

A second view of Kubrick's 'Orange'

a review

"Among those I would call the 'younger generation,' Kubrick appears to me to be a giant...I believe that Kubrick can do everything. He is a great director who has not yet made his great film..."

—Orson Welles in a Cahiers du Cinema interview, 1963

It is now 1972, and Kubrick has made his great film. It is 2001: A Space Odyssey not A Clockwork Orange. I suspect that all the hysterical acclaim for the film has come from reviewers who gave 2001 a lukewarm or bad review (and these were in the majority) only to see it become a film classic. They aren't about to make the same mistake twice; so, Kubrick makes the covers of Newsweek and Saturday Review and receives reviews as laudatory as those given to, say, since we started with a quote from Welles, Citizen Kane. And to draw a further parallel, just as Welles ironically received his only Oscar for the screenplay of Kane which Pauline Kael's research has proved he didn't write, so Kubrick is collecting his raves for a movie that is just... well, it's not a good movie.

It is a movie you'll probably never forget seeing. Visually it is incredible in the same way 2001 was: beautiful, audacious, surprising. The eye is never bored. It is hardly surprising that Welles spoke so highly of Kubrick back before Lolita, Strangelove or 2001; the two men share a fascination with the visual nature of a film; they can both take an audience by the throat and leave it breathless with what is shown on screen. Kubrick's movie bombards you visually, never giving you a chance to think about it, only to experience each new image, which is probably why so many critics have regarded it as such a great film: they didn't think about it. It's when you think about it, think about the philosophical point it tries to make, that it falls apart.

There are two ways to approach art, intuitively and intellectually. Kubrick's way is the latter. He is a highly cerebral artist, interested in ideas. There is nothing humanly moving in his films, only points fairly well-made (as in Strangelove) or not so well-made (as in Clockwork Orange). He is a

by Lloyd Rose

philosophical director with a dazzling camera style; Anthony Burgess, who wrote the book, is a philosophical writer with a dazzling literary style. They seem made for each other.

There is one important difference, however: Burgess has the mind to bring off philosophical points in art; Kubrick apparently doesn't. You don't remember Strangelove for its anti-war message but for its wit and black humor; you don't remember 2001 for its second-rate mysticism but for its visual poetry. When Kubrick's surface fails him, it becomes obvious that he doesn't know how to get his message across.

His surface ultimately fails him in A Clockwork Orange, which is why the film is a failure. The plot concerns a young hood name Alex in some not-too-distant future who speaks in a mixture of Russian and English called 'nadsat' and whose main pleasures come from, as the ads say, rape, ultra-violence and Beethoven (especially the Ninth Symphony's fourth movement, the "Ode to Joy").

In short, he's a sadistic punk. Caught for a murder, he is subjected to a treatment based on the conditioning theories of Pavlov which cause him to become violently ill when he feels a violent urge. He is thus made good, but deprived of free will. Beaten by two of his droogs (Russian for "friend") whom he angered before he went to prison, he crawls to the house of a writer whom he and his gang once beat and whose wife they raped. In the novel, she died from the rape. In the more soft-minded movie, she dies of pneumonia five months after the rape, and her husband is made a repulsive self-serving fool, whereas in the novel, he was a liberal novelist who coined the phrase "clockwork orange" (from the Cockney slang, actually) to mean a programmed victim of society.

Not recognizing Alex as his former attacker, but knowing him to be a victim of the new conditioning technique the government claims will bring back law and order, he uses Alex as an example of inhumanity to man to help oust the present government and

get his party in. Alex is de-conditioned and returns to his former sadistic joys. At least in the book. In the movie, when the writer recognizes Alex, he determines to drive him to suicide by playing Beethoven to him (Alex has been inadvertently conditioned against Ludwig van) but is foiled when Alex survives his suicide leap and the government re-conditions him to avoid adverse criticism.

These changes in the novel's translation to the screen are very important since Kubrick is making a philosophical movie from a philosophical novel. The novel caught the reader in a beautiful trap between reason and emotion: Alex was such a repulsive, evil punk that you wanted him to stay conditioned, yet your reason told you that if the government could condition people like Alex, it was just one step more till they could condition people like you, and you had to opt for Alex's return to "normal."

Never send, as they say, to ask for whom the bell tolls; if it tolls for Alex, it tolls for thee. The point was brilliantly made. However, it is not made in the movie; it seems to have been lost in translation and transformed into a point about how there's life in evil, or maybe that society deserves Alex, or maybe that it's all right to hurt people if they're stupid: it's hard to tell what Kubrick's saying.

In the novel, Alex was a menace to society: cruel, vicious, merciless and utterly without sympathy. In the film, however, Alex (played with bravura relish by Malcolm McDowell) has a certain Richard-the-Thirdish charm. All of his victims are made so repulsive, as they were not in the novel, that you automatically find yourself on his side by default. Kubrick dwells again and again on Alex's stupid guard, his sadistic, homosexual parole officer, his idiot parents, the neurotic, repulsive writer; we are made to laugh at them and applaud Alex when he wins over them.

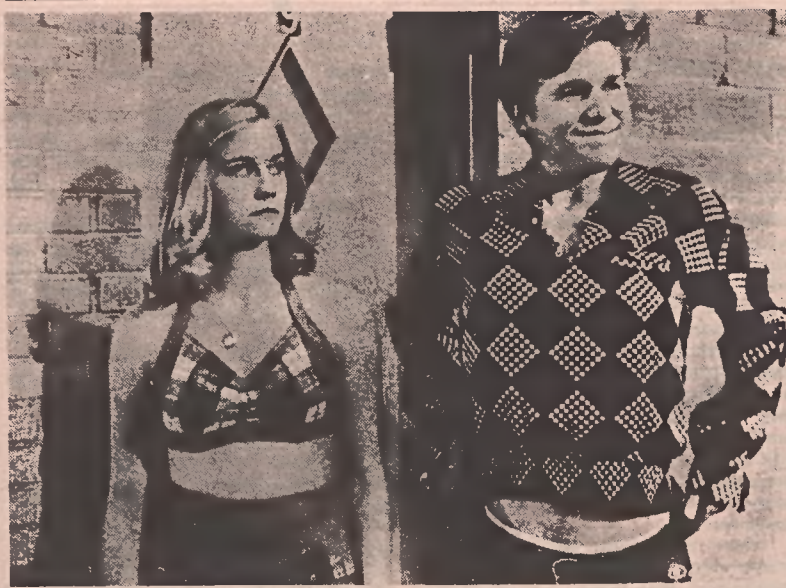
The fact that Alex has murdered two people, beaten up at least seven others, and raped at least one is unimportant: these people are, the film shows us, stupid and petty; so, Alex, murderer, rapist and sadist, is their superior. After all, he does love Beethoven. It's a shallowly-made and morally repugnant point. It's one thing to have to root for Alex because you have been shown that he is inextricably your brother; it is another to be manipulated into rooting for him because his victims and his society are so horrible.

This philosophical failure on the part of the film might almost be forgiven if the visual surface and cinematic treatment were pure and brilliant; but they're not: they're just flashy. Beautiful, yes; startling, yes; brilliant at times, yes; but with no content under them, they are just so much tinsel. What is the purpose, for example, of having the utterly surrealistic Korova milk-bar, and the strange drive through a night which is printed in negative and then shaded green, in the middle of an otherwise realistically set film?

Why does Kubrick linger so interminably on Alex checking into prison, checking out of prison, checking into the hospital, making the same old criticism of bureaucracy in three interminable scenes? Why does Alex have that speeded-up orgy which is out of his sadistic character and has no relevance to the rest of the film? Why, when he's made a nice touch, such as in the scene where Alex cannot drink his wine because it resembles the blood he has been conditioned against, does he drag his scenes on and on?

Why in the scene when Alex is being exhibited as a result of conditioning, one of the most important and potentially the most dramatic moment in the film, does he break all serious impact the horror of conditioning might have on us by cutting repeatedly to the stupid reactions of Alex's guard, giving us an easy, smug laugh? Why, in short, does he blow it? It is horrifying to think of an artist with so much potential for greatness having such narrowness of vision about the way he's presenting the film.

Still, go see it by all means. It is by Kubrick, who promises to be a strong talent in films for years to come; it is unlike anything you've ever seen; and the music, albeit trickily and badly used, is magnificent: it's written by two guys named Beethoven and Rossini.



review

'The Hot Rock'

The Hot Rock at Charlottetown Cinema 1: Robert Redford - George Segal - Zero Mostel.

—by Lloyd Rose

Suspense and humor, as Hitchcock has shown us, are not mutually exclusive, and I suppose it was inevitable that after The French Connection and Bullitt someone would return from Raymond Chandler to Topkapi, Gambit and all those 'funheist' films.

The Hot Rock is no better or worse than most of its genre. Redford and Segal are the movers of a 4-man gang out to steal the the Sahara Star (a diamond) for a black UN dignitary who wants it back for his small nation. The diamond is in a museum, guarded but not wired to any alarm system. They pull the heist, but the one who has the stone, Greenberg, gets caught, so they have to bust him out of jail-only to find he's hidden the diamond in a cell in a detention house, so they bust into the detention house; but, the diamond's not there, and it turns out Greenberg has told his father (Mostel) where it is and the old man's less than honest...you get the general idea.

On the way along the plot line, the thieves get uniforms, a Mercedes, a moving van, and finally, a helicopter from the long-suffering UN dignitary, and there's a lot of nice photography of N.Y. Redford doesn't have much to do except stand around and look tough. Segal, a marvellous comedian, is stuffed into a Nervous Jew role, but at least he has fun with it, whereas Redford appears to suffer through his lines. Mostel is wasted. Still, there are some nice funny moments and an ending where, at last, the hard-working, hard-luck, jinxed-from-the-start crooks win, a new one for this genre, and a happy change from retribution.

a modern fable

THE BOSS

When the body was first made, all parts wanted to be Boss. The Brain said, "Since I control everything, and do all the thinking, I should be Boss." The Feet said, "I carry man where he wants to go, and get him in position to do what the Brain wants, I should be Boss." The Hands said, "Since I do all the work and earn the money, to keep the rest of you going, I should be Boss." The Eyes said, "Since I must look out for all of you and tell you where danger lurks, I should be Boss."

And so it went, the Heart, the Ears, the Lungs, and finally the Asshole spoke and demanded that it be made Boss. All of the other parts laughed and laughed at the idea of an Asshole being Boss. The Asshole was so angered that he blocked himself off and refused to function. Soon the Brain was feverish, the Eyes crossed and ached, the Feet were too weak to walk, the Hands hung limply at the sides, the Lungs and the Heart struggled to keep going. All pleaded with the Brain to relent and let Asshole be the Boss.

And so it happened. All the other parts did the work and the Asshole just bossed and passed out a lot of shit.

THE MORAL: You don't have to be a Brain to be Boss... just an Asshole!

rose and holder

'Last Picture Show': Double reviews

The Last Picture Show — Manor Theatre: Timothy Bottoms. Directed by Peter Bogdanovich.

—by Lloyd Rose

The Last Picture Show is a nearly flawless film, an almost perfect work of art, and there's not a lot else I can say except that if you love films, go see it.

In the age of the auteur where a director stamps himself all over a film in not-too-subtle ways, it is astonishing to see a film that works without any tricks at all. Not that there's anything wrong with auteur-directed, obviously-crafted films — both Citizen Kane and 2001 belong to this genre. But The Last Picture Show stands in the line of American realism, and the film it makes one think most of is Von Stroheim's 1923 silent Greed.

They share an unobtrusiveness of direction, a magnificent realism, a genius for minutiae, marvellous acting, and a power that is hard to trace.

The film concerns life and coming of age in a grey, dusty Texas town. Like Von Stroheim, Bogdanovich built his scenes as wholes, almost vignettes, but I don't want to push the comparison too far — Greed, as its title suggests, is a 'message film'; The Last Picture Show is not. Its art lies in evoking an era, a time of life, a way of life that each one of us seems to have shared; like Proust's Remembrance of Things Past, which has the same effect, it is a work of memory and reality which reaches each person individually. The thought one is left with is how true, how real, the film is.

Simple story

—by Bill Holder

"I was just a teenage broncing buck With a pink carnation and a pickup truck."

—Don McLean (American Pie)

Films this season have been pretty tasteless. They have ranged from Straw Dogs, to Dirty Harry to Diamonds are Forever. There have been few, if any, quiet films that simply tell a story; most have relied on violence and sensationalism. But there is hope to believe that Peter Bogdanovich's newest offering may change this course.

The Last Picture Show is a simple story about two boys growing up in a small Texas town in the early fifties. The flick comes complete with notalgia ooze of bobby sox, Hank William's songs, and stereotyped characters, but under the skillful direction of Bogdanovich, these factors become assets instead of handicaps. All the



'Paradise Lost'

Professor C. A. Patrides of York University in England will lecture at 4 p.m., Tuesday, March 7 in Room 111 of the Denny Building.

His topic will be "Paradise Lost and the Iconography of the Fall." Professor Patrides, a notable English scholar, is a graduate of Kenyon College and Oxford University. He is the author of numerous books and articles on Renaissance and seventeenth century literature.

He taught for seven years at the University of California at Berkeley before accepting the position at York.

The craftsmanship of artist Rita Shumaker went on exhibit Sunday, March 5, in the gallery of the Rowe Creative Arts Building.

The exhibit will consist of wall hangings, jewelry, and space dividers composed of various textile media including resist techniques and hand-woven and sculptural pieces.

The gallery will be open to the public from 4 to 6 p.m. Sunday and from 1 to 5 p.m. for three weeks thereafter.

The artist is a magna cum laude graduate of Pfeiffer College and has done graduate work at Florida State University, Stetson University, and Georgia State College.

She has been represented in the Piedmont Crafts Show for the past several years and has also been represented in two southeastern invitational shows. She has won numerous awards in Florida and Georgia for her work, which is represented in various private collections throughout the area.