

FILM REVIEWS

ment — is that it fails to catalyze into anything greater than merely the sum of its parts. The film's tenacious collective stance and its refusal to resort to "obvious" narrative artifice, result — paradoxically — in a distinctly artificial and fragmented product, which *might* have fared somewhat better as theatre, where tradition and subsequent audience expectation allow for greater experimentation.

Also, the film's sets, as well as its best moment — a patently absurd conversation between the bride's mother and the groom on the relative merits of 14, 18 and 22-karat gold jewellery — are in fact, highly theatrical in nature; as is the scene in which an unemployed Spanish immigrant recounts his tale of woe to the women.

However, it is doubtful that this production would have succeeded fully even as theatre. Avant-garde art, since it resorts to none of the traditional narrative devices used to engage the viewer's attention, must force him to participate in some other way — by mystifying him, making him uncomfortable, curious or what-have-you. *La cuisine rouge* suffers from a sustained inability to move us, except in rare, isolated moments.

Lucienne Kroha



Holding on for dear life? *Suzanne's* Jennifer Dale and Winston Rekert

La cuisine rouge

d./sc. Paule Baillargeon, Frédérique Collin
exec. p. Bailon Blanc **assoc. p.** Claude Desagné, Renée Roy **p. asst.** Denis Hamel **p. sec.** Lucie d'Amour, Lise Roy, Colette Martin, Manon Lefebvre **a.d.** Lise Abastado, Claire Wojas **p. man.** Marie-Andrée Brouillard, Jacques Laliberté **d.o.p.** Jean-Charles Tremblay **asst. cam.** Pierre Duceppe (1st), Camille Maheux (2nd) **ed.** Babalou Hamelin, Marie Hamelin (asst.) **sync.** Sophie Bissonette **sd. ed.** Claude Langlois **sd.** Serge Beauchemin, Jacques Blain, Esther Auger **art d.** Réal Ouellette **props** Chantal Pépin, Gilles Ducas (asst.), Michel Lussier (asst.) **make-up** Dale Turgeon, Micheline Foissy **ward.** Louise Jobin, Lise Bédard **elec.** Normand Viau, Daniel Chrétien **machinists** Emmanuel Lépine, Pierre Charpentier, Patrice Bengle, Nathalie Moliavko-Visotsky **cont.** Marie La Haye **stills** Camille Maheux **mus.** Yves Laferrière **musicians** Richard Beaudet, Richard Perrotte, Gilles Beaudoin, Yves Laferrière, Monique Fauteux **boom** Gilles Perrotte **sd. mix.** Michel Descombes **craftservice** Albanie Morin, Jacques Leduc (asst.) **i.p.** Michèle Mercure, Han Masson, Catherine Brunelle, Marie Ouellet, Monique Mercure, Valérie Desjoe, Claude Maher, Gilles Renaud, Guy Thauvette, Raymond Cloutier, Jean-Pierre Saulnier, Pierre Curzi, Bertrand Carrière, Claude Laroche, Ghyslaine Tremblay **p.c.** Les Films Anastasie Inc. (1979) **col.** 16mm **running time** 82 min. **dist.** Les Films du Crépuscule.

Robin Spry's *Suzanne*

After the disheartening premiere of *Suzanne* at Toronto's Festival of Festivals last month, Robin Spry withdrew his film and made several changes to it before it was released commercially; the result is a better film, although five minutes here and there cannot transform an ugly duckling into a swan. It is nonetheless, for reasons I hope to make clear, an estimable film, and one wonders whether the sharp criticism of it is now justified.

The Canadian imagination has always had a self-conscious predilection for ideas. Maybe in our early factionalism ideas were weapons to defeat our opponents, religious or cultural; maybe ideas gave us a sense of civilization in our harsh surroundings. But rarely were they absorbed into the imaginative experience

of the country. *Suzanne* fairly begs to engage us with serious ideas. The opening scene — the disruption by political agitators of a Corpus Christi procession — is splendid and has been appropriately praised; the clash of traditional and modern forces in Quebec in the fifties is, we now realize, one of Canada's crucial conflicts. And *Suzanne*, the young girl who is the film's subject, ponders her own dual — French and English — background "There must be more to me than being split in two, never knowing who I am." The sectarian differences between French and English, Catholic and Protestant, wealthy and poor, figure in the movie as they did in our history. But the ideas do not mesh with the plot, and they are left dangling as the movie goes its predictable way.

Predictable, because Spry and Ronald Sutherland (who wrote the screenplay with Spry) are reduced to using tired, time-worn plot and characterization. Every figure is a walking stereotype, and as the movie progresses one starts checking off the dreary familiarities: Presbyte-

rian repression, French-Canadian liveliness (which, in the person of Suzanne's mother, is killed; I leave off drawing any conclusions from that), rape, abortion, the aggressive shallowness of wealth. It is, as Marc Gervais pointed out in last month's *Cinema Canada*, vulgar melodrama.

Yet why am I not irritated with this film? Improvements in sound and overall tightness no doubt play a part. But something else is going on here that interests me, something I can only call a considered sense of time and place. Beneath the cliché and predictability is an engaging aliveness to environment. The dance bandstand on the beach, the interiors of the houses, the drab beauty of the Montreal streets, each scene is scrupulously right, and each scene seems to testify to Canada's distinctness. I recall the excitement I felt, in the opening scene of **Duddy Kravitz**, seeing Montreal portrayed in a slick, confident movie — the backstreets and iron staircases were instantly recognizable as Canadian. We have always been hungry to know what has shaped us, what our cities looked like in times past, what life was like. This is no doubt a symptom of our lack of self-confidence. But it is also due, I suspect, to a certain admission of social realities. The narcissistic claustrophobia of a movie like **Kramer vs. Kramer**, wholly encased in the private world, is very far from Spry's film. In **Suzanne**, the public realm is always at the edge of the individual's life, whether it is the police (who are portrayed, tellingly, as nice guys), or society barriers, or the graveyard, the final public domain. We are not so unique and wonderful but are products of our time and place, Spry seems to be saying, and if he goes too far in reducing personality to stereotype, I prefer that excess to the hot-house inflation of the individual in **Kramer vs. Kramer**.

Spry's camera work is unobtrusive and suited to his purpose. Moods or states of mind are not portrayed cinematically so much as the felt actuality of the city. The streets gain a kind of luminousness through the camera's eye and might be termed a quietly active background.

I admire **Suzanne** for its earnest attempt to grapple with the Canadian experience. Like Hugh MacLennan's novels

(also rife with large ideas, never quite digested), the film brings to the fore ideas that have shaped and are shaping us. That effort alone does not produce art but it fosters the environment — of self-familiarity, perhaps — where art is possible. Towards the end of **Suzanne**, Nicky, the local no-good, talks of running away to California. But Suzanne has no desire to go, and judging by the happy life she makes for herself we can see why.

Hers is a quiet assurance that the Canadian here, regardless of repression and narrowness, and religious and cultural turmoil, is worthy of cultivation. That this assurance is possible is the film's sanguine message. That **Suzanne** never quite brings together ideas and experience puts the truth of the message, regretfully, in some doubt.

Peter Sanders



FROM SCRIPT TO SCREEN
**CANADA'S
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(Readers are referred to *Cinema Canada* no. 69 (Oct./Nov.), for the credits for **Suzanne**, which were published with Marc Gervais' review of the first version of the film.)

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