

FILM REVIEWS

Between Friends I

Directed by Don Shebib; screenplay by Claude Harz; cinematography by Richard Leiteman; film editing by Tony Lower and Don Shebib; music by Matthew McCauley; art direction by Claude Bonnière. Executive producer: G. Chalmers Adams. A Clearwater Films Production and Release. Cast: Michael Parks, Bonnie Bedelia, Chuck Shamata, Henry Beckman, Hugh Webster.

The strong humanist sensibility evident in Don Shebib's first feature films — *Goin' Down the Road* and *Rip-Off* — is at its most powerful in his newest feature, *Between Friends*. Shebib's uncanny ability to cut right to the heart of each of his characters, to expose them as they are in all their shallowness or multi-levelled complexity, and to do this without clouding his exposition with pity or self-righteous moralizing, shines through the sometimes oppressive solemnity of *Between Friends* and establishes him as one of film's most gifted explorers of the human condition.

Between Friends is a demanding film; it challenges the viewer to undertake the same firm suspension of moral judgement Shebib himself has achieved. Sombre in style and content, with characters who seem trapped and defeated from the outset, the film tempts you to seize the nearest label — “a film about losers” — and to fix it firmly in your mind thereby limiting your perception and appreciation of the film's wider, richer and deeper field of vision.

For Shebib, each of his characters — Chino (Chuck Shamata), Toby (Michael Parks), Ellie (Bonnie Bedelia), Will (Henry Beckman), and Coker (Hugh Webster) — is neither a “winner” nor a “loser”; neither “right” nor “wrong”. However, each in his or her own way is a limited being, whether due to a personal blindness (Chino's immature desire to return to the idyllic California life of his memories); due to a convention fostered by society (Chino, Will and Coker's simplistic pursuit of money as the only solution to their often complex personal problems — “Jesus!” says Coker, “We've got to get that money and get out of here!”); or due to a combination of both (as reflected in Chino's plan to use money not only as a means of escaping his present existence but also as a means of resurrecting an irretrievable past).

For a brief time one winter, the lives and private desperations of five people become intertwined as each faces a major crisis. How these people interact,

how each responds to his or her personal crisis, and how each copes with the crucial aftermath constitutes the structural backbone of *Between Friends*.

Toby, a former surfer and small-time drug dealer, is paid for his role as driver in a drug heist and leaves California for Toronto and a planned visit with Chino, an old surfing buddy. In the six years since he last saw Chino, a broken marriage and a young son have matured Toby. He soon discovers that Chino has side-stepped maturity in favour of a life fed by an obsessive adolescent fantasy of returning to a remembered California life that no longer exists. Glad to see Toby, Chino sees in him a tangible link to this past and a possible key to its restoration: if Toby would be the driver in a robbery he's planned with Will and Coker, then, reasons Chino, there will be money for him (Chino) to return to California, buy a house, two cars and a surfing life for himself and his “old lady”, Ellie.

Having grown increasingly frustrated and embittered by Chino's childishness, Ellie is initially hostile towards Toby (“I'm not running a kindergarten. One little boy around here is enough.”) until she sees him as a sensitive man capable of understanding her. “For once,” she confides, “I'd like to meet a man who could see through me. God knows I'm not complex.”

Will, Ellie's father, newly released from prison, arrives with his friend Coker and reveals their plan to rob the Northern General Nickel Company in Coniston where Coker works. The money is their key to freedom from a dreary constricting existence in the bleak northern Ontario mining community.

Complications arise quickly as each life moves relentlessly towards its crisis. Toby, attracted to Ellie, finds himself trapped between his love for her and his loyalty to a trusting and vulnerable Chino. Toby tries to keep the truth from Chino, knowing he would not understand the complexities and would be crushed. Ellie finally tells Chino of their affair and Toby's worst fears are confirmed: to Chino, Ellie is a heartless bitch whose actions are an affront to his manhood, and Toby is an unfeeling betrayer of friendship. Coker dies of a heart attack only days before the robbery which was to free him from his dreary miner's life. Will, having lost his closest friend, decides to continue with

the robbery plan and is faced with the task of preventing a violent and vengeful Chino from harming Toby and jeopardizing all of their lives during the robbery.

As the film draws to its taut finish the day of the heist arrives and all of these tensions, conflicts, personal crises and feelings of desperation converge in one devastating and decisive finale.

Shebib as director/editor, Tony Lower as his co-editor and Claude Harz as screen-writer have given the film a strong dramatic structure. As *Between Friends* builds towards its climax, there are many scenes remarkable for their taut bite of realism, and poignant mixture of tension, desperation and irony.

One scene is particularly memorable. Ellie, Toby and Chino are indoors one rainy afternoon: Toby is watching television, Ellie is nearby working at her sewing machine, and in another part of the room Chino prepares to renovate his battered surfboard. While Chino is out for a moment, a distraught Ellie begs Toby to tell Chino about their secret affair and to tell him *now* for she can stand the strain no longer. But Toby aborts his attempt when he sees Chino so engrossed in his restoration of the irreparably damaged surf board. (Says Chino to Toby: “I'm going to take myself, my board, my money and my old lady down to southern California.”)

Toby returns to his TV set in defeat; Ellie resumes her sewing with angry vigor; and the oblivious Chino starts up his electric saw. For one magnetic moment there is a wild cacophony of sound: Toby's TV blares senselessly, Ellie's machine whirs angrily at top speed, and Chino's saw roars imperiously over all else. Suddenly there is silence and darkness. The fuse has blown. Chino immediately blames everything on Toby's TV and Ellie's machine, Toby blames Chino's saw, and Ellie quietly suggests that someone go and fix the fuse.

As performed by Michael Parks, Bonnie Bedelia and Chuck Shamata, the scene is a beautifully realized and precise distillation of the Toby-Chino-Ellie relationship with its strong undercurrent of barely controlled inner tensions which will eventually explode into the open and out of control.

One disturbing flaw in *Between Friends* sets the film slightly off-balance and dissipates some of its ultimate impact: the relationship between Will and Coker remains largely undeveloped. Al-

though the important parallels between their relationship and that of Toby and Chino are suggested they are never fully realized and one aches to know more about the older men, especially Coker. When Will proudly sings a hymn at Coker's grave-side the oppressive sadness of the barren Sudbury landscape is broken only by the triumphant lyrics and a gaily coloured wreath of flowers placed on Coker's casket. It is a moving moment but the depth of our emotion is limited; we know so very little about the man who has earned such a touching tribute. What we do learn of Coker and the depth of his relationship with Will is gleaned primarily from Will's drunken reminiscences after Coker's funeral. Despite the limitations of his role, Hugh Webster as Coker succeeds in breathing life into a character whose greatest significance comes after death.

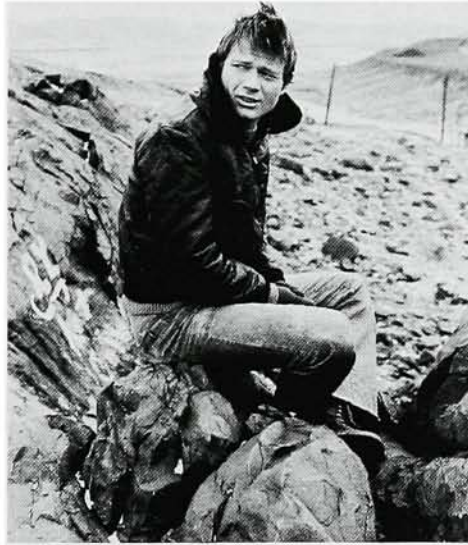
The film's strongest assets are the performances of Bonnie Bedelia, Chuck Shamata, Michael Parks and Henry Beckman, the subjects of Shebib's probing analysis. It is largely on these performances that the ultimate success of the film rests — they are the heart of the film. Their characterizations are carefully developed, well-shaded, and detailed creations; one welcomes the frequent close-ups of their marvellously expressive faces. But it is the intricate complexity of the Toby-Chino-Ellie relationship that remains indelibly in one's mind as a sensitive, often painful exploration of the nature and meaning of human friendship.

Richard Leiterman's fine cinematography captures the bleak loneliness of the film's various landscapes: the elegiac sadness of the sea-washed California coast in winter; the eerie ironic beauty of the Sudbury landscape with its grey-black rocks, sparse vegetation and the tall stacks billowing white-grey smoke against a grey-blue sky; and the strangely similar barren quality of the Toronto skyline with tall grey sky-scrapers etched against a cold blue winter sky. Through Leiterman's cinematography, these landscapes are endowed with a life and significance rivalling that of the film's human characters. Director Shebib uses these images as mirrors of his character's melancholy lives and — in the case of the Sudbury and Toronto scenes — as tangible representations of society's often oppressive influence on the environment and thence on the lives of its human inhabitants.

Between Friends is an engrossing and

valuable examination of the lives of people too often dismissed as unworthy of any great consideration. By making his supposedly limited characters so fascinating and complex, Don Shebib reveals the immeasurable importance of awakening ourselves to the unique value of each human being and to the fact that all human beings are limited in some way, it is all a matter of degree. If we find that Chino, Toby, Ellie, Will and Coker are "unworthy of further thought" then our own limitations may be far greater and more dangerous than theirs.

Laurinda Hartt



Michael Parks as Toby in "Between Friends"

Between Friends II*

Don Shebib's newest film following **Going Down the Road** and **Rip Off** is now titled **Between Friends**, after abandoning both **Surf's Up** and **Get Back**, in case you're getting confused and think he's made a number of unreleased films.

After a successful low-budget feature, and a reasonably successful second feature, one takes a certain narrow-eyed approach to a director's third feature film. Is he improving? Getting more sophisticated? Handling the mechanics of film-making better, encouraging increasingly strong performances, yet still maintaining that freshness and originality that set him apart in the first place?

The answer on all counts is yes, and it looks as if Shebib's latest work will be a popular Canadian hit. In fact the themes of separation, of aimlessness, of nostalgia for boyhood friends and pranks and a simple happy life, of the gradual awareness of aging, failure and

death, are so universal that the film ought indeed to find an international audience.

Laid against the cold Toronto skyline, and the bleak almost black and white of an Ontario October among the slag heaps and smelters of Sudbury, the film yet maintains a warm and friendly approach as it examines some minor misfits in society and the hopeful despair they live in, and which underlies society itself.

For instance, the American drifter, slightly cynical and sad, aware of his age and without goals, heads for Canada and the friendly security of the once-idolizing Canadian pal he taught to surf in the days of his prime. Who doesn't look to an old friend when all else seems worthless or lost? And the Toronto guy, leading an equally aimless life slinging hash for a living, is naturally overjoyed with the breath of fresh remembrance of things past — and wistfully, future — that his friend brings. Even his girl, apparently resigned to a dreary life and drearier job, wakes up and smiles when love for the American renews her. And her Dad, released after a long pen term, still hopes blindly for success like an O'Neill character, and persists in planning his doomed robbery, claiming "You can't lose them all."

The audience is captivated by this hopefulness and the warm-blooded and familiar human types tempted by it, and despite the slant of the road toward disaster, find themselves going along for the ride. At any rate, for these characters there seems to be no alternate route.

Essential for audience acceptance of all this are the characterizations. They're good. Michael Parks (**And Then Came Bronson**) is strong as Toby, playing him with his familiar slow masculine tempo, and a similar style of sweet bearish wit to that used by Doug McGrath in **Going Down the Road**. Chuck Shamata, in his first leading feature role, seems almost uncomfortably real, his performance is so natural, and Bonnie Bedelia rates superlatives as the girl who comes between friends.

The friendship between the two surf-lovers is paralleled by the friendship between the girl's father, well handled by Henry Beckman, and his old pal Coker, Hugh Webster. It's death that comes between these two, a prelude to the theme of the film, and out of Coker's funeral should rise the emotional climax. It almost does, as Will sings defiantly over

his old pal's grave, but since the relationship between the two men was underplayed, Coker's death actually seemed a little irrelevant and the funeral scene a little forced despite its thematic importance.

What comes between friends? In *Going Down the Road and Rip Off* it's girls and the separations into adulthood through maturing and mating, but although it appears that the girl also divides the pals in *Between Friends*, the final separation is death and it is the inevitability of this eventual parting that tones the film with its funny frantic sense of fated doom.

Natalie Edwards

Paperback Hero*

Director Peter Pearson seemed to successfully catch the flavor of the Eastern Ontario backwoods in *The Best Damn Fiddler from Calabogie to Kaladar*, yet he alienated the locals to such an extent that they still smart at the mention of the film. Now he attempts to capture the spirit of our prairie west in a movie originally titled *The Last of the Big Guns*, and made with the money of one of them, John Bassett. It may not capture Saskatchewan perfectly but the film is certainly popular this time with the locals, even outgrossing *The Godfather* in some Saskatchewan centres.

Retitled *Paperback Hero*, a film on the dying out of the mad loner type Western hero is hardly brand new. What is new is the beautiful Saskatchewan location work in Saskatoon and Delisle, using local people for background and small parts. The authentic western flavour is evident. Tumbleweeds tumble, dust blows, and the skies are fantastic, while the sweet lovely warble of the meadowlark makes any ex-Saskatchewanite's heart ache with nostalgia.

Yet there it ends. Who is this local dude and hockey hero played by Keir Dullea whom the local townspeople tolerate under the self-granted nickname of The Marshall? Complete with cowboy hat and gun, this old kid bases his self-worship on the image of the U.S. town strongman of moviedom. He even has a distracting American accent.

Dullea's lightweight petulance overlaid by brassy boyish bravado makes him look like the ritual weak-minded local boy of so many small town stories, who is accepted and even loved by the humanitarians of the area.

But the film isn't really about how the mentally immature succumb but, ac-

ording to the press release, about "a man who finds himself fading into obsolescence, just like the small town around him."



Locker-room scene from "Paperback Hero"

The reality of the prairies and the truth of the abandoned western towns never properly coincides with the image Dullea creates. The approach is full of mixed metaphors. Director Pearson has accumulated attractive scenes and interesting episodes but not bound them into a cohesive whole. There is a true moment of exhilarating action and force for instance when the camera joins the players on the rink and the audience briefly experiences some of the power and violence and excitement of hockey. But this sensation is left dangling, neither used creatively nor melded into an emotional or intellectual unity with the theme.

Despite action, sex and fun, the story seems to drag. The audience is not well led toward its responses. The camera works against the characterization, the characters against the symbols, and through it all, the townspeople pass quietly in the background, a whisper of the authentic prairie west missed by the film.

Natalie Edwards

Keep It In the Family*

The Canadianized commentary on the Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice theme turns up as Boy & Girl & Mom & Dad in a film which, if only it had better direction and acting, might well have been a very funny and pertinent poke at the current popular victims, middle-class young and middle-aged parents.

As it is, *Keep It in the Family*, despite bad reviews, still attracts audiences lured by the suggestive ads in the

Carry On movies style with their promise of "a riotous comedy of cuckoldry."

Starting from a reasonably funny idea and a good script, a comedy still requires direction skilled in comic timing to enhance the comedy of incident, and solid characterizations to bring out the human comedy. This movie did start with an amusing idea and a potentially funny script by Edward Stewart. Working from a story by himself and director Larry Kent, Stewart mixed current mores, fads and fancies, with the logical and ridiculous results possible in a world where "Which One Is the Mother?" sells soap and hope to a gullible public at one bargain price.

Two healthy spoiled children of affluence tire of their pseudo-hip communal life, and in searching for the \$300 a month for their plastic-dream apartment, are considerably annoyed to find their respective parents won't put out. Revengefully they determine to put their parents in a position from which they can't refuse.

What do middle-aged affluent parents want? Youth and sex of course. Kids provide same, and as the course of untrue love doesn't run any more smoothly than the opposite, the plot engages in a few deft twists before the inevitable Grab your Partner ending.

Larry Kent who directed *High and Sweet Substitute*, as well as *Façade*, *The Apprentice* and *Cold Pizza* among others since he began with *Bitter Ash* in 1963 at U.B.C., has a heavy amateurish hand here as director, which is unfor-



John Gavin and Adrienne La Russa in Larry Kent's new feature

tunately not corrected by his own editing. The film needs an editor with a sharp sense of humour and sharper scissors to trim away the over-long and double-takes, all the eye-ball rolling, smirking, winking and nudging humour, the ham acting and the over-exposed

gags, to make a considerably shorter and funnier film.

Two very good things in the film are Patricia Gage's adept handling of the mother's role, and a marvellously funny car chase sequence with a police car so constantly bashed and battered, rammed and ruined as it pursues the lovers on their calmly conversational drive, that it even caused the mid-afternoon crowd of five at the Imperial in Toronto to howl with laughter.

In the hey-day of Hollywood, comedies were exposed, withdrawn for trimming, and exposed again until they were pared into shape according to audience response. Now, it seems to me, neither *Keep It in the Family* nor *The Rainbow Boys* are really failures — they simply need this manicuring to sharpen their tempo and zip them past the critics to let the audience get the last laugh.

Natalie Edwards

The Pyx*

Finally! a dandy commercial movie, well acted, well produced, and altogether OK. Now, thinks the happy reviewer, maybe we're on our way. Audiences are lining up in Montreal and Toronto, and even advertising it as a Canadian movie hasn't kept them away.

With Montreal backgrounds, and French-Canadian accents and words leaking through the English everywhere, it is distinctively and delightfully Canadian, yet blessed with a solid American-style pace and slick surface that almost guarantee commercial success.

That's good for Canada, and also great for Harvey Hart, a director with an impressive TV background whose three feature films, *Bus Riley's Back in Town*, with Ann-Margret and Michael Parks, *The Sweet Ride*, and an exploitative version of Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, have been none too successful.

Like a cross between Humphrey Bogart and Jean Gabin, Montreal-born classic actor Christopher Plummer creates in this, his first Canadian movie, a detective endearingly low-keyed and quietly potent, as he eases his way through the mysteries surrounding the death of the beautiful hooker played by Karen Black.

A sense of Fatalism heightens the tension as the plot is unfolded in a paralleling of past and present. Intercut with the detective's search, we see the murdered girl's last days as she follows her fate to her death. A few extra bodies, and menacing characters like

Jacques Godin as the kind of apartment super that would inspire you to stay at home, and the terrifying millionaire man-of-evil played by Jean-Louis Roux (of the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde) keep the audience jumping or sucking an "ooooooooahhh" on cue.

All the characterizations are strong, and the benefit of working from a novel (written in the late 50s by Professor John Buell of Loyola) is evident in the fullness of the material provided. Donald Pilon, veteran of eight French-Canadian features, (best supporting actor Etrog for *The True Nature of Bernadette*) is such a perfect side-kick for Plummer that they've a ready-built audience for any sequel they want to make teaming "Henderson and Paquette."

And Yvette Brind-Amour performs as Meg, the manageress of the girls, with a perfection that inspires awe. Despite the ads "introducing" her, she is no novice, though this is her first film, but the founder of Montreal's Théâtre du Rideau Vert, and a well-known actress whose many awards include a medal of service of the Order of Canada. Something like being made a "Dame" in Britain.

Surrounded by such high-powered talent, Karen Black, always a good actress, turns in an interesting performance as a young woman with a fully believable past and present, though unfortunately, no future.

Faults in the film? Forget it. This is the kind of movie to go to for entertainment, not to discuss motivation and message.

Natalie Edwards



Christopher Plummer in "The Pyx"

U-Turn I*

U-Turn is an underrated film.

The hero of the movie is a big city jock who plays tennis, drives a red car, lives with a welcome willing school-teacher, likes gourmet foods, is interested in art, has a law career well on its way, and probably reads *Quest*, as well as *Playboy*. Now what more could there be to life than that?

Well, there's the impossible dream of course. The unreachable, that something special to be sought beyond status and money and success.

In the case of David Selby's Scott it is epitomized by a memory of a lovely lady dressed in blue drifting away on a ferry to an island, as if to another world. In the years since he saw her, his car, his career and all his physical life has improved yet still he cannot forget her haunting appearance and the strange



Scene from "U-Turn"

compulsion he felt at the time, that he was destined to know her.

He takes a U-Turn in his life and goes back to solve the mystery of what her memory means, and the U-turn and car imagery adeptly propel him into his pilgrim's-progress-like voyaging through some contemporary Canadiana.

The film is sprinkled with humour and spiced with tasty characterizations, as Scott searches for his lovely Renoir-like lady. William Osler enunciates his way through an eccentric character part as if he hadn't had such a good role to chew on for years, while Diane Dewey, Don Ewer, George Robertson, and particularly Don Arioli, whose sidewalk artist is an irresistible comic nut, are among the many vividly drawn bit parts. People are seen as coarse and crass, blatant and balmy, but except for the tenderly drawn mentally ill ex-beauty, also played by Maude Adams (the lady

*These reviews first appeared in *Toronto Citizen*.

in blue), the dramatis personae are generally quick colorful cartoon impressions of Canadian types, seen as if by a stranger's eyes.

For Hungarian-born director, George Kaczender, who has spent 10 years making small movies with the NFB, and one feature, *Don't Let The Angels Fall*, in 1968, one wonders if the girl is a visual hunger for the missing European loveliness and grace and mystery of his native land.

Interesting then, that Kaczender and screenwriter Douglas Bowie upturn the plot and let the hero *find* the lady. Interesting that though everything is set up so that the lady should want and need our hero, she shows she can easily get along without him. And that he then returns to his Canadian girl and his Canadian life, unlikely to U-turn again.

The visual style of the film is adept and the use of color subtle and suggestive. The blue-green tones, water imagery and calm pacing of the scenes with Maude Adams playing the remembered Paula, are further enhanced by her gentle voice and truly remarkable beauty. These contrast well with the bright, energetic, flat-out portrayal Gay Rowan gives Scott's girlfriend Bonnie, the kind of girl who seems to have modelled herself on TV series' heroines.

Though the acting is certainly uneven, the driving sequences apparently a little too drawn-out to please all audiences, and the ridicule needs ripening, this is still an enterprising, slightly meta-physical film with a lot of style and fun that shows a great step forward from Kaczender's *Don't Let the Angels Fall*, and promises interesting things from his future work.

—Natalie Edwards

U-Turn II

It would be interesting to ask audiences at George Kaczender's *U-Turn* whether they thought it had a happy ending. When Scott Laithem flings a bunch of roses down to his departing girl-friend, and she receives them rapturously as proof that he really loves her after all and is going to marry her — are we to be glad that he has finally seen where his true happiness lies, or dismayed by his capitulation? In finding and spending a night with the soulful lady whom he saw briefly at a ferry-crossing four years ago — has he happily laid the ghost that has been haunting his mature contentment, or sadly encountered his own banality? Has he been fulfilled or im-

poverished by the termination of his quest? Unfortunately this kind of ambivalence in Kaczender's film is to be ascribed not to any complex subtlety in the work itself, but to a pervasive uncertainty of tone and attitude. *U-Turn* is a film which has never been thought out.

The initial situation from which *U-Turn* proceeds, while by no means novel, is still a fertile one for an intelligent imagination to explore. Here is a man (it could just as well be a woman) propelled towards a choice which will define him pretty irrevocably. Is it to be a commonplace kind of bourgeois existence, familiar if not exactly contemptible, a marriage of young professionals who do the grocery shopping on Friday nights? Or will the possibility of something more radically transforming continue to exert its claim — something less wholly forseen, that seems more like a destiny than a fate?

Scott Laithem (played by David Selby) is clearly intended to come across as a man with Soul. In the eyes of the forthrightly marriage-oriented Bonnie (Gay Rowan) he may be something of a vacillating shthead, but the serene and lovely Paula (Maud Adams) discovers from the bumps on his skull that he is generous, idealistic, poetical, and many another nice thing beside. She confirms what we have been meant to think all along, that his quest for the magic and mystery surrounding his obsessive memory of her displays his fidelity to a romantic ideal.

Yet when he finally comes face to face with the image of his yearning, nothing really happens. A recently-widowed mother, Paula is indeed rendered as the rare person for whom a man would have to overcome his ordinariness. She apparently perceives a virtue in Scott Laithem, for she makes love with him — something which we cannot believe she would do lightly. But she tells him, "It wasn't me you were looking for", and reveals that she was reciprocally attracted by him that fatal day at the ferry. She actually obeyed an impulse to catch up with him, but saw him chatting up a chick at an A & W, and went on her way, unobserved. Bidding farewell to his fantasy object (who is leaving for England anyway), Scott hurries back to Montreal with placatory roses for good old Bonnie. In the final shot he shrugs wryly at the camera, and is frozen behind the credits.

As an ending it appears to be relatively cheerful and comic (Oh well, what

the hell!), but there's no clear impression of whether the entire episode has amounted to any kind of significant experience at all for Scott — or for the audience. (Have we sat through this meandering movie for nothing?) There seemed to be a hint that his fidelity to the image of Paula has all along been superficial and narcissistic, a mere fretfulness at the prospect of conjugality. But little effort is made to 'place' Scott's obtuseness in relation to an idea of a more developed sensibility. He is not revealed to himself as an immature creature, and if he appears so to us, it is rather the actor's failure than the director's success. Moreover, Bonnie is deliberately stereotyped as singlemindedly mate-hunting, which tends to justify Scott's unease. But from this point of view one might expect some sense of loss when a sympathetic hero settles for the plain, having dreamed of the coloured. Not that Bonnie is unattractive, mind you; but she and Scott are clearly going to marry and live rather depressingly ever after. The possibility of Scott transcending the Bonnie-Paula opposition and growing towards a more vital relationship never arises.

So Scott encounters his fantasy — and nothing happens. But the movie isn't *about* the fact that nothing happens. It simply lacks the imagination to do anything creative with its scenario. Instead of developing insights into the main characters and their relationships, the script squanders time and energy inventing a gaggle of eccentrics for Scott to meet on his travels. Instead of exploring the language in which people really talk to each other, it furnishes 'lines' for the actors to exchange. Think what an Eric Rohmer might have made of this plot . . .

Why, you might ask, does a reviewer spend so much time standing an inferior movie up against the more satisfying work that it should have been? Because, I would answer, when *U-Turn* opened in Toronto there were six Canadian films playing in major downtown theatres. In this unprecedented and exhilarating situation it is more than ever important to demand that Canadian films justify the attention they are at last receiving. People who chose, from the six available, to go and see *U-Turn* and the unspeakably witless and contemptible *Keep It In The Family* will only have been confirmed in their suspicion that the local product isn't worth bothering with.

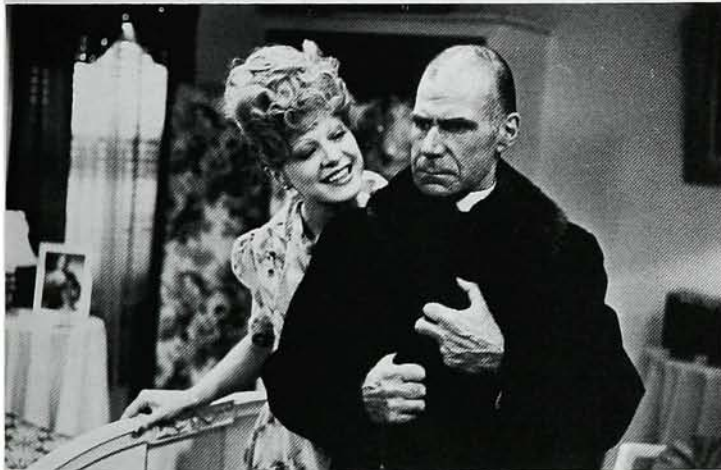
Bob Fothergill



Micheline Lanctôt in "The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz"



On location for "Child Under a Leaf"



Scene from Gille Carle's "Les Corps Célestes"

As "Bernadette"



been, but not recently, so I declined an argument.) About "Voyage en Grand Tartarie", a trippy, experimental feature and its young French director "he's a genius, the film is great, but it's not commercial. I don't know what will happen to it." And she's outspoken, most of all, about the man who 'discovered' her, Gilles Carle and his films.

Contradictory feelings emerge from between the lines as she talks about Carle. Obviously, she has a very high regard for the man, but is also very free with her criticism of him and his work. Of the latter, maybe it's no accident that her favorite is *Bernadette*.

"When I read the script, I was really touched, I was really captured, because the script itself was a perfect, structured thing. It had one line of thought that was followed throughout and it led somewhere. That film had something to say and it said it in a very refreshing fashion. I thought it had a lot of fine points that one could argue with, but it had such a variety, so much life in it! What makes "Bernadette" so different from "La Mort d'une Bûcheron" is that Bernadette had a thought, it had a structure, it had a bearing, it had a certain . . . it had definite guts!"

She strongly disagrees with the filmic path Carle has taken with his two recent films, *Death of a Lumberjack* and *The Heavenly Bodies*. But since she's one of the stars of the latter, she's faced with the dilemma of promoting a film that she doesn't believe in one hundred per cent. She very graciously declines to be quoted further on the subject out of loyalty to the project. Let's just say that Carle's current infatuation with international success, and the consequent commerciality of his recent work rubs her the wrong way. Her voice softens again, however, recalling their first collaboration.

"We were privileged having such comfortable shooting. I don't recall one bad feeling on the set. I don't know if it was due to the content of the film or because the people were all so nice. There wasn't a single conflict. Everything went so well, so fast, and so beautifully. Now that I have been on so many sets, I realize that there are so many problems, so many pressures and conflicts. They're starting to disgust me from acting, because I used to think that acting was so nice. But then you go to another movie and everybody's going around with all these grudges and most sets seem to be problem sets. 'Bernadette' is a nostalgic moment, because it was lovely doing it. It puts me into a nostalgic mood, just thinking about it.

"As far as 'Les Corps Célestes', we shot for two months, I had a lovely character named Sweetie, I had a ball doing that, but the pressures were horrible. The way Carle functions, for instance, is that he makes a film, sees its faults, then corrects them in his next one. I had an argument on 'The Heavenly Bodies' for twenty minutes with him, because he was reproached for using 'bad language' in 'La Mort d'une Bûcheron'. There was a lot of controversy about his use of 'joual', he was criticized, he was praised, he was criticized, he was praised. There was also a lot of swearing in that film.

"So we were shooting a sequence in 'Les Corps Célestes', and he wanted me to say 'que-pense tu?' which is a totally foreign form of speech for a French-Canadian. It's okay when you read it, you know, it's a very nice French dialect, so I didn't say anything, and when the scene came, I said it in my own words. I said 'comment trouve-t-il?' He stopped me — and he never does that — and he said 'the words are QUE PENSE-TU!' I said I'm sorry Gilles, it's not right in my mouth, I can't . . . it's not suited to the characters, not suited to my mouth, and I won't say it!

"He said, 'what's the use of making a film in bad French, when you can make it in good French?' I said, I'm terribly sorry, but if you look up in your grammar the phrase I've used, it is perfectly correct French. He wouldn't give in and it went on for ten minutes. Since he had been accused of using bad language in another film, he was now so sacred that somebody would use bad language, that he would give us shit if we were not speaking properly. It drove me insane!

"I can't blame him, because ever since 'Bernadette' was



launched on an international scale he feels sort of obliged to do it. But, you know, a full 30 per cent of the success of *Bernadette* in France was due to its language. Thirty per cent! 'It's so charming!' (affectatiously rolling her eyes to the ceiling— 'It's so cute!' (high pitched, mocking voice) 'They have such a lovely accent!' I was told that for eight days in a row at the premiere. To the point that every interview I went to I would offer my hand and say 'I'm your little cousin with the charming accent!' (smiles) And they'd say, 'Oh, yes!' because the French love what's exotic. And Gilles knows it. Yet when 'La Mort d'un Bûcheron' played there, it was subtitled *in French* because the French-Canadian was unintelligible. But why should they understand everything? It's spoken, it's our language, they'll understand. Their ears are going to get tuned in and they'll understand. That's precisely the point, it's French-Canadian."

"The character of *Bernadette*? Part of the conviction of the character was mine. That doesn't mean that my convictions are what I am. Unfortunately I have problems trying to reconcile the two. I usually have convictions that are not really mine. I mean I believe in some things that I realize are not feasible, so I'm stuck with a paradox. And that was the main point I had a problem with as *Bernadette*. Because I had convinced myself of certain things about the way things should be, and I keep coming up against the fact, that this is not the way things are.

"All the other parts I've done, all the other roles I've played, are parts of a character or a certain evolution of a character. But they were not as TOTAL as *Bernadette* was. *Bernadette* starts, evolves, and finishes. And you have a whole complexity of things going on, but the dynamic of the character is fabulous. In *Les Corps Célestes*, *Sweetie* is also sort of evolving, but she is very limited as a character. She has a certain thing, she has a certain background, and she is very monolithic. She has gone all the way through it in a certain fashion, and you can really graph the things out, because she has one purpose in mind and she is following it. So you couldn't mold her emotions as much as you could with

Bernadette, because there you have such a range, such a tactile range of emotions! I'll never find a part like that again.

"Parts of the script were really amazing! Gilles has been called a misogynist, or a guy who hates women, because of the previous films that he's done; he always uses them as objects. He's been called a lot of things about his point of view of women. And in this one sequence in the film when we go to the whore's room after we bury the horse and I open the drawer and I find this photograph of the cripple, and then it's the mechanism that goes on in the character's head! She not only finds out that the cripple had lied to her, but she also identifies with the whore to an uncomfortable degree. And there was such an insight into the mechanisms of women, that I read it and fell . . . I couldn't read it again, I thought, well, what am I going to do with this scene, it's so horrible, it's such a dreadful sequence. You see almost everything that goes on in her mind in a split second. It's really, it's her first big shock! It's the character's first real BANG! Because after that she says, okay, this is it for your convictions and your beliefs; you know, it runs very, very, very deep. I don't mean the lines as they were written, I mean the whole emotion involved in the sequence.

"We were rushed through it, and there were a lot of things that I couldn't . . . there were so many things that weren't established, that would have given a lot more impact to that sequence. I mean that's when her whole little society collapses, her authority collapses, her belief really collapses, and when she realizes that there's nothing to be done, you cannot live that way, period. And I can't blame him for shying back, because it was really a heavy sequence and I probably would have panicked doing it, you know. I would probably have panicked trying to do it the way it should have been done. But the rest of the filming went very, very well. And I was really amazed at the script, because that character is such a beautiful woman, that I don't think I've seen the equivalent of it in any film."

My thoughts exactly, as I bid farewell to Micheline Lanctôt

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