'Ducks' all wet; Steinbeck adaptation detached

By Henry Herx
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Loud and obnoxious sum up *The Mighty Ducks* (Disney).

For the record, the story centers on a mean yuppie lawyer (Emilio Estevez) and a bunch of nasty juveniles, all of whom are transformed by working together to win a pee-wee hockey league championship.

Director Stephen Herek's tale of the character-building potential of team sports offers bogus characters in situations that earn little sympathy or respect before the predictable outcome.

Because of the bone-crunching violence of a contact sport, nasty youthful pranks and coarse language, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

Deborah Croswell-Walt Disney Pictures

After a judge slaps him with community service coaching youth hockey, attorney Gordon Bombay (Emilio Estevez, second from left) faces a team of kids who can't skate, can't score and can't win in *The Mighty Ducks.*

Of Mice and Men

John Steinbeck's Depression-era novel, *Of Mice and Men* (MGM), has been brought to the screen in a handsome-looking, well-crafted but disappointingly flat version.

Practical-minded George (Gary Sinise, who also directs) has taken on the burden of looking after simple-minded, trouble-prone Lenny (John Malkovich), a man with the power of a giant and the innocent mind of a child.

The two men have nothing but a dream of saving enough money to buy their own place so they can live off the land and no one can fire them.

Hired as farm workers harvesting the wheat crop, George and Lenny come close to realizing their dream when an old handyman (Ray Walston) on the farm offers to put up his life savings to buy a small farm if they'll take him in as a partner.

But before they can act on it, Lenny accidentally kills the wife of the boss's son to stop her from screaming after she becomes frightened by him.

The movie is nicely done but with a sense of detachment that is hardly involving.

Because of some brutal violence, including murder in the plot resolution, and occasional coarse language, the USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Presbyterian minister reveals dark secrets in memoirs

Telling Secrets, by Frederick Buechner; Harper (San Francisco, 1991); 106 pages; $14.95.

By Sister Margaret Brennan, SSJ
Guest contributor

Frederick Buechner's graceful prose and practical applications of faith to life have delighted readers of spiritual literature for four decades.

The Presbyterian minister, author of 26 books, Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award nominee, teacher at Harvard Divinity School and spiritual guide, Buechner has always seemed to be the most sensible of men to me: funny, erudite, subtle, deep, detached.

In *Telling Secrets* he drops his detachment.

Although there is often a dark side to his characters and his view of the world, it is always tempered and illuminated by irony, wit and gentle wisdom. The darkness in this, his third book of memoirs, is different. It comes from the revelation of two events in his life that both shaped and terrified him: his father's suicide and his daughter's near-fatal anorexia. We meet five "characters" in his story: his father, mother, daughter, himself and God. Perhaps there is a sixth: the self he rediscovers after he comes to name and voice his secrets.

Some will find familiar a code he learned from his mother. "Don't talk; don't trust; don't feel is supposed to be the unwritten law of families that for one reason or another have gone out of whack ... (it) was the law we lived by and woe to the one who broke it," he writes.

Although he may seem harsh in his memory of his distant and beauty-conscious mother, his new understanding of what fashioned her own heart and cemented her denial is revealed with great love and pity. Buechne was only 10 years old when his young father calmly ended his life and 55 years later some of the mystery of that terrible act unfolds for him at last.

The other mystery — a daughter, greatly loved, turning from him to a solitary path of darkness and death — he recalls with pain and bewilderment. He comes to know that he can do nothing for her but to look on in love and repent of what was wanting in him, in his need to take care of her.

What makes this painful journey into memory different from the therapeutic books crowding our bookstore shelves is God's presence in every step. Hard times, says Beuchner, can be "fearsome blessings," changed when grace "explodes" into our lives and gives us our bearings.

He sees memory as God's gift to us, enabling us to replay moments — even painful ones — and begin to see their meaning, to bless the past and be blessed by it.

When Buechner speaks of the search for the child he was and for his lost father, or of his inability to "fix" a loved one's pain, his words do not have the irritating effect of jargon or "psychobabble." Rather he gives a perspective and hope to those who struggle with their own secrets and who try to understand how God speaks to us through "the hieroglyphics of the things that happen to us."

This is the kind of book you read with pen in hand, ready to underline or copy messages, the kind of book you want to read aloud to a friend, simply to relish the prose's beauty. Its themes are universal, reaching far beyond Buechner's experience.

"My story is important," he writes, "not because it is mine, God knows, but because if I tell it anything like right, the chances are you will recognize that in many ways it is also yours."

In *Telling Secrets,* he tells it right.

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