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Simon sneaks out. Much of the film is a reconstruction of a French-Canadian met and

backs, Simon plans an attempt to burgle the Riviera. Cleef & Arpels; Françoise dealer, thinks him but suspects otherwise. and her attraction to Situationist, prove seductive; caught in the back room Françoise pledges to wait a familiar enough situation given novelty by Françoise "to live like a man"—to do generally granted male sex. What gives *La* much of its real grace and arm is Simon's struggle. When he returns from the past: "It was my—of staying alive."

resakes the giddy sentimentality of *Man and a Woman* for that is full of pride, in compromise. Ventura and Mme. Fabian bring depth to their roles, and Lelouch the time and the lap their characterizations. s, memorably, on a close-up as he struggles to understand Françoise's insistence on and identity while he was

in prison does not preclude a real and enduring love for him. Lelouch never furnishes more than a hint about whether Simon will ever understand, much less accept this. But he, Ventura and Fabian have succeeded nicely in making it all matter.

■ Jay Cocks

Tragedy Trivialized

EXECUTIVE ACTION
Directed by DAVID MILLER
Screenplay by DALTON TRUMBO

Much of this film is fiction, according to the credits; but much, too, is fact. Which is which never becomes clear. This state of affairs might matter less in an ordinary thriller than it does here, in a melodrama concerning the assassination of John Kennedy. The film makers state in a disclaimer that they do not maintain that a conspiracy to assassinate the President did actually exist. They want only to suggest how such a conspiracy "might have happened."

It happens, in *Executive Action*, like a low-grade, seedy shoot-'em-up. Dalton Trumbo's script is based on a story written in part by Mark Lane, the lawyer and assassination-conspiracy buff. Real names of persons and places are used except where they would be most crucial. The conspirators—Burt Lancaster, Robert Ryan, Will Geer and John Anderson among them—are assigned fictional names, but only the vaguest iden-



LANCASTER & RYAN IN ACTION
Open wounds.

tities. Ryan, the force behind the plot, is wealthy; Lancaster apparently is a maverick intelligence operative; Geer, an elderly man who has oil interests. Such sketchiness satisfies the requirements of neither history nor drama.

If this were a film about another assassination—say, a plot to kill the board chairman of a large corporation—the tedium of Miller's direction, the dry rot of Trumbo's writing, would quickly do it in. Instead, the movie is kept going

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by the baleful novelty of being about Kennedy. Whatever factual points the movie might have made are inextricably mixed up in trappings that would have seemed awkward even in a creaky TV series like *Foreign Intrigue*. The existence of a double for Oswald is not made even dramatically credible; yet the movie and the assassination theory it implies depend crucially on that.

If the film makers hoped to reopen or revitalize the investigation of the assassination, there is nothing here to do it. The movie is so clumsy it may accomplish exactly the opposite: it may discredit all the theorists who have raised some pertinent and puzzling points and make them look like dabblers in unlikely melodrama. The movie trivializes national tragedy and leeches off still-painful wounds.

■ J.C.