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Author(s)	Judith Crist
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Fellini's 'Juliet'

—One of the Most Beautiful Ever

"JULIET OF THE SPIRITS"

RKO 58TH, RKO 23D CINEMA AND
NEW EMBASSY THEATERS

A screenplay by Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano and Brunello Rondi; directed by Mr. Fellini, presented in Technicolor by Angelo Rizzoli. Running time: Two hours and 28 minutes. With the following cast:

Juliet.....Giulietta Masina
Giorgio.....Mario Pisu
The Mother.....Caterina Boratto
Adele.....Luisa Della Noce
Silva.....Silva Koscina
The Grandfather.....Lou Gilbert
Valentina.....Valentina Cortese
Dolores.....Silvana Jachino
Friend of the husband.....Jose de Villalonga
Iris.....Sandra Milo
Bhishma.....Waleska Gert
The Headmaster.....Friedrich Ledebur

By Judith Crist

Federico Fellini's "Juliet of the Spirits" is a masterwork, certainly one of the most beautiful and stimulating films ever made.

It is far more than, as advance rumor had it, a "woman's" version of "8½" in Technicolor; as its predecessor did not in all its intellectual brilliance, it has a humanity and a compassion that edge this later film toward perfection. Again we have the Fellini faces, stark and haunting and lovely; the Fellini fantasies of memory, of perception, of desire and of despair; the cool Fellini view of the surface society that surrounds us, a society glimpsed in its sudden grotesqueries, harsh realities and mundane artifices. But at the core—and we return to the pre-"8½" Fellini—there is a heart as well as a mind, a soul as well as an intellect.

The core is as much the creation of Giulietta Masina as of Fellini. It is the portrait of a woman who has sought refuge in marriage, in dependence on her husband's love as a safeguard from the bedevillments that go with individualism. Simple, naive, this plain-jane luxuriates in domesticity as an escape from the saints and sinners of her childhood, from the sleek critical contempt of an exquisite mother and beautiful and sophisticated sisters, from the superficial diversions and fadderies of her friends.

But shadows filter through the sunshine life with suspicions of her husband's infidelity. Seances and phony gurus fail to banish the blight; she is beset by good and evil spirits, by yearnings suppressed, and fears expressed. When finally she cannot escape the reality of her husband's interest in another woman—harshly and heart-breakingly brought to her with the venal and efficient urbanity of our time—she is forced into self-knowledge. With the independence that signals maturity, Juliet banishes the spirits that have haunted her.

Miss Masina's Juliet is a grown-up but one with all the traces of the wail, the wide-eyed child, the gay sprite misplaced in the modern world, still apparent despite the stylish hairdo and the haute couture. She is a girl-woman, the soft rounded chin still somehow raised in defiance of fate, the smile still vulnerable, the glance naive; but slowly and surely the woman comes to the fore. The fantasies, the visions and the reality have left a mark.

There is a coherence to the seeming drift of Fellini's world—one that seems to move in and out of the grotesque, back and forth from the poetic that is tinged with the comic to the prosaic that is invariably chic. None of the fantasies is without its perceptive human revelation, none of the realities devoid of an acid social comment.

Fellini's wry view of delusion is demonstrated early on as Juliet, half-dozing on the beach, watches an exotic caravan cross the sands, only to see it plainly at the end as a group of neighbors settling down in the sun.

The imagery and colors are afire with the exotic and erotic and with every-day touchstones. There is the dominating memory of the grandfather who quixotically stopped the school play just as Juliet was heading for the stake and who less quixotically than aeronautically flew off with a circus bareback rider; the convent nuns paraded in inquisitorial style; the man-woman guru babbles about living to the full—and Suzy, the kindly neighbor who is lovely and languorous and all that is sexual, sunbathes in her tree house and offers a sympathetic ear, the diversions of an orgy, even her handsome young godson as a lover.

There is the husband's business associate from Spain to offer admiration of the perfect domestic calm of her household, tiny nieces to urge on the fairy tales, an elder sister to see that her husband's sins are documented, a husband to offer his bland lies. And against the realities are the writhing bodies, the surrealist memories, the self of childhood bound to the stake of superstition and terror.

All of these are presented in a never-ending swirl of mood and imagery, a blend of brilliant delineations of time and place in exquisite hues with every nuance clarified by Nino Rota's melodic and haunting score. This is an exploration of a woman's past and present in terms of feeling and imagination that transcend the merely psycho-analytical or purely intellectual.

Beyond Miss Masina, there is the grandfather of Lou Gilbert, a caricature of fond memory; the utterness in sensuality, warmth and Harlow-like good humor of Sandra Milo as Suzy; the rooster-like cackle-and-scratch of Valentina Cortese as a seance-minded friend, the vulgar frankness of Silvana Jachino as a sculptress, the exquisite maternal mask of Caterina Boratto as the mother—and watch the mask crumple once that devil is exorcised.

Thus "Juliet of the Spirits," so much of our time, so much of all women—a masterwork whose beauty belittles adjectives.

