

Crimes of the Heart

Review by Dianne Weaver

The Magrath sisters are an eccentric trio caught in the backwaters of a small town in Mississippi. *Crimes of the Heart*, directed by Bruce Beresford, is a vignette of the lives of these three Southern women reminiscent of a tragic Tennessee Williams' play. But, unlike Williams' plays, the tragedy is balanced by humor and joy.

The Magrath sisters' reputation is something the whole town gossips about, especially their next door neighbor and cousin, Chick (Tess Harter), but the three sisters, Meg (Jessica Lange), Lenny (Diane Keaton) and Becky or "Babe" (Sissy Spacek) seem far removed from concern about what other people think of them. They are too involved in their own lives, their own drama, to be concerned about what other people think.

Meg is the oldest. She remembers her mother's suicide the most clearly. She remembers her infamous father and secretly blames him for her mother's death. She is seemingly sure of herself and has a way with men, but there is an unspoken burden which weighs heavily on her.

Lenny lives in Meg's shadow. She is jealous of how Meg has always seemed to be the favored sister, more beautiful, more talented, with many boyfriends. The one man she did love, Doc (Sam Shepard), loved Meg. Lenny has

little confidence in herself and has dwelled on her "shrunk ovary" (definitely a Southern cliché) as the reason for her unattractiveness to men. At the beginning of *Crimes of the Heart*, Lenny is seen singing "Happy Birthday" to herself while she lights candles she has put on some cookies. She is a very lonely heart. The greatest joy for Lenny is her garden. She spends long hours in the garden wearing her dead grandmother's straw hat and lime-green gloves.

Becky or "Babe" is the youngest of the three sisters. She has a fertile imagination, is very poetic and loves to tell long detailed stories. She is also the most sensitive, dramatic, and inclined to follow in her mother's footsteps. At the beginning of the movie, she has just shot her husband, a mean, overbearing man. It is this action which brings all three sisters back to their grandfather's house and sets the plot for the rest of the movie.

The three sisters are very complex women. One moment they are little children together, giggling and hugging, reliving memories of childhood. The next moment, they are as crazy as hatters and you wonder, for instance, whether Babe really is off her rocker as she tells the lawyer that she went and fixed a pitcher of lemonade right after she shot her husband. And yet, each of them is a strong,

deeply sensitive and intelligent woman. And their love for one another surpasses all tragedy.

Every once in awhile, I come across a movie in which every scene, every camera shot, every action of the characters fits together to create a rich tapestry of cinematography. *Crimes* is such a movie.

Just little things can contribute to this feeling of harmony of all the elements in a movie. For instance, we get a close-up of Chick which emphasizes how obnoxious she can be as she gives her unasked-for opinion of the Magrath sisters' reputation. Her "big mouth" image is bigger than life.

Another more subtle way of tying the scenes together was used when Babe is reflecting on her mother's suicide and we see and hear the chimes tinkling just above her head, and then when we see a flashback of Babe shooting her husband, we see and hear the chandelier above his head tinkle the same notes. These two scenes are connected in our minds by this planned coincidence.

All of these "little things" add up to a flowing picture where every scene is connected to another and what goes on in the characters' minds is subtly and humorously revealed. *Crimes of the Heart* is a well thought-out gem of tragic-comedy.

now showing

An American Tail: Animated. A young mouse travels to America in the late 1800's, and washes ashore in New York harbor. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Assassination: A tender and witty French romance by... Oh, my mistake. This is something with Charles Bronson in it. West 11th (342-4142) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Wisdom: Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Bedroom Window: To protect his lover's identity, a man claims that he has witnessed a brutal beating. Stars Steve Guttenberg (*Cocoon*), Isabelle Huppert, and Elizabeth McGovern. Cinema World (342-6536).

Brighton Beach Memoirs: A weekend in Neil Simon's wisecracking youth, based on his hit Broadway play. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

The Color Purple: A Southern black woman endures, and finally arises from, a life of agony and struggle. Steven Spielberg sanitized Alice Walker's novel for this film. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Crimes of the Heart: Dramatic comedy. Three sisters reunite and consider their various notorious lives. Stars Oscar winners Diane Keaton, Sissy Spacek, and Jessica Lange. Based on the Pulitzer caliber play. Cinema World (342-6536).

Critical Condition: Comedy. Richard Pryor stars as a patient in a hospital during a power failure. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Crocodile Dundee: A celebrated Aussie adventurer, naive to city ways, spends some time in the Big Apple. Oakway (342-5351).

Dona Herlinda and Her Son: In which Mama arranges both female and male partners for her son. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

The Golden Child: Eddie Murphy is the social worker chosen to find a kidnapped youngster in Katmandu. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Heartbreak Ridge: Mayor Clint Eastwood as a too tough marine. (Reportedly, the USMC has

withdrawn support of this film due to surplus profanity.) Cinema World (342-6536).

Lady and the Tramp: Love, among the dogs is the subject of this Disney re-issue, ready for the latest generation of humans. Cinema World (342-6536).

The Little Shop of Horrors: Rick Moranis (*Ghostbusters*) takes on Steve Martin in this wacky musical comedy about a bloodthirsty flower. National (344-3431).

The Mission: A former slave trader helps a Jesuit priest try to protect South American Indians from Spanish exploitation. Stars Robert DeNiro, McDonald (343-4343).

The Morning After: A woman awakens from an alcohol-induced sleep to find a dead man in her bed. Stars Jane Fonda, Jeff Bridges, and Raul Julia. West 11th (342-4142).

The Mosquito Coast: An eccentric inventor moves his Yankee family to Honduras, seeking a paradise, finding a hell. Stars Harrison Ford. Directed by Peter Weir (*Witness*). Cinema World (342-6536).

She's Gotta Have It: Comedy. A Brooklyn woman takes on three completely different lovers as a way to get all she wants. Bijou (686-2458).

Something Wild: A free-spirited woman seduces a Wall Street v.p. into coming to her high school reunion. Bijou (686-2458).

Star Trek IV: More adventure for Kirk and crew. This episode brings them back to our present to help us do what we alone cannot—survive! West 11th (342-4142).

Three Amigos: Three jobless silent-film actors become unwilling heroes protecting a besieged Mexican village. Stars Steve Martin, Chevy Chase, and Martin Short. West 11th (342-4142).

Top Gun: Tom Cruise trains to be a hot-shot fighter pilot when he's not relaxing with Kelly McGinnis. Fine Arts (747-2201).

Wanted: Dead or Alive: Appears to be a modern version of Steve McQueen's old "bounty hunter" vehicle. This one stars Rutger Hauer (*Blade Runner*). Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Wisdom: A young man finds cause to rob a few banks, and that spells trouble for him and his lover. Stars Demi Moore and Emilio Estevez, who also wrote and directed. Shows with *Assassination*. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

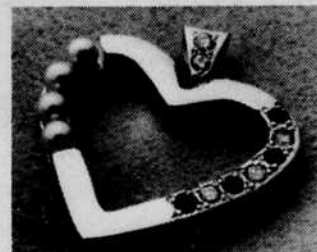
—Michael and the Sussman

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