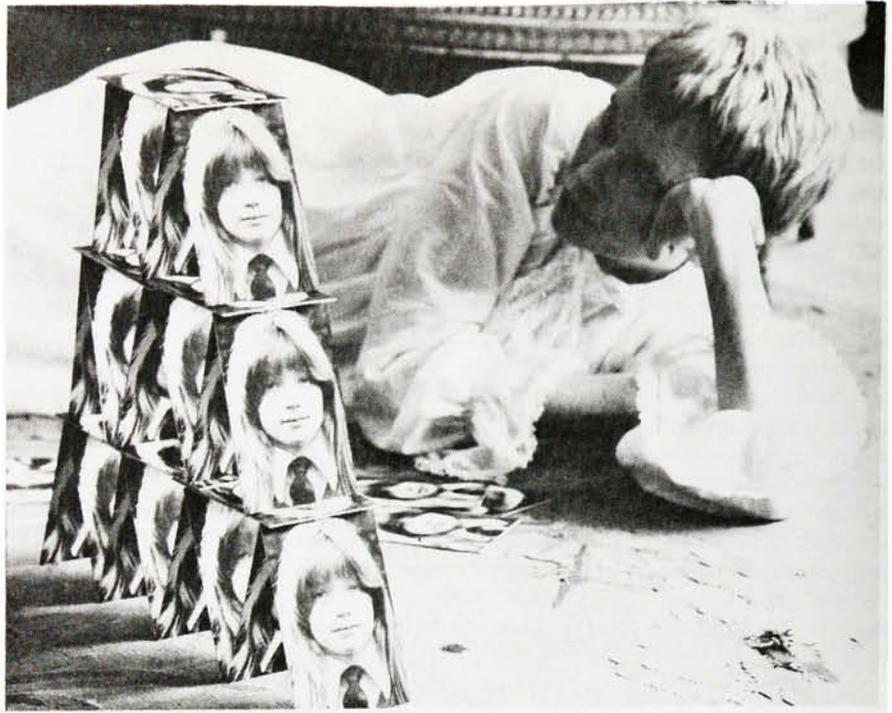


## Richard Loncraine's FULL CIRCLE

d. Richard Loncraine, sc. Dave Humphries, ph. Peter Hannan, ph. op. Terry Permane, still. Anthony Bliss, ed. Catherine Lane, sup. ed. Ron Wisman, sd. Jim Hopkins, sd. ed. Tony Jackson, a.d. Brian Morris, set dec. Chris Burke, cost. Shuna Harwood, l.p. Mia Farrow, Keir Dullea, Tom Conti, Jill Bennett, Robin Gammell, Cathleen Nesbitt, Anna Wing, Pauline Jameson, Peter Sallis, Sophie Ward, Samantha Gates, exec. p. Julian Melzack, p. Peter Fetterman, Alfred Pariser, p. sup. Hugh Harlow, p. manager. Peter Bennett, Tony Thatcher, p.c. Fetter Productions (London), Classic Film Industries (Montreal) 1976 col. 35mm. running time 108 min., dist. Astral.

Within the last year or so, the Canadian film industry has made several contributions to the growing number of "Bad Seed" motion pictures — films in which a spiritually or psychologically twisted child, almost invariably female, is used as an agent of mayhem and destruction. These have included Nicholas Gessner's *The Little Girl Who Lives Down The Lane*, Eddy Matalon's *Cathy's Curse*, (both of which were coproductions with France) and the Quebec episode of Denis Heroux's *The Uncanny* (a coproduction with Great Britain). Except for Gessner's film, which had the advantage of Jodie Foster in the title role and U.S. distribution by American-International, none of these works were distinguished by their plotting, execution, or by their box office reception. Thus, Richard Loncraine's *Full Circle*, based on Peter Straub's rather grisly novel *Julia* is not in very good company. All the more wonder, then, that it is really not as bad as one might expect.

It is perhaps to the credit of the backers of this film (including bookstore chain scion Julian Melzack whose Classic Film Industries is the Canadian production company), that they did not scrimp on production values. Cinematographer Peter Hamman shot *Full Circle* in a sumptuous, if rather dark style, using wide-screen Technovision equipment. While one may feel



Mia Farrow, sinking into depression, with photos of her dead daughter.

that Hamman overdoes his backlighting, it at least creates a thoroughly gloomy atmosphere that permeates the film. This is probably all to the good when the problems of the script are considered.

Writers Harry Bromley Davenport (adaption) and Dave Humphries (screenplay) have streamlined Straub's convoluted plot — wisely, though uncharacteristically discarding much of the supernatural and almost all of the sexual aspects of the story. The resulting material could have made a good suspenseful thriller in the Hitchcock mold, had the director had the wit to do so.

Richard Loncraine, however, chose instead to indulge in some fancy games with the viewers, beginning with some rather obvious casting. Mia Farrow, looking as clipped and gaunt as she did ten years ago, plays Julia Lofting, a depressive young woman who buys an atmospheric period house off London's Holland Park. There, she shuts herself away from her domineering husband Magnus (stolidly played by Keir Dullea) to mourn over the violent death of her eight year old daughter. Soon she feels herself haunted by the vengeful spirit of another child, Olivia Rudge, who had also died violently

over thirty years before, having been the instigator of the murder and mutilation of a playmate. It is just possible that Julia is insane, and has conjured Olivia's ghost out of a series of coincidences and her guilt over her daughter. Using this basic story, in itself derivative, Loncraine shows threadbare imagination by making passing allusions to a whole raft of psychological films, among them *Rosemary's Baby* and *Secret Ceremony*, *Bunny Lake is Missing* and *Wait Until Dark* and even uses some *Vertigo*-like staircase shots. In the midst of this, the plot gets so mired that Loncraine kills off three members of the cast — Dullea, Tom Conti as Julia's boyfriend, and Robin Gammell as one of Olivia's former gang — without any other reason than to get them out of the way. The deaths do not affect Farrow's character at all. This kind of arbitrary twist is not a means of compelling suspense; it is an artificial outlet from a sloppy plot.

The main problem with *Full Circle* seems to lie in the contradictions which are inherent in Loncraine's approach to the film. He was obviously aiming for a higher artistic plane than the blood-drenched fantasies of a Corman disciple like David Cronenberg. The fact that he never shows the phantom

Olivia (enigmatically and silently played, when she does appear, by a hollow-eyed and pretty girl named Samantha Gates) makes actually killing anybody a mark in his favor. Yet, he remains faithful to some of the most hoary conventions of the horror genre. One of these is the use of a mad old woman who speaks truths that are unrecognized, except by the hysterical heroine. Here, these roles are filled by Mary Morris, made up to look like Mia Farrow might at the age of seventy, and by Cathleen Nesbitt, who rather overdoes a classic death scene. Yet another convention is the whining piano and synthesizer score composed by Colin Towns. At least it does not resort to direct quotations from the works of Bernard Herrmann.

In the end, one is unsatisfied with Richard Loncraine's work in *Full*

*Circle*, partly because there was the promise of much better things. When the visual effects come together — Farrow's waifish vulnerability, Hamman's photography — the results are more often than not frustrated by the inconsistent plot. When Loncraine moves away from atmosphere to attempt to tell the story, the film seems to jerk in several disconcerting ways.

The problem may, in the end, lie in the genre itself. Almost all attempts to bring situations and characters that are proper to the Gothic tradition into a modern setting succeed only because a suspension of disbelief is achieved, especially if a child is depicted as an evil force. Because characters are so ill-defined in *Full Circle*, Richard Loncraine is not able to achieve anything like this, and so the effect is dissipated.

J. Paul Costabile

final release which I can only describe as a sense of flying. Material confines seem to have been dissolved and gravity itself defied, as though one had stepped into the fourth-dimension of relativity theory or the higher plane of Eastern mystics. There is a final, fragile coming to a point of rest, almost a bitter-sweet recognition of the necessity of being grounded once again in materiality. *Unremitting Tenderness* is a remarkable achievement as both a film "about" dance and a film "about" film because its creator so well understands both.

Even so, in comparison, *Look! We Have Come Through* is the more accomplished and intense work. Elder here set himself the difficult task of creating a seamless whole from approximately 385 separate shots, again of a dancer in motion. Unlike *Unremitting Tenderness*, this film does not rely on optical printing or loops to achieve its transformations. Instead, it is a revelation of the editing process, in this case done with remarkable care and precision. The intensity is in the cutting — almost an attempt to see simultaneously from all perspectives, but it is also in the use of extremes of darkness and light in tension within the frame. In comparison to *Unremitting Tenderness*, the camera distance from the dancer is lessened here by a quantum leap, and the interrelationship between moving body and moving camera is thereby heightened to the intensity of a struggle. In this piece, there is a terrible urgency, and an agony unlike anything I've seen visualized elsewhere, unless it be in the expressionist woodcuts of Edvard Munch. Yet, such a comparison ignores the extraordinary fluidity achieved in the editing, the exploration of dynamic motion which this filmmaker pursues relentlessly.

The work of Bruce Elder should be familiar to a Canadian audience. In 1976 his film *Barbara Is a Vision of Loveliness* won a Canadian Film Award in the category of experimental film. The very elimination of that category from the Awards this year does not bode well for Canadian film artists attempting to challenge the confines of filmmaking and our perceptions.

Joyce Nelson

## SHORT FILM REVIEWS

### UNREMITTING TENDERNESS

Filmmaker: R. Bruce Elder,  
Length: 9 minutes, color,  
Lightworks Production, 1977,  
Distributor: Lightworks Productions.

### LOOK! WE HAVE COME THROUGH

Filmmaker: R. Bruce Elder,  
Length: 12 minutes, b&w,  
Lightworks Production, 1978,  
Distributor: Lightworks Productions.

Stan Brakhage once asked us to "imagine a world before the beginning was the word." It is an invitation to another plane of perception, a more holistic plane where the subtle chains that bind and fix us into narrow path-

ways of separation and arbitrary divisions are left behind. I thought of this invitation while watching these two films by Bruce Elder, a filmmaker who, like Brakhage, is caught up in the synaesthetic and kinaesthetic flow of color, forms and motion, especially in their transformations. *Unremitting Tenderness* is the more gentle of the two films, gentle in the sense that its structure takes us more easily through its own process. The opening section, approximately 12 different shots of the dancer Sarah Lockett, functions like a threat to lead us through the labyrinthian transformations which follow, done through optical printing and rearrangements of the initial sequence. The affect, for me, is of scales falling away from the eyes, layer by layer, as if progressing unremittingly closer to the optic nerve. Yet, the combination of sitar music, fluid cutting on movement, and the color progressions make the process a painless one, as in meditation. There is a gradual working-through, both of the materials of film itself and of one's perceptions, into a