Christopher Chapman's
Kelly

"Exclusive of horror films that follow their own formula, the novels of English Canada observe certain clichés. Exploit the landscape: fly over, around, up and down the mountains, linger on the prairies; shoot the sunset; look for possibilities in snow, water and trees. If the action flags, make use of rapid cuts, flashbacks or short scenes. If you must specify the location, call it Alaska, Long Island, Montana, Texas or Bear Island; otherwise, keep mum. Include among the characters a wise old Indian or a philosopher-sage rooted in an earlier, simpler time. Growing up should be the theme, generally plotted around the search for a father, dead or alive. Whether, in the end, the values are accepted or rejected, the finding of that father is necessary to future fulfillment, because mother, when she appears at all, is ineffective. Show the seeker as troubled or disrupted, but establish from the beginning a sensitivity that indicates a basic natural goodness. Gather a chorus of quaint rustics or ethnics to comment wryly on the action, to add colour and to define the community. Furthermore, don't forget to display a confusing ambivalence toward nature. It must be beautiful or sublime in the best eighteenth-century aesthetic tradition, with the power to heal the wounded psyche. On the other hand, it must be genuinely threatening, and capable of nurturing mad trappers and killers.

Above all, remember that animals respond instinctively to good people. Relationships with animals, in fact, they birds, dogs, horses, wolves or Kodak bears, provide the window into the human soul. To guarantee a General rating, a touch of Walt Disney's sentimentalism is not amiss, although strictly to the point where seven Trappist monks play the Seven Dwarfs in Kelly's Alberta-as-Alaska forest. But perhaps that's just an in-joke, not a model to emulate. Indeed Kelly is not a model to emulate.

Kelly provides a study in why the rules that it so faithfully observes prove no substitute for a sound dramatic screenplay. The landscape, as photographed by Wili van der Lorne is marvelous; the rapids are dangerous, George Clutesi, as Clute, overcomes the banality of his role as wise-man-who-takes-to-trees to give the most interesting performance. But the script sinks everyone.

Kelly pretends to be the story of a young girl, frustrated by dyslexia, who has become a problem for her mother. Equally frustrated, her mother ships her to Alaska, to a bush pilot father whom she has never met, since her parents were divorced when she was born. In nature, she will learn to accept animals, her father, her mother and, most important of all, herself.

The first weakness in this screenplay concerns the characters. Aside from the fact that their dialogue is excruciatingly predictable, the story itself doesn't give them any scope. Susan, Kelly's mother, well-played by Elaine Nalee, has to be incurably urban. Her father, Dave (Robert Logan), also the author of all this simple-mind fluff, is competent and warm; he smiles, showing even white teeth. The villain, who doesn't fit comprehensively into the theme story, is a mean old boy (Doug Lennox); he snarls, revealing his horrid black teeth. The young heroine (Tlyda-Dawn Viktor), because she changes, should be interesting, but the script snatchs the opportunity away from her: Engaging as a defiant problem-child, game for every gesture including bank robbery, once she reaches the mountains, her resourcefulness is not allowed to function.

The primary device for establishing character in Kelly is the animal. Father and Clute are introduced rescuing a wolf in the mad trapper's cave;