



Brenda Donohue as Chloe in John Palmer's film of the Martin Kinch play *Me*.

They are more shadowy and get less sparkle and bite in their smaller share of Martin Kinch's peppy dialogue.

Although adapted from a play, this is by no means a static film. It has been "opened up" intelligently, with extra scenes taking place where well they might, such as a bar, in front of the St. Lawrence Centre and on a sidewalk by a puddle (quite natural, after a few drinks). The shooting and editing avoid visual monotony and we never feel too stagebound. Yet I think *Me* is most valuable as the "film of the play". Toronto has a thriving independent theatre now and it is logical, in fact it's a small breakthrough, for the best Canadian plays to be spread to a wider audience via film. Most Canadians know Pinter and Osborne from the screen rather than visits to the Aldwych or Old Vic in London. Or course, Canada will have to *show* its films more widely, both here and abroad. *Me* has no distribution at present; once again we find an absurd situation something like taking photographs with the cover over the lens.

Much praise is due to the four leading (and almost only) actors in *Me*. Brenda Donohue and Chapelle Jaffe make more of the women than the script perhaps offers them but certainly, with this script, the men dominate. Stephen Markle is especially effective as Terry — a bravura performance which only occasionally

looks too deliberate, a bit "pushy" so that one wishes for an alternate take. And William Webster is effective as the weak but touching Oliver. His overtures to Terry (whom he would only like to hold and kiss, "not much more") strike ironically the most genuine note in these compassionately observed disordered lives.

Clive Denton

Murray Markowitz's Recommendation for Mercy

A film by Murray Markowitz. **Screenplay:** Fabian Jennings, Joel Weisenfeld, Murray Markowitz. **Cinematography:** Richard Leiterman. **Music:** composed and conducted by Don Gillis. **Sound:** location sound, Rick McGuire; sound editor, Peter Burgess. **Editing:** George Appleby C.F.B. **Performers:** Andrew Skidd as John Robinson, Robb Judd as Frank Holmes, Mike Upmalis as Bruce Miller, Karen Martin as Nora Cook, Michele Fansett as Fran Bailley. **Producers:** James P. Lewis, Murray Markowitz. **Produced in 1974 by Paradise Films.** **Colour:** 35mm blown up from 16mm. **Running time:** 91 minutes. **Distribution in Canada:** Astral.

"The film you are about to see is fiction. Although the basic idea for the film was inspired by an actual event, the circumstances have been deliberately and extensively altered so that any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is purely coincidental. So far as the authors are aware the circumstances and characters do not and have not existed in real life."

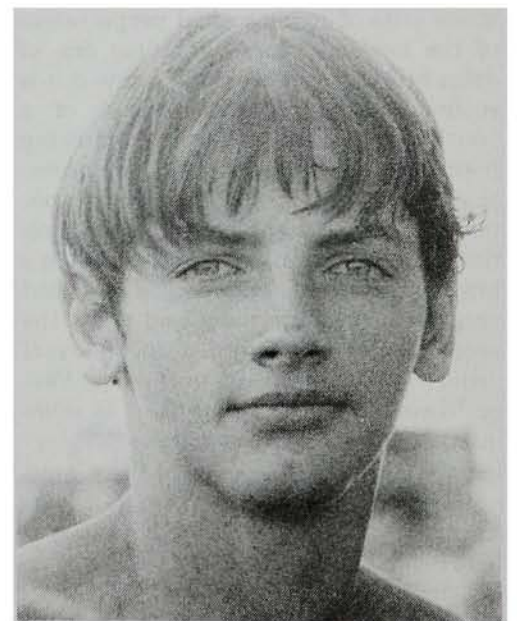
Toronto director Murray Markowitz is fooling no one with the lengthy and somewhat foolish disclaimer which both precedes and concludes **Recommendation For Mercy**. Only a Canadian citizen who has been residing on a Tibetan mountain-top meditating with a maharishi for the past 16 years could be oblivious to the Steven Truscott case of 1959.

Recommendation For Mercy is Markowitz's attempt at re-creating one of Canada's most sordid court cases.

For those who have been out of touch with the real world: in the summer of 1959 a 13-year-old girl was brutally raped and murdered. A 14-year-old youth was tried and convicted of the crime in adult court and sentenced to death. The sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

This fictionalized account of the Steven Truscott case has been hyped-up with smatterings of adolescent sex. It is indeed unfortunate that Markowitz sensationalizes the case to such an extreme degree because beneath the prurient surface lies the foundation of a compelling and gripping human drama.

But Markowitz's film flounders because he treats his subject (here called



Portrait by Shin Sugino of Andrew Skidd as John Robinson in Murray Markowitz' film **Recommendation for Mercy**.



photo: Shin Sugino

Murray Markowitz directing the tree house scene in **Recommendation for Mercy**.

John Robinson not Steven Truscott) so ambivalently. He raises the question of whether or not a director should take a firm stand on such a controversial subject or dazzle and confuse the viewer with lots of fancy footwork.

In an early scene in his film, Markowitz suggests his protagonist's innocence by having John fall from his bike and injure his groin, thus accounting for the injury discovered when he is examined upon his arrest for the crime. Yet he concludes his film with an older John pleading for parole and admitting to "one dreadful mistake".

Interspersed throughout the film are quick cuts of hypothetical perpetrators of the heinous crime including one of John himself. But we don't know if it is reality or the wild imaginings of a youth pumped full of truth serum being hounded by officers who want a confession. In fact, Markowitz suggests potential suspects with such conviction that the viewer almost expects John's lawyer, in the 11th hour, to whirl around in the courtroom and point the accusing finger of guilt at the real "who" in the whodunit in the best Perry Mason tradition. The film is more interesting when Markowitz isn't playing these silly mystery games and concentrates instead on the cold, uncaring impersonality of our law system.

Recommendation For Mercy is a frustrating and aggravating film because there are isolated moments of brilliance mixed with heaping portions

of incredible ineptitude and misdirection.

The confrontation between John and his father, who is not at all certain of his son's innocence, is poorly acted by Jim Millington as Mr. Robinson.

One segment stands out above all others both in performance and execution. The jury is out. Markowitz skillfully cuts to John in his cell eating his last supper with the inhuman drone of a clergyman reciting the last rites (or whatever). John is handcuffed and led slowly down the gloomy halls of death row. A door slowly opens... the gallows awaits. The white bag is placed over the boy's head and the knot of the rope is secured, biting into the cloth. With the snap of the trap door, the jury re-enters the courtroom.

It is the most harrowing, horrific scene since Susan Hayward was lead for the third time to the gas chamber in **I Want To Live**.

It's ironic (or is it?) that this film should appear on the cinema horizon just at the time when public pressure is crying for the re-instatement of the death penalty. This scene should convince most that judicial executions are morally wrong.

Newcomer Andrew Skidd gives a remarkably fine restrained performance as the confused, disbelieving youth who is yanked from the confines of a comfortable middle-class upbringing and thrust into the maze of the court process.

Markowitz runs a wee bit wild with the whitewash, painting John as a little too wholesome and perfect a lad. At

the same time the prejudiced judge, the gleeful back-stabbing friends and the ineffectual, idiotic lawyer are painted too black.

Markowitz is a shrewd director who knows how to get his films into theatres. A tough semi-documentary approach clinically examining the Truscott case wouldn't have a hope in hell of being seen. But these sexual perversions, and the lascivious activities in Smalltown Ontario will be seen by a great many.

Lee Rolfe


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