

Last of '68

Films

Dennis Raymond

1969

Every Christmas season, the movie market is positively flooded with the year-end glut of new releases, and 1968 proved no exception.

Trying to keep up with these new films is a major task for a pure-bred film buff like myself, but the fact is that I've seen only four holiday releases that I would risk recommending to you: "Faces," John Cassavetes' unmerciful study of middle-class mores in America; "Bullit," a fast, lean, and exciting detective yarn, and the only successful genre film of the year; "Romeo and Juliet," Franco Zeffirelli's irreproachable popularization of the play; and "The Stalking Moon," a Western that transcends itself and becomes instead a thrilling horror movie.

In the midst of this vast Christmas movie melange, the small but worthwhile film can be easily overlooked. "The Oldest Profession" sneaked into Detroit without any advance publicity or press screenings, clearly displaying the lack of confidence both the distributor and exhibitor have for it. Billed with some tepid little potboiler entitled "Love is a Woman," the film is currently playing at the Telenews.

"The Oldest Profession" depicts love through the ages as seen by Claude Autant Lara, Phillippe deBroca, and other noted directors. Five of the six individual skits range from mildly amusing to routine to unmentionable. But it is the final episode, directed by Jean-Luc Godard, that I would like to bring to your attention. Entitled "Anticipation," the sketch is an expansion of Godard's classic theme of prostitution and, in particular, a continuation of his earlier "Alphaville."

A member of the Sovietoamerican Army from another galaxy arrives at the Technical Capitol of Earth. The immigration control discovers, by examining his palm, that the passenger is sexually deprived, and so he is sent to an adjoining hotel to receive "treatment."

The first prostitute who arrives does not, however, excite him, largely because she never says a word. A second is sent for: she (Anna Karina) arrives dressed in a long white gown, and announces that she is "Sentimental Love"—the first girl was "Physical Love."

"Total Specialization" has progressed so far that one kind of prostitute is versed in the act of love, another in the language of love. The latter never undresses or touches her partner; she just talks and talks...However, our intrepid intergalactic visitor teaches Miss Sentimental Love that there is one part of the body that can both speak and make love: the mouth.

Up to this point, Godard has photographed his sketch in multi-colored monochromes, but as the pair kisses, the image is seen in full color for the first time.

Exactly what Godard's intentions were in using this color gimmick I am not sure, though it certainly does heighten the eerie beauty of the fine photography. As in "Alphaville," some of the shots Godard has succeeded in obtaining are simply inspired in their suggestion of a futuristic landscape. Something as common as a jet airplane moving along a runway becomes a vision of Things To Come.

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