

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

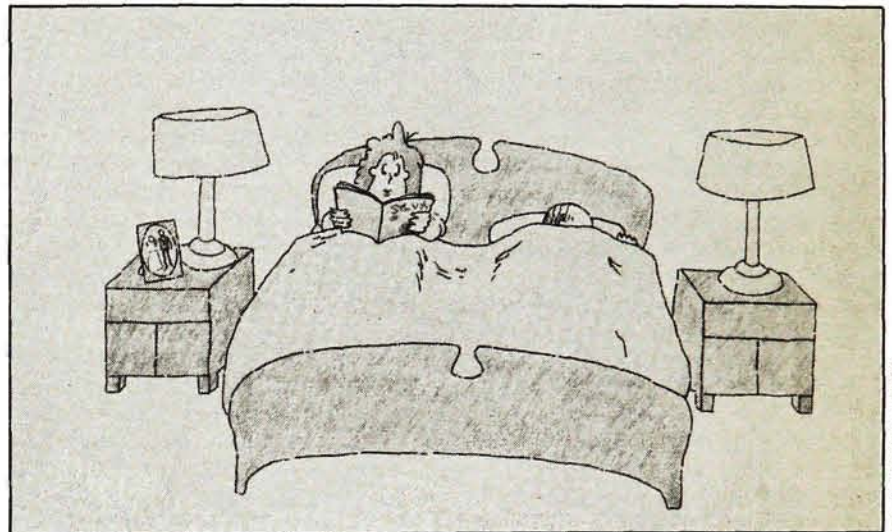


photo: Sylvia, NFB

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.