

Festival's Christine M: A murder with meaning

Marshall Golden
The Silence Around Christine M. is anything but silent. This Dutch film, which had its North American premiere at the Festival this week, screams at its audience. It's a "man-hating", feminist film, but the content justifies its message; and this is what makes the film so masochistically pleasing to watch.

The clever plot revolves around three women who have only one thing in common: through personal experiences each has come to hate men. Mrs. Jongman is divorced and works in a bar where she is taunted and propositioned by obnoxious workers all day; Anna is a secretary whose hard work and research go to

her boss' credit; and Christine is a housewife whose husband leaves her everyday with a houseful of bratty children.

The women, none of whom have met before, find themselves shopping in the same boutique. Christine is offended by an off-hand comment made by an unwitting shopkeeper and the three are united in their anger. Without a word, they savagely beat the man to death.

After their arrest, they are assigned a psychiatrist who attempts to decipher their motives. When questioned, Mrs. Jongman tells endless stories and Anna speaks intelligently about life's dilemmas. Christine refuses to speak.

Her silence is a protest. The shopkeeper was killed, we begin to understand, because he was a man, a symbol of all that the women hated for so long but were powerless to do anything about. Many women have expressed the frustration they feel when they try to tell the world what it is to be a woman and no-one hears their voice. This is the essence of Christine's silence. She is tired of talking when no-one listens.

The focus of the film becomes Mrs. Van de Boss, the psychiatrist. Initially, she is a cold professional. But through her discussions with the two who will talk, her female instincts stir. She begins to see that her husband, an intelligent lawyer,

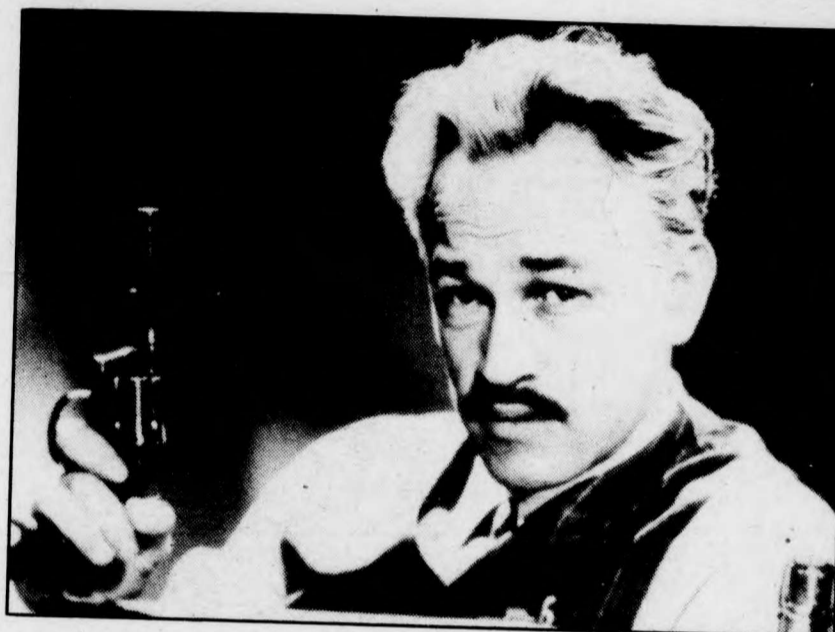
has some chauvinistic traits. When, one day, his behaviour toward her is blatantly oppressive, she finally understands what happened in the boutique; the women killed the shopkeeper because their hatred of men had grown so intense. They needed a release and he was there--the perfect scapegoat.

As Van de Boss begins to dismantle her own chauvinism, she comes to understand why these women are crying out. And she begins to really listen--not as a

psychiatrist, but as a woman.

Christine responds. The film ends with a wonderful "male justice system vs. female defendant" courtroom scene in which justice clashes with feminism; and feminism is the subtle victor.

The film is refreshing and powerful. In our traditionally anti-violent society, it is able to justify the man's murder: he, like all men in this film, deserved it. *The Silence Around Christine M.* cries out, "see me if I'm ever released in Toronto."



Hammett: A stagnant mystery

Marshall Golden
 The only intrigue in Wim Wender's noir style detective film, *Hammett*, is how anyone thought it could sustain an audience.

This latest release from Francis Ford Coppola's Zoetrope studios premiered at the Festival and has its North American release this week. But if Sunday's reception is any indication, it won't be around long.

The film's approach, at least, is fresh: a writer living within his own literary genre. Fredric Forrest in the title role, is fairly adept at looking ruffled and thinking aloud à la Sam Spade. He becomes involved in a "real life" mystery while working on one of his famed detective stories. But while the script suggests that the mystery has something to do with blackmail and a beautiful Oriental girl, there is a deeper, more disturbing mystery; what is the plot really about and how did the unfortunate Mr. Hammett become involved? And why should we care about him or his circumstance?

The first hour of the film is particularly stagnant. We spend scene after scene watching our hero type. And we listen to the sound of

his words echoing in his head. He receives mysterious clues and mysterious visits from his mysterious friend, Ryan (Peter Boyle). So cryptic, however, is Ryan that even the audience remains in the dark.

The 'dark' is one of the better features of the film. *Hammett* is photographed in the noir style of the 'forties; rich, dark night-time and harsh, long shadows. The sets are impeccable as Wenders has beautifully recreated a San Franciscan Chinatown of yesteryear.

The visuals, however, are not enough as we need to understand what is happening in these crowded, colourful streets. This is *Hammett's* most serious flaw. The film takes its mystery-genre goals too far. Although we are kept in the dark as to "who did it" until the very end, the film offers nothing to hold our interest while we are waiting to find out. The mystery is like both barrels of a tranquilizer gun.

Forrest should ask for a refund from the Bogart school of acting. Though not even Bogart could have solved the puzzle of paying five dollars to see this film.

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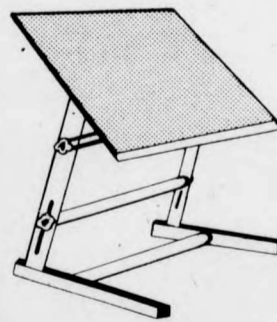
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