Zale Dalen's The Hounds of Notre Dame

Canadian filmmakers have often had a weakness for rambunctious, larger-than-life central characters, the kind of person who normally inhabits Reader's Digest stories. They had difficulty finding a truly unforgettable character. From The Bowdymen to Outrageous! such characters have been the focus of attention, and have invented uneventful plots simply by being there. At first glance, The Hounds of Notre Dame (produced by Fil Fraser, directed by Zale Dalen) looks as if it falls into the same mold. "Pere" Athol Murray is a priest who chain-smokes, drinks whiskey, sweats moderately (never more than a "goddam") or a transmuted "muckery," reminiscences about reading St. Augustine, coaches a hockey team at an impoverished school in Saskatchewan, and says unfashionable things about the C.C.F. The Bowdymen Rides West.

But it's not quite as simple as that. The real strength of The Hounds of Notre Dame is not so much the renegade priest but -- as the title suggests -- the community built up around him. Most of the minor characters regard Pere's blustering eccentricities with humorous indulgence, and quietly go about the business underwriting him. He dominates the community, but it also has an existence apart from him; the climactic events of the plot -- one boy's decision to leave, and another's to stay -- take place independently of him. The film is emphatically not an exercise in idolatry.

Most of the actors contribute to this feeling with a nice sense of underplaying, only David Fryer as Fryer, the "new boy" who has to be initiated into the community, is guilty of overstating his reactions, and hammering up his role. At the other extreme, Frances Hyland underplays so much that you scarcely hear, not to see the actors on the screen. The atmosphere of small Western town is quite splendidly evoked in the hockey game sequence, with its fiercely partisan crowd, its funningly inept but enthusiastic play, and Coach Murray ringing the changes on inspirational dressing-room pep talks.

Zale Dalen's direction is largely unobtrusive and efficient. As in his earlier film, Skip Tracer, he keeps the action moving at a clean, crisp pace. If Hounds doesn't quite have the same dark overtones as Skip Tracer, that may be largely attributed to producer Fil Fraser's desire to appeal to a more family-oriented audience. Which is not to say that Hounds of Notre Dame is sentimental. Dalen's fast direction, combined with Mitchell's tight script, avoids all the perils of cliché. In fact, so strong were these banshi that the motif of the unique conditions of viewing cinema can model itself more profitably to the real stars of the film. The Hounds of Notre Dame is a very pleasant, well-made, unpretentious, thoroughly likeable film. It doesn't make cosmic statements, it isn't trying to be The Great Canadian Movie, it's not an earth-shaking contribution to culture. But it is the kind of film that can be made into a kind of cinema on which a genuinely Canadian cinema can model itself more profitably than on the spurious sparkles of "Hollywood North."

Stephen Scobie

The Hounds of Notre Dame

ac. Linda Jeffery p. co. ed. Chris Level
art. Liz Van Dusen p. exec. Boyd Booth
pro. boy Cody. Cin. Liz Zelke. ef. Charles Carmel
key grip Shirley Degen asst. grip Bill Millie
carp. Dee Kline. Tom Sopher. David Forsen
 Earl Dean. Dave Pollock asst. edi. props. Carmen
Millenovich asst. props. Shirley Put. Lark and
Partridge assist. ed. Barbara Boydkiy. Fil Fraser
 direction. Vinnie anda. make-up. Bill McCormick
com. Lynn Copeman ed. Tony Lover ma.
Marita Marshall ed. Larry Sutnna. Paul Coates
Bob Robbins p. craft serv. John Board (ist)
Logan Cohn Gregory. Alan Stitchbury cost des.
Wendy Steinmann. Lynn Copeman ed. Tony Lower m.
Marita Marshall ed. Larry Sutnna. Paul Coates
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Bunraku theatre is eternal while insame. Thus the art of Chikamatsu and of Honors they are watching similarly held the screen, so too in from their conventional relationship to where the different sets are in relation to the puppets or, indeed, has developed this division of three. The drama Working mostly in medium- Chikamatsu Monogatari and a filmed version of a famous bunraku slightly, as if trying to slow it down. and a samisen player whose strummed also a singer (this time called a joruri) his two assistants are masked). Finally, pets are three puppeteers who are fully tators' attention is also divided in three. Moreover, in the course of the film, So an interest in bunraku need not be. By showing us all these details. The Lovers' Exile — the body's tangible abstraction. Bunraku does not aim to "animate" an inanimate object so as to bring a piece of the, a shred of mans, to life, all the while keeping for it a vocazion as a "part." It is not the simulation of the body which Bun- raku seeks, its — if this can be said the body's tangible abstraction. If classical Japanese theatre, inclu- ding the bunraku theatre, is held in check by the strong presence of verticals and horizontals, so in The Lovers' Exile Gross intensifies these restraints by masking all his action by a frame within the frame. This allows him to place his subtext in the bottom frame beneath the picture, allowing the represented image to retain its full integrity. This leads me to the one pedantic reservation I have about this uniquely valuable, this formerly delicate, this extraordinary Japanese/Canadian film: if Gross had put a slight ting of pink or yellow in the titles, the experience of reading them might have caused less pain to the eyes.

Peter Harcourt

The Lovers' Exile


Sophie Bissoutette Martin Duckworth Joyce Rock's A Wives' Tale

A Wives' Tale is a 73-minute film about the women who supported the 1978 strike of the Sudbury miners against Inco in the most ambitious labour film to be made in Canada in recent years, certainly the most ambitious made in English-speaking Canada since the early days of Evelyn and Lawrence Cherry and their agitator populist films of the '40s in Regina.

As A Wives' Tale, released first in French in Montreal, A Wives' Tale is very much in the tradition of militant Quebec cinema — the executive produ- cer Arthur Lamothe, whose film Mepris n'aure qu'un temps (Hell No Longer) remains a landmark of radical documentary. However, Quebec militant films, and unlike most labour-oriented documentaries made in English in Canada and elsewhere, A Wives' Tale is pre-eminently, self- consciously, happily and a feminist film, insisting on the priority of women's experience and women's voices. The different sets are in relation to the puppets or, indeed, has developed this division of three. The strike surrounded by the company to dispose of a nickel stockpile, on the evident assumption that a few months on picket lines would divert their attention from the transfer of power and the energies of the workers, so that they would crawl back to work whenever Inco offered some paltry concessions. The strikers held out for eight and a half months, until they were offered a contract that made the strike worthwhile. "In the end, they were able to hold out for so long was the support given by Wives Support the Strike. The Wives raised money for special needs, organized a Christmas party that gave out 10,000 toys, held suppers, sales, ran a thrift shop, developed a clear analysis of the reasons for the strike and its extension, and work- ed for emotional and physical support which proved to be invaluable. The most important accomplishment of the women who organized in Sud- bury, as their experience is presented by the film, was the validation of the women workers, the skills women have, and the right of women to speak on their own behalf. The most difficult challenge for the filmmakers, aside from the unusual hardships faced by radical artists here and everywhere, was to make this self-validation interesting and accessible on film.

The Wives make wonderful material for film documentarians — the colours and sounds of the molten metal the awesome machinery, the physical presence of the workers during the fury of the elements... How then to move from this audio-visual spectacle to the cinematic representation of the women's struggle, how to present the women's struggle, to the families and their children. Pauline Julien at a benefit for the strik- ers — singing of women who have borne and lost children, who have supported her own thirty years of service to him? This is my question, but it is raised, in other ways, by other women in the film. One woman says firmly, "My husband is the one who works and brings home the paycheque, but I'm the one who balances his bank account." Another who has been very active in the group announces "I'm not for the strike. I'm for my husband... and if my husband decides to go back to work, then fuck the strike." Other women applaud Cathy, one of the thirty women on strike (out of 11,000 strikers) retorts. "It's not your strike, it's our strike... this is history in the making."

A number of feminist documentaries have used historical material (photography, film, works, interviews) to pay tribute to active women of the past. Great Grand Mother, The Lady from Grey County, Union Maid, Babies and Banners, Rosie the Riveter. A Wives' Tale also uses this sort of archival material, to a very different effect, as it serves to validate the work and experience of working-class women and mothers, and it brings their rich and untapped history directly into the present, showing the unbreakable con- nection between working-class struggle and feminism.

The opening sequence of the film moves from a scene in the mine to an overview of the city of Sudbury. A woman's voiceover offers factual in- 

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