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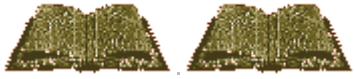

...DARK, MORBID AND FRANKLY DEPRESSING ...The movie, also produced as "Das Handbuch des jungen Giftmischers" in German and as "Manuel D'un Jeune Empoisonneur" in French, is dark, morbid and frankly depressing. While the acting of Hugh O'Connor, playing Graham Young is commendable, the movie itself is nothing but mediocre. Not recommended except for insane psychopaths or those looking to freak out their families...

The Young Poisoner's Handbook (1995) - DVD (99 minutes), *Produced by* Sam Taylor, Directed by Benjamin Ross. Music by Rob Lane/Frank Strobel. Main Actors: Hugh O'Conor, Antony Sher, Roger Lloyd-Pack, Charlotte Coleman, Ruth Sheen, Tobias Arnold, Norman Caro

Language - English
Color: Metrocolor
Sound Mix: Dolby
Studio: Mass Productions, Kinowelt, and Haut et Court (Jointly)

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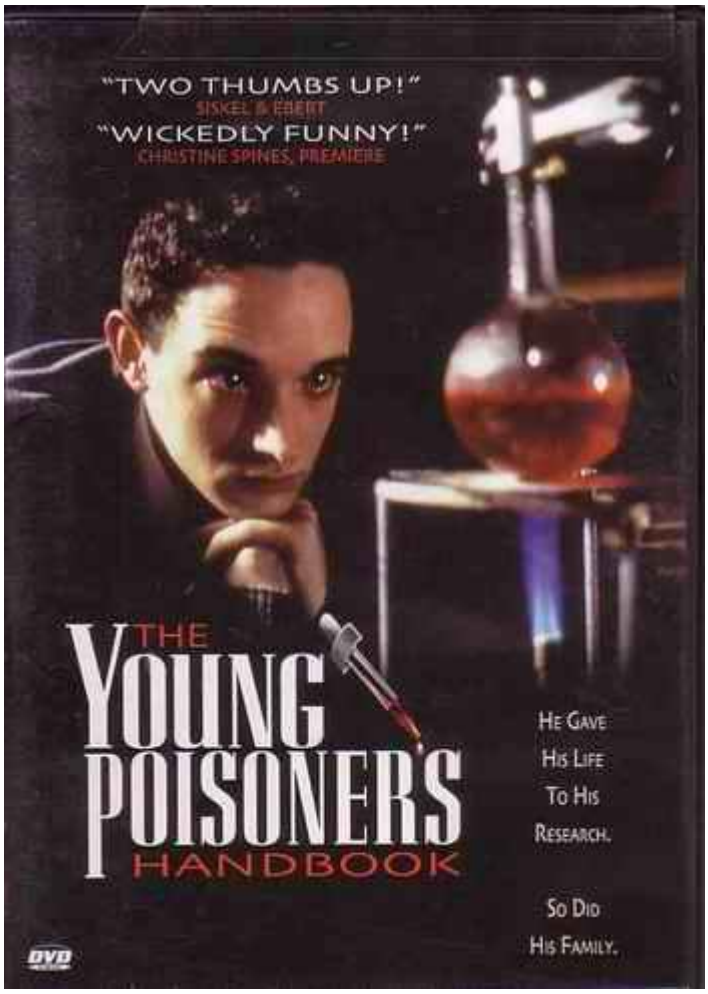

The great comedian Charlie Chaplin once famously remarked to Einstein "the reason people love me is because they understand me and the reason they love you is because they don't". Hollywood has long held a fascination for such misunderstood geniuses and much before the onscreen portrayal of Mr. Nash we were offered a helping of the life of Graham Young.

The only trouble was that Mr. Young wasn't your everyday misfit genius that could tug at your heartstrings for your support and empathy. Quite the opposite, he was a cold blooded psychopath who was convicted at the age of 14 for the murder of his stepmother. The movie takes us along Graham's childhood revealing his isolation and loneliness, and how he finds comfort in the more certain and predictable world of chemistry. Painfully shy and unable to express his feelings, Young finds solace in his books where he first learns of poisons. It is at this juncture that Graham's darker side is first revealed as he proceeds to poison his friend to clear the way for the girl he likes (by placing antimony sulfide on his sandwiches). The date however is a complete flop with Graham managing to scare off the girl with his morbid discussions of death.

As the film proceeds, Graham's conflict with his family reaches a point where he decides to poison his stepmother. While Graham ensures that she is systematically poisoned she actually begins to open up and bond with Graham. And this is probably the most disturbing and scary trait of Graham Young's personality; that in spite of everything he is unable to display even a shred of compassion or forgiveness for his stepmother who clearly has come to love him. What follows is the painful and sad decline of his mother's health who realizes only at the very end that it is Graham who is the cause for her ill health. He had been giving her poisoned chocolates and a steady dose of doctored medicine.

...The movie is loosely based on the life of a real character Graham Frederick Young (1947 -1990), a British poisoner, more commonly known as the "teacup murderer", who murdered with thallium. This is in fact the reason why the review of this DVD finds a place in this journal. Young is reputed to have killed a total of three people to death - his stepmother Molly in 1962, and then years later two work colleagues, Bob Egle and Fred Biggs. He is also reputed to have administered smaller doses to a number of other people (about 70 people were poisoned by him, fortunately none fatally)...

On questioning by the police Graham confesses to the crime and is sent to a centre for the insane. It is here that he is spotted by a doctor who persuades the authorities to let him work with Graham in the hope of rehabilitating him. Following his therapy, the board is sufficiently convinced that Graham has finally realized his sins and decides to relocate him to a new place with a new job.

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Young is reputed to have commented once, "I want to be the greatest poisoner the world has ever seen". His stepmother Molly once told him," You contaminate everything you touch. I'm going to scrub you till you are raw !"

Movie directors have often been accused of twisting the facts to give credence to their protagonist and this is one movie where Benjamin Ross has crossed the line by a wide margin. While the movie shows Graham being almost unwillingly united with his fruit of death-thallium, at his workplace what actually happened was that Graham Young went with his own will to purchase thallium from a specialized chemist. So what is shown as a chance accident which rekindled Graham's darker side is actually a lie to cover the fact that Graham never really considered it wrong to poison people. What follows is a downward descent into utter turmoil and darkness.

The movie, also produced as *"Das Handbuch des jungen Giftmischers"* in German and as *"Manuel D'un Jeune Empoisonneur"* in French, is dark, morbid and frankly depressing. While the acting of Hugh O'Connor, playing Graham Young is commendable, the movie itself is nothing but mediocre. Not recommended except for insane psychopaths or those looking to freak out their families. Nevertheless, it may not be entirely out of place to put it on record, that this movie has been reputed to have grossed $749,812 in USA alone.

-Rohit Raghav Gupta

Rohit Raghav Gupta is a brilliant budding doctor at Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi, India. He has a multi-hued personality. He is fond of music, an able Clarinet player, also a voracious reader with a discerning mind. He is a nature lover who has ventured into the deep jungles and Himalayas for his trek and travel. He was traveling in the Andamans when the earthquake and Tsunami struck. A sensitive human being with a scientific bent of mind. He can be contacted at doctornaresh@vsnl.com. During his spare time, he enjoys meeting friends



and traveling. He is seen here in the Andaman Islands holding his favourite Lonely Planet book on India (Click picture to enlarge).

Order *The Young Poisoner's Handbook - DVD* from Amazon by Clicking here

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N.Y. Times Review by Janet Maslin