

## Iolande Cadrin-Rossignol's **Rencontre avec une femme remarquable : Laure Gaudreault**

The story of Laure Gaudreault is probably not familiar to most Québécois, although she stands out as a truly remarkable character and educator. This film, which portrays the central years of her career, illuminates a woman of determination and intelligence. It is a captivating film for many reasons. *Rencontre* not only provides information but also, by bringing the information to a personal level, involves the viewer in a story that more closely communicates Gaudreault's struggle.

Laure Gaudreault, a teacher and later a newspaper journalist in the Malbaie/Chicoutimi region of Quebec, was the driving force behind the unionization of the province's rural teachers in the 1930's. Appalled at the conditions they worked under, she stepped in and formed a committee whose purpose it was to contact and organize teachers in other rural, even more isolated, regions of the province. Its intent was to unite rural educators to demand increased pay and better working conditions. At the outset many teachers did not wish to associate with a "union" and the Quebec ministry of education openly refused to acknowledge the teacher's problems, at one point even cutting already sub-survival wages. But, against much opposition from within as well as without, Gaudreault persevered. Her career spanned over forty pivotal years until her death at 86.

The film uses many of the techniques available to the documentary, interspersing them to create a comfortable rhythm between segments. One of the elements is dramatization. The film brings alive scenes of the 1920's, with the young Gaudreault visiting the one-room schoolhouses of the Malbaie region. This was the beginning of her involvement with the hardships of young women (she being one) who had left their homes and families to teach. In other dramatic scenes, a slightly older Gaudreault reminisces about the past. These scenes are situated in her office, which is filled with photos and memorabilia, with Gaudreault (Louissette Dussault) facing the camera and speaking directly to it, and to us. The space is small; the lighting muted; all techniques which draw us into her world and life. The third segment consists of interviews with men and women who knew Gaudreault personally, or worked with her throughout her fight for the rights of the rural teacher. The interviews serve to round out her character, the people proving to be amazingly candid, sometimes even amusing.

A female narrator in voice-over opens the film, briefly describing the development of the educational system up to the early years of Gaudreault's career. Visually, this is juxtaposed with children walking through snowy woods to a one-



● Gaudreault's lead article in the 1937 rural schoolteachers' bulletin

roomed school-house. The narrator tells of the many changes in ideals and life styles since the beginning of the century; how a profession that had throughout history been restricted to men, quickly changed after the First World War when women became predominant as schoolteachers. Most of these teachers were very young and freshly out of school. The social and economic climate of the time made them prime targets for exploitation and these young women worked in conditions that the men in the profession most likely never had to confront.

The dramatizations are well done and, therefore, one of the strongest points of the film. Scripting, characterizations, settings, costumes – all of the elements necessary to recreate a specific period are there and function in unity. Subdued lighting gives a sombre but appealing sense to these visually artistic scenes that balance the documentary element, making the information that the viewer retrieves from them understandable and memorable.

One of the most significant scenes of the film for me was that in which Gaudreault, accompanied by her sister, the bishop and several of the other teachers on her council for unionization, make a trip to Quebec City to see the minister of education. All are excited and agitated, but Gaudreault carries them through, confronting the minister and his disdain for her cause without for a moment letting his icy haughtiness daunt her. This scene, in which a few nervous and terrified women present their cause to government, is devastatingly contrasted by historical news-footage near the end of the film. It is from the '60s when thousands upon thousands of teachers took to the streets, demanding that the government and the population of Quebec take notice and acknowledge their requests. The contrast between the two situations underscores the changes that

had occurred in the world of education and in society. This footage effectively wraps-up the docu-drama.

*Rencontre avec une femme remarquable* is a special kind of film in two ways: for the story it tells and for the way it tells that story. The story is of a unique person, Laure Gaudreault, whose life and work would not necessarily be of particular interest to many, but is told in such an interesting and beautiful manner that its appeal becomes more general. An important accomplishment for a documentary.

Jan Teag ●

## RENCONTRE AVEC UNE FEMME REMARQUABLE: LAURE GAUDREULT

d. Iolande Cadrin-Rossignol **cam.** Jean-Charles Tremblay **asst. cam.** Pierre Duceppe **elect.** Daniel Chretien **grip** Robert Lapierre jr. **sd.** Yves St-Jean **asst. sd.** Jean-Guy Bergeron **mus.** Pierre Polvin **re-rec.** Studio Polyson **mixer** Michel Descombes **art d.** Paul Bussièrès **asst. art. d.** Carole Pare **make-up** Brigitte McCaughy **asst. make-up** Diane Gauthier **cost.** Denis Denoncourt **dresser** Pauline Fortin **props** Louis Canac-Marquis **ed.** Jose Heppell **asst. a.d.** Nicole Giguère **a.d.** Louis Richard **trainee** Marjolaine Page **cont.** Nicole Pomerleau **loc. man.** Eloi Deraspe **stills** Louise Bilodeau **p. assts.** Louis Archer, Renee Côté **p. man.** Pauline Geoffroy **add. photog.** Louis De Ernst **asst. cam.** Sylvain Brault **p. man.** Doris Girard **asst. p. man.** Bernard Dansereau **lab.** Sonolab inc. **opticals** Film doctor **titles** Graffart **post-synch.** Interloc **p.c.** Les Films Cenatos with the assistance of l'Institut québécois du cinéma, Radio-Québec, region de Québec-SRTQ, and La Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec. **Col.** 16mm **running time:** 89 min. **dist.** Video-femmes, 10 Mc Mahon, Québec QC G1R 3S1, (418) 692-3090. **lp.** Louissette Dussault, Nicolas Marier, Marie Michaud, Les enfants de l'école Frédéric Tetreault (Drummondville), Lise Castonguay, Marie-France Desrochers, Joanne Emond, Frank Fontaine, Marie-Thérèse Fortin, Estelle Dutil, Denis Bernard, René Massicotte, Jacques-Henri Gagnon, Richard Frechette, Louis-Georges Guard, Sylvie Auger, Andrée Samson, Danielle Mercure, Sylvie Lemoyne, Colette Therrien, Suzanne Parent, René Bourassa, Céline Côté, Dominique, and the members of the SPQM. **Interviews with:** Julienne Rochette, Thérèse Bousset-Frechette, Evlyne Fournier-Labbe, Laval Grondines, Germaine Camden, Imida Simard, Robert Tremblay.

## Bachar Chbib's **Memoirs**

Maybe I'm getting old, but most anti-content, new wave, punk-type movies just don't turn me on. And that includes Bachar Chbib's first feature, *Memoirs*.

But if you're in a pre-adolescent frame of mind, or if you're still a teeny-bopper between the ages of 13 and 25, you'll probably love it. If you've grown up a bit and want a solid, exciting plot-line or a really experimental frenzy with convincing performances, forget it; this film's not for you.

*Memoirs* consists of very non-professional acting, throw-away lines and little action. The only tension in the film occurs when a female performer ablates her left breast, which, when cut up, looks something like an old, brown sponge from an ancient Sears Roebuck catalogue. These days gore is definitely "in" – for gore's sake. Shock value is also a plus, but one wants more than a film that uses shock as a fringe benefit.

Though the film isn't that far away from the mood established in Vladislav Tsukerman's *Liquid Sky* or Amos Poe's *Subway Riders*, a film needs more than mood.

The photography by Christian Duquay and Bill Kerrigan is outstanding: it simmers and glows and does everything artistic that photography should do. Unfortunately, good photography doesn't make a good film, and good photography juxtaposed with poor subject matter makes the content of the film seem even weaker.

*Memoirs* is more a theatrical play than a film. The actors resemble robots, slowly moving from one stagnant line to another. The main characters include Johnny Daze, played by Philip Baylaucq, who represents more a facade than a personable character: he looks lovelorn and vapid for most of his 90 minutes on screen.

He arrives on a bus and has a rather boring soap-opera affair with Ida Rage, collector of art objects. Ida, played by Norma Jean Sanders, soon decides to collect bigger and better things, like people. She collects night-club singer Lotta Lov to create a facile "ménage à trois." Jealous, Johnny leaves, still in a meaningless daze. The film indicates that he will move on, hopefully, to new, more exciting, non-adventures. We develop no love for, or rapport with, the characters in the film because none of them ask us to become involved with their vacuous lives. Their monotone lines are spoken as if everyone were reading the script for the first time. And the words offer no sense of comic relief as does Alan Rudolph's *Choose Me*, also a stylized film, but one which effer-vesces with subtle humor.

If *Memoirs* is supposed to be a humorous soap-opera spoof, it completely loses me. The problem seems to be that *Memoirs* has no relation to people – unless you're a new wave punk and like looking into empty eyes for an hour-and-a-half.

One redeeming aspect of the film is its music performed by the group Condition and its performance art by Lotta

Lov, played by Julia Gilmore. This spoken-art-song does create a mood and lifts the film off onto another level. Also, Rotwang, who plays himself as a club-owner, is very funny and refreshing with his little diatribes, but he appears only for a few fleeting moments in the film.

Chbib's earlier work indicated much promise. *Or D'ur* was a convincing pseudo-documentary about male prostitutes which showed a unique sense of humor and freshness, and it teased the audience with wonderful characters. *Bread*, a film produced by Chbib, was a delicious documentary directed by Albert Kish.

Perhaps Chbib just needs time to develop his sense of making a longer film. Feature films are peculiar animals, and one doesn't hold an audience's attention for 90 minutes easily.

Chbib brags that *Memoirs* was written in two weeks, pre-produced the next week, and shot the following four weeks. It looks it. He should have spent more time thinking about the content of his film. For some reason young filmmakers today think that speed means quality or indicates something wonderful. They should learn from Flaubert who worked on *Madame Bovary* for five years, often only completing a page a week, re-writing sentence after sentence.



● Human art objects: Julia Gilmore and Norma Jean Sanders in *Memoirs*

Yet the notion of collecting art objects and then going further to collect people is a very good idea. *Memoirs* would have been better if this idea had been taken one step further, perhaps if it had been turned into a collection of many

different people, rather than just one. The variety would have been stimulating.

Personally, if I'm going to watch social satire, I'd prefer John Water's *Polyester* or *Pink Flamingoes*. I like humor that comes right out and bites me. Humor that hides in corners, pretending to be something other than what it is, just doesn't turn me on.

And I want some charm, like Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger Than Paradise*. But I'm sure *Memoirs* would do well at festivals – it is definitely different and has already played in New York at The Bleeker Street Theatre, where it has become a mini-cult film for midnight viewers.

Perhaps I've just seen too many He, She, It movies, and I'm ready to have, as Rotwang says in *Memoirs*, "Two toast, one jam, and move on."

Lois Siegel ●

**MEMOIRS** d./p. Bachar Chbib sc. John Beckett Wimbs. Bachar Chbib, based on the original play "Memoirs of Johnny Daze" by John Beckett Wimbs cam. Christian Duguay, Bill Kerrigan mus. Julia Gilmore, Edward Straviak, Philip Vezina ed. Bachar Chbib, Amy Webb sd. Gabor Vadney p.c. Cdn. dist., foreign sales: Les Productions Chbib Inc. (514) 397-1402 Produced with technical assistance from the National Film Board of Canada. Colour, 16mm running time: 91 mins. Lp. Philip Baylaucq, Norma Jean Sanders, Julia Gilmore, Rotwang.

One cannot have examined the decisions made by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) over the past 20 years without coming to the conclusion that, in this country, the solution to any broadcasting problem is inevitably to throw hardware at it. Software – the actual programming to be carried by that hardware – is far down the list of priorities. It is as though the regulators simply took McLuhan's dictum – "the medium is the message" – quite literally and never looked back. They have been expanding the medium at the expense of the message ever since.

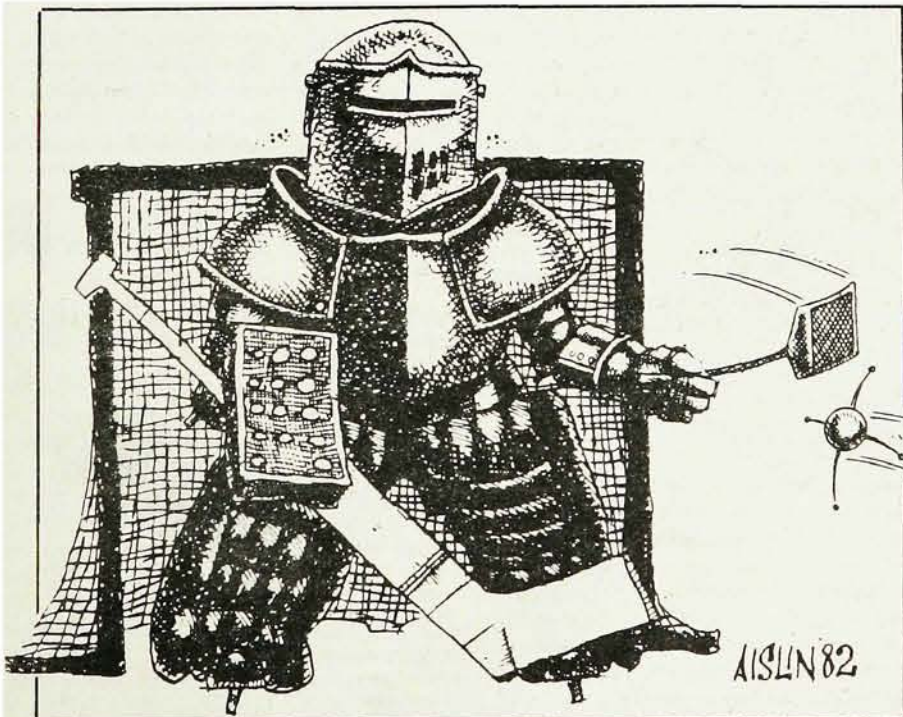
This mind-set is revealed once again in the recent CRTC decision, referred to as "distant signals", to create Canadian superstations – regular stations delivered nationally by satellite to communities now served by a maximum of two TV signals, or where cable companies have fewer than 3,000 subscribers and offer fewer than 12 channels. The stations which have in principle been given the go-ahead to become superstations are Hamilton's CHCH, Edmonton's CITV, Vancouver's CTV affiliate CHAN, and Montreal's private French network affiliate TCTV.

CRTC chairman André Bureau told the *Toronto Star* (Mar. 23) that the superstations were being created chiefly "to give markets a third TV (Canadian) service and to help prevent Canadians from bypassing the Canadian broadcasting system by buying satellite dishes." *The Globe & Mail* (Mar. 23) quotes Bureau as explaining that "the kind of balance (between Canadian and foreign stations) we used to have in our system is eroding" and so the CRTC will authorize as many new Canadian services as it can "before it is too late." In its decision, the CRTC says that superstations "will improve the choice offered to Canadian viewers" and thereby contribute of "the critical struggle for a distinctive and strong Canadian broadcasting system." *Globe & Mail* reporter Dan Westell

## SCAN LINES

by Joyce Nelson

### Very distant signals: Canadian content minimalism



notes that at the same time, the CRTC "approved a task force report that recommends allowing the same communities to have access to up to three U.S. stations for every Canadian one."

To consider the extent to which soon-to-be superstation CHCH Hamilton (channel 11 in my area) contributes to the "critical struggle for a distinctive and strong Canadian broadcasting system", I examined its prime-time programming for the weeks of Mar. 2-8, Mar. 9-15, and Mar. 23-29. During the hours of 7-11 p.m., the 7:30-8:00 time slot appears to be Canadian Content Time. On Monday

it's filled by *The Pierre Berton Show Revisited*. On Tuesday, by an in-house production called *Smith & Smith*. On Wednesday, it's *Don Cherry's Grapevine* – a sports celebrity show. On Thursday, something called *Backstage* – a talk-show about theatre. That same evening, the station boldly creeps into peak viewing hours (8-11 p.m.) with a regular offering called *Niagara Repertory Company*. This venture into an 8:00 p.m. time-slot for Canadian Content would seem to make up for the fact that Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights are traditionally free

of Canadian programming on CHCH, though the weeks under study here, there was a Sunday prime-time NHL Hockey broadcast on Mar. 24.

Indeed, were it not for CHCH coverage of NHL hockey on Wednesday nights, the station would boast a grand total of 2 1/2 hours of Canadian programming per prime-time week, out of a possible 28 hours. Otherwise, its schedule is filled with American network offerings, making it a "Canadian" superstation in the most minimal sense of that adjective.

Considering that CHCH, as a highly profitable independent station, has had at least a decade in which to build up its contribution to Canadian broadcasting through re-investing in in-house productions and purchase of independent Canadian programs for prime-time, it has actually done little but help drive up the bidding on American shows. For this, it is being rewarded with superstation status – an irony not lost on the Canadian networks (CBC, CTV, Global) which opposed the CRTC decision. As reported by the *Toronto Star's* Sid Adilman, "the networks argued that letting these stations spread nationally would create bidding wars for U.S. programs they now buy exclusively and would cut into their revenues, in part, now used to produce Canadian programs."

Nevertheless, the decision is clearly in keeping with Canadian broadcasting regulatory tradition. Yet another stage in the hardware delivery-system is achieved, extending again the reach of American programs. The U.S. pay-TV companies plan to scramble their signals by the end of this year, so Canadian satellite dishes are not necessarily the threat perceived by the CRTC. The real beneficiary would seem to be financially troubled Canadian Satellite Communications Inc. (CANCOM), formerly headed by Bureau himself. As usual, another hardware solution further complicates this country's broadcasting morass.