

Recent movies plumb the depths of mediocrity

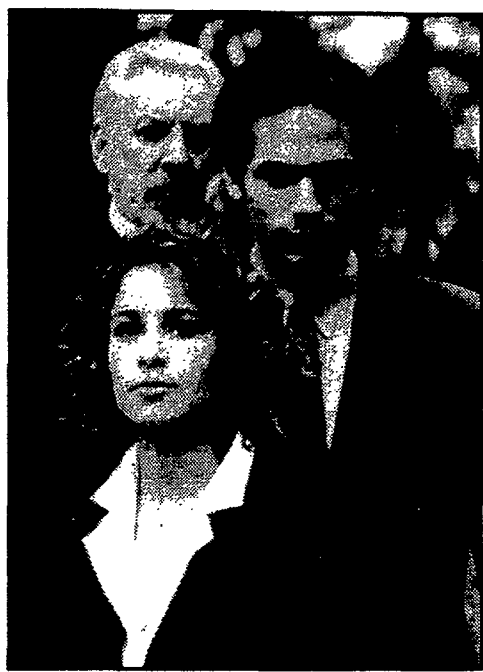
NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are capsule reviews of movies recently reviewed by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

'The Puppet Masters'

(Hollywood) Government agents Donald Sutherland and Eric Thal turn to scientists Julie Warner and Will Patton in a race against time to rescue people being turned into automatons by aliens. Stuart Orme's by-the-numbers direction results in an unremarkable blend of science fiction and horror. Intermittent violence, brief rear nudity and an instance of rough language. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

'The Road to Wellville'

(Columbia) Unappetizing satire about the bizarre digestive and sexual practices at a loosely fact-based turn-of-the-century Battle Creek, Mich., health spa run by cornflakes inventor Dr. Kellogg (Anthony Hopkins) centers on the an-



Buena Vista Pictures
(Clockwise from left) Donald Sutherland, Eric Thal and Julie Warner star in 'Robert A. Heinlein's The Puppet Masters.'

tics of a confused couple (Matthew Broderick and Bridget Fonda), a would-be cereal tycoon (John Cusack) and the doctor's lunatic son (Dana Carvey). Director Alan Parker's failed comedy plumbs the depths of scatological humor as characters drone on about bodily functions. Recurring nudity, an adulterous situation, toilet humor, an electrocution and an instance of rough language. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

'The Browning Version'

(Paramount) British production of Terence Rattigan's play about a teacher (Albert Finney) in a boys' prep school where, on the eve of his retirement, he finds the gumption to stand up to his unfaithful wife (Greta Scacchi) and a manipulative headmaster (Michael Gambon) after being affected by a gift from a student (Ben Silverstone). Directed by Mike Figgis, the half-hearted attempt to update characters and situations from

the 1950s fails to make the period story credible in the present, save for Finney's compelling performance. Implied adulterous liaisons, some rough language. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

'Faust'

(Zeitgeist) Surrealistic Czech fantasy in which a man (Petr Cepek) is drawn to a Prague theater, where he finds himself playing the role of Faust, sometimes on the stage or in a medieval setting but most often in a marionette version, all of which end with Mephistopheles (again Cepek) claiming the man's soul. The work is a playful composite of live action, puppetry and clay animation, but the story gets lost in a welter of shifting scenes and bizarre images. Sparse dubbed dialogue. A satanic incantation, some bawdy humor and sexual innuendo. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. Not rated by the MPAA.

Collection provides primer of U.S. Catholic experience

"The American Catholic Heritage: Reflections on the Growth and Influence of the Catholic Church in the United States;" Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, U.S. Catholic Conference (Washington, 1992); 131 pp.; cloth \$14.95; paperback \$9.95.

Reviewed by Father R. Emmett Curran
Catholic News Service

The essays in "The American Catholic Heritage" grew out of a lecture series sponsored by the Pontifical North American College in Rome in 1989-90 to commemorate the bicentennial of the establishment of the American hierarchy. Six prominent American Catholics were invited to address key issues related to the Catholic experience in the United States. These included religious freedom, the relationship between church and state, the relationship between the American hierarchy and the Holy See, education, the development of religious life in this country, and the American engagement with the Catholic social tradition.

The result is an engaging primer in the American Catholic heritage.

Jesuit Father Walter Burghardt analyzes in his masterly homiletic manner the contribution of the church in the United States to Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Freedom as well as its revolutionary implications for a theology of freedom which the church yet needs to develop, not only concerning its external life in the world but within its own body.

Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia acknowledges the American role in legitimizing the principle of separation of church and state but cautions that confusion over the very distinct concerns of each can be very damaging to both. In fact Scalia's own differentiation of the two realms is itself confusing, with its strong implication that the church's proper concern is limited to "the spiritual welfare of individual souls" and that "religious preoccupation with government — with material welfare, with power, with coercion — can destroy the church."

Indeed in his traditionalist emphasis on the God-based authority of legitimate government, Scalia finds the main church-state relationship in America to be that of the responsible individual



obeying the laws of his duly constituted government.

In the longest essay of the volume, Jesuit Father Gerald P. Fogarty provides, among other things, an excellent contextual overview of the evolution of such notions as religious freedom and separation of church and state by tracing the two centuries of the American Catholic hierarchy's relations with the Holy See.

Jesuit Father William J. Byron addresses in a thoughtful, comprehensive essay the achievements and challenges of American Catholic education in a pluralistic society. The former president of The Catholic University of America's assertion that "the theologian must enjoy academic freedom and the university must enjoy institutional autonomy" is obviously made with conviction but not without irony in light of the case of Father Charles Curran during his administration in which the authority of the Holy See took precedence.

Sister Mary Milligan, in a richly suggestive survey of the history of women religious, explores the impact of cultural and ecclesiastical conditions in the United States upon the life and apostolic scope of their communities.

Finally, Lawrence A. Pezzullo, executive director of Catholic Relief Services, reflects on the growth of a social consciousness within the American church in this century.

This is an engaging and enlightening book for the American Catholic community in general.

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Father Curran, a Jesuit, is an associate professor of history at Georgetown University and the author of "The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University" (1993).

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