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The Many Hats of Robert Altman: A Life in Cinema

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Bouquets & Tomatoes

Throughout his film-making career, Robert Altman's films generated intense reactions. Both professional critics and everyday viewers were often at one end of the scale or the other in terms of loving or hating his work. The "Altman style" with its carefully cultivated unresolved plots, scripts that sounded like ordinary conversation with overlapping voices, and sardonic commentary on the state of the country and world were never "easy" for viewers. Noted critic Pauline Kael of *The New Yorker* came to be a big Altman fan and championed many of his works, but there were also avid fans among ordinary moviegoers, as shown by the fan mail in the archive. Shown here is a sampling of reactions to movies from Altman's early career.

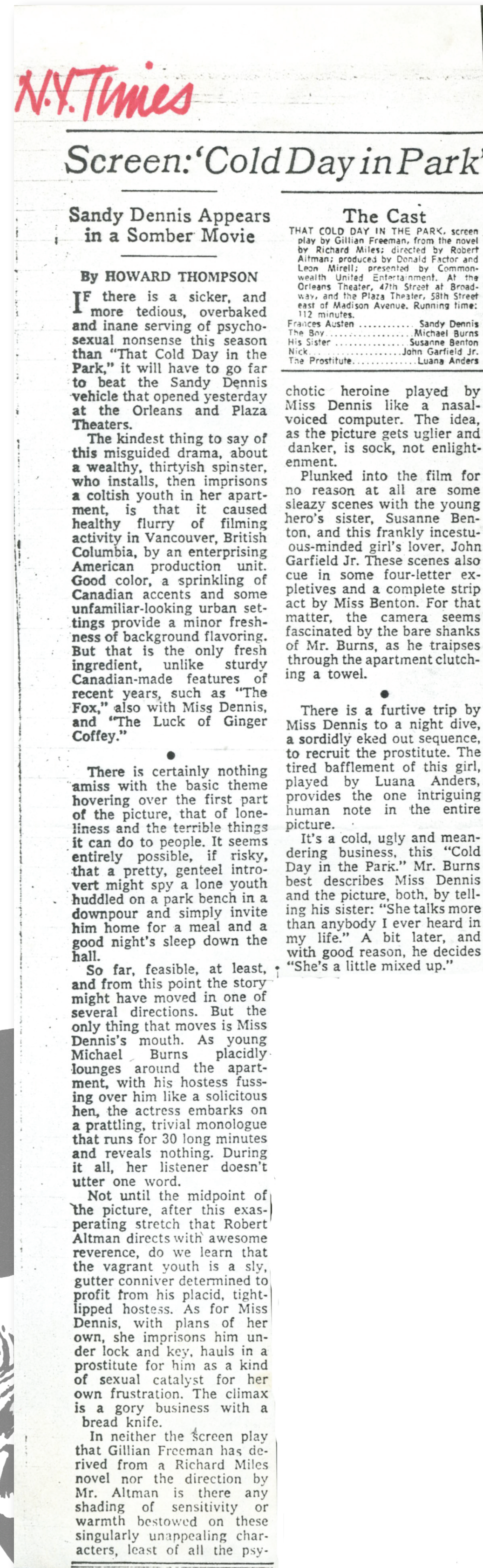
That Cold Day in the Park (1969)

Seemingly, no one who saw Altman's *That Cold Day in the Park* remained neutral. In it, a rich spinster invites a young man from a nearby park to stay at her apartment, then attempts to seduce him. Some thought it was a "brilliant" story with phenomenal actors. Others believed it to be "a piece of psycho-sexual nonsense."

Howard Thompson of the *New York Times* thought the film overly sexually explicit and containing boring characters with no real plot. His review opens:

"If there is a sicker, and more tedious, overbaked and inane serving of psycho-sexual nonsense this season than "That Cold Day in the Park" it will have to go far to beat the Sandy Dennis vehicle that opened yesterday at the Orleans and Plaza Theaters."

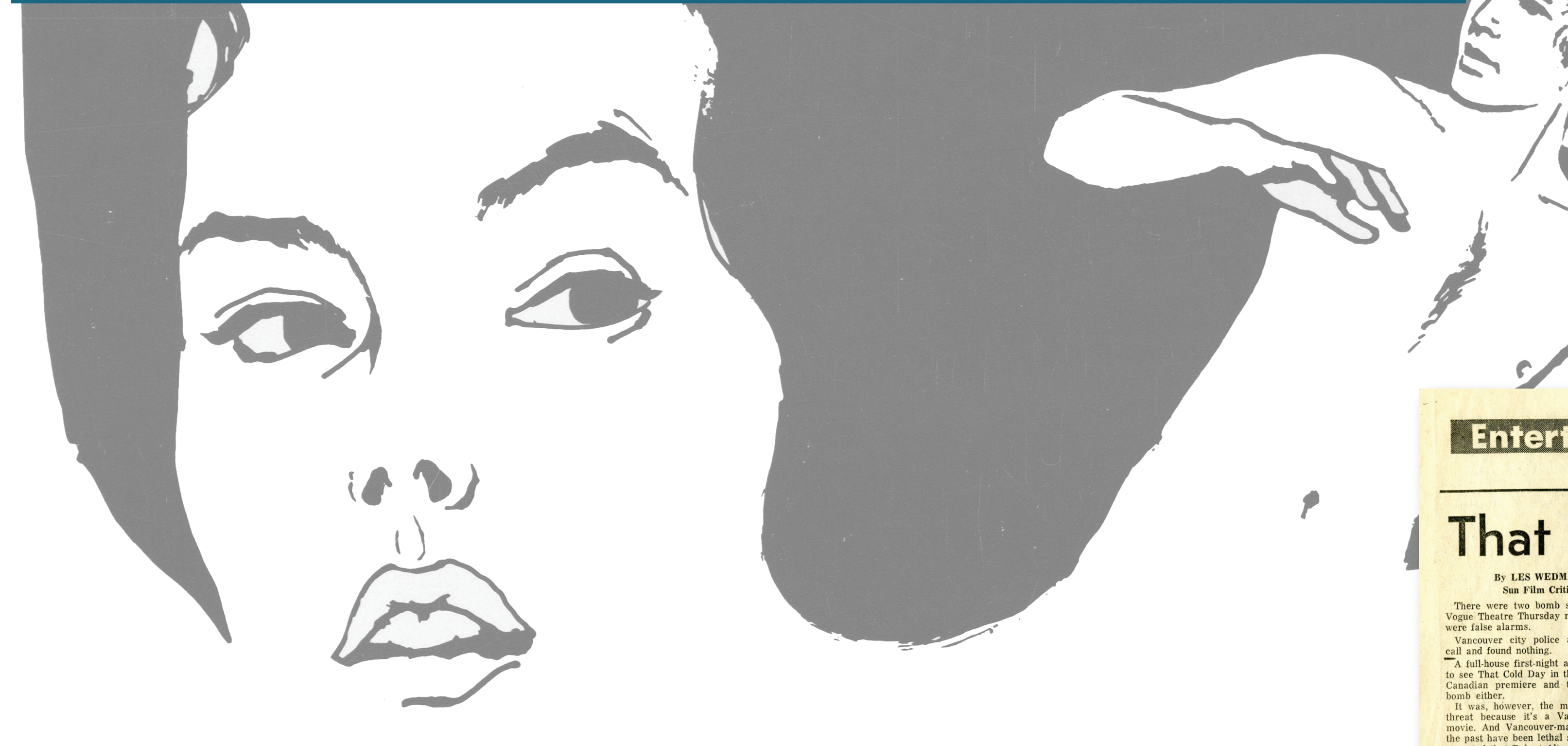
-Howard Thompson



Howard Thompson, "Cold Day in the Park," *New York Times*, date unknown



Les Wedman, "That Film Made in Vancouver - Shocking and Great," *Vancouver Sun*, June 20, 1969



The film had special significance for readers of the *Vancouver Sun* because it was shot on location there. Wedman was quite positive about the film, saying that Vancouver was proud to have an Altman movie filmed there and hoped he would return. That wish came true when Altman returned to shoot the 1971 *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*.

"Altman has an eye for unusual and effective visual images. ... Personality doesn't count with what shows up on the screen but creative know-how does. And Altman certainly has it."
-Les Wedman