Cathy Ord's

Dear John

You have seen this film before - almost.
A young, strawberryblonde female in leather jacket and high heels trots anxiously along a maze of industrial back alleys, obviously searching for somewhere to hide. She is being stalked by a silent, rodent-like man dressed as a soldier. Tension mounts. Then, defeated by her pumps and a brick wall, the woman is trapped by the fatigued soldier figure. She savours the fear on his victim's attractive face before raising a sub-machine-gun in air. But the weapon is plastic, and the fired shots are only vocal imitations. The homicidal maniac laughs in childish delight. The victim gives him a look of utter disgust and walks away. Roll credits.

These are the opening moments of Dear John, a first feature written and directed by Cathy Ord. From this disorienting beginning, the film's viewers are implicated and drawn into its constantly shifting levels of fiction. In exploring ideas of personal, social, (and hemic) truth, the filmmaker plays the conventionally "realistic" visual style of Dear John against a narrative preoccupation with appearance and identity. This is certainly well slick-doo-some in the area of Canadian cinema. English-language features in this country - from Going Down the Road to I've Heard the Mermaids Singing - have displayed an obvious predilection for tales of the contemporary social world. John's features in this country - from Going Down the Road to I've Heard the Mermaids Singing - have displayed an obvious predilection for tales of the contemporary social world. John's characters are palatable by the script's surreptitious humour. This constant interplay between the minute detail and the macro context of the work as a whole, these layers of narrative, setting, character and situation are sometimes unconvincing when delivered by a hammy actor in his most overdone hammerhead role. Nonetheless, if Eve's film contains a single unique and genuinely moving moment, it is found here.

Dear John's final scene makes explicit its socio-political concerns. Allegorically-speaking, we witness the imposition of patriarchy and the emergence of a whole new kind of Adam and Eve - whom we embrace! Narratively satisfying, this film ends up with a forced and out of proportion after the peculiar delicacy of DeJohn's finest observations. Nonetheless, if Eve's film contains a single unique and genuinely moving moment, it is found here.

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