

# REVIEWS

## Jean-Claude Lord's Visiting Hours

It would be an interesting experiment to collect the dementia-forming experiences of the psycho-killer movies of the past few years and present them to a good clinical psychiatrist for comment. It is likely that any good shrink would laugh at the evidence and tell you that the resulting trauma would be unlikely to create knife-wielding killers. After all, what is most twisted about the psychopath is not guilt-inducing experiences but the absence of moral sense. They may feel compelled to kill, but they are able to kill because they cannot feel guilty.

In the pursuit of narrative tidiness that has marked the thin retreats of *Psycho*, there is always a flashback or introductory sequence which explains the killer's motivation as that of revenge, or sexual disgust, or loneliness. What is forgotten about *Psycho* is first that the psychiatrist's explanation tells us far less about Norman Bates than we already know for ourselves, and second, that Norman was something far more unusual than a psychopath: he was a legitimate schizophrenic.

In Jean Claude Lord's *Visiting Hours*, the demented slasher is Colt Hawker (Michael Ironside), an impotent sadist who is haunted by memories of the day his mother assaulted his dad with a pot of boiling oil while he was trying to screw her in the kitchen. Dad is still hanging around, horribly scarred and hospitalized, but Colt remains peeved enough at women to enjoy stabbing them and photographing their deaths.

Colt's latest rage is triggered by Deborah Ballin, (Lee Grant), who delivers strident editorials on women's issues - her latest hobby-horse being a woman convicted of murder for killing her husband after several years of abuse. Colt attacks her unsuccessfully, and she is rushed to the hospital where she is attended by her boyfriend/producer Gary Baylor (William Shatner), and Sheila Munroe (Linda Purl), described in the execrable press kit as a "dedicated, caring nurse." Of course, Colt Hawker is not yet finished, and the film follows his efforts to kill Ballin in what desperately wants to be a terrifying climax.

There are two or three essential problems with *Visiting Hours*. First and foremost is the cast. There is a legitimate lack of sense in casting a horror film of this sort with a relatively upscale cast. The teenaged thrillseekers who form the main audience for this kind of picture do not really care that it is Oscar-winning Lee Grant who is the target of the madman's blade. After all, *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*, the two most successful slasher pictures, have no stars of any description. Indeed, the presence of good actors like Grant and Lenore Zann have the effect of distracting us from the affectless, existential hell of the low-budget horror film. It is even possible to argue that recognizable faces make it less easy to create sympathy than unknowns, because we spend half our time wondering what Lee Grant is doing in a turkey like this, rather than worrying about her character.



● Hospitals just aren't as safe they used to be, as Michael Ironside shows Lee Grant.

By populating a slasher movie with adults, you create a second credibility problem. After all, you expect teenagers to do dumb things. Lee Grant comes home to an empty house to find the shower on and the maid not answering. Does she leave the house and call the police? Nope. 'There may be a burglar with a gun in the bathroom, so I'd better investigate.' One gets the feeling that people in cheap horror movies have never seen a cheap horror movie.

Creating yet another problem is a psycho as a fully realized character. With Michael Ironside in *Visiting Hours* (or Tony Beckley in *When a Stranger Calls*), you do not have the faceless monster of *Halloween* or *Friday the 13th*. Putting a human character in that situation creates a different kind of movie, one as much about the psycho as about his victims. Remember, *Psycho* is very much about this sensitive, nervous, young hotel manager who takes such good care of his mother, and the balance of sympathy is on his side for a great deal of the film.

The third and knottiest problem is that *Visiting Hours* is a Canadian film designed to follow box-office trends. The problem is that there are very few trends left at all, and the slasher cycle is a particularly dodgy one, because the only two which have taken off into the box-office stratosphere have been *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*. This type of horror film is essentially inimical to our national psychology. After all, it is arguable that our two greatest horror stories are the saga of the Donnelly family (the community turns on outsiders) and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, which is a ghost story in which the ghost never appears. One might add to this list Earle Birney's *David*, were the monster its nature itself.

The crazed killer is an American phenomenon - witness the classic myths like the story of the escaped mad murderer, the man who kills the baby upstairs while the baby sitter sits downstairs, and all the variations on these tales. The fact that these stories are native to the American psychology means that John Carpenter could make art out of *Halloween*, George Romero out of *Night of the Living Dead*, and Tobe Hooper out *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* because they felt the stories in

their bones. When we try to imitate a foreign genre, we wind up with a *Visiting Hours*, a *Terror Train*, a *My Bloody Valentine*, where artistic decisions are based solely on commercial factors. These films are aesthetically unsuccessful because they are not felt by their makers. And if the filmmaker has no feeling for what he is doing, then the audience is unlikely to have any feeling for what is being done to them.

John Harkness ●

**VISITING HOURS** d. Jean-Claude Lord p. Claude Heroux sc. Brian Taggart exec. p. Pierre David, Victor Solnicki d.o.p./operator Rene Verzier music Jonathan Goldsmith ed. Jean-Claude Lord, Lise Thoun art d. Michel Proulx prod. man. Gwen Iveson 1st a. d. Julian Marks 2nd a. d. Blair Roth 3rd a. d. David Bailey unit man. Michel Wachniuc sc. girl France Boudreau a. p. man. Janet Cuddy gaffer Don Caulfield elec. Marc Charlebois 1st a. art d. Dominique L'Abbe ad. art dept. Sylvie Dagenais set dresser François Seguin a. set dresser Jean Gauthier, Simon Lahaye prop. master Jean-Batiste Tard props man Daniel Huysmans props buyer Frances Calder sp. eff. sup. Gary Zeller sp. eff. co-ord. Don Berry sp. eff. a. Renee Rousseau, Peter Dery, Frans Sayers sp. eff. tech. Yves Dubreuil, François Beaugard costume des. Delphine White a. costume des. Ginette Magny-ard Lee Grant's costumes Burton Miller head dresser Mario D'Avignon seamstress/cutter Monelle Leblanc daily help Sylvie Bellemare make-up Inga Klauti a. make-up Kathryn Casault sp. eff. make-up Stephan Dupuis sp. eff. make-up asst. Michele Burke hair stylist Pierre David head hairdresser Constant Natale 1st a. focus Denis Gingras 2nd a. clapper leader Jean-Jacques Gervais camera dept. Barbara Samuels stills Pierre Dury Steadicam Louis de Ernsted key grip Jacob Rolling a. key grip dolly Norman Guy grip Michel St. Pierre loc. mixer Don Cohen boom op. Gabor Vadney sec. to p. Monique Legare administrator Serge Major prod. accountant Yvette Duguet comptroller Gilles Leonard bookkeepers Joanie Gosechin, Diane Williamson, Linda Duguet prod. sec. Denise Forget sc. co-ord. Denise Dinovi construction sup. Claude Simard trans. capt. Charles Loupin craft serv. Michael Eyles drivers Richard Marsan, Real Baril Jean-Claude Cloutier, Glen Light, Michel Mar-

tin, Michel Sarao, Maurice Dubois, Vincente Di Clemente, Bernard Kirschner prod. a. Jerry Potashnik, Louis Gascon, Peter Serapiglia stunt co-ord. Jim Arnett casting Toronto: Walker Bowan MLC: Ginette D'Amico casting ass. Flo Gallant, Rosina Bucci unit pub. Pierre Brousseau marketing Publifilms Ltd. Paratel, David Novak Assoc. post-prod. co-ord. Bill Wiggins music sup. David Franco music co-ord. Pierre Brousseau recording engineer Monk orchestra conducted Bruce Pennycook soundtrack recorded at: Manta Sound Studio, Toronto/Little Mountain Sound Co., Vancouver ad. des. Marcel Pothier dialogue ed. Claude Langlois, Brian Holland a. sd. ed. Viateur Paiement, Gilles St. Onge, Michael Ray folley Andy Malcolm mixing Sonolab Inc. ad. cr-rec. Michel Descombes, Andre Gagnon lab. Bellevue Pathe titles Film Titles -Quebec/ p.c. Filmplan International (1981) Lp. Michael Ironside, Lee Grant, Linda Purl, William Shatner, Lenore Zann, Sylvia Lennick, Frances March, Steve Michaels, Kimberley McKeever, Bob McKeowan, Malcolm Nelthorpe, Roland Nincheri, Mary Rathbone, Ron Robbins, Robbie Robertson, Danielle Schneider, Lisa Schwartz, Danny Silverman, Marty Starr, Jerome Fibberghien, Katherine Trowel, Len Watt, George Zeeman, Linda Singer, Michelle Viau, running time 105 min., colour, 35mm dia., 20th Century-Fox.