

FILM REVIEWS

Claude Chabrol's VIOLETTE NOZIÈRE

d. Claude Chabrol, asst. d. Philippe Delarbre and Brice Defér-Auboyneau, sc. Odile Barski and Claude Chabrol, ph. Jean Rabier, ed. Yves Langlois, sd. Patrick Rousseau, p. designer Jacques Brizzio, set dec. Robert Christides, cost. Pierre Nourry, l.p. Isabelle Huppert, Stéphane Audran, Jean Carmet, J.-F. Garreau, Lisa Langlois, Philippe Procot Guy Hoffman, Jean Dalmain, Bernadette Lafont, p. Eugène Lepicier, Denis Héroux, p. sup. Alain Fleury, p.c. Filmel -FR3-Cinevideo co-production, 1977, col. 35mm, running time 107 minutes, dist. Cinepix.



Chabrol with his arms around *Violette Nozière*'s stars Lisa Langlois and Isabelle Huppert

From the start of his career back in the late '50s, Claude Chabrol has seemed a far more conventional filmmaker than most of his colleagues who, collectively then, were known as the French New Wave. In comparison with Godard, Truffaut, Rivette, and Resnais, Chabrol showed little interest in innovative forms or unusual subjects. His early films lacked both the audacity of Truffaut and the intelligence of Godard and, for the most part, they remained firmly planted within the conventions of middle-class life. In this way, it was easy not to take Chabrol too seriously. He seemed just another filmmaker, making films in a traditional way about the tired conventions of the middle-class.

By the late '60s, however — by the time Chabrol had made *La Femme Infidèle*, *Que la Bête Meure* and *Le Boucher* — even his detractors had to admit that this most conventional of filmmakers was handling these conventions with exceptional authority. True, he was still making movies about middle-class life and was still concerned, in his Hitchcockian way, with the delineation of character and with the creation of suspense. There was a Langian dimension to his work as well — the sense that his characters were the helpless pawns of fate. They were all victims of their own conditioning, of the social repressions and

genteel expectations of their class.

As Chabrol's work increased in skill, it grew rich in texture. All the tiny details of all his characters' lives were so minutely observed and so persuasively presented that he came to be known, not entirely playfully, as the Balzac of the cinema. Now if Karl Marx could admire Balzac because his novels demonstrated the contradictions within bourgeois ideology, we might admire Chabrol in much the same way. In the best of Chabrol's films (for he has certainly made some clinkers)—supremely in the three films mentioned above—he exposes with loving detail and extraordinary nuance the repressed tensions in middle-class life that make all of our lives at least partially a lie. And since there is no bourgeois like a French bourgeois, Chabrol could turn out pictures of elegance and charm, both in their execution and in their subject-matter, which revealed to us the repressed emotions that all this elegance denies — negative emotions of jealousy, vengeance, sexual need, and hate. In all his films, these are the emotions which, bit by bit, break apart the apparently tidy complacency of his characters' lives.

Dealing with family life as he had done, Chabrol has been unique in the

prominence he has given to children—so often the justification of all the platitudes that hold family life together. But his children are rarely innocent. They often possess an insight, mute though it may be, into the falsities that their parents have long ago ceased to recognize. Yet there is an ambiguity in Chabrol about his children, sometimes wilfully indulged in. In *Que la Bête Meure*, was it really Charles, the man seeking vengeance, who killed Paul, the hateful father, or was it Paul's own son? In *Les Noces Rouges*, when the daughter writes to the police about her mother, is it innocently to clear her name or actually to turn her in? We can speculate about these matters but Chabrol makes it difficult for us to come to any confident conclusions.

In his latest film, *Violette Nozière* nominally, minimally, a Canadian French co-production—Chabrol has chosen for his source material an actual event which is studded with ambiguities. As the facts have been collected for us by the French journalist, Jean-Marie Fitère and shaped for the film by Odile Barski, *Violette* tells the story of a young woman in the '30s who lived a double life. School-girl and prostitute, a potential liberationist who was nevertheless capable of the most self-deceiv-

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 Peterson

CANADIAN MAGAZINES



Boréal
publié dans un contexte nord-ontarien et il met l'accent sur un éventail de questions régionales. where the voice is of the boreal, a trilingual and tricultural journal of northern Ontario. \$6.00



Esprit
A national consumer magazine, for and about gay men and women. 12 issues, only \$10.00



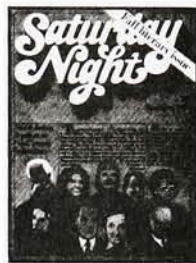
Performing Arts in Canada
A journal of drama, music and dance in Canada, including comment, news and schedule information. "The National Forum of the Performing Arts." 4 issues, only \$3.00



Canadian Dimension
Now in its 11th year, featuring articles on politics, the arts, the economy and sports from a socialist perspective. 8 issues, only \$7.00 (students and pensioners, \$5.00)



The Last Post
Canada's magazine for news features, current reports, reviews and columns. 8 issues, only \$5.00



Saturday Night
A rich blend of political insight, social perspectives, cultural trends, national issues and entertaining fiction for today's Canadian readers. 10 issues, only \$8.00



The Canadian Review
The best in new Canadian journalism, in articles, essays, reviews, poetry and cartoons with updates on all facets of cultural and political life in Canada. 10 issues, only \$6.50



Makara
A bi-monthly general interest magazine produced by women. High-quality format; exciting graphics. 6 issues, only \$6.00



Sound Canada
Laboratory tests and reviews of the latest audio equipment; classical, contemporary and jazz record reviews; columnists like Clyde Gilmour, Oscar Peterson, B. B. King and George Hamilton IV. 12 issues, only \$6.00



Content
Everybody complains about newspapers and television. **Content** analyzes them. Precise documented reports. Independent polished commentaries. 12 issues, \$5.50



This Magazine
Treats issues in Canadian and world politics, culture and education from a critical perspective. Interesting and stimulating. **This Magazine** leavens its subject matter with wry humour and Canadian comics. 6 issues, only \$4.00



Ovo/Photo
Ovo/Photo is dedicated to the promotion of good photography as means of visual communication and self-expression. 5 issues, only \$7.00

JUST SOME OF OVER 120 EXCITING CANADIAN MAGAZINES

IF YOU'D LIKE A COMPLETE CATALOGUE CHECK HERE

Canadian Periodical Publishers' Association

Clip out and mail

Please enter the following subscription in my name: (I enclose a cheque or money order.)

Magazine	Am't	Magazine	Am't

Name _____ Total am't: _____
Address _____

Postal Code _____

Make cheques payable to "CPPA", 3 Church St., Suite 407 Toronto, Ont. M5E 1M2

FILM REVIEWS

The problem with the film is that its mind is not as good as its craft. Behind the whole story lies a moral hollow.

For the basic stance is that it is wrong for a man to enforce the repayment of debts. Collins' job requires that he make, and then recover loans; that this job should be considered innately villainous is stupid.

All kinds of problems grow out of this attitude in the film.

First, although Collins is supposed to be a callous sort of Shylock-Hitman, he is from the outset played as a rather honorable man. He tries to warn an old pensioner off his company's cut-throat terms, for example. And he spurns the sexual compromise offered by the wife of his most important account.

Second, his ostensible moral awakening begins under paradoxical conditions. The man who first advises him bravely to confront himself is a rather unattractive debtor who has himself been cowering in a sewer pipe. There is no honor in the hero's moral awakening.

Nor in his awakening. The film's climax has the hero screw his company by misinforming the computer that all his clients are deceased, their debts cancelled. He is to be applauded for shafting his company.

Now, it should be as wrong and as self-degrading to shaft a company as it is to shaft a person. Companies work for people. And it is the shafting that is wrong, not the nature of the shaftee.

This film requires us to sneer at the hero when he does his helpful job reasonably and well, and to applaud him when he defrauds his company

and gives his clients the chance to cheat.

Shades of *One on One* wherein the snotty puling hero exploits his athletic scholarship and is supposed to command our admiration when he walks out on it after finally making the team!

Maybe it's in the air. Maybe it's the dying gasp of the flower children, with a pistol-packin' flourish where a bit of logical ethics should be.

Were I a financier, I wouldn't hesitate to fund a feature film by the Dalens, as far as their arts and crafts are concerned. But I'd have to assume that the moral lapse is only a lull in the narrative logic, but a sign of some subversive bent.

Three minor elements locate the film in the noble tradition of American B-films. From the Western comes both the ambush of the hero, and the motif of the old hand training a young naif (the engaging John Lazarus here), while ardently warning him away from the life of specious glory. From the urban crime film comes the overall atmosphere of sweaty greed and manipulation, and the subplot of a debtor driven to suicide.

An efficient genre film like this provides the audience connection and the technical experience on a larger scale and with better results than do the host of glossy co-productions that have been visited upon us of late.

Maurice Yacowar

SHORT FILM REVIEWS

ANOTHER KIND OF MUSIC

d. Glen Salzman/Rebecca Yates, ph. Mark Irwin, sd. ed. Glen Salzman/Rebecca Yates, m. Ishan People, p. Glen Salzman/Rebecca Yates, p.c. Fruits and Roots, col. 16mm. running time 24 min. dist. International Telefilm.

Another Kind of Music is a straightforward (sometimes too much so) plea for tolerance. However, it is also more than this. It is positive in its approach to people and things, and it maintains that an open mind is a virtue because there are things of value in different lifestyles and cultures that can, and should, be enjoyed.

The plot concerns itself with two young, Toronto teenagers, one white and one black. Dave is a drummer who is tired of playing hard rock. After an argument with his closed-minded band members, he goes to a record shop



where he meets Tony who introduces him to reggae. From this point on, the plot becomes fairly predictable. Dave's friends do not like Tony and Tony's friends do not like Dave. After a certain amount of emotional upheaval on both sides, the film ends happily.

Most of the film suffers from obvious artifice. The major flaw is the uniformly poor acting. I assume everyone in-



the skip tracer collecting