

MICHAEL B. RITCHIE

Michael Ritchie, who directed films like "Downhill Racer," "The Candidate," "Smile," "The Bad News Bears," "Semi-Tough" and the "Fletch" movies starring Chevy Chase, died on April 16, 2001 from complications of prostate cancer. He was 62 and lived in Manhattan.

Mr. Ritchie, who attracted attention in his senior year at Harvard in 1960 by directing the original production of the Arthur Kopit play "Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad" in Cambridge, Mass., developed his career in television before making his Hollywood feature debut in 1969 with "Downhill Racer." Based on a screenplay by James Salter, this fictional examination of an egocentric American Olympic skier, played by Robert Redford, was celebrated for the realism and excitement of its racing scenes and established Mr. Ritchie's reputation as a skilled storyteller drawn to tales about the price to be paid for success.

In 1972, Mr. Ritchie directed "The Candidate", a highly acclaimed film that stars Robert Redford as an idealistic young politician who eventually finds himself part of the corruption he despises.

In more than 20 years of filmmaking, Mr. Ritchie had his share of successes and failures, a record that he assessed philosophically. "You have to keep some perspective on your work," he said in a 1993 interview in The New York Times. "I was once working on an unsuccessful film with Michael Caine, and he told me this Kipling line that has stayed with me for years: 'If you can treat success and failure as the twin impostors they are.' That's really what it's about."

At the time, Mr. Ritchie had just completed "The Positively True Adventures of the Alleged Texas Cheerleader-Murdering Mom," an HBO production, starring Holly Hunter, about a woman accused of plotting to kill the mother of her daughter's cheerleading rival. "The film really defied conventional plotting and the idea that you have to have a sympathetic central character," he said. He added that cable television offered "opportunities to do the kind of interesting films that were done in the 1970's, films that are not quite mainstream but are very accessible." "Directors used to think they were slumming when they worked on television," he continued. "Not anymore."

For the French company, Audio Visual Library, Mr. Ritchie completed "Einstein," an ambitious documentary about Albert Einstein and his theories. Mr. Ritchie also directed episodes of "Profiles in Courage" and series like "The Man From U.N.C.L.E.," "Dr. Kildare" and "Felony Squad" before Mr. Redford invited him to direct "Downhill Racer." His other films include "The Island" (1980), "The Golden Child" (1986), "Diggs town" (1992) and "The Fantasticks" (2000).

Mr. Ritchie was born on Nov. 28, 1938, in Waukesha, Wis. His family later moved to Berkeley, Calif., where his father, Benbow, was a professor of experimental psychology at

the University of California at Berkeley, and his mother, Patty, was the art and music librarian for the city.

At Harvard, where he was a member of Adams House, he received an AB in history and literature, and his work on Mr. Kopit's play led to a job offer from Robert Saudek, the producer of the "Omnibus" television series.

Besides his wife, he is survived by a son, Steven P. Q. of Berkeley; four daughters, Lauren A. of Los Angeles, Jessica A. S. of San Anselmo, Calif., and Lillian and Miriam R. of Manhattan; two stepchildren, Nelly Bly of Manhattan and Billy Bly of Harris, N.Y.; a brother, John; and a sister, Elsie.

Mr. Ritchie said he didn't always win the opportunity to direct the films he wanted to make. "You take what you get," he once said. "Besides, I truly want to make movies that are not films in the art house sense of the word, but films to be enjoyed."

Adapted from LAWRENCE VAN GELDER, *New York Times*, April 18, 2001