

# FILM REVIEWS

45 + 28 = 1260 + .02 = 25.20

## Daryl Duke's THE SILENT PARTNER

d. Daryl Duke, sc. Curtis Lee Hanson, ph. Billy Williams, bsc, ed. George Appleby, cfe, sd. David Lee, m. Oscar Peterson, l.p. Elliott Gould, Christopher Plummer, Susannah York, Céline Lomez, John Candy, exec. p. Garth H. Drabinsky, p. Joel B. Michaels, Stephen Young, p.c. Silent Partner Film Production Ltd (1977), col. 35mm, running time 102 minutes.



Christopher Plummer as Santa, director Daryl Duke and Elliot Gould

Sometimes the film world plays nasty, and sometimes pleasureable tricks on those of us who by necessity or inclination write about it. A reviewer may find himself at loose ends one evening and walk into a movie house to see a film he has had no advance information on and be pleasantly surprised to discover a delightful gem all by himself. At other times, one can look forward to a new film, savoring the glowing accounts of its virtues by respected colleagues and come away reeling with the disappointment of shattered expectations.

The latter example is unfortunately the case with **The Silent Partner**, which despite a successful box office and the accolade of receiving six Etrogs, was unsatisfactory and disappointing.

The story involves a bank heist which is turned around when the would-be victim, Miles Cullen played by Elliott Gould, becomes aware of the impending robbery and on impulse prepares to turn it to his own advantage. Gould gives a credible performance as the milque-toastish bank teller who seizes the once in a lifetime opportunity to break out from the set pattern of his narrowly defined world of cheque cashing and goldfish feeding. However, Gould is forced to work with a script that gives him nothing to say or do beyond "B" movie clichés, though he is not the only victim. Christopher Plummer, as the psy-

chopathic bank robber, Harry Reikle, is forced to bear his own burden of hammed phrases that are supposed to suggest malevolence, but result only in making the character seem mealy-mouthed.

The story line comes from a suspense novel **Think of A Number** by Anders Bodelson which screenwriter Curtis Hanson optioned, reworked into a screenplay, and showed to producers Stephen Young and Joel Michaels, who in turn brought it to executive producer Garth Drabinsky.

The idea of a man confronted with a crisis point in his life, who opts for a radical departure from the norm, could have resulted in an intriguing character study which, in the context of **The Silent Partner**, should have grown into an intricate cat and mouse game between Cullen, who discovers unsuspected resources in himself and the psychopathic Reikle, who seeks revenge for being stymied in his plans. This is the point at which Hanson and director Daryl Duke have let us down, by turning the material into simple melodrama with its hollow dialogue and its failure to provide proper motivation for the characters, as they move through the film.

All this is more than somewhat surprising since Duke's previous directorial efforts, most notably the film **Payday**,

have dealt quite sensitively with characters who undergo personal crises. But the script for **The Silent Partner** defeats him, and he seems unable to conjure up a real tension between Plummer and Gould which would have lifted the material into art. Instead Cullen is forced to muddle along, reacting without conviction to Reikle's scheming in a moral vacuum where no one bothers to reflect on what they are doing.

In fact, the film descends into a mean spiritedness when the hero's (rather, protagonist's) bumbblings lead to an ending that affirms the grubbiness of everyone concerned. The bank teller is in no way better than the murderer, and the sympathies that have been forced from us throughout the film all cry false. Even the love interest is not sustained and leaves a bad taste in the mouth.

The delightful Céline Lomez who more than anyone injects some vitality into the film is summarily dispatched, with nary a tear shed by Miles, who, one thought, had formed a strong attachment to her. No regrets, only expedience governs the film and Plummer's character no longer seems as macabre when we compare him to Miles whose reactions and new found strengths seem to exist outside of morality.

And can we ever forgive the director for the cheap and gratuitous way in which he dispatched the lovely Ms.

Lomez in one of the film's lower moments? This scene, with its distinct lack of subtlety, pretends to terror, but ends by being merely an inferior substitute — gross excess.

Susannah York is largely wasted as a bank manager's mistress who is attracted to Miles as he becomes increasingly obsessed with outwitting the killer who torments him. The inadequacies of the script prevent York from being a fleshed-out character, as it does the other principal actors, and we are never sure what she wants from the relationship with Miles. The ending, where Miles has finally outwitted the robber and escaped from the bank, is unsatisfying because in this world devoid of ethics and morality, we doubt the bond that exists between the characters played by York and Gould. Are we witness to the triumph of love over adversity or the beginning of another con?

Minor characters such as those played by Gail Dahms and John Candy are wasted in superfluous roles because again the writer has not been inspired to create the density of background detail, though to say, "Look there's Canada in needs.

One other false note, or rather an observation, that is disturbing about the film (although *The Silent Partner* has had successful runs all across Canada) is that Canadian films are becoming distressingly militant in their Canadianism.

In *The Silent Partner*, we are told in no uncertain terms that we are watching a Canadian film (in fact, a Toronto film) by means of lingering pans over one downtown shopping mall recognizable to Torontonians as well as by the odd way in which the CN Tower appears in the background of so many shots as though to say "Look there's Canada in the background!" Such trifling with the audience's interest (the voyeuristic tendency to say, "Hey, I stood in that same spot where Elliott Gould is walking") has a way of backfiring because, while recognizing the Eaton Centre and the "First Bank of Toronto" may elicit a murmur of approval from Toronto audiences, it'll leave the boys and girls in Moose Jaw or Montreal pretty cold.

Most American films that rely on a sense of place have the grace to do a

quick pan of (say) the New York skyline during the opening credits and then forget about the locale for the rest of the film unless it plays an important part in the development of the plot. *The Silent Partner* doesn't need the allusions to Toronto because Toronto is meaningless to the story. Thus to see Canada written in such a way all over the film strikes one as cheap and naive and ultimately pointless outside the immediate community.

*The Silent Partner* is a forgettable film that delivers much less than its potential given the people involved in its making. What is irritating is that somewhere along the line, too many wrong decisions were allowed to creep into a production that could have been a Grade A thriller in the Hitchcockian vein. This irritates because one can see dimly that inside this turkey of a film, there are the bones of a damn good story.

Günter Ott



Talk about conspicuous consumption! A victim of the Bronswik TV

## SHORT FILM REVIEWS

# L'AFFAIRE BRONSWIK

d. Robert Awad, André Leduc, sc. Awad, Leduc, animation Awad, Leduc, and Jean-Michel Labrousse, ph. Richard Moras, Jacques Avoine, Raymond Dumas, Simon Leblanc, electronic sd. Alain Clavier, ed. Awad, mixing. Michel Descombes assisted by Adrian Croll, sd. ed and music. Gilles Quintal assisted by Rita N. Roy, music advisor. Karl du Plessis, Don Douglas, narrator. Michel Mongeau, voices. Jacques Beaulieu, Claire Bourbonnais, p. René Jodin, p.c. National Film Board of Canada, 1976, col. 16mm, running time. 23 min, 24 sec. dist. NFB.

45415 = 675 x .02 = 13.50

Talk about subliminal seduction. It almost seems inevitable that when a man without a car buys dozens of tires, when a woman who detests dogs stocks up on cases of dog food, or when countless other such tales of excessive consumerism come to light — well, these days, sophisticated suspicion would probably lead us straight to out television sets. Alas, we were not so wise in 1964. Not, at least, according to writer/directors Robert Awad and André Leduc, whose delightfully tongue-in-cheek "docu-drama" traces the development of the Bronswik Affair from its roots to its culmination, leaving no stone unturned and brilliantly parodying the documentary genre as it goes.

The premise that multinational corporations would conspire to short-circuit the consumer's ability to resist