

The Newest Nixon

Stone's Fiction Reveals Truths

By Bob Woodward
Washington Post Staff Writer

The authentic images of the real Richard Nixon will be replayed for generations. Two videos will likely stand out. First, Nixon's famous 1952 Checkers speech, one of live television's rawest and most emotional moments, in which he successfully appealed to the public for his political survival and forced Dwight Eisenhower to keep him on the ticket as his running mate. Second, Nixon's 1974 farewell to the White House staff the day he resigned the presidency—another raw and emotional moment. In those 22 years between the pleading and the goodbye lies the heart of Nixon's political career.

Future viewers, who never had the real Nixon in their lives, will likely ask: How could such a man have been president? Even those of us who lived through Nixon's era have asked that question.

In Oliver Stone's new movie, "Nixon," he and actor Anthony Hopkins, in the title role, attempt to find answers. But for

See NIXON, G5, Col. 1



Anthony Hopkins and Joan Allen as President and Mrs. Nixon.

Nixon's Shakespearean Dimension

By Lloyd Rose
Washington Post Staff Writer

The statement that Richard M. Nixon, late president of these United States, is a character worthy of Shakespeare isn't even a cliché. It springs to everyone's mind fresh as the perfect—maybe the only sufficient—way to describe this poisonously hypnotic public figure: the loser who wouldn't lie down, the misfit who refused to acknowledge that he didn't know his place, the striver undone by his own ambition with a neatness almost too symmetrical for art.

Because of his name, Richard Nixon has often been likened to Richard III. (There was even a '60s play called "Dick Deterred.") The comparison is almost irresistible, but it doesn't really work. Shakespeare's crippled king is above all seductive, a master manipulator, a specialist at luring others to

See SHAKESPEAREAN, G4, Col. 1

SHAKESPEAREAN, From G1

their doom. Nixon had all the social ease of a Brillo pad and he lumbered to his own doom, unable to force even the minor functionary John Dean to take the fall for him. He's more like the shifty, hypocritical Bolingbroke, who managed to get rid of Richard II while protesting he really didn't want to. Bolingbroke became Henry IV, a character who has two plays named after him yet stars in neither of them—just the kind of thing you feel could have happened to Nixon, a star of history with the personal magnetism of a bit player.

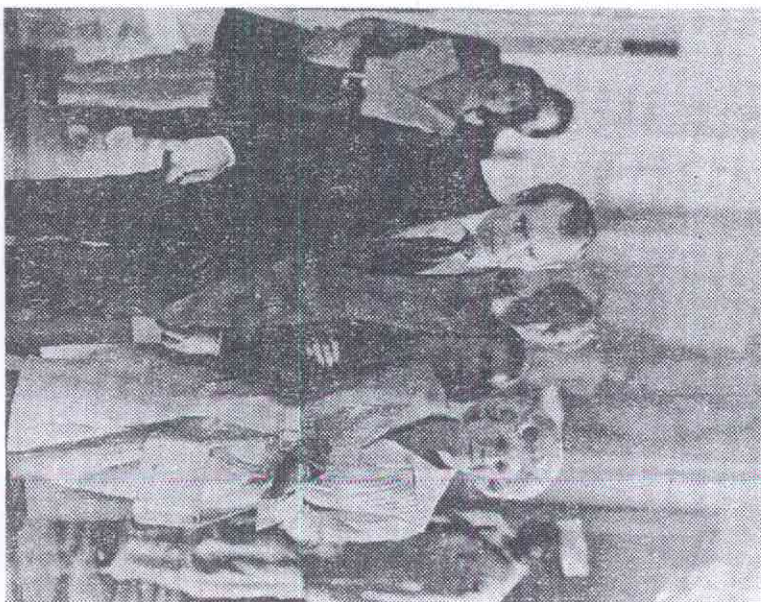
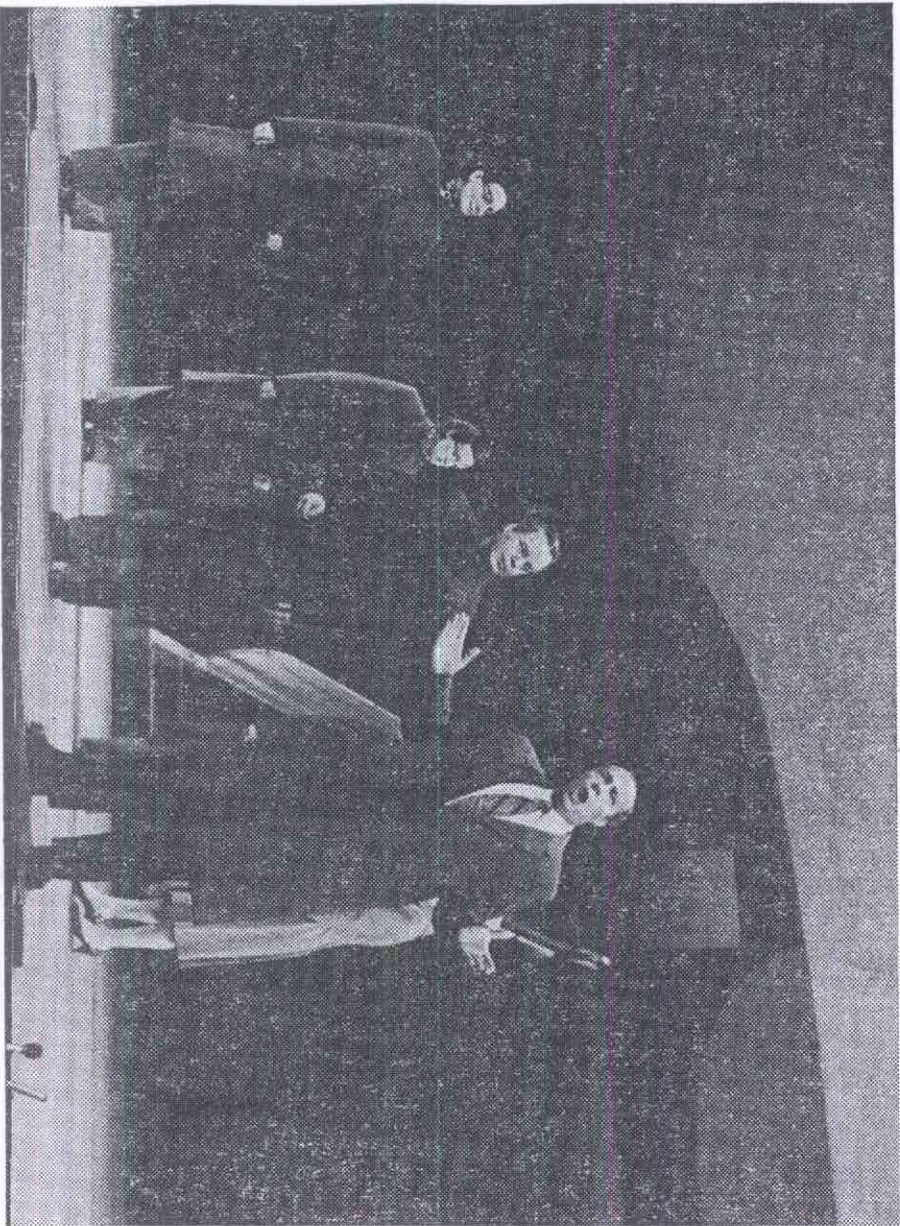
Calling Nixon "Shakespearean" is acknowledging his complexity. Men who are just jerks hold no fascination; they're shallow, and bore us quickly. Nixon combined seemingly disparate elements—he was evil yet also pathetic, clumsy yet wily, idealistic and venal. He didn't make any sense at all, really, yet we feel we know him—that he is, in journalist Tom Wicker's phrase, "one of us"—and we wait for an artist to make sense of him where we cannot.

We've seen a lot of Nixon this month, as if he were some sort of perverse holiday figure, a ghost-of-Christmas-best-forgotten: the presents that flopped, the cookies that burned. Aside from Oliver Stone's heavy-breathing "Nixon," the made-for-television "Kissinger and Nixon" was on TNT, and in New York, a short, smart play called "Nixon's Nixon" also features the president and his secretary of state. (In a piece of casting Washington audiences—and all political ironists—will appreciate, Kissinger is played by Steve Mellor, last seen here as Groucho Marx in "The Cocoanuts.")

Even from beyond the grave, Nixon causes upsets: Right after he died, a lot of the liberal press was nice about him, incurring the wrath of other members of the liberal press for "going soft." America has yet to shake his cold, pale hand from its throat. What have our artists taught us about his phantom's grip?

On "Saturday Night Live," Dan Aykroyd, taking the low road as is his wont, established the definitive Nixon caricature, the Nixon Aykroyd's generation loved to hate—a creep to make your skin crawl. With blithe sadism, Aykroyd homed in on all the characteristics that made Nixon such a poor figure in this age of television: the awkwardness, the homeliness, the choked, gravelly voice churning far back in his mouth as if he didn't really want to let words out at all.

If you look at Aykroyd's Nixon today, it's fascinating how



Nixon onstage, on TV and in the movies, clockwise from left: James Maddalena as the president in "Nixon in China"; Lane Smith and Susan Brown as the first couple in "The Final Days"; and Anthony Hopkins and Annabeth Gish as Nixon and daughter Julie.

much hatred went into the portrait, how much Aykroyd could count on the audience hating along with him. He made fun of Nixon like one makes fun of a freak—the underlying assumption being that someone so misshapen deserves any slime you sling at him. It was Nixon's misfortune to be a genuinely ugly man, charmless, without even the equally unhandsome Johnson's brutish masculine force. (There exists a superb little Oliphant bronze of Johnson as a centaur; it's impossible to imagine Nixon so animally virile.) There's a smug cruelty in Aykroyd's attack—his glee goes beyond smacking Nixon for his political sins and into the nasty, forbidden area of hurting someone *because* he's weak. Aykroyd and his contemporaries went after Nixon like playground bullies after the class nerd.

To this day, there are people who turn livid at the idea of granting any sympathy to Nixon. But even if one accepts the Aykroyd viciousness as deserved, such one-sidedness is inadequate for creating a dramatic character, one with enough inner tension to hold an audience's interest. Sympathy is demanded not by the strictures of compassion but by those of drama. Stone has said that he became less judgmental of Nixon the more he read about him. This might have been less an emotional reaction than the simple artistic need to turn the guy into someone who could carry a three-hour picture.

By far the most generous portrayal of Nixon on stage or in film is in John Adams's "Nixon in China." A minimalist composer with a romantic's soul, Adams was drawn to the hope and surprise in Nixon's rapprochement with Mao, to the idea that history is not a predetermined freight train hurtling to crush us all. A singing Nixon is in itself an almost loony idea, implying as it does a grace and lightness of spirit

that seem totally alien to the man. But Adams's Nixon is a visionary. His arias express a man who is at heart a political mystic—when he meets with Mao, another ruthless dreamer, it's a communion of brothers.

The trip to China is the heroic element in Nixon's myth, the achievement that keeps him from being just a nasty historical embarrassment and adds the sense of tragic waste to his story. Without China, Nixon is a bad joke; with China he's a mystery. Stone does no justice at all to Nixon's foreign policy brilliance, yet in his film the only scene that has anything like beauty is the one where the president and the dictator meet. Though it's only two tired men sitting in armchairs, the image is striking—Anthony Hopkins's Nixon leans toward Mao with a relaxed physical assurance, a sense of self, that he shows nowhere else in the movie.

The legendary meeting also sparked the imagination of Russell Lees, whose "Nixon's Nixon" is a sharp, unsparing, funny play, a fictional re-creation of what might have been said between Nixon and Kissinger the night Kissinger came to advise the president to resign. The egotistic jousting of Nixon and his ambitious secretary of state is drawn much more wickedly than in the more staidly "historical" "Kissinger and Nixon." Like Nixon, Kissinger is a great mythic character, and we're eager to see how a writer treats him and an actor plays him. (For the record, Ron Silver's Kissinger is brilliant, slippery, powerful and depressed in "Kissinger and Nixon" and Paul Sorvino's is brilliant, slippery, powerful and a master at covering his butt in "Nixon.") In "Nixon's Nixon," the two partners and adversaries parry in

different styles—Nixon jabbing at the slower, more lugubrious Kissinger, but Kissinger landing a roundhouse punch whenever he manages to connect.

In this play too, irreverent as it is, the visit to China is treated with respect. Nixon and Kissinger reenact the meeting with Mao, and the stage direction reads: "Kissinger becomes Mao. He speaks only Chinese in a genuine and moving tone. Nixon becomes gracious and not without presence himself." At one point, Nixon expresses his awe of the Chairman: "My god. I think of myself as a world leader, but . . ." though Lees mischievously undercuts the danger of too much seriousness by following up with this line: "He did that, the uh, very long hike."

Lees's play is a sparring match—his Nixon is a fighter, and a good one. This is another side of his character that hasn't often been dramatized. Both Hopkins's Nixon and Lane Smith's in the 1989 television film "The Final Days" have a bruised doggedness, and Hopkins adds a sullen, simmering resentment that is almost aggressive. But neither of them, any more than the Aykroyd cartoon, gives any sense of real power—they don't make Nixon frightening, an odd omission when playing someone who was so widely reviled. Is this the man with the force to torment and haunt a nation, this maladroit schlub?

Oddly, Beau Bridges, though nowhere near as affecting as Hopkins or Smith, manages to convey a sense of danger in "Kissinger and Nixon." It's difficult to tell whether this is owing to the actor's choice or a limitation of talent—his Nixon is disturbingly inexpressive. He lurches around the room spouting sports metaphors when Kissinger is trying to discuss foreign policy matters of life and death; Bridges' deliv-

ery is staccato, and his Nixon is privately amused at jokes no one else understands. (Makeup artist Kevin Haney, who so memorably turned Robert Morse into Truman Capote onstage, layered Bridges' very un-Nixonlike moon face with latex; this may account for some of the stiffness and the fact that the eyes seem vividly, warily alive in the heavy face.)

Nixon's face was not, in fact, very expressive, and this presents a problem for anyone who plays him, since an actor's job is to let us know what's going on inside the character. Bridges' opacity, while unsatisfactory dramatically, is nonetheless convincingly Nixonian. Hopkins gives an extraordinary performance, but there is a sense in which the more moving he is, the less he reminds us of Nixon. Hopkins has a warm, alive, actor's face—Nixon's wincing, inhibited spasm of a smile is an effort for him.

Hopkins is an unusual actor, capable of giving perfectly dreadful performances ("Magic," "Bram Stoker's Dracula") and breathtakingly effective ones ("The Elephant Man," "The Silence of the Lambs") that don't seem to emanate from the same source. His Nixon is one of his great ones—troubled, haunted, without defenses, a breakable man. Lane Smith too played a Nixon who knew pain, his body rigid with resolve, his eyes darkly vulnerable. But Hopkins's small, slovenly creation, who seems to smell the stink of his own inadequacy, is a whole other level of suffering down. We're a long, long way from Aykroyd. In a reverse of the dictum, Nixon's life has played out first as farce and then as tragedy.

Stone's film is finally extremely sympathetic to Nixon, though in a peculiar way. He forgives Nixon only because he can be fitted neatly into Stone's personal, cracked vision of history. Stone's America is a paranoid theme park, and he's successfully turned Nixon into one of the rides. Not a flashy one, of course. Kennedy gets to be the exciting, high-tech experience, the Indiana Jones or Space Mountain; Nixon must make do with a role somewhere on the level of Mr.



all the power and superb spirit of this movie they never reach the heights of the real Nixon of those speeches. Nixon himself later wrote of the Checkers speech: "Apparently my emotional nerve endings had been rubbed so raw by the events of the previous few days that I was able to convey the intensity of my feelings to the audience."

Raw, rubbed nerve endings were the theme of Nixon's life, and his story was of triumphs and failures on the epic scale. This is the moviemaker's dilemma: The actual facts of the rise and fall of Richard Nixon cannot be made more dramatic, no matter how they might be dressed up.

But Stone has not made a history. As best as I can tell, about half the movie is based on facts. The other half ranges from sound speculation to borderline slander.

What Stone has undertaken is nothing less than a cinematic psychoanalysis of perhaps our most mysterious president. As with all psychoanalysis, the result is a mixture of fact, interpretation and some fantasy.

A single question—Why?—pulses through "Nixon." The movie Nixon (like the real Nixon) searches mercilessly for scapegoats—the East Coast, the Kennedys, the CIA. Hopkins, as Nixon, says "the press, the kids, the liberals—they're out there trying to figure out how to tear me down." But Stone and Hopkins show that Nixon did it to himself.

Why? In scene after scene, Stone shows Nixon searching for a qualified analyst, someone to explain him to himself. Desperately, Nixon auditions everyone around him on his psychic casting couch—from his wife, Pat, to his top aide, H.R. "Bob" Haldeman; from his mother, Hannah, to the 19-year-old woman he confronts during an anti-war protest, who tells him that even the president is not in control, that the system is an unmanageable "wild beast."

In the end, Nixon gets the analyst he deserved—Oliver Stone. Both manifest paranoia. Though Stone shows some tenderness and empathy, like a good shrink Stone is relentless. And his ultimate version of Nixon is, in many respects, at least as compelling as the truth.

Fact and Fiction

I've spent some hours trying to truth-squad the movie and its annotated script—which cites such sources as

books, tapes and testimony in 168 footnotes. Stone has the outline of Nixon's life about right. He sees the centrality of Watergate. The movie begins with the Watergate burglary in June 1972 as Nixon is seeking reelection as president, and it ends with Nixon's resignation. Most characters are at least partially true to life; the only totally concocted one is a rich Texas oilman, played by Larry Hagman.

Stone nicely portrays some of the complex reality of Nixon's key relationships with men—particularly with Henry Kissinger, and with his two chiefs of staff, Haldeman and Alexander Haig. Nixon's interactions with women in the film—particularly with his mother and with Pat—are wildly speculative, however, and among the least supported parts of the film. But Stone uses these invented scenes convincingly to show Nixon's deep isolation and his cold, needy, rocky love. They are high drama but very bad history.

In a manufactured confrontation near the end of the movie, Nixon and his wife get into a spat about the secret



THE WASHINGTON POST



Emotional nerve endings rubbed raw: Nixon's most memorable video moments were his farewell speech in 1974, top, and his Checkers speech in 1952.



Anthony Hopkins's Nixon on the campaign trail in 1968, above, and the real McCoy, below.



White House tape recordings. "No one will ever see those tapes," Nixon says. "Including you!"

"And what would I find out that I haven't known for years?" Pat replies in this fictitious conversation. "What makes it so damn sad is that you couldn't confide in any of us. You had to make a record . . . for the whole world."

"They were for me," Nixon says. "They're mine."

"No," Pat answers. "They're not yours. *They are you.*"

To Stone's credit, however, the movie quite nicely lays out the whole range of illegal activities undertaken by Nixon's administration—bogus national security wiretaps, the payment of hush money to the Watergate conspirators, the break-in at the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist in the truly bizarre effort to discredit the man who had leaked the Pentagon Papers in 1971.

But he places Watergate in an imaginary context of some deep-seated obstacle hampering Nixon. Stone hypothesizes that Nixon is racked with guilt over some vague, perhaps indirect, pre-presidential involvement in CIA plots to assassinate Cuban leader Fidel Castro; this fiasco, Stone suggests, in turn led to the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy. Thus, when Stone's Nixon is told that one of the Watergate operatives is a former CIA agent named E. Howard Hunt, he worries obsessively that the whole tale might become public. For Stone, this is a key motive for the Watergate coverup.

There is no convincing evidence of this. In reality, the core problem for Nixon during Watergate was not a sense of guilt. It was an absence of guilt. The voluminous Watergate record shows that Nixon had little or no regard for the law. The Watergate coverup became necessary because Nixon's administration had used government power—the FBI, the IRS, the CIA—illegally. Not in the distant Eisenhower era, but during his own presidency. Such conduct was widespread. It was habit. And when some of his operatives were caught in the Watergate burglary, they had to be silenced before they led to what Nixon's Attorney

General John Mitchell later called the "White House horrors."

The mix of fact and fiction is intricate. The 126 scenes in Stone's film are themselves often a blizzard of fragments—phrases from the tapes, real dialogue, concocted dialogue, real news clips, Hopkins speaking real Nixon speeches and so on. For those who know the story, Stone's version feels as if the script had been written on note cards that Stone dropped, then scooped up in random order, on his way into the studio to make his film.

But Stone has been honest in his labeling. At the beginning, he issues a clear warning that scenes have been compressed and "hypothesized." So this is fiction. Stone has told us so.

Truth at Its Core

It's not easy turning history into film. I have closely watched filmmakers translate two books I co-authored. I have some sympathy, having seen the process up close.

"All the President's Men," the book Carl Bernstein and I wrote about reporting the Watergate story, was made into a movie in 1976. The filmmakers were painstaking with the facts, but still there were compromises. Four key editors at The Washington Post supervised our Watergate reporting. In the movie version, they became three. Things said by one editor were put in the mouth of another for dramatic compression.

In one climactic scene, Benjamin C. Bradlee, the executive editor of The Post, played by Jason Robards, tells his reporters to pursue the story even though it looks as though Watergate is going to lead to Nixon himself: "Nothing is at stake except freedom of the press, free speech and possibly the future of the country."

In fact, as the book version shows, Bradlee said that night, "What the hell do we do now?" It was the right question, because Watergate was unknown journalistic territory. But the real question didn't have dramatic punch.

Our second Watergate book, "The Final Days," is cited 14 times as a source in footnotes to Stone's script. Again, the film version of "The Final Days," by ABC television, got more than 90 percent of it right. But filmmakers need freedom to turn explanation into drama, sketch into intimacy.

Stone's Nixon is an unexpectedly successful portrait; his fictionalized version of Nixon's inner turmoil is stunning—a caged man who has made his own prison in the highest office of the land.

This is not the Nixon of historical

record, but he rings true emotionally. And here Stone has captured something important. The factual histories, the memoirs, the volumes of sworn testimony and some 60 hours of secret office tapes show a Nixon hellbent on settling scores with real or imagined enemies. This Nixon of history is hateful. He is small. He speaks the language of vengeance.

But there has always been something more, an unpleasant quality that I've never been able to name until seeing this film. That quality was Nixon's selfishness and self-centeredness. Here it is, in all its paranoid ramblings. Stone's Nixon is literally using the American presidency and its power to find himself. Each meeting and encounter, each speech and fragment is all

about self. Stone's diagnosis of narcissism is palpable, and though he gives us an extreme presentation of the symptoms, he is starting with the truth. The great psychosis in the Nixon presidency was that it was all too often and all too much about *Nixon*. Not enough about principle. Not enough about the public that had elected him president. Not about doing good. Not about elevating ourselves as a nation.

This is the Nixon of the tapes, of the Haldeman diaries, and of the hundreds of interviews I have conducted with those close to Nixon over the last 23 years.

Shrinking the Presidency

Is it possible that Nixon's greatest corruption of office was using the presidency for his own radical psychoanalysis, to finish the business of his childhood and other real or perceived slights? Scene after scene in Stone's film turns on discussions or depictions of mother, father, death, childhood, hate, love, lies, secrets, power, darkness, sacrifice, tears, manhood. The stuff of psychiatry.

Nixon is shown cavorting with his past relentlessly, self-indulgently. And everyone plays the game. Unfortunately, it seems all too true.

After the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy and the thousands of

deaths in Vietnam, and after Nixon has won the presidency, Stone shows him reflecting aloud, "Who's helping us? Is it God? Or is it . . . Death?" It's a great line, but the annotated script gives no footnote. There is no reason to believe it was ever said. Yet it is plausible. Nixon could, conceivably, see God and history as servants of his own cause.

Or his line: "I feel too much sometimes." Again, I don't know any evidence that he said it. The line is right out of "Oprah," but again it is powerfully plausible. Nixon felt his way through the presidency. He personalized everything, every event. "This is about me," Stone's Nixon tells Pat. "It's not the war. It's Nixon! They want to destroy Nixon!"

I have a good deal of sympathy for Nixon's two daughters and their husbands; they issued a statement last week charging that the Stone film includes scenes "calculated solely and maliciously to defame and degrade President and Mrs. Nixon's memories in the mind of the American public." But beyond their personal feelings, theirs is a magnificently Nixonian statement, one the old man would no doubt be proud of: Still and always, "they" want to destroy Nixon.

I believe Stone when he emphatically denies that his intent was to defame and degrade. He says he is trying to reexamine and understand. The energy, depth and richness of his film proves that. But at the same time, Stone has been unnecessarily sloppy and self-indulgent. There was no need to mix up history this badly, because his central theme converges with the facts.

Stone is saying, in dramatic terms, precisely what history has said and will say with increasing authority as more tapes are released, more books published and more testimony sifted. The point is simple: America had the wrong person as president. Nixon was not suited to the office. It's not just the criminality, the insularity, the almost total absence of higher purpose. It was the sheer inadequacy of the man, who could not order his own life, much less the life of the country.

Peter Gay, in his biography of Sigmund Freud, summarizes the essence of modern psychology: Personality is about the organization of inner conflicts, not the resolution of inner conflicts. In many ways, the real Nixon and Stone's Nixon converge on this: Nixon failed even to organize his inner conflicts.

The Next Big Source?

But this is not the final version of Nixon, surely. There are reasons to

hope for still a better, fuller, *truer* version. Before Nixon found an analyst in Oliver Stone, he had his private Dictabelt machine. These weren't the famous White House tapes, but a more intimate private diary. Only a few of these Dictabelts made their way into the public record during Watergate, and Nixon used carefully selected excerpts from dozens more in preparing his memoirs.

According to Nixon's Watergate lawyer, the late J. Fred Buzhardt Jr.—one of the few people who ever heard more than a few of these recordings—these evening monologues were "not meant for human ears." The machine was his psychiatrist, Buzhardt said once in an interview. "It was uninhibited. I'm embarrassed at the insights I have from those." Though he declined to give much detail, he said that Nixon on the Dictabelts was a true introvert who hated campaigning and public gatherings. His chosen work, politics, was the antithesis of his nature. Nixon lived a false life, Buzhardt said, creating an almost unbearable psychic strain.

"When a man does something like that to himself, [he] puts on an outer shell," Buzhardt said, and Nixon's shell made close relationships impossible. Nixon lived a submerged, artificial and distant life.

There are about 500 of these Dictabelts in the hands of Nixon's family. Whoever gets to study them—if anyone does—will likely make the next significant advance on the Nixon mystery.

Stone ends his film with an epilogue noting that Nixon lived for 20 years after his resignation, wrote six more books, traveled the world as an elder statesman and was eulogized at his funeral by President Clinton and Sen. Bob Dole.

But a stronger ending was available: On the final page of his thick 1978 autobiography, "RN," he tells of leaving the White House that August day in 1974. After delivering his raw and powerful farewell address, he gave his famous double-V salute and climbed into the presidential helicopter.

"The engines started," Nixon wrote. "The blades began to turn. The noise grew until it almost blotted out thought. . . . There was no talk. There were no tears left. I leaned my head back against the seat and closed my eyes. I heard Pat saying to no one in particular, 'It's so sad. It's so sad.'"

Special Correspondent Karen Alexander contributed to this article.

Oliver's Twists

To the Editor:

John Powers, the author of "The New Stone Age" [Sunday Arts, Dec. 17], asserts, "No one has done more to shape popular conception of contemporary American history than [Oliver] Stone."

No one? How about Aaron Spelling? Or Rush Limbaugh? Or Jane Fonda? Or Dan Rather? Or even Nixon himself? Perhaps he meant to say no other director has made as many movies on recent current events as Stone.

He also stated that "Salvador" was "the best movie made about U.S. involvement in Central America." Best? How many others were there? "Platoon" and "Born on the Fourth of July" were movies that "changed how the country thought about Vietnam and its vets." How about "Coming Home"? Perhaps "Wall Street" was the only movie that gave voice to a liberal's simplistic mischaracterization of their view of the '80s.

And how could "JFK" have reopened what is really an eternal debate on the assassination?

SCOTT VANATTER
Fairfax

To the Editor:

I write to address your piece on Oliver Stone and his new fairy tale, "Nixon." Why you and the likes of the New York Times choose to give front-page Arts and Style publicity to this assassin of history is for you to ponder—not me—from the viewpoint of both art and morality. I suppose the "morality" word may make some folks feel uncomfortable. How about the old news adage to print what's true, as best one knows it?

You've given great warmth and comfort to a moviemaker who tells lies. To borrow from Casey Stengel, that great guy who always tried his best to say it like it was, "If Nixon was alive today, he'd be turnin' over in his grave."

John Powers reported Stone's wonderment at why so many people despise him. Pass the word: A lot of people like myself—an old intelligence guy who toiled in the fields in search of truth—despise this man Ollie primarily because he gleefully lies and gladly rapes history. And he is smart enough to know exactly what he's doing. The loathing also stems from the great bully platform you lend him, thus joining in the cynical plot to obscure things the way they really happened.

JOHN PLATT

Toad's Wild Ride, stodgy but serviceable. Somehow by the end of the movie, we *are* back to Aykroyd again: Stone worships the sexy young Kennedy and must make him a martyr to The System. The best he can do for unattractive old Nixon is depict him as a reluctant benefactor of that system. Physiognomy is destiny.

"As long as you can act the part," Nixon tells Kissinger in "Nixon's Nixon." "Kennedy taught me something there. He was one great actor. Debates? I beat his [expletive] off. Ask anybody. He acted his way to president." Kissinger responds: "You have to be an actor," and Nixon agrees, "God, yes. This job, you have to be. On the world stage and so on." The question remains: What exactly is the part he's playing?

In our national psyche, Nixon's role has probably been best defined by Tom Wicker, whose following observation is paraphrased (without credit) in "Nixon": "If John Kennedy embodied, as Norman Mailer once wrote, something like the nation's 'romantic dream of itself,' perhaps Richard Nixon represented a harder and clearer national self-assessment. In the dark of their souls, which Nixon seems to have perceived, Americans could have seen in him themselves as they knew they were, not as they frequently dreamed of being."

As for the Shakespearean comparison: Nixon was a man who thought he deserved power but was cheated of it, he was a man whose predecessor/father-figure, Eisenhower, both inspired and betrayed him, he was a man who worshiped his mother, he was a man of vision and intelligence whose actions fell short of his talents, he was possibly a little crazy, and—ultimately, elusively—he remains a man who resists all attempts to probe his mystery.

He's Hamlet.