

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. I.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" I.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. Francc 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. Cinélumc 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 •

SCAN LINES

by Joyce Nelson

When books become grist for the media mill

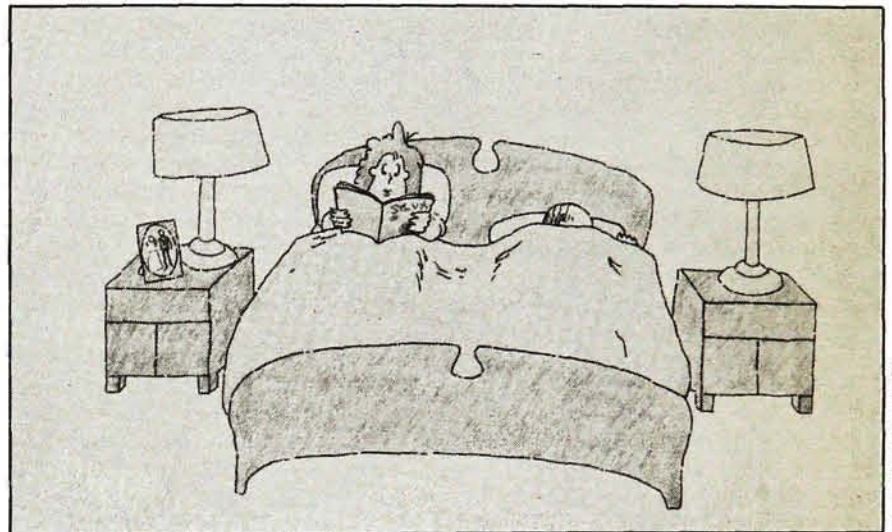


photo: Sylvia, NFB

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.

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.