

Document Citation

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|---------------|----------------------------------|
| Title | Providence |
| Author(s) | Gene Moskowitz |
| Source | <i>Variety</i> |
| Date | 1977 Jan 12 |
| Type | review |
| Language | English |
| Pagination | |
| No. of Pages | 1 |
| Subjects | |
| Film Subjects | Providence, Resnais, Alain, 1977 |

VAR 1/12/77

Providence (FRENCH-COLOR)

Paris, Jan. 11.

CCFC release of Action Films-SFP production. Stars Dirk Bogarde, Ellen Burstyn, John Gielgud, David Warner, Elaine Stritch. Directed by Alain Resnais. Screenplay, David Mercer; camera (Eastman-color-Panavision), Ricardo Aronovitch; art director, Jacques Saulnier; editor, Albert Jurgenson; music, Miklos Rosza; produced by Kalous Hellwig, Yves Gasser, Yves Peyrot. Reviewed at Ariane, Paris, Jan. 1, '77. Running time, 110 MINS.

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|--------------|---------------------|
| Claude | Dirk Bogarde |
| Sonia | Ellen Burstyn |
| Clive | John Gielgud |
| Kevin | David Warner |
| Helen | Elaine Stritch |
| Mark | Cyril Luckham |
| Dave | Denis Lawson |
| Boon | Kathryn Leigh-Scott |

(English Soundtrack)

A striking amalgam of the literary and theatrical approach in scripting; that is, sharp talk, high-blown scenes of personal revelation and general politico asides; has been turned into an unusual visual tour-de-force by French director Alain Resnais working in English from a script by David Mercer of Britain and a mixed bag of top British and American players.

It is a riveting pic pictorially, offering dense insights into the flights of imagination of a supposedly dying writer of perhaps some faddish fame. Keeping an enigmatic aloofness, pic still is more accessible than Resnais's "Last Year in Marienbad." The style is impeccable as the film sashays from the novelist's feverish, drunken rambles about his new novel, putting his family into it, and commenting on them.

Scripter Mercer's revealing dialog and sometimes shrill dramatics are offset by Resnais's elegant direction. It makes some of the bawdy and off-color language more a personal shield than trying to shock or be used for its own sake. John Gielgud's mellifluous or impassioned delivery as the writer is extraordinary as well as Dirk Bogarde as the son, a cold, internally-wounded man who cannot show emotion.

Ellen Burstyn is rightly both yielding and tough as his wife since the age of 17 who cannot escape him despite her growing hatred of his ways. David Warner, finally revealed as the only recognized bas-

tard son of the writer, is right as a sort of anarchic would-be saint in the book segs while Elaine Stritch is correctly acidulous as an older woman mistress of Bogarde due to her resemblance to his mother.

Pic scrambles and unscrambles these skeins as Gielgud drinks, chortles, has pains and thinks he is dying during a sleepless night in which he reworks his life and feelings towards himself and his characters into this gaudy book. There is a sort of Harold Pinter ambiguity and menace plus the ranting of a John Osborne.

But Mercer's own lucid, wry humor and evaluation of the lives of his characters are expressively visualized. There are scenes of what seems like Chilean herding of dissidents into a ball park with beatings that lurk behind Gielgud's surface ways and recur throughout as well as a trial in which Bogarde, a lawyer, hounds Warner, who as a soldier killed an old man seemingly turning into an animal. He is acquitted but later killed that way by Bogarde who thinks he is his wife's lover, not so.

A country dinner, reuniting Gielgud with the real son, bastard son and wife of the son, hint at some truth in his rambling invention but more the delirium of a dying rambunctious man, a womanizer who ignored his wife, alienated his son, but is forgiven by the latter as not being responsible for the wife's suicide.

A fascinating pic puzzle that should easily get buffs and more selective audiences everywhere, enhanced by its English original soundtrack that for once is not at odds with the rhythm or conception of the pic. Natural fest aspects and also having the brilliance to break out into big urban situations despite a perhaps self-pitying aspect though leaving some ray of human hope and feeling in this otherwise harsh pic about death.

Some reminiscences of "Citizen Kane," in its approach to the writer's country house, and to Ingmar Bergman's similar probings of an old man's thoughts in "Wild Strawberries" but going its own way in assimilating them for a stylish pic. There is fine decoration of the imaginary scenes, expert lensing and cold and rich hues, when needed, by Ricardo Aronovitch and an arresting, lush, dramatic score for these mental meanderings by Miklos Rosza.

Resnais has always preferred having novelists doing his scripts and mounting them carefully. But he does evince an interest in probing time and memory as he did in "Hiroshima Mon Amour," "Muriel," "The War Is Over" and especially "Marienbad." —Mosk.