

'Tess' sets old fashioned mood

By Scot K. Meyer

Battalion Staff

"Tess" is probably the best film Roman Polanski has ever made. It is a Victorian romance novel seen through Polanski's admittedly non-Victorian eyes; but although the film has a slightly modern outlook, it is still brought to the screen with the mood of a lyrical, old fashioned love story.

And although some viewers might be offended by their perception of Polanski's personal life, there is nothing to be offended by in this film.

"Tess" is an adaptation of Thomas Hardy's novel "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," brought to the screen in living, breathing technicolor. It would probably be quite impressive if I could do a literary analysis of this film, comparing it to the novel. Unfortunately, I have never read the novel. Meant to, of course, and yet

... Still, I have had "Tess" the novel described to me. As long and boring. "Tess" the motion picture is not boring, but it is still long. Like the seedless prunes that still have wrinkles. But another way of looking at it is that, at three hours, "Tess" is a lot of film for your money. And it's good.

For one thing, one comes away from the movie wishing for postcards of it to send to friends. The scenery and the camera work are fantastic. For another, Nadia Kinski is excellent in the title role.

Basically, "Tess" is about a young woman, Theresa D'Ur-

berville, whose family discovers that it is of noble descent. Being practical and poor as well, the family decides to see whether the title can be of monetary value. So Tess is sent to visit her cousins, another D'Urberville family, to "claim kin" and ask for financial aid.

The other family's real name is Stokes, though; they bought the D'Urberville title for a little extra prestige. There is a roguish young Stokes who is quite taken with Tess's beauty, so he arranges for her to work for the family.

Eventually he manages to "seduce" Tess, relying to a large extent on his strength and her fear. He would like to keep her, own her perhaps, but it is not to be. For although he has all the aces — money, power and charm — she has pride and determination. So she leaves him, and goes on living life her own way.

Sounds pretty existentialist, doesn't it? A person living her own "authentic" life, making her own decisions and accepting responsibility for them. The only problem is that Tess lives in a world of social classes. And although her aristocratic lineage may seem to put her in the upper class, money talks, and money says she is lower class.

It sometimes seems that the only way for a member of the lower class to live his or her own life is to be ignored by the upper classes, but unfortunately Tess is too beautiful to be ignored.

So she isn't, as this film shouldn't be.

'Heaven's Gate' fails

By Scot K. Meyer

Battalion Staff

I had heard about "Heaven's Gate." Mainly that it was a very expensive, very long movie that had bombed when released. And that director Michael Cimino had taken it back for re-editing, in an attempt to get at least part of his studio's money back.

When I heard that a full hour had been cut from "Heaven's Gate," I expected the result to be choppy and fast-paced.

Such is not the case. The film is so slow-moving that it is hard to believe there could have ever been more to it. This is not a lean film, even for an epic.

It is also not a great film, even for an epic. It is a movie of hits and misses.

First the hits. "Heaven's Gate" is a beautiful film to watch. It succeeds in creating mood and texture to an extent that, if it were a painting, it would have to be considered a complete success.

The film also features a very poignant love story involving not two but three of its main characters.

Okay, now for the bad news. "Heaven's Gate" might succeed as a painting, or perhaps as an idea, but it fails as a story. And, unfortunately for the filmmak-

ers, movies are only as good as the stories they tell.

The story begins at Harvard University, with commencement exercises for the class of 1870. The commencement speaker injects the graduates, as such speakers tend to do, with a large dose of idealism. (Unspoken question: how long will it last?)

Kris Kristofferson plays James Averill, a member of the class of '70 whose idealism takes him to Wyoming and makes him a marshal (a really nasty thing for one's idealism to do, as Wyoming was not a barrel of laughs in the late 1800s).

Some of Averill's old classmates are also in Wyoming, but they were brought there for reasons other than idealism. They are members of a cattleman's association, and are interested primarily in making lots of money.

Unfortunately for everyone's well-being, the place is chock full of Russian immigrants who are starving. These people, in desperation, have taken to stealing cattle to feed their families. The association has decided, in a quiet boardroom manner, to draw up a list of 125 men (almost every immigrant male in the county) who will be killed as an example to starving cattle thieves everywhere.

Although the association has hired some real low-rent mercenaries to carry out their plan, they do have the support of the governor, so presumably they have the law on their side. But since their plans resemble an extermination rather than a series of fair trials, still-idealistic Averill objects.

Now to make things interesting. In sticking up for the immigrants, Averill is betraying his class, because he is both Harvard-educated and wealthy. He is also protecting his lover, who runs a brothel and who is on the list because she would accept either cash or cattle as payment for her services.

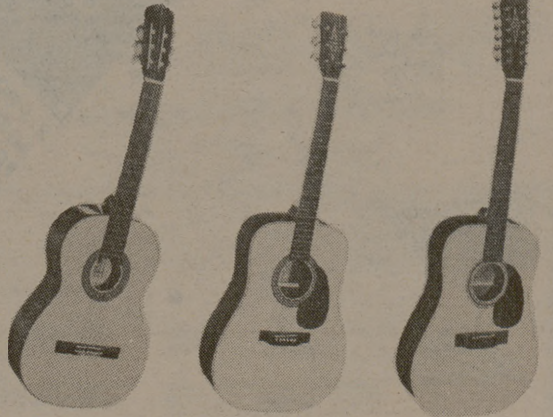
Ella, his lover, is also in love with Nate Champion, who is of Russian descent, but who works for the association. He doesn't know that Ella is on the list.

Unfortunately, the plot fizzles. Rather than dealing with conflicts generated by the failure of idealism, the betrayal of one's social class or even the problems in loving someone who also loves someone else, the film ends up saying only that the association members really weren't very nice. Which most of us already knew.

And try though it might, the film is too lethargic to be a good shoot-em-up.

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