

Reunion

US TV : 1994 : dir. Lee Grant : RHI / Hart, Thomas & Berlin : 90 min
 prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:
[Charly Simonyl](#)
 Marlo Thomas; Peter Coyote (?)

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Radio Times review:

"This far-fetched drama - which owes more than a little to "GHOST" - stars Marlo Thomas as a mother who is so grief-stricken at the death of one of her young twins that she finds consolation only in the periodic visits of his spirit. That excellent actress Lee Grant directs without undue reliance on tear-jerking melodrama. ** "

"Drama. Tragedy strikes Sam and Jessie Yates when one of their twins dies, but Jessie is comforted by her son's ghostly visits."

[no listing in "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "The Critics' Film Guide" or "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995"]

Not to be confused with the 1989 French/German/British co-production of the same name. As usual with TV movies, the principal cast are given only in the opening titles, and left off the end credits altogether, which is why they are missing here.

Keep a vomit bag to hand, because this is emotional pornography of the first order, as only Americans can do it, an anthem to maternal self-centredness. The Yates family are struggling to raise horses on their paternal grandmother's farm while wife Jessie is an aspiring painter. They have a daughter, Anna, of about 11, and twins Jamie and Megan, 5. Jessie is portrayed as the kind of parent who gushes syrup over the children, over indulges them - buying Megan a \$25 doll even when the family is on the verge of bankruptcy, promising Anna a foal that's about to be born, even after her husband has already agreed a sale on it - yet by the end of the film she is calmly resolved to murder Megan and herself in order to seal the "reunion" of the title.

It's intended to be a story about, as present jargon has it, "closure" - coming to terms emotionally with a tragedy in the family. Little Jamie is the apple of mommy's eye, and after one or two false alarms (running out into traffic, attempting to "fly" from the heights of the family barn) he is finally "gathered" when Jessie allows him to take a toy horse into bed during a violent thunderstorm, and he's discovered next morning throttled by the horse's pull-chord. However the film, and Jessie herself, are entirely preoccupied with the mother's grief and sense of guilt over the boy's death. Husband Sam has also lost a son, Anna and Megan a brother, but their own grief and guilt are barely touched upon here. Jamie was his mother's possession, and his loss is her *private* loss - the film agrees with her on this.

Scarcely surprising then, that the dead Jamie chooses only to materialise to mommy, and no-one else - husband, mother-in-law, local priest - will give her story any credence. Jamie's spirit begs her to go with him, and ultimately his pleas become so frantic that she decides on

suicide. He also tells her how much he misses his twin sister, so mommy decides that Megan too should join him prematurely in the after-life. But hey, there are ninety minutes to be filled here, so the writer has grafted on a secondary and quite contradictory theme about little Jamie's ghost attempting to engineer the deaths of his mother and sister, the maiming of his father, by various "accidents". At one and the same time we're asked to believe he is a projection of his mother's profound sense of loss, and a baleful spirit seeking companionship beyond the veil, by fair means or foul.

These crossed wires throw up such illogicalities as the portrait in the attic. Jessie is at best a talented amateur, but an art critic tells her (shortly before the death) that Jamie shows genuine flair. So when his ghost visits her by night they work together on the best paintings she's ever done, and he even completes a marvellous self-portrait for her (not bad for a five-year old). Yet husband Sam, who stubbornly refuses to see any ghost, is still able to marvel at the completed self-portrait of Jamie. He can still be trapped in some farm machinery when Jamie's ghost-foot, not his mother's, accidentally throws a lever to start the machinery. In other words, this phantom projection of his wife's grief nearly rips his arm off.

It was made for American TV, so you won't need to be told that it all ends in hugs and kisses round the Christmas tree, and final acceptance of the son's death. Or that the family's crippling financial problems evaporate by the end without a word of explanation. Or that husband forgives wife for attempting to take his daughter from him also. The syrup remains on tap.

Emotional pornography is a term of my own coining, but it describes aptly this wallowing in sentiment which often approaches hysteria pitch – witness the scenes attendant on the funeral of princess Diana, or the insatiable appetite for over-wrought domestic soaps on TV, children's hospital dramas, and the tabloid preoccupation with "human interest" stories that wring every last drop of emotional excess from private tragedy. There can be little argument that the appetite it feeds is overwhelmingly a female one – women themselves insist that they are the more "emotional" gender – and that it is pornographic speaks pretty well for itself.

The identities of the three children are unknown, but Charly Simonyl has a momentary appearance as Anna at age 6. Only the girl who plays the older Anna emerges from this wallow with any dignity. The child cast as Jamie is simply too young to carry his dialogue with any persuasion, and in any case it is largely of the "come with me mommie" sort – resolutely infantile dialogue to complement the parental gurgling which evidently passes for conversation with small children in some American homes. A sad and faintly creepy film, but in none of the ways it intends.

See subject index under **CHRISTMAS / THANKSGIVING, DEATH / DYING CHILDREN, FARMS & FARMING, GHOSTS & HAUNTINGS, GRANDPARENTS** and **TWINS**.