

movies

The Sorcerer • Exorcist II: The Heretic • A Bridge Too Far • Short Takes

● When *The Wages of Fear* (*La Salair du Peur*) was made in France in 1953 by the great French director Henri Clouzot, it was one of the most stunning suspense thrillers ever made. The first hour was devoted to building up the characterization (four desperate men from various countries) and the atmosphere (the torpor of a hot and squalid Central American jungle village), and the two other hours were filled with spine-tingling suspense as two trucks loaded with nitroglycerin traveled over disused jungle roads to put an end to an oil fire 200 miles away.

THE SORCERER is a "remake" of the earlier French film, and it captures some of the atmosphere and relates many of the same incidents. Though it is handled by a very competent American director, William Friedkin, it lacks most of the raw power and searing intensity of the original—though it is still worth seeing.

There are many reasons for the difference. Space permits me just one example: in the original, after one of the two trucks has narrowly escaped destruction off a mountain precipice, our attention turns to the second truck. After a huge fallen tree that blocks the road has been blasted away with nitroglycerin, the two men in the truck are singing in celebration of their latest victory over nature, when an explosion is faintly heard in the distance—the other truck has exploded and killed both occupants. We have expected and dreaded such an event a dozen times before, but it didn't happen; now it happens unexpectedly, just when the audience's attention has been distracted from the fate of that truck's occupants. The psychological impact of the incident is shattering—particularly since we have come to know and empathize with the two riders, through careful characterization and bits of self-revelation, and we now feel the full impact of their sudden and meaningless destruction.

In the new version, the truck simply rolls off the road and explodes. Without proper buildup or context, the psychological impact is largely lost.

The making of good suspense films depends on the careful placement of a thousand details like this, requiring both a depth of psychological insight and an uncanny sense of timing—which is why the original film is a near-miracle of growing involvement and almost unbear-

able suspense, whereas the present version misses its potential impact because it is largely a delineation of external events. Will the makers of remakes never learn from their betters?

—John Hospers

● The fate of sequels to successful Hollywood motion pictures is not a happy one. Whether **EXORCIST II: THE HERETIC** will be as successful at the box-office as its predecessor is difficult to say (it probably won't be); one can say only that it doesn't deserve to be.

Films dealing with the macabre and the supernatural have been in high fashion the last few years. Almost all of them are sheer trash: e.g., *Carrie*, *Audrey Rose*, *The Sentinel*, etc. etc. What distinguished the original *Exorcist* of a couple of years ago was that it was a brilliant intellectual exercise in the successive elimination of alternative hypotheses: every time the viewer concluded that this or that (psychosis, brain damage) was a plausible explanation for the extraordinary events depicted on the screen, the new alternative was closed off by some dramatic development, until at last only one alternative remained: the literal habitation of an individual by a demonic force with evil supernatural powers. Many viewers didn't for a minute believe in the truth of this hypothesis, but the challenge, the battle of wits between the viewer and the film as its story unfolded, was a refreshing and stimulating change in film fare. The pattern of action, however repellent to some viewers, remained rigorously clear and sharp, thanks largely to the clarity of vision of director William Friedkin.

All that needs to be said about *Exorcist II*, which Friedkin did not direct, is that it almost succeeds in descending to the level of *Exorcist I*'s trashy imitations. Unfocused and unguided by the directorial powers of its predecessor, even the actors in this sequel seem to sense that in the absence of discipline, all is mush.

—J.H.

● **A BRIDGE TOO FAR**'s account of the Allied invasion of German-occupied Europe in the vicinity of Arnhem, Holland, in September of 1944, is a kind of companion piece to *The Longest Day*, about the Allied invasion of Normandy in

June of 1944, which was filmed about 15 years ago. The Arnhem incident is less well known today to the general public, but was also a complex logistical operation, and the opportunity to portray a gruesome amount of casualties is equally present (and used) in both.

There are other similarities. Both films attempt to be historically accurate, down to comparatively small details. Both use famous actors in bit parts, thus largely wasting their talents; *A Bridge Too Far* has Robert Redford, Laurence Olivier, Liv Ullman, James Caan, and many other million-dollar-a-film actors in parts that call for only a few lines. (As a result, both films were extraordinarily expensive to make—in the case of *BTF*, \$30 million.) Both films are "fair to the other side," no longer portraying all Germans as inveterate villains. Since both films give accounts of large-scale military operations, the action is so dispersed that the progress of events is somewhat hard to follow, and as a result it lacks in dramatic force. The scene constantly shifts from one location to another, and though the particular incident may be clearly portrayed, its relation to the whole operation is often quite obscure, thus frustrating the viewer who desires a clear clean story line. This feature is particularly evident in *A Bridge Too Far*: *The Longest Day* succeeded somewhat better in giving a sense of the whole.

Both films convey a sense of the horror of war, from viewing those horrors firsthand and without false heroics. But in *A Bridge Too Far* there is an additional twist. There is left a distinct impression that the military brass purposely engineered an operation that they had good reason to believe would result in defeat (thus fanning the current dislike of the military). But this impression is largely mistaken: those who planned the Arnhem operation had no way of knowing that at that very time and place there were crack Panzer divisions "resting" for a military confrontation that they thought would take place elsewhere, and whose presence at the wrong place at the wrong time (from the Allied point of view) largely sealed the fate of the whole enterprise. (This fact is mentioned in the film, but the opposite impression is nevertheless created.) An attempt to ride a current popularity wave is thus gained at the expense of accuracy. In this respect *The Longest Day* was more objective: it took no sides, and pretty much let the historical story tell itself. *A Bridge Too Far*, which was on the whole competently directed by the fine British actor Richard Attenborough, would have done better to stick to the same ideal of total accuracy without trying to play to the galleries.

—J.H.

● **THE LITTLE GIRL THAT LIVES DOWN THE LANE** is an interesting and diabolical character, to say the least. But the film does not go in for mysticism or supernaturalism, and is a neat little suspense thriller on a very minor scale. If you want to have one cinematic version of what little girls are capable of, you might enjoy this film, if you have nothing better to do to while away an evening.

—J.H.

● **CHAC, THE GOD OF RAIN** will probably not be shown at many American theaters. This is unfortunate, for it is a beautiful and moving film, shot in the jungles and mountains of Panama with the Mayan Indians of Panama as the (totally authentic) actors. You may first have to engage in a "willing suspension of disbelief," accepting for the duration of the film the supernatural origin of natural phenomena; the point is to make you see

reality from the point of view of the native Indians. The people and their beliefs may be primitive (though fascinating), but the color photography, the direction, and the ascending pace and dramatic sweep of the picture certainly are not. The human drama and the splendid scenic background combine to make this an engrossing and eloquent film.

—J.H.

money

Support Your Local Counterfeiter

The great advance of western political philosophy, at least since the time of Vlad the Impaler, has been the acceptance of the notion that society is better off being oppressed by a single great criminal so powerful he cannot be resisted, than to be oppressed by a normal assortment of petty crooks who could be kept off with a vicious dog.

In economic matters this has led us to accept the notion that the offense of counterfeiting is committed only by the emission of worthless currency by a private person. Each element of the offense must be proved, and if the rascal can convince a jury that he is a public entity (i.e., a duly-annointed criminal monopolist) then they are bound to acquit, no matter how greivous his mischief.

Of course, since as von Mises tells us, money is anything merchants will accept as money, there is no reason you can't have private persons issuing their own banknotes at whatever the market will value them. This was done rather extensively during the 19th century, both here and abroad. Outside of the United States the best known of these were the Scottish banks, whose sound management of private money is credited with the industrialization of that otherwise very unpromising country.

The variety of private note issue did not, as the running dog apologists for statism assert, result in economic chaos. Since most people are fairly competent in handling their own affairs, they had no unusual difficulty sorting out good credit bank notes from the dubious issues, discounting the various private bank issues along a market price continuum, just as we today value corporate securities, private mortgages, commodities, etc., through the free market's marvelous price mechanism.

But since one thing leads to another, the State's monopoly on counterfeiting has been extended to cover the issuance of good bank notes as well as bogus ones.

For good measure the State, through the Legal Tender Act, *requires* that the people accept its monopoly money (the pun was unintended) so that we now find that the occasional losses suffered by private note holders during all the "bad old days" of free note issue pale to insignificance beside the annual losses forced upon people by the State monopoly money.

But monopolies, as we know, are very hard to maintain. In the free market they are entirely unstable and invariably short-lived. They are maintainable for any time only with legal protection, and even then it requires constant recourse to the gendarmes to prop them up against the inexorable force of rational self interest.

The State's monopoly on the issue of bogus money is no exception.

As all of us who grew up listening to "The F.B.I. in Peace and War" on our Atwater-Kent know, the feds will swoop in through the kitchen window with tommy guns at the ready if you so much as try to take a wax rubbing of a dollar bill. (Substitute Efrem Zimbalist, Jr. and silly putty if you're younger; the idea is the same.)

A couple of times a year you will see stories in the newspaper of the feds busting a counterfeiting ring. The story will usually explain that the bills can be spotted by the fact that the picture of Hamilton is upside down, or some such clue for the sharp-eyed.

An interesting observation on all this was made by a friend in the printing business who remarked that you never hear about a counterfeiting scheme that involved anything near the state of the printing art. New presses and techniques can do marvelous work, and the equipment is widely available, but you only hear about counterfeiters who have been using old Xerox machines and magic

markers.

From this my friend concluded that either (1) anyone who has access to good printing equipment is incapable of contemplating counterfeiting or, (2) there may be a lot of funny money in circulation.

The government hasn't helped the situation by the deterioration in the quality of its own product. (Of course I might be wrong about this; I have just assumed all the bad printing I have seen was Treasury work—maybe it wasn't.) For another, citizens are not encouraged to report dubious money they find in their change. If they're lucky the government simply seizes the notes and they are out the money. If they're unlucky they may have some long ego-threatening talks with gimlet-eyed T-men.

Of course, there could be counterfeiting even in a free market. In Scotland, for example, if a customer brought in a bogus note, the bankers would give him a new one and apologize for the inconvenience. At the same time in England, where there was a State monopoly on note issue, possession of a counterfeit note was a hanging offense.

But a fresh breeze blows. *Uberwirtschafter* F.A. Hayek, who formerly defended the notion that government had a legitimate function in the provision of money, has now recanted and announced that money should be a wholly private enterprise.

Hayek's conversion is welcome not only because it is always gratifying to see truth received but as well because it is one more case refuted of the claim that we must have a State—an institution of coercion against peaceful persons—in order for society to function. In this sense the argument for private money is like the argument for private roads and schools and courts. By showing people that the State is unnecessary for some heretofore-thought-essential social function, you show that the burdens of supporting this great criminal are not man's inexorable lot.

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