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Hot Shots

Three vintage films exhibit blatant lesbian tendencies.

BY CANDACE MOORE

Seduction always requires some role-playing. Three pre-Stonewall films offer rousing exhibitions of lesbian erotic panache: in *The Killing of Sister George*, two British ladies battle to play fuck nanny to a 32-year-old child; Marlene Dietrich's incandescent drag act liquifies the screen in *Morocco*; and a rich socialite tries to top a saucy pauperess in *Les Biches*. These oh-so-rentable classics celebrate dyke sensuality as performance site.

Morocco

(MCA/Universal, 1930)

On an ocean liner to *Morocco*, smitten aristocrat Kennington (Adolphe Menjou) tries to advise "one way ticket" Amy Jolly (Marlene Dietrich). "I won't need any help," says the sultry blonde, shredding Kennington's address and flicking the confetti out of her palm. The dialogue, from a play by Vigny Benny, is sadly expository as it follows the love affair of a chanteuse and a lady-killer legionnaire, Tom Brown (Gary Cooper, who's not bad looking, either). As transformed by Josef von Sternberg's idolatrous lens, mere narrative structure can't stop Marlene Dietrich from embodying sex. Viscerally stunning in top hat and tux, Dietrich transforms a cabaret performance into an erotic spectacle for both sexes. Snubbing a man's paw, she swoops in on a society girl's lips: after dashing plucking a flower from behind the lady's ear, she smirks and bends to land one smack on the kisser. The club's audience is transfixed and titillated; men and women swoon unabashedly for this she-Adonis. You'll drool throughout this 90-minute potboiler as one of the world's most sumptuous creatures does the simplest things: smokes a cigarette, fans herself with a deco fan, or just puts her hands in her trouser pockets. Grade: **B**

The Killing of Sister George

(Anchor Bay Entertainment, 1968)

By the makers of *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (producer/director Robert Aldrich and writer Lukas Heller), this metrocolor laugh-riot could be considered a dyke *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Both adult dramas enact the bittersweet conviction "all the world's a stage." George (Beryl Reid), an aging BBC soap-opera star, boozes it up, outrageously jumps two nuns in a cab, and makes her younger lover Childie (Susannah York) eat cigar butts. The film's title refers both to the onscreen death of George's TV character and her own figurative death: she loses both Alice and her public. George's quip-laced tantrums get wittier as her devastation increases. George offers sex as an apology for her petty brutalities, but this couple mostly suffers from lesbian bed death. Why wouldn't blonde bottom Alice turn to protective, powerful producer Mercy Craft (Coral Browne)? Electrified by Mercy's wicked-

stepmother caress, Childie surrenders in a long and surprisingly explicit sex scene—which some would class in the horror genre—while Childie's dolls watch. Grade: **A+**



Les Biches resembling one another too closely

Les Biches

(Connoisseur Video Collection, 1968)

Claude Chabrol's racy flick, deceptively titled *The Does*, packs plenty of repressed French girl-girl frothing at the mouth. Wealthy Frédérique (Stéphane Audran) picks up homeless sidewalk artiste Why (Jacqueline Sassard) off the Pont Neuf, takes her home, and bathes her. The camera scans the opaque bathwater as Frédérique cherishes the exposed legs and neck of her new acquisition. Why submerged is doubly desirable: we know she's nude but can't visually consume her. Once the grime's off, Why could be Frédérique's clone, with the same glowing olive complexion and long chestnut cheveux. Trying to coax Why from the tub, the older woman coos, "After all, we're both women." Why protests, "That's just it." Dressed, Why happily lets the older woman kneel at her crotch, peel her shirt up, and unbutton her pants. (What unfolds is a reverse-gender version of Patricia Highsmith's *Talented Mr. Ripley*, cinematically closer to *High Noon* than the unfortunate Matt Damon vehicle.) *Les Biches* has an SM twist: Frédérique showers Why with affection and treats her as slave property. Struggling to accept her submissive role, Why develops the face-saving strategy of morphing into Frédérique. The rich bitch closes in on the first man to bed Why, moving the mortifyingly bland Paul (Jean-Louis Trintignant) into their St. Tropez home as Why's replacement. The amorous and schizoid Why is left to emulate her mistress's wardrobe and eyeliner on the sly, when she's not masturbating outside the new lovebirds' door. Without giving away the ending, let's just say things don't work out well for everyone. Grade: **B+**

Candace Moore, co-editor of small press *Runcible Press*, lives in Los Angeles.

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