Contrecoeur

Jean-Guy Noël's Contrecoeur seems full of interesting ideas and totally bereft of some means to pull them together. His tale of three misfits who band together for a trip to a small Quebec town follows a more or less conventional narrative, and then doesn't resolve it: that is by no means a cardinal sin, but Contrecoeur doesn't seem sure of its own intentions and ends up confusing the spectator. That's a flat-out problem.

The story follows Blanche (Monique Mercure) and Fabienne (Anouk Simard) as they make plans to visit the town of Contrecoeur where they've left behind somewhat complex family ties. Theo (Maurice Poitry) is Fabienne's father and Blanche's ex-husband, while the alcoholic Roger (Gilbert Sicotte) is Fabienne's ex-husband and Blanche's son. The two women take Fabienne's boyfriend Jean-Paul up on his offer to drive them to Contrecoeur in his oil tanker; during a long snowbound night on the highway, the three play power games and uncover some truths — most significant is the fact that Jean-Paul is dying of multiple sclerosis. Blanche has insisted from the outset that she is travelling to meet spring, an ongoing, mid-winter obsession that Fabienne finds rather amusing. But she capitulates to it after their presence in Contrecoeur sets off a chain of emotional events; the two women struggle to understand something odd about Quebec and an anguished Jean-Paul between them.

It's possible that Contrecoeur is intended to work as a somewhat complex mood piece, but it doesn't; finally, there's so much dramatic baggage here that you're trying to piece together the plot most of the time. Noël has enlisted the

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