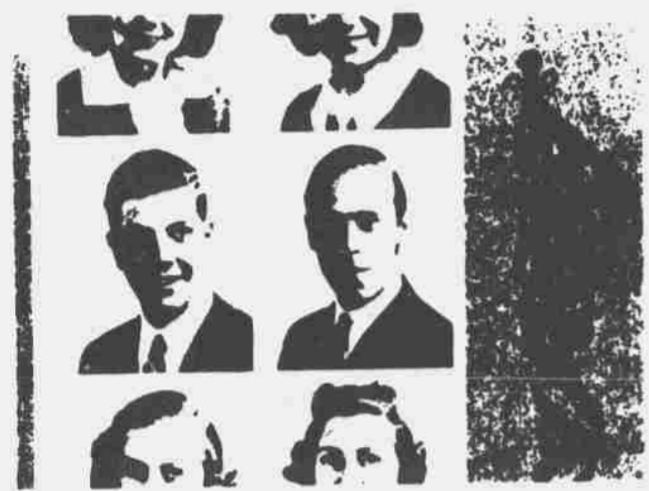


Arts & Entertainment

HAM ON RYE



CHARLES BUKOWSKI

Stale 'Ham on Rye' recounts bleak reality of Bukowski's youth

Ham on Rye
Charles Bukowski
Black Sparrow Press

Charles Bukowski writes like Roberto Duran used to box — no frills or wasted motion, just straight shots to the gut. Bukowski is as real as herpes.

"Ham on Rye" is Bukowski's remembrance of things past. Beginning with his first conscious memory and proceeding through his early 20s, "Ham on Rye" is an account of a bleak experience of youth that is helpful in explaining his later misanthropic view of life. However,



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this bleakness makes "Ham on Rye" less appealing than his short stories and other novels. In his other works, Bukowski's redeeming virtue is the keen sense of the absurd, which is lacking in "Ham on Rye." But if you're into being morose, this even beats Lou Reed doing "Heroin."

Maybe Bukowski is getting tapped out of ideas, as he has published 40-odd books of prose and poetry since 1960. Making his reputation first as a poet, Bukowski is particularly well regarded in Europe. He branched into prose when he wrote a column for an underground paper in Los Angeles during the '60s.

A compilation of these columns was published as "Notes of a Dirty Old Man." Buy it — this captured the essential Bukowski. Here was a guy pushing 50, just this side of being a wino and hanging around with a bunch of idealistic young commies who forgave any eccentricities because French critics approved of his poetry. Always autobiographical in approach, Bukowski's columns ended up describing endless rounds of parties where he runs amok and gets away with it because of his big-time reputation. Artists can always get away with murder or breaking windows because they're so sensitive, you know.

"Notes of a Dirty Old Man" showcases Bukowski's encounters with the then nascent youth culture, the L.A. police and other stories of general madness. My personal favorite involves Bukowski rolling into a neighborhood gas station to fill up an "inflatable love doll" while the attendants heckle him.

His novels, including "Post Office," aren't as funny as his short stories. His favorite topic there is menial jobs Bukowski has known his share of these, as his first book wasn't published until he was 42. Yet amid the depressing reality of being a working-class hero, Bukowski still throws in his crazy humor.

Unfortunately, "Ham on Rye" lacks these punch lines. It does explain how Bukowski became what he is, but it's not a pretty picture. His parents used to beat him regularly, he had an obscure skin disease that caused disfiguring boils to wreak havoc on his face, plus he was a poor kid going to Hollywood High. Bukowski was like the Elephant Man, as he still had your basic human feelings though he was reviled by virtually everyone. No wonder he turned out to be somewhat cynical.

Pat Higgins

A whole lot of sinnin' going on

By Jeff Goodwin

The Catholic Church always has been a popular subject for Hollywood. The newest film dealing with life in the Vatican is "Monsignor," starring superpriest Christopher Reeve.

Reeve plays Father John Flaherty, a young priest who becomes an army chaplain during World War II.

Flaherty gives the last rites to a dying soldier. Then, immediately afterward, when the Nazis attack, Flaherty mans the machine gun and helps to wipe out the Germans and starts a counterattack. Sin No. 1.

Flaherty is then transferred to the Vatican, where he helps shore up the Vatican's sagging finances by going into the black market. He is aided by his childhood buddy, Lodo Varese, who introduces Flaherty to Mafia hoodlum Don Appoloni.

Appoloni at first rejects Flaherty's proposal out of hand, calling him a crooked priest. Then Flaherty makes it clear to Appoloni that he is associated with Cardinal Santoni, and Appoloni accepts his offer. Sin No. 2.

Clearly, Father Flaherty is not your Barry Fitzgerald-Bing Crosby type of priest. But wait, there's more.

Flaherty meets and falls in love (or at least lust) with the young postulant nun, Clara (played by Genevieve Bujold). But he never tells her that he's a priest. Sin No. 3.

Despite all of his sinning, Father John continues to rise in the Vatican ranks and eventually gains control of all its financial resources.

But to accomplish this



Photo courtesy of 20th Century-Fox

Christopher Reeve as Father Flaherty in "Monsignor"

fellow Cardinals and retreats to a remote monastery in upstate New York.

But, like Nixon, he makes a comeback, returning to the Vatican after his mentor, Cardinal Santoni, becomes Pope.

Reeve plays the role of Flaherty well, giving the character a certain innocen-

most moral man of all is Appoloni (played by Jason Miller, who turns in a remarkable performance). At their first meeting, he tells Flaherty that the three most important things in his life are his family, his honor and his church.

We don't know much about Flaherty's family, but

making a mint and helping out his neighborhood pals.

One aspect of the film that is never adequately explained is Flaherty's relationship with Clara. It starts off innocently enough and then, almost casually, develops into a passionate affair. All of that can't be explained by pure horniness.

The film also ends rather abruptly, with Flaherty's return from exile to the halls of the Vatican. One isn't quite sure if he is reformed or if he is ready to plot more mischief.

This film is worth seeing if only for the performances of Reeve and Miller. An added bonus is the beautiful scenery of Rome or, as they used to say in the barbarian movies, "the splendor that is Rome."



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he must use the mob's money. This shaky house of cards comes falling down for Flaherty when his old buddy Varese, who is fronting the operation for the mob, takes a powder, and a whole lot of the mob's money goes with him. Flaherty is denounced by his

ce, even though he is a rogue priest. Flaherty is not so much of a crook as he is an achiever. If the only way to get the Vatican out of the hole is to go into the black market, that's what he'll do.

It is ironic that the

you get the impression that his honor and his church, while important to him, aren't the most important things in his life. Indeed, one gets the feeling that Flaherty's biggest passion is power. We might have liked him more if he was just a Brooklyn guy



Fleetwood Mac will be appearing in concert tonight at the Bob Devaney Sports Center at 8 p.m. Glenn Frey, former member of the Eagles, will be the opening act.