**The Bicycle Thief** — Maurizio Nicchetti’s parody of The Bicycle Thief was more than just an entertaining fable. It was a wicked skewering of commercialism and the Italian television industry. Nicchetti plays himself, the director of The Bicycle Thief, the story of a poor man, his family, and his attempts to find work in post-war Italy. The film is being shown on late-night television, but the station keeps interrupting it with tame commercials after tame commercials. When a tall, leggy blonde from one advertisement suddenly appears in Nicchetti’s “masterpiece,” the director becomes so incensed that he misses his own film to retrieve the misplaced model. Fictitious? Improbable? Yes, but a whole lot of fun.

**Pretty Woman** — This modern-day Pygmalion story may prove to be sexist among the over-sensitive college crowd, but that certainly hasn’t prevented maverick America from turning out droves to see this movie. Starring Richard Gere as the wealthy corporate raider/strong, silent type and Julia Roberts as the L.A. prostitute/vulnerable lady, this movie triumphs in spite of its rather obvious faults. The key lies in its use of vulnerability. Both characters, it turns out, have plenty of it. That, coupled with the sappy, happy ending, makes Pretty Woman irresistible for the average romantic.

**Reversal of Fortune** — If we are to believe the portrayals in this film about the von Billov affair, then Alan Dershowitz (Ron Silver) is a lovable Harvard Law School professor who enjoys patronizing impressionable young law students while taking credit for their hard work; Sunny von Billov (Glenn Close) is the poor little rich girl who enjoys being miserable for no discernible reason whatsoever (except, perhaps, for humor value); and Claus von Billov (Jeremy Irons) is little more than an anal-retentive Ralph Lauren model who probably wouldn’t think twice about killing his wife for her money. Perhaps not entirely the truth, these portraits nevertheless provide a colorful backdrop for a humorous depiction of the lifestyles of the rich and shameless. Worth going for, if only to be horrified by Close’s constipated voice-over.

**The Russia House** — This adaptation of the 1983 John le Carré novel brings the world of espionage into the age of glasnost, where the outbreak of freedom behind what remains of the Iron Curtain largely overshadows the geopolitical concerns of the now rather purposeless intelligence community. It is against this backdrop of renewal in the Soviet Union that a love story emerges between Harley Blair (Sean Connery), a burned-out English publisher and novice spook, and Katya (Michelle Pfeiffer), his Soviet intermediary. The two prove love conquers all, and even those who distrust the power of love are won over.

**Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!** — Whether or not you liked this film depended on if you believed director Pedro Almodovar’s explanation that the scenes that bind his main characters, Marina, were meant to represent not physical bondage, but love’s “ties that bind.” As usual for Almodovar, it’s a highly peculiar love story. Upon release from a mental institution, a young man named Ricky kidnaps a soft-core porn actress and holds her captive to make her fall in love with him. Some felt that Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down! was nothing but a glorified rape tale — even though Marina never has sex with Ricky until she wants to — if you bought into Almodovar’s premise, the film was both funny and enjoyable.

**Total Recall** — Arnold Schwarzenegger, the nation’s largest Republican, returned to the big screen this summer in another powerhouse action flick. This time, he is in a near-future world in which memories are subject to artificial implants. From the city streets of Earth to an oppressed mining colony on Mars, our muscle-clad hero struggles to overcome his artificially implanted memory, only to discover that his real identity is less than desirable. If you can bear the scenes involving grotesquely mutated residents of Mars and the rather dubious prospect of Arnie and his gal (Sylvia, yet domineering) surviving the bizarre Martian atmosphere, then you’ll be able to enjoy the creativity of writers Ronald Shusett, Dan O’Bannon, and Gary Goldman, as well as the mind-numbing genius of director Paul Verhoeven.