

FILM REVIEWS

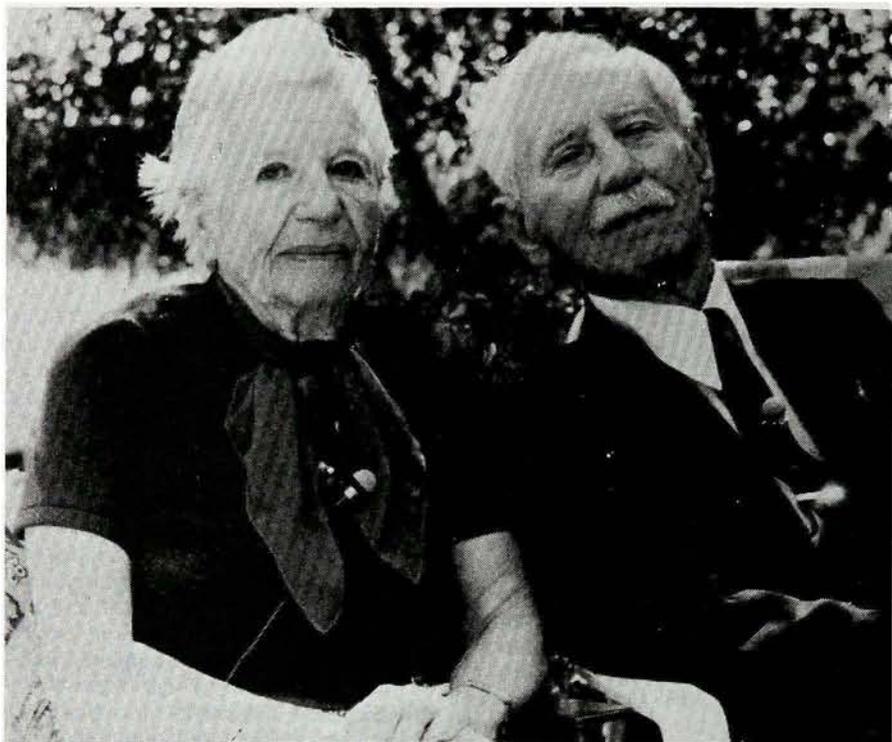
THE CANADIAN CONNECTION: THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

d. Harry Rasky, sc. Harry Rasky, ph. Kenneth Gregg, asst. ph. John Maxwell, ed. Arla Saare, sd. Erik Hoppe, p. Harry Rasky, p.c. Canadian Broadcasting Company (1978), col. 16mm, running time, 60 minutes, dist. Canadian Broadcasting Company.

As in his award winning *Homage to Chagall*, Harry Rasky turns his attention to an important cultural influence of the century in this, his latest interview-profile. This time he faces a greater challenge in presenting his subject visually, for the people he deals with here have devoted their lives to ideas: in particular, to the study of mankind and the lessons that history teaches. They are Will and Ariel Durant.

Born in Massachusetts in 1885 of French Canadian parents, Will Durant anticipated the Quiet Revolution by almost sixty years. Rebelling against his conservative and Catholic heritage, he became both an atheist and a radical. By 1914 he was a teacher at the Ferrer Institute in New York, one of those immigrant and workingmen's school-cum-social-and political institutions that sprang up before the First World War. There he met a brilliant young Russian-born girl named Chaya Appel, who married him at the age of fourteen, and whom he named Ariel after the sprite in *The Tempest*.

Will Durant wrote a series of inexpensive (5 cents) booklets for the working people and immigrants for whom he lectured on philosophy at the Labor Temple. Out of these came his first major work, *The Story of Philosophy*, perhaps one of the first modern attempts to explain this complex subject



Will and Ariel Durant – husband and wife collaborators on some of the most widely read books ever published

for the layman. His interest in history came naturally from his dissatisfaction with philosophy's inability to provide him with the answers to his questions. He became convinced that history's record was of supreme importance to the present and future of mankind. So he began the travels and research that was to lead to his monumental work, *The Story of Civilization*. From the beginning Ariel's contributions were important, first as Will's primary researcher, and then as his co-author. Though she says little in the film, compared with her husband, her sharp comments – when she does make them – show how well she has lived up to her name.

In dealing with two people whose contributions are difficult to realize in cinematic terms, Rasky falls back on the tried and true methods of montage. Unlike John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Age of Uncertainty*, the visuals do not detract from the intellectual content. Rasky is content to let the Durants'

eloquence speak for itself. Although now rather frail in his 90's, Will Durant's mind remains as sharp as ever. The clear and concise analyses that Rasky draws from him, with some pointed interjections from Ariel, show clearly the breadth of their knowledge, and also why their achievements have been slighted by a somewhat jealous academic community. The public has not, however, slighted them. *The Story of Civilization* is one of the great best sellers, but unfortunately, it is not likely to be extended into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Will Durant originally hoped. Since the world will probably not see the likes of the Durants again in the near future, at least not in America (it is ironic that they live in that least humane of American cities, Los Angeles), Harry Rasky has performed another signal service by capturing their humanity on film.

J. Paul Costabile