FILM REVIEWS

Claude Jutra's

Pour le meilleur et pour le pire

A film by Claude Jutra. **Screenplay:** Claude Jutra. **Cinematography:** Alain Dostie. **Music:** Pierre F. Brault. **Editing:** Pascale Laverrière. **Performers:** Claude Jutra, Monique Miller, Monique Mercure, Pierre Dufresne, Gisèle Trépanier. **Producer:** Lamy. **Produced in** 1974. **Colour:** 35mm. **Running time:** 117 min. **Distribution in Canada:** Cinepix.

Claude Jutra has long made personal feature films in Canada. He is often writer and director and he has a stubborn habit of acting as well – rather endearingly, for as an actor he shows a certain ease before the camera but is unlikely to win any awards. His most openly personal film surely remains the dazzling **A tout prendre,** an astonishingly mature study of youthful passions and yearnings, for his age and stage of career back in 1962. Now, after the more reflective and traditionally narrative **Mon Oncle Antoine** and **Kamouraska,** comes a return to quirkiness and casually free form. Jutra has said how much he admires Jean Renoir and that admiration (by way, I suspect, of François Truffaut) shows clearly in his latest film, just about to be released in original and sub-titled versions. Hurrah for this return, by the way! For Renoir can be tart as well as warm, flippant as well as sentimental. **Pour le meilleur et pour le pire** is all of those things, alternatively and sometimes simultaneously.

The film opens on a married couple (Jutra and the very watchable Monique Miller) waking in the morning. When they get up, it follows them through one day. He goes to work, she sees a friend and her child, in the evening they are reunited. Only, without especial emphasis, we are shown that the daughter grows from babyhood to teenage size and the season outside changes from spring to autumn. Jutra sees marriage, apparently, as unchanging and unsatisfying, with the partners poised uncertainly between love and loathing. This viewpoint is the sad centre of an often very funny film. The passing of seasons and years within a single day is more than a clever conceit. It is the main individuality of a film which deliberately deals in the commonplace in order to point out an eternal verity or two.

Twenty years ago there was an English picture about marriage called **For Better For Worse** just like this one. It was a dewy little film, not nearly so observant or truthful as Jutra's, but it did have the good sense to run for only 83 minutes. The main fault of Jutra's generally notable film is to go on and on, until its fragile framework almost collapses. I thought the couple were about to go to bed at the 90 minute mark and they should have. There remains some unfunny business with a burglar and a gun which adds nothing and threatens to detract fatally. Happily, on balance, the film mainly achieves le meilleur rather than le pire.

Clive Denton

Claude Jutra and Monique Miller as the couple in Jutra's film **Pour le meilleur et pour le pire, For Better and For Worse**

John Palmer's

Me

A film by John Palmer. **Screenplay:** Martin Kinch, Barry Pearson, from the play by Martin Kinch. **Cinematography:** Nicholas Evdemon. **Music:** Noel Elson. **Editing:** Honor Griffith. **Performers:** Brenda Donohue, Chapelle Jaffe, Stephen Markle, William Webster. **Producers:** Christopher Dalton, Peter B. O'Brian. **Produced in** 1974 **by** Muddy York Motion Pictures. **Colour:** 35mm blown up from 16mm. **Running time:** 85 minutes.

"Terry, a young Toronto writer, is beleagured by his estranged wife, Kathy, while conducting a hot affair with his livewire mistress, Chloe. His best friend, Oliver, also declares his love! He is so swamped by other people's demands that he soon stops saying 'Me?', and says 'Me!'"

When this clever and enjoyable film was shown during "Canada Day" at the recent Stratford Film Festival, the programme booklet carried the above brief, trenchant synopsis. This somehow conveyed the film's flavour of edgy comedy, modulating towards – and then retreating from – pathos and even incipient tragedy. The audience collectively seemed to respond to this none-too-easy style very perceptively. But afterwards some individual reactions expressed puzzlement. What sort of Canadian experience was this? Four rather flippant, often bitchy, essentially selfish people quarreling, screwing and (occasionally) working in a Toronto "underground" of failed plays, unsold novels, some aspiration and great unease? Could **Me**, really, have much to do with us?

Well, yes, I think so. I know nothing about the Toronto Free Theatre, where John Palmer and Martin Kinch have worked industriously, and perhaps their considerable artistic success makes them unlike the egotistical, wearily seductive Terry and the easily discouraged, lovelorn Oliver. But I'll bet they *know* Terrys and Olivers – and so do I, in film societies, playreading groups and on the fringes of radio and TV, Ontar-iarians all. Not bad people, not worthless people, more articulate and less resigned than your average postman. I'm not so sure about the women.

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."

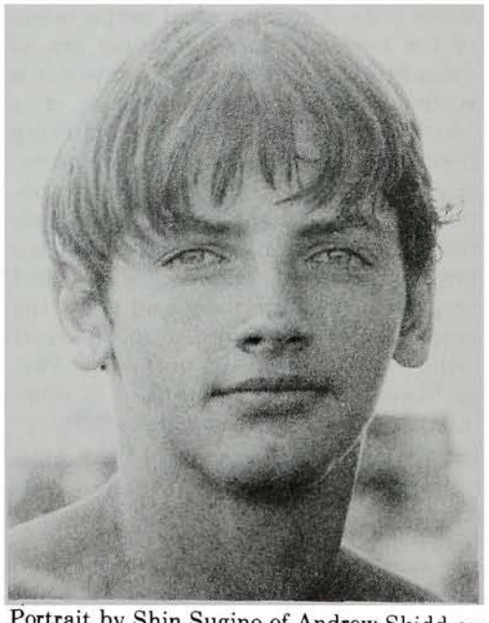
Toronto director Murray Markowitz is fooling no one with the lengthy and somewhat foolish disclaimer which both precedes and concludes **Recommendation For Mercy.** Only a Canadian citizen who has been residing on a Tibetan mountain-top meditating with a maharishi for the past 16 years could be oblivious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