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ATTO DI DOLORE

(ACT OF PAIN)

(ITALIAN)

Variety 9/17/90

An Istituto Luce-RAI-Rete 2 production. Directed by Pasquale Squitieri. Screenplay, Squitieri, Sergio Bianchi, Nanni Balestrini; camera (color), Romano Albani; editor, Florenza Muller; music, Rossini; production design, Massimo Carubelli; production manager, Bruno Cardinale. Reviewed at Montreal World Film Festival (competing), Aug. 30, 1990. Running time: 110 MIN.
Elena Basile Claudia Cardinale
Sandro Karl Zinny
Martina Giulia Boschi
Also with: Bruno Cremer.

Pasquale Squitieri, whose last outing was Tri-Star's little-seen international thriller "Rus-sicum," bounces back with this contemporary drama about a mother whose teenage son becomes a heroin addict. Unfortunately, a strong subject is defeated by the director's tendency towards overkill and melodrama.

Claudia Cardinale gives a sterling performance as Elena, a widow who sells old wares in a street market and lives with daughter Martina and son Bruno. One night she awakens to find Bruno in agony undergoing drug withdrawal. She had been unaware he was an addict.

Soon, Bruno is sending his mother out to the local bar to buy him a fix. He keeps promising to kick the habit, but never does, and gets involved with robbery and violence. He disappears for a long period, and is found in a coma.

Treatment in a rural commune doesn't help, and he returns to the city (Milan) to terrorize his mother, stealing her money and jewelry and frequently beating her. She finally takes violent action to rid herself of her terrifying offspring.

No doubting Squitieri and his writing team set out to make a grim picture of the drug scene, the inability of the police and social workers to deal with junkies and the degrading effects of the habit. It's all been done before, however, in films from different countries, and usually with more thoughtful treatment than it gets here.

The Rossini choral music over the most dramatic scenes — especially the hysterical, almost comic climax — adds nothing to the drama. But there are creditable performances from the players. Cardinale enters into her role with relish in the sort of part that wins awards, but she has actually done better work in less showy circumstances.

Theatrical chances outside Italy appear to be limited for this basically familiar material.

— *Strat.*