

what's at the movies



Nastassia Kinski plays the title role in "Tess," based on the Thomas Hardy novel "Tess of the d'Urbervilles."

the movies Louise Snider Camera captures strong imagery with film 'Tess'

Roman Polanski's "Tess" (PG), from Thomas Hardy's 19th century novel, "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," is one of the few exceptions to the rule that serious literary works don't adapt well to the screen.

What irony that this terror of a director, responsible for "Chinatown," "Repulsion," "The Tenant," should have made such an eminently respectable, stately film about repressed passion, guilt and violence.

If anything, Polanski has shown too much respect for Hardy's novel. The movie, three hours long, progresses like a pavan with measured movements and turnings and great restraint.

"Tess is a beautiful, but poor and odd simple country girl. When she is 16, she is raped by her employer, a wealthy landowner. She returns home to bear his child, who dies while still an infant.

"TESS LATER MARRIES a proper young gentleman in a true love match. However, when she confesses her experience to him, his Victorian standards don't allow him to accept a tarnished wife, so he abandons her.

The deserted woman labors for years like a beast in the field, awaiting her husband's forgiveness and return. Her torment and suppressed hatred eventually lead to her destruction.

Nastassia Kinski, a European beauty who is the daughter of German actor Klaus Kinski, plays Tess. She vividly conveys the childlike innocence and sensual attractiveness but not much emotion, even allowing for the restraint of the period.

Leigh Lawson as the seducer and Peter Firth as her husband give greater range to their expressions, but we still learn little about their motivations and feelings.

By the last half of the film, therefore, one becomes weary of Tess martyring herself waiting for her self-righteous husband to return. When her seducer tries to coax her back to him and away from her druggery, he says, "There is a point at which stubbornness becomes stupidity."

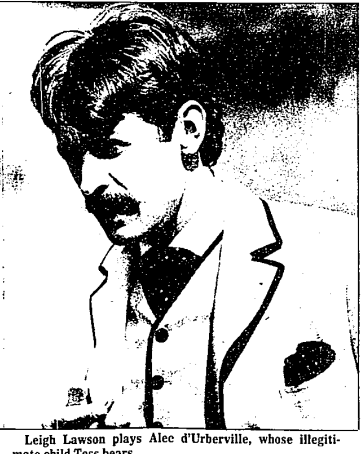
By then, we've seen enough to agree.

"THE FLAWS ARE there, but they are imperfections on a large and handsome canvas. With the help of the late cinematographer Geoffrey Unsworth, and Ghislain Cloquet who replaced him, Polanski has created a masterpiece.

The imagery might well be a survey of the palettes of great artists. It ranges from the golden tones of a Rembrandt to the atmospheric effects of English watercolorists to the fresh, direct hues of the Impressionists.

It catches the contrasts of newly mechanized agriculture and pastoral settings, of crisp, richly textured interiors and soft, shadowy forests.

"Tess" is a film that rewards the patient viewer with a succession of beautiful, resonant images.



Leigh Lawson plays Alec d'Urberville, whose illegitimate child Tess bears.

NEW RELEASES ALTERED STATES (R)... CHARLIE CHAN AND THE CURSE OF THE DRAGON QUEEN (PG)... THE DEVIL AND MAX DEVILIN (PG)... THE ELEPHANT MAN (PG)... FORT APACHE, THE BRONX (R)... THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING WOMAN (PG)... INSIDE MOVES (PG)... KAEGEMUSHA (The Shadow Warrior) (PG)... MELVIN AND HOWARD (R)...

THE MIRROR CRACK'D (PG)... NINE TO FIVE (PG)... ORDINARY PEOPLE (R)... RAGING BULL (R)... TESS (PG)... TRIBUTE (PG)... MOVIE RATING GUIDE

Actor appears in production Tom Fillbrook of Rochester is playing Dr. Bradman in the Romeo Community Theatre Inc. production of Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit" at 9 p.m. Thursday-Saturday at the Romeo High School Auditorium, 11091 W. 32 Mile Road.

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