

scene, when we were watching it together: "What a dreadful woman." But you can see by the end of the film, that what is going on with her is the rage. She is saying, "Take it all, while you're at it. You might just as well destroy the whole goddamn thing." She is the great tragic figure in the story. They're all going, and so she says finally, "If you're going, then really go. But stop all this bullshit."

Cinema Canada: Do you have plans to do any more films with Robin Phillips?

Timothy Findley: Well, I want to. In my heart, I'm working with Robin till the day I drop. I don't know how he feels about it. But I'm not going to get down on my knees and say 'Robin, please'. Because that would be ridiculous. It would make a fool out of him. But it is my wish that there will be a lot more. My greatest interest is to write for Robin and the stage.

Cinema Canada: What are the things holding filmmakers - and writers like yourself - back from making more films like *The Wars*?

Timothy Findley: Courage. There are too many bureaucracies in charge of what gets to happen. That is what is wrong with the CBC, the CFDC and the NFB. This is not to say that all three are not necessary. But they've got to learn how to work in a different way. When great things happen there, they happen in spite of, instead of because of, those people. Someone has got to fight through all of that bureaucratic stuff to get the thing on film and then to protect it from the corridor after corridor of willing - all too willing - editors, each of whom wants to have a little say in how the thing looks. And the bureaucratic, "Let's form a committee and all sit around the table and discuss how to write this scene." You cannot do that! You cannot make a film that way! It has to come out of a channel that is vibrating and alive with a single vision. And anything that is done to tamper with that vision is nothing but a sin.

Robin Phillips'

The Wars

The Wars is a resonant drama about madness and war, an excellent screen adaptation of Timothy Findley's bleak, though brilliant, novel of the same title. In Findley's vision there is no strength through vulnerability, and love is inevitably twisted, on the rack of power and duty.

It is a film of great psychological depth which, although it isn't as well crafted as cinema, stands up to the inevitable comparison with the Australian anti-war tragedy, *Breaker Morant*. The problem with *The Wars* is that it's missing too much story; even without familiarity with the novel, one feels the holes where scenes from the script were dropped from the final film. It is evident that the structure which Findley and director Robin Phillips had in mind was severely compromised in the editing room.

Like the book, the film gives us concentrated images of the Great War as grotesque and absurd. There are no battle scenes, only the laboured advance of boots and wagon wheels over greenish pieces of corpses embedded in the mud of France. War is mud and mist, rotting flesh, aching wounds, waiting for rations and waiting for explosions. It is an obsession with scraps of civilization: a book, some stained glass, a menagerie of pets, a silver spoon. The "enemy" is virtually absent, and war is seen not in terms of the conflict of armies and nations but in terms of the destruction of frail individuals.

The Wars is as much about women as it is about men, and the women are stronger. By sustaining the tone of suffering between women and soldiers at a parallel pitch, Findley and Phillips have exposed the most profound psychological truth about war. That is, that militarism depends entirely upon the repression of feminine wisdom.

As Mrs. Ross, the queen mother of this

repressed state, Marthy Henry is magnificent. Addicted to "duty" and cushioned from her self-loathing by genteel alcoholism, she drives her only son Robert (played with total commitment by Brent Carver) to enlist in the army. With the finality of a curse she tells him, "I can give you birth but I cannot give you life", and he realizes in that moment that she never has been capable of the unselfish maternal love he craves. For Robert, the psychic violence of this realization precipitates a loss of both innocence and hope. The rest of his tale is informed by this fatalism.

Only animals can remain innocent, and even they must become victims of man's inhumanity. Horses are especially prominent symbols of noble innocence harnessed to the yoke of man's power complex. The young hero, Robert Ross, prefers animals to people, and shots of him riding a black mare in terror through orange mist are among the most vividly memorable visuals in the film.

There are a few powerful images, but the cinematography is generally quite pedestrian. At times it suffers from the self-consciousness common to filmed theatrical productions, where the viewer becomes painfully aware of camera position and changing focus. This is a problem not only of camera work but also of coverage; it is apparent in certain scenes that the editor just didn't have another shot to cut to.

The editing is inconsistent. Cross-cutting between Toronto and the trenches works very nicely - it was this cinematic aspect of the book which made one feel that it was written to be made into a movie. There are eloquent moments, as when we cut from a miasma of mustard gas creeping over Robert, face down in the mud, to tendrils of cigarette smoke curling across his mother's haggard, noble face in her Rosedale mansion. Many narrative links are missing, however, and this makes *The Wars* a very fragmented experience. To some extent, this works. It becomes an effective structural equivalent for the disintegration of heart and mind wrought by Edwardian morality and modern warfare.

All references to homosexuality, which are integral to the original story, have been written out of the film script. In Findley's novel, the links between the repressed feminine and the mysteries of male bonding, and further between militarism and violent homosexuality, are explored with great courage. In the film, all sexuality is either ambiguous or merely stunted. This is interesting, but shallower than the source material.

Robin Phillips is an immensely gifted dramatic director. The performances, from an ensemble of some of Canada's finest stage actors, are uniformly excellent, and the child actors are extraordinarily. Glenn Gould's music perfectly complements the film's delicate balance between elegiac reflection and immediate tragedy, giving *The Wars* an elegance which may make it, notwithstanding its flaws as cinema, a Canadian classic.

Christopher Lowry ●

THE WARS d. Robin Phillips exec. p. Robert Verrall p. Richard Nielsen sc. Timothy Findley, based on his novel "The Wars" mus. Glenn Gould d.o.p. John Coquillon, B.S.C. a.d. Tony Lucibello art d. Daphne Dare cost. des. Ann Curtis sp. efx. Colin Chilvers ed. Tony Lower assoc. p. Robert Linnell assoc. p. for Polyphone Christoph Mattner ed. const. Tom Daly sd. mix. Joseph Champagne make-up Shonagh Jabour hair James Keeler sup. sd. ed. Bernard Bordeleau post-p. sd. cons. Bruce Nyznik cast. Walken-Brown. Produced with the participation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation, and Famous Players Limited. p.c. Nielsen-Ferns International Limited, National Film Board of Canada, Polyphone Film-und-Fernseh GmbH. dist. International Spectrafilm Distributors Ltd. col. 35mm running time 120 min. lp. Brent Carver, Martha Henry, William Hutt, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Jackie Burroughs, Jean Leclerc, Domini Blythe, Alan Scarfe, Margaret Tyzack, Barbara Budd, Susan Wright, Richard Austin, Roger Barton, Paul Batten, Rod Beattie, Tom Bishop, Kirsten Bishopric, Richard Blackburn, Fred Booker, Dwayne Brenna, Michael Caruana, Shirley Cassidy, Clare Coulter, Richard Curnock, Shirley Douglas, David Dunbar, Rubert Frazer, Craig Gardner, Graeme Gibson, Maurice Good, Bobby Hannah, Paul Hubbard, Jeff Hyslop, Eleanor Kane, James Kidnie, Leo Leyden, Hardee T. Lineham, Robin McKenzie, Matthew Mackey, David Main, William M. Malmo, Jefferson Mappin, Marti Maraden, Anne McKay, Richard McMillan, David Robb, Stephen Russell, Abigail Seaton, Heather Summerhayes, Irene Sutcliffe, Simon Treves, Annette Vyge, Timothy Webber.

● Balanced between elegiac reflection and immediate tragedy, *The Wars* is a Canadian classic

