

ing kind of romantic love, Violette tried to live her life as fully as she could. Obedient (if often sullen) when at home, she was outrageously audacious when out on her own. In her dealings with men, was she playfully teasing or sexually serious? Did she want to make money by selling her body or did she simply accept it when it was assumed to be required? Did she actually have syphilis (as the historical facts suggest that she did) or (in the film) was this just the kind of thing that men would say about her when frightened by her sexuality? Finally--a crucial question both for the actual Violette and for the film--did her parents know about her double life? There are hints that they did; but as in other Chabrol films in the best bourgeois tradition, nothing serious is ever talked about, nothing overt about life's passions can ever be said.

Violette gained notoriety by poisoning her parents, actually killing her father and bringing her mother to the point of death. In the France of 1933, there seemed no doubt about her guilt. Yet while sentenced to death, she was never guillotined. She served twenty-five years in prison; but at the end of the war, she was pardoned by Pétain and later eventually rehabilitated by the government of de Gaulle. Why was this? It is hard to say (and we can't expect the film to tell us!); but partly it was because over the years she had come to be seen as a heroine of her times. The surrealists adopted her as their archetypal heroine, a primordial existentialist, a character like they could only read about in the pages of de Sade. André Breton wrote about her; Magritte painted her; and Paul Eluard wrote a poem about her. They admired her because she fully acknowledged the unresolvable conflicts between the super-ego and the id, between the restrictions of society and the needs of passion. She not only acknowledged them, she acted them out in full.

**Violette Nozière** represents Chabrol at his finest. Working with much the same team as he has always worked with -- Jean Rabier as lighting cameraman, Pierre Jansen as composer, and Stephane Audran as the mother--Chabrol has deftly crafted a film which is simultaneously exact and mysterious.

What we see are "the facts." We are denied explanations. The consoling comforts of motivation are nowhere in the film. We must find them for ourselves. Why do people do the things they have to do even when they know, rationally, that they will hurt other people? This is the question that Chabrol puts to us but denies us an answer.

As Violette Nozière, Isabelle Huppert has a far more active role to play than she had in **La Dentellière (The Lacemaker)**; and an extraordinarily restrained performance as her cellmate, is given by Bernadette Lafont -- one of France's most underrated actresses. For those of us familiar with other films by Chabrol, many of the recurring elements are present in **Violette** -- particularly the site of the dinner table as the place around which the formal hypocrisies of middle-class life are most consistently enacted. Chabrol plays with this -- almost to the point of self-mockery. The night that Violette decides to poison her parents, she has them all dress up as if going to the opera and the table is laid with special care and festive candles--an elegance indeed appropriate to the seriousness of the occasion, as if for a wedding, a Christmas feast, or a funeral!

**Violette Nozière** is a film both to be enjoyed and reckoned with. In a recent interview, Isabelle Huppert suggested that, nowadays, Violette would probably be a terrorist. This gives us food for thought. She was a protester against the established norms of our not-too-satisfactory society. It is to the credit of Chabrol and one of the lasting values of the film that Violette lastingly values of the film that **Violette Nozière** not only presents us with the study of a woman but also of a set of social codes which prompted her to act as she did. Murderess or revolutionary? The film leaves that question for us to decide. For such a "conventional" filmmaker as Claude Chabrol, this is not the most conventional way of handling a piece of cinematic entertainment.

Peter Harcourt

## Claude Chabrol's BLOOD RELATIVES

d. Claude Chabrol, asst. d. Justine Héroux, Brice Defer, Louise Arbique, sc. Claude Chabrol, adapt. Claude Chabrol's adaption of Ed McBain's novel **Blood Relatives**, ph. Jean Rabier, ed. Yves Langlois, sup. ed. Ian Webster, sd. Patrick Rousseau, a.d. Ann Pritchard, cost. Blanche Danièle Boileau, I.p. Donald Sutherland, Aude Landry, Lisa Langlois, Laurent Mallet, Micheline Lanctot, Stephane Audran, Donald Pleasance, David Hemmings, Ian Ireland, Gregory Jannis, Tammy Tucker, Julie Anna, John King, Victor Knight, Tom Scurfield, Marguerite Lemir, Guy Hoffman, Howard Rychpan, Penelope Bahr, Nini Balogh, John Boylan, Terence Ross, Tim Henry, Winston McQuade, Jean LaBelle, Robert King, Victor Desy, Kevin Fenlon, Jerome Thiberghien, Jan Chamberlain, Richard Niquette, Lynda MacKay, Sony Forbes, exec. p. Julian Melzack, p. Denis Héroux and Eugène Lépicier, p. manager Claude Léger, p.c. A Classic -- Cinévideo -- Filmel coproduction, 1977, col. 35mm, running time 90 minutes.

French director Claude Chabrol is slowly heading for Hollywood -- via Canada. Never fully appreciated in his homeland, Chabrol is finally branching out in an attempt to gain greater world recognition. Fortuitously, or not, depending on your viewpoint, he has crossed paths with Montreal producer Julian Melzack who is also experiencing growing pains. The meeting of these talents is **Blood Relatives**.

While infinitely better than **Tomorrow Never Comes**, another Melzack production, **Blood Relatives** is a disappointing Chabrol film. Had it been made by a Canadian director, it would be hailed as a masterpiece, or falling back on that hackneyed word, a "breakthrough." Still, a lesser Chabrol picture is much better than most of the gunk that American distributors pollute the box office with.

**Blood Relatives**, a dandy double-edged title, is another venture into a genre Chabrol has made very much his own: the 'why-dunnit.' Chabrol has always been keen on examining the personalities surrounding a murder, the ambience of the crime and all the pres-



surging elements that drive someone to commit murder. He is respected for rising above the crude simplicities of the 'who-dunnit'. His finesse, in addition to his skill in establishing mood, lies in the ability to reveal human behaviour, to bring understanding to an action that most would dismiss as irrational. His studies are not cold, clinical or detached but neither are they sentimental.

Unfortunately, with **Blood Relatives**, Chabrol brings elements of the 'who-dunnit' into the 'why-dunnit,' and the two don't gel. To comprehend the motives behind the crime, we must know the murderer but he keeps us guessing, or rather tries to, and the whys surrounding the crime become muddled, unclear.

One dark and stormy night a young girl (played by Aude Landry), her clothes torn and her hands bleeding profusely, bursts hysterically into a police station jabbering uncontrollably about the murder of her 17-year-old cousin, Muriel. The two were returning home from a party when Muriel is sexually assaulted and brutally stabbed to death: Patricia escapes. Working with sketchy information Insp. Carella (Donald Sutherland) begins rounding up suspects.

But we are made privy to only one interrogation. Doniac, played by Donald Pleasance, looks like your typical middle-aged creton with a penchant for nubile girls. We know from the outset he's not our man. Yet the interplay between Pleasance and Sutherland is sharp. Chabrol uses the scene to show the greyer shades of moral questions. Upon checking out Doniac's alibi, Carella learns that nubile girls can be every bit as much victimizers as are middle-aged men. During the grilling, while Doniac professes innocence, Sutherland tries to keep his mounting anger in check but you can see the steam seeping from each spicurl adorning his head.

While Chabrol, doesn't take a firm moralistic stance, he comes awfully close in using Carella as his mouthpiece. When Patricia, in a surprise move, accuses her own brother Andrew of the murder, Carella consoles her by saying that even he would place the law above familial loyalties. The director avoids making any judgments when Carella learns of the relationship between the murdered girl and her cousin Andrew.



Chabrol on location for the shooting of **Blood Relatives** with Aude Landry, Laurent Malet, Lisa Langlois and Brice Defor

The pair, living in Andrew's home, became lovers. While he wanted to marry her, she rejected him because of the blood ties. Later she becomes involved with a married man, played by David Hemmings. Another questionable relationship, but Chabrol and Carella are silent.

**Blood Relatives** doesn't really work as a police thriller. Although Sutherland, reprising his low-keyed cop of **Klute**, is fairly good, the character as seen by the director is an ineffectual boob. Carella, outraged by the murder and fearful that it could happen to his own daughter, should be obsessed, driven to find the murderer — and it wasn't the butler — but Carella is nothing more than a functional character, a narrative device. The solution of the crime relies on chance, and not on solid police detection.

In fact, the crunch only comes after Carella learns of Muriel's diary, which is found in the garbage. Too convenient. Convenient, also, are the intimate details revealed in the diary. Young diarists, I think, tend to be more cryptic, embellishing unimportant events, noting fantasies and down playing significant matters. The frank honesty of the diary is, ironically, dishonest. It's an easy cop out.

Carella spends one night reading Muriel's life, learning what happened in her last days. (Here, Micheline Lanctot

a sadly misused actress, bounces in as Carella's wife.)

The diary's revelations come as a big surprise to Carella and the audience is supposed to react with comparable amazement, but throughout the film the viewer has been given more information than our Inspector has obtained. Next to Carella, Inspector Clouzeau is a veritable Sherlock Holmes.

**Blood Relatives** aspires to be both an absorbing psychological melodrama, and a thrilling murder mystery but it just doesn't wash. Carella comes to grips with the murderer in the closing moments and the reasons and motives are casually summed-up, almost dismissed with a 'so-what' off-handedness. The film fails as a tantalizing murder thriller in the Agatha Christie tradition because Chabrol doesn't provide us with a wide selection of delectable suspects from which to pick and choose.

Much is made of the murder weapon, a vicious-looking butcher knife lifted from the home of Paul Gaddis, the boy who gave the party which Muriel and Patricia attended. Any good inspector worth his salt would have questioned Gaddis *toute suite*. But he doesn't appear in the film, because Chabrol for some unknown reason, has mercifully whittled down the suspect list.

Aside from Sutherland, the only other fine performance is given by Aude



## FILM REVIEWS

Landry, doing a nicely restrained version of the Bad Seed character. The other juvenile parts (Lise Langlois and Laurent Malet as the young lovers) are awkward and self-conscious with a kind of the look-at-me-Ma-I'm-in-the-movies quality to their acting. Stephen Audran (Mme. Chabrol) is badly dubbed and this discolours her entire performance in the film. And why was she dubbed in the first place? She has appeared in American films; *The Blackbird* and *Silver Bears* among them.

Chabrol, as usual, has created a wonderfully moody piece. The dank streets of Old Montreal are properly eerie and the feeling of gloom and doom is nicely captured by Jean Rabier's camera. Rabier is to Chabrol what Sven Nykvist is to Bergman: both make a perfect team. But in *Blood Relatives* the timing is off. Rabier sets the shot, but Chabrol fails to follow through with the volley. Atmosphere is everything to Chabrol but it doesn't add-up to a thrill.



It's all in the family in *Blood Relatives*

## Zale Dalen's SKIP TRACER

d. Zale Dalen, asst. d. Tom Braidwood, sc. Zale Dalen, sc. cont. Gayle Scott, ph. Ron Orioux, asst. ph. Chris Gallager, Jan Martel, ed. Zale Dalen, asst. ed. Vicki Duggan, sd. Richard Patton, m. Linton Garner, J. Douglas Dodd, cost. Mary Crawford, l.p. David Petersen, John Lazarus, Rudy Szabo, Allan Rose, Sue Astley, John Scott, Mike Grigg, p. Laara Dalen, assoc. p. Paul Tucker, p. manager Martin Walters, p.c. Highlight Productions Ltd. 1976, col. 16mm blown up to 35 mm, running time 90 minutes

*Skip Tracer* is such a briskly told, well-acted, engagingly shot genre exercise that one can almost ignore the puerile moral at its base. Almost.

John Collins (David Peterson) is the skip tracer, a loan company clerk, whose job is to hound and collect from delinquent borrowers. He is the model collector, who has devoted his life and every energy to his job. Now he is vying for his company's Man of 46/Cinema Canada

the Year award, for an unprecedented fourth year.

But time wounds all heels. The cold professional crust is beginning to crumble. The film anatomizes the costs of this kind of professional success.

The story-line is familiar enough, with its dramatization of the soul's chill by ambition and the dog-eat-dog (or vice versa) world of business. What distinguishes this film is the freshness of its Vancouver setting and the calibre of performance, which is generally much better than the script.

Especially effective is David Peterson, a Cardston, Alberta, native working with the Tamahnous Theatre Workshop, who makes his film debut as a soft-edged Widmark type.

The husband-and-wife director-producer team of Zale and Laara Dalen must be credited with a film that looks far classier than its \$145,000 budget would suggest. Since the setting doesn't strangle the film with its local habitation and a name, it should thrive wherever there is a market for a genre thriller.



Director Zale Dalen confers with lead Petersen