wrong with the Canadian cinema. John Huston is without question the best director ever to make a Canadian film. So why did the producers hire one of the last of the old masters, to knock out the kind of story which is regularly knocked out by first-time directors? (The sort of thing that a Carpenter, or a dePalm, does with his eyes closed). Huston's great virtues are as a storyteller (note the sweep of The Man Who Would Be King, and the relaxed orneriness of The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean), and as a director who can get his characters to inhabit real places — as in the extraordinary cityscapes of The Asphalt Jungle and Fat City. He has never been wound tight enough to deliver that remorseless little horror thriller that Phobia so longs to be. Therefore, we must ask why he was hired. For the class of his name? To control John Colicos?

John Trent, in a recent Toronto Star interview, claimed that the Canadian cinema is a producer's, rather than a director's cinema. This would be no problem, if the producers hired the right directors for the job.

Mind, Huston did bring something to Phobia — aside from a mere forty-odd years of experience. He gave it a visual sense, which brought out the best in cinematographer Reginald Morris. One need only compare the bland, television look of Middle Age Crazy, which Morris lensed for Trent, with the mysterioso darkness that crowns the edge of the frame in Phobia. This points the way to a second problem in Canadian movies. With the possible exception of David Cronenberg, is there a single English Canadian director with an distinctive look, or even any visual flair? Phobia is the first Canadian film I've seen since The Brood that hasn't resembled a bad CBC drama; that looks as if someone actually sat down and thought about how a movie is supposed to look. Contrasting the appearance of recent American films to recent Canadian features, there can be no question as to which side wins. Where are our Carpenters, our dePalm, our Scorseses — directors whose films are both commercially successful and artistically exciting to look at? Even films like Days of Heaven and The Black Stallion, which exist in complete intellectual vacuum, are stunning to look at. Until we have directors begin to concern themselves with films as more than tax shelters for dentists, and "packages" of talent with "proven" ingredients (out-of-work TV stars, aging hams, hack directors, and plots made out of elements that weren't very good to begin with), we are doomed to second-rate, cinematic, junk food that nourishes neither the mind nor the adrenal glands.

Phobia itself is destined to become a footnote to a great director's career, nothing more.

John G. Harkness

John Guillerman's Mr. Patman


One of the most fascinating aspects of watching mid-level multinational productions (in this case, one American star, one Canadian star, one British character actress, British director and d.o.p.) is observing the interplay of well-known actors with people you have never seen before. In fact, the "unknown quantities" in these Canadian productions often provide some of the major pleasures in what are frequently awful films — Frances Hyland, for example, in The Changeling, blowing the comatose Trish Van Devere of the screen without even working up a sweat.

It is axiomatic that the performances of "stars" are often the same. For stars are not always stars because of talent, but rather chemistry. The ability to sustain a career is a bonus. James Coburn, the eponymous hero of John Guillerman's Mr. Patman, has never been the sort of star whose name guarantees the success of his project. Many of his most interesting projects — Dead Heat on a Merry-go-round, Peckinpah's Fat Gar­ret and Billy the Kid, Herbert Ross's The Last of Shiel, have been his least successful. But he has a fascinating persona and sufficient star quality to often make him the best thing in bad pictures, offering sufficient justification for sitting through appalling messes like Blood Kin.

Coburn is certainly the best thing in Mr. Patman, but nevertheless, he faces competition from Fionnula Flanagan, who plays his landlady like some demented erotic avatar out of Sean O'Casey's more lurid wetdreams. The scenes between the two of them have an erotic charge seldom seen in Canadian films not featuring Carole Laure or Celine Lopez. They are certainly far more interesting than the scenes of Coburn with Kate Nelligan, his official girlfriend with whom he plans to depart at the film's conclusion.

Patman is a male nurse in a psychiatric ward of some major metropolitan hospital. He is not only a ringmaster who can work miracles with his patients, but also as they say, a devil with the lady's. This is the good part, and Coburn's performance is a whirligig of movement and expression. The plot's drama stems from the fact that our hero is "haunted by a terrible secret from his past" (gasp) and is prone to strange delusions which
Robin Spry's
Suzanne

Suzanne had its premiere screening at the Festival of Festivals in Toronto, and Marc Gervais was there to review it. Since that screening, the production has re-cut the film, and a shorter version is being used in its commercial release. Cinema Canada will publish a separate review of this second version of the film.


Like it or not, certain films often find their way onto the public screens burdened with an enormous weight of expectation. Poor Suzanne falls into this category. Or perhaps one should say "fell." The moment of its premiere falls into expectation. Poor Suzanne was ominously propitious. There we were in Toronto, jammed into the Elgin — one of the last of the posh old film houses — on one of its gala nights, right in the middle of the Festival of Festivals, with the Great Film Debate raging a few streets up (cf. the articles on Trade Forum '80, pages 13 to 16 in this issue). All that was asked for, nay, demanded, was that Suzanne be the Great Canadian Movie, the reconciling of genuine Canadian Concern with boffo box office.


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indicate that he is rapidly losing his tenuous grip on reality.

Thomas Hedley, author of the film's screenplay, is a good writer of scenes. His dialogue, give or take a few clunkers assigned to Kate Nelligan, tends to be excellent. However, like most writers today he has no sense of how to construct an original story. (When did you last see an American film with a truly coherent script? Manhattan, perhaps?) Consequently, he Cuisinarts together an assortment of elements from minor O'Casey, bad Snake-Plt-type films and lesser films noirs. The proof is that he gives his hero a cat — a sure sign of trying to pep up a script by giving the hero a number of interesting character quirks. The proof of Coburn's performance, and those of the supporting players, is that they can overcome it.

John Guillermin, the director, is one of those faceless technicians who made his reputation doing mindless spectacles for Irwin Allen and Dino DeLaurentis. His presence is negligible, and while he does nothing to damage the film, nowhere in it does one sense any directorial urgency.

Mr. Patman should be seen for its cast and their performances. And for one other reason. It does not insult the viewer's intelligence: hardly a trivial consideration in a year which has seen such releases as Bear Island, Happy Birthday, Gemini, Nothing Personal and Death Ship. Simple intelligence is beginning to look like a major virtue.

John G. Harkness