

REVIEWS

Denys Arcand's

Le crime d'Ovide Plouffe

The films of Denys Arcand are a scathing dissection of the socio-economic and moral corruption of his fellow Francophone North-Americans. What is remarkable about Arcand's latest feature, *Le crime d'Ovide Plouffe*, is how successfully the director and his collaborators have managed to sugarcoat a very bitter pill indeed.

It is hazardous, of course, to attribute primary credit for this marvelously cynical film only to its director, for it goes without saying that the successful unfolding of *Le crime d'Ovide* is also due to co-scriptwriter (with Arcand) Roger Lemelin, author of the original Plouffe novels and TV series; to background producers John Kemeny and Denis Héroux and foreground producer Justine Héroux; as well as a fine cast; all of whose contributions significantly make the film what it is. But the acid eye that composes the film's look is ultimately Arcandian in that *Le crime* completes the portrait of an entire society's poisoning by modern commercial relations that Arcand's features and documentaries have hitherto relentlessly sketched, class by social class.

Yet what makes *Le crime* far more than a brilliant sociological analysis of the manner in which human relations are taken over by commodity fetishism is the fact that audiences love the film. Not only because it is funny, which it is, but more importantly because the nature of that humour is self-disparaging, and it is, one suspects, the recognition of that self-disparagement that gives shape to the audience's mirth. For the daily press was virtually unanimous in celebrating *Le crime* as the authentic portrait of the ordinary *homo quebecensis*, yet this is not the archetypal Quebecer of, for instance, Pierre Perrault's filmed nostalgia, it is rather Quebec man in a nation of vulgar and conniving Elvis Grattons. For *Le crime d'Ovide* is very much a modern story of the Fall.

If Gilles Carle's 1981 *Les Plouffe* (screenplay by Lemelin and produced by Denys and Justine Héroux) was an affectionate remembrance of a totem, the Arcand-Lemelin-Héroux sequel details the rampage of the sons and daughters 'liberated' by the death of the father and all he stood for. Irrevocably shattered by the arrival of modernity, the Plouffe family is a family no longer: just a collection of remotely related individuals connected to each other by relations of exchange.

It is 1949 and boom times in the new world. High-tech reigns supreme: the film opens with a long camera caress of that symbol of the corporate good life, the airplane; cars gleam with status; it is a time of furious urban development; of renovation and soaring real estate values; of the spread of banking and consumer loans; of the rise of corporate-sponsored media; of clocks relentlessly ticking reminders that time is money. In the midst of this vulgar and feverishly



● Sex on the rocks: Rita Toulouse (Anne Létourneau, center) about to get coked in *Le crime d'Ovide Plouffe*

expanding world of buying and selling, Ovide Plouffe (Gabriel Arcand) has become a prosperous *boutiquier*, selling clocks and decorative geegaws throughout the province, while sponsoring a radio-show that dispenses an inspirational liberalism for the times. He has a business partner, the crippled Frenchman Berthet (Jean Calmet) confined to the shop where Ovide's wife, the generously endowed Rita Toulouse (Anne Létourneau), is left amid the ticking clocks (of passing time) to mind the store.

Yet unlike earlier Canadian 'historical' reconstructions of a distant past (which would include *Plouffe I*), *Le crime d'Ovide*, very early into the film, is not re-constructing anything, but constructs itself, in the extremely knowing manner used by commercials, on the basis of voyeuristic desire. Within ten minutes of the film's opening, a very specifically contemporary consumer world of desire and false gratification has been minutely described and fused with the camera's slaving examination of Rita Toulouse's breasts and thighs which is not only the perspective of the crippled Frenchman who is watching her through a peephole, but, through the camera itself, is the perspective of the audience. The film, in other words, pulls in the audience through voyeurism, and in the next ten minutes has 'gratified' that voyeurism as Rita's old beau Stan Labrie (Donald Pilon) turns up, easily lures Rita from the shop, takes her off to meet an old fling, and is soon sitting back coolly watching the friend screw Rita and another girl. As Rita's amorous cries ring out in an abandoned quarry that she has moments before described as "beautiful Canada", Ovide's sweating partner is watching from the top of a cliff, just as the audience in the theatre is itself watching.

What is really going on here? *Le crime d'Ovide* is dealing utterly pro-

foundly with an extremely complex network of relations that are all mediated by money on the one hand (and that includes the relationships of the screenwriter, director, etc. to the producers; the producers to the market; the audience to the film) and frustration on the other. Berthet is crippled - if he had money, he could buy Rita and sleep with her; instead when he hurls himself on her later, claiming he loves her, she runs away calling him "un maudit infirme." This reflects back on the audience, which also, like the cripple, can only possess Rita in fantasy. The film so far has built up desire, and frustrated it. Berthet will now get even, which forms one of the two subplots that'll carry the film through to its conclusion.

The other subplot revolves around Ovide. Ovide, if one recalls, was in *Plouffe I* the seminarian who left the priesthood for love of Rita. Ovide is pure: he hates what he has become; to all extents and purposes just another whore, like his wife. He meets a French girl, Marie (Véronique Jannot); she too is pure; he defends her honor against the Québécois slobs in the bar where she works; they go off for an idyll at the Ile aux Coudres (a location reference perhaps to the famed trilogy of Pierre Perrault, a filmmaker whose concerns are the complete antithesis to Arcand's); they dream of going to France together.

Now the family intervenes in all this adultery. What is left of the Plouffe family is basically dear old mom (Juliette Huot), hysterical unmarried sis (Denise Filiatrault) and brother Napoléon (Pierre Curzi) who is a successful, gadget-crazed junk dealer. Old-fashioned values are reasserted as Mom tells Ovide to go with Rita to visit a bishop-friend and bring him a statue of the Virgin. Ovide complies. The film now regales the audience with a scene on the pathetic corruption of (religious) art. Rita thinks a reconciliation is underway

and preens herself for the journey. At the last minute, Ovide tells her to go alone. Sadly she does, only to moments later cuddle up on the plane with the handsome pilot (who for some reason is more into scrutinizing Rita's bosom than flying his craft, but anyway...). The plane is blown up; Rita and six children are killed.

Whodunnit is the concern of much of the rest of the film, as a corrupt society turns on the model businessman lauded by one and all only weeks before. That the entire system is totally corrupt is stressed repeatedly as Napoléon is twice shown attempting to buy the judge, but the police, the government and American capital (!) all want Ovide the murderer to hang. The media which once fawned at Ovide's feet is unrestrained in its presumption of his guilt. In the end, it's the pimp Labrie who, because he sort of loved Rita the whore, saves Ovide who stoically suffers through all the slanders, jail, an expedient trial, and a stint on death row.

The conclusion to the film is perhaps the most puzzling scene of all. (On one level, it is the French part of this Canada-France coproduction; on other levels, it is much more than a mere technical requirement.) Ovide, some years later, arrives in Paris. He's become an academic and is there ostensibly to give a conference on obscure Indian tribes that draws nobody much. His French girl turns up and he runs out of the lecture hall. They are reunited in Paris, city of light and dreams, and there no doubt live happily ever after.

Contrasted with this utterly curious yet naive redemption of the Québécois intellectual by the cultural superiority of France (and its women), the contempt for Quebec around which *Le crime d'Ovide* structures itself confers upon the film as a whole a rare fascination. *Le crime d'Ovide* explores, one feels, an authentic self-loathing. Whether

the source of that derives from Arcand, or Lemelin's nihilistic destruction of a myth of a golden past that his angry novels never intended, an anger not reflected either in the '50s TV series or the Carle film, or the Héroux's lyrical exploitation of the French connection, hardly matters. For *Le crime*, because it works that loathing so effectively, admits to a corruption in Canadian filmmaking that has until now never been acknowledged, at least never so profoundly – and certainly never before on-screen.

Michael Dorland ●

LE CRIME D'OVIDE PLOUFFE d. Denis Arcand **exec. p.** Denis Héroux, John Kemeny **p.** Justine Héroux **sc.** Roger Lemelin, Denis Arcand **mus.** Olivier Dassault **p. man.** Micheline Garant **loc. man.** Josette Perrotta **unit man.** François Sylvestre **1st a.d.** Jacques W. Benoit **2nd a.d.** Monique Maranda **3rd a.d.** Martha Laing **cont.** Johanne Prgent **d.o.p.** François Protat **1st asst. cam.** Yves Drapeau **2nd asst. cam.** Michel Bernier **stills** Piroshka Mihalka **sd.** Claude Hazanavicius, Michel Guiffan **boom** James L. Thompson, Marc Conil **ed. (mini-series)** Pierre Bernier, Werner Nold **film ed.** Monique Fortier **1st asst. ed.** Suzanne Bouilly **2nd asst. ed.** Anne Whiteside **3rd asst. ed.** Marie Hamelin **art d.** Jocelyn Joly **asst art d.** Raymond Dupuis **art d. coord.** Vicky Frodsham **head props** Ronald Fauteux **off-set props** Jean Labrecque, Josiane Noreau **period vehicles** Jacques Arcoette **set dec.** François Seguin, Jean-Baptiste Tard **on-set props** Patrice Bengle, Ian Lavoie **set painters** Sylvie Lacerte, Claire Alary **set assts.** Jacques Belair, Andre Chamberland, Jean-Maurice Fecteau, Sidney Leger **buyer/constr.** Henry Gagnon **head make-up** Marie-Ange Protat **asst. make-up** Blanche, Pierre Humbert **head hair** Gaetan Noiseux **asst. hair** Christiane Beau **cost. des.** Nicole Pelletier **asst. cost.** Lise Pinet **dresser** Sylvie Rochon **asst. dresser** Sophie Beasse **ward.** Laurie Drew **ward. dressers** Louise Gagne, Mary Jayne Wallace, Claire Garneau, Luc Breton **set dresser** Hazel Côté **asst. set dresser** Robert Houle **gaffer** Don Saari **best boy** Chuck Hughes, John Lewin **key grip** Serge Grenier **grips** Robert Grenier, Gregoire Schmidt **p. assts.** Ken Korral, Michel Côté, Gilles Perrault, Joe Sanchez, Ronald Vachon, Harold Trepanier, Jean Racine, Michel Boyer, Neil Bibby, Jacques Bernier **p.c.** Cine-Plouffe II inc. (514) 284-9354. In co-production with Antenne 2 and Filmax (France) **running time** 107 mins. **l.p.** Gabriel Arcand, Anne Letourneau, Jean Carmet, Veronique Jannot, Juliette Huot, Pierre Curzi, Louise Lapare, Denise Filiatrault, Serge Dupire, Donald Pilon, Roger Lebel, Dominique Michel, Marcel Leboeuf

Jean Beaudin's Mario

Jean Beaudin's (*Cordélia*, *J.A. Martin photographe*) latest work has the ethereal quality of a legend. From the moment its first image bursts onto the screen, you know that, like the evanescent stuff of dreams, what you see will soon quietly disappear in the recesses of your mind, leaving a fleeting, if recurring, impression.

Mario (Xavier Norman Petermann) is a 10-year-old boy who doesn't talk. Whether he is mute or autistic is of little concern. The fact is, Mario does not communicate or feel empathy for anyone except his 18-year-old brother, Simon (Francis Reddy), who populates his dreamworld with visions of past heroes and recreations of the battles they waged. As the film opens, the two boys, after having reversed Louis Riel's defeat and relived the battles of the Aztecs, have turned into Islamic soldiers come to civilize the Gauls.

Mario and his brother live with their parents (Murielle Dutil, Jacques Godin) on the picturesque Île-de-la-Madeleine. It is an isolated existence, and in their isolation the boys have ample time to live out a fantasy existence as rich in their acting out as it is rich – to our eyes – in symbolism.

But with the summer season come tourists, including Hélène, a beautiful young girl who casts Simon under her spell. She draws him into the real world, away from his brother and their dreamworld games. Left alone with only his stuffed coyote for a companion, Mario retreats even further into his imaginary world. Incapable of venting his anguish and frustration, he becomes destructive, using the other children on the island as scapegoats. Although vaguely aware of his brother's despair, Simon refuses to acknowledge it; and as long

as Hélène is there, he has other interests.

With summer's end and the departure of Hélène, however, he turns back to his brother... but it is too late: the games have been destroyed. Realizing the ephemeral quality of their world, the brothers resolutely turn away from it in a final search for the absolute. While the social worker who had caught wind of Mario's plight is on the case, trying to take the boy away, Simon scripts a different farewell scenario.

In the end, it is Mario who guides his brother to what seems to be a familiar spot by the ocean... their final escape. In an ambiguous final scene, an explosion occurs: the boys had always imagined going out with a bang, and this seems to be their destiny.

This sad little tale is beautifully told, with a visual integrity and force reminiscent of the magic realism of Pratt and Colville. The bleak and blunt visuals add an ethereal dimension to what is really a tale of misery unto maudlin excess. The acting throughout ranges from the believable to the superb, with the highest marks going to the parents who manage to bring out all the dignity and the sadness of their minor characters. Unfortunately, Nathalie Chalifour (Hélène) breaks the spell her presence creates on the screen every time she opens her mouth, and one wishes she had been cast in Mario's mute role.

Although Jean Beaudin claims that Mario is not so much a story of people and nature, but rather about children, games and real and imaginary worlds, the characters of this film are essentially born of the landscape around them. Mario in particular is a product of sand, and sea and wind. The brothers' death only returns them to what is theirs.

But once the film has receded in the mind's eye, the way a summer romance fades from the heart, what are we left with? As the beauty of Pierre Mignot's camera work and François Dompière's score dominate the film as much or even more than the poignancy of the boys' plight, one could say this film is little more than another moment in the seemingly unending saga of Quebec

angst-on-film. And indeed one wonders if, in reducing the theme of alienation to its most simple form, Quebec filmmakers are not evading the complexity of a more complex composition.

Josée Miville-Déchêne ●

MARIO d. Jean Beaudin **based on the story** "La Sablière" by Claude Jasmin **sc.** Arlette Dion, Jean Beaudin, Jacques Paris **d.o.p.** Pierre Mignot **mus.** François Dompière **ed.** Werner Nold **art. d.** Denis Boucher **p. man.** Lorraine Richard **assoc. p.** Hélène Verrier, Jean Beaudin **exec. p.** Jacques Bodet **cont.** Monique Champagne **unit man.** Ginette Guillard **loc. man.** Louis-Philippe Rochon **asst. ed.** Nicole Chicoine **1st asst. cam.** Jean Lepine **2nd asst. cam.** Christiane Guernon **sd.** François Laplante **sd. sup.** Bruce Nyznik **sd. ed.** David Evans, Wayne Griffin **1st a.d.** Michel Gauthier **2nd a.d.** Phil Comeau **3rd a.d.** Louise Chantraine **asst. sd.** John Brooke, Susan Lindell **asst. mix.** Adrian Croll **boom** Esther Auger **mixer** Hans Peter Strobl **gaffer** Roger Martin **best boy** Guy Bechard **set dec.** Alain Singher **key grip** Yvon Boudrias **grip** Jean-Pierre Lamarche **gen. op.** Eddy Trempe **make-up & hair** Brigitte McCaughy **cost. des.** François Laplante **coyote cons.** Francine Gagne **cost.** Marianne Carter **cost. trainer** André Henault **stage props.** Charles Bernier **prop. assts.** Mario Lapierre, Dino Bonaio **mus. rec.** Paul Page, Louis Hone **sd. efx.** Andy Malcolm, Peter McBurnie **sd. trans.** Gordon Thompson **post-p.** Soundscore Lee, Toronto, Canada **stills** Attila Dory **sp. efx.** Gregg Curtis, Jacques Godbout, Gary Zeller **set const.** Leo Marchand, Eugene Monette **2nd unit cam.** Thomas Vamos **cam. asst.** Francine Tougas **elect.** Daniel Chretien, Claude Fortier, Gilles Fortier, Normand Viau, Michel Periard **make-up** Mikie Hamilton **p. assts.** Alain Belhumeur, Jacques Forget, Pierre Guillard, Richard Karol, Louise Richard, Gaston Solomon **p. coord.** Nicole Hilareguy **post. p.** Edouard Davidovici **admin.** Huguette Bergeron **titles** Louise Overy **clerks** Micheline Sauve-Bernier, Berthe Constantineau, Louise Cousineau **post. synch.** Sonolab Ltee, Montreal, Canada **stunt coord.** Andre Beckrich **stunts (horses)** Graham Caseley, Justin McFadden **stunts (drowning)** Denis Cayouette, Eric Cayouette **l.p.** Xavier Norman Petermann, Francis Reddy, Nathalie Chalifour, Jacques Godin, Murielle Dutil, Claire Pimpère, Christiane Breton, Marcel Sabourin, Jonathan Painchaud, Sylvain Cormier, Marc-Andre Vigneau, Michel Gauthier, Genevieve Gauthier, Michele Lapierre, Alcide Painchaud, Yvon Boudrias, Monique Champagne, Esther Auger, Marie Christine Perrault, Christine Landry. **colour.** 35mm, **running time:** 99 mins. **p.c.** National Film Board of Canada.

Stephanie McLuhan's Marshall McLuhan The Man And His Message

There have been several previous screen productions concerned with Marshall McLuhan and his ideas, but it is fitting, four years after his death and in the resonant year of 1984, to have yet another look at the man who devoted his life to understanding media. This particular program – telecast by CBC on Oct. 18 – takes us a step closer to demystifying the man, and to a certain extent McLuhanism, mainly because it is produced and directed by his daughter: Stephanie McLuhan. She has wisely used, rather than masked, the intimacy of her knowledge to inform this production.

The structure of the program is a fascinating interweaving of the public and private sides of McLuhan. The former is conveyed through a remarkable selection of televised appearances by McLuhan on various talk-shows – Stephanie McLuhan says she culled 118 hours of archival tapes to make her selection – in which his aphorisms on media pile up in layers. For viewers new to McLuhan's thinking, these sequences may spark curiosity and intrigue, sending



● Sad little tale of sand, sea and wind: Francis Reddy and Xavier Norman Petermann in *Mario*