

trademark? Remember **Paperback Hero?**) are carefully contrived and then fully and forcefully exploited.

Likely as not though, someone had a great time developing **Only God Knows** from that mysterious idea. There's a hint (just a hint) of a rare and spontaneous spirit which might well have infected the entire film. But it's easy to get carried away. There are times like that; one joke leads to another and before it's all over, well. . . . Perhaps they might just be better forgotten. But God help us if there's a film to be found in every old joke.

The Visitor

So, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has yet to be convinced. All along, the powers-that-be have been reluctant to recognize Canadian films. Now that they have (at least the summer series, **Canadian Cinema** is a step in the right direction), it's obvious that they've still very little respect for the films as anything other than filler between commercials. And equally obvious that this country's film industry may have won a small battle for Corporation recognition, but they're still losing the war.

Consider **The Visitor**. Not that it was any more thoughtlessly handled than the others in the series, (in that respect, **Mon Oncle Antoine** suffered much more) but this was, in effect, the film's "first-run" showing east of the Rockies. It deserved better.

The Visitor is a film of moods, a chilling and fascinating study in the psychology of Time, weaving the immediate present and the carefully preserved and beautifully evoked turn-of-the-century past around a kind of Canadian Victorian romance. As the "visitor", Pia Shandel portrays a young history student whose interest in the past, specifically Calgary of the early 1900's, has ceased to be a simple matter of academics. A growing obsession drives her to spend three mid-winter weeks in an empty old mansion, all in the name of research. After a restless first night's sleep, she awakens into the strange olde world of her daydreams. Triggered by the appearance of a mysterious young man (Eric Peterson) who claims to be the master of the house in his parent's absence, the romantic reverie begins. And slowly turns into a nightmare, full of the psychological ambiguities so characteristic of the troubled world in which Paul Almond's heroines seem to find themselves.

Unlike an Almond film though, **The Visitor** remains coherent in its direction, even as its realities become increasingly

confused. Throughout, the old house is the one continuing reality and director John Wright uses it effectively, richly visualizing the warmth and atmosphere that the young woman so passionately wished to experience. (Could Wright have felt the same obsession? What better way to indulge it than to make a film.) Its imposing presence gives the film a theatrical air; the two young people, in the process of getting to know one another and adjusting to the strange situation, often work to it in the blocked movements of the stage.

In these same ponderous moments, they pass the time with some fairly contrived philosophic conversation about the meaning of life and other such related matters. Thankfully, it's offered (presumably at Wright's prompting) with a collective non-committal



Eric Peterson in "The Visitor"

shrug, as if the questions are just too weighty to be rewarded with an answer. So why worry? Wright even includes a short poem by Robert Service, **Just Think**: "... Your life is but a little beat/Within the heart of Time..." A comfortable and reassuring thought. But as irrelevant and half baked as it may seem (and perhaps it's wrong to think of it in terms of present day cynicism), the polite conversation does serve to deepen the tension, simply by delaying the inevitable. Only as the visitor becomes completely involved in this past society, and feels the coldness of the people who know nothing of her dilemma (and may not even exist outside of her imagination, there's always that unresolved uncertainty), does the tension find a final release. The visitor proves to be less than the perfect guest.

Unfortunately, the dream world of **The Visitor** is no match for the harsher dream world of commercial television. Perhaps the National Film Board was right when it, among others, voiced reservations about the successful transi-

tion from large screen to small. The transition *has* been uncomfortable, and never more than in the hands of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

— Mark Miller

About rape and recent releases

If there are any indicators of the present state of our collective consciousness as English-Canadians, surely the recent works of our artists would have to be classified as such. As a firm believer that films, whether popular or artful in design, are among the most colourful and valuable expressions of this country's culture, I also hold that the creators of film are no lesser *artists* than those who choose to apply oil paint to canvas, rather than light to celluloid.

A glance at five recent titles is almost alarming in its clarity of message. Read together, **The Hard Part Begins**, **Why Rock the Boat?**, **Only God Knows**, **Monkeys in the Attic** (a tale of exploding dreams), and **125 Rooms of Comfort** cannot fail to conjure up obvious concerns of our collective journey, circa three-quarters of the way through this century. **Comfort** was originally entitled **The Adventures of Johnny Cannuck**, and the Canadian content of the message is, as a notable criminal once used to say, perfectly clear. Especially if applied to our perplexed feature industry.

Having seen all except the last, the thematic connection one soon discovers is rape — both the mind and body fuck varieties. John Lynch's **Hard Part** foists upon our consciousness yet another tale of a Canadian loser, in the grand tradition of **Goin' Down the Road**, but missing Shebib's ballsy ambience. Bradley and McGrath are back in well-played supporting roles, but Donnelly Rhodes' fucked-over country and western singer lead is weak compared to Rip Torn's in **Payday**. As is Nancy-Belle Fuller's country belle in comparison with the lady whose voice was dubbed in for her songs. Nevertheless, the critics all flocked to praise this film with surprising enthusiasm. Cinépix is handling the distribution, on this low-budget rendering of small town Canadian life, also dealing with how country culture is being replaced by rock culture in most parts.

John Howe's **Why Rock the Boat?** is a period comedy set in the forties, but its explorations of socialism vs. capitalism, male vs. female, honesty vs. corruption, and sex vs. love are as contemporary in concern as what to do if another depression comes. Its major theme is seduction, a mild form of rape: Stu Gillard's bumbling cub reporter is being

constantly conned into the service of the above conflicting philosophies, notably by Henry Beckman's mean managing editor, Ken James' seasoned photographer, Tiiu Leek's so-so beautiful activist and Patricia Gage's sex-hungry and lovely wife characters. The latter two manage to seduce Gillard literally as well. High point in the film is our idealistic and naive young anti-hero getting drunk and unwittingly striking a great blow against the corrupt, 'free-enterprise' world of Montreal newspapers by breaking through the fears of the men and women in the newsroom and organizing the first union rally. Some of the acting is stereotypical and flat, but *Why Rock the Boat?* is unashamedly Canadian in setting and a joy to watch throughout. A warm, human comedy that should become a popular movie, it is being distributed by Astral.

Peter Pearson's *Only God Knows* received such a vicious review in our 'national newspaper,' that producer Larry Dane, whose original idea gave birth to the film, may take legal action. It's an innocuous comedy, but deserves better treatment than that. If you haven't yet heard, it's about a priest, a minister, and a rabbi who decide to rob the Mafia in order to finance a drop-in centre for young drug victims of the very same syndicate. Gordon Pinsent's priest is life-size and believable, John Beck's minister is stiff but lovable, and Paul Hecht's rabbi is a low-key version of Elliot Gould and a pleasant surprise. Their relationship comes across as honest and human, and Peter Pearson's direction is full of subtle touches, embellishing an otherwise ordinary script into a very pleasing movie. Pearson learned part of his craft in Europe, and it shows, especially on this film. The humour is there for those open to it, as are the rape related themes: the mob raping our young with drugs, and the clergy 'raping' us with religion. These are subliminal themes only, however. What makes the movie work for me is its well-constructed hilarity in parts — notably a rollicking chase sequence through fields of man-sized corn — and professionalism throughout: good acting, well-chosen locations, outstanding cinematography (Don Wilder) and successful editing. What certain critics found so objectionable, only God knows. Distribution by Canart/Queensbury.

In Morley Markson's *Monkeys in the Attic*, the dreams explode into actual rape and attempted suicide. Male and female, gay and straight, dreams and realities, clowns and tragic people, seekers and forsakers, death and life itself are played off by this very skillful direc-

tor to produce by far the best film in this group. Two couples inhabit a luxurious Toronto house and expose all their in-

wedlock by reading the stars, or the small-boy hero of Jan Kadar's *Lies My Father Told Me*, both films delayed in



Scene from "125 Rooms Of Comfort"

ner conflicts during the space of a single, eventful night. The amount of control Markson managed to infuse into his script (with John Palmer), his direction of the excellent cast, Henri Fiks' superb colour cinematography, the set design by Tony Hall and Arnaud Maggs, as well as into the beautifully tight post-production elements (both the multi-levelled soundtrack and the very creative visuals), is amazing. Jackie Burroughs' Wanda is sensational, and the rest of the cast is equally impressive. A deeply moving and alternately phenomenally funny film, it is exhilarating throughout, and is being distributed by Ambassador films.

Patrick Loubert's *125 Rooms of Comfort* also stars Jackie Burroughs, and for this reason alone I would recommend a viewing, sight unseen. Thematically, I'm told, it includes a rape, as well as transvestitism, small-town hooliganism and the demise of yet another performer, this time a rock singer who's all washed up. If that doesn't make it Canadian, it was shot in St. Thomas, Ontario by a cast and crew of youthful Toronto film enthusiasts, this last remark being in no way meant to question their professionalism. Quite often professionals lack enthusiasm; my admiration goes to the people who worked with producer Don Haig on this picture, for having retained this quality. More on this in our next issue.

Pregnancy sometimes follows rape, and another brief glance as to what the future holds turns up a surprising number of child-related themes, whether it's the heroine of Gordon Sheppard's *Eliza's Horoscope*, who's determined to choose the father of her baby out of

post-production but promised as forthcoming soon. Martin Kinch's *Me*, Peter Bryant's *The Supreme Kid*, and Murray Markowitz' *Recommendation for Mercy* (on the Stephen Truscott rape murder case — whew!) will all deal with some aspects of adolescence, one suspects, if not chronologically, at least in mental attitudes. As will George Kaczender's *Micro Blues* and Graham Parker's *Lady of the Meadow*, neither as yet in production. *The Search*, *The Fury Plot*, and *The Parasite Complex* sound as if adolescence was instrumental in coining the titles, although they're probably thematically divergent from the above group. But the upcoming Crawley Films/Japan co-production, *Child in a Prison Camp*, is very obviously about a Japanese kid who was interned by the Canadian government as an enemy of the state during the war, even though he was most likely born in this country. The ultimate rape.

Omissions? Trevor Wallace and Gerry Arbeid produce pictures in this country, but their themes have nothing to do with Canada. Neither do their casts and crews in a lot of cases. As for the Québec films of late? Probably in a subsequent article. Until then, if there exist writers or filmmakers in Montréal who are bi-lingual and would like to review Québec films for Cinema Canada, please let us know. Wouldn't mind reviews of recent films by Jutra, Carle, Lord, Brassard, Brault, Arcand, Perron, Lefebvre as well as those of younger directors. Subtitled prints take so long to be made, that by the time these films get to Toronto, they're ready for the archives.

—George Csaba Koller