



entered a world of opulence. Most of the palaces are now history or falling apart. In India, however, where the world's largest film industry still thrives, the concept of the movie palace is still going strong. The Raj Mandir in Jaipur is the second-best theater in all of Asia according to the Lonely Planet guide. It is

an impressive building, with mirrored interiors, pink decor, and rounded rampways to higher floors. The theater's capacity is about 1300 people. As we approached, a huge movie board announced it was showing Kumar's KHAL-NAAIKAA. For as little as Rs7 for the front row to Rs18 for the Diamond Box, you can see a film on the big screen (about twenty-five feet high and fifty feet wide). [A rupee is about three cents.] We each got into line. They have separate lines for men and women. No hanky-panky in line! The women's line went faster so Evelyn bought the tickets. We went inside and admired the interiors for a while, then the lights dimmed.

KHAL-NAAIKAA is about two-and-a-half hours long and the plot was not hard to follow even if it was entirely in Hindi. What helped especially was what Evelyn pointed out how familiar the plot actually was. This was Bombay's two-and-a-half-hour musical remake of THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE. Now we never bothered to see this film, but we did hear what the plot was and it was pretty much all there, including the governess's weird motive for her evil and even a greenhouse murder that exactly repeated the scene in the coming attraction for the American film. Just why anyone needs a greenhouse in India would be anybody's guess. Mr. Kumar is not one to take only partial advantage of the unenforcibility of copyright law. He is a very thorough thief. But what about is this about it being a musical? Well, just about all Indian films are musicals regardless of subject matter. This was the very first psychotic killer musical we had ever seen, but we bet others in the audience had seen more than enough psycho-killer musicals. Before I get to the film itself, I want to mention one more thing about the theater itself. The ceiling of the screening room is highly fluted and apparently at least two birds were nesting there and at inopportune times would fly in front of the screen. Kumar was often very creative in how he put in his production numbers. The heroine is singing a production number on television at one point and the villainess reaches into the television screen and pulls out the

heroine and the two sing together. A second grab at the heroine causes her to fall back into the screen. All during this scene the Venetian blinds, which are white on one side and red on the other, flash from red to white and back. Rebecca DeMornay is fairly attractive and the part calls for her to be seductive. The Indian woman who plays the same role does fill the bill.

One of the things that helps the understanding is that there is a lot of English language used in the film. Scenes in a doctor's office are in English and a fair number of English phrases are used at odd moments. People say, "I love you," in English. It seems odd to come to Jaipur to see a version of THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE, but you do learn a fair amount about Indian culture from the experience and it is a comfortable and pleasant three hours.

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2. VAMPIRES AND VIOLETS by Andrea Weiss (Penguin, ISBN 0-14-023100-5, 1993, 184pp, US\$12.50) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Subtitled "Lesbians in Film," this work is obviously written for the academic audience. Though its lengthy discussion of female vampire films might initially attract a less intellectual audience (I admit I was first interested in it because someone said it contained a long section on Hammer's vampire films), passages such as "One way the narrative structure enforces these cultural myths is by closing down the range of possible, alternative interpretations that spectators can read from the film" are likely to warn off the casual reader who was expecting another book on horror films aimed at the teenage reader. And in fact the vampire chapter is only one part of V\_a\_m\_p\_i\_r\_e\_s\_a\_n\_d\_V\_i\_o\_l\_e\_t\_s, which begins with a look at the portrayal of lesbians in the silent and early sound cinema, continues through the 1930s (focusing primarily on Dietrich and Garbo), post-World-War-II films, and art and independent lesbian cinema.

Not surprisingly, many of Weiss's observations and interpretations deal with the role of women in general in film. She frequently

discusses the intent of the studio to attract and please the male (heterosexual) viewer while also pointing out the director's or female actor's or even lesbian viewer's attempts to subvert this intent. Dietrich in M\_o\_r\_o\_c\_c\_o may dress in a tuxedo and kiss a female nightclub patron as part of her character's attempt to seduce a man, but viewers can also read the kiss as being the real Dietrich momentarily showing through her character.

The basic text for people interested in gay and lesbian images in film remains Vito Russo's C\_e\_l\_l\_u\_l\_o\_i\_d\_C\_l\_o\_s\_e\_t. (And indeed Weiss frequently quotes Russo and gives him special acknowledgement.) But Russo's book deals more with the portrayal of male homosexuality in film than female. For example, Dietrich gets two sentences in Russo's 276-page book versus a dozen pages as well as additional mentions in Weiss's 180-page one. This is due more likely to the dearth of archival material on films with female leads than to bias on Russo's part. (Weiss discusses some of the difficulties she had in viewing some of the films, or in finding subsidiary material, so this is not unlikely.) On the other hand, it is reasonable to assume that Russo would be more likely subconsciously to write about the films he was most familiar with, and those would be those dealing with male homosexuality. (The basic text on vampires in Hammer's films, by the way, would be David Pirie's H\_e\_r\_i\_t\_a\_g\_e\_o\_f\_H\_o\_r\_r\_o\_r.)

V\_a\_m\_p\_i\_r\_e\_s\_a\_n\_d\_V\_i\_o\_l\_e\_t\_s is a book that will appeal only to a specialized niche audience, and for its audience it serves its purpose moderately well. There are no amazing new insights or revelations here. Weiss chooses to analyze a few films in detail

rather than to provide a list of films with lesbian images. She succeeds in that, I believe, but in doing so does not write for the masses.

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### 3. THE BLUE KITE (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: The life of one Chinese family

through fourteen years of political upheaval is chronicled in this moving but very downbeat film. It was censored in China, not too surprisingly. The film lacks focus at times, but many of the situations are haunting and the film is a moving indictment of politics out of control in Maoist China. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4).

T\_h\_e\_B\_l\_u\_e\_K\_i\_t\_e is the fictional autobiography of the first fourteen years of Chen Tietou's life in Mainland China. The story goes from Tietou's parents' marriage in 1953 up through the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1967. Tietou remembers himself as having been a particularly difficult child, but the problems he caused were small next to the family's political troubles. Tietou's family is perfectly loyal to the country and is not particularly political, yet it still torn apart repeatedly and eventually destroyed by the vagaries of a powerful, repressive and capricious political system. Much of what happens in the early parts of this film will remind Americans of McCarthyism. Yet the fact that these are just ordinary people, not celebrities or people in the public eye, reminds the viewer at how much pervasive the drive for political correctness was in China than it ever has been in the United States. The Chens are loyal enough to the government that they feel impelled to bow to the picture of Mao at their wedding and sing patriotic songs. It is very clear these of not political activists. They are good hard-working people who believe in Mao and his policies for China.

Encouraged by a government policy anxious to root out its own problems, Tietou's father is willing to discuss with friends what things needed change. When this Hundred Flowers policy is replaced by a government stance more paranoid, local officials turn viciously on Tietou's family. Repeatedly we see people's loyalty to the government betrayed. The country is so anxious to root out supposed traitors that they give the weapon of political ostracism to anybody who finds it convenient to use it. In one chilling sequence schoolboys are tired of school so they accuse their teacher of being a counter-revolutionary and have her humiliated and dragged away. It takes little to be accused of being disloyal and once accused there is little chance of being vindicated.

The film is 139 minutes long and follows Chen Shujuan, Tietou's mother, through three marriages and many life experiences, mostly ending in misery either because of the system's inadequacies, and its political paranoia.

Some aspects of this film would have played better to a Chinese audience. An important part of this film, presumably, are the political slogans and posters one sees as in the background of many of the scenes. Only occasionally are the signs translated in the subtitles, but the viewer gets the feeling that a lot was missed. Still there is the compensation that we get a view into town life in China that is probably more of interest to Westerners than to Chinese. I would give T\_h\_e\_B\_l\_u\_e\_K\_i\_t\_e a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

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#### 4. WIDOWS' PEAK (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule review: The peace of a small post-WWI Irish village is shattered by the feud of two women in this picturesque comedy. As with many recent British films, the setting is the real star of this film. The plot twists are not as mysterious as they were intended to be. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4).

WARNING: A VERY HEAVY SPOILER FOLLOWS THE REVIEW.

In the 1920s, Kilshannon, Ireland, is a town dominated by rich widows. The hill at the center of the town has been given over entirely to the women and has been dubbed "Widows' Peak" by the locals. Of the elder female contingent, first among equals is Mrs. Doyle Couniha (played by Joan Plowright). The one non-widow on Widow's Peak is Katherine O'Hare (Mia Farrow) who was adopted by the other widows after an indiscretion earlier in her life. O'Hare is a quiet mousey woman who uncharacteristically takes an immediate dislike to newcomer Edwina Broome (Natasha Richardson). Even before Broome's arrival O'Hare is finding reason to hate her and soon the two women are constantly at each others' throats, quite to the bemused amazement of Kilshannon.

The screenplay of W\_i\_d\_o\_w\_s'\_P\_e\_a\_k was written years ago for Maureen O'Hara to play O'Hare and for Mia Farrow to play Broome. Time passed and Farrow took the role originally written for her mother. It is really a pity it was not cast that way since O'Hara had the fiery personality of O'Hare. One side effect is that Farrow has to sound Irish and Richardson has to sound American. It would not have been nearly as difficult for Farrow to sound American and her mother to sound Irish. Also, Farrow is far too quiet and introspective for the role. Richardson has a teaspoonful more personality, but neither actress can wrest the audience's attention

from Plowright. Adrian Dunbar of H\_e\_a\_r\_M\_y\_S\_o\_n\_g is present but a real disappointment in a role that gives him little chance to fulfill the promise he showed in that film.

One odd note, the film steals a joke from C\_a\_s\_a\_b\_l\_a\_n\_c\_a. In a film set after 1943, it would have been considered a film allusion.

W\_i\_d\_o\_w\_s'\_P\_e\_a\_k is set in the 1920s and that makes it a theft.

John Irvin directs taking maximum advantage of the small Irish town location. He builds texture into the film showing us scenes around the town, taking us to a local dance and to the town's regatta. He almost has Bill Forsythe's ability for making the town itself the star, but his town does not have quite enough personality to be really interesting. Now and again he does get off a clever piece of local color, like a fairly witty scene of all the widows in town visiting their husbands' graves at the same time, but it is not quite enough to make the town really engaging.

This is a film that is never so tricky as intended, but it is always watchable and usually quite fun. I give it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

SPOILER...SPOILER...SPOILER...SPOILER...

What I found to be the greatest flaw in this film is what was for me almost its utter predictability. I knew that there were surprises coming, admittedly, but I have to say I figured the entire plot before we even saw the character of Mrs. Broome. I saw Miss O'Hare behaves peculiarly negatively about the coming of Mrs. Broome, I thought of the demographics of the area, and I knew exactly what was happening. Even then it seemed to me that Richardson was giving too much away by making Mrs. Broome a terrible actress. (Okay, there were details about what was going on that were not available until later, but even there I was well ahead of the script.) It would not be fair to downrate the film because I guessed too early what was happening, but I think they could have done a better job of misleading me once I knew.

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