

but the splitting of the glaciers and the blinding, white on white snow storms raise this modest, low budget film to epic proportions.

The film is chock full of biblical references converted into Eskimo folklore. There are the non-believers praying to the golden walrus calf and the eating of unleavened whale blubber during the pilgrimage to the promised land in mukluks. But this *Exodus* of the North really exists on the level of personal human drama with Alexandra Stewart playing a moving Ruth, and John Vernon as the fiercely credible Johocifat. Intriguing as the idea is though, I'm not sure that this film will convince very many people that the Eskimos are really Jewish; but as the sun sets on the five month long sabbath and you see their ghostly silhouettes against the oil lamps, you get the spooky feeling that the great Canadian North has many secrets still to be told.

— Ron Blumer

Black Christmas

Directed by Bob Clark, Produced by Gerry Arheid, script by Roy Moore from "Stop Me...", photography by Reginald Morris (of the Paper Chase), music by Carl Zitrer.

I was relieved when I noticed the small U.S. flag sitting on the detective's desk at Police Headquarters. It made *Black Christmas* look like an American movie. Also, the kind of crowd that would go to it always bolt abruptly once the film ends; they'd never notice the combined financial credit after the titles to Famous Players and the Canadian Film Development Corporation, or that in fact this was a typical sell-out Canadian film. And they wouldn't need a U.S. flag to identify its national character either.

Robert Fulford tells us that in Barry Lord's Maoist criticism of Canadian art Lord identifies works that colonized people create to buy status and profit for themselves by helping the imperial power exploit their fellow colonialists, as "comprador" art.

That's *Black Christmas*. Politically, it's a browner's sycophantic effort to sidle up to lower U.S. taste for cheap thrills and fast cash.

As Jean Paul Belmondo said to Jean Seberg at the end of *Breathless*: "C'est vraiment dégueulasse."

The strangest thing about seeing this anti-female stock horror caper at the Imperial in Toronto was the incredible juxtapositioning of it with a reasonably clever, highly female-oriented 1972 NFB short, *L'oeuf* by Clorinda Warny, full of surreal effects and montages relating to eggs and life. Someone must



Margot Kidder in "Black Christmas"

have noticed they both dealt with the female.

The combination was about as sensitive as that ad in which a chicken encourages you to eat at Colonel Sanders.

Black Christmas is well located and photographed. It features a sorority house where, one by one, accompanied by what women prefer to think of as harmless though sick-minded obscene phone calls, all the little ladies get their comeuppance for being lovely, young, well-to-do and/or liberated. And the most suspicious male is of course artistic. A pianist.

The satisfactions of a film in which upper middle-class females, sharp and sexy, are terrorized and brutally or gruesomely destroyed can be easily seen to appeal to all misogynists, insecure and frustrated men, and a thwarted and denied working class who resent college kids, liberated women, intellectual and particularly artistic males, and, quite possibly, the expense of Christmas.

The performers came in for a shaking from Toronto critics, but actually they were quite acceptable in their roles. Abandoning any social, sexual, moral or political critical attitudes, toward the movie, the females had the edge in performance. Margot Kidder particularly gave life and vivacity to her characterization of the cynical sorority sister, while Andrea Martin (super in *Cannibal Girls*) was humorous, touching, warm, silly and sympathetic to a fault. Even Marian Waldman's guzzling sewer-mouthed house mother, wildly overdone, and American Olivia Hussey as an affected snob-sister, worked hard to try to capture both the silliness and scariness of the plot.

Canadian males shouldn't go unnoticed either. I found it sad, life does

go by so fast, to see Doug McGrath, a male who can literally reek sex, relegated to a sexless stereotyped boob-cop role. But he made it a pleasure anyhow, and with James Edmond, as a father who acts somewhat more bewildered than quite necessary (was he ever told the plot?) and Art Hindle and Les Carlson, the Canadian contingent did what they could, which was basically, lie low.

Keir Dullea played the paperback pianist with anguished sensitivity rather suitably, but finally the only performer came out on top was the heavy breathing garbled telephone voice(s), which gives you some idea of whose alter ego invented the script.

— Natalie Edwards

Child Under a Leaf

That glossy world pictured in consumer magazines and in sunny Sunday Supplements, with the fur throws, white deep pile rugs, forever green plants, and wide glass walls leading into flagged gardens; that wonder-world of buxom healthy women in impeccable white caftans sprawled contentedly among the cushions, with handsome sensitive males standing nearby holding a Chivas Regal, and maybe a baby or a cat or dog cunningly settled by the latest in porcelain fireplaces; well, that world of fad and fashion and fancy comes to a sort of life in *Child Under a Leaf*, a new semi-Canadian film by George Bloomfield.

Photographed with centre-spread skill by Don Wilder (*Paperback Hero*) the woman is Dyan Cannon (*Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice*), the lover, Donald Pilon (*The Pyx*, *True Nature of Bernadette*, etc.), the baby Julie Bullock and the husband Joseph Campanella. The emotion-nudging music is by Francis Lai, known primarily here for his work for *Love Story* rather than his many Claude Lelouch scores.

This is another CFDC backed film made blatantly for the U.S. market, calculated with such care that commercial slots and easily cut censorable scenes are practically marked with dotted lines, ready to be clipped out for TV. Unlike *Black Christmas*, it doesn't place an American flag in sight, and in fact, to satisfy nationalists, perhaps, an Information Canada sign can be briefly glimpsed in one street scene.

Other than that there is nothing to offend the American TV viewer with a sense of the foreign, especially once Micheline Lanctôt's French Canadian accent has been removed, and another

voice dubbed in.

Bloomfield, five years ago produced works like *Eloise* and *Abelard*, and Pinter's *The Basement* for CBC-TV, works that demanded the creation of a highly romantic, dramatic or logically illogical world. Here he once again attempts to construct an unreal dramatic world, but unfortunately his writing doesn't provide him as director with sufficient dramatic strength or logical coherence to carry his moralistic tragedy.

The story of the eternal triangle plus baby-makes-four seems designed as a luscious slick sad story in the women's weepy vein, but lacks the detail, honesty of perception, and style that *made* most of those underrated forties' films so successful.

Dyan Cannon, used, tanned, practically a personification of California, is the woman who has everything: husband, home, dream cottage, artistic lover, little dog and, best of all, a pretty baby. The moralistic message of the movie suggests she can't keep it all: the burden of mother love requires some sacrifices and decisions.

The potential subjects here are exciting and relevant. How much do children restrict sexual adventure? What duties and responsibilities are essential? Greed, and possessiveness for objects, creatures and loved ones can indeed lead to disaster, and a contemplation of the interlocking uses people make of each other under the banner of love could provide the film with a fascinating examination of contemporary means and morals.

Unfortunately the characterizations are as superficial as the décor. We seem to be watching made-up people in a made-up place, and the surface gloss is so hard we cannot feel the pulse or smell reality anywhere. As a result it is difficult to care what happens to these people, and even the death of a puppy dog or a baby is as uninvolved as a newspaper item. This fictitious world with its unbelievable romanticism, is, in fact, unbelievable.

Don Wilder's photography reveals to us a world that is glossy, commercially pretty and totally false. No amount of subtle acting, plot repair or charged direction can dispel the influence of the visuals as designed and photographed, unless they are calculated for ironic contrast. And when the characters are as glossy and unreal as the environment, there is no contrast. Thus the design of the film, the conflicting art styles purported to be by artist Pilon for instance, the meaningless photography, and the motivational holes in the story (big healthy babies that age don't die instantly from a bit of cotton in their mouths for example) weaken the film drastically.



Dyan Cannon

There is always, however, a favorite scene for me in every film I see. In this it is Al Waxman's hilarious gunshop proprietor leafing through a magazine of sexy pictures, expressing disbelief, amazement and delight in turn. At least the voyeurism and eroticism are frankly enjoyed for what they are and not hypocritically delivered as art. It's a refreshing moment.

The second funniest scene was unintentional, and involves Pilon and Cannon driving their white sports car to their special field to make love. She jumps out and in one swift gesture disrobes and flings her arms up in a gay mother earth come-and-get-it pose. Inspired, he whisks off his shirt (no buttons) but then suddenly sits back down in his car. To take off his shoes and socks? To hide his genitals? No. To *drive* the thirty feet or so over to her.

Now how much more California can you get?

— Natalie Edwards

Child Under a Leaf

It's all very tragic. The old Greeks would have loved *Child Under a Leaf* with its grand and noble passions and classic themes of Life, Death and Retribution. Of course, the details of *Child Under a Leaf* are long removed from antiquity, although the story has a certain timelessness. It's a tale of two lovers, their affair and the man who comes between them. In years past, it might have been written in rhyming couplets: For never was a story of more woe. . . . Than this of Joseph and his Domino.

She's married. He's not. Together they have a child, a baby girl. The problem is her husband. Who else. He's

in the way, he's suspicious and he's making threats. He has already killed her French poodle, simply because "he knew that (she) loved it". For the same reason, Joseph is in danger. Perhaps the child is too. They discuss murder: "Maybe I should kill him. . . . But what if you miss? I'll practice. . . ." Joseph buys a gun, but they do nothing.

It's a promising conflict of tensions. And the child's presence provides the film with an interesting structural twist on the usual lover, wife, husband triangle. But writer-director George Bloomfield has left his characters high, though not always dry, uninteresting and very much unmotivated. They are, in fact, people with no past, and of

Scene from "Child Under A Leaf"

