

MOVIES

'Superman III' Loses Steam

By Michael Gallagher
And Henry Herx

New York (NC) — "Superman III" (Warners), the latest and perhaps last of the Superman movies, is by far the weakest of the three, a muddled, unfocused picture that keeps promising to develop into something entertaining but never delivers.

For one thing, it has two plots which, despite the best efforts of writers David and Leslie Newman, never quite come together the way they were meant to, a failure that pretty well exemplifies where "Superman III" goes awry. It's chock full of happenings, far more incidents than even a film three times its length could adequately develop.

The first and by far the most promising plot line has Superman-Clark Kent (Christopher Reeve in as good form as ever despite the flaws of the movie) going back to Smallville for his high school reunion and running into a beautiful classmate (Annette O'Toole), the prom queen, whom he had admired from afar. Now a single parent — her husband, the prom king, having abdicated after three years — she takes one look at Clark and reciprocates his regard, which, Clark finds, has not waned at all over the years.

(In case you were wondering about poor Lois Lane, played by Margot Kidder, she's off to Bermuda on a story, limited to making brief appearances at the beginning and end.)

The second plot, inevitably, has to do with the machinations of a set of villains — a ruthless tycoon (Robert Vaughn) intent on doing all manner of nasty things to the economy of the world with the aid of an incompetent dishwasher-turned-computer-wizard (Richard Pryor).

Not only are these villains pallid and quite unformidable, but the Newmans, after coming up with the promising idea of a woman who respects Superman but is on the verge of falling in love with Clark Kent, don't pursue the idea at all.

Another clever twist that doesn't come off is having Superman develop a nasty side, thanks to that trusty device of Superman lore, Kryptonite radiation.

The Newmans do follow this out, but after a good start — Superman develops five o'clock shadow, his costume becomes seedy looking, he straightens out the Leaning Tower of Pisa on a spiteful whim — it palls and culminates in a boring and drawn-out battle between a good and bad Superman in a junkyard.

The realistic quality of the violence in the junkyard battle, and some aspects of Superman's conduct while under the influence of the Kryptonite rule out younger viewers. The U.S. Catholic Conference has classified it A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

Jamie Lee Curtis a Victim Of Chauvinism, Corporate Greed

By Michael Gallagher

New York (NC) — There's a Victorian era anecdote about a country vicar of stern mien and righteous character who was invited to a gala at the local manor house. The latest Parisian fashions were very much in evidence, it seems, and the lady of the manor, somewhat apprehensive as to how the clergyman might be viewing all this, turned to him with a tremulous laugh and asked, "Vicar, have you ever in your life seen such a sight?"

"No, Madam, I haven't," answered the worthy man. "Not since I was weaned."

I thought of the perspicacious vicar the other night at a screening of "Trading Places" when, about a third of the way through, the female lead, Jamie Lee Curtis, casually bared her torso in front of Daniel Aykroyd and — eventually anyway — millions of moviegoers throughout the Free World. Then about 15 minutes later, she did it again, for the benefit, presumably, of anybody who happened to be at the popcorn stand the first time.

Now, to be fair, Miss Curtis was playing a prostitute, and prostitutes do this sort of thing all the time, I understand. Miss Curtis herself, however, is not a prostitute, and reputable directors, including the most famous, have had no difficulty in effectively conveying what's needed in such an encounter without requiring actual on-screen nudity from their actresses. On the contrary.

What a good director would want to emphasize here would be the reaction of the man, in this case a stuffy young WASP suddenly reduced to wretched circumstances. The focus, therefore, should be upon him and his astounded reaction and not upon Miss Curtis and our not-so-astounded reaction. We should be taken up with its effect upon him, and not, willy-nilly, with an assessment, however objective, of Miss Curtis's attributes.

Questions of morality aside, then, the scene would have been far more effective in terms of the comedy genre to which the movie belongs if the actress's nudity had been suggested rather than shown.

Let's take another movie of an entirely different sort, "Blue Thunder," whose thin, implausible plot is no more than an excuse for some spectacular stunts in the skies above Los Angeles. As a mindless action movie, it's pretty good entertainment. Early on, however, two policemen hover in their helicopter outside an apartment window watching a naked young woman performing some exotic calisthenics.

Again, to be fair, there is a plot link. At that very moment a crime is being committed not far off, and so the two enthralled officers incur official disfavor. As in

"Trading Places," however, the important element is not what's being looked at but its effect upon the looker. And here, too, the director, John Badham — or his editor or producer — chose to give us a lengthy closeup of the woman herself.

In both cases, the U.S. Catholic Conference was obliged to give an O, morally offensive classification. The industry rating, moreover, is R.

In either movie, the simplest sort of editing — editing, moreover, that would have improved both pictures in terms of their respective genres — would have gained an A-II, adolescents and adults, classification and a PG. Instead we have an O and an R.

Granting that hip producers today don't care at all about what kind of classification the U.S. Catholic Conference gives out, why, nonetheless, were they willing to incur an R from the Motion Picture Association of America? An R is supposed to shut out all adolescents under 17 who aren't with a parent or guardian, and a restriction like this would presumably cut into the very audience at whom these two movies are primarily directed.

I think it indicates that the R classification has become largely meaningless in terms of actually keeping any but unescorted toddlers out of movie theaters. Just look around at the audience the next time you see an R-rated film and judge for yourself.

So if producers have good reason to believe that even the youngest of teen-agers won't be held back by an R classification, then why not toss a bit of sexual exploitation into the mix and maybe draw in more kids than you would have otherwise? A cynical bit of calculation that manifests as little regard for basic esthetic consideration as moral ones.

In the meantime, in a day when a woman's awareness of her rights and dignity has supposedly reached stratospheric levels, we have the ironic phenomenon of talented and vibrant actresses being asked to shed their clothes at the male-chauvinistic whim of even the most mediocre of directors or at the command of greedy and cynical producers. A further bit of irony is that Miss Curtis, who made her way up through a series of cheap horror movies, managed to avoid nudity until this, her first big-budget film.

If the Motion Picture Association of America wants the public to maintain even a minimum regard for its classification system, it must do at least one of two things and preferably both: (1) impress upon theater owners the importance of enforcing the restriction embodied in the R classification; (2) do something to check the flood of R-rated movies cynically aimed at younger teen-agers.

BOOKS

Blockbuster 'Cajun' Just Doesn't Work

Cajun, by Elizabeth Nell Dubus. Seaview-Putnam (New York, 1983). 417 pp., \$17.95.

Reviewed by Patricia B. Hoffman
NC News Service

The Cajuns of the title were the French settlers in Nova Scotia expelled by the British in 1755. The entire colony was forced to move away from homes and farms, incurring dreadful hardships in their attempts to find a new land. Many settled in Louisiana, where their original title of "Acadians" was corrupted to "Cajun," a term still proudly used by their descendants.

Mrs. Dubus, a Louisianan, begins her four-generation saga with the expulsion of the Langlinais family from Nova Scotia — Claude, Mathilde and their baby son. This brief section leads into the established family prospering in its new home, Attakapas, not far from New Orleans.

To this remote location come Noel and Helene de Clouet, fleeing from the revolution in France. They are a complete contrast to the happy, hard-working Cajuns: ill-matched in every way, the aristocratic emigres find great difficulty adapting to the rough existence of farming.

The author traces the history of these couples and their descendants through

four generations, down to 1916. Thoughtfully, an elaborate genealogical table is provided, as many of the characters bear the same names.

Along with the family saga, Mrs. Dubus has given us generous helpings of the history of Louisiana, introducing many historical figures, such as Jean Lafitte, the pirate. Unfortunately, the history and the narrative are not well integrated, which makes for somewhat disjointed reading. We do learn, however, a great deal about a period that is relatively unknown and glossed over in American history.

On the human side, every possible action is brought in: duels, suicide, adultery and a great deal of sex. It is the

latter that seems, at least to this reviewer, to be brought in only to hold the reader's interest.

If Mrs. Dubus had stuck to the story of the Cajuns instead of attempting to tell the tale of too many people, her book would have been more successful. Unfortunately, she has opted for a "blockbuster" in which the characters don't come alive to us, and the chunks of history aren't really woven into the narrative.

There's material for half a dozen novels in "Cajun." On the whole, it is not a success, in spite of the author's obvious knowledge of her background.

(Mrs. Hoffman is a freelance writer and critic based in Indiana.)

Capsule Movie Review

"Octopussy" (MGM-UA) Superagent James Bond (Roger Moore) is once again on the trail of an international conspiracy, this time involving an East German circus, a maverick Soviet general, an Asian dealer in counterfeit gems and an Oriental ring of women. Like previous Bond movies, the plot is less important than the tongue-in-cheek treatment of an unflappable fantasy hero surrounded entirely by curvaceous women, cartoon violence, mechanical gimmicks and exotic locales. This venerable formula succeeds only intermittently here, principally in the excellent stunt work atop a speeding train and in an assortment of land, sea and air vehicles. Because of its double entendres and several sexual encounters, the U.S. Catholic Conference has classified it A-III — adults. The MPA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

A Fresh, Delightful Portrayal of Franklin

A Biography of Benjamin Franklin, by Ronald W. Clark. Random House (New York, 1983). 530 pp. \$22.95.

Reviewed by Richard Philbrick
NC News Service

Just as George Washington often appears to be best remembered for cutting down a cherry tree, so Ben Franklin is to many the wise man who said, "A penny saved is a penny earned." That's a pity because, as this biography proves abundantly, Benjamin Franklin is one of the most fascinating characters in this nation's history.

He played with lightning, as every fifth grader knows, and, yes, he was easily charmed by attractive women, but that scarcely begins to characterize him. Franklin, says the author without qualification, was a genius.

By even the most stringent standards he was an outstanding scientist. As a diplomat no American has ever surpassed him. The electricity conductors used today to protect buildings against the ravages of lightning are very much like those Franklin designed. As deputy postmaster-general in North America during colonial days he set up pigeonhole manual sorting techniques to process letters that survived little changed until the U.S. Postal Service introduced multiple position letter sorting machines in the 1950s.

Franklin is an ideal and obvious model for a story of a boy born poor and with no advantages who by striving mightily became a tremendous success. Clark, wisely, subordinates that aspect of the great Founding Father's life to a far more engaging account of how Franklin utilized his extraordinary talents.

The extensive footnotes and comprehensive bibliography lend credence at every turn. With the index they make the

book a good candidate for an academic supplementary reading list.

In almost unbelievable fashion Franklin managed to be at the core of virtually everything of significance that happened to Americans from the unrest preceding the writing of the Declaration of Independence to the adoption of the Constitution. To read of him as he rose from printer's apprentice to elder statesman is to have a magnificent view of a crucial, stirring period of American history.

Clark's skill in portraying Franklin as a leader of the American colonists is what makes this biography a pleasure to read. Whether the philosopher-diplomat-scientist is on the road to suppress attacks by Indians or at a dinner in the villa of a French nobleman the author provides all that is necessary to make the picture not only complete but vivid.

One highly interesting product of the author's zeal to present the pertinent background is that in doing so he touches upon much of the religious complexity of the colonies as they moved to unite.

It is important to remember that the Quakers of Franklin's hometown, Philadelphia, viewed warfare from a far different standpoint than the heirs of the Puritan tradition in his native Boston. And nothing in either heritage prepared him for the Catholicism he encountered as the colonists' representative in France or the Anglicanism he met while a colonial agent in London.

No one should say that having read about Franklin there is no reason to do so again. His life was far too full and complex to be recounted once and for all. This book is a fresh, delightful portrayal of an endlessly captivating character.

(Philbrick is NC's book review coordinator.)

Viewpoint Sisters

By Sister M

Paths Of Peace

To describe peace as daily life, define "peace" as becoming a holiday, working a woody pace, My daily cement ar vinyl tile casual tween. On days, the and "peace" together only.

It is not anything a walks down paths, wa turnpikes, through streams, silences p by the hu cry of a bi gentle voi From the fabricate c especially lead deep accentuat clouds ov moving jointly, ce total beau ple of Go the univers

Peace, i by-prod balance.

wished fo cannot another u be God. "peace" is is a pivota pivot itself it is a juggled b pulls an everyday l in the hea eye of a s calm.

Creatin onself, a stressful h the appro us, it becc challenge. gravitatin challenger help othe thusiasti However, tions even outside a timately, measure c and find a it in the at ever-cha around us

Balance

Adoratio

Adoratio Sacramento starting at July 7 at I Church. R cited at benediction p.m., prec 5:20 p.m. N intention is moral v country."

Dead

Items in tion must l Courier-Jo noon Thu Wednesday Courier-Jo 114 S. Un N.Y. 14607