Peter Wronski's
Bad Company

Bob Schroder sd. John Gundy l.p. Rolf
Kempf, Clay Borris, Liesja Wagner, Eli Allon,
Gene Paulson, Wayne St. John, Perry Thomp­
son, Peter Baily, Vince Guerriero p.c. Faster
Films Production, 1978, with financial assis­
tance from the Ontario Arts Council p. Paul
Eichgrun, Steven Klys, Peter Wronski Cdn.
distrib., foreign sales Asonis Film Enterprises
col. 16mm running time 76 min.

Bad Company, Peter Wronski's first
feature film is, for the most part, a ragged
unoriginal work, made up of what are by
now little more than Canadian film com­
monplaces. Although the occasional ac­
complished scene stands apart from the
rest, these brief moments are too few to
uplift the film as a whole. They, however,
shed light on Bad Company's weaknes­
ses.

One of these effective scenes is set in a
quick-lunch restaurant. Billy, the central
character, and his girlfriend Dallas are
discussing their relationship and its fail­
ings. Billy tells Dallas he's decided that
robbing a bank will solve their problems.
The two of them, and an unshaven man
next to Billy, are all facing forward, seated
at the lunch counter. As Billy and Dallas
converse, the stranger nervously stam­
ers to himself. Billy gives him a side­
long glance and asks if he's "playin' with a
full deck," to which the man replies, "I'm
just talking to myself, okay?" When Dallas
has heard enough of Billy's far-fetched
solutions, she says "You're crazy. He's
crazy. We're all crazy," and quickly
leaves, with Billy trailing after her. In a
close-up the camera concentrates on the
stranger's face as he chats to himself and
sips his coffee. The dark humour in this
scene gives a much-needed depth to the
film. The stranger's inclusion provides a
subly ironic counterpoint to Billy's grand
and childish plans. He also increases
Dallas' frustration by making it hard for
her to be heard. As well as adding com­
plexity to Billy and Dallas' relationship, he
exists in his own right — a disturbed,
lonely man at a Toronto lunch counter,
captured in the rough impressionism of
simulated cinema-direct. The intensity of
human emotion present in this straight­
forward scene results from the inclusion
of elements not totally germane to the
film's plot.

The majority of the film, however, is
given over to advancing a standard
loser's-last-big-chance plot. As with so
many other Canadian films, the prota­
gonist is a male with little left to lose, and a
desire to do one big thing to set himself
right — or at least go out in a big way.
Again, like the many previous films it
resembles, Bad Company at times seems
more concerned with describing charac­
ters in context than advancing the actual
story line. Despite this, there is little
evidence of real insight into the people
and situations portrayed. Ultimately, the
spectacular presentation of increasingly
extreme events drives a wedge into the
film, until the references to a contempo­
rary Toronto milieu are finally irrelevant.
What is left is the skeleton of an old story
held together by blood and violence.

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No ethical signposts are erected in this film, but for the cheap, righteous, moral implicit it its conclusion. That all the characters in Bad Company are ethically bankrupt (everyone is corrupt, but some, however, are successful) is not a fault in itself; it is rather the delineation of this world which seems too precociously cynical. Because of the film’s hollowness precious little intensity of feeling is evoked.

The two cops, “Mutt” and “Jeff,” who tail Billy and his friends — harassing, intimidating and finally killing one of them — are simply other movable pieces in this nihilistic game; two standard, ugly, and evil authority figures. Billy’s character too is disturbingly simplistic. He is in no way an enigmatic figure, although his friend Dick, who twice asks him how he got his limp and twice receives evasive answers, seems to think so. He’s very much a creature of his environment, but in a typically pat way. The violence of the world he inhabits is demonstrated in a nicely prolonged scene of Billy and his friends watching two pubescent boys boxing in a makeshift ring in a warehouse, the various adults cheering loudly and making bets. When this scene returns later as a somewhat crude memory insert, it suggests far more than it ever lives up to; as does Billy’s explanation to Dallas of his bank-robbing dreams: “All I want is respect.” Never again do we get an inking of this motive — the words forced to carry much more meaning than the rest of the film supports.

Bad Company is an easy depiction of an ethically destitute world. But lacking a real understanding of such destitution, its “surprise” ending (Billy and Dallas outwit the cops and get away with a large sum of money), while convenient, suggests a moral again not wholly supported by the film. Bad Company’s only resolution is a narrative one. Although its one-dimensional characters and superficial sociology do not allow for a more insightful summation, its ending is a disconcerting value-judgement; disconcerting, because it is totally unfounded, given what has preceded it. As opposed to detailing Billy’s plight, the film merely sides with him, suggesting that he’s a good-guy in the anti-hero sense, who, in his own way has beaten the bad guys. Previous to this, however, there haven’t been any good or bad guys. Apart from those few brief scenes that convey a little of life’s true complexity, Bad Company, is finally false to even its own would-be cynicism.

Mark Mercer

Tin Drum hearing (cont.)

that I have spoken to in the House, has been with respect to the matter of the procedures of the board. If, from the polls that have been taken or from whatever the term “community standards” means, there is some desire within the province of Ontario to have a form of overview of films, then that may well be the society in which we live and that may well be the conclusion that the government reaches, rather than dealing with classification or other themes.

But the point that I raise is one of dealing with procedures. I have followed quite seriously this entire involvement of “The Tin Drum” and the operations of the board. I would put this question to you which comes out of an article that was in the Kingston Wig Standard, because it is the theme of the procedures that I would hope each board member would want to consider — and, indeed, the minister as well.

This is the question raised by Michal Cobden in this article. “Why do we need a censor board which deliberates in private, which provides no criteria for its judgments, no explanations of its censorship and which is accountable to no one.” The question involves procedures, the theme of appeals, the whole review of responsibilities and an opportunity to question, not in the informal way, but in a somewhat more open structure. How would you answer that question? If you think you are able to.

Mr. J. Cunningham: I think this is a tremendously legitimate concern in any democratic society; that I, as a citizen, understand the process that is going on in government or government agencies. If I don’t know, I am suspicious of what is going on. I would wish that, as a taxpayer, I would be given more information as to what is going on in the censor board.

Further excerpts, and coverage of the Tin Drum controversy can be found in CineMag, issue no. 41.

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