more pro-American than any recent film I can think of. Cimino doesn't just note the predominance of male-male ties in American life, and decry the paucity of the female-male bond. He makes us understand the experience which bonds males together. A class of people which to the exterior perspective seems to be a conglomeration of Archie Bunkers is seen to be a community which lives and feels intensely if not necessarily intelligently. A film like *The Deerhunters* is enough to revive hope for the American cinema, cinema which still can produce a movie which delves into the heart of the American public as this one does.

Experimental poetry reading next wk

bp Nichol is perhaps the most important and most experimental poet writing in English, let alone the Canadian literature scene, today. He has won a reputation as a 'sound poet,' and as a visual poet, being one of the first Canadians to be published in European and South American magazines of world sound poetry and one of the most sought after sound poet/performers at sound poetry readings in Europe and the United States.

As a member of the Four Horsemen he has performed all over Canada, in the U.S. and Europe. He is an important and innovative writer in both

Students' art exhibit coming

March 23 will be a good time to buy some art. The artists are U of A students, and not quite dead yet. The prices are reasonable. There will be free beer and two colors of cheese, Jan Randall's fine people dressed like Leonard Cohen metaphors, people of the same profession as Picasso, eager to show the vintage of their inspiration. We'll be at the Student's Union Gallery at 8:00 in the mess gondola to explain about care and feeding of art. Should anyone be attracted to the glamour and the tax rebate that comes with being a patron.

prose and poetry. Among his many books, from the 'box', *bp*, which appeared in 1967 containing examples of all three forms of 'writing' which he explores, to the two recent volumes of prose, *Craft Dinner* (1978) and *Journal* (1978), his most important work is the ongoing, epic-stature poem, *the martyrology* (1972-).

The first four books of *the martyrology* are now in print from Coach House Press. Nichol is now working on Book 6, and will be reading from a draft of part of Book 5 at his reading, copies of which he will make available to the audience beforehand, thus maintaining a tradition he began in 1976 when he first read a draft of Book 4 to a large audience in Edmonton. bp Nichol is a fine performer of his own poetry and his readings are always stimulating and entertaining.

In his review of all four books of *the martyrology*, Stephen Scobie says: "*The Martyrology* is a redeeming book, an experience of community, a 'gift of joy.'" bp Nichol's readings also provide that experience, that 'gift.' Come and hear him, Thursday, March 22nd, Humanities Centre AV 1-3, at 12:30 noon.

There is no entrance charge, but to get out, the artists only ask that you comment in the book by the door on the results of four years hard work.

There will be sculpture in wood, clay and metal, figurative and abstract paintings, prints, unretouched photographs and drawings at the exhibiton. The show will run until April 4 or for 15,000 miles. See the art sometime during the week when it is not as crowded, but come to the opening at 8:00 pm, March 23 to meet the people behind the art, below the art, in front of the art....

A musical note

The University of Alberta Stage Band, under the direction of Fordyce Pier, will present a concert Tuesday, March 20, at 8:00 pm in Convocation Hall on the University campus. Music by George Gershwin, Thad Jones, Toshiko Akiyoshi, Jay Chattaway and others will be heard. Admission is free.

Lullaby

The lullaby of the sea
Softly whispers to the child of the waters,
Rocking him to sleep
While the cry from the sky
Assures him that life
Is still moving on.

Feel safe little one—
To know that upon your return,
Perhaps tomorrow—
Perhaps in centuries to come,
The sea will whisper its lullaby—
To you once again,
And the cry from the sky
Shall continue its message to you.

Anita Brunsch