

ENTERTAINMENT

Great book turns to mediocre film

The Wars
Odeon
opening January 20

review by Mark Roppel

Why did God put press screenings at ten in the morning?

It's one thing to get up at such an obscene hour to see a great movie, but it is quite another matter if the film is only mediocre.

And unfortunately *The Wars* is only mediocre.

The movie lacks all of the power of Timothy Findley's 1977 Governor-General's Award Winning novel *The Wars*.

The Wars is the story of Robert Ross, a withdrawn young man who doesn't get along too well with his stern and all too proper parents. His only real friend is his invalid sister, Rowena. When Rowena falls from her wheel chair and dies, Robert decides to enlist. Despite the fact that he can't even stand to see rabbits killed, Robert is off to fight in the Great War.

Technically, the film is fine. Aside from a fondness for shots with nobody in them, Robin Phillips' debut as a feature film director is a success.

True, some of the scenes of soldiers crawling through the mud at Ypres look surprisingly like actors crawling over piles of dirt in the studio, but for a Canadian movie, *The Wars* is not painfully low-budget.

One of my chief bitches with war movies has always been that there is never enough grime. I refuse to believe that in the middle of trench warfare, our hero, Lieutenant Robert Ross, could find time to shave - let alone have his uniform drycleaned.

The screenplay is by Findley and it was probably a mistake to let him adapt his own novel to the screen. Findley tries to be faithful to the book, but of course, most books are longer than most movies. What Findley and Phillips do is to meticulously



The horror, the horror.

recreate most of the key scenes from the book and leave out all the transitional scenes in between.

Many of the gritty details of life at the front which made *The Wars* such a power-

ful novel are left out of the movie, and the storyline becomes choppy.

For example, Robert's training receives only one brief shower scene in the movie.

It is never explained that because Ross is from a wealthy family he could go directly into the cavalry and train as an officer.

To anyone who has not read the book it may seem strange that on his first day at the front Ross is busily ordering veterans around.

The episodic nature of the plot also

makes the characterization of Robert rather sketchy.

The end result is that when Ross mutinies against his incompetent captain, and is tracked down and killed by the MP's, nobody really cares.

There is no real sense of tragedy or outrage - no overwhelming feeling that an incredible injustice has been done.

All in all, *The Wars* is not worth five bucks.

Buy the book instead, it's cheaper.

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Whoneedspunctuation

seagull on yonge street
 by bill bisset
 Talonbooks 1983
 unpaginated

review by alex

seagull on yonge street is bill bissett's latest collection of 'pomes', chants, and sketches. Unimpeded by trifling complications such as spelling or grammar, the presentation is frequently a vehicle for rampant prolix.

Consider the following:

mr president dont yu know yr
 an embarrassment to the free
 world whats so
 free abt it yr xpensiv suits ar
 embrassing

yr no kissinger yr no pearson yr no
 great statesperson whos elegance
 can

mask the essenshul horror trudeay
 is trying
 for yu to heer the silens n cries uv
 starving

millyuns but yr a bomb salespr-
 son...

By the end of the tract, one can discern that bissett is against imperialism and for nuclear disarmament. He concludes (eighty-two lines later):

...yr blinded by th effects uv yr
 own
 deels will yu be embrassed bcoz
 yrs ne russyas

weapons arint aimed at each othr
 theyr aimed
 at all uv us

Uh huh.

The politics of Canada are, however, quite a different matter. In "to irrigate the sahara", a chant (dedicated to the Loughheed team?) in free verse, the lyrics are (in part):

dansin for dome petroleum
 dansin for dome petroleum
 dansin for dome petroleum
 dansin for dome petroleum

evn th rich peopul have no munee
 they
 say evn the rich peopul have no
 jack...

If you manage to overcome an initial aversion to bissett's stylistic 'encumbrances', you gain an appreciation of bissett's ironic sense of humour. In "grade school in halifax", he describes a session of corporal punishment:

ths hurts me mor than it duz yu she
 sd i pulld my hand away quik as th
 strap cum pounding down on her
 knee

n that time it did hurt her mor...

There are other examples as well, but you'll have to read the book to find them.

For the poetry fanatics that enjoy experimental poetry and free verse, this book will find a place in your hearts and on your bookshelves. For the non-fanatics...