

**Zardoz an outrageous allegory**

# Decadent immortals not to be taken seriously

By DION McGRATH

Before the titles for Zardoz, a choral figure appears onscreen to explain in detail why the film isn't to be taken seriously.

The immediate result, if local reviewers are any indication, is that most of the audience (or is it just most of the reviewers?) assume this means the film is to be taken seriously. They then spend the entire running-time searching for the underlying meaning of all the gags, parodies, and self-parodies. And they don't have any fun at all.

Which is not to say that Zardoz is pointless. If you really want, it can even be described, fairly accurately, as a Freudian allegory. But the allegory is purposely outrageous and the symbolism so grotesque (one of my favourites is the introduction of Sean Connery in a "birth" scene where he rises, pistol first, from a pile of sand) and so insidiously pervasive that you soon begin to feel an uncomfortable suspicion whenever a rounded shape appears on the screen.

The story, set 300 years in the future, presents a bored and decadent group of immortals who live, protected by an invisible and impenetrable force-field, in an area known as the Vortex, where they survive by the forced labour of the savages who live in the outer world. One of these, Zed (Sean Connery), succeeds in stowing away aboard the flying stone head that the immortals pass off as a god to control the savages, and thus enters the vortex.

The film then builds its effects, like director John Boorman's earlier Point Blank, on the nihilistic exhilaration to be found in watching an anarchic individualist bring a machine culture tumbling in ruins.

But the immortals themselves want to be destroyed, partly to escape the monotony of their lives, but also because Zed, the bearer of impulses they can no longer feel, represents a vicarious release, through violence, from their own frustration.

But audiences for movies, especially

violent movies, are seeking much the same kind of vicarious release, and this provides the film with a remarkable ambivalence which is reinforced by the tongue-in-cheek treatment.

The audience, while identifying with Zed, is equated with the immortals, who also identify with him. This is crystallized in one remarkable scene where they watch, for entertainment,

Zed's memory images of a massacre, projected on a movie-like screen.

Visually the film is stunning. (In case you haven't heard, it's a movie to see stoned; even the distributors expect the audience to smoke up in the theater.) Geoffrey Unsworth's photography is lush and beautiful, even if I did find myself wishing occasionally that he'd swear off

Vaseline.

The Irish landscapes are ideally suited to a vision of nature as both beautiful and terrible, and the special effects, based entirely on process-work, are frequently stunning.

Finally, a word about Charlotte Rampling who, if there by any justice in movieland, should soon be a very brightly shining star. For much of its length, the story-line tries to convince

us that she's only a secondary character and that the romantic interest is going to be provided by Sara Kestelman.

But the strategy is doomed from the beginning, because Rampling has the kind of face you recognize even if you've never seen it before, and Kestelman has the kind you forget during the cutaways.

## Little-known play was obscure for a reason

By AGNES KRUCHIO

Who said there was no Canadian drama written by, for and about Canadians?

If the play written by Merrill Denison in the early 1920s is an example, there must be many other obscure plays written in the above specified manner. And, if the current production of his Marsh Hay at Hart House is any indication, they will probably remain obscure.

The story concerns the life of a 50-acre farmer ("fifty acres of grey stone") somewhere in the vicinity of Belleville. Both husband and wife blame each other for not having gone west to get a new farmstead; and ul-

timately it seems neither really had the courage it took to uproot themselves and move to a new area where, according to Lena Seang, the farmer's wife, "there would be no trees."

Five of their children have died on the farm, which is good only for growing marsh hay, and four others have been driven off by the father's capricious tyranny, born of frustration.

While the plot of Marsh Hay might have represented an original idea in 1923, all the elaborate preparations that went into its Hart House premiere cannot hide what is basically an uninspiring script.

The play's characters never really

come to life, except in places: Lena Serang, played by Leigha Lee Browne, when she becomes inspired by the notions of a traveller who insists that her daughter's illegitimate child should come into a world that wants him; or neighbour Mrs. Clantch, played by Eileen Williams, who shows some spark when she rails at Lena for spoiling her daughter.

I missed a sense of stature and depth in David Garder's portrayal of John Serang; while he has all the external qualifications for the role, including physical build, a strong voice and a suitably hunched posture, he remains too uninvolved in his role, and almost totally effaces himself as a result.

Director Richard Plant has failed to give us believable characters; the action, instead of rising towards the finish, tapers off altogether in the last act, and it matters little to us that after a temporary amelioration, conditions go back to the way they were before the play had started.

Special mention should be made of Linda Hardy's elaborate sets: the interior of a farmhouse and that of a general store on a revolving stage are effectively cluttered and accurate to the last wolf-skin hanging on the wall.

Marsh Hay runs at Hart House until March 31, the last production this season, at 8:30 p.m. Tickets are \$1.50 with student card.

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