

REVIEWS

Jean-Jacques Annaud's Quest for Fire

A pack of hungry wolves stalk a lone tribesman in the wilds of 80,000 years ago. Their bloodthirst adheres to the unwavering law of the animal: kill in order to survive. We quickly apportion our sympathy to our weaponless human ancestor, urging him on as he makes a narrow escape. But we soon learn that our sentiments may have been prematurely drawn. These proto-humans differ frighteningly little from the animals. In fact, their savagery goes one step beyond. They butcher their own kind mercilessly. We are faced with the unavoidable: human beings have a common origin with the beast.

This disturbing truth runs through the opening moments of *Quest For Fire*, a Franco-Canadian production. One need not be a Creationist to feel disquieted. Constantly threatened by the ultimate barbaric act - nuclear incineration -, the last thing we humans need is a film that adds to our fatalism.

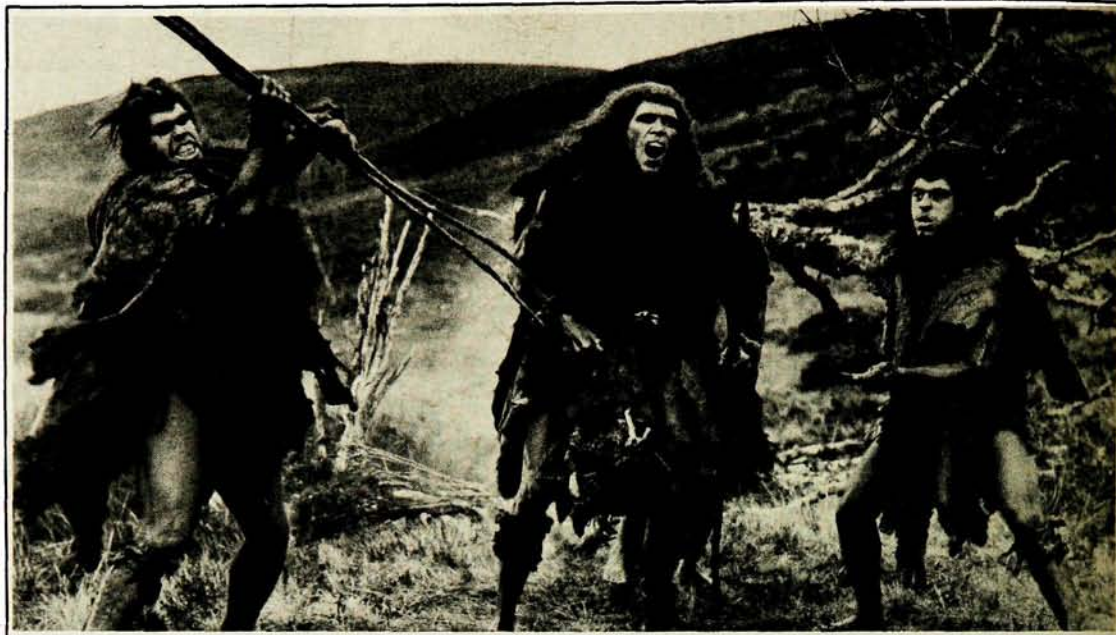
It is, therefore, with unexpected serendipity that one finds *Quest For Fire* to be one of the most hopeful and inspirational stories about the human journey ever filmed. It is a magnificent cinematic achievement, certain to stand as one of the greatest motion pictures this country has ever been associated with. *Quest For Fire* is about as realistic a portrayal of the beginnings of humankind as we're ever going to get. And much to our delight, it also happens to be one of the most entertaining films made in years.

Shot entirely on locations around the world, with exquisite photography by Claude Agostini, *Quest For Fire* traces the long and arduous journey of three Ulam (early Homo sapiens) warriors who've been left with the task of searching out fire for their tribe. The Ulam do not yet know how to create fire. They equate it with life itself. Without it, they are powerless and vulnerable to the cruel world around them.

Naoh, Amoukar and Gaw (played by three superb actors, Everett McGill, Ron Perlman and Nameer El-Kadi, respectively) embark on an odyssey filled with indescribable hardship; blood-drenched battles with cannibal tribes, snow and rain, and the ever-present threat of animal predators.

What is so remarkable about *Quest For Fire* is that, despite some of the most gruesome scenes ever to show up on the screen, it is essentially a very moving and uplifting story. Much of the credit must go to the aforementioned actors. Despite being hidden under pounds of make-up, and distanced from us by 80,000 years of language development, the three swiftly shatter these barriers and crawl right into our hearts. While the Ulam are certainly not the most advanced and "civilized" of the tribes roaming the earth during the Ice Age, Naoh and his two friends exude a certain inquisitiveness which makes us instantly identify with them. It is not long before their hardship becomes our hardship; their quest, our quest.

This very ability - to engage us in the



• A brilliant odyssey in an uncharted world; *Quest's* warriors prepare to defend themselves

notion that we human beings have been on an odyssey from the very beginning - is part of *Quest For Fire's* brilliance. For this accomplishment alone, praise must be extended to the film's prime movers: executive producer Michael Gruskoff, director Jean-Jacques Annaud and screenwriter Gerard Brach, with a good hand for producers John Kemeny and Denis Héroux who saw the project through completion. They've not only managed to give us an extremely informative film, but a relevant and poignant one as well.

What's even more amazing is that *Quest For Fire* never degenerates into fairy tale. While its realism is unceasing, the scenes of bloodshed and gore are interspersed with genuinely humorous and "human" episodes such as when the three warriors are chased up a sapling tree by a sabre-tooth tiger. They remain clinging to its fragile branches for over a day before realizing the tiger is no longer there.

And when the three meet Ika, a whippy, little female from the "mud people" tribe (played charmingly by Rae Dawn Chong), we are treated to some truly revelatory scenes. Ika not only teaches them how to create fire (by rubbing two sticks together) but gives Naoh a whole new outlook on life, or, more succinctly, on the facts of life.

Restricted by characters who lack a coherent language, the makers of *Quest For Fire* have wisely conscripted the renowned linguist and author Anthony Burgess, and anthropologist Desmond Morris, to help bring life to our apish ancestors and the situations they were likely to experience. Both gentlemen have contributed admirably. Never does humour approach camp, never does awkwardness become infantile. The primitivism expressed in this film is always scientifically sound. The attempted words and exaggerated actions of our human forebearers, while at times amusing, are convincingly pure and virginal.

They mesh seamlessly with the film's central purpose: to show how humankind coped with its loss of beast-like innocence.

In this sense, *Quest For Fire* is as courageous a film as *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and may very well be eventually considered as a companion piece to Kubrick's masterwork. It is a film that can be shown in every country of the world because its message needs no translation. We human beings are together in this journey.

And where are we going?

Quest For Fire doesn't extrapolate on this. It's not the film's purpose. But when Naoh and Ika (expectant with child) sit gazing at a glowing full moon at the film's end we can almost see Kubrick's Star Child floating through space towards Higher Consciousness.

Our quest is clear.

Stephen Zoller •

QUEST FOR FIRE d. Jean-Jacques Annaud p. John Kemeny, Denis Héroux exec. p. Michael Gruskoff sc. Gérard Brach based on the novel by J.H. Rosny, Sr. co-p. Jacques Dorfmann, Vera Belmont languages created by Anthony Burgess body language & gestures created by Desmond Morris music Philippe Sarda d.o.p. Claude Agostini ed. Yves Langlois assoc. p. Michael Moore, Claude Nedjar, Garth Thomas (Europel p.des. Brian Morris (Scotland and Kenya), Guy Comtois (Canada) music performed by The London Symphony Orchestra, Les Percussions de Strasbourg pan flute solo Simion Stanciu conductor Peter Knight creat. makeup consult. Christopher Tucker cost. des. John Hay, Penny Rose princ. cam. op. Al Smith unit man. Peter Bray p. co-ord. Barbara Shrier asst. to d. Laurence Duval p. compt. Wilma Palm asst. to p. Karen Fried princ. makeup Joan Isaacson, Suzanne Benoit, Josiane Deschamps sp. efx. makeup Stephan Dupuis asst. cost. des. Blanche Boileau ward. mist. Renée April body movement coaches Desmond Jones, Peter Elliott casting Lesley de Pettitt (London), K. Hazzard (Toronto), A. Champagne, A. Rysphan, (Montreal), Lois Planco (New York), Ellen Chenoweth (Los Angeles), Mamade (Paris), Dominique Cheminal (Nairobi) stills Takashi Seida props master Brian Payne props Enrico Campana, Gareth Wilson gaffer Maris Jansons best boy Frieder Hochheim grip Carlo Campana const. man. Claude Simard sd. superv. Ken Heeley-Ray loc. mixer Claude Hazanavicius dialogue ed. Martin Ashbee sd. efx. eds. David Evans, Kevin Ward re-rec. mixers Joe Grimaldi, Austin Grimaldi asst. ed. Glenn Berman crew in Canada: p. man. Stephan Reichel 1st a.d. Matthew Vibert 2nd a.d. John Desormeaux,

Michael Williams 3rd a.d. François Leclerc, Jennifer Jones asst. unit man. Doug Smith sc. superv. Joanne T. Harwood p. sec. Luise Massari cam. op. Paul van der Linden, Andy Chmura 1st asst. cam. Paul Gravel, Robert Guertin, Greg Farrow 2nd asst. cam. Paul Morin, Michel Girard, Patrick Clune head makeup dept. Michèle Burke sp. efx. makeup John Caglione makeup artists Pipsan Ayyote, Jocelyne Bellemare, Normande Campeau, Kathryn Cassault, Micheline Poisy, Inge Klaudi, Marie-Josée Lafontaine, Kathleen Mifsud, Louise Mignault, Linda Preston, Denise West hair/wigs Bob Pritchett, Barbara Alexander, Jenny Arbour, Richard Hansen, André Lafrenière, Ivan Lynch, Fautina Recio makeup lab. tech. Frans Sayers, Luc Champagne body painters Michel Sequin, Marc Sequin, Grace Yu sp. efx. superv. Martin Malivoire sp. efx. tech. Neil Trifunovich, Mark Molin elec. David Hynes, Adam Swica gen. op. Jock Brandis grips Johnny Daoust, Pierre Charpentier, Emanuel Lépine asst. art. d. Raymond Larose ward. assts. Fabienne April, Sylvie Bellemare, Mariane Coulon, Mario Davignon, Maureen Gurney, Johanne Prigent, Martin Sauvè p. acct. Kay Larlham unit pub. David Novek & Associates (Quinn Donoghue) driver capt. Rick Disensi animals provided by Gentle Jungle, Inc. animal consult. Ralph Helfer crews in Scotland & Kenya: p. man. Matthew Vibert 1st a.d. David Bracknell 2nd a.d. Terry Pearce p. coord. Angela Heald p. sec. Jackie Fritz asst. unit man. Chris Knowles performer coord. Bob Jordan loc. man. (Kenya) Rick Anderson art d. Clinton Cavers 2nd cam. op. Keith Woods 1st asst. cam. Ronnie Ancombe, George Bottos 2nd asst. cam. Larry Lynn, Christophe Bonnière p. asst. Valerie Craig

London contact Laura Grummitt head makeup dept. Sarah Monzani princ. makeup Michèle Burke, Sue Frear, Maureen Stephenson makeup Lyne Desmarais, Nick Forder, Colette Kramer hair/wigs Barry Richardson, Stuart Artinstall ward. Janet Yates, Briony Anderson prop. master David Jordan const. man. Terry Apsey grip Michel Chohin boom Denis Dupont p. acct. Paul Cadioui unit pub. David Novek & Associates (Chris Nixon) animals provided by Mary Chipperfield Promotions animal consult. Jimmy Chipperfield mammoth cost. Colin On Lp. Everett McGill, Ron Perlman, Nameer El-Kadi, Rae Dawn Chong, Gary Schwartz, Naseer El-Kadi, Frank Olivier Bonnet, Jean-Michel Kindt, Kurt Schiegl, Brian Gill, Terry Fitt, Bibi Caspari, Peter Elliott, Michelle Leduc, Robert Lavoie, Matt Birman, Christian Benard, Joy Boushell, Lydia Chaban, Mary Lou Foy, Dena Francis, Robert Gondek, Hélène Grégoire, Sylvie Guilbault, Lloyd McKinnon, Steve Ramanuskas, Georgette Rondeau, Rod Bennett, Jacques Demers, Michel Drouet, Michel Francoeur, Charles Gosselin, Bernard Kendall, Benoit Lévesque, Joshua Melnick, Jean-Claude Meunier, Alex Ouaglia, The Great Antonio, Jacques Caron, Jean-Pierre Gagné, Hercule Gaston Héon, George Buza, Danny Lynch, Butch Lynch, Luke McMasters, Adrian Street, Mohamed Siad Cocke, Tarlok Sing Seva, Lolamal Kapisisi, Hassannali Damji, animal stunts Joe Campassi, Brian McMillan, Shawn Gruskoff, Karin Dew stunt performers Dwayne McLean, Brent Meyer, Tim Huleatt, Bonnie Gruen, p.c. ICC-Ciné Trail (Montreal), Belstar Productions/Stephen Films (Paris), in association with Gruskoff Film Organization running time 90 min. col. 35mm dist. 20th Century-Fox.

Rex Bromfield's **Melanie**

Back in the late '50s, there was a short series of films built around the central character of Tammy, an uneducated Southern girl who was an absolute fount of motherly wisdom. In films like *Tammy Tell Me True* and *Tammy and the Doctor* (with a pre-Corman Peter Fonda) she solved the problems of the rich and the well-educated with a dash of down-home country wisdom.

The Simcom production of *Melanie* could easily be called "Tammy and the Rock Star," with Glynnis O'Connor taking the old Sandra Dee role and rescuing on-the-skids, stoned rocker Burton Cummings from his own bad habits and writer's block, while rescuing her son, who has been kidnapped by her redneck husband.

Actually, this sort of throwback plot does not really hurt the film - much more damage is done by the absolute lack of focus and purpose. There are about three plot threads going here: Melanie's struggle for literacy, her battle to get her son back, and Rick Manning's (Cummings) struggle to get back on the road to stardom, but none of them ever really rise to the surface.

The scene at the divorce hearing is shot without dialogue as one of Cummings' tunes whines away on the soundtrack, as is most of her struggle with the ins and outs of letters and words. Melanie even seems to forget at times that she's there to hunt for her son.

While the film is more than competently made and well-directed by Rex Bromfield, it needed another draft or two on the script to bring out the dramatic moments. There are rarely any of the moments that one finds constantly in a film like Truffaut's *L'Enfant Sauvage*, or like the more emotional parent-child moments in *Kramer vs. Kramer*.

Despite this script problem, *Melanie* is not a bad picture. One feels no real urge to run from the theatre. Glynnis O'Connor, who is sort of a cross between Sissy Spacek and Barbara Hershey, is quite good as the eponymous heroine, suggesting quite well that she may in fact be illiterate - she masters just the right degree of embarrassment com-



● Everything's o.k. until they wise up: Rick (Burton Cummings) and Melanie (Glynnis O'Connor) play cut-out

bined with curiosity about what she's shut away from. Indeed, the best scene in the film takes place between O'Connor and Donnan Cavan, a punkie girl she meets on the bus to L.A. As they sit in a restaurant, Cavan realizes that Melanie can't read, and Melanie knows that she knows, and the whole scene is shot through with potential embarrassment and a very delicate sort of feeling.

Burton Cummings, in his feature film debut, is good until the last half hour of the picture, when he sobers up and flies right under Melanie's ministrations. Cummings is great as an obnoxiously stoned rock star, but as a sweet sensitive guy he doesn't have anything like the acting tools required to make the character interesting.

Trudy Young, as Melanie's friend who left Arkansas and lives in the big city is all right, but how can anyone who grew up watching *Razzle Dazzle* take this

woman seriously as an actress (we will not speak here of *Face Off*).

Bromfield's real triumph as a director here is the creation of interesting - even narrative - "walking on the beach" sequences.

A "walking on the beach" scene generally occurs after the starring couple realizes that they are in love. For five minutes or so, a bad song plays on the soundtrack and we are treated to the unedifying sight of two highly paid actors walking on the beach, eating in restaurants, playing touch football and shopping for cute things that they don't need. Usually, it is the best time to sneak out for a cigarette.

Bromfield's scenes, wherein Melanie learns to write and stretches her relationship with Manning and his lawyer, Walter (Paul Sorvino) actually move the story along, which is a minor achievement.

Yet stuck in the film are some very odd scenes. One has a Norman Maine-ish Cummings playing his songs at a party for his friends, all of whom walk out on him. I don't know why - the songs seem no worse than any other Burton Cummings songs that have sold millions of records.

One could ask the question "What does all this have to do with Canadian culture?" but that would be irrelevant. Simcom, as it proved with *Prom Night*, is not interested in making Canadian films, and I would much rather watch Peter Simpson's fair-to-middling American-style movies than, say, Garth Drabinsky's awful American movies. In *Melanie*, the producers have real, human-scale characters at work, which is a pleasant change from the slasher aesthetics of their Paul Lynch epic.

John Harkness ●



● John Savage only adds to the amateur effort

Charles Jarrott's **The Amateur**

There lurks a dark, reptilian instinct within us all. It goes like this: when something strikes out at you, strike back and chew hard. Having endured *The Amateur*, this primeval urge is now uncontrollable.

First of all, to entitle a film as such, must certainly be an act of masochism, because the makers of *The Amateur* have set themselves up to be skewered with catcalls and cries of amateurism. This is not to say that the film is ostensibly bad. But then again neither is an amateur. The looks may be there but it is backed by little substance or skill.

Producers Joel Michaels and Garth Drabinsky have once again lived up to their Romulus and Remus legacy by doling out the mega-bucks to come up with an appetizing package. And on the surface they've succeeded. *The Amateur* has all the trappings of a taut espionage thriller; along the lines of *Three Days of the Condor* and *The Marathon Man*. They've supplied a long list of stars: John Savage, Christopher Plummer, Marthe Keller, Arthur Hill and John Marley. Included in the price of admission is a European travelogue. (Accomplished smartly, so that Vienna not only serves as itself but Munich and Prague,

MELANIE p.c. Simcom Ltd. Production d. Rex Bromfield exec. p. Richard Simpson p. Peter Simpson sc. Robert Guza, Jr. and Richard Paluck d.o.p. Richard Clupka ed. Brian Ravok p. des. Roy Forge Smith p. man. Gerry Arbeid loc. man. (Canada) Brian Ross loc. man. (U.S.A.) David Nelson unit pub. Pat Whittingham p. co-ord. Judith Rubin loc. co-ord. (U.S.A.) Angela Heald cast. Mitchell-Polley Casting 1st asst. d. R. Martin Walters 2nd asst. d. Alan Goluboff cam. op. Fred Guthe focus puller Andy Chumra clapper/loader Marvin Midwicki ed. mix. Douglas Ganton boom op. Tom Hilderly cost. des. Julie Ganton ward. Gaye Gardiner make-up Shonagh Jabour hair Jenny Arbour p. accountant Robert Duckworth sc. superv. Pauline Harlow stills John Williamson asst. art. d. Barbara Matis 2nd asst. art. d. Dave Davis art trainee Birgit Siber art. dept. asst. (U.S.A.) Michelle Minch set dresser Angelo Stea asst. set dressers Enrico Campana, Gareth Wilson, Tony Bennett prop. mast. Anthony Greco asst. prop. mast. Joe Hampson gaffer John Berrie best boy Richard A. Allen elec. Bill Brown key grip Norman Smith 2nd grip Michael O'Connor 3rd grip Sean Ryerson gen. op. Greg Daniels transp. capt. Don Baldassarra p. asst. Michael Curran 1st asst. driver Tom Pinteric driver Curtis Brown orig. music Burton Cummings l.p. Glynnis O'Connor, Paul Sorvino, Burton Cummings, Trudy Young, Don Johnson, Jamie Dick, L.Q. Jones, Lisa Dal Bello, Yvonne Murray, David Willis, Donnan Cavan, Jodie Drake, Martha Gibson, Jim Martin dist. Twentieth Century-Fox.

and our beloved Toronto passes not only for Washington D.C. but Connecticut as well.)

And there's the promise of a cracker-jack plot: we witness a terrifying scenario hot off the front page. Terrorists (à la Bader-Meinhoff gang) seize the American consulate in Munich and brutally gun down an innocent young woman in front of the TV cameras. The sharp, emotion-wrenched message is clear: once and for all, something must be done about these barbarians. And we have the man to do it, Charles Heller (played by John Savage), the murdered woman's lover, a cog-in-the-wheel computer analyst at the CIA. Undaunted by his company's hands-off edict, Heller turns vigilante and embarks upon an elaborate and intrepid pilgrimage of revenge which leads him into Czechoslovakia, the known hide-out of the terrorists who executed his girl.

Heller is after blood, especially that of Schraeger, the steely-eyed Arian leader of the group (played by steely-eyed Canadian Nicholas Campbell).

Inarguably, the ingredients for a first-rate potboiler are all here. Michaels and Drabinsky have been astute enough to buy the right kind of cookbook. So what's wrong with *The Amateur*? Plenty. In fact, the makers of this film will be lucky to escape being boiled in oil by those unfortunate few who will be lured into theatres.

Writers Robert Littell and Diana Maddox foolishly expect us to swallow a plot that resembles Swiss cheese, with holes big enough for all those shiny Mercedes Benz production cars to drive through. Initially, they have Heller ingeniously blackmailing the CIA into helping him enter Czechoslovakia. Once in Prague, however, the writers wage war on plausibility by having Heller encounter a horde of James Bondian black-gloved spies, all carrying their KGB or CIA affiliations as if they were readily sold at the corner store.

Director Charles Jarrott fares no better. He comes off like some sort of Maytag repair man, deluded into believing that there are similar iron-clad guarantees in film. He is sadly mistaken. The need for a fine directorial touch is painfully evident throughout *The Amateur*. Suspense, and methods of creating it, seem completely out of Jarrott's grasp. (Not surprising mind you, from the man whose last "memorable" work was *The Other Side of Midnight*.)

The really sour points in this film, however, come from the performers, and in particular, John Savage. Never has a leading actor so savagely maligned the profession. His acting range is so limited, his presence so non-existent, that one wonders why somebody - somewhere along the line - didn't have the sense to pull the plug on this poor man's constipated excuse to be on the big screen. Savage literally mumbles and stumbles his presence so non-existent, that one wonders why somebody - somewhere near tension. One has to reflect on (and perhaps re-evaluate) his role as the war amputee in *The Deer Hunter*. In Michael Cimino's film, Savage seemed perfect as the shell-shocked veteran constrained to a wheelchair. But in *The Amateur*, given the full use of his arms and legs, he's at a total loss.

And there's not much to be said about Marthe Keller as Chuck's Czech accomplice. Ms. Keller has been in this kettle before and seems destined to forever play a European-accented woman caught on the wrong side. Only Christopher Plummer, as Prof. Lakos, adds the proper

flavouring to his part. Plummer is fully aware of the schlock being served here. He doesn't hold back on the ham, making his Lakos a Czechoslovakian Columbo with a dash of Sherlock Holmes.

How Lakos fits into the scheme of things, and how *The Amateur* limps to an end is not worth recounting here. Suffice it to say that Charles Heller finds his steely-eyed terrorist in a chandelier factory... a shoddy symbol that serves only to point out the film's shattering vacuity.

Oh, yes, there is a surprise ending. Heller's sweet taste of revenge is tainted, somewhat, by the disclosure that Schraeger, our steely-eyed terrorist, was not really a terrorist but working all along for the... (need it be said?). By this time, none of *The Amateur* comes as a surprise, but as welcome relief that the whole sloppy affair is finally over.

Stephen Zoller ●

THE AMATEUR d. Charles Jarrott p.c. Balkan Film Productions Ltd. p. Joel B. Michaels, Garth H. Drabinsky sc. Robert Littell, Diana Maddox, based on novel "The Amateur" by Littell exec. p. Mario Kassar, Andrew Vajna cam. John Coquillon, b.s.c. p. des. Trevor Williams sup. ed. Richard Halsey, a.c.e. mus. Ken Wannberg USA cast. Fenton-Feinberg Cda cast. Walker-Bowen p.man. Marilyn Stonehouse 1st asst. d. Jon Anderson prod. co-ord. Suzanne Lore exec.asst. to prod. Margaret Livingston ed. Stephan Fanfara asst. ed. Bruce Lange art d. Richard Wilcox cost. des. Suzanne Grace set dec. Rondi Johnson, Steve Shewchuk asst. to prod. Patricia McCarthy asst. to d. Margo Ley cam. op. James Turrell 1st asst. cam. Thom Ryan 2nd asst. cam. David Makin prop mast. John Berger asst. set dec. Dennis Kirkham asst. prop mast. John C. Rose draughtsman Richard Harrison loc. man. Michael Brownstone key grip Ron Gillham gaffer Chris Holmes 2nd asst. d. Otta Hanus 3rd asst. d. Bob Wertheimer 2nd asst. ed. Marta Nielsen sd. mix. Peter Shewchuk sc. sup. Sandra Ulosevich Marley sc. research Connie Josefs boom op. Herbert Heritage best boys Glen Goodchild, Tony Eldridge grips Wayne Goodchild, John Davidson stills Shin Sugino unit pub. Lynda Friendly makeup John Brook hair James Keller asst. makeup Patricia Green asst. hair Albert Paradis ward. mistress Aleida Macdonald ward. asst. Nadia Ongaro Steadicam op. Robert Crone elec. John Spurrell, Sam Hughes sp. efx. Gene Grigg, Michael Clifford, Leland (Bud) Fisher p. sec. Angela Heald stunt co-ord. R.L. (Bobby) Hannah gen. op. Herbert Reischl underwater cam. Rich Mason underwater cam. op. Bob Saad prod. cont. Heather McIntosh prod. acct. Lyn Lucibello, Lorraine Valentine, Joanne Jackson orchestrations Albert Woodbury mus. mix. sup. Len Engel re-rec. Joe Grimaldi, Austin Grimaldi, Dino Pigat sd. efx. ed. Dennis Drummond, Wayne Griffin, Michael O'Farrell asst. sd. off. ed. Michael Rea, John Szoges 2nd unit d. Richard Halsey 2nd unit cam. James Devis 2nd unit cam. op. Michael Rutter prod. asst. Tom Pinteric, Rich Watts, Alan Zweig trans. co-ord. Bill Jackson scenic artist Guenter Bartlik head painter Willi Holst const. sup. Ron MacMillan craft serv. James Carruthers background extras Film Extra Services prop stills Lynn Goldsmith Inc. Vienna crew: prod. sup. Hannah Hempstead prod. man. Otto Boris Dworak asst. to p. man. Andreas Debowski art d. Herwig Libowitzk p. sec. Gerda Haller asst. d. Gusti Brunjes prod. asst. Isabelle Groote, Carl Ludwig property buyer Juri Juda prop. asst. Reinhard Binder makeup, hair asst. Margarete Ehringer ward. asst. Lena Ilgisonis gen. op. Adolf Wazin gaffer Erich Kristufek grips Peter Holba, Eduard Richter elec. Norbert Erben, Waldemar Haidinger, Walter Lobarzewski, Anton Pniesz prop stills Lynn Goldsmith Inc. Washington D.C. crew: loc. man. Stuart Neuman trans. co-ord. Eric Young prod. sec. Victoria Eves title des. Douy Swofford opticals Film Optical title opticals Movie Magic Lp. John Savage, Christopher Plummer, Marthe Keller, Arthur Hill, Nicholas Campbell, George Coe, John Marley, Jan Rubes, Ed Lauter, Miguel Fernandes, Jan Triska, Graham Jarvis, Jacques Godin, Chappelle Jaffe, Lynne Griffin, Vladimir Valenta, Vlasta Vrana, Neil Dainard, Lee Broker, Tedde Moore, Maruska Stankova, Irena Mayeska, George Buza, George R. Robertson, John Kerr, Guy Sanvido, Robert Beatty, Walter Reyer, François-Regis Klanfer, Peter Wolsdorff, Henry Gomez, Erin Flannery, Lisa Schrage, Susan Young, Tony Kramreither, Paul Reymont, Aubrey Taylor, Roman Chabursky, Bob Lem, Fred Culik, Peter Langley, Harty Hornisch, Helmut Graef, Zdenek Gruner running time 112 min. 35mm colour Canadian dist. Pan-Canadian Film Dist. Inc. U.S. dist. Twentieth Century Fox.

Denys Arcand's

Le confort et l'indifférence

"Gouverner c'est rendre vos sujets hors d'état de vous nuire."

Machiavelli

"On aime ça d'même."

Beer commercial

One wonders what sort of film Denys Arcand would have made, had the *Oui* won the May 1980 referendum. For *Le confort et l'indifférence* only makes sense in the light of the No victory. Yet it is the reality of that defeat that lets Arcand amuse himself with unfair arguments against History. In this sense, Arcand's is a hypocritical film, but, in the same sense that Max Beerbohm once said "Every kind of writing is hypocritical," this is in part, the hypocrisy of art.



● Denys Arcand and crew

To be sure, when Arcand began filming as of 1977, there was no way to know what would be the referendum's outcome. Like the Toronto news producers who would send camera crews to Montreal at every provincial election to film what they imagined would be instant independence, there was still some hope perhaps of capturing great History in the making.

Sometime after the grim returns, Arcand began rereading the classics of political thought.

"I wanted a commentary, something from outside, by a foreigner," Arcand explains. "I began to read Aristotle's *Politics* and Clausewitz' *On War*, but it was only when I reread Machiavelli that I knew he was the one I wanted. It was hallucinatory. Something jumped out from every page!"

Le confort et l'indifférence is Arcand-Machiavelli's judging of Quebec society, and the dream of democratically achieving independence by referendum. Machiavelli (admirably portrayed by Jean-Pierre Ronfard) peers across Montreal from the vantage-point of his hotel room and, while sitting down to a hearty lunch, offers gems from *The Prince*, his treatise on how to acquire and preserve a monarchy. Against this background, the viewer gets to relive the events of the referendum from the tabling of the question to the cultural "highpoints" of the summer of 1980 (Canadiens' victory parade after winning the Stanley Cup, the Floralties, etc.).

Arcand's National Film Board colleagues (Pierre Perrault, Bernard Gosselin, Gilles Groulx) provided 10 percent of the

footage. For the remainder, Arcand worked with some 60 hours of film. The result, boiled down to 112 minutes, is a meditation that is sarcastic, cruel, brilliant, facile, sad, and yet mercifully very funny.

Only film could have caught the look René Lévesque gave the camera crews that accompanied him on his trip to Paris to speak before the French National Assembly. Greeted like a head of state, made to review an honor guard, Lévesque goes through the motions with some embarrassment, but when he recognizes the cameras from home he raises his eyebrows as if to say "Gee, for pea-soups, we've sure come a long way." The moment is heart-warming in the naïveté, but there's always Machiavelli's suave voice to remind us that this is no game for the sentimental or the naïve.

The Machiavelli excerpts work with especial brilliance in a scene where Ronfard explains that to win the loyalty of his minister, the prince must cover him with honors, positions and riches so abundant that he will oppose any change. Cut to Jean Chrétien listing all the ministerial posts he has held - as proof that there's opportunity for Quebecers in Ottawa.

Arcand realizes a brilliant montage of economic debate reduced to complete triviality over the costs of independence in which Trudeau, Lévesque, Ryan, Camille Samson, Gérald Godin and Bernard Landry all hurl statistics at each other in wild disarray. At one point Landry looks up from his reams of statistics and blurts out: "Il y a quelque chose qui marche pas ici" (Something isn't working out here).

A lot sillier, though still amusing, is the coverage given a *Oui-Non* boxing match involving indépendantiste goon Reggie Chartrand and some poor has-been who is flattened in 45 seconds. Ex-boxer Ronald Jones (of Gilles Groulx' *Golden Gloves*) provides sympathetic non-involvement to this sequence.

Pierre Trudeau (playing himself, namely The Prince) is appropriately hat-chet-faced, and suitably flanked by secret service gorillas, or reviewing troops in the company of Her Majesty, or waxing eloquent over our Rockies and "our" natural resources.

Of considerably less interest are the long scenes devoted to an evangelical "charismatic" rally at the Olympic Stadium, though it does provide the stunning image of Christ framed between an ad for Miracle Mart on the left and Steinberg on the right. But "poor ignorant" religion is just that, and Arcand's attempt to generalize it into a statement about the poverty-stricken dreams of Quebecers (as against the grand dream of independence) simply does not work.

Le confort et l'indifférence, reaction to which Arcand says "has surpassed all expectations," has already aroused controversy in the cultural pages of the press, and promises to enliven Québécois intellectual living-rooms for months to come.

For Arcand's film is one of disappointment, and above all, of disappointment in a people's inability to dream, to escape its servitude and live free. That the Parti Québécois had only its verbal version of that dream to go on is criticized as a lack of realism in a world where, as Machiavelli reminds us, a good army is everything. What, after October 1970, was the alternative?

The chief culprit, Arcand seems to be saying, is the miserable, comfortable Quebec people who traded their birthright for a federal pension cheque and

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UIC benefits, and are uncultured beer-drinking boozers to boot. Maybe and maybe not; but as Brecht once asked, what would you do, dissolve the people and elect another?

Arcand, now 40, whose *On est au coton* and *Québec: Duplessis et après* were outstanding filmic moments of pre-referendum *cinéma engagé*, has come full circle. In this lofty judgment, though, he does more than damn the idols of yesterday. He confronts the viewer (Canadian as much as Quebecer) with History. And if from this perspective, that of Canada is particularly damning, precisely because of its comfort and indifference, Arcand at least has done what the artist can only do: raise questions.

That he has chosen to do so in terms of the reigning *Kulturkritik* paradigm of rich vs. poor, capitalists vs. workers, dreamers vs. walking dead can be taken

as a way of better raising those questions; that is, of questioning the paradigm itself since it was it that produced the dream.

Yet this is only a suggestion, for Arcand only touches upon it obliquely in one moving interview with Greek social worker Irene Typaldos who explains, crying, why she voted No. Because she felt a debt of obligation to those who accepted her when the Québécois would not. It is Typaldos who suggests that there is/was something wrong with Quebec nationalism from the very beginning.

And that, ultimately, is the question. Would Arcand have made such an acerbic film as this had the Oui won? It is the inability to clearly answer that question that makes Arcand's film hypocritical. But then again this is the Baudelairian hypocrisy of *mon semblable, mon frère*.

Arcand's *Le confort et l'indifférence* is a film that invites the most serious self-questioning. That alone makes it totally worthwhile.

Michael Dorland ●

LE CONFORT ET L'INDIFFÉRENCE

d. Denis Arcand ed. Pierre Bernier d.o.p. Alain Dostie sd. Serge Beauchemin p. Roger Frappier, Jean Dansereau additional cam. Pierre Letarte, André-Luc Dupont, Martin Leclerc, Roger Rochat, Bruno Carrière, Jean-Pierre Lachapelle, Pierre Mignot additional sd. Yves Gendron, Claude Hazanavicius, Richard Besse, Esther Auger, André Dussault, Jacques Drouin, Jean-Guy Normandin mix. Jean-Pierre Joutel cam. asst. Séraphin Bouchard, Michel Caron, Jacques Tougas, Daniel Jobin, René Daigle, Serge Lafortune, Jacques Méthé, Simon Leblanc, Robert Martel ed. asst. France Dubé administration Michelle Mercier, Denise Deslauriers, Diane Leblanc, Evelyn Regimbald p. asst. Lucie D'Amour, Huguette Bergeron consultants Bernard Gosselin, Pierre Perrault, Tahani Rached, Gilles Groulx, Jacques Bensimon, Jacques Godbout, Guy L. Côté l.p. Jean-Pierre Ronfard col. 16mm running time 113 minutes p.c. National Film Board of Canada.

may fix the setting, the next zoom in for a close-up. The lighting also changes according to scene (indoor-outdoor, daytime-nighttime) and mood. Earnshaw exploits this beautifully. Presently a freelancer, his past experience in 10 minute shorts for the Nature Conservancy of Canada, commercials and as a cameraman for Global news have taught him the tricks of the trade. Technically he is quite competent. Minor flaws, such as panning too quickly in the scenes before Caiphas, are more than compensated for by his surprising treatment of Peter approaching the High Priest's palace or his examination of the sleepy disciples at Gethsemani. The paintings themselves partially determine the camerawork but there is ample evidence of one disciplined mind communicating to another. Earnshaw shows fine discernment, self-control and a good eye in his selection of an attention to relevant and striking detail.

As producer and director, Earnshaw deserves a first class grade. The running time of 28 minutes seems like 10, no mean achievement when confronted with still lifes. From his stunning opening achieved with a juxtaposition of colour and images, to the concluding shot of "the consummation of the world", there is a tightness of control over material which, in lesser hands, could easily have slipped away. Earnshaw never loses sight of his story. The \$35,000 production cost was well spent. The colour, especially working from paintings with so many night scenes, is excellent. The narration of the gospel is by Len Cariou and here, except for an unfortunate substitute of a "Jeremy" for a "Jeremiah", there can be no complaint. His pace is steady, his inflection considered and, as one should expect, his rendition is professional. His voice moves the film along. The music is a further embellishment. Composed by Frank Felco (York University) and his wife, Jane Fair, both jazz musicians, their score subtly keeps the action progressing, sets the mood and yet never intrudes. Joining all of this to special sound effects was the work of Wally Weaver of PFA labs.

An English version of the film is ready, and French and Spanish versions are projected for the very near future. For church groups or for television viewers, Earnshaw's film is a worthwhile work and one to be eagerly anticipated. For Kurelek lovers around the world, it marks the completion of Kurelek's dream for the series. And Kurelek would have been pleased with Earnshaw's production. But just as Kurelek's original paintings seem hidden away in the little-known Niagara Falls Art Gallery & Museum on a service road of the Queen Elizabeth Way, so English Canadians may wait awhile to see an important part of their heritage. The religious programming department of the CBC has rejected the film as too "anti-semitic". Maybe Kurelek would point out that "a prophet has no honour in his own country," but English-speaking Canadians will have to suffer the deprivation of such censorship in the interim. Kurelek's paintings and Earnshaw's production deserve a better fate.

Gerard T. Campbell ●



● Kurelek's "Passion of Christ" on exhibit in Niagara Falls

Photo: St. Catharines Standard

Phillip Earnshaw's The Passion of Christ

On New Year's Day, 1960, Canadian artist William Kurelek began work on a monumental series of paintings entitled "The Passion of Christ." It was to take him more than three years to complete them. Although many of his other works are better known, these 160 paintings were very special to him. They were an act of thanksgiving for his conversion to Roman Catholicism, a conversion from being a "practising atheist" to being a committed Christian, a conversion from a state of intense personal suffering and despair to one of reverent acceptance and joyful celebration of life. It was the

turning point in Kurelek's life and career.

This awesome "Passion of Christ" series, complete in itself, was part of an even more ambitious project, unfulfilled because of Kurelek's early death, of illustrating in paint the whole life of Christ. The paintings in this film portray the Easter story, depicting the last supper, the passion, the death and the resurrection of Christ, sentence by sentence, according to the gospel narrative of Saint Matthew. Although Kurelek attempted careful research for historical authenticity, nevertheless, whenever the narrative permitted, he boldly projected his interpretation to times and places other than ancient Israel to show the universal and eternal nature of man's redemption and salvation. No one in the history of painting had ever essayed a project of such epic proportions. Now that effort has been captured on film.

Translation of an artistic work from one medium to another often invites comparison with the original and sub-

sequent disappointment with the translation. Phillip Earnshaw's remarkable production of *The Passion of Christ* provokes neither. Instead, this fine film makes a very fitting complement to Kurelek's paintings. And although the film was produced four years after Kurelek's death, it is entirely proper to rejoice at what is a happy collaboration between Earnshaw and Kurelek.

How does one collaborate with the dead?

Before he even began the paintings Kurelek envisaged the series as one day being produced on film. As a result, his compositions are organized in terms of a dramatic presentation with a camera-conscious arrangement of images. The viewer sees the drama unfold before him. In the trial before Pilot, for example, the viewer sees the action sometimes from Pilot's perspective, sometimes from Christ's, sometimes from among the crowd below or on the porch as a Roman functionary. One painting

THE PASSION OF CHRIST p./d./ cam. Phillip Earnshaw ed. Mairin Wilkinson narration Len Cariou music comp. Frank Falco, Jane Fair prod. asst. Guido Kondrus title design Bill Boyer sd. re-rec. Wally Weaver paintings William Kurelek p.c. Shooting Pictures Ltd. running time 28 min., 16mm colour dist. Magic Lantern.



**National
Film Board
of Canada**

**Office
national du film
du Canada**

NFB NEWS

And the nominees are...

Janet Perlman and John N. Smith will be making the pilgrimage to Hollywood to join in this year's Oscar night. Perlman's *The Tender Tale of Cinderella Penguin* has been nominated for best animated short; and Smith's *First Winter*, for best live-action short. *Cinderella Penguin* is a tale... well you know the story about a delightful porcine penguin who get the glass flipper.

First Winter, a half-hour drama filmed in Algonquin Park, tells a simple, moving story of an Irish immigrant family surviving their first winter in Canada. Fine acting performances are given by Kathleen McAuliffe, Sharon O'Neill and Eric Patrick Godfrey. The screenplay was written by Gloria Demers and Cynthia Scott.



Monique Spaziani, nominated for *Genie*, with Robert H. Thomson - *Les beaux souvenirs*.

Genie Genie Genie

The National Film Board has received five nominations for this year's Genie awards given

by the Canadian Academy of Cinema. The nominees in the feature film categories for *Les beaux souvenirs* are: Monique

Spaziani for best actress; Jean Cousineau for best musical score; and Réjean Ducharme for best screenplay.

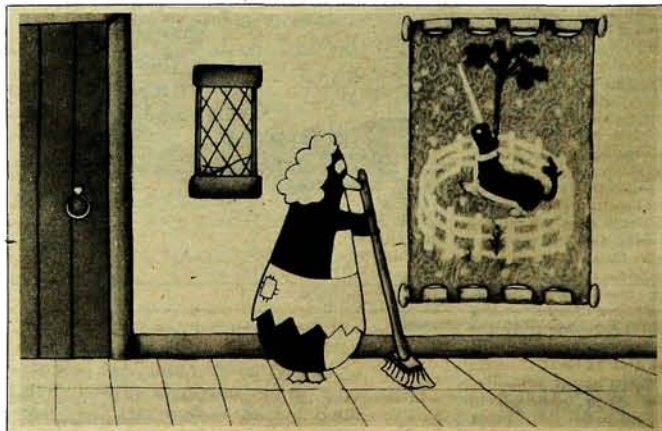
For best short subject film, the Canadian Academy nominated the explosive little film *Zea* by André and Jean-Jacques Leduc; a portrait of a lowly vegetable made magnificent through the magic of film. *Top Priority*, a new animated film by Ishu Patel was also nominated in this category. Patel's remarkable, fluid art style is applied to a story line about third world problems.

P.S.

Eight NFB productions have been selected for the Filmex Festival held in Los Angeles March 16 - April 1. *Devil at Your Heels*, *The Tender Tale of Cinderella Penguin*, *Death in the Spring*, "E", *Zea*, *One Way Street*, *Top Priority*, *Luna, Luna, Luna*.



Eric Patrick Godfrey plays role of young boy in *First Winter*.



Cinderella Penguin hard at work never imagining that one day she will slip her webbed foot into a glass flipper.

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