

Join the Clockwork Orange cult

arts
12
excelsior february 5, 1992

by Nina Kolunovsky

"What is a cult movie?" It's a rhetorical question I ask myself; but, I do not answer, because, of course, talking to oneself is a sure sign of senility.

But if pressed, I would say that a cult movie is one that everybody has heard about. You don't even have to see the film to have an opinion on it.

A Clockwork Orange is like that. It is a movie many people love, some hate, but few have actually seen. I know one person who, while of sound mind and body, actually fell asleep during it. Generally, though, it elicits a much stronger reaction.

The movie is about Alex (Malcolm MacDowell, who is tailor-made for the part), a ruthless leader of a vicious youth gang. In a hauntingly familiar future, Alex is made part of a crime-

FILM

A Clockwork Orange
directed by Stanley Kubrick
starring Malcolm MacDowell
Vanier's Cult Film Festival

fighting experiment in which he is made physically ill at the thought of violence.

Ultimately, Alex' past and nature catch up to him. The movie questions the notion of "wiping the slate clean," and how much individual freedom must be accepted when it threatens social stability.

People generally hate *A Clockwork Orange* for its violence. Thugs beating up old drunks and graphic depictions of rape are not for the faint of heart (or stomach). It has been

argued, however, that director Stanley Kubrick had to be graphic to deliver his message.

I personally found the book by Anthony Burgess much more disturbing, precisely because the degree of horror was left to my imagination. The book also has a straightforward plot. In the film, Kubrick has done what he does best: created powerful images, sometimes lavish, sometimes disturbing, which somehow fail to cohere into a clearly understandable story.

A Clockwork Orange should be seen more than once to be completely understood. Better yet, read the book. It is thin, cheap and available from the York University Bookstore.

A Clockwork Orange is playing Wednesday, February 12 as part of Vanier College's Cult Film Festival.



Theresa Russell and Jeremy Irons pay attention to director Steven Soderbergh on the set (which also happens to be the city of Prague) of his latest film, *Kafka*. It doesn't have much to do with the legendary author of *Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*, but it is campy, sci-fi fun.

Campy thriller is short on Kafka

by Omar Majeed

Kafka, the new film by Steven Soderbergh, is a fun, campy, sci-fi thriller that has very little to do with Kafka's work, his life, or his writing in general.

The similarities between the film and Kafka's work lie mainly in the expressionist tendencies Soderbergh pays homage to. The sets could have been right out of *The Strange Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, or *Nosferatu*. The expressionist sets and photography in the film create a similar expressionist mood derivative of Kafka's novels, *The Trial* and *The Castle*. Aside from this, however, the film's treatment of Kafka is little more than a betrayal of his work.

The greatest flaw with Lem Dobbs script is that it attempts to concretize everything that was skillfully ambiguous and abstract in Kafka's writing; it ends up merely politicizing ideas capable of greater depth. The script implies that at the source of Kafka's work was a need to rebel against political oppression. However, the problem with such an overtly political interpretation is that it neglects almost all the philosophical, symbolic, and internal depth that Kafka's novels and stories subtly create.

The castle is transformed into a fascistic, mind-controlling, bureaucratic warehouse powered by mad scientists and crooked politicians. The symbolic relevance of the castle as everything that is unattainable and never accessible to the protagonist, is simply ignored by the film. Instead, the ideas of the castle have been translated to be another Orwellian prediction.

The film revolves around a protagonist by the name of Kafka (played excellently by Jeremy Irons) trying to discover the truth behind his friend/doppelganger, Eduard Raban's death. During this quest he encounters a group of intellectual anarchists with Eduard's previous mistress Gabriella (Theresa Russell) heading the group.

At this point, the castle is identified as the enemy and Kafka decides

FILM

Kafka
directed by Steven Soderbergh
starring Jeremy Irons and Theresa Russell
produced by Miramax

to sneak in and find out for himself. First of all, the film starts to lose substance as a good thriller since everything that is revealed was alluded to earlier by the anarchists.

In making Kafka the protagonist of this mystery, Lem Dobbs and Soderbergh seem to be confusing Kafka with the protagonist K. that shows up in much of Kafka's work. While K. is usually mixed up in bizarre situations and goes forth on quests for truth (*The Trial*) or acceptance (*The Castle*), Kafka, the writer, was just this guy who worked in an office by day and then wrote stories by night. Definitely not your "Action Jackson" type of guy.

There is a fundamental problem in the way Kafka chooses to search for truth. K., in both *The Trial* and *The Castle*, is searching for truth in all the wrong ways, and the futility of his quest never seems to dawn upon him until his death. In this film, the protagonist Kafka approaches truth in the way an Agathe Christie, or Sherlock Holmes would. There are even connections to the film noir detective (the black and white film, the night settings, the femme fatale). This film might have even worked better had it been called *Holmes*.

In all fairness, *Kafka* is not a bad movie. I cannot help but confess to being entertained by its campy, fifties-style, sci-fi, horror-mystery approach. Jeremy Irons is always good. Theresa Russell had a very strong presence, except that her performance might have been a little modern American woman for a turn of the century Prague. Sir Alec Guinness plays the Chief Clerk of the office Kafka works in, and gives an excellent performance in his two or three scenes.

Aside from good performances, the film looks great too. If any other York film students think that they would ever want to do a Kafka inspired

movie, then Walt Lloyd should be the man you beg to do your cinematography.

Soderbergh's homage to German expressionism and macabre horror films, and his editing job was consistent and well structured, if not too conventional. The music, performed by The Gypsy Band of Joseph Balaz, was extraordinarily adequate for creating a mood for this film, and even the dialogue (despite the script's constrictions) maintained an element of kafkaesque wit and humor.

However, I could not help but be disappointed at the trite presentation of Kafka and his work. I keep having this premonition that teenagers are going to walk out of the theatre saying stuff like:

"Ay, that Kafka was action packed!"

"Hey, that Kafka was almost as whacky as Alice Cooper!"

"Lethal Weapon 3 or Kafka? Hmmm, I can't decide!"

"Wasn't the guy who played Obi-Wan-Kenobi in this?"

"He wrote some book about a guy turning into a bug? Musta' smoked some weird shit in his time, eh?"

"I'm gonna buy the book to this movie? Who wrote it?"

The other thing that disappointed me was that there are better films dealing with the inspiration of writers. In this year alone there was *Until the End of the World*, *Barton Fink*, and the incredible *Naked Lunch* (which actually contains more relevant allusions to Kafka than Soderbergh's film). Better films that dealt with the kafkaesque are Martin Scorsese's *After Hours*, and Terry Gilliam *Brazil*. While neither of these two are actually about Kafka or his work, they do reflect a similar ideology in their narratives and their direction.

Aside from these films, the only thing that I have encountered that has rendered me with the absolute feeling of that which is kafkaesque are those "Blue Blocker" sunglasses commercials on late night television. All else fails to throw me into such an extreme state of angst and suicidal despair.

1992-93 Residence Donships

All Undergraduate Colleges are currently accepting applications for Residence Donships. These positions are open to York Graduate and Senior Undergraduate students in good standing.

Visa students are welcome to apply.

For further information & application forms, please contact the following offices:

325 Calumet College
Lynn Hamilton ext. 20201

315 Stong College
Master's Office ext. 55132

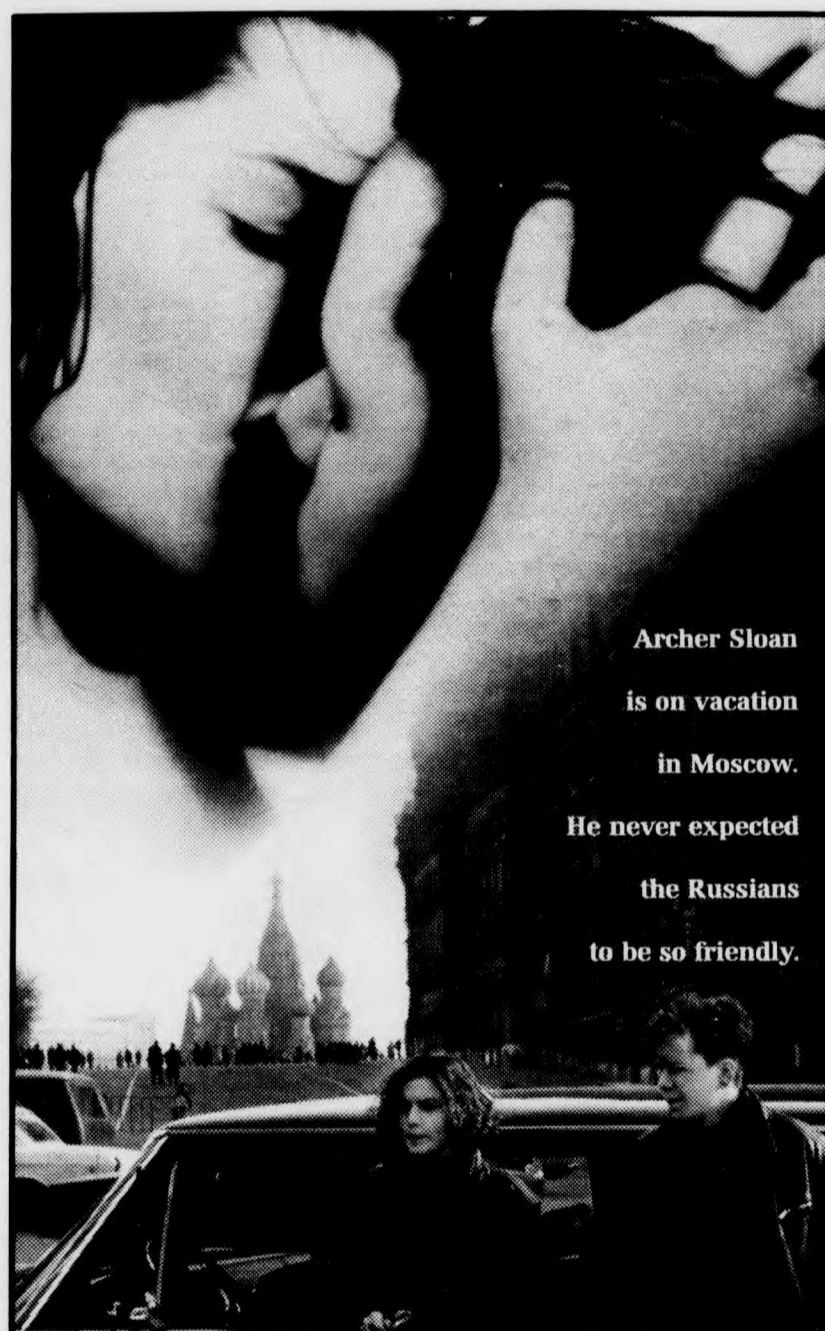
221 Founders College
Bev Richards ext. 66919

254 Vanier College
Pam Persaud ext. 77399

222 McLaughlin College
Pam Montoute ext. 77084

275 Winters College
Valerie Bruce ext. 77446

205D Norman Bethune College
Janet Waisglass ext. 33958



Archer Sloan
is on vacation
in Moscow.
He never expected
the Russians
to be so friendly.

BACK IN THE USSR

LARGO ENTERTAINMENT presents "BACK IN THE USSR" FRANK WHALEY
NATALYA NEGODA OF ROMAN POLANSKI with LES HOOPER and IAN CRAFTFORD
Director of Photography YURI NEYMAN Executive Producer LOUIS A. STROLLER Executive Producer LINDSAY SMITH
Screenplay by ILMAR TASKA & LINDSAY SMITH Produced by LINDSAY SMITH and ILMAR TASKA
Directed by DERAN SARAFIAN

LARGO ENTERTAINMENT

RESTRICTED

UNDER 17 REQUIRES ACCOMPANYING PARENT OR ADULT GUARDIAN

DO NOT STEAL

RELEASED BY TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

Starts Friday February 7 at a
Cineplex Odeon Theatre Near You.
Check Local Listings