

ing powerful machines in the workshop. As always, Cronenberg is aware of the power of images by themselves, without commentary or emphasis: so much can be shown that doesn't need to be, that *can't* be, explained in terms of words. This is the mark of the purest kind of filmmaker — a Hitchcock, an Ozu, a Bresson, a Rohmer — and if Cronenberg doesn't exactly occupy their exalted station, he is nevertheless of their fraternity.

Despite Cronenberg's gifts as evidenced in this film, though, I can't in good conscience recommend *Fast Company* with much enthusiasm to anyone but dedicated students of the art of cinema, since the banality of the scenario can never be disguised for long. Better far to pay another visit to *Shivers*, *Rabid*, or *The Brood* — truly accomplished expressions of perhaps the most imaginative vision in Canadian films today.

Bill Beard

David Cronenberg's The Brood

d. David Cronenberg, asst. d. John Board, Libby Bowden, sc. David Cronenberg, dial. ed. Brian Holland, asst. dial. ed. Lois Tupper, ph. Mark Irwin, ed. Allan Collins, asst. ed. Carol Zeifman, sd. Bryan Day, boom Tom Mather, sd. ed. Peter Burgess, asst. sd. ed. Jeremy Maclaverty, sd. re. rec. Joe Grimaldi, a.d. Carol Spier, set dec. Angelo Stea, m. Howard Shore, cost. Delphine White, continuity Nancy Eagles, make-up Shonagh Jabour, l.p. Oliver Reed, Samantha Eggar, Art Hindle, Cindy Hinds, Nuala Fitzgerald, Henry Beckman, Susan Hogan, Michael Magee Gary McKeehan, Bob Silverman, Joseph Shaw, Felix Silla, John Ferguson, Larry Solway, Rainer Schwartz, Nicholas Campbell, exec. p. Pierre David, Victor Solnicki, p. Claude Heroux, p.asst. Maureen Fitzgerald, Bob Wertheimer, p. manager Gwen Iveson, p. secretary Trudy Work, p.c. The Brood Inc., col. 35mm, (year) 1978, running time 92 minutes.

There are these basic, common fears: mutilation, dying and the malevolent unknown. There are the surefire mechanics of suspense, shock and gore. Even a novice filmmaker can manipulate them for a strong, gut-level response. In the audience, we need not think or even learn the names of our fears, we will react anyway. Total titillation. Walk home with nothing more horrifying

than the dregs of an adrenalin rush. It's fun and profitable. It's what's being done in *Alien*, *Prophecy* and *Halloween*. It's what David Cronenberg did in *Shivers* and *Rabid*. It's *not* what he's doing in *The Brood*.

A few horror films, *The Innocents*, *Psycho*, *The Tenant*, work on the head and the heart: a definition of 'grotesque', by John Ruskin, "...the expression in a moment, by a series of symbols thrown together in bold and fearless connection, of truth..." Usually, the truth expressed concerns the inner landscape of one or more characters. Imagination gives understanding. Understanding awakens pity and terror for a condition that may have nothing to do with one's own fears. It can be a very instructive horror.

Cronenberg structures *The Brood* and engages the imagination with a series of mysteries. What is the dangerous flaw in Dr. Raglan's radical therapy, Psychoplasmics? Who or what is murdering the people that Nola Carveth, Dr. Raglan's star patient, hates? How are the murders and the therapy connected? These fuel the action and encourage us to look for clues, to try and beat Cronenberg to the punchline. But, while we're doing it, he's feeding us scenes that lead to an awareness of a second, unstated mystery. Is Nola Carveth really crazy? If so, what are the causes and forms of her madness?

The climax of the film links the two sets of mysteries and satisfies the demands of the plot (and the audience) in as gruesome a manner as could be wished. It also reveals the title creatures as reflections of Nola. These reflections spark others: Nola's daughter as a reflection of her, Nola as a reflection of her mother, her ex-husband, Frank, as Nola's father. This is what sparks our understanding of Nola's inner life and the causes of her disturbance.

The success of the reflections depends on the clarity of the character sketches that precede them. Nola's mother, Juliana, is given like this: We see Nola in therapy, claiming her mother beat her as a child. Is she telling the truth, or as the plot suggests, is she making a distorted confession to beating her own daughter? Cut to Nola's mother babysitting Nola's daughter. She's getting primly drunk. Her behavior with the child suggests nothing so much as a little girl playing grown-up. An old photo shows Nola sick in a hospital bed, while Juliana's bright smile for the camera is a clear denial of her daughter's in-

jury. Her comments — that she *never could* find out why Nola kept waking up cut and bruised — show that twenty years later, she's still dying.

Anyone familiar with newspaper stories on the subject, will recognize in Juliana a typical, abusing parent. To Cronenberg's undying credit, nobody stands up and spells this out for us. Child abuse is not a fashionable subject to be exploited for thrills and cheap moralizing in *The Brood*, it merely happens to be one of the central concerns of the story.

There are holes in the presentation of the other characters. We learn, for instance, that Nola married Frank for his sanity, but we never learn why he married her. We never see how Nola interacts with her daughter. These holes, with one exception, fog the reflections of the climax only slightly. The one exception is Dr. Raglan. We're told he is a prominent and respectable psychiatrist, but this image is destroyed when, in one afternoon, he callously evicts all his highly unstable, highly dependent, live-in patients. This makes him the unfeeling mad scientist, but the climax destroys that image and paints him as the dedicated and caring therapist. None of this chaos is cleared up by the casting and acting of Oliver Reed in the role. His arrogant thug aura is fun to watch, but does nothing to raise Dr. Raglan above the level of plot device. Despite this, Dr. Raglan's fate is wholly appropriate to his place in the story and a snappy comment on the practice of radical psychiatry.

There are a few other flaws in the script — a therapy scene that's a bit too long and a bit too flat and a couple of scenes with detectives that are pure exposition — but none of these detract from the effectiveness of the film. Cronenberg handles the suspense well. The middle of the babysitting sequence, which has begun calmly enough, is the beginning of the killer's approach, a suspense sequence which ends, and ends the babysitting sequence, in bloody murder. The murders, themselves, are fine set-pieces of bizarre composition, sharp cutting and brutal action. The special effects are grisly and convincing.

Mark Irwin's lighting and photography create a world of thick, normal surfaces and suggest, without resorting to distortion tactics, the ugly, unacknowledged passions beneath. It's an atmosphere ideally suited to the story and characters and that seems, quite natur-

ally and unself-consciously, to be very Canadian.

Of the performances in *The Brood*, only Michael Magee's as Inspector Mrazek, seems wrong. Art Hindle is convincing as a low-key, unemotional man coping with his fears and his deep love for his daughter in a low-key, unemotional way. Samantha Eggar as Nola treads the fine line between the obviously sane and the obviously insane with sympathetic and eerie effect. Nuala Fitzgerald shows all the tension, fear and self-deception in Nola's mother. The best performance, though, comes from Bob Silverman as a victim of Dr. Raglan's methods. The part is small

and mostly comic. Silverman milks his lines for all they're worth and gets more laughs from bits of business. At the same time his bitterness and obsessions make him a menacing figure constantly on the verge of losing control. He's like one of those eccentrics who used to inhabit *The Avengers* in the days of Emma Peel, but much more effective.

The Brood closed in Toronto in less than a month. I suspect its potential audiences were more interested in *Alien* and *Prophecy*. But in twenty years, when they're long forgotten, *The Brood* will be a television and revival showing favourite and just as enjoyable then as now.

Andrew Dowler

Theodore J. Flicker's Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang

d. Theodore J. Flicker, asst.d. Mireille Goulet, Pierre Poirier, sc. Theodore J. Flicker, casting Howard Ryshpan, ph. Francois Protat, camera op. Allen C. Smith, sp.ph.effects Michael Albrechtson, sup.ed. Stan Cole, sd. Ken Helley-Ray, sd.ed. Patrick Drummond, Ellen Adams, continuity Monique Champagne, a.d. Seamus Flannery, m. Lewis Furey, cost. Francois Barbeau, make-up Marie-Angele Protat, Diane Simard, l.p. Stephen Rosenberg, Alex Karras, Guy L'Ecuyer, Joy Coghill, Claude Gai, Earl Pennington, Victor Desy, Marfa Richler, Thor Bishopric, Yvon Leroux, Basil Fitzgibbon, Walter Massey, Jill Frappier, Nan Stewart, Deena Baikowitz, Ainsley Robertson, John Wildman, Kirsten Bishopric, Marc Goldstein, Geoffrey Kramer, Stephanie Brandman, Peter Tanaka, Ryan Campbell, Rona Sinclair, exec.p. John Flaxman, p. Harry Gulkin, p.manager Mychele Boudrias, p.c. Gulkin Productions, (year) 1976, col. 35mm, running time 80 minutes, dist. Gulkin Productions/Saguenay Films.

In recent years, feature films made for a children's audience or "family films," as the industry likes to call them, have been something of a graveyard for directors. The 1976 version of *The Blue Bird*, directed by elder statesman George Cukor, was disparaged and ignored. Bryan Forbes, who had a reputation as a sensitive maker of films with youngsters, saw that reputation damaged when *International Velvet* — even with Tatum O'Neal — did



Stephen Rosenberg who plays Jacob Two-Two awaits the verdict that will sentence him to children's prison

so badly that M.G.M. would not even release figures on it. To be sure, the stature of Walt Disney Productions remains high, but now it largely rests on their past triumphs and the occasional (for them) innovative idea like *Freaky Friday*. By and large, however, the output from Disney is so trivial that even such traditionally favorable observers like Judith Ripp of *Parents' Magazine* have taken the studio to task for their shallowness. In spite of this, these films continue to do good business, for fairly obvious reasons:

they enable parents to send their kids to the movies without the moral qualms that attend even so innocent a film as *Star Wars*, and they enable exhibitors to make a killing on the concessions.

Once in a while, though, a film does come along which tries to be entertaining for children and has some artistic pretensions as well. Such a picture was Alan Parker's *Bugsy Malone* which, in spite of its kinky overtones, was really just a game of dress-up carried to a logical conclusion, made for a generation which, because of television, is more cinematically literate than its predecessors. And *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* should have had a similar effect and have made a fair bid to become a classic in the manner of *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Wizard of Oz*. That the Harry Gulkin-Ted Flicker production is not really up to those standards is a disappointment, but perhaps understandable in the light of the troubles that have surrounded it.

The story of the "repatriation" of Mordecai Richler's best selling children's novel has already been told (*Cinema Canada*, No. 31), and the further problems which Harry Gulkin encountered may be summarized briefly. The American distributor, Cinema Shares, lost interest in *Jacob Two-Two* after some negative test screenings in 1977 and, for the next year or so, stories appeared telling of how the producer was trying, without much success, to find an alternative source to handle it. With 1979 designated as International Year of The Child, Gulkin decided to do it himself, and in March opened the film at Montreal's Snowdon Theatre. Soon, the cast-off film was outdrawing Disney's *The North Avenue Irregulars*. That was enough for Saguenay Films to pick it up.

As finally released, the film, at 80 minutes in length, is able to avoid the extraneous padding that often causes family films to sprawl unnecessarily. *Jacob* (Stephen Rosenberg), a two-plus-two-plus-two-year-old who has to say everything twice because no one listens to him the first time, falls asleep in Mount Royal Park after running away from a grocer (Earl Pennington) who threatens to have him arrested for insulting an adult. In his dream, he finds himself before Mr. Justice Rough, (also played by Pennington), and a jury-cum-choir which sings platitudes at him ("It's for your own good...