

The Classics Go to the Movies

By: Todd Ritter

Maybe it's just me, or does there seem to be a rash of movies based on literary classics? This year alone there's "Of Mice and Men", "A River Runs Through It", "Malcolm X" and, the best of the literary bunch, "The Last of the Mohicans" and "Bram Stoker's Dracula."

In "The Last of the Mohicans", Daniel Day Lewis plays Hawkeye, a white man adopted into the Mohican tribe. He falls in love with Cora (Madeline Stowe), a British officer's daughter. It is before the Revolutionary War and the English are fighting the French for hunting and trapping rights in the New World. The French have enlisted the help of the Hurons, a violent tribe upset with English colonization. The Mohicans, however, are opposed to the war in general and remain neutral.

None of this is important save for the fact that it puts Cora and Hawkeye in dangerous situations and gives the audience something to care about. Plotwise the film is weak, the age old cliché about good guys fighting bad guys on the American frontier, but visually it is brilliant. The whole movie

looks spectacular. All cast members, dressed in cool costumes, could pass for models in the latest L.L. Bean catalog and the sets are accurate to the smallest detail. Director Michael Mann (Miami Vice) stuffs the movie with breathtaking scenery and makes full use of the faithful script, based on James Fenimore Cooper's novel and two earlier film versions. Through Mann's point of view, the hills seem lush with greenery and every scene, especially the action ones featuring Indian raids in cornfields and frontier canoes tumbling over raging waterfalls, grows to mythic proportions. Even the characters aren't realistic. They seem like legendary beings who have stepped out of the pages of American folklore, which, in a sense, they have. The whole film is enhanced by a superb musical score that heightens every scene, until finally, during the heartbreaking, exhilarating cliff-top climax, everything reaches an emotional high. Through his use of visuals Mann creates a film that, despite its lack of coherent plotting, is ultimately satisfying.

Another movie that

looks great, but is not downright perfect, is Francis Ford Coppola's version of "Dracula", Bram Stoker's novel about the Nosferatu, bloodsucking creatures of the night. Like Mann, Coppola visually enhances the whole film, creating a disorienting, nightmarish and very effective version of the Stoker tale.

Relative unknown Gary Oldman (Lee Harvey Oswald in "JFK") plays Dracula and he gives a tour de force performance that will surely make him a star. His Dracula is evil, yes, but vulnerable to the love of one woman, Mina Murray (Winona Ryder). A fascinating prologue to the film tells how Dracula, a warrior named Vlad the Impaler, became the way he is by renouncing God. Mina is engaged to Jonathan Harker (Keanu Reeves), who has gone to Dracula's castle on business. Also involved is Professor Van Helsing (Anthony Hopkins) an expert on blood and its diseases who must try to stop Dracula.

The film can only be described as a roller coaster ride that slows down only enough to give the audience a breather from the action. And there is plenty of action. Dracula transforms himself from an old man, into a young

man, a werewolf, a pack of rats, green mist, and, of course, a rather large bat. Plus there's the usual bug-eating, blood sucking, beheading and stake-stabbing that is expected of any Dracula film. In other words, this isn't a movie for the faint at heart.

Unfortunately, the movie isn't very scary, although it makes up for it in atmosphere and special effects, and the supposed heroes (Reeves, Cary Elwes, Bill Campbell and Richard E. Grant) seem really dull compared to Oldman, Hopkins, newcomer Sadie Frost, as Lucy, Dracula's first victim, and Tom Waits as Renfield, Dracula's insect-munching disciple. But, like "Mohicans", the film is a feast for the senses and Coppola directs the whole thing brilliantly, creating what could become the definitive film version of the Dracula legend.

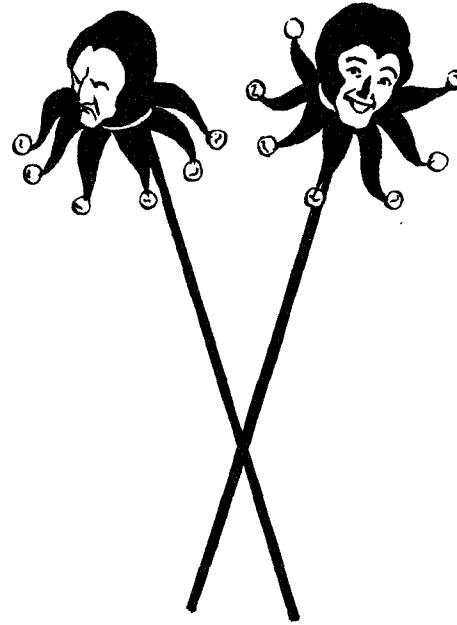
I have come to the conclusion that, yes, there is an unusual stream of classics flooding the theaters this year. Next year promises even more literary adaptations, including Martin Scorsese's long awaited version of Edith Wharton's "The

Age of Innocence". So until Hollywood gets some new ideas, I'm sure we'll see more movie versions of famed classics. That's fine with me, though, if they're all as good as "Mohicans" and "Dracula."

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Star Trek is that the human race, flawed as we are, possesses a unique and almost magical ability which NO other species in the Universe possesses. We are a precious diamond among many jewels in the Universe. And we have the ability and curiosity to strive toward unknowns if for no other reason than to learn as much as possible. Indeed, as many of our philosophers, poets, politicians, and dreamers like to believe; we are a most unique and wonderful people from a most intricate and beautiful world and we are only now beginning to realize this.

This tribute to the human spirit, this television morality lesson has taught myself and many other fortunate people to strive for the future, to accept and respect that which we don't understand and to NEVER give up on the ideal that we as a people are truly an integral part of the universe as much as the stars are. Check your local Fox Television listings for the times in area, you won't regret it!



SEX

I'm not a pervert. I was just curious. So, on October 21, after months of hype, I was one of the first people to purchase Madonna's first literary effort, Sex.

With two friends by my side, I bravely walked into Walden Books at the Laurel Mall, intending to buy Sex. We searched the displays, then the new releases, then the nonfiction and finally the Arts and Photography section. But no Sex could be found. The next step was to summon up all my courage and ask a friendly Walden Books employee. I boldly walked to the counter and asked in as quiet a voice as possible, "Do you have the new Madonna book?" (Notice how I didn't ask, "Do you have Sex?") The clerk looked at me, nodded, and reached under the counter. (Aha! I thought. "So that's where they keep them!") She pulled out a large silver package with a photo of Madonna in ecstasy on the front and stuck it in a bag. I paid the \$39.00 price tag, (it was originally \$50, but I got it on sale), took the book, and left.

Now, I know you're all asking, "How's the book?". The

book itself is hermetically sealed in a silvery pouch that resembles aluminum foil and it comes with a free CD of Madonna's new "Erotica" single. Now what's inside is-well, kind of interesting. There's Madonna at the beach with super-model Naomi Campbell, Madonna with Vanilla Ice, Madonna with a dog (don't ask), and, my personal favorite, Madonna hitchhiking through the streets of Miami wearing only a smile. Plus, there are a lot of things that look awfully painful and a running commentary on the action by Madonna's alter-ego, Dita.

I'll bet your next question is, "Was it worth the money?". Actually, yes, it was. I know that \$50.00 is a lot of money for something you can get in "Playboy", but it is Madonna. And Warner Books, the publisher, has stopped printing copies, so it will be a collector's item in the near future. So, if you're open-minded (very open-minded) and have around \$50.00 to spare, head on over to your local bookstore and buy some Sex.