Gilles Carle's Maria Chapdelaine

Gilles Carle's new movie, Maria Chapdelaine, pushes all the right buttons to assure its success in Quebec, if nowhere else (in its first week alone, after opening April 29, it brought in over $130,000). Based on the bestselling novel of the same title by French expatriate Louis Hemon, the movie deals with the travails of a beautiful, taciturn, young woman trying to survive against all odds in the wilds of Lac-St-Jean. Quebec novelist Roch Carrier claims the novel has captured the Quebec imagination because "it's not a work of precise ideas but rather what he calls "a vast emptiness" upon which readers can impose their own ideas or fantasies. Carle, working with a $4.5-million budget, impose ideas all right—the virtues of obscurity ("J'y suis, f'y reste"). Romantically idealizing of alienation, he depicts Thiver and all that—and achieves a vast emptiness of his own: a hollow epic.

An overheated back at the Montreal Gazette once called Carle's last-to-film, Les Plouffe, Quebec's Gone With the Wind. This may mean that Maria Chapdelaine is gun Dr. Zhivago, for all that entails. There certainly is a lot of snow, and when there isn't, woodsy types pick blueberries and do countless photography chores. If it's broken by waterfalls or playing with the Chapdelaine's lovable mongrel.

The publicity material accompanying the premiere makes a great deal of its authenticity and the difficulties the director faced in shooting four seasons in two months. It feels like Carle shot a lot more seasons than that, but then you tend to lose track after a while, as the authenticity marches steadily sideways toward nostalgia. (Why, by the way, did you choose that dog to be your costume? Were humberjacks really this stylish?)

Carle came late to the project, the third in a series of directors hired to make both a theatrical feature and a four-hour mini-series for Radio-Canada. The novel has captured the Quebec imagination because it's not a work of precise ideas but rather what he calls "a vast emptiness" upon which readers can impose their own ideas or fantasies. Everything is changing now; we must organize ourselves, find money, and the left touches individualism while the right touches conformity. You need people like that. I have that. Gilles Carle, working with a $4.5-million budget, impose ideas all right—the virtues of obscurity ("J'y suis, f'y reste").

The film's director, Gilles Carle, is known for his deft handling of comedy. In his previous works, he has won critical acclaim for his ability to blend humor with drama. His latest project, Maria Chapdelaine, is based on a popular novel and has been much anticipated. The movie is set in the wilds of Quebec and follows the story of a young woman, Maria Chapdelaine, who struggles to survive against all odds.

**Cinema Canada**

**Do you still believe in what you called production families?**

**Gilles Carle:** I personally believe, as I always do, in small production teams, in production families. I always try to have my own family. Apart from my personal talent, that's what helps me continue shooting. But the biggest mistake with beginning filmmakers is that they associate with people like themselves. You need a truck driver who wears a carry-sack to the car, or an accountant who would like working with a theater group better than at Household Finance, you know. You need a tailor who shares your own family, and they have been constantly working with me for ten years now. We need these small teams.

The other day, I saw a group from the south-shore of Montreal getting lost in the corridors of the NFB, and I was disappointed. Why go to the Board? We must organize ourselves, find money, and the left touches individualism while the right touches conformity. We have to make a film. But cinema is disappearing anyway. It's finished; now it's television, and I don't know what's going to happen. These electronic instruments are very costly, you know. Bill 109 on the cinema: damn it! Let's open the NFB, as recommended by the Applebaum-Hilbert report.

**Gilles Carle:** Damn! It's open, the NFB, not close it. Closing it is not the solution, we must open it to young filmmakers, to new artists, give them a chance to express their own vision. We have an opportunity now: we have pay-TV, and all that, and it's all under federal regulations. I don't know what's going to happen, really.

**Richard Martinave**

**Maria Chapdelaine**

Gilles Carle's Maria Chapdelaine is a strong and engaging film that explores the struggles of a young woman in Quebec's wilderness. The movie is set in the early 20th century and follows the life of Maria Chapdelaine, a woman who must survive against all odds to make a living. The film is a beautiful tribute to the rugged beauty of Quebec's landscape and the resilience of its people. Carle's direction is masterful, and the performances are outstanding, particularly from the lead actress, who delivers a powerful and moving portrayal of Maria. The film is a must-see for anyone interested in Quebec cinema or historical dramas.