

MOVIES

'Under the Volcano' a Film Worth Seeing

By Michael Gallagher
New York (NC) — "Under the Volcano" (Universal) is based on Malcolm Lowry's 1947 novel about an alcoholic Englishman, an ex-consul, consummating the self-destructive bent his life has taken.

He plays out his endgame during a 24-hour period in Cuernavaca, Mexico, against the background of the garish festivities surrounding the celebration of

All Souls Day, popularly called "The Day of the Dead."

Director John Huston, a giant among pygmies on the American film scene, apparently has wanted to make a film of Lowry's novel for 30 years, and now he's done it. He's done it, moreover, probably as well it could be done.

That doesn't a successful movie make, unfortunately. But it's still one worth seeing, especially for those

seeking something made for grown-up people in this, the silly season of "Gremlins," "Indiana Jones" and so forth.

The plot is quite simple. Geoffrey Firmin (Albert Finney), a retired British diplomat abandoned by his beautiful wife Yvonne (Jacqueline Bisset), spends the night of All Saints Day in an alcoholic binge, during the course of which a kindly Mexican brings him to a local shrine of the Blessed Virgin and persuades him to pray for Yvonne's return. Firmin is astounded the next morning when Yvonne suddenly appears as he declaims in an empty bar about a war experience that has affected him deeply.

Yvonne has come back because she loves him despite everything — including her own infidelity, a brief affair with Geoffrey's half-brother Hugh (Anthony Andrews), a flamboyant and politically committed journalist. As it happens, Hugh, back from

the Spanish Civil War where he has been covering the fighting from the Loyalist side, is visiting Geoffrey, trying to stem his drinking.

Were there any chance for reconciliation and restoration, however, Hugh's presence, despite his good intentions, would have doomed it.

The three set out in apparent good cheer to see the Fiesta sights in Cuernavaca, an expedition that seems to reach a happy climax when Hugh does a skillful bit of impromptu bullfighting and Geoffrey seems ready to agree to Yvonne's proposal to leave Mexico to make a new start somewhere else.

But Geoffrey, growing more and more manic as he describes what they might do to achieve their dreams, abruptly turns violent, abusing both his wife and his brother and frantically gulping down alcohol to maintain, he says, his balance.

The day ends in tragedy

when Geoffrey, after fleeing Yvonne and Hugh, takes refuge from the rain in a sinister brothel teeming with the dregs of the town and ruled by vicious fascist thugs.

The centerpiece of Huston's film is Finney's performance as the self-destructive consul. Witty, brave, artistic and intellectual, Lowry's consul personifies the adage "corruptio optimi pessima" — "the corruption of the best is the worst."

But in the medium of film, drunkenness, as well as madness, presents almost insurmountable problems.

In real life, drunken strangers — since we have no way of knowing about any richness their inner lives may possess — invariably unsettle us and bore us by turns. And despite Finney's effort, I think his consul is going to affect most viewers in much the same way for much the same reason.

Film resolutely externalizes. In a novel a

character's thoughts can be his or her actions, but a director tackles a novel of this sort — the works of Joyce, Faulkner, Proust — at his peril.

Finney, Huston and adapter Guy Gallo, admirable as their varied contributions are, haven't succeeded in conveying the inner Geoffrey Firmin. As a result, we're left on the outside. A tragedy may in fact be taking place, but we aren't made to feel it.

Despite this significant failure, "Under the Volcano" has some very good moments and, like almost any film of the great Huston, is certainly worth seeing.

It is, of course, adult material, especially because of the violence and graphic sexual atmosphere of the brothel sequence. The U.S. Catholic Conference has classified it A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America has rated it R — restricted.



Ectoplasmic exterminators (top) Bill Murray, left, and Dan Aykroyd, center, remove some uninvented guests, namely ghosts, from a fancy hotel in "Ghostbusters." Zach Galligan, left, is awed by the small and highly unusual pet he receives from his father, Hoyt Axton, while his mother, Lee McCain, looks on with equal interest in "Gremlins." (NC Photos)

Capsule Movie Reviews

"Ghostbusters" (Columbia)
Three parapsychologists (Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis), bounced from Columbia University because of the dubious nature of their discipline, go into private practice as ghost exterminators. As it happens they choose a propitious moment to ply their trade since all hell is about to break loose, quite literally. The dauntless trio, in the film's climax, wield their proton accelerators in a supernatural shootout with the forces of darkness atop an Art Deco apartment house on Central Park West. Thanks mainly to Bill Murray's presence, there are some very funny moments. About midway through, however, spectacular special effects begin to dominate and the humor fades. The direction of Ivan Reitman, moreover, is uncertain at times, especially in sequences involving a man from the Environmental Protection Agency who objects to the ghostbusters' disposal system. But despite its defects, the movie is a fairly good comedy for mature viewers. Because of some ribald jokes in the dialogue, it has been classified A-III — adults — by the U.S. Catholic Conference. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

"Gremlins" (Warners)
A kindly but ne'er-do-well inventor (Hoyt Axton) buys a cute, furry little creature as a Christmas present for his son Billy (Zach Galligan). He's cautioned not to expose it to strong light, not to get it wet and never to feed it after midnight. He brings the creature home to a Disneylike town whose tranquility is shattered when the prohibitions are violated, and his son's gentle pet produces offspring that turn into fierce, savage little monsters bent on mindless mischief and mayhem. "Gremlins" — which is "presented by Steven Spielberg," whatever that means — is a nasty and tasteless little movie that cares about nothing but how to top itself in terms of sick jokes and violence. (An embattled mother defends her kitchen by pulverizing one of the toothy little wretches in the blender, decapitating another with a bread knife and exploding a third in a microwave oven.) Certainly Spielberg, director Joe Dante and writer Chris Columbus didn't have to look very far to find inspiration for the personalities of their eponymous heroes. And it's no doubt that the gremlins are the heroes, not the plastic Billy and his plastic girlfriend. Because of the violence, the USCC classification is A-III — adults. The industry rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

Menotti's New Mass Raises Flap

Baltimore (NC) — A new Mass by composer Gian-Carlo Menotti received a mixed reception June 10 during the closing of the Baltimore Archdiocese's observance of the founding of Maryland.

Described as "a contemporary Gregorian" Mass, the performance of "Mary's Mass: A Mass for the Contemporary Liturgy," was in the Basilica of the Assumption in Baltimore. Baltimore's archdiocesan newspaper, The Catholic Review, said although the crowd applauded "long and hard" for the premiere performances, one musician in the congregation called the

Menotti work a "put-on" resembling "something from the 1940s."

Menotti had complained about changes in his works and criticized Carole Sorrell, music consultant for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Menotti was quoted as saying Ms. Sorrell should be "an air stewardess in Lufthansa rather than a musical director in a church."

"The Catholic Church must learn to treat the arts with more respect and understanding, or it will lose us all," said Menotti. "Fortunately, I wrote this Mass for the glory of God, and I hope God will receive my modest effort more mercifully than

Ms. Sorrell did," added the composer, famous for such operas as "Amahl and the Night Visitors," "The Medium" and "The Saint of Bleeker Street."

Ms. Sorrell said she was in shock from Menotti's public criticism and said the composer was slow to turn over the music for rehearsal.

"We were given the score for the Menotti Mass on May 15," she said.

Robert Twynham, director of music at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Baltimore, said he respected Menotti's point of view as an artist but added he did not believe Menotti understood

"where the church is in music now."

"Though he is a world-class composer, I think he's got something to learn about religious composing. Menotti's approach to religious values is more from the dramatic point of view," said Twynham.

The Mass was commissioned by the Paul VI Institute for the Arts, a Catholic art gallery which sponsors activities to promote the arts in the Archdiocese of Washington. The commission was made possible by a grant from the Anthony and Anna Louise Carozza Foundation of Hillcrest Heights, Md.

BOOKS

'God's Broker,' a Pseudo-Life

"God's Broker," by Antoni Gronowicz. Richardson and Snyder (New York; 1984). 483 pp., \$20.

Reviewed by Jerry Filteau
NC News Service

Fact and fiction are inseparable in "God's Broker," which carries the lengthy subtitle, "The life of Pope John Paul II as told in his own words and in the reminiscences of cardinals, bishops and friends."

If this were an authentic biography, one could put up with such things as Antoni Gronowicz' pretentious efforts to appear knowledgeable in Latin and Italian. Or the stilted style in which he repeatedly has Pope John Paul II, the late Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński of Warsaw, or other high church officials recite precise, detailed biographies of other churchmen or pieces of church history to him in the course of various interviews. Or even the frequent pompous insertions of the author's own self into the narrative.

One might even forgive occasional blatant errors of fact such as references to the future pope as "priest Wojtyla" and "Reverend Karol Wojtyla" organizing protection for Jews during World War II, when in fact Karol Wojtyla was not ordained a priest until 1946.

But how does one explain Gronowicz' assertion on page 34 that "During his coronation, John Paul II, so as not to create a fuss among the conservative cardinals, reluctantly wore the tiara for the first and last time"?

Hundreds of thousands in St. Peter's Square and millions who saw the inauguration on TV witnessed that the pope did not don the traditional papal tiara and in fact stated in his inaugural homily that he was foregoing a coronation out of deference to contemporary sensitivities regarding the ceremony. Later Gronowicz compounds the confusion by devoting a whole chapter, titled "The Coronation of John Paul II," to an event that never occurred.

If such egregious errors of public fact could lead even the most casual observer to question the credibility of "God's Broker," there is much more in store.

From Cardinal Wyszyński's mouth — as interpreted by Gronowicz but attributed to the cardinal in quotation marks — we hear a diatribe against the spying, scheming Jesuits in which we learn that they were actually founded "by St. Augustine in the fourth century." Perhaps that is meant to prepare the

loyal followers of St. Ignatius for some of the wonders that follow: that Pope Paul VI nominated Father Pedro Arrupe as their general, and that Father Arrupe was a conservative who opposed some reforms instituted by Popes John XXIII and Paul VI and conspired to embarrass a progressive German bishop.

By the time Cardinal Wyszyński breaks the seal of secrecy on the 1978 papal story to Gronowicz, it is no longer even a surprise to find the author asserting, through the Polish primate, that a faction of Americans was pushing Cardinal John Cody of Chicago for pope.

Like the earlier anti-Jesuit diatribe, invective against American cardinals Cody, Cooke and Spellman is placed in the mouths of popes and other high church officials but seems more likely to be nothing more than the personal prejudice of the author.

Examples of Gronowicz' lack of historical self-discipline abound, rendering suspect any contributions his research could have made to knowledge about the early life of Pope John Paul II. While he has obviously studied a great deal of the pope's

poetry and theological writings, his summaries of the pope's thought provide no particular depth, coherence or insight.

Gronowicz, a Polish-American novelist and playwright, claims to have spent more than 200 hours personally interviewing Pope John Paul II since November 1980. He has photos to prove he met with the pope — so do I and thousands of other people — but internal evidence in the book defies his claim of close familiarity. If he visited the Vatican as often as he claims, he could not possibly, for example, have so confused St. Anne's Gate with the Bronze Door as he did in describing his first visit.

Gronowicz freely admits he has not been a practicing Catholic for years and practically defies the reader to hold that against him. But when his misinformation about the church is projected into the words of popes and cardinals, he does a serious disservice to anyone who may read the book and actually believe what it says.

Filteau, a staff writer for NC News, spent three years as Rome bureau chief for NC, covering the pontificate of Pope John Paul II.

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