

could have used a bit of fiddling. Co-written by Jill Hyem, **Leopard in the Snow** is riddled with banal dialogue. Example:

"You're mad," says Helen staring at Dominic Lyall as he disappears into his room. Just when silence matched with a sharp glare would have been a nice touch, Dominic instead quips: "You're entitled to your opinion."

Poor Helen, and the rest of us, are left out in the hallway looking a little dazed by such a juvenile remark. After saying such a line, it seems there should be a "nyahh, nyahh, nyahh" tagged on for good measure.

Mather and Hyem have tried to remain so faithful to the virtues of Harlequin - no overt sex scenes, no foul language, no violence - that the film is curiously lifeless. Harlequin books may be a passport to romance, but one shouldn't have to daydream to fill in what the writers dare not provide.

While Keir Dullea fills the bill physically - he's tall, dark and handsome - he seems ill-at-ease in the role of the romantic figure. He's trying desperately to escape the type-casting of the psychotic weirdos he usually plays, but the fact of the matter is, Dominic is a touch odd. Dullea's manservant, played by Jeremy Kemp, would have been better in Dullea's part. He has that aura of gothic sinisterness and swarthy attractiveness, much like Heathcliff in 'Wuthering Heights', or Rochester in 'Jane Eyre'.

Susan Penhaligon, as the daffy Helen, is rather bland and the part could have taken on some dimension and interest had, say, Hayley Mills played the role. Miss Penhaligon, who played Glenda Jackson's watergate rival in **Nasty Habits**, looks properly do-eyed but her performance is a bore.

**Leopard In The Snow** features a surprisingly strong supporting cast of British actors who add some interest when they appear. Billie Whitelaw, an actress who has never received the parts due her, has a few nice bits as Helen's bitchy step-mother. Kenneth More, late of *The Forsyte Saga*, does a guest stint, wrinkling brow, looking dreadfully concerned over daughter's life. And Kemp, who specializes in tacky Germans, serves tea marvelously well.

The first half of the film, where the three are stuck in the house together, should be the most forceful, fraught with the most tension. We should be worrying about the fate of our heroine.

Is she in the home of a madman or is he really just an emotional cripple, as she suspects? Director Gerald O'Hara, who could have been creative in this latter day 'Jane Eyre', does nothing to create an ominous, spooky atmosphere.

Even when Dominic screams in terror in the middle of the night, Helen barely takes notice. I, on the other hand, would have been quivering under the sheets, while as we all know, a true-blue movie heroine would have stalked the house to see what was up.

Because there isn't that much to sustain our attention, we begin looking for inconsistencies. It didn't seem to bother the makers that the nozzle of a snowblower, creating those blizzard conditions, is crystal clear in one scene. And no one seemed to notice that while the snows are howling in the north part of England, London is green and dry.

The truest devotee of Harlequin is quite likely to find this film a hoot. Although producer Chris Harrop openly admits to wanting to create films for women, the same way Disney makes films for kids, he shouldn't insult their intelligence.

While Harlequin junkies turned out in droves on opening night, one lady who was questioned said she came because "I'm hoping to see Keir Dullea's throbbing Manhood".

Both the junkies and this lady left disappointed.

Lee Rolfe

### Eddy Matalon's

## Cathy's Curse

**d:** Eddy Matalon, **sc:** Myra Clement, Algin Sens-Cazenave, Eddy Matalon, **ph:** Jean-Jacques Tarbès, **ed:** Pierre Rose, Micheline Thouin, Laurent Quaglio, **sd:** Jean-Michel Rouard, **sd. rec.:** Jean-Paul Lelong, **m:** Didier Vasseur (Pema Music), **l.p.:** Alan Scarfe, Beverly Murray, **Randi** Allen, Dorothy Davis, Roy Witham, Mary Morter, Renée Girard, Hubert Noël, Sony Forbes, Bryce Allen, Linda Koot, Bob Gerolami, Peter McNeil, Lisa Nicklet, **exec. p.:** Nicole Mathieu Boisvert, **p:** Eddy Matalon, **p.c.:** Agora Film Prods. Ltd. (Mtl), Maki Films (Paris), 1977), **col:** 35mm, **dist:** Cinepix Inc., **running time:** 90 minutes.

Incandescent eyes on a fierce little girl, and a set of quotes calculated to chill your heart, set off the excellent poster and ads for the film **Cathy's**

**Curse.** All is promises, however. The clichés crowd each other as mental illness, spiritualism, perversion, a hate-filled ghost, a creepy old mansion, cluttered attic, even a murdered dog and a situation that seems to threaten death or worse at every nightmarish turn, all add up to little more than an agreeably amusing movie for the devoted and undemanding fan of horror-schlock.

There's a lot of evident dislike of females in this insipid spin-off, or should one say flick-off, from the genre of **The Exorcist** et al. In this type of film the young female frequently is used as a vague symbol of the budding menace and power of the whole female sex, and very often little girls are given strange powers, and, armed with vacant expressions or sneaky smiles, come to represent the mystery that will be woman: menacing, suggestive of death (the 'little death' men experience during intercourse?) and usually connected to blood, vomit, excrement, etc.

Cathy's curse comes from her curiosity (like Bluebeard's last wife): seeing too much, discovering too much, loving too much, and worst of all, growing up female. Eve had this problem too. But this isn't enough; the film has an Oedipal angle as well.

Oedipal in the merest sense, however. All the original problems of the story evolved from a wicked mother who took her son with her when she ran off, and left her daughter and husband behind. These two then burned to death in their car while chasing the runaways, when the father swerved to avoid hitting a white rabbit (oh, shades of Alice, alas). All this is obviously the mother's fault. But the little boy she ran off with is going to be in trouble too. Or will be when he grows up. We meet him as he moves back to the creepy old mansion with his own little girl and his neurotic wife, recently and tentatively recovered from a nervous breakdown.

Thus, Alan Scarfe, in a feeble impersonation of Christopher Plummer, tries to console his exceedingly strange wife, played by Beverly Murray in a scene-stealing non-style as if she were Viva in a Warhol film, while managing a household equipped with the customary staff for Gothic Movies, the creepy couple, suitably portrayed by Dorothy Davis and Roy Witham, as Mary and Paul. After Mary's death Paul even gets to graduate to the dirty old man.



## FILM REVIEWS



Cathy, doing her thing, looking upset

Unfortunately, however, much of the tension of such a plot depends on the sexual innuendoes, the Lolita-like fascination of a true nymphet, and the skill of suggestion in the young actress playing the key role of the little girl. Randi Allen tramps through her part barely visibly differentiating between smug, sad and scared.

It isn't an easy part to handle though, for she is expected to be either evil or innocent, either a victim or a villainess, with both equally possible (though neither very plaus-

ible) to the very end. It creates a certain ambiguity in the portrayal, a sort of extension of the idea of little girls being sugar and spice.

But little girls are only sugar and spice when tasted. Edible. When little girls grow up to be women they tend to have appetites of their own, a frightening prospect. In order to keep them sweetly edible, they should be properly subdued. But how? A whole genre of horror film suggests the answer: beat up the little girl, terrify her, or torture her, through agents of the devil, of course, or the powers of suggestion from a malignant evil force. In **Cathy's Curse**, as in **Full Circle**, another Canadian co-production released this year in which a nasty little female is under the influence of an even-nastier former little female, there is a certain circuitousness to the path of evil. Where could it all have begun? At any rate, in this type of film the female is frightened, mystified, sometimes even mutilated, and always an attempt is made to manipulate her to being a proper subdued and helpful little creature, ready to take her place with the other growing-up females in a male society. No one says this, of course, but moviedom's little boys are seldom infested with spirits and mystery, most often being seen as forthright devil-may-care little explorers of the universe.

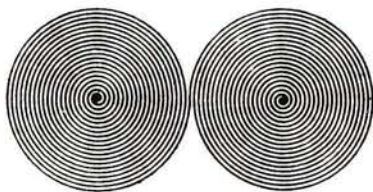
Although the plot for **Cathy's Curse** has its interesting aspects, it is neither scary enough, nor gory

enough, despite some vivid effects created by Gaetan Lafrance, nor psychologically astute enough, nor even well-performed enough, to work with any degree of effectiveness.

What will also cool the box-office for this film, is its sense of good taste and middle-class mindlessness. The performers act out a fantasy of what it is like to live in a grand hoary old mansion, without making it believable enough to allow the audience to feel in-the-know about their lives. They don't belong, but they don't seem to realize it. Audiences for horror-schlock do like to watch the rich suffer and strain, and the basic idea of placing tortured wealthy people in extravagantly beautiful old homes always satisfied audiences by permitting them to see the rich have a rough and miserable time, teetering between difficult pregnancies and mental breakdowns if they are female, or bankruptcy and impotency if they are male. Audiences like to feel they're getting a look at something they wouldn't normally see or experience. But this seemingly suburban bunch have sitcom superficiality.

Bad psychological continuity, peculiar motivations, any number of situations that seem to suggest something interesting, and come to naught, inconsistent acting styles, and a script that seems to require a few more drafts, make this offering a weak sister in the sneaky-evil little girl genre.

Natalie Edwards



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