

lot more than anyone else. Instead, he organizes a seance, where Helen Burns turns in a terrifyingly believable performance as a psychic medium. Through the rather nebulous connection of Scott's recent bereavement, it evolves that a 'presence' is not only trying to communicate with him, but also gain his assistance to settle an old score.

Ultimately, this brings Scott to old Senator Joe Carmichael (Melvyn Douglas in an excellent performance). However, in the final confrontation, even Douglas is unable to overcome the inconsistencies built into his character, and the result undermines a scene on which so much hinges that it sets a wonky tone for the bang-up, no-holds-barred, burn-down-all-the-sets ending.

With few exceptions, there seems to have been little restraint in any area of this production.

The script by William Gray and Diana Maddox, from the story by Russell Hunter, brings into play all the well-worn tactics of the genre, though many of them, on their own, work effectively — largely due to George C. Scott's almost consistently intelligent performance.

Rick Wilkins' score contains a sweet and haunting melody and the cues are admirable. But in the end, the music is laid on too thickly, as though silence behind scenes is almost unthinkable, and the audience must be continually reminded of how nervous it should be.

Trevor Williams' art direction is another area where the film goes overboard. Costumes are intrusively tasteful, and the sets so sumptuous that one can't help wondering how these people got so filthy rich.

Director Peter Medak's overall pace is languorous, too often dwelling on the scenery and plot points that are already more than clear. The resulting film runs about twenty minutes too long. Though a good line of tension runs through certain sequences, the meanderings and credibility problems make it tough to maintain.

The most serious error of excess has to do with the character of the 'spirit' in the house, which seems to have been delineated not by the writers, but by what must have been an enormous special effects budget.

If this spirit can make thunderous sounds, open and slam doors, strike piano keys, break windows, switch on lights, turn on taps, make its voice heard on tape, dictate musical compositions to Scott's unconscious, throw glasses, instantaneously retrieve a child's ball thrown into a distant river, push wheelchairs around, make gold chains slink up

out of the ground, appear to a child in another house, shatter mirrors, cause fatal car accidents, violently shake massive pieces of furniture in an office miles away, set fires and cause hurricane winds (even indoors), what does it really need Scott for?

With its four, major, foreign stars, the one area where this picture has managed to show restraint is in its use of Canadian performers. Much has been made of this lately, and with good reason. It's amazing to see just how tiny these token cameos for indigenous talent can become; and taking co-star billing for a three-minute part seems a humiliating concession.

Most noticeable among the locals, aside from those mentioned, is a flash of Barry Morse as a parapsychologist, and a single scene of John Colicos in a broad, eye-popping parody of a police chief.

Trish Van Devere's performance so often relies on bland and elegant poise, and an impeccable wardrobe, that one is

tempted to speculate that her participation, and name above the title, could be one of the perks that goes along with being Mrs. George C. Scott.

**The Changeling** won 'Best Picture' at Canada's Genie Awards; but alas, these things are relative. In the American system, this would be comparable to something less than **The Omen** or **The Offering** winning a Best Picture Oscar.

In addition, **The Changeling** will undoubtedly do business, and could even garner good reviews in certain places. But there's something vaguely dishonest about this picture. At its core, it has not been well enough constructed to offer much more than a rehash of some of the gothic-suspense genre's most tortured clichés, and no amount of spectacular production value is really able to compensate.

Roy Moore

## Jean Beaudin's Cordélia

p.c. National Film Board in collaboration with Radio-Canada p. Jean-Marc Garand p.man. Laurence Paré d. Jean Beaudin a.d. Jacques Benoit sc. Jean Beaudin, Marcel Sabourin, based on novel **La lampe dans la fenêtre** by Pauline Cadieux cont. Monique Champagne art. d. Denis Boucher, Vianney Gauthier d.ph. Pierre Mignot sd. Jacques Blain mus. Maurice Blackburn ed. Jean Beaudin cost. Louise Jobin chief elec. Kevin O'Connell l.p. Louise Portal, Gaston Lepage, Raymond Cloutier, Gilbert Sicotte, James Blendik, Pierre Gobeil, Jean-Louis Roux, Marcel Sabourin, Claude Gauthier, Jean-Pierre Masson, Julie Morand, Michelle Rossignol, Olivette Thibault, Lionel Villeneuve, Rolland Bédard, Françoise Berd, Roger Garand, Jean Gascon, Henry Ramer, Serge Thériault pub. Les Films Mutuels col. 35mm length 118 min. year 1979 dist. Les Films Mutuels.

"Guilty for having loved life... Condemned for having lived it passionately." So cry out these lines from the advertisement which, along with a picture of Cordélia (Louise Portal) pulling at prison bars, announces that this is a tragic film of injustice. Cordélia Viau's husband was murdered in 1897, and the film is about the unjust trial and hanging of Cordélia and her supposed lover, Samuel. *La Presse* claims the affair "still haunts the memory of the population" of Quebec, and that it has become a legend here.

**Cordélia** is a film of social criticism, and in particular, a criticism of Quebec

society at the turn of the century. The overwhelming power of the Catholic Church parallels that of the legal system, and is just as oppressive. The force behind

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No escape for Cordélia (Louise Portal)

these all-powerful and inflexible institutions stems from the social mores of the times, and the intolerance of family-oriented rural society. The village women express most of this intolerance; an intolerance which ranges from the suppressed resentment of the women who watch over Cordélia's mourning for her dead husband, to the blatant, spitting animosity of Samuel's mother. Why do they hate her? Because Cordélia loves to sing and dance and enjoy life? Or is it because she loves to flirt, and spends her time with men, instead of other women? Or, most damning of all, is it because of the social crime she commits by not having any children?

Who the real murderer is, and why Cordélia and Samuel are persecuted, are questions which demand attention in the plot of such a film. But what if the 'whodunit' cannot be solved, as is the case here? The determination of the legal system to find them guilty for, what is presumably, someone else's crime, is carefully documented in the film. But the motivation for this persecution is only half-explained in a rapid series of mysterious meetings between important officials in the city and in strange country châteaux. This issue is inadequately dealt with, perhaps because of a too-strict interpretation of the book on which it is based, *La lampe dans la fenêtre*. In book form, the vague suggestions and hints of a

possible solution to the mystery crime are acceptable; but an unexplained treatment of plot details does not usually work in a film — especially if the film itself introduces details and then ignores them. In doing so, one concludes that the crime's solution would have been better left totally to the spectator's imagination.

Also confusing is the mystery of Cordélia's skin disease. The titles preceding the film suggest that the disease has scarred her psychologically but, strangely, there is only one direct reference to it in the plot. After nearly being raped, she cries out in shame that she has never shown it (her scarred skin?) to anyone. But what she says doesn't seem to make any sense, for her reference to the disease is far from explicit, as is the shot of her exposed abdomen. If indeed the disease has scarred her psychologically and physically, why is this not made clearer, especially in the one scene that explicitly deals with the subject?

Like Beaudin's last feature, *J.A. Martin photographe*, *Cordélia* is also a sumptuous period piece of pastel colours, soft, expressive lighting and glimpses of a visually beautiful past. But occasionally the prettiness of these images creates a discord in the film, not unlike that resulting from the unexplained plot details already discussed. The beautiful light in the jail makes Cordélia's imprisonment appear unnecessarily romantic. And in the hang-

ing scene, some of the beautiful close-up textures, of the wood of the scaffolding, the rope, and the black veil over her face, seem to detract from the emotional climax itself.

Beaudin is a master filmmaker, and he presents the film as a series of short, unified sequences, separate emotional events or comments which are memory units in the building of this portrait of the emotional Cordélia. Often the characters in a sequence communicate entirely through glances or peculiar expressions. Beaudin's camera style is also very interesting. Often the camera does not move, or moves very subtly to follow the central character in frame — usually Cordélia. At other moments, when Cordélia does not move and is alone in frame, (at home or in prison), the camera moves in very slowly to an ever closer close-up. The camera is always discreet, never attracting attention to itself.

An obviously moving camera is used in only three sequences. These are the scenes where the people in the community are all seated together: in the church, at the trial, and at the hanging. The camera tracks slowly across the townspeople in a different way each time, finally, directly accusing the faces of legal murder.

As for the acting, the performers are generally excellent; particularly Gaston Lepage as the "haunting" face for the country bumpkin, Samuel, and Raymond Cloutier, as the loathsome family friend and public prosecutor, Jos Fortier. Louise Portal's performance as Cordélia is also superb, and suffers only in comparison with Monique Mercure in a similarly challenging role in *J.A. Martin*. Unfortunate as it is, this comparison will be made almost automatically by anyone who has seen both films, because of their similar subject matter, and their shared directorial vision and style. However, Portal brings to the character a liveliness, vitality and range of emotion absolutely essential to the film's success. For example, one of the most moving scenes in the entire film is highly improbable, and would easily be unbelievable were it not for Portal's talent. Cordélia, seen through the bars of her cell, is singing under the window. It seems absurd, but she is half-singing, half-screaming about how happy she is, and how beautiful life is. For a very long time, we are captivated by Cordélia, her depression, her strength, and her humanity.

*Cordélia* is a fine and moving film. It is a flawed masterpiece. Not surprisingly, it is also a success, both at the box office and with the critics.

**Mark Leslie**