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Film Reviews, by Jno.

## WOMAN POSSESSED

LIZZIE

(Bryna Productions-M.G.M.)

R: 16 and over only.

"ELIZABETH, Beth, Betsy, and Bess, they all went together to find a bird's nest..." Most of us, I suppose, remember the old riddle, and its answer: How they found a nest with four eggs in it and each took one, and there were three left because, of course, Elizabeth and Co. were all one and the same person.

That is the theme which Shirley Jackson began with when she wrote *The Bird's Nest*—the novel from which *Lizzie* is adapted—and the impact of the story derives in part at least from the shocking contrast between the innocence of the childish conundrum and the horrific variations which the author composed on it. For this is the story of a multiple schizophrenic, Elizabeth Richmond, under whose timid and somewhat gauche exterior lie, like the skins of an onion, three other divergent and conflicting personalities. At least, Shirley Jackson gave her three others, to match the nursery riddle. The screenplay—possibly out of consideration for Eleanor Parker, who has the principal role (or roles)—contents itself with two alter egos, Lizzie and Beth.

Perhaps I should admit right now, before the more muscular experts start heaving halfbricks at my receding hairline, that I am aware I have used terms loosely. Elizabeth might better be called a disintegrated personality and, whatever she is, I suppose Lizzie is no ego, alter or otherwise. In fact, it would be

a good deal easier to discuss the case of Elizabeth in terms older than those of psychology. You could call her a woman possessed, and the film a study of exorcism. Lizzie, an amoral baggage addicted to going on the bash nights, and reducing Elizabeth to an aching bundle of nerves the morning after, is a demon who can be called up only when her mortal tenement is under deep hypnosis. Beth, the balanced personality Elizabeth might be, lies closer to the surface, but appears to be losing ground to Lizzie. Lizzie, when she can get



ELEANOR PARKER  
*Sisters under the skin*

## BAROMETER

FAIR: "Doctor at Large."  
MAINLY FAIR: "Lizzie."  
DULL: "Lazy Lena."

"out," writes poison-pen letters to Elizabeth and these drive Elizabeth closer to breaking-point.

It is, in fact, all horribly complicated—and I can't say that I found the film convincing, or the novel either (in spite of Shirley Jackson's power in narrative and characterisation). Dissociated fragments of personality—and I have an expert's word for it—don't pop in and out like so many jack-in-the-boxes, however useful it would be for film-makers or novelists to have it so. (Incidentally, the same authority regarded Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* as the best film study of schizophrenia he had seen.)

Lizzie, in fact, is not the most successful film of the week, though it tries the hardest. Miss Parker copes well with the haunted Elizabeth, and is her own pleasant self as Beth; but she does not really get inside Lizzie, and I can hardly blame her. Richard Boone plays the psychologist and the director is Hugo Haas (who also gave himself the part of Elizabeth's elderly next-door neighbour). As you may have gathered, I was at least not bored. But I wouldn't recommend it to Aunt Daisy. She'd call it stark.

## DOCTOR AT LARGE

(Rank-Betty Box)

G Cert.

[F *Lizzie* overreached itself and fell short of the mark, *Doctor at Large*, coasting cheerfully along in the wake of *Doctor in the House* and *Doctor at Sea* and not aiming higher than the average capping show (well, not much higher), achieves all that it could reasonably be expected to do. It keeps one laughing. I should confess that I saw neither of the two earlier instalments of this saga, both of which turned up when I was off duty, though I don't think that had anything to do with my enjoyment of the latest one. I had dipped into all three, as they appeared in print, and should, I suppose, have been slightly inclined to boredom at this stage. But I wasn't. James Robertson Justice roars delightfully, Donald Sinden is a good deal more happy here than he was hunting tigers a fortnight ago, and Dirk Bogarde is, I suppose, the incarnation of every pony-tailed popsy's romantic dreams. (Speaking personally, I wish his suits weren't cut so sharp.) And the best of the book (including the hilarious interlude with little Eva and the stethoscope) appears to have been preserved. But it seems a howling injustice that doctors should get so much more fun out of life than the rest of us.

## LAZY LENA

(Monark Films)

G Cert.

[I HAVE no reason to doubt that *Lazy Lena* could be uproariously funny to a Swede, but I reach that conclusion widdershins, as it were. It's billed as a comedy, there is an unconscionable amount of Swedish dialogue in it, and I didn't find it funny. Perhaps that is being too harsh. There were odd moments when there was a little simple clowning, enough to crack a faint smile—though one of the best of these was a parody on Rostand. But, to be quite blunt, this kind of comedy (where at least 75 per cent of the fun resides in the dialogue) is not suitable for export with sub-titles only. Well-dubbed dialogue should be a minimum requirement.

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