

# Miscarriage of justice theme of Medak's new film

by Sheena Jarvis

Focusing on one of the most sensational crime stories of the century, *Let Him Have It* is a powerful and disturbing film. Directed by Peter Medak, it is based on the true story of Derek Bentley and Christopher Craig, two youths charged and convicted of murdering a police officer in Post-WWII Britain.

The 19 year-old Bentley, an adult under British law, was executed for the crime, because 16 year-old Craig, who shot and killed the officer, was too young for capital punishment.

During the trial, the prosecution mounted a case based on an archaic British legal concept which defines a person as guilty if they are an accessory to a crime. The controversy surrounding the statement Bentley was alleged to have made to Craig, "Let him have it Chris," is still going on today as people continue to debate whether he meant "shoot" or "give him the gun."

Bentley had the mental capacity of an 11 year-old and an IQ of 66; obviously unfit to stand trial, he was forced to.

The jury chose to interpret Bentley's actions as inciting violence,



Set against the backdrop of an angry nation, Peter Medak's new film *Let Him Have It* explores a miscarriage of justice in post-World War II Britain. Although he did not fire the shot that killed a policeman, Derek Bentley was hanged for the crime; Christopher Craig, who actually pulled the trigger, was ineligible for the death penalty because he was only 16.

and he was hung, despite the judge's recommendation for mercy, his family's desperate fight to secure a pardon and the support of a nation

that knew justice had not been done. Christopher Craig only served 10 years in prison.

The brilliant film explores how

the explosive circumstances in a restless nation combined with Bentley's personal experiences to lead to his execution. At the same time, the obvious injustice of the case raises questions about capital punishment, the British judicial system and the complicity of the media.

Using authentic movie, sound, television and news clips from the forties, Medak captures the mood of a nation on edge. Craig and his gang of hoodlums are portrayed throughout the movie as youths swept up in anger

## FILM

**Let Him Have It**  
directed by Peter Medak  
starring Chris Eccleston and Paul Reynolds  
produced by Fine Line Features

at the state of their country.

Craig and his friends are children playing at being gangsters. Their dress is reminiscent of famous gangsters of the twenties, thirties and forties. The way they walk, talk, drink, smoke and swagger is almost funny, like a bad James Cagney imitation.

Much of the strength of the movie lies in the simplicity of the plot. Right from the beginning, it unambiguously takes a position, making no excuses for its treatment of Bentley as a victim.

From the opening scene in which he is dug out of the rubble of his home after it has been bombed to his first meeting with the charismatic Craig, the audience feels a sense of inevitability surrounds Bentley.

Chris Eccleston is nearly flawless as Bentley, but Paul Reynolds lacks the necessary charisma to play Craig. Clare Holman is exceptional as Iris Bentley, the backbone of her family, while Tom Courtenay has one of the most wrenching scenes in the film, helplessly holding his son Bentley in the middle of an epileptic fit.

Dealing with such heavy material, Medak has done a terrific job of making a film that is at once thought-provoking and entertaining.

Forty years later, following the release of this film, the British government has agreed to reopen the case.

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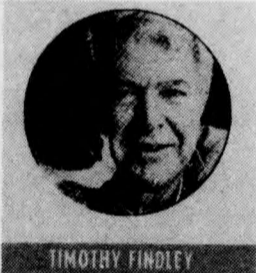
# A Voyage that's not worth making

by Michael Hussey

Not wanted on the stage!

The much talked about adaptation of Timothy Findley's book *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, put on by the Canadian Stage Company, sank straight to the bottom. But it did so nobly.

The book, a retelling of the biblical story of Noah's Ark, is tremendous. Findley wrote his own radio play based on the book, which premiered just over three months ago on CBC stereo, which was also tremendous. But, the stage version written by Richard Rose and D.D. Kugler just doesn't hold water.



TIMOTHY FINDLEY

But, what are you going to do? Build an ark on a stage, put some actors into animal costumes and try to pretend that all of humanity is going on a cruise? That's exactly what the Necessary Angel Theatre Company tried to do.

Although the set was beautiful, the script did little to realize the plot. When action took place on stage, the characters, more often than not, had to tell the audience what was going on. Even when they didn't have to, they still did. This really isn't good theatre; it's more like story time.

If story time was what we wanted, we could have stayed home and read the book and made snacks. Or better yet, listened to the radio play with a friend, while making Christmas cookies.



JANET WRIGHT

The ark, a huge wooden thing with three levels, was exquisite. But for

## THEATRE

**Not Wanted on the Voyage**  
based on the novel Timothy Findley  
adapted by Richard Rose and D. D. Kugler  
The Canadian Stage Company

the most part it was in darkness, with actors running around holding hand lights. It got very tiresome, and wasn't very believable.

Noah throws the last dove up in the air above his head, grabs it and puts the olive branch in its little claw. He smiles to the audience (he might as well have said cheese) and tells the rest of the crew. Yippee.

At some key moments, the play got absolutely ridiculous. When Noah sends the doves off to find land, for instance, he grabs things that look more like those glider plans we used to have when we were kids. Sure, it was funny (the first time, anyway), but it makes you wonder if they ran out of money.



RICHARD ROSE

The humour totally detracts from the impact of the scene. In fact, the audience is left with a warm feeling for Noah — the same character who, along with Yaweh, refers to Eve as a bitch. This and other misogynistic elements of Findley's characters are downplayed in, if not totally absent from, this adaptation.

To be fair, the show was technically brilliant. The lighting and the set were magnificent. The use of streamers, held by a running crew, to indicate a river which Mrs. Noyes crossed in order to save the ape child Lotte; or the forest scene that had characters holding tall branches indicating trees. These were stunning visually, but they didn't support the show.

I just wish somebody could put together a show with strong fundamentals: a good script, a director who conveys a fluid meaning from it and actors that take direction well.

It's great for a group of talented people to get together and come up with stunning visual effects; but, if you can't develop more than pyrotechnics, why bother?

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