

A FEW MORE WORDS ABOUT MR. GOODBAR

-CUP-

In a famous sequence of photographs we are allowed to watch a young woman die. You probably saw the pictures: the rescue attempt that failed. A fifth floor fire escape, fireman looking very brave, smoke billowing behind. The photographer is shooting one frame every fifth of a second with a motor-driven Nikon. The first picture shows the fireman, the woman clutching her child on the fire escape. A ladder is only a few feet away. As the structure tears loose from the building in the second, we see the mother and child sliding into space. Catch them. In the final frame: death in action; the insane, soundless terror of violent death, everyone's atavistic nightmare fear of failing. Her face is frozen, her arms outstretched, twisted, one tenth of a second from the pavement. She does not want to die. They are not pleasant pictures.

When they appeared on front pages, the public sound and fury surprised even editors, used to estimating public reaction and seldom far wrong. "Invading the privacy of death." "Cheap sensationalism." "A tawdry way to sell newspapers." These are only a few.

"Looking for Mr. Goodbar" reminds me of those photographs. Still pictures of a woman dying. It is, as they say, "gripping" and "riveting". It is also unpleasant, embarrassing and pointless in the extreme.

How much of the above quoted (and of my own reaction) is squeamishness and/or puritanism? Nora Ephron, writing in *Esquire* defends the fire escape pictures on grounds that "death is one of life's main events...they deserve to be printed because they're great pictures, breathtaking pictures of something that happened."

Fair enough. And fair, too, for newspaper coverage of the first death of Teresa Dunn. Judith Rosner's novel, the unrecognizable 'source' for the film, is more interested in motive, psychology, the life that bred the death. But to recreate sensational violent death on film, simply for its own sake (or should I mention a profit motive?) is

beyond bad taste, beneath criticism.

Like the deaf mute children "Mr. Goodbar" struggles to "say something" and pretends thereby to relevance. "We all need someone who won't blame us," says the sister, but everyone in Teresa's life does, sooner or later, and her quest is for those who don't - her Mr. Goodbars. Ultimately, of course, she finds one who blames her more than anyone. That's it. Isn't life ironic? Except that the film is not about life, it's about death, and though, as Ms. Ephron says,

sell hundreds of thousands every month. Son of Sam received more column inches in the New York dailies last summer than anything since the presidential elections. Politicians might envy his coverage. I always read the "crime" section before the "world affairs" in my weedy newsmagazine. And it isn't just death; not release or catharsis or feeling glad it happened to someone else. (How many people do you find who are avid readers of obituary columns?) Death and violence. Violence and death. An irresistible

instant Kennedy's brain is blown apart, as Freddy Prinze is reported to have done, until he put the gun in his mouth and tried it for himself. It becomes a pornography of violence; meaningless, repetitious, soliciting, vicarious pleasures from those who would like to pull the trigger or vicarious empathy from the curious who wonder what the bullet feels like. Death and violence, violence and death.

Mr. Goodbar, I think appeals to these instincts: elements of the circus sideshow, wish fulfillment, voyeurism, curiosity, a taste for the bizarre, and, like dutiful sheep, we line up and pay our money to see pictures of the pain. We go to watch pictures of this woman die knowing exactly what we will see (even the monks in the Tibetan Himalayas must know the plot of "Goodbar" by now). There is obviously an innate desire to see such things. So be it. But what I object to, nay revile, is the blatant exploitation of this desire, the manipulation, the using it as an excuse, by those who perpetrate mass culture in this society, to glorify the new Holy Trinity of Low Level Life: death, sex and violence. Richard Brooks is a pioneer, first to achieve the consubstantial unity of the coprophilic father and the catamite son in a picture wholly unencumbered with sense, meaning or "redeeming social value." He'll probably make a million.

The question of where the representation of death or violence or the act of copulation, all undeniable facts of existence, goes beyond art into the realm of pornography has been debated since Shakespeare put Gloucester's eyes out on stage in "King Lear". Violent? Very. Necessary? The answer, I think, is that Shakespeare makes of Lear's life and death a testament to the nobility of the human spirit. Richard Brooks doesn't even try. He cares less about the life of Teresa Dunn. And he makes an ugly two-hour photograph of her dying - guttering, falling, her human eyes screaming to us out the horror of her death.

The #1 best-selling novel is now a movie.



LOOKING FOR MR. GOODBAR Starring DIANE KEATON
TUESDAY WELD WILLIAM ATHERTON
RICHARD KILEY RICHARD GERE Produced by FREDDIE FIELDS

death is a part of life, it is never exclusively so.

The film medium makes us see by careful use of emphasis and selection, yet director Richard Brooks gives every incident equal weight, equal time, so that he may as well be shooting stills, three per second. Dying with a dying fall. He may think his technique constitutes realism: it adds up only to pointlessness.

I can find no *raison d'etre* for "Mr. Goodbar" except of course, the near-universal morbid fascination for the ways and means of violent death. We bought several million copies of *Helter Skelter* to read, for the hundredth time, how Sharon Tate was stabbed to death. "True Detective" type magazines

ble song and dance team, they find a clandestine audience in most of us.

It is suggestive, perhaps symptomatic, that, fourteen years after the fact, thousands pore over the smallest details of the killing of John Kennedy; that 81% of Americans are not satisfied by the explanation of his death. Explanation, mind you. How did it happen? I hope his suffering was small. Tell me every detail for I've got to know it all. And do you have a picture of the pain? wrote Phil Ochs, sometime before he hung himself in his room last year. It is something more than suggestive to purchase a copy of the Sapruder film of that day in Dallas and to run again and again the