

Revolution

UK / Norway : 1985 : dir. Hugh Hudson : Goldcrest / Viking / Warner : 125 min
 prod: Irwin Winkler : scr: Robert Dillon : dir.ph.: Bernard Lutic

[Sid Owen](#)
 Al Pacino; Donald Sutherland; Nastassja Kinski; Dexter Fletcher; Joan Plowright; Dave King;
 Annie Lennox; Steven Berkoff; Jesse Birdsall; Graham Greene; Robbie Coltrane; John Wells;
 Richard O'Brien; Paul Brooke; Eric Milota; Felicity Dean; Jo Anna Lee; Cheryl Miller

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	KBytes	Ω □ € Z ☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Source: *The Moving Picture Boy*

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 2001 review:

"Only a half-dozen or so movies have dealt more than superficially with the Revolutionary War; thanks to this mega-bomb, it'll be 2776 until we get another one. Pacino, two centuries too contemporary to be convincing, is the trapper whose boat and son are conscripted by the Continental Army; Kinski is the headstrong rebel from a family of Tories. Ludicrous script and acting sink some splendid production values. Shot in Super 35. **BOMB**"
 The Critics' Film Guide review:

"Baddies (British) fight goodies (American). Somewhere in the middle of all this, Al Pacino and Nastassja Kinski play love scenes.

Lavish production values and impressive battle scenes couldn't save this dire film from critical and commercial Armageddon. "**REVOLUTION**" got the worst reviews of any British film released during the 1980s - which was unfortunate, since the fortunes of its production company, Goldcrest, were riding on its success. But, if you look at the film it's



Source: *The Film Yearbook* vol.5

hard to understand how anyone at Goldcrest ever gave such a stupid, confused script the go-ahead. The miscasting of the three lead actors didn't help, and the accents of Pacino and Sutherland were laughable. 1/10 "

"Easily one of the worst movies of the year"
- **L.A. Daily News**

"Dull and long-winded"
- **Christian Science Monitor**

"Storyline often appears confused and fractured and its script at times almost laughably one-dimensional" - **Guardian**

"Dingily photographed with the compositional eye of an earthworm"
- **Toronto Globe and Mail**

"A chaotic two-hour, five-minute mess"
- **Time**

"The most hilariously maladroitness historical pageant since **"KING DAVID"** - this movie is nuts" - **Village Voice**

"If Al Pacino's accent doesn't put you off, wait till you hear the screams during the ten-minute

infected-foot cauterising scene. Not the patient's screams - yours" - **USA Today**

"At last, the real reason Britain lost America. We bored them so much they couldn't stand it any more." - **David Rose**

The Film Yearbook vol.5 review:

"An example of how not to make a big budget costume epic, **"REVOLUTION"** is a disaster from start to finish, although it now seems almost wilfully cruel to add to the chorus of critical disapproval which greeted its release. The screenplay, however, is woefully inadequate: the American War of Independence has been reduced to a couple of hours of milling extras, interspersed with confusing battle scenes and an excruciating half-hour chunk of Al Pacino in full method-acting flight. As a trapper drawn reluctantly into the conflict, he is presumably supposed to represent Everyman adrift in the inexorable march of history, but he merely comes across as a big-name actor left stranded by the ebb tide of the British Film Industry. US opening: December 25th, UK opening: January 31st."



Pacino and Kinski do for the *War of Independence* what Gable and Leigh did for the *Civil War*... not.
Source: *The Film Yearbook* vol.5

"Turkeys of the Year" article from the same source:

"Dear Member of the Media," ran the Warner Bros press release. "We are sending you these litho prints to give you a better idea of the scope, spirit, and overall magnificence that we believe is inherent in **"REVOLUTION"**." Attractively posed portraits of the stars in period dress mixed with similarly striking group scenes (street fighting, marching troops, cast-of-thousands on the battlefields) do create a favourable impression. No question that director Hugh Hudson and his collaborators have something very special in mind.

Or is there something else at play here? Strange how an initially favourable impression suddenly becomes clouded over by an unsettling sense of *déjà vu*. Oh yes. Oh no! **"HEAVEN'S GATE"**! Industry scribes well remember how months prior to the premiere of Cimino's Folly a special advertising supplement was inserted in the weekly edition of *Variety*. Ordinarily a glossy extra of this kind would be confected to promote an entire slate of studio products. This time only one film was involved. Featuring portraits of **"HEAVEN'S GATE"** stars, as well as group action scenes, the insert was designed to give exhibitors a first tantalising peek at a film that up until then had received nothing but negative pre-release publicity.

But rather than stave off the doomsayers, the **"HEAVEN'S GATE"** ad only helped to goad them on. The consensus was that for all the millions spent on the thing it looked ... well, dowdy. So here we are some five years later looking at another costly graphics snow job designed to disguise a disaster. For off the litho page and up on the silver screen **"REVOLUTION"** is purely and simply **"HEAVEN'S GATE"** Redux. Not quite as costly as its predecessor perhaps, but just as tedious, just as pretentious, just as wasteful.

What makes **"REVOLU-TION"** worse than **"GATE"** is the

sneaking suspicion that Hudson, rather than cook this turkey of his own accord, used Cimino's fiasco for a recipe. How else to account for an epic historical drama void of character and narrative development but filled to the rafters with meaningless detail (costumes, sets, props, etc) - all dressed up with no place to go?

"Al Pacino is Tom Dobb, the colonialist and widower who is swept into the conflict. Donald Sutherland is Sgt Peasy, the hardened, loyal instrument of the Crown. Nastassia Kinski is Daisy McConnahay, the blue-blooded daughter of a wealthy loyalist who believes fiercely in the cause of independence ... and Tom Dobb." So reads the film's ad copy. But without this scorecard you'd be hard-pressed to know exactly who's who or what's what as one lifeless shapeless scene follows another. Crowds jeer and bellow as they swarm through city street. Crowds jeer and bellow as they swarm across battlefields. Pacino, Kinski, and Sutherland are the nominal centres of this jeering, bellowing swarm - but just barely.

We see Pacino "swept into the conflict" but we never discover where he came from, where he wants to go to, or anything that happens to be on his mind along the way. We see Kinski defying her family by leaping from their carriage into a mob of rebel supporters, but we're given no information as to how this "blue-blooded daughter of a loyalist" got radicalised. Clearly such mundane narrative interests are above the likes of Hudson. He wants you to be involved in what's going on all right but not through

character and story. The sweep of history itself is what Hudson has in mind and he means to capture it by the literal sweep of his camera.

Every shot in this slightly-over-two-hour production is a moving one. Like a hyper-active adolescent the camera is ceaselessly running across spaces, circling about performers or trundling along after them puppy-dog fashion. Cinema verité realism is the desired effect. But motion sickness quickly takes precedence over aesthetics as Hudson's *mise-en-jog* reduces everything in sight to a pile of peripatetic mush. The sole moment of mobile respite comes when the camera pauses to peer at the large hairy wart plastered on Donald Sutherland's face. Underdeveloped as Pacino's and Kinski's parts may be they're virtually multi-layered in comparison to Sutherland's sadistic "instrument of the Crown." Outside of a vague yen for pre-pubescent drummer boys, only this wart delineates his character.

Okay, okay. Let's be as fair as we possibly can. Perhaps there's something we're missing in all of this. Why should Hudson be held to dealing with conventions of plot and character when the likes of Jean-Luc Godard roam free? Clearly Hudson's people and places aren't being presented simply as dramatic fodder. They're part of a vast tapestry. Why just look at that woman over there! Well, she's gone now, but for the second or two she was on screen she suggested less a character than an ideogrammatic essence of the period. No?

No. That's what Hudson's looking to do all right, but that's not what he actually does. Putting conventions on the back burner in order to treat the screen as an audio-visual dynamic can only be done when conventions pertaining to realism are abandoned. Hudson is far too caught up in them. He wants the look and feel of "the way it was" as much as possible.

Throwing plot and character out the window in this context result in all tail and no dog. Like Cimino before him, Hudson has thrown what doubtless started as a perfectly straight-forward script to the winds and marched off in search of the images that would somehow galvanise the whole show into life. But as his camera stumbles through smoke, fire, and mobs of expensively costumed extras it's clear he's not going to find them.

What we the viewers find is fairly simply stated. Pacino and Kinski cross paths early on, make

decorous goo-goo eyes at each other, then get pulled apart by the mob. A few scenes later at a different locale they meet as arbitrarily as before and resume their flirtation. Yes, we know - "heroic individuals torn existentially asunder by the forces of history", right? But all we see on the screen are a pair of international stars trapped in an elaborate, overextended, period-set "Meet Cute".

No, this wasn't at all what those prints suggested. But in a way the "REVOLU-TION" press kit is the one positive aspect to emerge from the whole affair. After the Sunday supplement callisthenics of "CHARIOTS OF FIRE", and the ersatz nineteenth-century landscape painting of "GREYSTOKE", in "REVOLUTION" Hugh Hudson has discovered his true métier -lithography."

- David Ehrenst

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
review:

"Bland, big-budget epic about a father and son's experiences during the American Revolution. What could have been a mediocre mini-series instead becomes a live-action Disney film, complete with overdrawn bad guys (the British), simplified good guys (the colonists) and friendly natives (the indians). Pacino's accent suggests that he grew up in a Brooklyn suburb of Great Britain. * "

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

"What is billed as an epic about the American Revolution is in fact a muddled cinematic disaster. If more attention had been devoted to character and script development, rather than costumes and scenery, the picture might have succeeded. The story is told primarily through the experiences of ordinary citizens. Pacino stars as a fur trapper, initially uninterested in the conflict, who finally becomes involved. His talents are wasted along with the efforts of Kinski and Sutherland. Also with Joan Plowright and Annie Lennox. * "

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"An almost inconceivable disaster which tries for a worm's eye view of the American Revolution, the worm in question being Pacino

as a son of the good earth who is pushed into the fight by the taunts of Kinski and motivated by the sadism of British sergeant Sutherland. Maybe the original script had a shape and a grasp of events. If so, it has gone. There has clearly been drastic cutting, and nothing is left but a cortege of fragments and mismatched cuts. It's also the first 70mm movie that looks like it was shot hand-held on 16mm and blown up for the big screen. Director? I didn't catch the credit. Was there one? Video: Parkfield Entertainment VHS PES 11532"

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"Condemned by the critics and shunned by the paying public, this rambling American Independence film helped to sink the British production company Goldcrest that backed it. Not even the presence of Al Pacino, then at a career low point, could create enough box-office interest. Director Hugh Hudson certainly has a great visual style (witness his earlier **"CHARIOTS OF FIRE"** and **"GREY-STOKE"**) but a ludicrous script with huge moments of incoherence delivers the death-blow here. Among the more bizarre castings are pop singer Annie Lennox and comedian Robbie Coltrane.
* "

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Watching **"REVOLUTION"** is a little like visiting a museum – it looks good without really being alive. The film doesn't tell a story so much as it uses characters to illustrate what the American Revolution has come to mean.

Despite attempting to reduce big events to personal details, **"REVOLUTION"** rarely works on a human scale.

While intimate story of Tom Dobb (Al Pacino) and his son Ned (Dexter Fletcher, Sid Owen as young Ned) and Tom's love for renegade aristocrat Daisy McConnahay (Nastassja Kinski) is full of holes, the larger canvas is staged beautifully.

Unfortunately, against this well-drawn background the small story that is meant to serve as a way into the drama for viewers looks too much like an historical re-enactment.

Performances fail to elevate the material with only Pacino, Fletcher and Owen giving their characters a personal touch. Donald Sutherland is wasted and distant as an English officer, partly because it is nearly impossible to understand what he's saying through his thick brogue."

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Director Hugh Hudson must have had good intentions going into this project, examining what it might have been like to be involved in the American Revolution. Unfortunately, his actors are so miscast and the script so ragged that Hudson's project stalls almost before it gets started. Rated "R". ** "

[no listing in "The Good Film and Video Guide" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Tisk tisk. When the critics round on a film and savage it so remorselessly you're almost left taking pity on the poor wreck – unless of course you've had the misfortune to sit through it. They weren't terribly more enthused by Mel Gibson's recent stab at the same territory in **"THE PATRIOT"**, which also boiled the complexities of history down to a simple goodies v baddies tale. For that matter, Hugh Hudson's previous film garnered mixed reviews – the earnest but flawed **"GREYSTOKE: THE LEGEND OF TARZAN, LORD OF THE APES"**. The film (as indeed its title) promised much but was overlong and some way short of the highbrow epic it set out to be. Hudson does not seem to have learned many lessons from that misfire.

Both Dexter Fletcher and Richard O'Brien were erstwhile British boy actors: Fletcher (now X) appeared in **"THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY"**, **"BUGSY MALONE"**, **"THE ELEPHANT MAN"** and later **"CARAVAGGIO"**; O'Brien (now X) in Nastassja Kinski (now X)

See also **"BADKONAK-E SEFID"** and **"BASHU"** - both recent Iranian films, and subject index under **ARAB WORLD / MIDDLE EAST**.