

## FILM REVIEWS

economies meant that Rose could not afford to retake scenes to any great degree, to use a more expensive color stock of film, or to help the most inexperienced of the cast (Langevin) with his acting.

This should not, however, negate the fact that **Three Card Monte** is something of an achievement, especially for Richard Gabourie. Against all odds he fought for his project, developed it with Ron Iveson, convinced the initially skeptical Les Rose to direct it, and then went out and personally sold it to a distributor. This kind of energy and dedication richly merits the recognition which he received at

the Canadian Film Awards ceremony, where he was given both the Best Actor and the Wendy Michener Awards. Although **Three Card Monte** is less than a success, (though three weeks at Toronto's Imperial Theatre is by no means a failure), it is noteworthy for what it promises for the future. The Canadian film community can never have enough of people like Ron Iveson and Les Rose who are willing to take risks like this, and it especially needs people like Richard Gabourie who not only believe in their films but have the hustle to go out and sell them as well.

J. Paul Costabile

## SHORT FILM REVIEWS

### A.M. KLEIN: THE POET AS LANDSCAPE

d. David Kaufman, asst. d. David Hillel, sc. David Kaufman, Usher Caplan, ph. Rodney Charters, ph. research Anne Epstein, ed. Stephen Lawrence, sd. Don Book, John Gundy, Brent Haliskie, David Appleby, sd. ed. David Appleby, sd. rec. Don Book, John Gundy, Brent Haliskie, m. Cynthia Moseley, Albert Kussin, Lyndamae Harris, l.p. the off-screen voice of A.M.Klein as interpreted by Earl Pennington and on-screen narration by David Lewis, Sophie Lewis, Irving Layton, Leon Edel, Max Garmaise, David Rome, Colman Klein, Ruth Wisse, p. David Kaufman, asst. p. Patrick Masterson, p.c. David Kaufman Photography (Toronto), 1977, col. 16 mm, running time 58 minutes, dist. Marlin Motion Pictures

It's a rare but real pleasure to be 'knocked out' by somebody's first film. David Kaufman's documentary on the Canadian poet A.M. Klein is a stunning work, with none of the weaknesses usually noticeable in novice films. In fact, **A. M. Klein: The Poet As Landscape** could rank with some of the work of Donald Brittain, the veteran Canadian documentarist. Kaufman reveals a si-



A.M. Klein enjoying a day out on the Mountain

milar painstaking attention to subtle details in the soundtrack, the same respect for the poetic potential within a voice-over narration, and an eye for visuals which work in counterpoint to words. His integration of Klein's poetry within the narration makes for a smooth flow from exposition to quotation, avoiding that jarring sense of a poem's insertion into material of a very different style. Partly, this is achieved by the use of Earl Pennington as the reader for the narration, but more precisely it is the result of fine writing in the script and a feel for the nuances of language. As

well, the film is visually rich in religious symbolism, conveying the uniquely Catholic and Jewish neighborhoods which made up Klein's Montreal.

Klein was a product of the St. Urbain Street milieu - a Jew writing in English about the concerns of his people, against the background of French Canadian Catholicism. He deeply understood the sense of community and ritual so important to both groups, and his poetry connects them in a common landscape. It is perhaps for this reason that David Lewis, the former NDP leader, calls Klein "the archetype Canadian." His work reconciled seeming differences among people, finding common ground in their daily rituals, traditions, and deep cultural roots. Interviews with other friends and colleagues, including Mrs. Sophie Lewis, the poet Irving Layton, Ruth Wisse, and writer Leon Edel, explore the passion for literature and compassion for humanity which characterized this man for whom "poetry came like breathing." A major figure in the Canadian and international literary scene during the 1930s and 1940s, Klein was also a lawyer, journalist, community leader, and family man. Kaufman's selection of poetic excerpts, old photographs, and interviews creates layers of a personality thoroughly at ease with the most seemingly diverse strains of life and letters, from Talmudic scholarship to the avant-garde writing of James Joyce.

But central to Klein's life and at the structural center of this film is the Holocaust of World War II. Using rare archival photographs, the filmmakers have constructed a devastating sequence of stills from Nazi rallies, European ghettos, concentration camps, and wartime destruction. Placed at mid-point in the film, the sequence effectively conveys the impact which this war had upon A.M. Klein. He never fully recovered from it and, in the words of his son Colman Klein, was simply "not prepared for the evil and destructive world" which had emerged so horrifyingly during this period in history. A nervous breakdown in 1954 marked a kind of "non-physical suicide," as well as the termination of his writing career. The man who was "the voice of Canadian Jewry" and

"the eternal idealist" remained virtually silent, communicating only with family members, until his death in 1972.

Yet even with the tragic events of these later years, A. M. Klein: *The Poet As Landscape* is a powerful affirmation of life and an eloquent portrait of a poet who cared so deeply about people and community. This film deserves, and will surely receive, wide exposure. The thorough research, excellent craftsmanship, and passionate commitment which created it have made this documentary an extremely memorable and moving experience, unique among current filmmaking efforts.

Joyce Nelson

## NICOLINA

d. Rebecca Yates & Glen Saltzman, sc. Marc Rosen, ph. Mark Irwin, ed. David Leach, sd. Brian Day, sd. ed. David Leach, lp. Johanne Hinterseer, Rosalia Maggio, Antonis Michailides, Demetres Anastakis, p. Rebecca Yates & Glen Saltzman, p.c. Cineflics Ltd., (year) 1978, col. 16mm, running time 27 minutes, 45 seconds, dist. International Tele-Film Enterprises, Toronto.

There are moments in this film that Truffaut would be proud of: the subliminal humor, the delicately drawn textures, the use of secondary images in the frame, and the self-questioning that, as with the male equivalent of puberty in *The 400 Blows*, comes with Nicolina's brand new breasts. And this 25-minute film ultimately succeeds because of Johanne Hinterseer, a "discovered" non-actress twelve-year-old in the title role, who is perhaps as significant a find as Jean-Pierre Léaud.

"Weddings are really dumb — especially Greek weddings!" cries the girl in dismay when she is obliged to step out of a figure skating competition because it coincides with nuptial festivities in the family. Rosalia Maggio as Nicolina's Aunt Sophie has come all the way to Toronto from Greece



Johanne Hinterseer, playing Nicolina

for the event — and Nicolina's awe of this draconian and portly version of Sophia Loren who can't speak Canadian, the hairdo bouffant, is the basis of her coming of age.

There are clues laid down early in the film in a scene where Nicolina's father is frustrated in his attempt to interest her in Greek grapevine dancing, the rhythm of the camera-work repeating the earlier lyricism of the opening sequence of Nicolina figure skating. "I can't understand Greek, I hate this stupid dance and I don't care," seems to tear irreparably across the tentative bridge the old culture is putting out to the new. But the use of image on image in the film conveys a turning point in the drama as Nicolina becomes intrigued despite herself with Aunt Sophie's old wedding album. The filmic transition from the stills of Greek ancestors in the album to freeze-frames of Nicolina in Greek costume at the wedding may be cliché, as are the MOS shots of conversation as Nicolina confides her dilemma to her friends: but these stylisms are often used because they can work well, and they certainly do here.

The director-writer's fine touch with detail (father in hard-hat meets daughter... and in the next sequence the daughter is seen wearing the hard hat )

and humour (the kid brother who smothers his food in ketchup at the dinner table; later at the climactic arrival of the news that Nicolina will be able to skate in the free expression event, he interrupts with, "You wanna listen to my bazouki?") manage to slip the romanticism of the film behind our defences and allows the poignance and the sentimentality to seem welcome in an ending that might be all too pat.

In the final image, which is forgiveably a freeze-frame, we see Nicolina pirouetting on skates in a drastically shortened version of an ethnic wedding outfit which was once her great aunt's, giving her family the thumbs-up. Greek roots and juicy fruits, old and new, multiculturalism and pop culture come together. Nicolina's selfhood focuses in the subtle monochromes of this last single frame as does the inconography of the film itself. The obligatory cut-aways here and there, the frequent absence of foreground in framing and the single, derivative use of the pull-back out of a mirror can be forgiven. The film *Nicolina* is an honest, well-written evocation of the T.V. generation's insensitivity to what has gone before and it reconciles the opposites without diminishing any of the several parties.

Michael Asti-Rose

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