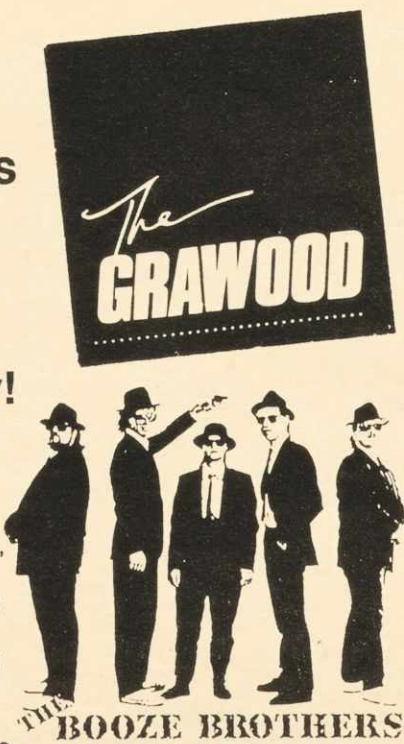


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A very tempting movie

by Amber-Leigh Golding

The most talked about motion picture release in years, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, has finally opened in Halifax. Considering all the hype and hysteria that has surrounded this film over the last several months, it is extremely difficult to approach the film from a purely objective perspective. Overblown controversy aside, folks, try to remember that *Last Temptation* is just a movie after all, and an admittedly earnest but somewhat flawed one at that.

The entire production is deliberately low key, with costumes and sets that are authentic but non-obtrusive, presumably to keep the focus firmly on Jesus Christ Himself.

The camera work is sombre and sparse — and all the more effective for it — providing imagery consistent with the narrative's serious mood.

Special credit is due to Peter Gabriel's striking music which somehow succeeds in being radically contemporary and appropriate.

If *Last Temptation* has a liability, it is most certainly Paul Schrader's problematic script. Adapted from the acclaimed/condemned novel by Nikos Kazantzakis, the dialogue too often falls flat. Doubtlessly, this is the reason why the performers occasionally appear ill at ease.

Christ's characterization is awkward, from a dramatic as well as a theological standpoint. Unfocused, Jesus is either defiant or distant — sometimes both at the same time.

Though he doesn't quite manage to overcome the apparent discrepancy in his role, Willem Dafoe's performance is a fine accomplishment nonetheless. The portrayal is frequently moving, especially so when the actor suggests Christ's torment and intense sense of responsibility.

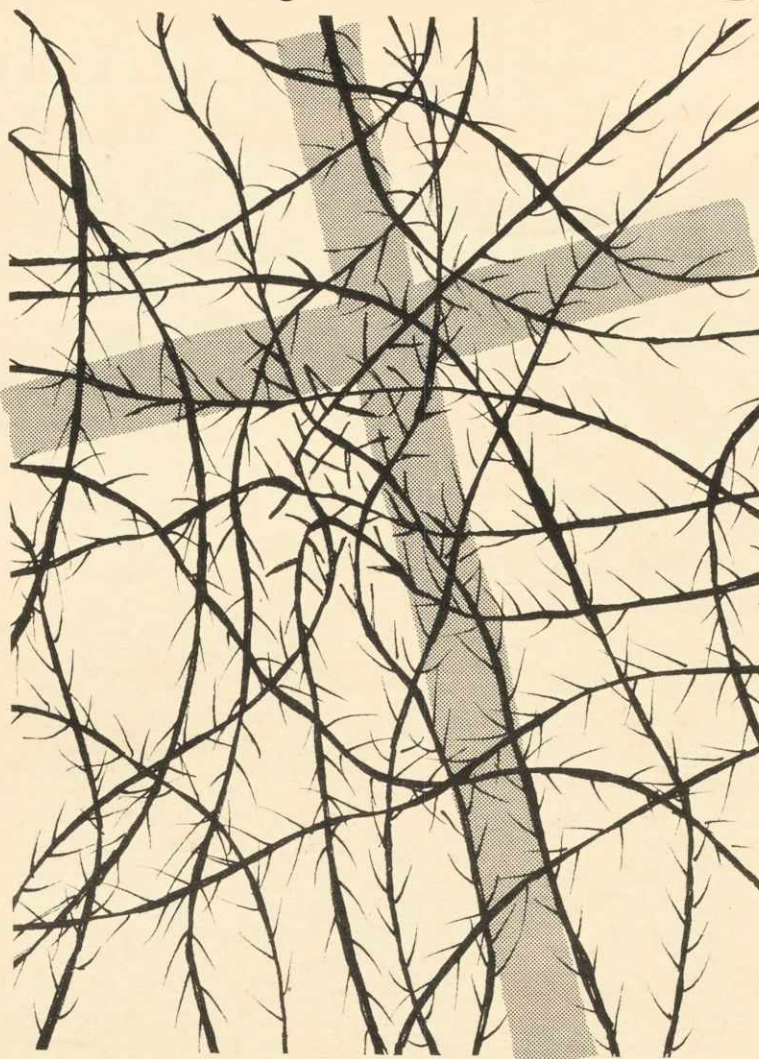
Also well worth noting is Barbara Hershey's performance as Mary Magdalene. Her work here reinforces her reputation as a gifted screen presence to keep your eyes on in the decade ahead.

Moralist claims against *The Last Temptation of Christ* as blasphemous celluloid are to a large extent, overstated. True, aspects of the biblical Christ are fictionalized, but clearly these innovations were inspired, at least in part, from the Bible itself.

Jesus is portrayed, prior to His later evangelical period, as a builder of crosses that the Romans used to crucify Jews with. This ironic plot device is more than slightly reminiscent of the Bible's account of St. Paul, who was converted from a persecutor of Christians to a revered Christian in his own right. In the same way, the much criticized dream sequence whereupon the devil tempts Christ with the vision of what His life could have been, as He is dying on the cross, is a logical extension of the devil's temptation of Christ which the Bible says took place when Christ was alone in the desert.

Claims by the opposition that the film is some sort of sleaze-fest

Continued on page 13.



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