

## cinema

## 'Handkerchiefs' a modern fairy tale inspiring innocence

By ANN SMALLWOOD

There once was a king who had a daughter that never smiled. The king so wanted his daughter to smile that he offered her in marriage to any man in his kingdom who could bring the faintest shadow of a grin to her face.

As the story goes, none of the gallant young bachelors in the land was able to bring cheer to the princess. Instead, it was only the youngest son of a poor woodsman, a social outcast, who was able to coax the solemn maiden to laughter and so win her hand.

Bertrand Blier's new film, *Get Out Your Handkerchiefs*, is reminiscent of this old fairy tale, but it has quite a bit more modern sophistication than its traditional counterpart.

*Handkerchiefs*, or as it was released in France originally, *Preparez Vos Mouchoirs*, is a marvelous satire of the eternal mystery of woman. More than that, and most enjoyable for those of us who are classified as the other sex, the film points up the even more unfathomable stupidity of man.

The story begins with a riveting close-up of the woman in the film, Solange (Carole Laure), listlessly shoveling forkfuls of unappealing sauerkraut into her mouth. Her husband Raoul (Gerard Depardieu), a simple but sincere driving-school instructor, is trying, as he does throughout the film, to make his near-catatonic wife happy.

In desperation, Raoul, decides to give his wife to a

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A sophisticated tale of the mystery of woman, with Gerard Depardieu, Patrick Dewaere and Carole Laure

stranger, a pseudo-intellectual Mozart-lover named Stephane (Patrick Dewaere), if he will give the cheer-up-Solange game a try.

The two are an improbable, but likeable pair of Romeos—Raoul, the big blond teddybear, and Stephane, the dark scruffy, sensitive-type. But even their combined, and hilarious, efforts to bring Solange out of her gloom are to no avail. Says, Stephane, in one particularly profound moment, "There are two kinds of women. There are ordinary ball-breakers and there are high class ball breakers. Solange is no ordinary ball-breaker."

Yet despite the frustrations of their quest, the two men stand in amazement before the work of art that is woman. Raoul marvels, to the accompaniment of some discreet violin melodies, about "the body of a woman...a whole factory, functioning silently." Before him the pretty, though rather ordinary Solange, sleeps. Stephane and Raoul look on with the wonder of men from a faraway, all-male country who have discovered an

alien on their shores—the first woman. In short, they look ridiculous.

The solution to Solange's depression, the men conclude, is to get her pregnant. They believe, that a mother simply has to be happy. They were 100 percent correct, but they did not expect Solange to adopt instead of conceive. She chose precocious, 13-year-old Christian Boleil (Riton) to be her son, and lover.

As in the fairy story, woman made the least likely decision imaginable.

Still, her Oedipal affair, though somewhat perverse, is not without its charm. But unfortunately, here the film runs into problems. Blier seems to be trying to make a statement about innocence, perhaps even about Christianity, that is a bit far-fetched.

It is enough just to look at Jean Penzer's romantically golden cinematography and watch the bumbling antics of the characters. The film's light-hearted humor is all the message an audience could ask for. *Handkerchiefs* inspires innocence, not intellect. And it's women and children first. ■

## Monotony name of game

By BUDDY BURNISKE

After watching Robert Altman's latest film, *Quintet*, you may feel as though the die from a cinematic crap game just fell squarely on your head.

In truth, quintet is the name of a game—the game played by the central characters in this bizarre vision of an Ice Age to come. But the

real game is the one that surrounds the pentagonal playing board; it's the game of life. Unfortunately for all concerned, neither of these games is pointedly addressed, but instead, both are left only as loose ends in Altman's strands of thought.

The story is set in a desolate future world where glaciation afflicts the living and buries the dead. Most animals are extinct, wood is

scarce, friends have been replaced by 'alliances', and smiles are but a memory.

Paul Newman plays Essex, an enigmatic 'omega man,' who searches first for a family and then for the answers to the mystery of quintet. Essex is first seen with his wife, trudging through the barren snowlands toward the city that was once his home. As the couple makes its way through the frozen wilderness, most viewers will panic, privately wondering, "When will something happen?"

Indeed, following the screen credits an abstinence from words and action is forced upon the audience for several minutes. All that's provided are two distant figures, a vast whiteness, and an annoying piano tinkling in the background. When the city is finally reached part of the audience is snowblind.

The rest suffers from a bad case of stimulus deprivation.

The monotony turns to madness after Essex locates his brother, a man he hadn't seen in over a decade. While Essex steps out to buy firewood for the household, a quintet tournament player sabotages the house, killing the family, and setting off a startling sequence of events. Essex takes up pursuit of the murderer (who claims to be 'within the rules') only to witness his death at the hands of another player. Baffled by the strange happenings (aren't we all) Essex assumes the identity of Redstone, the slain murderer, inheriting quintet pieces and a list of tournament players in hopes finding the answer to the mystery of the game.

The game we are told, is life itself, and the stakes run high. As Gregor (Fernando Rey), the tournament referee, tells Essex, "The

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game is all that's important. It is life. You play for the thrill of it. That's what the game of quintet is all about—feeling the heat of adrenaline flow through your body."

The game runs through—and over—its share of bodies before the film's conclusion. And truthfully, a good deal of suspense and intrigues develops as the names are gradually removed from Essex' list.

But the attraction of individual characters is overwhelmed by the chaos of Altman's story-telling technique. Subtle nuances that should be woven into our perspective of quintet's parallels to life only serve to confuse the audience. For a moment, the story looks ripe for conclusion, but then an uncooperative piece appears, throwing Altman's puzzle into complete disarray. Such occurrences bewilder the audience, making viewers feel they're either too shallow to understand or were never intended to.

Believe it or not, there is a message to this madness. Just what that may be, I'm not sure. I, like Altman, choose to leave such interpretations to the discretion of viewers.

Certainly, Altman takes a sinister look at life, and raises some stirring questions about man's persistence to live despite the wretchedness of this world. Death is viewed as an escape from life's suffering and a provision for hope, but it's not made clear just why it gives hope. Repeatedly, the film drifts off just as it prepared to deliver an accurate feel for what the director wants to say. Instead of presenting cohesive elements, it provides a conglomerate of slit throats, speared heads and grotesque sound effects (of dogs slurping over frozen corpses in the city snow). It's too steeped in symbolism, to inundated with gore and too damn chaotic to make sense.

Whether it's perceived as a game or a film, quintet proves to be a distressing experience. Watching it is like being backgammoned by an 11-year-old. Both events will frustrate and disappoint you to no end. ■



The games are loose ends in Altman's strands of thought