

American remake of 'The Vanishing' retains dark spirit

BY JOHN MONAGHAN
SPECIAL WRITER

I wasn't the only one to place "The Vanishing" on my list of 1991's 10 best releases. The obscure Dutch thriller, which screened locally at the Detroit Film Theatre, was unanimously hailed as a clever, uncompromisingly dark film that delivered one of the screen's most chilling final images.

Hollywood has now remade "The Vanishing," importing director George Sluizer and retaining much of the same spirit that made the original so captivating. Of course, there have been com-

promises. Given a budget probably 100 times larger than the original's, Sluizer has softened both the message and the ending for American consumption. It still provides ample intelligence, wit and psychological horror.

MOVIES

sanity in question, he still searches for clues to her whereabouts.

By this time, Jeff hardly cares whether Diane is alive or dead. His obsession lies solely in learning the truth. "Instead of a chance that she's alive somewhere without me knowing it," he says in anguish, "I'd rather have her dead and discover what happened to her."

Where Sluizer's original kept

us guessing along with Jeff, the remake introduces the madman responsible during the opening credits. The message is no longer that the madman's looking family man might have, for no reason at all, swiped your girlfriend.

Barney, played here by Jeff Bridges, now becomes a run-of-the-mill American psycho. A chemistry professor who speaks his teenaged daughter with a picnic basket full of spiders and drops flies into chemical-filled petri dishes. With locks of long, curly hair falling into his face,

Bridges plays him overly affected and eccentric.

Kiefer Sutherland, however, makes a convincing man obsessed. He tries to start a new life with a new love, Rita (Nancy Travis), but the relationship is haunted by reminders of Diane (Sandra Bullock). Just when he thinks the demons of the past have been exorcised, Jeff receives a message from Barney which gives him a chance to find out exactly what happened to his love, but with one little catch.

For his more exciting, though contrived, climax Sluizer inserts some of Hitchcock's red herrings.

We know the loaded gun Jeff keeps hidden in his apartment will surface again. Other bits of information are introduced but never mentioned, such as Rita's comment that she knew Jeff in high school.

The best thing about Sluizer's handling of "The Vanishing" is the sparseness of style. After some shaky camerawork to accentuate Jeff's panic early on, he sticks to the ordinary and natural in subtly stylized compositions. Most importantly, he realizes that horror doesn't always rely on graphic special effects. True horror exists in the imagination.

Responsibilities to kids include upholding laws

STREET SENSE



BARBARA SCHIFF

This is from voice mail: Barbara Schiff. The following is not so much a question as it is a comment, an angry comment at that. Zoe Baird withdrew from consideration as attorney general of the United States because of the public outcry she provoked by hiring undocumented workers to care for her child and her home. Some years ago when both my children and I were younger, I had the same problem and I solved it the same way.

I am a professional woman as is Zoe Baird; I have been listening to self-righteous anger all around me and now I need to express some myself.

When I chose the woman who cares for my children I did it because it was obvious that she could love my children better than anyone else I interviewed. I hated breaking a law, but I valued my children's welfare more than any other consideration.

The woman without the green card stayed with me for some time. Sometimes, because of guilt, I would think of finding someone else, but my children really loved her, and so I felt I couldn't disrupt their security. All of this time I was suffering from the added guilt of knowing that I was not home with my children myself.

I cannot be sure of Zoe Baird's motivation in this matter, but I do know there are many out there like me struggle to make good choices in a tough world where sometimes none exist.

Working Mom

Dear Working Mom, Thank you for your comments; I am happy to print them. I hope you will think about this response although you may not like it. The controversy over whether or not to hire illegal workers when it is the best care you can find for your children is many faceted. I'll address only the morality issue and not the political or legal ones.

Let's say we accept Zoe Baird's claim that she is "acting as a mother" when she hired undocumented workers. By that behavior she implies that her moral responsibility to her child was greater than her moral responsibility to uphold the law. Do not misunderstand, there is no way to know if her defense was the truth. I am using this as the premise because it is what you felt the need to do, put your children's needs above the law.

Since the fallout from the feminist movement began to define our gender differences there has been research on the differences in morality between men and women. In some of these studies, men have been seen as more moral than women because they were more likely to base their moral choices on rules and on universal principles than were women.

Women were more likely to base their moral choices on caring for others and on responsibility in relationships. Men are seen as being worried about interfering with each other's rights while women worry about not helping others when they could have.

It is an oversimplification but still true to say that the reason given for this is that because women bear children they are more concerned with closeness than with independence. The conclusion of these research studies

is that we shouldn't think of one kind of morality, adherence to rules, as being better than another. The kind of morality, responsibility in relationships. The studies say that yes, they are different, but that one is not better than the other.

It is a tribute to women that the opposition to Zoe Baird didn't divide by gender. As many women were outraged by her behavior as were men.

Morality by its very definition is not what we do because it fits the situation at the time but what we do because it is correct or right no matter how hard it is. What do we teach our children when we break the law so that their lives can be easier?

That does not mean that even honest men and women will not continue to make pragmatic decisions that will break the law. It does mean that we cannot take the moral highground when we do so. It also means that we must necessarily take the consequences for our behavior. It was appropriate that Zoe Baird wasn't given the role of top law enforcer in our land.

Barbara

If you have a question or comment for Barbara Schiff, a trained therapist and experienced counselor, send it to Street Sense, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150. You can also leave a message by calling 953-2047, mailbox 1877, on a touch-tone phone.

DETROIT FILM SOCIETY

Detroit Public Library, 5201 Woodward Ave., Detroit, Call 833-4048 for information. (\$25 series membership, \$4 individual admission)

"Brought to Life: A History of the Black Film Industry," 7 p.m. Feb. 12. A special lecture/film presentation conducted by Detroit film historian James Wheeler, who charts "race" films from 1910 through 1950. Excerpts from films made and performed by blacks are shown, along with the rarely-seen feature "Ebony Parade," starring Count Basie, Cab Calloway, Dorothy Dandridge and the Mills Brothers.

DETROIT FILM THEATRE

Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit, Call 833-2323 for information. (\$5; \$4 students and senior citizens)

"Van Gogh" (France — 1991), 7 p.m. Feb. 12-13; 1, 4 and 7 p.m. Feb. 14. In this 10th screen treatment of the artist's life, French director Maurice Pialat ("A Nos Amours") limits the focus to the last 67 days of Vincent's life.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY

13671 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 943-2330 for information. (Free)

"Beauty and the Beast" (France — 1946), 7 p.m. Feb. 8. Long before the Disney directors were even born, French artist and filmmaker Jean Cocteau created this poetic version of the fable. Josette Day and Jenn Marais play the respective title roles in this haunting black-and-white classic.

MAPLE THEATRE

4135 W. Maple Road, Bloomfield Hills. Call 855-9090 for show times. (\$5.75 evenings; \$2.95 twilight)

"The Crying Game" (Ireland — 1992). Love, loyalty, murder and

seduction are the themes of this stylized new thriller from Neil Jordan. Giving away the plot would be doing an injustice, so suffice it to say that the Irish director of "Mona Lisa" and "The Miracle" provides more twists and turns than a ride on the Tilt-a-Whirl. Stephen Rea, Miranda Richardson, Forest Whitaker and Adrian Dunbar star.

MICHIGAN THEATRE

603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 668-8397 for information. (\$5; \$4 students and senior citizens)

"The Crying Game" (Ireland — 1992), through Feb. 22. Love, loyalty, murder, and seduction are the themes of this stylized new thriller from Neil Jordan. Giving away the plot would be doing an injustice, so suffice it to say that the Irish director of "Mona Lisa" and "The Miracle" provides more twists and turns than a ride on the Tilt-a-Whirl. Stephen Rea, Miranda Richardson, Forest Whitaker and Adrian Dunbar star.

"The Magician" (Sweden — 1958), 4:15 p.m. Feb. 8; 7 p.m. Feb. 9. Ingmar Bergman directs the story of a 19th century magician/hypnotist (Max Von Sydow) who meets with hard times. Many consider this among Bergman's most personal works, shown here as a part of a weekly retrospective.

"My New Guy" (USA — 1992), through Feb. 18 (call for show times). A husband buys a gun for his wife in order to protect her. She reluctantly accepts it, only to have it taken without permission by a neighbor who has a crush on her. This quirky comedy from first-time director Stacy Cochran stars Diane Lane and Tess Harper.

RABBIES COFFEEHOUSE

22010 Harper Ave., St. Clair Shores. Call 779-0707 for information. (Free)

SCREEN SCENE

"City of Fear" (USA — 1958), 11 p.m. Feb. 8. Atomic film noir at its finest in which escaped convict Vince Edwards is chased through L.A. streets thinking he is carrying a case of heroin. In actuality, it contains enough nuclear plutonium to destroy the city.

STATE THEATRE

2115 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 961-5450 for information.

"Blue Velvet" (USA — 1985), 9 p.m. Feb. 8. David Lynch's sick look at small-town life stars Kyle MacLachlan as a college student involved both with a darkly troubled nightclub singer (Isabella Rossellini) and a pretty young high school student (Laura Dern). Dean Koppert stars in the film as the sadistic Frank Booth.

— John Monaghan

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