

REEL REVIEWS

By WILLIAM CLAIRE

'Educating Rita' 'Scarface'

Following Christmas break, many university students grimace at the prospect of putting up with more lectures and pronouncements of boring professors. It is likely, however, that most professors think similar thoughts about their students.

The teachers probably see their captive audiences as nothing more than a swarm of boring drones and resign themselves to this fate, hoping that a few times a during their careers they will come into contact with a student who really wants to learn.

That's what *Educating Rita's* all about. Adapted from the hit stage play of the same name, the movie

concerns Rita (Julie Walters), a working-class hair dresser and a tremendous thirst for knowledge.

Rita studies via television's 'open university' concept and once a week supplements the TV lessons with a session with a university tutor. Her first course is drama. Her tutor is boozy, university professor Dr. Frank Bryant (Michael Caine), a disillusioned, tenured poet.

During the course of their relationship, each tutors the other in an unplanned course of self-discovery, teaching each other to "change from the inside".

Rita is the student most pros would kill for; Bryant is the male who treats Rita as a human being, not as



Al Pacino gives a strong performance as cocaine-dealer Tony Montana in *Scarface*, a three hour deed.

the traditional housewife her husband prefers.

To say Walters, a newcomer to films, and Caine, a cinematic veteran, work well together is an understatement. Both should garner Academy award nominations. Walter's zesty, energetic portrayal balances Caine's disinterested, fed up with the world, cynical professor.

Walters delivers a flawless, engrossing performance in her transformation from a lower class hairdresser to an educated woman who, in the course of learning the tricks and techniques of literary criticism, sheds her former lifestyle and remakes herself in her own image.

Bryant, too, is transformed and Caine makes that transformation believable. The weekly encounters with Rita revives both his poetic soul and his desire to rejoin the mainstream of life.

For those who saw Caine as the alcoholic honorary consul in *Beyond The Limit*, it should be noted it was released prior to *Educating Rita*, but filmed immediately after. In retrospect, Caine's consul is a severe toning down of the broader, richer and infinitely more complex Bryant.

The film's origin as a theatre piece is its severest limitation. As the comedy emanating from the characters and their relationship takes the inevitable

serious turn, *Educating Rita* slows down. The restrictiveness of the stage and wordiness required to deliver the author's message result in a modified version of talking heads during a portion of the film's final third.

Overall, *Educating Rita* is a joy to behold. It is a well-acted comedy-drama that speaks to realistic situations. Tutor and student share a true learning experience: the discovery that asking questions, being excited by the answers and learning to make reasoned choices about real-life alternatives is what education is all about.

Tiring of homages of Hitchcock, DePalma dedicates this dud to Howard Hawks and Ben Hecht, director and screenplay writer, respectively, of the first *Scarface* (1932), a film considered to be a pioneer in the evolution of screen violence. Despite an orgy of violence during the last sixty minutes which is topped off with a bloodbath of foolish proportions, *Scarface* 1983 just doesn't measure up.

Unlike its inspiration, *Scarface's* final demise is not tragic. It is a relief. Hawks and Hacht would have been disappointed.

CUBAN GODFATHER -- Al Pacino's characterization as a slightly crazed, angry, aggressive punk who wends his way from small-time criminal to cocaine-racket

boss is the only redeeming feature of *Scarface*.

Twice too long at three hours, *Scarface* might have been sub-titled, 'The Godfather Goes Cuban'. It is a coincidence that director Brian DePalma's lead character who is assassinated in Francis Coppola's classic?

In attempting his version of the epic gangster film, DePalma failed to realize that such a project cannot succeed on the strength of one well-developed character, now matter how good the performance is.

Pacino's superb acting ability makes Cuban immigrant Montana believable, but his accomplishment is overshadowed in the company of the cardboard characterizations and an anorexia-thin plot.

Scarface -- he was a welt of a scar running above and below his left eye -- is the honest criminal who holds honesty and integrity as his long suits. He won't kill a contract victim if it means doing away with the man's wife and children; he sacrifices the life of his friend as an alternative to squealing. Yet the lack of consistency in Montana's personality becomes almost laughable when he guns down his best friend in a fit of unreasoned rage.

Count Dracula

The halls are alive with bats and ghastly screams at the Playhouse in Fredericton as rehearsals begin for TNB's production of *Count Dracula*.

This wonderful new adaptation written by Ted Tiller is as spine-chilling and delightfully eerie as the original Bram Stoker version, but contains some thrilling new surprises.

Michael Boucher, who directed *Memoir and Mass Appeal* last season, and has written directed for TNB's Young Company, will be directing this production.

The cast includes four actors who make a welcome return to TNB. The "Count" himself, Brian Taylor, appeared in TNB's *MacBeth*; Richard Farrell performed in *Murder Game*; John Dolan was last seen in *Arms and the Man*; and David Huband played the romantic lead in

The well-known bilingual actors, James Lradford and Denise Fergusson are also in the cast. They have appeared in numerous theatre productions in Canada, the United States and Britain. Moncton native Myriam Cyr, newcomer David Nairn and Shawn Wright who has performed with TNB's Young Company, complete this talented cast.

The set and costumes are designed by gifted Fredericton native Patric Clark, and Howard Munroe takes on his fourth assignment as Lighting Designer for TNB.

Should you notice two tiny red marks on your throat upon leaving the theatre, TNB will not be held responsible....

Count Dracula plays in Fredericton January 21 through 28 prior to a two-week provincial tour.