

CINEMA

Agnes of God

Directed by Norman Jewison; screen-play by John Pielmeier; with Jane Fonda, Anne Bancroft, Meg Tilly.

One of the first scenes in *Agnes of God* shows a small group of nuns parading slowly around their chosen idol. With heads bowed to their rosaries in thoughtless, languid march, overtowered by a dull stone wall, the sisters seem more imprisoned than impassioned with devotion. Like cellmates, they exercise their convictions.

Agnes of God is foremost a battle of convictions, a contest between those prisons known as religion and intellect. While both faith and science try to serve us by putting the world in explainable terms, they also create walls that limit our beliefs. The confines of either set of walls may offer security, or hope, or ethics, but at their most established foundations they are mutually exclusive.

The theme of this film is loosely clothed in a scandalous murder mystery. A young nun (Meg Tilly) unexpectedly gives birth, and the newborn infant is found murdered. It is fairly well assumed that the sister has killed her child, and a psychiatrist is appointed by the court to decide on her sanity. The nun, Agnes, is remarkably innocent in behavior, thought, and appearance, and she sincerely has

no recollection of the birth, the death, or even of the conception. The questions posed by the psychiatrist are simple: Who killed the baby? Who is the father? The answers are very deeply buried.

The doctor (Jane Fonda) is a career-minded ex-Catholic who is earnest in her quest for justice and truth. Her more intense efforts are

well as Catholic devotion. While always protective of her nuns and steadfast in her faith, she readily shows love, anger, wit, despair and fear. I can't imagine a better performance in a role so endangered with stereotype.

As the naive and mysterious sister, Meg Tilly simply shines. She crosses an exceptional range of behavior from inspired ignorance to fearful entrancement to mad disturbance. Agnes is memorable, touched and touching. I think of Agnes now, rather than of Tilly, and that is as fine a compliment as I can give an actress.

John Pielmeier adapted *Agnes of God* from his own stage play. As directed by Norman Jewison, it retains its theatrical essence. Much of the film consists of two or three characters having meaningful conversations in otherwise quiet rooms. It is never distinguished by camera work or action, but is carried by the excellence of the script and the actors' performances. I suspect that the stage version could be more compelling, but the slight trade-off is worth the accessibility of the screen.

How one accepts the story's resolution will depend upon personal beliefs. It may be that dissatisfaction with the outcome may be justification for the dilemma. For thoughtful and engrossing drama, see *Agnes of God*.

—Michael Sussman

REVIEW

barred by the convent's Mother Superior (Anne Bancroft) who is more anxious for Agnes's pious virtues than for any legal findings. This conflict is worsened by the court's insistent prodding for a decision, which is itself provoked by heavy media coverage in the religious environs of Montreal.

Jane Fonda performs with assurance in a part that offers few risks. If anything, her talent works against her here. Fonda's presentation just doesn't allow someone of such star quality to appear as anyone other than herself. I am not demeaning her work in this film, but feel that her excellence is too expected. She deserves a challenge. This was not it.

Bancroft's Mother Superior is a woman of secular emotions as

NOW SHOWING

Agnes of God: A court-appointed psychiatrist (Jane Fonda) investigates whether a young nun (Meg Tilly), charged with murdering her newborn baby, is capable of standing trial. Anne Bancroft plays the mother superior. McDonald (344-4343).

Back to the Future: A boy trips back to the past, and meets the teenagers who'll become his parents. West 11th (342-4142) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Beyond Obsession: Starts this week at Cinema World (342-6536).

Commando: Arnold Schwarzenegger as Chuck Norris as Rambo. Cinema World (342-6536) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Creator: A mad biologist wants to re-create his dead wife. Stars Peter O'Toole and Mariel Hemingway. With *Silverado* at National (344-3431).

Cry From the Mountain: Religious fund-raiser from World Wide Pictures (aka Billy Graham). Leasing this week at Oakway (342-5351).

Desperately Seeking Susan: Rosanna Arquette as a bored Jersey housewife with a Madonna-wanna-be complex. Plays with *Maxie* at Mayflower (345-1022).

E.T.: Steve Spielberg's lovable, mega-money-making alien finds a temporary home in suburban America. With *The Goonies*. Playing at Fine Arts (747-2001).

Ghost Busters: Parapsychologists Bill Murray, Dan Akroyd and Rick Moranis capture ghosts to keep New York City safe. With *Teen Wolf* at Cinema World (342-6536).

Goonies: Adventure. Kids searching for treasure must outwit bandits and bank robbers. Plays with *E.T.* at Fine Arts (747-2201).

Invasion, U.S.A.: Chuck Norris saves America from foreign terrorists. Cinema World (342-6536) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Jagged Edge: Murder mystery, with Glenn Close and Jeff Bridges. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

The Journey of Natty Gann: A girl searches for her father during the Depression. A Disney release. Springfield Quad (726-9073) and West 11th (342-4142).

Maxie: Comedy. Glenn Close plays a straight-faced wife whose body is possessed by the spirit of a 1920's flapper. With Ruth Gordon in her last film role. Plays with *Desperately Seeking Susan*. Mayflower (345-1022).

Pee-wee's Big Adventure: TV nerd Pee-wee Herman stumbles onto the silver screen, where he's out to recover stolen goods. With *Real Genius* at Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Real Genius: A brilliant college prankster gets even with a nasty professor. A mind is a terrible thing to waste. With *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

The Rocky Horror Picture Show: More. Friday and Saturday late show at the Bijou (686-2458).

Silverado: Not out of bullets yet? With *Creator*. National (344-3431).

Teen Wolf: Hair-raising hormones turn Michael J. Fox (*Back to the Future*) from high school wimp to basketball hero. With *Ghost Busters* at Cinema World (342-6536).

Trek: Said to be a travel/adventure film from the land down under. West 11th (342-4142).

Utu: An educated Maori corporal turns against his military company in order to avenge attacks on his tribe. Based on a true incident in colonial New Zealand. Bijou (686-2458).

Cinema 7 Film Festival

Camila: A young Catholic socialite falls in love with a Jesuit priest. Unacceptable behavior in mid-nineteenth century Argentina. More recently, unacceptable politics. Sept. 27 through Oct. 3 at Cinema 7 (687-0733).

Dangerous Moves: An aging Russian chess master defends his title against a young and arrogant defector. Winner of 1985's Academy Award for best foreign film. Oct. 4-10 at Cinema 7 (687-0733).

—Michael Sussman

Showing of Camila to Benefit CHRLA

Cinema 7 will donate the proceeds of this Saturday's matinee showing of *Camila* to the Council for Human Rights in Latin America. *Camila* explores the violent political setting of Argentina in 1847 through the steamy, illicit

love affair between a young priest and the daughter of a prominent colonial governor. Such an affair threatens the corrupt element in both the Roman Catholic Church and the government. Director Maria Luisa Bemberg has taken this true story and created, through *Camila*, a reflection of modern dictatorships in Latin America. The benefit showing is at 4 pm on Saturday, October 5, at Cinema 7 (in the Atrium Building, 99 W. 10th).

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