

Raymond dumps on film reviewers

Dennis Raymond

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Just how do you go about opening a good movie in this town without getting jumped on? Ingmar Bergman's *Hour of the Wolf* is the best film to appear in Detroit since his earlier *Persona*, yet by the time you read this, it will probably have already left the Studio North Theatre.

The mechanics of film distribution is often a complicated and unfair process: The survival of a small specialized film—Alain Resnais' classic *La Guerre Est Finie*, for instance—depends entirely on the support of local critics. Hardcore Resnais buffs can fill a small theatre for maybe four nights, but after that, the film is on its own, *La Guerre Est Finie* opened in Detroit during the newspaper strike and, despite the rigorous attempts of the distributor and exhibitor to save it, it barely stayed above water for two weeks. If a Resnais film results in financial loss, will that same exhibitor be willing to risk playing any future films by Resnais? We can only hope and pray.

The reason why Orson Welles' *Falstaff* will never open in this town is because local critics failed to generate any enthusiasm for *The Trial* during 1963. The reason why we haven't seen a Godard film here in four years is because these same critics were incapable of sustaining any interest in *The Married Woman* in 1964.

Well, we can blame Bob Carr of the *Detroit News* if we never see another Bergman movie again.

Alice Beasley, editor of (and thus guilty for) the movie ratings in *Tempo*, gave *Hour of the Wolf* no less than one star. Carr compared "Hour of the Wolf" to "watching the kids at Halloween or a high school mystery play. When was the last time you saw a high school play that you could speak of on the same level as a Bergman film? Such pathetic attempts at slashing wit are genuinely embarrassing and a little sick.

I am angry, but am I unjust? Here's Carr:

Ingmar Bergman's latest invasion of the psyche may appeal to hard-core Bergman fans and lovers of the grotesque. To the general audience it may appear as just a hodgepodge of *Halloween* and hallucination as Bergman wavers between emotional drama and shock value. Since this is one of those 'now you see them, now you don't' movies, the viewer is left to puzzle for himself what really happened and what didn't. The first answer that comes to mind is 'who cares?'

Bob Carr may not be the most insensitive movie critic practicing today (that dubious distinction belongs to Mr. X of *Time*), but he's just typical of the many clowns in this profession who have no real passion nor interest for film. Critics like Carr, who apparently considers himself a member of the "general audience," are so unused to the experience of art in movies that they can't even recognize it when they see it. They fight it: "Who cares?", asks Carr.

They're so accustomed to the flat and contrived, the stupid and vulgar in our current movies that the rare work, the work of beauty, intelligence, grace and art—an *Hour of the Wolf* or a *Belle de Jour*—is regarded as having something the matter with it.

Movies are made and criticism is written by the use of intelligence, education, experience, sensitivity, imagination, dedication, taste, talent, emotion, and discrimination. The role of the critic is to help people see what is in the work, what is in it that shouldn't be, what is not in it that could be.

He is a good critic if he helps people understand more about the work than they could see for themselves; he is a great critic if, by his understanding and feeling for the work, by his passion, he can excite people so that they want to experience more of the art that is there, waiting to be seized.

He is not necessarily a bad critic if he makes errors in judgment. Infallible taste is inconceivable; what could it be measured against?

He is a bad critic if he does not awaken the curiosity, enlarge the interests and understanding of his audience. The art of the critic is to transmit his knowledge of and enthusiasm for art to others...and then to keep that art alive.

But what of the critic who, placed in an influential position—a position where he can make or break a *La Guerre Est Finie*—is neither capable or competent, of judging what is good or bad cinema?

Bob Carr and all his middle-brow contemporaries reduce the art of film criticism to a blatant “I liked it” or “I didn’t like it” which wouldn’t be so bad if they could convince us why. Opinions are cheap and plentiful; criticism is tough work.

This is not so much a review as it is a futile attempt to save “Hour of the Wolf” from the jaws of indifference at the public. For those seriously interested in my comments on the film, I suggest you check the November 14 and 21 issues of *The South End*.

Whether you do or not, I urge you to see *Hour of the Wolf* if it is at all still possible. For this is how movies can be made, this is why so few people make them well.

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