

Robert Rauschenberg's Inferno: Dante Alighieri's despair in a new disguise

It is generally true that if an artist is inspired by a piece of literature, his work will be considered secondary to that of the author concerned. This is particularly so with illustrators, whose work is often no more than a tool used by editors to improve layout. Happily, this is not the case of an exhibit currently running at the Fine Arts gallery.

The exhibit consists of thirty-four drawings by Robert Rauschenberg for Dante's *Inferno*, and will be showing until October twelfth.

Those who visit the show (and everybody should) will find that although a knowledge of the *Inferno* is academically desirable, it is far from necessary. Rauschenberg's work stands quite capable by itself.

The drawings are in effect a total visual recreation of the *Inferno*. Each drawing corresponds to a separate canto, and may be read, like a page, from upper left to lower right.

Two of the most striking elements of the series are the artist's use of technique and symbolism. His technique includes the use of pen, pencil, gouache, watercolor, and a transfer method, as yet unnamed. This last consists of wetting clippings from magazines or newspapers with a solvent, placing them face down on the paper, and rubbing them. The result is a textured reproduction of the original which Mr. Rauschenberg uses in the same manner as a montage.

Mr. Rauschenberg's use of this technique, and indeed, his whole style, changes considerably from first to last. In his first drawings, the effect is murky, ominous, and chaotic. As Dante's vision of Hell becomes clearer, the drawings show stronger coloration, and the energy behind them becomes more directed and precise.

The symbolism is difficult to describe, as it is not specific, but general. However, as one views these drawings, one is aware that Rauschenberg envisioned a hell for modern man, with very modern eyes.

As a bonus for those who take the time to see this worthwhile series, the gallery upstairs is showing an historical exhibit of prints. The survey extends from hand colored woodcuts of the fifteenth century to the latest developments in the twentieth century, among these a vivid serigraph on aluminum. The survey is by no means exhaustive, although it is representative, and includes two intriguing prints by Blake.

Finally, I must recommend the current exhibit in the SUB art gallery. It is another series of prints, this time by Mrs. Gersovitz, an artist from eastern Canada. Mrs. Gersovitz explores some interesting shapes and textures, and her use of color and subtle irony give her a rapport with her viewers that many artists fail to achieve.

—Bill Pasnak

Chamber musicians: Dvorak Quartet

The Edmonton Chamber Music Society will again present three string quartets in its concert series this year. The Dvorak String Quartet of Czechoslovakia will open the 1968-1969 series with a concert on Wednesday, October 23 in Convocation Hall.

The Aeolian String Quartet from England will play for Society members on Wednesday, February 19, and The Orford String Quartet will close the series on Wednesday, March 12.

The Society will also present an outstanding woodwind ensemble, the Adelaide Woodwind Quintet from Australia, on January 8.

The Edmonton Chamber Music Players will play music of Brahms on November 13 and music of the baroque on January 22. Regular tickets for the series of six concerts are \$10 and full-time students can buy season tickets for \$4. Tickets are on sale now at arts 348 (the department of music) and at the Allied Arts Box Office in The Bay.

All concerts are in Convocation Hall on the campus. There are no single admissions.



THE DVORAK STRING QUARTET: The first presentation of the Edmonton Chamber Music Society will take place in Convocation Hall October 23. It appears that they have prepared a very interesting year.

Students for a Medieval University

Films

Imagine a *Hamlet* with that manic-depressive charmer absorbed into the system—a Polonius of a *Hamlet*, in fact.

Imagine his role as heart-breaker taken over by Laertes. Not the decent, fuzzy-minded Laertes of Shakespeare's play, but a trickster, a coward, a bon vivant, almost a psychopath.

But imagine that Ophelia remains essentially Ophelia—an eighteenth-century Ophelia, perhaps, outwardly strong-minded and rationalistic, an Ophelia who reads Voltaire; but at heart still vulnerable.

And still Laertes' sister.

There you have the beginnings of the plot of *My Sister My Love* (*Siskonbadd*) at Studio 82, a film I recommend warmly.

It was directed by the man who made *Dear John* (whose name stupidly escapes me as I write this); you may recall that film as a fresh, apparently naive modern love story about a sea-captain and an unmarried-mother waitress, which made slightly too much of flashbacks and flash-forwards.

Dear John was a very pleasant film indeed, but it didn't lead me to suspect the extent of its director's talent.

In *My Sister My Love* he plunges bravely into Ingmar Bergman country, the Ingmar Bergman of the early fifties, master of costume comedy and metaphysical fairy-tale.

Amazingly, he survives the plunge.

For one thing, the film is exquisitely photographed, frame by frame. Motifs are established; over and over again shots are composed around the superimposed profiles of pairs of characters. Various significant animals make appearances. Wigs and the skulls beneath them take on an obsessive power.

But technique here is (as it wasn't always in *Dear John*) relentlessly functional. With the single exception of an ill-judged low-life scene on the heroine's wedding night (she marries Hamlet-Polonius), there's nothing in the film that doesn't contribute to establishing a broad but powerful theme.

To put it very crudely: the film is about privilege as incest.

Given a social system which narrows power, both monetary and sexual, into the hands of a smaller and smaller oligarchy, incest—metaphorically—becomes the logical end of the process.

What *My Sister My Love* does is to work out some implications of the metaphor.

Its period setting therefore is not merely decorative: it locates the action at the point at which the Old Order is over-ripe (the unseen King whom Hamlet-Polonius serves is obviously feeble-minded), ingrown, capable of giving birth to health only at the cost of its own absurd, grotesque death.

I realize this is a terribly schematic way of looking at a richly-textured film, and one could certainly reject this formulation of its theme without rejecting the film itself. But it seems to me that some such overarching view of the film is needed to account for its essential coherence, the elegance of its progression from comedy to despair.

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I suppose no-one needs my nudging to impell them to the other exciting movie in town at the moment, Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Opinions on Kubrick's extravaganza of numbness (and believe it or not, I don't mean that to sound off-putting) are going to vary wildly. Next week I'll unveil the Thompson-Bordo theory of the film (yes, that noted campus figure is a film-nut too); bear in mind, if you see the film before then, that HAL the computer is played by none other than Canada's own Douglas Rain.

And don't forget that Classic Film Society opens on Monday, and Main Series blasts off the Monday following.

—John Thompson