

Desecration's imagery is the stuff of nightmares: faceless nuns and hellish clowns, freakish vines creeping up bedroom walls and twining suggestively around a teenaged boy's leg.



★ **Country**

Richard Pearce, USA, 1984; Kino Lorber

IN RESPONSE to the agriculture crisis under Reagan (due to soaring debt and dwindling land values), a healthy crop of films about American heartlanders facing very real fears about their economic livelihoods emerged in the mid-'80s, from *Places in the Heart* and *The River* to Louis Malle's marvelous documentary *God's Country*. The best fictional entry in this mini-subgenre was Richard Pearce's *Country* (which opened the 1984 New York Film Festival). Jessica Lange is effortlessly earthy as Jewell Ivy, just as nimble balancing a child on one hip and flipping pancakes as she is operating farm equipment, while struggling to keep her family together (including husband Sam Shepard) as she takes on the draconian federal assistance agency that is cruelly forcing them into bankruptcy and a humiliating property auction. It's the kind of political, adult-oriented studio production (the second from Disney's Touchstone Films) we're unlikely to see again anytime soon.

—MICHAEL KORESKY



★ **Desecration**

Dante Tomaselli, USA, 1999; Code Red

DANTE TOMASELLI'S EERIE, painterly first feature, a fever dream of guilt and piety, revolves around 16-year-old Bobby, who accidentally kills a nun with a radio-controlled airplane and somehow opens a gate to hell. The film's imagery is the stuff of nightmares: faceless nuns and hellish clowns, freakish vines creeping up bedroom walls and twining suggestively around a teenage boy's leg. That New Jersey-bred writer-director Tomaselli's inspirations include Maya Deren makes complete sense: *Desecration* is a low-budget masterpiece of dream logic. It is also a horror film predicated on a deeply Catholic fear of religious authority, exemplified by black-clad clergy, the bodies beneath unimaginable and sanctified by their fealty to a higher authority. Tomaselli scored a casting coup in theater actress Irma St. Paule, who plays Bobby's devout grandmother—the formidable front line in the war against the ever-watchful Devil.

—MAITLAND McDONAGH

20 DISCS

TO WATCH

● ★ **Andrei Rublev**

Andrei Tarkovsky, Soviet Union, 1966; The Criterion Collection

★ ★ **Beast** Michael Pearce, UK, 2017; Lionsgate

★ ★ **Cold Water** Olivier Assayas, France, 1994; The Criterion Collection

★ **The Complete Films of Joaquim Pedro de Andrade** 6 features & 8 shorts, Brazil, 1959-82; Kino Lorber

★ **Distant Voices, Still Lives** Terence Davies, UK/West Germany, 1988; Arrow Academy

★ ★ **Eight Hours Don't Make a Day** Rainer Werner Fassbinder, West Germany, 1972-73; The Criterion Collection

★ **Gloria** John Cassavetes, USA, 1980; Twilight Time

★ ★ **Hereditary** Ari Aster, USA, 2018; Lionsgate

★ ★ **Leonor** Juan Luis Buñuel, Spain/France/Italy, 1975; Scorpion Releasing

★ **The Man Who Cheated Himself** Felix E. Feist, USA, 1950; Flicker Alley

● ★ **My Man Godfrey** Gregory La Cava, USA, 1936; The Criterion Collection

★ **The Revolt of Mamie Stover** Raoul Walsh, USA, 1956; Twilight Time

★ **Some of My Best Friends**