
CAVEAT EMPTOR:

You, Worcester, and movie rentals to avoid at all costs

(Movies that I've seen... so you don't have to)

By Jessica Lerner

Thinking about heading out to Blockbuster this evening? Frustrated with the last of the diners Worcester has to offer? Assuming that a movie is the most fool-proof form of entertainment you can stomach right now? Well, then you might want to consider this little cautionary list that I've compiled, since experiencing movie rental hell over the last few weeks.

Where should I begin? I think I'll start with a film that I did not, by any means, rent or intend to rent. To get off the track slightly, this was a film I was required to watch for film class. Yes, film class. Which means, by all general assumptions, that it should be good, right? Entertaining, intriguing, intellectually stimulating? Sure. I have a feeling that if you have taken Intro. to Screen Studies at Clark you might be able to empathize with me here. This is a movie so bad, so paralyzingly awful to watch, that I refuse to mention its name aloud (this may also be because I can't pronounce it). Anyway, at the risk of disrespecting the professors and the class itself, (who *picked* this freaking movie? God help them.) I must come forth with the information that *Powwauquatsi*, a film with music (supposedly) by Philip Glass deserves to be at the top of this list of Terrible, Terrible Stay-Away-From-It-Like-The-Plague movies. Actually, that title belongs to this one alone. There is no dialogue of any kind to be found in the film; there are no main characters, either. It seems to be a visual documentary of sorts, structured around people in both Third World and Western countries, doing what they do everyday... walking, working in the fields, marching, eating, the buildings in the cities... in slow motion. For two hours. Yes, that's right, *two hours* of random people, eating, bathing, buying, selling, farming, staring, standing in place where they live, working, breathing in the city air, crossing the street, all in slow motion. I am repeating myself because I feel that it is very important for you to get the gist of the movie as clearly as possible, so that you may have the

good fortune of staying as far away from it as possible. But wait—I have not yet tackled the most intolerable aspect of the film. *The music*. I'm not sure if Philip Glass actually did have a hand in the music (you do see his name appear briefly in the credits), and if he did, it makes me wonder what kind of drugs he was amusing himself with at the time. But the combination of a very strange, rhythmic, *Chariots of Fire* kind of thing pulsing in the background, along with some very weird melodies reinforced with flutes and xylophones that couldn't even hold up in the early seventies (when the film was made) really made my poor stomach feel as if I was stuck in some void reserved for brain-dead ants who are flash-backing from too much acid. All I can say is, it's a good thing that my watch glows in the dark, because I would have otherwise assumed that this movie lasted for eight hours.

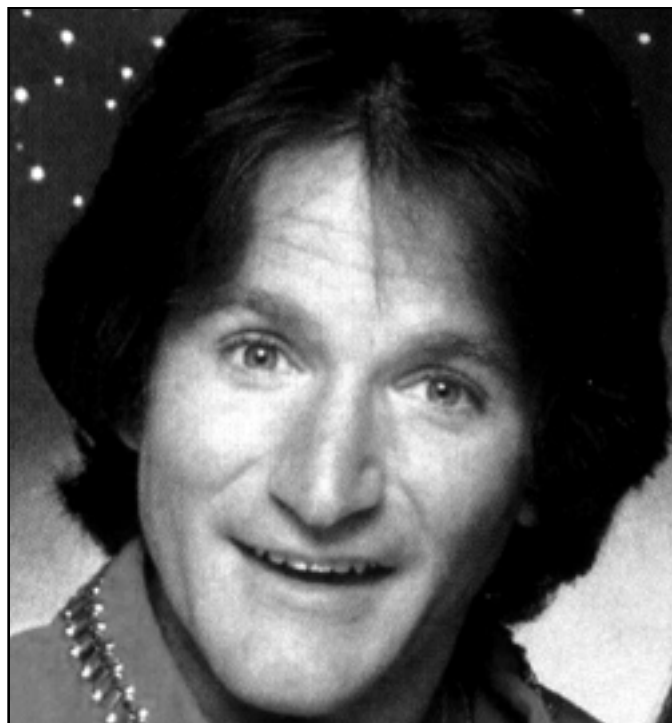
Okay then, onto another really bad flick. This one I rented. Yes, everybody, I take full responsibility for picking this one out. Somewhere, in the back of my memory where the miscellaneous file is spilling over with useless



and half-accurate information, I recalled thinking that *The World According to Garp*, supposedly a terrific book by John Irving would be a good choice. The movie version, I had been told by none other than my own mother, was pretty good. Actually, her exact words were, “Jessica, it has John Lithgow playing football in a dress. You would love it.” So yeah, that alone was enough to make me rent the movie (having doubts about my judgement? I admit, my personal taste tends to lean towards the slightly whacked, eccentric side, but trust me, try to avoid *Powwauquatsi*). So I rented this movie, and forced four or five of my friends to watch it with me, promising that it would be a good time. Let me tell you what happened:

The Players: Robin Williams plays a guy whose life span is the story line of the movie. He grows up, decides to become a writer, gets married, has kids, has emotional frustration, watches a lot of people get shot, becomes a wrestling coach, and dies. That, in a nutshell, is the plot. Glenn Close plays a one-dimensional (most likely the script’s fault) tough, strong-willed and independent mother. She is a compassionate and open-minded nurse who likes to take in misfits of society and nurse them back to reality. She wants to make her son happy so she provides him with a prostitute now and again, writes a best selling feminist/activist novel, and gives controversial lectures all over the country— all the while wearing that damned nurse’s cap. John Lithgow plays an over emotional transvestite who is the family’s best friend. He does a damn good job, but even that goes on too long until it’s not even close to being entertaining anymore.

The Point: There is none. You get to watch Robin Williams in each stage of his life (it feels like you’re watching each year) from babyhood to wrestling coach, with lots of fruitless tragedy thrown in for good measure. One of his sons dies in a car crash, the other loses an eye— the good news is that they have a daughter to replace the son. His mother gets shot down (still wearing her quaint little nurse outfit, complete with cap) and both Robin Williams and his wife end up in neck braces and arm-slings galore (car crash) and to top it all off and give it a nice clean finish, Robin Williams gets shot in the middle of a wrestling match (just when you thought he was getting his life back together) by some freako in a nurse’s outfit. You *do* get to see John Lithgow play football in a dress, but at that point, if you’re not so bleary



Robin Williams, in his popular role as Mork

eyed and irritable from sitting through the movie, it still might be hard to appreciate. (He looks good in lipstick, though.) I apologized to all my friends and vowed to call my mother and chew her out for that suggestion. After all, she is supposed to have relatively good taste in movies— she did study acting and film for four years. So don’t see it, okay?

Note: I did call my mother and when I asked her what she had been thinking, her disclaimer was, “Oh, I don’t remember, it was a very long time ago. All the movies in the early seventies were bad. Everybody gets shot. You know that.” This was not a good enough excuse in my opinion. Maybe I’ll make her watch Powwauquatsi.

All right. The last movie that I’m going to shoot down with violent criticism is, unfortunately, a touchy subject. There are a lot of you out there, particularly guys, who think that this movie is to be honored and respected as a classic and watched with religious appreciation, so by just mentioning it I am going to stir up a lot of anger and disgust that will end up being directed at me because of my opinionated little comments. But you know what? I can’t hold it back, I can’t lie. I must tell the truth— my truth. About how I was so revved up, so enthusiastic about seeing this film. How my good friends insisted that it must be seen. How, once again, I recalled

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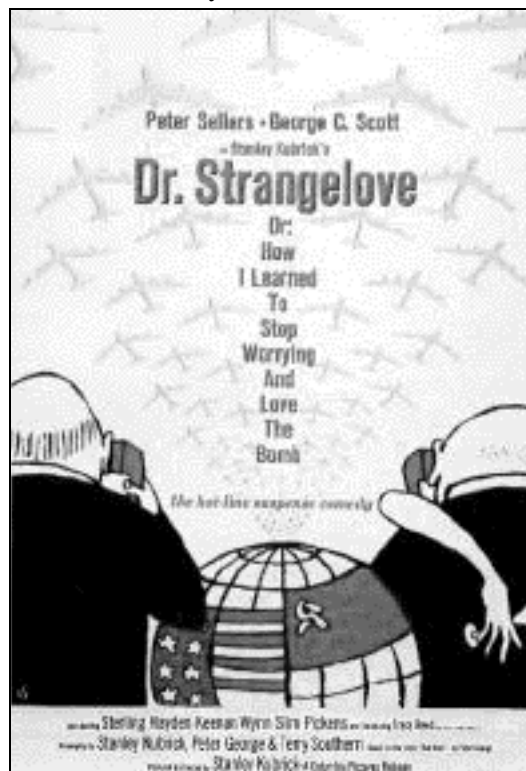
my movie-knowledgeable mother saying that I must see it (assuming the last one was a fluke). Remembering the cult my friends organized around the filmmaker, standing in a great circle, chanting “Stanley Kubrick, Stanley Kubrick, our hero, our inspiration!” Okay, okay. I know I’m getting a little carried away. There actually was no cult. I’m just nervous that I’m going to get shot down for this one. Well then, so be it. I stand beside this decision to express my disgust with this film. Enough of this irritating prattle. Let the opposition begin.

About two weeks ago, I sat down to watch *Dr. Strangelove (or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb)* with some friends. I tried very hard. I did. I watched closely and carefully, nodding appreciatively at the supposedly funny parts, allowing my eyes to glaze over like the rest of my friends at the brilliance that was being executed (peer pressure). Alas, I found no jokes amusing, no part of the plot sustaining, and no acting slightly noteworthy. The only thing I absorbed from this film was lots of inane conversations, lots of meaningless war, lots of surprisingly awful moments from Peter Sellers, too much gum-chewing, and an interestingly young James Earl Jones in a small and disappointing role. The whole thing is about being in a plane, or being in the drab uniformity of the Pentagon in the Fifties, with lots of planes and ships exploding, lots of stupid telephone conversations, lots of basically, war with no point. Which is not so different from reality, but it is supposed to be a parody. I find it an unsuccessful one at that. I tried to get interested during the dialogue, but found it unfulfilling and fell asleep near the end. It seemed like two hours of the same thing over and over to me. The worst part being, again, the music. Throughout the entire movie, you hear drums being beaten to the tune of “Johnny Comes Marching Home.” This alone, if nothing else, makes it unbearable.

I do not regret my decision to share all of this with you. Hopefully, you will be able to avoid watching this film, and the others that I’ve mentioned. Even when your friends suggest them, think to yourself, “I know better.” Maybe I’m wrong about this one movie— so many people place it high on their list of important movies. But maybe it’s just like everything else... one person says it’s cool so everyone else agrees. (“Hey, man, ever seen *Dr. Strangelove*? Man, that’s the shit. It’s just so great,

man, it’s a classic. You’ve seen it, haven’t you? Isn’t it great? Jeez, Kubrick’s a genius, isn’t he?”). Don’t succumb to the peer pressure! I am here to knock down that obstruction, to demystify the myth. And it is just that— a myth. Please, please don’t waste your energy over glorifying shitty movies. And if you want to take this outside, I’m up for it.

Now that you’ve endured my overly wordy prose— but with good cause, I assure you— you may now find yourself in the position to criticize efficiently and knowingly. Believe me, there is a lot still to be conquered out there... find those movies, seek them out, destroy them! Send letters to filmmakers of all nations (particularly this one), letting them know we’ve have enough of this appalling insult to art! Remember, be careful checking out those videos. (Oh, and an important footnote: the first movie in *Intro to S.S.* might be bad, but I believe the rest are all right. Don’t let that discourage you from taking the class. It is, however, at your own risk since you’ll have to figure out how to avoid that movie.) I’m not going to ask for recommendations anymore. I’m going to rely on my own well-informed opinions from now on. Be careful out there— it’s a scary scene in *Worcester*. You don’t need a bad movie to wreck the rest of your night... or month... or year. . .



The original *Dr. Strangelove* movie poster.