

Dustin Hoffman tries hard as Lenny Bruce**Film doesn't explain what made Lenny tick**

By AGNES KRUCHIO

The man who had been trivialized into just a "dirty comic", whom Time Magazine called "sick", and to whose nightclub act thousands thronged to see him repeatedly busted in his later years is now on the silver screen. Lenny Bruce the gadfly, teacher, moralist and social critic is now safe.

Let us not kid ourselves that it could not happen today, that he could not be arrested on obscenity charges. The tactics he used were radical relative to his day — he used words like "nigger" to desensitize his audience to their meaning and to promote his profoundly humanistic message that "we're all the same schmuck underneath". He would use some equally radical method to bring us to our senses today.

This is the basic problem with a film, any film, no matter how good, about Lenny Bruce. In reminiscing about him, ignoring his message is made easy. By looking at an illustrated account of his life, we analyse the man under the microscope lens of the camera as some curious 'social phenomenon'.

Such is the treatment Lenny Bruce gets in *Lenny*, starring Dustin Hoffman, which opens in Toronto next Wednesday. The film struggles with the very real problem of having to pack in much factual information about Lenny Bruce, and offer an insight into his personality, his work, and the mood of the times. It walks a very fine line between an objective and

a subjective treatment, with now the one, now the other winning out.

A series of scenes from Lenny's life, the film is structurally held together by a recurring scene of Lenny in front of an audience, in a smoke-filled joint, bearded and in an army shirt, doing his 'schtick'. His stream of consciousness monologue is sprinkled with spontaneous wit, jokes, and caustic remarks.

The sense of the documentary is heightened by the use of high contrast black and white film. Time is compressed in the film by director Bob Fosse's up-tempo pacing. There is little leisure allowed for the audience to become involved in any of the episodes or nightclub routines before pressing on to the next scene. We get a chance to see how Lenny works — he uses his life as raw material for his humour — but get little insight into why his humour is so honest, so unerringly aimed at the heart of hypocrisy. What makes Lenny tick remains a mystery.

Dustin Hoffman has a formidable job in portraying a man many people still vividly remember. The most striking quality of Lenny Bruce, the immediate feverish intensity of his presence, Hoffman securely captures in only the one paramount nightclub sequence, where he outdoes himself.

Hoffman is surprisingly lively; adopting the comic's timing and style is no mean feat. He also does a fine job in portraying the unravelling of Lenny's personality.

Towards the end, Lenny Bruce was not very funny.

Valerie Perrine plays Honey, (Bruce's stripper-junkie-lesbian wife); her vivaciousness and playful pussycat personality are exquisitely charming. She is very good at being degenerate, dishevelled, becoming undone and

breaking with emotion.

In a most demanding scene, however, where she and Lenny dissolve into a tearful embrace after a sadistic game of the who-have-you-been-sleeping-with genre, her acting hits a rather shallow bottom. Her buoyant personality cannot carry all of the

character and we are left without any real insight into the psychology of Lenny Bruce's wife.

While there is some ground to accuse the film of lacking sufficient bite, it is both an entertaining and worthwhile film, so long we remember to separate it from the real thing.

Dustin Hoffman and Valerie Perrine star in Bob (Cabaret) Fosse's film *Lenny*.**Hawklime Monster will disappoint Brautigan fans**

By DOUG TINDAL

Richard Brautigan's latest offering, *The Hawklime Monster*, is disappointing. Brautigan's dawdling schoolboy style remains intact, but the lyrical wit and insight which made it worthwhile are missing.

The *Hawklime Monster*, sub-titled *A Gothic Western*, is neither gothic nor western.

The story opens as two gunmen, Greer and Cameron, crouch in long grass somewhere in Hawaii deciding that they can't bring themselves to shoot a man while he's giving his son a riding lesson.

They quietly leave and occupy themselves with unwestern style carousing until Brautigan sees fit to introduce Magic Child, who hires them to slay the *Hawklime Monster*. The monster is in fact the creation of a group of experimental chemicals which have become sentient and developed a malicious sense of humour.

They turn their inventor, Professor Hawklime, into an elephant's foot umbrella stand and then busy themselves with "fucking up" the minds of the professor's twin daughters.

After a great deal of sex and pointless inane conversation, Greer and Cameron kill the monster by pouring a glass of whiskey into the jar of chemicals.

The professor returns to human form; Greer marries Jane Hawklime but they get divorced shortly thereafter; Cameron and Susan Hawklime decide to get married but have a big fight and call it off; they all spend their money foolishly; the reader hopelessly tries to make some sense of it.

Within the thin plot, Brautigan uses coarse language and sex excessively and indiscriminately; but it is all done so casually, so pointlessly, that it could be deleted with very little change to the story, and no loss of coherence.

With only moderate revision, *Hawklime Monster* could be transformed into a charmingly innocuous children's story and at about half its original length. It would be a distinct improvement.

Glendon anger

A York videotape called *Approaching Anger* is now available from Instructional Aid Resources for classroom and group showings. It is a thematic organization of poetry by contemporary poets Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Mary Percy and Margaret Atwood read by Glendon faculty women Cindy Fothergill, Penelope Doob and Adrienne Harris. A growing feminist awareness results in *Approaching Anger* and the tape is an excellent source of generating discussion in classrooms seminars.

Erratum

Excalibur last week contained a review of the National Ballet's workshop which incorrectly stated the name of one of the dancers as Karen Jago; it should, of course, have been Mary Jago. Excalibur regrets the error.

Waves drags in flotsam, jetsam

By OAKLAND ROSS

Pus, piss, throwing up, mental hospitals and weather-beaten, barely rising thighs are the main contents of the latest issue of *Waves*, York's tri-annual collection of prose, poetry, photographs and what-not.

Grim.

The popular pose this time around is Sylvia-Plathian horror, but without the fascination. There are confessional tales of the poet poisoning his grandmother, or the poet having a lobotomy, or the poet getting mad several times, or the poet going mad, or the poet not having much fun in bed.

There is nothing wrong in principle, with hard-core realism, but the muck itself has no meaning. Eileen Shea's poem, *Visiting my Brother in the Douglas Hospital*, is a lucid and striking picture of hopelessly mad young men. Some of the images (for example, "bricks mortared with pus", "the speech of fish", "skulls like flotsam", "crushed spit around the mouth") are quite lovely but they are buried under their own weight.

In contrast is Robert Clayton Casto's poem, *The Farewell to Venus at Rockland State Hospital*. The poem descends from an image of a transcendental goddess treading summer fields to an almost funereal vision of the hospital inmates as weedlike priestesses sinking listlessly through underwater gloom. The ethereality of the first stanza is transformed into laundry-room steam, then into a floating landscape and, finally, it becomes a dank, watery underworld. It is this balance between the pastore and the gloom that gives the poem its shape.

UNBALANCED

This balance is lacking in many of the poems. C. Patterson, Andrew Lincoln and Stanley Cooperman, among others, tend to weigh the

whole poem against the last line. The technique can work. The irony and isolation of the last line in Pat Janus's *The Sensitive Lover* is a case in point. But, more often than not, the last line is simply too light to be used as ballast for the entire poem. Repeating it four times as Stanley Cooperman does in *Territorial Grant*, doesn't necessarily help.

There are several fine moments in the book, some of them simple (Frame by W. Robert Arnold), and some of them ambitiously complex (A Phoenix by Installment by George McWhirter). Some of the photographs are very pleasant, especially John Oughton's tranquil oriental composition on page 37.

GOOD POEMS LOSE

But the good pieces in the book

are overshadowed by the self-conscious gruesomeness of many the pieces and by the unsettling fuziness of *Wave's* editorial policy.

The foreign language editor of *Waves* is Hédi Bouraoui. And the total foreign language content of *Waves* is three poems in French by H.A. Bouraoui (a clever disguise).

Bernice Lever, the principal editor, has included a two-page review, written by herself, of Matt Cohen's collection of Canadian short stories, *The Story So Far/2*. The review is a stilted, barely literate tirade against Margaret Atwood, in which Lever concludes that, unlike Atwood, some writers "do not bore their readers with formlessness, or excuse confused writing with 'that's the way it is' (their world view) with their lack of talent to tell their story" (sic).

Acting group merits recognition, combines energy with innovation

By BOB McBRYDE

Playing is a short playlet put on by first year theatre arts students last Friday in Atkinson Studio, in the context of student project week. Although attendance was regrettably small, those fortunate enough to see this ritual of dance and movement were amazed and encouraged by the depth of the students' inspiration and talent.

Playing, based on several sources, combined the rhythms of ancient rites with music recognizably modern. With the aid of Glendon professor and playwright Bob Wallace, the students (Gracie Eaman, Les Dodman, Chuck Syme, Phillip Adams and Bess Parrott) mimed themes of the self versus the mask, death and rebirth, man's fall into self-

consciousness, with great emotional enthusiasm.

The participants, with only one week of preparation, choreographed a programme of compressed breadth. Their ritual evoked emotions running a gambit from joy to abject despair within a context which emphasized the transience of both pleasure and pain.

It was interesting to hear afterwards an exegesis performed by one of the few faculty members in attendance in which he described all of the ancient themes from which the players (unconsciously) derived their rite.

One hopes that these theatre students will receive the recognition that their talents merit. With opportunities provided to perform, they will continue to do work which combines energy with innovation.