

Nardo Castillo's

Claire cette nuit et demain

Claire cette nuit et demain is quite simply the most beautiful (and so the most perfected) feature film ever made in Canada, this is both an occasion for wonderment and perplexity. In a simpler time, the astonishment produced by aesthetic effects working entirely on their own terms was known as the Beautiful. In our more problematic world, this view has been renamed *kitsch* or, in Milan Kundera's words quoted in the film, "the aesthetic attitude that negates shit." In this sense, *Claire cette nuit et demain* is a triumph of *kitsch* by its radical negation of shit.

However, as an aesthetic concept, 'shit' has a wide variety of meanings, suggestive of flaws, inadequacies, and failure. In its most serious sense, shit is a derogation of the natural, and so stylistically its negation is a profound denial of the natural and the aesthetic that could be termed 'naturalistic' that has had such a deeply formative hold on Canadian cinema.

The drastic denial of the natural, upon which *Claire cette nuit et demain* so brilliantly constructs its aesthetic, is the technological invasion of the biological that informs the film, beginning with its opening and only sex scene: video images of magnified sperm. For *Claire*'s is the fully modern world of the educated eyeball, at one end, the voyeurism of the scientific eye's penetration of the organs of human sexuality, and at the other the spectacle of the image consumer's comfortably narcissistic interface with the surfaces of appearance. It is the tension between these two extremes (total exposure and total reflection) that *Claire cette nuit et demain* occupies, and pivots upon, in a commanding display of post-modernist illusionism that not only deconstructs the film itself and the viewer, but in the process shakes Canadian cinema to its foundations.

With *Claire cette nuit et demain*, Canadian cinema is finally liberated as an (independent) aesthetic, free to indulge, and be indulged in, on its own terms.

Claire (Liliane Clune) is, in the words of a currently running TV commercial for sanitary tampons, a "thoroughly modern" woman. In her late '20s, she is successfully running her own business, a publishing house. She exists - at work, at home, in the city - in a completely renovated environment: tasteful, artistic, stylized. At the office, she is working through a manuscript appropriately entitled "Immoderainties"; at home she is reading Kundera's *Insupportable Lightness of Being*. Her life is in control; no messy relationships; she is free.

But dissatisfied. Biological yearnings and her last relationship, now over, with a theatre director, have brought to the fore the issue of pregnancy (as she puts it, "the problem of maternity versus liberty") and, as the film begins with

her visit to the input clinic, has tentatively decided to be artificially inseminated. In making such a rational decision, she has to, however, select somebody's sperm with which to be impregnated and this selection brings into question her system of values: because she has to choose, not between people, but between *genera*. And as she is at the peak of her fertility cycle, she must choose now, that day. She opts for the sperm of an artistic type, (but not too young because that would indicate he's not yet a well-known painter).

Her choice settled, Claire has to return that evening for the operation. Back at the office, she can't work. She goes to visit a client, a distributor, whose advances she rebuffs with the dire warning that he could come out of this a father. She wanders through Old Montreal. She buys a blouse and ends up at the studio of the painter Julien - who's not only an artistic type, but used to be her lover.

Julien (Luc Matte) is doing well; a Senator is interested in his painting, though these signs of success also leave him dissatisfied. Julien plays life as it lays - "I let life come to me, I don't provoke it." In his painting-filled studio, there's a written quote, tacked to a wall, from Chamfort's maxims, that, in this society, sex "is the contact of two epidermises." Neither Claire nor Julien have seen each other for a year; a cautious flirtation develops. But just as Claire is (perhaps) about to come to the point, one of Julien's girl-friends drops in.

Claire returns to the office. Soon Julien appears with flowers - or rather it's Julien saying he's the double of the real Julien who's waiting downstairs. He takes her off to see a Russian countess who, among other things, was Mayakovsky's lover. Now in her '70s, she reveals that, of all human desires, sex is the last to go. And, as if to prove her point, the visit is interrupted by the arrival of a man. As she shows Claire and Julien out, the countess delivers the credo she inherited from her late father: "If you look life in the face, you won't see death coming."

Claire and Julien meander through Old Montreal's reflections and refractions. Too late Claire remembers her appointment at the clinic; she calls from a booth. The doctor, her white coat undone, tells her it can wait for another time, then returns to amorous gropings with another white-coat that Claire's phonecall interrupted.

Claire and Julien decide to have supper together; as she returns from buying the food, he's kissing a woman who slips away when Claire appears. They begin walking to her house but jump into a taxi when Claire is overcome by the urge to pee.

At Claire's house, the flirtation continues through the making and eating of supper. It's in this context that Julien reads the epigraph about *kitsch* from Kundera's novel, and Claire prophesies that "One day everything will be *kitsch*."

Predictably, they end up in the bedroom. The phone rings. Wrong number. They try again, but at that point Claire tells Julien that she wants to get pregnant. Julien rapidly loses his ardour.

The bedroom again. Claire and Julien are under the sheets; she's on her side staring ahead. He asks her if she's sad; she replies no, that sometimes in life, everything can seem fine and yet be sad. Is it afterwards or another time, either in the past or in the future? *Did* anything, in fact, happen?

The film now cuts to Claire earlier that day walking past the boutique where she had bought the blouse. But she does not go in. She arrives at Julien's studio; however, it's arranged differently.

He's ecstatic; he's off to New York where he's gotten a show. He's in a great hurry; what did she want? There's no answer but the end-credits.

A re-telling of the narrative line of a film is always inadequate, and perhaps even more so with this film, whose plot is not only uneventful, but is so intricately a function of all the other elements that come together to give *Claire cette nuit et demain* its perfect wholeness that, like the Cheshire cat's smile,

dissolves itself by the film's end. These elements include Allen Smith's stunning photography; Anne Pritchard, Jean-Baptiste Tard's and Michèle Forest's splendid set design; the mastery of the lighting; the richness of the sound-editing; all these visual and aural elements coordinated with consummate self-confidence by director Nardo Castillo who, with co-producer Arnie Gelbart, co-authored a superb script among whose many quotable lines I can't resist reproducing this one: "He's says he's got many things to tell but nothing to say."

If the acting is uniformly on its marks throughout, surely some special applause must be given to Liliane Clune who carries much of the weight of this film by her remarkable ability to convey the insupportable lightness of contemporary being. And the Montreal that shimmers through the film - caught in the voices' slightly pretentious, almost Castilian, nasality of current Montrealese; its baroque architecture - there's a high-angle shot taken near the Hôtel de Ville whose lighting makes the surroundings into a tiny Versailles; its stylized *pastiche* of the Old and New Worlds - is a city irradiated with a cinematic uniqueness that no other film made here has ever yet gotten to such a degree.

For there are no exteriors in *Claire* outside the contexts of urban culture; every glimpse the film takes outside the immediate 'reality' of its story only serves to throw back the self-reflections of the characters themselves as physical surfaces of appearance. Like Claire's own 'life,' the film works because of its complete self-control, or negation of exactly what's 'shitty' in Canadian cinema: namely, its dependence upon a referential reality greater than film-reality.

By this achievement, *Claire cette nuit et demain* catapults itself outside of the referential universe of strictly Canadian cinema into that larger universe of the more purely filmic. In such terms (and for what they're worth) *Claire cette nuit et demain* commandingly holds its own with mini-classics like Rohmer's

● Perfectly postmodern: *Claire cette nuit et demain* leads Luc Matte and Liliane Clune



Ma nuit chez Maude (minus the theology), Woody Allen's *Interiors* (minus the hysteria), or Tanner's *Le milieu du monde* (minus the passion); that is, at ease among the other personal universes of contemporary aurorial cinema.

Secondly, in so effortlessly soaring to this standard, *Claire cette nuit et demain* ironically ups the ante for the Canadian feature in general, and strongly becomes yet another indicator of the possibility of a real creative boom in the not-too distant future (some elements of which are already visible here and there). It is worth pointing out that *Claire* was done in an unhurried 20 days on a \$600,000 budget by a carefully chosen and very professional team, an approach to filmmaking that visibly commends itself.

The irony, of course, is that the 'secret' of *Claire's* success rests upon the powerful infusion into the film of the aesthetic of the TV commercial, that medium's most successful form which has re-energized such staples as the cop show (most notably, *Miami Vice* and for a Canadian equivalent, if to a lesser extent, *Night Heat*).

Yet if *Claire cette nuit et demain* most beautifully balances its constitutive tensions, as *Claire*, the character, says of her success, as she muses on the freedom that she controls but cannot live, "It's all very nice, but it's an identity card for whom?" Beyond the dazzling display of resplendant surfaces, there's a profound (and growing) existential anxiety that the film simply points to; for, like *Claire*, it does not know either what to do when the polymorphous perversity of existence itself becomes merely generic, but, like *Claire*, it can, for a while at least, seek comfort and refuge in the aestheticization of life.

For the *kitsch* universe - that is, one from which shit has been negated - comes with a price. Eventually, massive aesthetic constipation results.

But why anticipate problems? For now, it should really be quite enough to savour the fact that *Claire cette nuit et demain* is that astounding, rare thing in cinema: a masterpiece.

Michael Dorland •

CLAIRE CETTE NUIT ET DEMAIN d. Nardo Castillo p. Arnie Gelbart, Charles Ohayon sc. Castillo, Gelbart from an idea by Victor Désy 1st a. d. Mireille Goulet cont. Brigitte Germain d. o. p. Allen Smith asst. cam. Robert Guertin trainee Borek Sodivsek stills Attila Dory art. dec. Anne Pritchard set des. Jean-Baptiste Tard des. Michèle Forest asst. des. Nathalie Noël props. Daniel Huysmans montage/dec. Paul Vanzadloff p. sup. Lorraine DuHamel admin. J. Serge Alary acct. Chantal Groleau p. sec. Johanne Messier loc. scout Pierre Laberge p. assts. Norbert Dufour, Frédéric Lefebvre ed. François Gill asst. ed. Christine Denault sd. Patrick Rousseau boom Véronique Gabillaud make-up Diane Simard ward. John Stowe, Huguette Gagné dresser Francine Blais gaffer Jacques Fortier elect. Claude Fortier, Gilles Fortier key grip François Dupéré grip Sylvain Labrecque urit. pub. Monique Gignac, Brigitte Germain l.p. Liliane Clune, Luc Matte, Nicole Leblanc, Maryse Pelletier, Margarita Stocker, François Cartier, Gisèle Rousseau, Michel Laperrière, Johanne Messier, Francisco, Francine Alepin, Denise Boulanger, Jacques Leblanc, Roger Léger, France Laverdière, Louis-M. Morin, Pascale Navarro, Véronique Pinette, Max St-Amour, François Sylvestre, Michel Provost, and the voices of Victor Désy and Jean Lafontaine. p.c. Cléo 24 Inc., (514) 842-8336, with financial participation of Telefilm, SGC, and SRC. dist. Vivafilm Running time: 145 mins.

John Paizs'

Crime Wave

C *Crime Wave*, the first feature film by Winnipeg's thoroughly postmodern John Paizs, displays all the healthy shortcomings of an early work by a potential mindblower of a director: too crammed with ideas and greedy for gags to heed the statutes of coherent plot development, *Crime Wave* unfortunately suggests that the hoary old critical cliché about parts amounting to more than wholes can't be retired yet.

But those parts, in this case, are both abundant and remarkable. Moreover, they can be discovered not only in up-front bits of inspired silliness (like the character who arrives at a suburban costume party - and who can't understand why conversation crumbles in his presence - dressed as the psycho who threatened to blow himself up in the neighbourhood Mac's Milk), but on such less immediately gutbusting levels as editing, soundtrack and (honest) colour-processing. Thematically, the film is no shirker, either: while remaining principally and effectively a comedy, *Crime Wave* ponders such pertinent but unlikely laugh-fodder as the relationship between culture and social behaviour; Canadian cultural Ameriphilia and its schizoid effects: creative stagnation, and the perpetually self-replenishing nature of popular culture. To complain of the movie's lacking in overall consistency is, in fact, to ignore the wealth of those ideas and elements that keep popping up in the middle of the road and throwing *Crime Wave* off course - Paizs may not take us where he tells us he

will (or where we think he should), but he sure does take us on one wily and wacky ride.

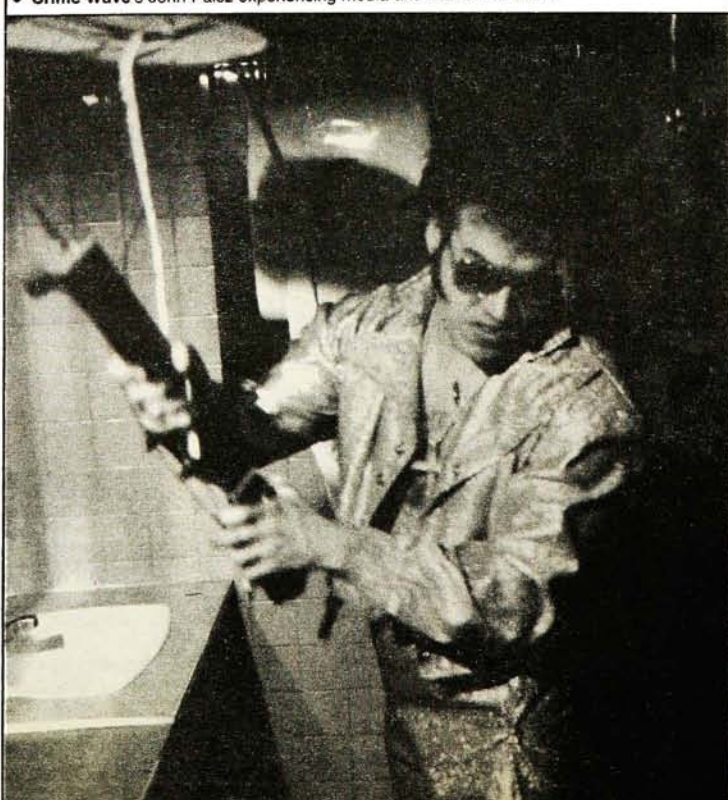
With his first four (significantly sit-com-length) short films (available, like *Crime Wave*, from the Winnipeg Film Group), Paizs established a mode of filmmaking that simultaneously reproduced, defamiliarized and criticized the American pop culture dreck that, like it or not, comprised the most sensational and penetrating visceral experience for most middle-class suburban Canadian kids growing up in the post-television age (kids for whom Don Messer was no substitute for other Dons like Adams, Knotts or Corleone). What distinguishes Paizs' practice from those myriad forms he so uncannily, and with deadpan directness, emulates, is a surrealist sensibility that exposes the structures and assumptions behind these media-systems by simply scrambling them. Thus, in *The International Style* (1983), Paizs' most purely surreal film, B-Western cowboys invade a James Bondish dinner soirée and, like splatter-movie zombies, threaten to cannibalize the participants. What makes the short films so effective, both as entertainment and polemic, is the uncovering of the fundamentally systemic nature of pop culture forms they so gleefully vandalize; in other words, a blasphemous magnification of the basic principle of internal logic upon which most pop culture narratives depend on to maintain their credibility and transparency. Paizs' films challenge the hegemony of these structures, not by blowing them apart with ridicule but by conflating a number of them together *without* disrupting the narrative flow. The revelation lies in the realization that, while characters, costumes and conventions may change, the basic story remains the same - to be played out eternally - and with an absurd subconscious, dreamlike shuffling of elements, forever deep in our TV-perforated sensibilities.

Crime Wave takes this practice of deconstructive, ironic mimicry and pushes it a step further: it's a meta-meta-movie-movie. The frame of the film, set in an impossibly sunshiny, picture-perfect suburban neighbourhood (replete with perennial bird-chirps on the soundtrack) is pure '50s family sitcom - when Eva (Eva Kovacs), the 12-year-old narrator of the film, makes her daily morning skip to the mailbox, you could swear you see Wally and Beaver pass by.

The sitcom context, which introduces us to the cipher-like, would-be "colour crime movie" writer Steven Penny (John Paizs), through the Terence Malick-like device of a young girl's narration, also establishes *Crime Wave's* principal strategy of smudging characteristic distinctions between style and content, fantasy and reality, imagined and experienced, medium and mediated. While the story, which revolves around Steven's comically-lachrymose attempts to surmount the somewhat selective strain of writer's block he suffers from (he's great with beginnings and endings, but stymied by middles), functions at the outset as the point of access into a number of increasingly surreal "imaginary" sequences - Steven's story fragments visualized, his nightmares and hallucinations - the point of *Crime Wave* is not the distinction between actual and idealized experience, but the absolute interdependence of both. This is evident, if not yet obvious, from the opening, which introduces Steven's situation in stylistic terms that are every bit as codified in generic terms as his subsequent stories and hallucinations - if Steven's *life* is rendered as a kind of Kafkaesque Bob Cummings Show, can we really trust the *imaginary* nature of his mondo-bizarro dreams and stories? That *Crime Wave's* world is one where the media, its consumers and its effects are indistinguishable is made obvious during the sequence in Steven's tiny, garage-attic apartment (lit only by the appropriately cathode-like blue of an electric streetlamp outside the window), when a roomful of characters from Steven's middleless colour crime movies materialize and commence to party, flirt and eventually brawl with one another. In *Crime Wave's* micro-waved world of media and mental meltdown, Jung's collective unconscious runs smack into Larry Curly and Moc.

Playing on a neat reversal of *The Wizard of Oz* (itself a mythic pop text of not inconsiderable influence) the final part of *Crime Wave* depicts the odyssey of innocent abroad Steven (a kind of catatonic Canadian Dorothy Gale) to Kansas, of course, where he has been summoned by bogus script-doctor C. Jolly (a lizard-lipped milquetoast with a ten-gallon stetson and a parallel capacity for homicidal perversion). While this passage in *Crime Wave* was extensively criticised following its Toronto Festival of Festivals première because its sombre surrealism subverted the gag-ridden satire of the film's first 45 minutes*, Steven's eerie trip to the post-apocalyptic, chemically-poisoned night-world of *Crime Wave's* Kansas is a logical and profoundly resonant extension of the hitherto purely comic descent into the media melting-pot. The trip to America is, for Steven and the

• *Crime Wave's* John Paizs experiencing media and mental meltdown



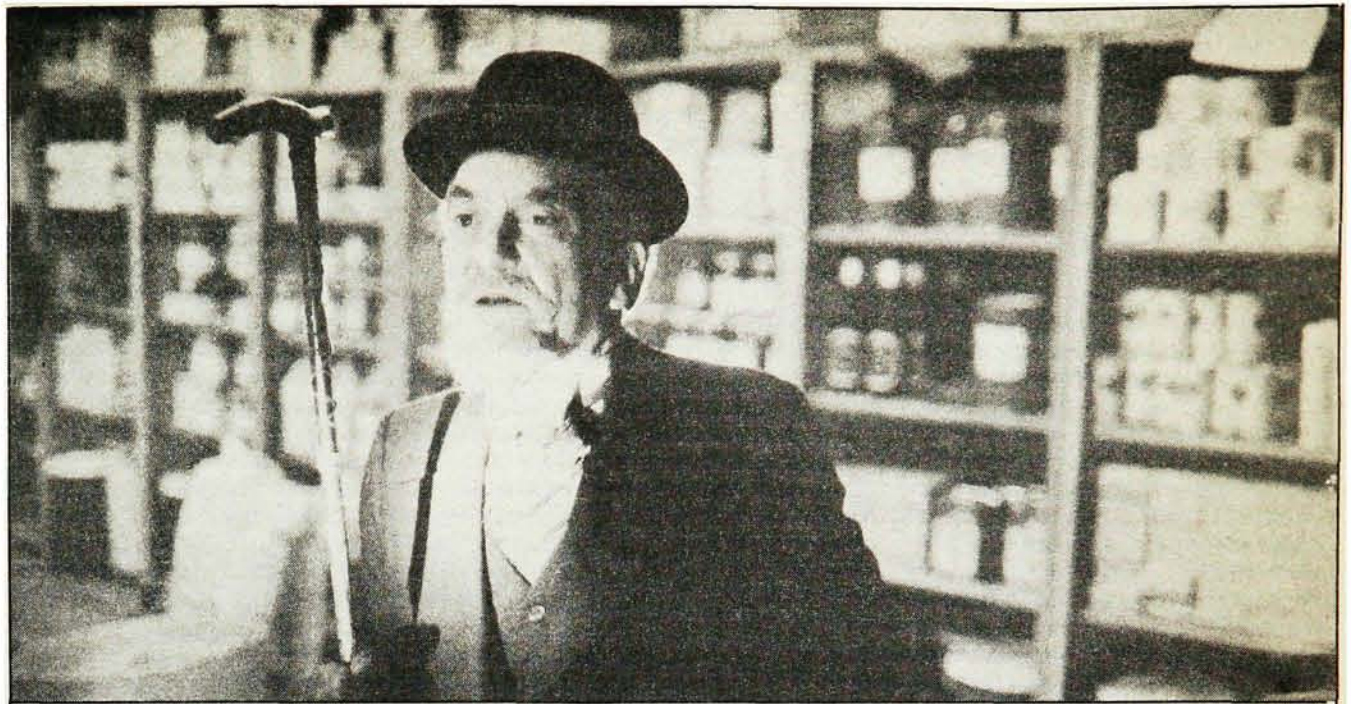
countless couch-potato Canadians he represents, a kind of journey to a sub-conscious homeland, which, like Oz's Emerald City, represents something as mysterious and alien as it is magical and magnetic. Simultaneously Steven is confronted both with his desire for and his difference from the media-created world of America he's so desperately wanted to be part of (a condition of cultural schizophrenia as characteristically Canadian as any other factor of our much-stalked identity). On the one hand, his reverential awe leaves him vulnerable to exploitation and a likely ravaging at the hands of the perverse Dr. Jolly (who exploits the Canadian's reverence for Yankee knowhow with no less cunning and ruthlessness than Donald Brittain's Hal C. Banks did), on the other, Steven finds a family in Kansas – albeit a crippled one, consisting of an invalid hillbilly woman and her oafish son – a family that was conspicuously absent from the otherwise TV-idyllic suburban environs of the first half of the film. And it is the strength provided by this image of American familial solidarity – retarded as it is – that fortifies Steven sufficiently to return to Winnipeg and crank out some middles.

Crime Wave may be the first Canadian movie that addresses the perennial issue and phenomenon of American media saturation in Canada that does not take absolute sides (it's neither nostalgic nor wistful, like *My American Cousin*, nor is it angry and cynical, like *Canada's Sweetheart: The Saga Of Hal C. Banks*), but instead acknowledges the actual complexity of the Canadian obsession (an obsession characterized by both attraction and revulsion) with our big brother's ceaseless northwards populace onslaught. If only for that, *Crime Wave* is a singular, and singularly Canadian (for what it's worth) achievement. That it has so much more to offer, including the promise of a future for Canadian cinema that develops out of, instead of withdrawing from or surrendering to, the inescapable fact of American cultural occupation of our Sonys and our subconscious, makes it something of a revelation to boot.

Geoff Pevere •

**At the time of writing, Paizs was hard at work shooting an alternate ending to Crime Wave, following the director's dissatisfied reaction with the split Toronto Festival reception. Paizs' concerns are commercial and thoroughly justified, as the journey-to-Kansas section of the movie is too dark and tonally at odds with the first part to make the movie a likely hit with distributors and mass-market audiences. My hope is that he keeps the original Crime Wave, in all its unbalanced, brilliant looniness, and releases them both. The more versions of this corker the better.*

CRIME WAVE d./sc./art.d./cam./p./ John Paizs ed. Paizs, Gerry Klyn, Jon Coultts p.c. Favorite Pictures Studios, 88 Adelaide St., Winnipeg, R3A OW3; dist. Winnipeg Film Group, (204) 942-6795 **running time:** 80 mins., **l.p.** John Paizs, Eva Kovacs, Darrel Baran, Jeffery Owen Madden, Barbara MacDonald, Tea Andrea Tanner, Mark Yuill, Neil Laurie, Mitch Funk.



• *Le Matou's* evil Ratablavsky (Jean Carmet): ancient Quebec icon

Jean Beaudin's **Le Matou**

Florent Boissonneault is a young Québécois who works at a boring job and has a passion for restaurants. When a mysterious gentleman by the name of Ratablavsky offers him the chance to buy a local Montreal restaurant, La Binerie, famous for its Québécois cuisine, he invests his life's savings in it. To make ends meet he adopts as his partner a co-worker, Len Slipskin. Ratablavsky and Slipskin, however, manage to cheat him out of his restaurant and his money. But, with the help of his wife, Elise, he amasses enough capital from the sale of French-Canadian antiques to buy a new restaurant across the street from La Binerie. With the help of his friends (a French cook and a slum child) Florent defeats his ex-partner and the devilish Ratablavsky.

Le Matou, the novel by Yves Beauchemin was a huge success, not only in Quebec, but also in France where it won the prestigious Prix du livre d'été in 1983 and was selected for the French Book of the Month Club. It is an upbeat book.

But Beauchemin has been accused of anti-Semitism for making his devil figure, Ratablavsky, of Polish-Jewish origin. The author has publicly expressed regrets for his choice of antecedents for Ratablavsky, and all references to the character's religion have been expurgated from the English translation. And from the film as well.

Le Matou, the film, is fast-paced and entertaining, and, when the film premiered at the close of the World Film Festival, certainly the audience seemed to enjoy both the comedy, which is rather broad and caricatural, and the melodrama where the idealistic young couple wins against the devil himself. Yet a viewing of this Canada-France co-

production does not dispell the uncomfortable impression that either the Jew or, at least, the immigrant (still of Polish origin) has replaced the English capitalist as the villainous opponent to a new Québécois society.

The ally of the diabolical Ratablavsky (Jean Carmet) is the slippery Slipskin (Miguel Fernandez). It is hard to place him. He speaks mostly English and some very bad French; the film is very unspecific as to his origins. He seems to be some sort of Anglophone of immigrant origin. With a name like Len Slipskin it is hard for me to see this character as anything but Jewish. Included in his villainous traits is a liking for French-Canadian girls who are, in his words, "such good fucks." Slipskin seems reminiscent of Mordecai Richler's anti-heroes. Richler, however, places his heroes' sexism and opportunism in a psychological and social context. *Le Matou* does not. The anger of the new Québécois society seems to have been deflected from the English to the immigrant capitalist (Ratablavsky) and small entrepreneur (Slipskin).

Perhaps this is why the story supposedly takes place in the Plateau Mont-Royal (even though only a few of the location shots are actually filmed there). For it is here that the immigrant population is probably thickest in Montreal and it is here that immigrant entrepreneurs and restaurateurs abound. Do the Québécois feel that they are being pushed out of what was once a traditional French-Canadian working-class neighbourhood? It is true that gentrification has become a threat to this area of Montreal, but it is also a district where traditionally the waves of new immigrants have settled. The district at one time harboured the then-recent Jewish immigrants of Eastern Europe and Russia. In the film, the contemporary immigrant presence is used as a colourful backdrop. But, more insidiously, the immigrant comes to represent the forces of evil that the hero must conquer in order to establish the new Québécois society.

If one looks into the history of Québécois cinema one can see that other forces beside xenophobia must be at play in this social fable. Ratablavsky is reminiscent of an icon from the Québécois' cultural past, that is, Séraphin.

Séraphin was the main character in a popular novel, a radio program in the 1940s, a TV program in the 1950s, and two films, *Un homme et son péché* (1948) and *Séraphin* (1949). The diabolic Séraphin was a money-lender who through his greed for gold and his knowledge of the law controlled the village and was emblematic of the Québécois' fear of the money-principle. In her important study of Québécois cinema, *Un cinéma orphelin*, Christiane Tremblay-Daviault sees Séraphin's sin as that of political and economic power over a world that was supposed to be based on spiritual values and human relations, the world of rural French-Canadian society.

In *Un homme et son péché*, the force of money is greater than the force of nature. The hero, Alexis, is robbed by Séraphin of his land and his love. In the sequel, *Séraphin*, Alexis wins out over the money-lender and reestablishes himself with a new wife on virgin land. The continuation of Québécois society is assured. In *Le Matou*, Florent (Serge Dupire) also wins out over Ratablavsky in the end and ensures the continuation of Québécois society with the birth of his first child (he promises 23 more). But Florent does not base his prosperity on the promise of the land; on the contrary, he only goes back to his rural roots so that he can exploit his cultural past. His wife (Monique Spaziani) is an expert in French-Canadian antiques and they rebuild their capital by cheating farmers out of their seemingly valueless goods. Significantly enough, it is the discovery of a cupboard from "before the conquest" which makes their fortune. The Québécois hero has learned to use his roots and the power of money to his own advantage. A new society has been established, not only by defeating the immigrant, but also by defeating the fear of money and business-values of an urban society, a fear which shows up in many of the films of the '40s and '50s. Whether money and business values are really better than the spiritual and human ones of the past is a question open for debate.

In many ways, however, the central focus of the film is not the hero, Florent, but Émile (Guillaume Lemay-Thivierge), the slum child that the couple virtually adopts. On the film's publicity

poster Émile and his cat are the central motif. He is a boy of approximately six years of age, wearing a "Canadiens" hockey sweater and holding a beer in one hand. Literally abandoned by his mother, a lady of loose morals, he roams the back alleys with his cat and lives on Mae Wests, peanut butter and any booze he can find. A strange figure but also not without precedent in the history of Québécois cinema.

One of the most popular films of the 1950s in Quebec was *La Petite Aurore, l'enfant martyre* (1951). In this story of a mistreated child, the threat to the rural society comes from a process of self-destruction and self-alienation. According to Tremblay-Daviault, this sado-masochistic process issues out of the depths of a society which has been kept in a total state of dispossession on the moral, as well as the economic, political and social planes. Émile in *Le Matou* certainly seems to stand for this part of the Québécois society's past. Therefore, he must die by the end of the film as it is a past which the new Québécois society understandably wants buried. At his funeral Florent's wife goes into labour. But this baby will be born with a silver spoon in her mouth. However, the triumph of Florent's prosperity is still troubled by the shadow of Ratablavsky. After all, the devil cannot die.

Why does *Le Matou* evidently return to the motifs and symbols of Québécois films of the '40s and '50s? Perhaps the answer lies in its targeted audience, that is, that of television and popular commercial cinema. The film was funded, in part, by Telefilm Canada, Radio-Québec and Radio-Canada. Telefilm's Canada's funding of commercially viable films has led to a reliance on the Hollywood model. *Le Matou* is also to be made into a six-part TV mini-series. In such a case it makes sense to use icons familiar to a mass audience. For the same reason, the film uses well-known TV actors in character parts. We are in the realm of the Hollywood film and, therefore, in the realm of a popular genre. As in any genre film, a conflict of values pertinent to the society contemporary with the film is used as the basis for a dramatic conflict. In *Le Matou*, as in most Hollywood films, this conflict is resolved by displacement: Ratablavsky and Slipskin, the two outsiders, take the blame for the destructive aspects of an individualistic capitalism. And so, the hero is able to found a new Québécois society which has somehow integrated the values of capitalism with the human and spiritual values of the traditional peasant culture.

Mary Alemany-Galway •

LE MATOU d. Jean Beaudin, p. Justine Héroux sc. Lise Lemay-Rousseau from the novel by Yves Beauchemin p. man. Micheline Garant loc. man. Michel Chauvin 1st a.d. Mircille Goulet d.o.p. Claude Agostini cam. Michel Caron sd. Claude Hazanavicius art. d. François Lamontagne set. des. Réal Ouellette set props. Charles Bernier head make-up Louise Mignault head hair Camille Bélanger cost. des. François Laplante cost. Manon Brodcur gaffer John Berric key grip François Dupéré p.c. Cinévidéo Inc., Radio-Québec, SRC, Telefilm Canada, Société générale du cinéma, Intial Groupe, Antenne 2 TV France/Film A2 Cdn. dist. Vivafilm l.p. Serge Dupire, Monique Spaziani, Jean Carmet, Guillaume Lemay-Thivierge, Julien Guiomar, Madeleine Robinson, Miguel Fernandez, Julien Poulin, Alexandra Stewart, Yvan Canuel, Rita Lafontaine.

Sturla Gunnarsson & Robert Collison's
Final Offer

Final Offer: Bob White and the Canadian Auto Workers' Fight For Independence, the 90-minute NFB/CBC co-production broadcast Nov. 26 on prime-time, is one of the most compelling documentaries ever made in this country. The film takes us into the heart of the 1984 Canadian United Auto Workers (UAW) contract negotiation

with General Motors, an intricate process that becomes a riveting two-front battle conducted by Canadian UAW leader Bob White against senior-management of the American UAW and GM. In challenging the most powerful labour union in the U.S. (subsequent to which the Canadian UAW broke away from the American 'international'), as well as the world's largest industrial corporation, Bob White and his inner circle engage in a battle of nerves, bluff, strategy and stubbornness that takes on all the excitement of a political thriller.

The progress of events in this historic confrontation is gripping in itself, but co-directors Sturla Gunnarsson and Robert Collison heighten the tension by using techniques that seem to bring the

viewer right into the centre of the unfolding drama. In part, this is the result of the *cinéma-vérité* style, with its emphasis upon a moving camera, tight close-ups, and editing rhythms that emphasise cuts from one scene of tension almost directly into the next, with virtually no diminishment of the gathering energy. But perhaps even more fascinating, and subtly effective, is their use of a unique voice-over narration which plays the role of taking us right into the mind of Bob White himself. Time and again, the narrator tells us precisely what White is feeling or thinking, and why, during a phone conversation with his UAW adversary, the U.S. union president Owen Beiber; a confrontation with GM head of industrial relations Rod Andrew; a stressful moment at the bargaining table or with his own Canadian inner circle.

This style of voice-over is highly involving, and subtly becomes a means for the viewer's identifying with White as we experience the unfolding of events through his perspective. Coupled with a very clear detailing of exactly what is at issue moment by moment in the two-pronged negotiations process, this intimate voice-over fully includes us so that the impact of each stage in the tense situation hits home viscerally.

The film also has a highly dynamic structure, interweaving scenes of increasing stressfulness at the auto-assembly production line – the noise of the drills and the disturbingly metallic surroundings underline the difficult working conditions where a worker has to wait up to an hour just to be to go to the toilet – with the scenes of strategizing in White's office. Through this structure, we never lose sight of the Canadian workers for whom White is battling. As well, the scenes at the auto plant convey a certain vivid, *macho* dignity (no female workers are seen) which matches the negotiating style of the "tough, but steady" Bob White.

But it is in focusing centrally upon White himself that the film maintains its momentum and its political impact. The man's style, with all his energy, toughness, humour and political commitment, fully informs the film and makes it a story of personal triumph as well as a victory for Canadian labour. *Final Offer* is essentially about taking risks, not just in labour negotiations, but in every endeavour, including filmmaking. The skills of Sturla Gunnarsson, Robert Collison and their crew in terms of courage, talent and risk-taking, fully match those of their subject, the maverick labour leader, Bob White. This production is nothing less than a milestone in Canadian documentary history.

Joyce Nelson •

FINAL OFFER d. Sturla Gunnarsson sc./co-d. Robert Collison ed. Jeff Warren cam. Leonard Gilday loc.sd. Brian Avery, Ian Hendry mus. Jack Lenz narr. Henry Ramer asst.film ed. Susan Shipton asst.cam. Joel Guthroc add.cam. Rodney Charters add.loc.sd. Wolf Ruck re-rec. Terry Cooke p.asst. Renc Gluck unit admin. Julia Sreny, Sonya Munro p. Sturla Gunnarsson, Robert Collison senior p. John Kramer exec.p. John Spotton. The producers wish to thank: The membership and the leadership of the United Auto Workers Union in Canada, General Motors of Canada Ltd, The Royal York Hotel p.c. The National Film Board of Canada, (Ontario Production Studio), in association with The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.



• Canadian UAW head Bob White and advisors in *Final Offer*: draped in the Canadian flag

Kevin Sullivan's

Anne of Green Gables

In 1908, Lucy Maude Montgomery could have had little foreknowledge that her novel, *Anne of Green Gables*, would ultimately become a "hot property" in the era of voracious media hype and entertainment. The book has inspired two Hollywood feature films (in 1919 and 1934), a CBC-TV musical in 1956, the perennially popular stage musical at the Charlottetown Festival since 1965, a BBC musical mini-series in 1972, and now the two-part made-for-TV movie *Anne of Green Gables*, directed by Kevin Sullivan and aired on CBC prime-time Dec. 1-2.

In a sense, Montgomery's classic story has become a kind of political cipher passing back and forth among countries and interests eager to exploit the popularity of a book, now translated into 30 languages, with passionate fans around the world. This time, the Canadians have scored the coup, taking the dramatic story back from the Hollywood studios, back from the British, and shaping it to the dictates of Canadian television — with an eye, of course, to the worldwide television market.

If this seems a cynical way to begin this review, it appears necessary: given the fact that director Kevin Sullivan is already hinting in interviews about "talk of a half-hour series as a sort of sequel" to his 198-minute-long production. As the *Anne of Green Gables* phenomenon heats up again in this latest round of hoopla, one is moved to return to Montgomery's original text, finding there not only a wisdom and peacefulness that goes beyond all the subsequent media incarnations, but also a literary flavour that puts those reincarnations into perspective.

Inevitably, a television production based on a well-known novel invites such comparisons. Kevin Sullivan's two-part made-for-TV movie of *Anne of Green Gables* is strangely uneven in its two-part division. Part I, which closely follows the book in both spirit and plotting, has an energy and exuberance and emotional depth that somehow outshine Part II, where Sullivan and co-screenwriter Joe Wiesenfeld have taken greater liberties with L.M. Montgomery's novel. Arguably, the places where *Anne of Green Gables*, the TV series, veers away from *Anne of Green Gables*, the book, reveal more about the realities of TV marketing and packaging than about the particular flavour of Montgomery's work. My hunch is that Sullivan did not quite know what to make of the character of Anne once she has emerged from her delightful, irrepressible pre-adolescent stage (Part I), into the dreamy, but ambitious scholar fully intent on her studies. In other words, Sullivan did not know how to handle the emerging character of Montgomery's independent woman.

The best thing about *Anne of Green Gables* is its casting, and therefore, its superb acting. Megan Follows, Colleen Dewhurst and Richard Farnsworth are

simply perfect for the roles of the high-spirited, imaginative orphan girl and the elderly sister and brother who adopt her into their Prince Edward Island home. The entire production depends on the chemistry among these three principals, and they carry it off beautifully. In fact, all the actors in this film seem exactly right for their parts, and Sullivan gets fine performances from beginning to end. In particular, as a director he is sensitive to the nuances conveyed by the lift of an eyebrow, the turn of a head, the blink of an eye. In revealing the landscape of the human face, Sullivan shows himself to be especially suited to direction for television, which depends upon close-ups and medium-shots for its effectiveness.

Ironically, however, this very strength becomes a weakness in dealing with a book like *Anne of Green Gables*, which has, as one of its primary literary elements, a strong evocation of place. The vividly described landscape of Prince Edward Island so thoroughly informs the book that it has inspired hundreds of thousands of tourists to visit P.E.I. to experience first-hand the sense of place so fully created by L.M. Montgomery. And yet, the television screen is inadequate for conveying this dimension; it is best suited to interiors and close-ups. The handful of exterior scenes in *Anne of Green Gables* acknowledges this inadequacy of the medium.

And so, Sullivan has had to focus his television adaptation along other lines, sacrificing the evocation of the sense of place to the elaboration of character. This, in itself, could be a justifiable decision, given a book rich in character and human interaction. But Sullivan seems to mistake emerging character for Romance, especially in Part II. He and Wiesenfeld have greatly expanded the

role of Gilbert and altered the relationship between him and Anne so that it veers off in the direction of romantic soap-opera.

Where Montgomery maintains, just pages from the book's end, that "There was no silly sentiment in Anne's ideas concerning Gilbert. Boys were to her, when she thought about them at all, merely possible good comrades," Sullivan shifts the story significantly: making Anne a rather modern, flirtatious teenager angling for Gilbert's attentions, if somewhat ambiguous about her own desires.

This decision to romanticize the relationship between Anne and Gilbert somewhat subverts the spirit of feminist independence running through Montgomery's text and shifts the focus to an underlying sexual subtext that is not present in the book, but which probably is thought to make for good television. Thus, Sullivan and Wiesenfeld add scenes in which Marilla (Colleen Dewhurst) expresses concern over Anne's having been seen holding hands with Gilbert, and pointedly tells the latter that Anne is still quite young. These scenes, more in keeping with current familial concerns than with anything in the novel, are undoubtedly an attempt to 'modernize' a story that is in no need of modernization. But whatever the motivation behind them, such changes are in line with other liberties taken with Montgomery's text, especially the death of Matthew.

In the original, Matthew's weak heart is ultimately undermined by the failure of the bank in which he has placed his life's savings. He dies of a heart attack upon hearing the news — a scene which has been replaced in *Anne of Green Gables* by his lyrical demise while bringing home the cows. No bank failure, no shock of economic destitution. "The

whole concept of a bank folding and Matthew having a heart attack just seemed too conventional, too trite," says Sullivan. "We tried to make it a little bit more peaceful and beautiful than that." Yet surely Montgomery intended the economic dimension which runs throughout the book and is especially noticeable in its final scenes. It is part of the thematic opposition between practical, factual realism and Anne's imaginative flights of fancy: an opposition which structures the entire book and gives Anne depth of character through her struggle to maintain her fiercely imaginative spirit. The economic cause of Matthew's death is a particularly painful way for Montgomery to underline the societal factors that cruelly limit one's dreams and circumscribe one's aspirations. While no one would argue that Montgomery's novel is a political tract, it does have certain dimensions of sociopolitical awareness. By diminishing such dimensions, *Anne of Green Gables* loses more than it gains.

There are other problems in the production, including an omnipresent musical track, the occasionally awkward conflation of scenes from the original, some obvious editing errors (in the trip from the train station and the tea-party scene), and a predilection for tableaux in which characters are arranged with no blacks to the camera — regardless of how stiff and awkward that may make the seating arrangements. A predominantly stationary camera and a reliance primarily on dialogue to carry scenes make the production visually less interesting than it might have been. Moreover, the sense of time passing seems somewhat scrambled, largely by being hinged upon a confusing series of exams confronting Anne.

And yet, *Anne of Green Gables*, the



• *Anne of Green Gables*' star Megan Follows: CBC's all-time winner at the ratings

series, manages to transcend these problems. There is a certain ineffable quality surrounding the production which makes one feel mean-spirited to have noticed its faults. No doubt, this is mainly the result of the superb acting by Megan Follows, and the truly touching scenes involving Follows, Dewhurst and Farnsworth, who bring to life the complexity of emotional undercurrent at work in their characters. One gets the unmistakable sense of a cast and crew who cared deeply about this production and gave to it fully.

Certainly, Kevin Sullivan emerges as a director capable of eliciting excellent performances and able to meet the demands of doing a period piece that accurately evokes the look of the distant past. He also seems sensitively in touch with the pains and joys of childhood, a rare quality in any case, but especially necessary for a director working in the realm of family entertainment.

Finally, however, it is the quality and spent of the original story itself that shines through here, despite the twists and shifts and alterations and problems encountered in Sullivan's production. One wishes, somehow, that L.M. Montgomery herself could reap the rewards.

Joyce Nelson •

Anne of Green Gables d./exec.p. Kevin Sullivan p. Kevin Sullivan, Ian McDougall assoc.p. Trudy Grant p.man. Nick Gray sc. Kevin Sullivan, Joe Wisenfeld d.o.p. Rene Ohashi art d. Carol Spier ward. des. Martha Mann unit/loc.man. Lin Gibson p. coord. Fran Solomon 1st a. d. Otta Hanus 2nd a. d. Kim Winther t.a.d. Jeff Wilkinson, Ron French, d's observer Bronwen Hughes office p.a. Paula Ncedham craft/serv/p.a. Martha Bean con. Nancy Eagles p. acct. Dorothy Precious asst. acct. Carol Jurchison asst. art d. Alta Louise Doyle art. dept. trainee Katherine Mathewson set dressers Martin Weinryb, Gary Jack, asst. set dresser Danielle Flury asst. props/floor props Vic Rigler asst. props Gina Hamilton const. sup. Kirk Cheney hd. carp. Ian Fraser asst. hd. carp. Myles Roth scenic artists James McAteer, Nick Kosonick asst. cost. des. Derek Baskerville key ward.620? Delphine White asst. ward. Maureen Gurney, Kat Moyer, Sherry McMorrin make-up Shonagh Jabour asst. make-up Jane Meade hair. Ivan Lynch asst. hair. Jocelyn MacDonald 1st asst. cam. John Hobson 2nd asst. cam. David Perkins stills Rob McEwan sd.rec. Stuart French boom Michael LaCroix key grip Christopher Dean 2nd grip Gordon Forbes best boy grip Dan Narduzzi gaffer Maris Jansons best boy David Owen elect. Frank Foster gennie op. Cactus Simscr trans. coord. Michael Curran dr. capt. Jerome McCann drivers John Bray, Ron Coles, Robert Bartman, Dave Brown eds. Moe Wilkinson, James Lahti sd. ed. Steven Cole cast. Diane Polley extras cast. Faces & Places animal wrangler Lionel's Pony Farm p.c. Sullivan Films Inc., CBC, PBS/Wonderworks, TV-60 Munich/ZDF, with the participation of Telefilm Canada. running time: 198 mins. 16mm. Col. l.p. Megan Follows, Colleen Dewhurst, Richard Farnsworth, Patricia Hamilton, Schuyler Grant, Jonathan Crombie, Charmion King, Jackie Burroughs, Rosemary Radcliffe, Marilyn Lighthone, Paul Brown, Miranda Deponcier, Jayne Eastwood, Dawn Greenhalgh, Vivian Reis, Samantha Langevin, Cedric Smith, Christiane Krueger, Joachim Hansen, Jennifer Inch, Trish Nettleton, Mag Ruffman, Sean McCann, Robert Haley, Michael Tait, Robert Collins, Dave Roberts, Nancy Beattie, David Hughes, Fiona McGillivray, Wendy Lyon, Zack Ward, Sharon Dyer, Rex Southgate, Juliana Saxton, Molly Thom, Jennifer Irwin, Sandra Scott, Jack Mather, Peter Sturgess, Ray Ireland, Dawn Taylor, Patrick Allard, Adrian Dorval, Martha Cronyn, Martha Maloney, Morgan Chapman, John Conway.

Claude Grenier's **Le Vieillard et l'enfant**

As the first (and, for demographic reasons, very likely the last) French-language dramatic fiction film to emerge from Franco-Manitoba, Claude Grenier's one-hour *Le Vieillard et l'enfant* merits greater attention than it has so far received. Especially from Quebec where there's a long-standing concern with the linguistic and cultural future of the Francophones of the other provinces, and perhaps even more so in the Quebecois cinematic milieu where such, no doubt now forgotten, films as *L'Acadie l'Acadie*, once played an important role in politicizing Quebec filmmakers who saw, in the fate of the Francophone minorities, a grim prediction of the Québécois future itself.

Not that *Le Vieillard et l'enfant* is a political film; far from it. But the all-too-rapid dismissal of this film during its brief passage on two Montreal screens in late-November-early December by the daily newspaper, radio and TV critics, on the grounds of not enough jolts per minute, indicates an imaginative dullness that is grossly unjust to *Le Vieillard et l'enfant* which is nothing if not a film about the imagination.

Le Vieillard is a cinematic fable about a child (Lucie Laurier) and an old man (Jean Duceppe) who meet at the privileged interstices of the beginning of life and the end of life. In other words, at that critical cultural moment when the past articulates and transmits its vision to the present that will become the future and, in turn, a past, and so on. And in cinema especially – because of the medium's youth – such

moments possess an added significance that calls for a particular attentiveness; even more so in a cinema like that in Canada which is barely out of its infancy.

M. St-Hilaire, the character played with the usual excellence that has made Duceppe one of Quebec's outstanding transmitters of the classical theatrical tradition, is himself a man with no past, or, more accurately, a severed past. He comes most likely from France – the film only refers to the photo of a sailing ship on which he says he crossed the sea. He has lived, since then, in Manitoba – the film is set at the height of the Depression in the summer of 1935 – for some years; was once married; had children, the exact number he can't recall, among them a favorite daughter about whom he also says nothing, other than that she was beautiful, and whose memory visibly occasions him some pain.

Christine, the child, is aged between seven and nine, and lives with her mother (Patricia Nolin), who is fading wearily into the bitterness of a bleak and penny-pinching middle-age. There is no father, nor reference to one, though there are references to family in rural Quebec, where mother and daughter in previous summers would visit, but cannot this year for lack of money.

Christine, a lonely child, wanders among the prairie sea, brooding over the recent death of a grandmother, and grappling with the meanings of life. In this context she encounters M. St-Hilaire.

Aside from the natural affinity of the very young and the very old, what he has to give to her is, in one word, a vision. For one, the very ancient French-Canadian linguistic and cultural claim to the continent. For another (or what's the same), a vision of the imagination which specifically takes the form of his taking her to see with her own eyes the

site of the imagination itself; in the film, "great Lake Winnipeg," or one of Canada's inland, continental seas. *Le Vieillard et l'enfant*, then, is a fable about the quest for – and confrontation with – the Canadian imagination.

It is after Christine and M. St-Hilaire's arrival at the shores of great Lake Winnipeg – about three-quarters into the film – that the fable reaches its dramatic climax.

As M. St-Hilaire tells Christine: "The water is eternal, as is life. And it knows – because it will still be there after all our descendants have gone. It will be our witness, for the lake waits for all of us, one after the other." And, then, he breaks down and weeps.

Similarly, the film – or more exactly the realist tradition in Canadian cinema – too breaks down. For other than showing a body of water, the film is unable to show the water as an imaginative substance; only as wet matter. What causes M. St-Hilaire to cry when his imaginative vision is confronted with the uninspiring materiality of a mere lake is structurally paralysed by the Canadian realist film's inability to get beyond the brute facticity of Canadian nature. For the only way beyond it is death: M. St-Hilaire's realization of his own imminent death, and, again, parallel to it, the death of the realist tradition itself.

However, the imaginative vision breaks down to the extent of being grounded in naturalism. De-naturalized, it can continue on its way, for it is from de-naturalization that cinema is born.

M. St-Hilaire takes Christine back to her mother. He bids them good-night and walks off down the street into the Light – into, that is, the diffused back-lighting of the cinematic apparatus itself as it recasts the surrounding trees and lawns in the re-naturalization that follows the successful, if painful, transition to the realm of the cinematic imagination.

What Claude Grenier has illuminated with *Le Vieillard et l'enfant* could be described as a 'fictional documentary' that reveals with stunning clarity the transition beyond realism. *Le Vieillard* is slow-paced and basically uneventful, like much in Canadian cinema, but also

• *Le Vieillard et l'enfant's* Jean Duceppe and Lucie Laurier on the shores of the imagination



LE VIEILLARD ET L'ENFANT d. Claude Grenier sc. Clément Perron, with Grenier based/on the story by Gabrielle Roy, "Le Vieillard et l'Enfant" l.p. Jean Duceppe, Lucie Laurier, Patricia Nolin, Michèle Magny; d.o.p. Thomas Vamos ed. Michèle Groleau mus. Normand Roger arr. Normand Roger, Denis L. Chartrand; sd. Martin Fossum art d. Aaron Johnston cost.con. François Laplante narr. Yvon Rivard sd.ed. Alain Sauvé, Danuta Klis; mus.rec. Louis Hone mixer Hans Peter Strobl 1st a.d. Lise Abastado 2nd a.d. Denis Lavoie cont. France Boudreau make-up/hair Diane Simard pre-prod. Laurence Paré cast. Lise Abastado loc.man. Ginette Hardy gaffer Frank Raven key grip Michel Chohin cam.asst. Charles Lavack boom Richard Dupas props.? Avelin Gautron cost.asst. Marie-Marthe Guénette asst.elec. Mike Fones grip Bryan Sanders gen.op. Rod Merrells set.des. Avlin Gautron add.cam. Charles Lavack stills Robert Barrow p.assts. Dennis Connelly, Lucille Fournier, Sylvain L'Archevêque, Raymond Lemieux, Don Sharpe, Marie Laurier; loc.scouts. Aaron Johnston, Dennis Connelly; post.p. Edouard Davidovici titles Serge Bouthillier post.synch. Cinélum p.sec. Marie Fournier admin. Carol Smith p. René Piché exec.p. Raymond Gauthier. Couleur, 16mm and videocassette; running time: 51 min 17s p.c. Production française/Ouest Office National du film du Canada with la Société Radio-Canada; dist. NFB/ONF.

acutely existentially attuned to those important moments of passage in which, if life loses something, it is art's (in this case, cinema's) gain. *Le vieillard*, in its quiet simplicity, is, as M. St-Hilaire says at one point, "a feast of hope." All in all, no inconsiderable artistic accomplishment for a film that emerges from the depths of a slowly dying collectivity in what remains of the French conquest of the West. Indeed, *Le vieillard* is something of a monument of commemoration.

Grenier, of course, had a lot of good fortune in the making of this film — a Gabrielle Roy story to adapt; a script by Clément Perron (*Mon Oncle Antoine*) who has brooded long and hard over the meaning of childhood and filmmaking; an actor of the stature of Duceppe

and a giant little talent in Lucie Laurier; the delicately baroque music of Normand Roger; a devoted crew of the competence of people like d.o.p. Thomas Vamos. And, in Manitoba at least, where the film got some of the recognition it merits among Francophones, an enthusiastic audience turnout.

But in Quebec, an ex-bastion of francophonie that prides itself on its cinematic sophistication, it was met with, at best, yawns; at worst, an unconscionable insult.

Maybe that's why Grenier, a Québécois, has decided like Jutra once, he'd rather work as a filmmaker out of Toronto.

Michael Dorland •

MINI - REVIEWS

by Pat Thompson

THE ORDINARY BATH

Some xylophone music and some bubbles, and it's off to the fantasy land for children created by writer Dennis Lee and artist Jon McKee.

A small boy is left to play for a while in the bath before bedtime. Narrator Lee informs us that the lad is no fool as he announces, "Always splash, that's what water is for." He then adds that the boy "knew how to turn on the taps," and proceeds to do so. The winged Bathtub Creature comes out of the tap, and it's sort of fun — the boy, his duck and the creature having a good time. But then the Nasties start to rush from the tap — oozing, roaring, and shimmying. One stank, one was covered with lumps which had faces, and another exploded! "Why did I turn on that tap?" moans the boy — but do not despair, the duck saves the day.

A cunning little kid-gem from Mirus Films. It may appear to be animated but, in reality, Jon McKee's drawings for the book are moved and manipulated to give them life and, coupled with some lively, driving music and imaginative sound effects, things really swing along. Of course, Dennis Lee's language is gorgeous — the beasties hop/sing/slither/slop, and are humpy and bumpy and glubbe and burp.

The film was enthusiastically received by hordes of tiny tots at its premiere in Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum at the launching festivities of the 1985 Children's Book Festival in November.

p./d./cam./ed. Paul Caulfield, exec.p. Don Haig, assoc.d./illustrator Jon McKee, sc./narr. Dennis Lee, mus./sd. Philip Balsam, 11 mins, col., 16mm/video. Availability: Kinetic Films, 781 Gerrard St.E., Toronto M4M 1Y5 (416) 469-4155.

In October the Audio-Visual Dept. of the Mississauga (near Toronto) Library System had the happy idea of putting on four evenings of student-produced films from Sheridan College (both Animation and Media Arts Departments), York University and Ryerson Polytechnical Institute.

It was interesting to note that some of the older films still hold up — Oh Sean, Harlequin, Academy Award winner Charade (of course), Tale Win — all animated. And a few of the newer ones also show that talent still manifests itself each year.

TAKO (Kite)

A most elegant, sparsely drawn, colourful burst of kites — twisting and twirling to flute music and a drum beat. There are red kites, kites that look like tadpoles with long tails, and some with fierce warrior faces.

A film by Mike Fukushima (Sheridan College Animation Dept.) 1985. 2-1/2 mins. Col. 16mm.

THE COMPUTER BLUES

A whirlwind amalgam of pixillation mixed in with a lad playing computer games and with wind-up cars, which somehow transport him to a sort of circus. A little plasticine animation is then tossed in, and then the keyboard is 'bombed' with globes...whew! A little less excess — please.

A film by Mark Kingston (Ryerson) 1985. 7 mins. Col. 16mm

WOMEN AND PILLS

A documentary on valium addiction, which is obviously well-researched, and drawing on interviews with women relating their cases, but somehow the heart isn't touched. Perhaps it's a bit too textbook in approach, as the format is predictable and pretty rigid. Real-wife stuff these days has to have more feeling than this.

A film by Kathy Nicholaichuk (Ryerson), 1985, 27 mins., col., 16mm.

AFTER THE ARGUMENT

A carefully arranged, well thought-out, single five-minute take of the debris after a male/female argument. Here again, perhaps without a heart to it, but certainly crisply executed.

A film by Christopher Ball, 1985, 5 mins., col., 16mm.

SCAN LINES

by Joyce Nelson

When books become grist for the media mill

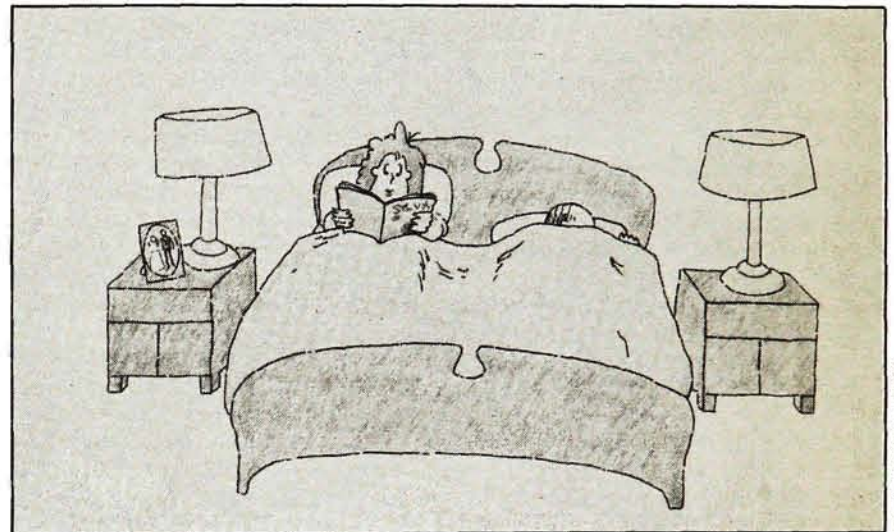


photo: Sylvia, NFB

Elsewhere in this issue, I reviewed the made-for-TV movie *Anne Of Green Gables*, aired on CBC-TV Dec. 1-2, without mentioning the really central issue that it raises: namely, the extremely questionable practice of using literary fiction, especially children's books, as the basis for television and movie adaptations. This practice is so widespread and commonplace, and has been for such a long time, that it would be unfair to single out Sullivan's production as unusual in this regard. Nevertheless, the topic is worth exploring, especially as an ever-increasing number of popular novels and short stories become grist for the visual media mill.

The problem is that, once you have seen the TV or movie version of a literary story, it is simply impossible to read the original work without recalling the movie's images. Thus, for example, those who see the movie *Gone With The Wind* first, and then turn to a reading of the novel, find it virtually impossible to picture the character of Rhett Butler (for instance) any other way than as Clark Gable portrayed him. Try as one might to imagine one's own creation of the character while engaged with the book's prose, the movie version inevitably arises in the mind's eye. Similarly with any other movie version of a novel or short story: the scenes, character portrayals, even the tone of voice in passages of dialogue, all reappear when one then reads the book — replacing the imaginative work that is central to the pleasures of reading itself.

If this seems a trivial issue, consider the implications it has for the developing imaginations of young children. In adapting children's books for the screen, we are handing them ready-made imagery, imagery far more powerful and elaborate than their own young imaginations might be capable of generating. Those who suggest that seeing a screen adaptation of a book will encourage children to read are overlooking what is involved in the act of reading itself.

The imagination, like any human skill, has to be nurtured and developed or it simply deteriorates. It is the capacity of forming vivid mental pictures, unique combinations of sensual elements, orig-

inal arrangements of imagery according to one's own degree of experience in the world. Reading fiction depends upon this skill because of the limited suggestiveness of words. No matter how detailed and vivid a description of something may be, it depends upon the reader's own experience and imaginative capabilities, which is why every reader of a given novel will have a totally unique imaginative experience that is somehow different from every other reader's.

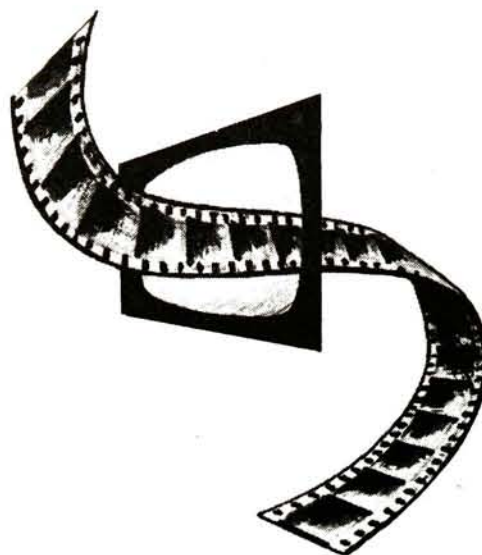
A filmed adaption of a novel, however, provides one fixed way of visualizing. It is someone else's imagining, rendered concrete... not by the author of the book, but the director's interpretation. In other words, one particular reader's vision (or that of a collective cast) becomes privileged over all other possible imaginings. That then becomes the experience for all viewers.

It's little wonder that today's kids get turned-off to literature. If they are reading a book they've already seen on the screen, there's little for them to do, as they struggle through the prose, but replay the movie version in their minds — in which case, they often reasonably conclude, why not simply rescreen the the movie itself? And if it's a story totally new to them, many school-age kids have so little experience in using their own imaginations that they are simply incapable of making the words come to life in their mind's eye.

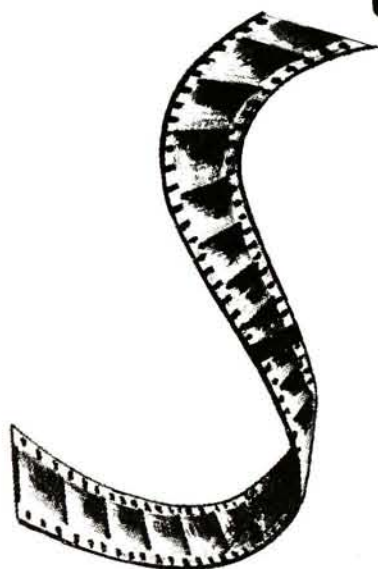
At bottom, the issue is the conservative nature of the film and television industry, which looks for pre-sold properties with guaranteed audiences. Adaptations of popular books provide precisely this safety factor in terms of investment. Rather than encourage the development of original scriptwriting — which necessarily involves a higher degree of risks — the industry often tends to prefer known works which have already proven their marketability or appeal in another medium.

Whatever profitability and respectability may accrue to the industry by this practice, it is, I suspect, in the long run eroding something precious in the society-at-large, which, once lost, can never be replaced.

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