

trademark? Remember **Paperback Hero?**) are carefully contrived and then fully and forcefully exploited.

Likely as not though, someone had a great time developing **Only God Knows** from that mysterious idea. There's a hint (just a hint) of a rare and spontaneous spirit which might well have infected the entire film. But it's easy to get carried away. There are times like that; one joke leads to another and before it's all over, well. . . . Perhaps they might just be better forgotten. But God help us if there's a film to be found in every old joke.

The Visitor

So, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has yet to be convinced. All along, the powers-that-be have been reluctant to recognize Canadian films. Now that they have (at least the summer series, **Canadian Cinema** is a step in the right direction), it's obvious that they've still very little respect for the films as anything other than filler between commercials. And equally obvious that this country's film industry may have won a small battle for Corporation recognition, but they're still losing the war.

Consider **The Visitor**. Not that it was any more thoughtlessly handled than the others in the series, (in that respect, **Mon Oncle Antoine** suffered much more) but this was, in effect, the film's "first-run" showing east of the Rockies. It deserved better.

The Visitor is a film of moods, a chilling and fascinating study in the psychology of Time, weaving the immediate present and the carefully preserved and beautifully evoked turn-of-the-century past around a kind of Canadian Victorian romance. As the "visitor", Pia Shandel portrays a young history student whose interest in the past, specifically Calgary of the early 1900's, has ceased to be a simple matter of academics. A growing obsession drives her to spend three mid-winter weeks in an empty old mansion, all in the name of research. After a restless first night's sleep, she awakens into the strange olde world of her daydreams. Triggered by the appearance of a mysterious young man (Eric Peterson) who claims to be the master of the house in his parent's absence, the romantic reverie begins. And slowly turns into a nightmare, full of the psychological ambiguities so characteristic of the troubled world in which Paul Almond's heroines seem to find themselves.

Unlike an Almond film though, **The Visitor** remains coherent in its direction, even as its realities become increasingly

confused. Throughout, the old house is the one continuing reality and director John Wright uses it effectively, richly visualizing the warmth and atmosphere that the young woman so passionately wished to experience. (Could Wright have felt the same obsession? What better way to indulge it than to make a film.) Its imposing presence gives the film a theatrical air; the two young people, in the process of getting to know one another and adjusting to the strange situation, often work to it in the blocked movements of the stage.

In these same ponderous moments, they pass the time with some fairly contrived philosophic conversation about the meaning of life and other such related matters. Thankfully, it's offered (presumably at Wright's prompting) with a collective non-committal



Eric Peterson in "The Visitor"

shrug, as if the questions are just too weighty to be rewarded with an answer. So why worry? Wright even includes a short poem by Robert Service, **Just Think**: "... Your life is but a little beat/Within the heart of Time..." A comfortable and reassuring thought. But as irrelevant and half baked as it may seem (and perhaps it's wrong to think of it in terms of present day cynicism), the polite conversation does serve to deepen the tension, simply by delaying the inevitable. Only as the visitor becomes completely involved in this past society, and feels the coldness of the people who know nothing of her dilemma (and may not even exist outside of her imagination, there's always that unresolved uncertainty), does the tension find a final release. The visitor proves to be less than the perfect guest.

Unfortunately, the dream world of **The Visitor** is no match for the harsher dream world of commercial television. Perhaps the National Film Board was right when it, among others, voiced reservations about the successful transi-

tion from large screen to small. The transition *has* been uncomfortable, and never more than in the hands of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

— Mark Miller

About rape and recent releases

If there are any indicators of the present state of our collective consciousness as English-Canadians, surely the recent works of our artists would have to be classified as such. As a firm believer that films, whether popular or artful in design, are among the most colourful and valuable expressions of this country's culture, I also hold that the creators of film are no lesser *artists* than those who choose to apply oil paint to canvas, rather than light to celluloid.

A glance at five recent titles is almost alarming in its clarity of message. Read together, **The Hard Part Begins**, **Why Rock the Boat?**, **Only God Knows**, **Monkeys in the Attic** (a tale of exploding dreams), and **125 Rooms of Comfort** cannot fail to conjure up obvious concerns of our collective journey, circa three-quarters of the way through this century. **Comfort** was originally entitled **The Adventures of Johnny Cannuck**, and the Canadian content of the message is, as a notable criminal once used to say, perfectly clear. Especially if applied to our perplexed feature industry.

Having seen all except the last, the thematic connection one soon discovers is rape — both the mind and body fuck varieties. John Lynch's **Hard Part** foists upon our consciousness yet another tale of a Canadian loser, in the grand tradition of **Goin' Down the Road**, but missing Shebib's ballsy ambience. Bradley and McGrath are back in well-played supporting roles, but Donnelly Rhodes' fucked-over country and western singer lead is weak compared to Rip Torn's in **Payday**. As is Nancy-Belle Fuller's country belle in comparison with the lady whose voice was dubbed in for her songs. Nevertheless, the critics all flocked to praise this film with surprising enthusiasm. Cinépix is handling the distribution, on this low-budget rendering of small town Canadian life, also dealing with how country culture is being replaced by rock culture in most parts.

John Howe's **Why Rock the Boat?** is a period comedy set in the forties, but its explorations of socialism vs. capitalism, male vs. female, honesty vs. corruption, and sex vs. love are as contemporary in concern as what to do if another depression comes. Its major theme is seduction, a mild form of rape: Stu Gillard's bumbling cub reporter is being