

FILM REVIEWS

to continue to an open-ended manner. It also marks the return of the director's essentially apocalyptic vision (in *Film Comment*, Cronenberg remarked that he didn't want to see an apocalypse in his lifetime — yet *Shivers*, *Rabid* and *Scanners* all move in that direction.)

For many years, a small group has been touting Cronenberg as Canada's finest, most visionary director. Partially, this is in reaction to maudlin, much-loved memoirs like *Lies My Father Told Me* and

Who Has Seen The Wind, and partially, it was because anyone that the upholders of good taste and high culture (e.g. Robert Fulford, Clyde Gilmour) reacted against so strongly could not be all bad. But with the release of *Scanners*, there is no need for defensiveness. Cronenberg is our greatest director, and *Scanners* should be the first in a long line of commercial and artistic masterpieces.

John G. Harkness

Bob Clark's Tribute

Tribute is the story of an irrepressible life-of-the-party who refuses to confront the grim horror of cancer for fear that he will exit this life with not a belly laugh but a whimper. It is also, sadly, a film that for the most part refuses to take itself seriously, given the gravity of its topic.

The death-of-a-clown concept is pregnant with dramatic possibility, but screenwriter Bernard Slade (*Same Time Next Year*), and TV's *The Partridge Family*, has little mind for the untidy aspects of cancer. A joke for him is like a drink for an alcoholic: he does not know how to joke moderately, and so goes on long gratuitous gag-jags that wreak havoc with the film.

Jack Lemmon is a New York PR man with an endless supply of jokes and friends. Three minutes into the film he is told — sledge hammer to the temple — that he has cancer. His son (Robby Benson), an earnest, bespectacled sort, visits him for the summer. Their conflicting worldviews, along with the question of mortality, become, ostensibly, the meat of the film.

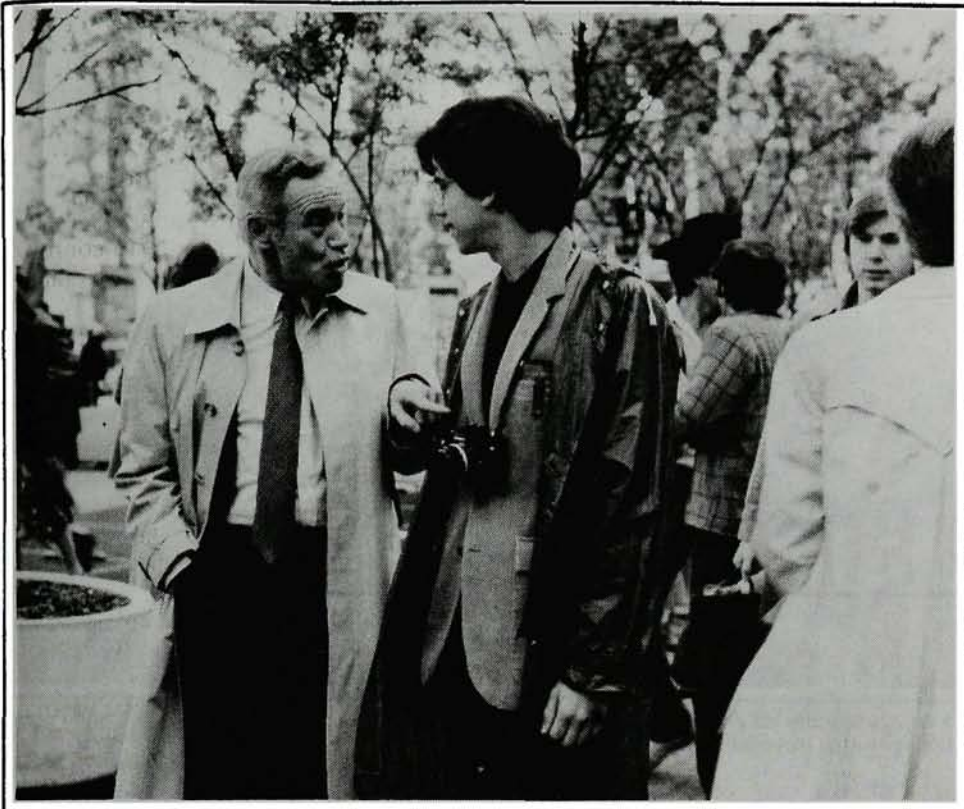
But then the magic lure of 'comedy' presents itself. And Slade, seemingly, has no will power. Vaudeville schtikks abound. Every ringing doorbell becomes an opportunity for Lemmon to drop his pants, cross his eyes, and go into yet another daffy bit. If it is Slade's fault that the film is loaded down with so much sitcom material, it is to director Bob Clark's (*Murder By Decree*) discredit that Slade, and star Lemmon are allowed to indulge themselves in such shameful burlesque.

At times it is difficult to figure out where the schtikks stop and the film begins. Sandwiched between one scene, where Lemmon throws a testimonial party for a down-on-her-luck hooker (Gail Garnett), and another where Lemmon jumps out of a door as a fertile yellow chicken, there is the scene where young Benson meets up with his love interest, Kim Cattrall (a vacuous model type who could not act her way out of a fashion supplement). Benson and Cattrall are sharing a pastami and some laughs, on what appears to be a nice summer's afternoon, when out of nowhere the skies open, rain falls, and they are forced inside for a romantic fireside picnic — just like in the movies. *Tribute* lurches forward in similar stock



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Scottie (Jack Lemmon) pokes fun at Jud (Robby Benson) as the two struggle to understand one another

scenes, as if the film's makers learned how to make a drama not by observing life, but by watching TV.

We know early on in the film that this is not going to be an unflinching tragedy in the Eugene O'Neill style, but rather, "a deft blend of laughter and tears" Neil Simon carbon. When Lemmon is told, behind closed doors, that he has cancer, we cannot hear his response. At the time, the scene appears to be a nice touch, a suggestion that there is no adequate response to death. But later, when Lemmon's treatment for cancer is depicted in a montage of still photographs, a more likely explanation becomes apparent. Neither Slade nor Clark want any part of the true horror they are dealing with. Cancer is in the film merely to gain our sympathy, not our attention.

Slade has provided enough good one-liners to stock a dozen sitcom episodes; and the film's finale, a testimonial to Lemmon, with Benson and ex-wife Lee Remick (the film's best performance) in attendance, is effective melodrama. But good, lightweight entertainment should be breezy, and Lemmon tackles his every scene like a long-out-of-work actor, pulling all his tricks in his one big scene. There is no pace to his performance. His miscal-

culated energy unbalances the film and makes it an often enervating chore to watch.

Lemmon's manic work in *Tribute* comes as a surprise. In the '70s, in films like *Save The Tiger* and *The China Syndrome*, Lemmon portrayed the Sick-Soul-of-the-Establishment — the good man fallen victim to the unscrupulousness of the times. His role as Scottie Templeton here marks a return to the Clown-in-the-Grey-Flannel-Suit roles he perfected in the late '50s and early '60s (*Some Like It Hot*, *The Apartment*). But whereas Lemmon invested those roles with a beguiling comic energy, his performance here is at times almost senile in its lack of control. Only the fact that we know he is dying keeps the film from flying apart during the early sequences when Lemmon's performance veers most dangerously out of control.

As to whether or not *Tribute* "addresses the Canadian experience" — or some such CFDC homily — the film is no more Canadian than Herbert Ross's next popcorn muncher. The film's establishing shots are New York, the beer is Bud, and the principal actors are all American. I am sure that producer Garth Drabinsky, screenwriter Slade, and director Clark — all Canadians — never intended to make

anything other than a Hollywood film in Canada. They have succeeded. Good for them; it's a big club. My only hope is that the next time they paint Toronto up to be New York, they seal all the holes. There is, in *Tribute*, one reference to Canada (a mistake I hope), where Benson complains to his father about a hooker the ol' man set him up with: "And when I got back to Canada I found out I had the clap." So Canada is rendered in the eyes of the world as an exotic venereal disease clinic.

Stephen Cole

Tribute

d. Bob Clark p. Joel B. Michaels, Garth H. Drabinsky sc. Bernard Slade exec. p. The Turman-Foster Co. & Richard S. Bright assoc. p. Hannah Hempstead d.o.p. Reginald H. Morris, csc p. design Trevor Williams ed. by Richard Halsey, ace mus. Ken Wannberg based on stage play by Bernard Slade p. man. Gerry Arbeid p. co-ord./asst. p. man. Suzanne Lore editors Ian McBride, Stan Cole asst. ed. Richard Cadger asst. to p. Margaret Livingston, Christine Pittel a.d. Ken Goch (1st), Don Brough (2nd), Alan Goluboff (3rd) art d. Reuben Freed, Charles Dunlop (asst.) superv. set dec. Roni Johnson prop mas. Charles Dunlop, Dennis Kirkham (asst.) cost. design. Suzanne Grace leadman Robert James asst. set dec. Stan Conley cam. op. Matt Tundo asst. cam. Gordon Langevin (1st), Stewart Miller (2nd) key grip Ron Gillham gaf. Chris Holmes boom Stephen Switzer best boys Glen Goodchild, Tony Eldrige grip Wayne Goodchild elec. John Spurrell, Brian Woodruff sd. ed. Patrick Drummond, Kenneth Healey-Ray, Wayne Griffin asst. sd. ed. Kelly Hall, Brenda Ashbee sd. mix David Lee, cf. ss re-rec. Joe Grimaldi, Austin Grimaldi, Dino Pigat orchestrations Gordon Langford mus. superv. by Len Engel make-up Ken Brooke hair James Brown ward Larry Wells (master), Mary McLeod (asst.) Debra Starr (asst.) sc. superv. Sandra Ulosevich-Marley cast. Clare Walker (Canada), B.C.I. Casting (N.Y.) extra cast. Weist-Barron (Can.), Michael Kara Casting (N.Y.) unit pub. Lynda Friendly gen. op. Cliff West PanaGlide op. Graig E. Di Bona transp. co-ord. Don Retzer stills Curt Kaufman p.a. Rick Watts, David Daniels researcher Peter Cresswell p. compt. Heather McIntosh p. acct. Lisa King, Lorraine Valentine asst. acct. Lyn Lucibello scenic artist Geunter Bartlik head painter Willi Holst, Fred Geringer (asst.) p. sec. Francie Green-spoon craft service Brad Blackwood construc. superv. William Collett head carp. Alfred Sutton, Weits Jekel (2nd) carp. Bill Privett, Stanley Young p. laborers James Duffy, Bert King drivers Gary Flannagan, Jim Kennedy, Bill Jackson, John Oliphant, Fred Ionson, Joe Muscat l.p. Jack Lemmon, Robby Benson, Lee Remick, Colleen Dewhurst, John Marley, Kim Cattrall, Gale Garnett, Teri Keane, Rummy Bishop, John Dee, Bob Windsor, Eileen Lehman, Andrew Foot, Trevor Daley, Sid Smith, Jennifer Goldie, Bill McMann, Gaylyn Britton, Peter Peers, Ron Marino, Tony Powers, Bob Scarrantino, Michael Monet p.c. Kudos Film Productions (1980) col. 35mm running time 125 min. dist. Pan-Canadian Film Distributors