

Hollywood redeems itself

Movie review by Marni Stanley

Kramer vs Kramer is a carefully rendered, emotionally detailed film about the disintegration of a family. It is also the finest human drama to come out of Hollywood in some time.

The film opens with Joanna Kramer (Meryl Streep) preparing to leave her up and coming Junior Executive husband Ted (Dustin Hoffman), and then follows Ted's discovery of his six year old son, Billy. Fifteen months later Joanna returns and the rest of the film is devoted to the Kramers' battle for the custody of their son.

The bare bones of the plot, from Avery Corman's novel by the same name, do not sound like much but this is an actors' movie that has been very skillfully cast. Hoffman and Justin Henry (Billy) are the best thing since Charlie Chaplin met Jackie Cooper. Henry is allowed to express all the confusion and anger that children are want to do and his confrontation with his father's naked girlfriend in the hall is as genuine as his defiant insistence of having the Chocolate Chip Ice Cream.

Hoffman's Ted begins the film as an insensitive cad who is so busy bringing home the bacon (as he repeatedly puts it) that he doesn't know what grade his son is in, nor how desperate his wife has become. By the end of the film he has developed into a man who loves being father to the son he has come to know very well. Hoffman brings a lot of energy to the role and captures the audience's sympathy early on.

It is, unfortunately, sympathy won at the expense of Streep's character. There are moments where Joanna Kramer just doesn't work. She is

made to utter a hopelessly cliché "I had to find myself" speech that almost single-handedly destroys the aura of intelligence and honesty that Streep had constructed around Joanna. She is much better in the courtroom scene where Streep was apparently allowed to write her own section of the script.

Jane Alexander also gives a strong performance as the neighbor and friend of Joanna's whose loyalties slowly turn towards Ted. The simplicity of her approach to the character she portrays is a nice balance to Streep's very studied and polished Joanna.

Robert Benton served as screen writer and director for the film. By all accounts he gave his actors a fair amount of improvisational freedom and they rewarded him with very captivating performances. His constant use of opening and closing doors becomes a visual metaphor for the changes the characters are going through as well as providing the opportunity for some interesting juxtapositioning. The tense Ted Kramer nervously insisting on a job interview while an office Christmas party vies for attention from the next room, for example.

Benton must also be complemented on his focus during the lengthy courtroom scene. Instead of showing the typical lawyer showmanship we have come to expect from such scenes he turns the trial into a dialogue between the two Kramers speaking to each other only through the medium of the court.

Kramer vs Kramer is a good story well told and that along with the precision of its craftsmanship makes it worthwhile.

Student lectures on punk

by Janice Michaud

Punk and new wave music is nothing more than a fad like disco, a U of A student said in a 90-minute lecture Wednesday afternoon.

In Canada, punk and new wave has become a fad for the middle class while in England there still is a smattering of social purpose, Gerard Botch commented. It has shaken up the country, revolted against traditional politics, society and philosophy. In addition, this music has reasserted the social purpose of rock music, Botch said in his historical commentary.

This trend in rock music started in England with the punkers.

New wave is still a protest against politics, philosophy and society but the harshness, characteristic of punk, is gone. The groups have maintained and developed a stylistic freedom in addition to expanding on the up-tempo beat. One example is the band The Clash.

"Their music still has the same vicious thrust against boredom."

Not all new wave music advocates violence. One example, "Tommy Gun" takes an anti-war stance, Botch said.

Interspersed with his commentary were recordings by such bands as The Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Ramones and Elvis Costello.

"Punkers saw the horror of the past... they made rock music dangerous again."

In protest against the 1960s and 1970s, punkers like the Sex Pistols issued shorter songs, became anti-commercial and performed in small clubs versus the big stadium playground of previous rock generations.

The punkers "were never in it for the money." They moved to break away from fashion. But in doing so "they established their own status quo," Botch said.

New Wave was an outgrowth of punk. Punk's heir, new wave, toned down punk's harshness but elaborated on several qualities of its forefather, he emphasized.

Bricks for the winter blahs

Book review by Julie Green

Robert Morley's *Book of Bricks* is a gem. For the lovers of anecdotes, be they silly or sardonic, this book provides a feast of entertainment.

A brick is not, as you might think, a rectangular block of clay used in the construction of buildings. Oh no! It is, instead, a statement which mistakenly implies criticism or insult while intending to be friendly or complimentary. It is putting one's foot in the proverbial mouth.

Often, bricks are dropped out of sheer ignorance, especially in the case of gestures. Gestures aren't easily transferred from one culture to another. For example, in Britain, the thumbs-up sign means 'all's well,' while it means 'sit on this' in Sardinia and parts of the Middle East. Desmond Morris recounts this misfortune in the introduction to the book.

"I have watched British hitchhikers in southern Sardinia at the side of the road, jerking their thumbs at passing cars, and cursing when they failed to stop. Instead of asking for a ride, the hitchhikers were saying 'up yours,' and the faces of the angry drivers should have given them a clue that something was wrong. No, in many countries, the way to ask for a ride is with a limply waved, flattened hand."

Bricks often creep into print as another contributor, Miles Kington, recounts: "Richard Williams, now editor of *Time Out*, is an expert on advanced jazz and rock music, so was given the job ten years ago of dealing with a new John Lennon LP. One side, reported Williams, was devoted to fairly conventional songs but the other side was very experimental. It contained an electronic tone which continued throughout the whole side, varying slightly from time to time, giving a fascinating glimpse of the avant-garde side of John Lennon and his interest in electronic music. Or so Williams wrote.

"In fact the noise he was reviewing so seriously was merely an endless tone placed there

by engineers to indicate there was no music at all on the second side. It was a long time before his cynical colleagues let Richard forget that gaffe."

Some of the jokes contained in the book will be more or less funny depending on your own repertoire of English expressions, gestures and personalities. In most cases, however, the botch is apparent in any culture.

For light reading to brighten the mid-winter blahs, the *Book of Bricks* will not fail to amuse.



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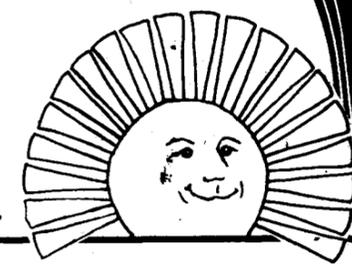
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