

Léa Pool's

Anne Trister

If feminism in the '60s consisted, in part, of a rejection of mothers and their roles in the social structure, the '80s have brought a return to the mother, if not to the domestic and familial values of the '40s and the '50s.

Anne Trister, Léa Pool's second feature, seems to be concerned with this new feminist position which echoes the concerns of other feminist films of the '80s, such as **The Bad Sister**, made for British television by Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, and Kay Armatage's **Storytelling**. These films try to find some kind of alternative position for women that is outside the classical Oedipal text. Much of this work is based on the post-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory of such French feminists as Cixous, Irigaray, Lemoine-Luccioni and Montrelay, concerned with the relationship to the mother, the return to the mother and the need to accept the mother if one is to produce a feminist discourse outside the patriarchal (Oedipal) cycle.

The first shot in **Anne Trister** is that of a young woman's naked back, she's lying on a bed and crying. The camera pulls back and we see an older woman dressed in black sitting rigidly on a bench a few feet in front of her. She does not move to comfort her. The next shot is of the young woman walking around in a desolate, half-built building whose grey walls are covered in graffiti. We hear the sounds of water and wind. On one wall is scribbled, "Adam and Eve" On another there is a huge drawing of a naked man and woman and two small children. As she walks around this labyrinth-like structure we see another graffiti of a raised fist, some written obscenities, and the words "La loi" appear on another wall. Cut to her face as she walks forward. A woman's voice is raised in the Hebrew prayer for the dead and we see a corpse, wrapped in a white sheet, being carried through the desert on a stretcher. A funeral procession follows, and the young woman is one of the mourners. The titles appear over a close-up of moving sand; the sound of water is heard.

The opening scenes are highly dramatic and their lack of a realistic context makes them seem to be symbolic. Of what, we do not know yet.

A hand paints a red line on a window, the camera pulls back and we are with the young woman in an art class. From this point on the film takes a realistic turn and the emphasis is on the psychological drama of the young woman, Anne Trister, trying to come to terms with her father's death. She decides to leave her lover and go to Montreal. At the airport, her mother (the woman who was watching her cry) sneaks to Anne's lover, Pierre, of her



• Symbolizations of desire in **Anne Trister**: Louise Marleau as Alix with Albane Guilhe as Anne

daughter's despair over the death of her father and how the mother was never able to give her daughter the love she needed.

Loud, dramatic music now and a jerky pan over the skyline of Montreal. It's Anne's point-of-view. She has arrived in Montreal and here she looks up two people. One is an old Jewish man who runs a café, a friend of her father. As they sit talking about her father (in a conventionally shot scene consisting of close-ups and shot-counter-shot editing) there is a sudden cut from Anne's face to a video-screen shot of a little girl bandaging a teddy bear. She is being treated by a therapist at the Sainte Justine Hospital. The woman therapist, Alix, is the other person who Anne looks up. She moves into her apartment and the continual and rather awkward cross cutting between Anne and the child, Sara, whom Alix is treating makes it obvious that we are to draw a parallel between their two cases.

One of the virtues of the film is that it is rather hard to tell what will be the outcome of this plot. But one of the disappointments is that eventually we realize that this is a conventional dramatic story, with its usual narrative tension and climax. However, here the roles have been switched and instead of the tension between a man and a woman leading to the climax of their eventual coupling, we find ourselves involved in a love story between two women. One begins to wonder if we'll be subjected to the usual titillating, exploitative scenes of lesbian love-making. Fortunately the film avoids this and Louise Marleau's performance as the therapist caught between her male lover and her concern for and attraction to the young painter is both believably

and sensitively played. Albane Guilhe portrays Anne as a lost, young woman looking for herself in her art and in her relationship to another woman. Although she's believable enough in the role of a sensitive girl in need of the care and affection of an older woman, it is hard to see her as conscious or sophisticated enough to create the complex art work which becomes the central symbol of the film.

Simon, her father's friend, and an obvious father substitute, gives her a studio. There is a long pan around the peeling grey walls, which echoes the pan through the deserted building at the beginning. Anne takes the whole studio as her canvas and turns it into an intricate architectural environment whose obsessive all-over patterning, and multiple false perspectives, crossed with a strong linear play of shafts of light and painted shadows, is reminiscent of the expressionist sets of **The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari**, the 1920 silent film classic. In some ways the studio comes to look like a mausoleum, a tomb, and Anne's own precarious balance is echoed in that of a falling red chair she paints on the wall. There is a beautiful scene where she is lying on the scaffold with her eyes shut and an overturned pot of red paint at her side. She awakes to find that a pigeon has somehow flown into the studio. It flaps around the room trying to find a way out, knocking against the real and the false windows but finding no exit.

Unfortunately (except for the prologue) the rest of the film does not come up to the imaginative height of this central symbol. Instead it becomes a psychological drama with an emphasis on the character's emotions, shot mostly in sharp, well-lit close-ups. Like

other films financed in part by television, the visuals seem to be constructed specifically for the small screen and a sense of claustrophobia develops. In this case this is doubly disappointing. First, because the concept of the film and some of its parts promise much more, but also because Léa Pool's earlier films show such a wonderful mastery of the cinematic language as a means of poetic expression.

La femme de l'hôtel (1984) also deals with the parallels between the artist and the neurotic personality. But in that film there is no separation between the real world and that of the artist's imagination. A soft, muted light echoes the muted lives of the women, and the deadness of the city in winter becomes an ever-expanding metaphor for the deadness and alienation that they struggle with. The inter-relationship of the artist/filmmaker and the neurotic woman who resembles her fictive character is carefully woven out of chance encounters. In other words the inner and outer realities of the film mirror and echo each other in a more subtle and evocative way than in **Anne Trister** where the continual straight cuts between Anne and her counterpart, Sara, are jarring and heavy-handed. Except for some wintry exteriors, the physical reality of the city does not seem to be used in any metaphorical or even mood-inducing manner. Alix's apartment, with its soft greys and blues and its multiple windows that look out into the real world, does seem to function as an alternative symbol to the mausoleum-like studio. But, like most of the other locales in the film, it looks like a stage set and I ended up feeling that I was watching a play filmed for televis-

ion. The filmmaker must have also felt a lack because her use of music becomes over-emphatic, making sure we understand the dramatic emotions involved in her story and threatening to turn the whole thing into a melodrama. When the chords started plunking at every kiss of the climactic scene I definitely squirmed in my seat. The non-diegetic use of the song "La main gauche" seemed rather excessive. Especially as its message was already present in the conflicting emotions passing across Louise Marleau's wonderfully expressive face. That the intricate and painful emotions of such a relationship could be so subtly portrayed in the acting and then marred by the shortcoming of the film is doubly frustrating.

In the end one is left feeling that the film is taking a strong feminist stance. But what is it? Certainly the men in the film seem silly and inconsequential (except for the dead father and he only lives on as a ghostly presence). It is the women who are strong, interesting characters and their dilemmas central to the plot. That Anne is trying to get back to her mother through Alix is made obvious in two passages in the film; the Petit Poucet story, and the letter she writes to her mother. At one point, Anne listens to a tape from her lover telling a story of the Petit Poucet finding his way back to his mother's womb. And towards the end of the film, Anne writes a letter to her mother which sounds as if it's written to her lover. Towards the end, the scene of Anne crying in the bed with her mother looking on is repeated with Alix in her mother's place, but this time the mother figure crosses the space between them and holds her. This is the climax of the film.

Thus Anne Trister can be seen as a re-working of the Oedipus myth in feminist terms. The fall of Oedipus, as a tragic hero, comes about because, in his hubris he kills his father and marries his mother. The girl-child also experiences her first erotic attachment to the mother but in working out the conflicting emotions inherent in that relationship she rejects the mother and transfers her eroticism to the father. However this entails a rejection of solidarity with her own sex and an acceptance of her role as secondary to that of the male. In Lacanian terms, it also entails an acceptance of patriarchal law and an entrance into the symbolic; the codification of reality by language. A return to the mother thus signifies a return to the imaginary, the pre-verbal world, that she is associated with. Although the mother is the spokesperson for the symbolic order she bars total access to it. The never-ending fascination of the relation with the mother holds part of women in the imaginary order and for her to be able to speak for herself she must acknowledge the permanence of this relationship.

As Anne herself says as she rejects the standard forms of the still life to achieve the conception and actualization of her imaginary architectural environment, "One has to be in an extremely serious situation to be able to move...I would like to have the courage of my dreams." For her this situation is the death of the idealized father. It leaves her in a state of disarray clearly articulated by the multiple perspectives and dizzying imbalance of her creation. But it also al-

lows her to find her way back to the mother through her relationship to Alix. In her role as therapist Alix also plays the part of the mother, mediating between the imaginary and the symbolic, dream and reality, past and present.

However, like the tragic hero, Anne, in her hubris, brings about her own fall. This is already implied in the falling red chair she paints on the wall. As in the original childhood conflict, she stands between the father and the mother, in this case Alix and her lover, Thomas. It is after Thomas comes and tells her that he loves Alix and won't let her be destroyed that she forgets to set the lock on the wheels of the scaffold and this oversight is the occasion for her fall.

In mythic terms, the fall of the hero is also the fall into time and reality, as in Adam's fall from Paradise. But it is also a fall to the natural cycle and can imply a sense of liberation, as well as a passage from innocence to experience. Anne's artistic creation is destroyed when the building it was housed in is demolished. But this scene also suggests a sense of liberation as fresh air and sunlight are allowed into its closed world and we hear the sound of the bird escaping.

The scene of Anne crying on the bed is re-enacted at the end of the film, but this time the return to the mother is achieved through her relationship with Alix. The film ends with a home-movie of Anne in Israel, besides her father's grave, but the desert around it has blossomed into flowering plants.

If *Anne Trister* for me succeeds less well than *La femme de l'hôtel* as a visual, artistic whole, it provides deeper and more complex characterizations in the two leads. Unlike the earlier film, these characters do not remain static, trapped in their neurosis, but achieve both transformation and growth.

Mary Alemany-Galway •

ANNE TRISTER d. Léa Pool sc. Marcel Beaulieu, Léa Pool, from an original idea by Léa Pool p. Roger Frappier, Claude Bonin exec.p. Roger Frappier 1st a.d. Mireille Goulet cont. Monique Champagne d.o.p. Pierre Mignot cam. Jean Lépine 1st asst.cam. Serge Lafortune 2nd asst.cam. Michel Bissonnette video cam. François Gill sp.efx.coord. Jacques Godbout assts. Philippe Palu, Pierre Rivard, Antonio Vidosa, Gilles Rieuppreux stills Bertrand Carrière sd. Richard Besse boom Yvon Benoit sd.efx. Ken Page asst. Vital Millette sd.efx.rec. Claude Chevalier mus.rec. Louis Hone mix. Jean-Pierre Joutel, Hans Peter Strobl p.man. Michel Dandavino, Marie-Andrée Vinet p.assts. Norbert Dufour, Ghislaine Mathieu, Tristan Roy loc.man. Pierre Houle, Pierre Plante unit man (Switz.) Gérard Rucy unit man (Isr.) Shlomo Paz admin. Monique Létourneau asst. Louise Cousineau, Evelyn Régimbald p.sec Johanne Pelletier, Nicole Bernier p.acct. Daniel Demers, Louise Dupré tech. coord. Edouard Davidovici post-p.sup. Suzanne Dussault painted environment concept & d. Geneviève Desgagnés, Daniel Sirdey assembled by Marie Maltais, Peter Hastings, Caroline Drouin assts. Greg Charlton, Georges Léonard, Paola Ridolfi art d. Vianney Gauthier asst.art d. Patrice Bengle on-set props Daniel Huysmans props Ian Lavoie, Pierre Gauthier cost. Gaudeline Sauriol dresser Marie-Anne Carter make-up Diane Simard hair Gaétan Noisieux, Lyne Normandin hd.lighting Roger Martin elect. Normand Viau, Jean Trudeau trainee Sylvaine Dufaux key grip Yvon Boudrias grip Jean-Pierre Lamarche loc.scout Michel Dandavino ed. Michel Arcand asst.ed. Alain Belhumeur orig.mus. René Dupéré with Daniel Deshaime mus. Sylvain Clavette, Claude Vendette mus.rights Evelyn Régimbald, "De la main gauche" comp.& sung by Danielle Messia, "Kaddisch" by Maurice Ravel int.by Marie-Danielle Parent, soprano, and the Studio C chamber orchestra directed by Richard Hoenich, "Ridiculous Love" comp. & interpreted by Daniel Lavoie, "Primadonna" by Gianna Nannini p.c. National Film Board of Canada, and Les Films Vision 4 Inc. produced with the participation of the Société Générale du Cinéma du Québec, Téléfilm Canada and the Société de Radio-Télévision du Québec dist. Ciné 360 Inc. running time: 115 mins. l.p. Albane Guilhe, Louise Marleau, Lucie Laurier, Guy Thauvette, Hugues Quester, Nuvit Ozdogru, Kim Yaroshevskaya.

Yves Simoneau's **Pouvoir intime**

"God, that was good! But, uh...what's the point?"

— overheard after screening

A black screen: the darkness oppressive as the gritty sound-track insinuates itself into consciousness, then the story slowly unfurls with deliberate, careful pace. Now a unique visual style washes over the screen: the first characters you see are in eerily beautiful shadows reminiscent of the black and white classics of the thriller genre, yet made prosaic by a strange new voice. As further characters are introduced, each with a different and spectacular cinematic device (overhead travels, back to cameras, low-angle backward, etc.) you feel them gaining a physical existence with a control of effects that belies this director's youth, but not his talent.

By the time the audience cries out in unison at the first surprise fright, we're hooked.

It is, indeed, at the visceral level, where thrillers should act, that *Pouvoir intime* works so astonishingly well. Director and Genie-winner Yves Simoneau, 30, manipulates tension and suspense using a triple-whammy combination of masterful pacing, original visual style and a surprisingly effective soundtrack. Without resorting either to the genre's typical gore and car-chases, or to stereotype over-kill, he tells his story — in fact, grinds it into you. *Pouvoir intime* contains scenes that reverberate in one's consciousness days after viewing, as a distant echo of some forgotten horror. We live with these characters, their courage, their fears, their limitations, their failures. And we curse their deaths.

The premise of the story, the conflict between power and the lack of it, between control and being controlled, is transmitted through the vehicle of a

botched security truck robbery. The thieves, a pair of down-and-out ex-cons, the son of one of them and the girlfriend of the other, act under the illusion that they are working for themselves, for Big Money. Actually they are mere pawns in the hands of a powerful and mysterious civil servant and his seedy go-between who are after secret documents inside the truck in question. Only the ring-leader, Théo, is aware of the game.

Through an unforeseen turn of events, a guard is left still alive inside the truck after it has been successfully taken and hidden in an old theatrical warehouse. The plan for a quick getaway is foiled by the guard, who makes a courageous stand inside the locked vehicle despite every attempt the thieves make to dislodge him. The torment of each opposing faction as they strive against each other with courage, determination, violence and the threat of slow death makes for gritty scenes of incredible, blood-curdling power. This cinematic rendition of conflict is its purest, abject form, implicit and realistic, is among the strongest I've ever experienced in any Canadian film.

The script, co-written by Simoneau and actor Pierre Curzi, handles action, fear and tension better than it does the dialogue, which is adequate but unremarkable. True to the genre, all the female roles looked flat compared to their male counterparts. In an unsuccessful effort to add flesh to the Roxanne character (played by Marie Tifo), the script operates a stereotype-in-reverse. Instead of a chesty, squeaky-voiced blond bombshell, we have a plain, androgynous and square-boned woman who wanders into either men's or women's bathrooms indifferently, whose existence seems ill-defined and unrealistic.

The characters form the spectrum of the thriller format: 1) the manipulating bad guys, first lit in black and white shadows but moving on to artificial lighting, which, much like their interests, are preoccupied with exterior, modern, superficial desires; 2) the anti-heroic thieves, true "beautiful losers" of Canadian lore, who wear their humanness as a badge of glory and die with tears in their eyes; 3) the honest, good guy, security guard Martial, terrified,



• *Pouvoir intime* works at the visceral level: Jacques Godin holds Eric Brisebois as Marie Tifo and Pierre Curzi look on