

A Cinema Canada interview with Loyalties' director Anne Wheeler



Anne Wheeler and *Loyalties'* d.o.p. Vic Sarin

Since her first short *Teach Me To Dance* (1978) and in her subsequent award-winning dramatic shorts co-produced with Atlantis Films, *One's A Heifer* and *To Set Our House In Order*, as well as her feature-length work, the docudrama *A War Story* and for CBC's acclaimed *For The Record* series *Change of Heart*, Edmonton filmmaker Anne Wheeler's work has explored the tensions between the individual and the community, between heritage and prejudice.

In *Loyalties*, Wheeler's first feature film, selected as part of the Festival of Festivals' Perspectives Canada program, an aristocratic Briton (Susan Wooldridge) and a Métis woman (Tantou Cardinal) discover a friendship beyond class and national differences.

In the following Cinema Canada interview, critic William Beard speaks with Wheeler about her work so far, her Western sense of place, the priority she allows her actors, and the attention to detail that characterises her filmmaking.

by William Beard

Cinema Canada: At this point, you seem to have made the long haul, so to speak, from short Film Board documentaries, to a sort of long-format docu-drama, then into short fiction, and now theatrical features. Has this been a conscious progression?

Anne Wheeler: It wasn't an ultimate goal, actually. I'm not a filmmaker for whom the actual film is the reason I'm making films – I like to communicate with people. I would still make documentary films if that would be the best format to say something in particular. But yes, every step, every film I've made has had some new element in it for me to learn, so that I've been a rather cautious filmmaker – I haven't taken any large leaps or big risks in what I've taken on. I've been fairly confident that I can do every film that I initiate. And I suppose the whole theatrical element wouldn't have entered my life if the situation in Canada hadn't swung around in the last two or three years. Now it's feasible to make features – there is government support and interest in developing a feature film industry. And that really enabled me to make features. I guess I've been interested in making dramatic films since about 1977, when I made my first, which was *Teach Me to Dance*. There

aren't that many subjects I would make in documentary any more, because I find that I feel rather exploitive making documentary films.

Cinema Canada: Exploitive of your subjects, you mean?

Anne Wheeler: It's a format where you're really exploiting other people's lives, and the more emotional or the deeper you can dig into a person's life, the better the documentary. You know doing dramatic films you know that, everybody is there because they want to be there, and they're all being paid, and what you're going to say has been thought out in the long pre-production and the writing of the script, so not so much is being left to chance. And you hope that you've based it on truth, and on reality, and that you're not exploiting anybody.

Cinema Canada: Do you see yourself now as addressing a broader audience? I mean, working at the Board you had a kind of ready-made NFB audience.

Anne Wheeler: I got very frustrated at the Board with their distribution system. When you make a film for the Board, you may have a screening or two that you attend as a director, but the Film Board puts out so many films every year, and really isn't able to put a lot of energy into any one particular film. It's left up to people who haven't really worked on the film as to how the film will be treated, and if it will even get much of a distribution. You feel quite powerless – at least I felt quite powerless – as filmmaker with the Board. And there naver is a budget to involve a

filmmaker in the distribution – there may be a few bucks, but there really are very few dollars put into direct distribution of each film. So it gets really frustrating. For example, *Change of Heart*, which I made almost three years ago, now belongs to the Film Board – it didn't belong to the Film Board for a year because it was a co-production with the CBC, so the CBC owned it television-wise for the first year – and it got one screening on television and was hardly ever seen again. And you just know that film has a broader audience than one television viewing.

Cinema Canada: Moving away from the Film Board was a turning point, then?

Anne Wheeler: It was a big turning point. Certainly it put me in a much riskier position. I didn't have the constant support and I didn't have a wage coming in every month. But it meant that I could be more the artist, more the creative person, and I could write and direct. And when I look over my résumé, I realize that I've been more productive out of the Film Board in terms of the number of projects I worked on than when I was on-staff.

Cinema Canada: One might see yours as an almost model career for a regional filmmaker. You've never gotten away from your roots, or the milieu around you, and yet you've succeeded in making a feature with a potentially international market. I wonder whether you feel that maybe this kind of truth-to-place might be the best way for Canadian films to be internationally viable?

William Beard teaches in humanities at the University of Alberta.

Anne Wheeler: I have to hang on to that belief, that films have to be rooted in some sort of historical truth, or reality of the present. I mean I'm not in it to be making a lot of money or to produce pure entertainment. There's got to be some substance to my films, and if there's to be depth it's got to be based on some area I feel confidence in making a statement about. And although I've travelled a fair amount and have lived in places like India and Africa for short periods of time, I'm glad that to this point I've rooted my films in Western Canada. I expect that probably in the next 10 years I will broaden the base of my filmmaking...

Cinema Canada: ...But for your reasons rather than production reasons or business reasons?

Anne Wheeler: They will always be films to which I am personally connected in some way. I've bought the rights to a small children's book called *Angel Square*, which was written by a guy called Brian Doyle, and it's really a kind of autobiographical childhood story of growing up in Ottawa – and because he's so familiar with what he's written, and I feel it's written with integrity and humour and everything. I can connect with that kind of project. But just to make up a fantasy story for pure entertainment and monetary reasons is not interesting to me.

Cinema Canada: You have a production company (Wheeler-Hendron Enterprises), and you were a co-producer on *Loyalties*. Do you feel you have to exercise a producer's function to some extent to make the films you want to?

Anne Wheeler: Especially being a regional filmmaker, I do – I have to hang onto as much power as I can. I'm so far away from the centres of power in film in Canada that I feel I can get disconnected from a project pretty easily if I don't retain some kind of power. I'm going to do a feature, I hope, with Atlantis where they'll just hire me straight as a writer-director, but my priorities will always be always be films that I own and initiate.

Cinema Canada: How did the *Loyalties* project arise?

Anne Wheeler: I had directed *Change of Heart*, which Sharon Riis had written, and I wanted to work with her again very much. I think the feeling was mutual. I felt ready to take on a feature project, and I have a number of historical dramas that I'd like to make, but I was advised that if I could start with something that was contemporary it would probably be wise just because of costs. Sharon and I worked together so well; it was a kind of tried-and-true relationship. So I started it as a producer, in the way that the whole development of scripts etc. has been set up in Canada. It's not directors who initiate projects; which I think is quite wrong in some ways. I put on a producer's hat and went to the usual places – Telefilm, the CBC, the AMPDC – to raise money to hire a writer: Sharon.

We started to develop the story together, and once we got it to about a third or fourth draft, which was quite a good draft and close to the production script in fact, then I didn't want to spend the next six months of my life in Toronto looking for money, and I wanted to have another producer involved. So I went producer-shopping –

I literally went down to Toronto and for a couple of weeks met nearly every producer in town, and promoted this script to them. I liked going that way because they know what I'm selling, and it's fairly clear whether they like or want to do that film right then and there, rather than trying to develop with them and struggle over what the film is we're going to make. I met Ron Lillie and Bill Johnston, who were putting together this twinning package, and the fact that my script had a British lead and would be of interest to people in Britain kind of fitted into their plans, so we formed a company together and we're 50/50 owners.

Cinema Canada: The twinning arrangement didn't influence the nature of the film, but rather the other way around.

Anne Wheeler: Yes, the nature of the film got this twinning arrangement together more quickly.

Cinema Canada: And was Dumbarton's presence instrumental in getting Susan Wooldridge involved in the project?

Anne Wheeler: Only in that the Telefilm rules, and the CBC rules, say you can't have foreign leads if you use their money. But the fact that we had \$450,000 of English money in it gave us a good argument that we should have a British lead – otherwise we wouldn't have been able to. But Dumbarton didn't find her or promote her to us or anything. I went over with the casting director and we auditioned about 25 women for the part and chose her. They were excited and supportive of the decision.

Cinema Canada: Was there any kind of audience or market research? I understand Telefilm likes that kind of thing to be done.

Anne Wheeler: I don't think there was. There is still concern that it is a rather unique film, and selling it is going to be a real challenge. You know, it's a sort of mystery, it's a sort of issue film, many things, but it's a film unto itself. You don't want to promote it and give away the ending. So there's still dialogue going on as to how exactly to sell the film. But I think it was a very good script – the dialogue was very very clear – and people just liked the script.

Cinema Canada: How much control do you have over post-production – I don't mean just editing, but distribution and release strategies?

Anne Wheeler: We cut the film in my backyard, right to a frozen cut. I went for a last week in Toronto and did a few trims, but basically the cut was done in my backyard. Bill Johnston, one of the producers, flew out for two days during the editing and we made a few changes then, but basically it was left in my backyard to complete. I worked with the sound editor and the composer and went through the mix and pretty well saw it right through to the end.

I feel I had a fair amount of control. I was never vetoed. As for the distribution with Norstar/Simcom, we talk fairly regularly. I recognize they have way more experience in this than I do – I've never distributed a feature. We talk about to what extent we should go to festivals with it, and keeping it to the Festival of Festivals and opening it in the fall – those sorts of decisions. I expect they'll run the promotional material past me, and if I made a big fuss I

could stop it, if necessary. I don't feel overpowered by them. We're doing it fairly co-operatively.

Cinema Canada: *Loyalties* was entered at Cannes. Was it an official Canadian entry?

Anne Wheeler: Actually, it was taken to Cannes by the British – Dumbarton took it, and took Susan Wooldridge there as well.

Cinema Canada: How was it received?

Anne Wheeler: Very well. *Variety* did a very nice thing on it. Otherwise we have kept the press fairly minimal. The *Globe & Mail's* Jay Scott saw it in order for it to go there, and the European critics have also agreed to hold their reviews until it is released. Susan talked to a lot of them, and she said that their reactions seemed to be very positive.

Cinema Canada: Did the increased scale of everything in a feature give you any special problems – as a producer, a writer or a director?

Anne Wheeler: It wasn't all that different from doing *Change of Heart*. It was a bigger budget, and it still befuddles me as to why I didn't get more time

Cinema Canada: One of the most attractive features of your work with Sharon Riis in *Loyalties* and in *Change of Heart* is a wonderful feeling for detail. These films are full of little touches that deftly characterize people and situations and end up giving the sense of a recognizable, three-dimensional world rather than just an effective story. Is this something you consciously strive for – the throwaway line, the marginal observation?

Anne Wheeler: Yes. For instance, with Beatrice's house in *Loyalties* – I spent a day with Vera Martin just decorating it with her, as if she lived there, because she has lived in places like that. There were some details in the script, but we took those as a beginning, and the prop department had a whole lot of stuff, and we just decorated it together. Being a non-actor, that was very important to her – that it not feel like a movie, that it feel real, or I probably wouldn't have gotten the performance from her that I did. But it comes also from the fact that Sharon's writing about people she lives with every day, and certainly I have rel-



• *Loyalties* script-writer Sharon Riis

to shoot it – it was very, very fast. And I had a lot of non-actors, so it wasn't like the money and the format enabled me to hire top-notch actors, because the script demanded a cast that wasn't easy to find amongst the professional acting community. Actually I didn't feel there was a great deal of difference between directing this and directing small dramas. My strengths, I think, are with actors. So I run it very much as I would a smaller film, in that I work out all my technicalities before I get on-set – I do a shot list and know pretty clearly how I'm going to cover a scene and shoot it – to free me to work with the actors, which works very well for me.

In terms of money and that sort of stuff...we had union problems, which I've never had before. We had union problems because it was getting into that range of money, which I found very frustrating. Our driver got as much as our art director, and we had a crew used to working for American films, and so were used to a certain kind of treatment, in terms of food and accommodation, which had to be paid for. Actually, the amount of time and scope that I was given as a director wasn't significantly different than if I had been doing something for half the money.

atives in rural Alberta and a sense of what it's like there. It goes back to us regional people writing about who we know.

Cinema Canada: Would you describe yourself as a committed filmmaker – in the social and political sense? Many of your films have what might be called a feminist viewpoint, and many of them deal with people who are seen as suffering from oppression to some degree.

Anne Wheeler: I guess I'm fairly serious – but I'm amazed, actually, at how many laughs *Loyalties* gets at a screening. Ironically, in university I was close to being a comedian, doing a lot of theatre and doing a lot of character parts – and I'd like to get some of that into my films, more than I have. The serious nature of my first dramatic films comes from a documentary background, where you feel that if you're going to spend the money and exploit these lives, you should treat things fairly seriously, and not lightly. I guess you could say I'm a serious filmmaker as opposed to an entertainment filmmaker.

Cinema Canada: Within the category of serious filmmaker, do you feel

you're someone who's concerned with social issues, as opposed to, for example, existential ones?

Anne Wheeler: No, I think *War Story* is pretty existential. It could have been much more political in terms of the Japanese and the war than it was. I found that I got more fascinated with the doctor becoming the hero, and why people needed heroes, and what kept people alive. But certainly I see film as a medium which will help promote a universal understanding, which hopefully will make for a better world. I can't see going through all this just for the heck of it.

Cinema Canada: You couldn't call *Loyalties* a particularly political film, but it does deal with human and cultural values that make some kind of social statement. I'm thinking not only of the feminist element, but also of the contrast between middle-class and small-town lifestyles, and between white and native cultures.

Anne Wheeler: Yes, I call myself a feminist but I always flinch when other people call me a feminist, because I'm not sure that I know what their definition of it is. I don't know why *Loyalties* would be called a feminist film – or if it was, would *Rambo* be called...whatever the opposite of feminist is? It happens to have two female characters who are the lead characters, and it's maybe dealing with an issue primarily of importance to women – but I would hope it is relevant to all people. So I flinch when people call it a feminist film, because that is immediately going to limit the audience, and I hope that it brings in a broad audience, not just a converted audience.

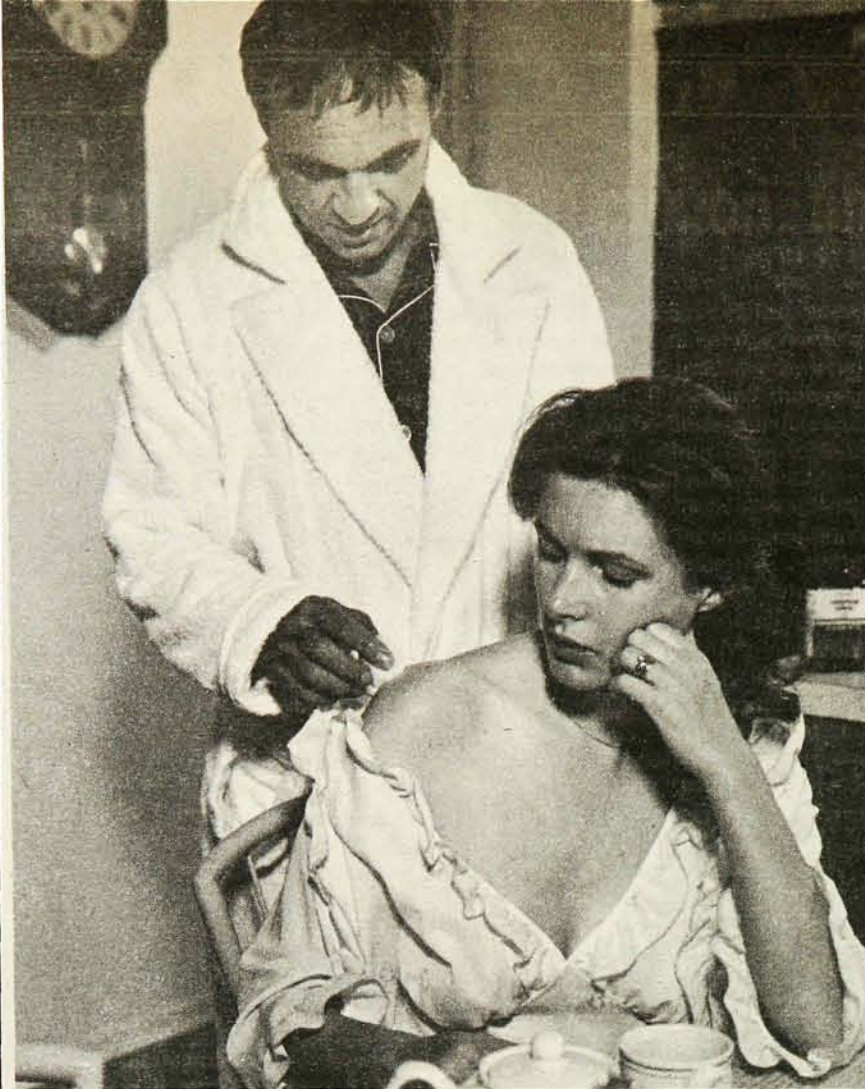
Cinema Canada: The friendship between Rosanne and Lily despite their vast differences in background is obviously a central feature of the movie. Rosanne says at one point, "The only difference between her and me is money" – and that seems to encapsulate something crucial.

Anne Wheeler: Yes – and it's a hell of a difference. We were trying to show that there are values that are pretty universal if you could get in touch with them. We gave them both quite a few kids, so they obviously both had mothering instincts. I think the whole money thing will continue to be a difference. A lot of people come out of the movie wondering what's going to happen after the movie. But you know it's going to be a very hard battle, and if it weren't for Lily's money, Rosanne wouldn't have a hope in hell – she did come in with a loaded gun.

Cinema Canada: Lily might not have a hope in hell, either, at the end of the film. Is she going to stay in Lac La Biche, for example?

Anne Wheeler: Yeah, is she going to stay in Lac La Biche, in Canada or is she going to go back to England? We couldn't pick up all those bits. We wanted to leave it on the note that they were at least going to begin the fight together. How far they would take it is, then, open to question.

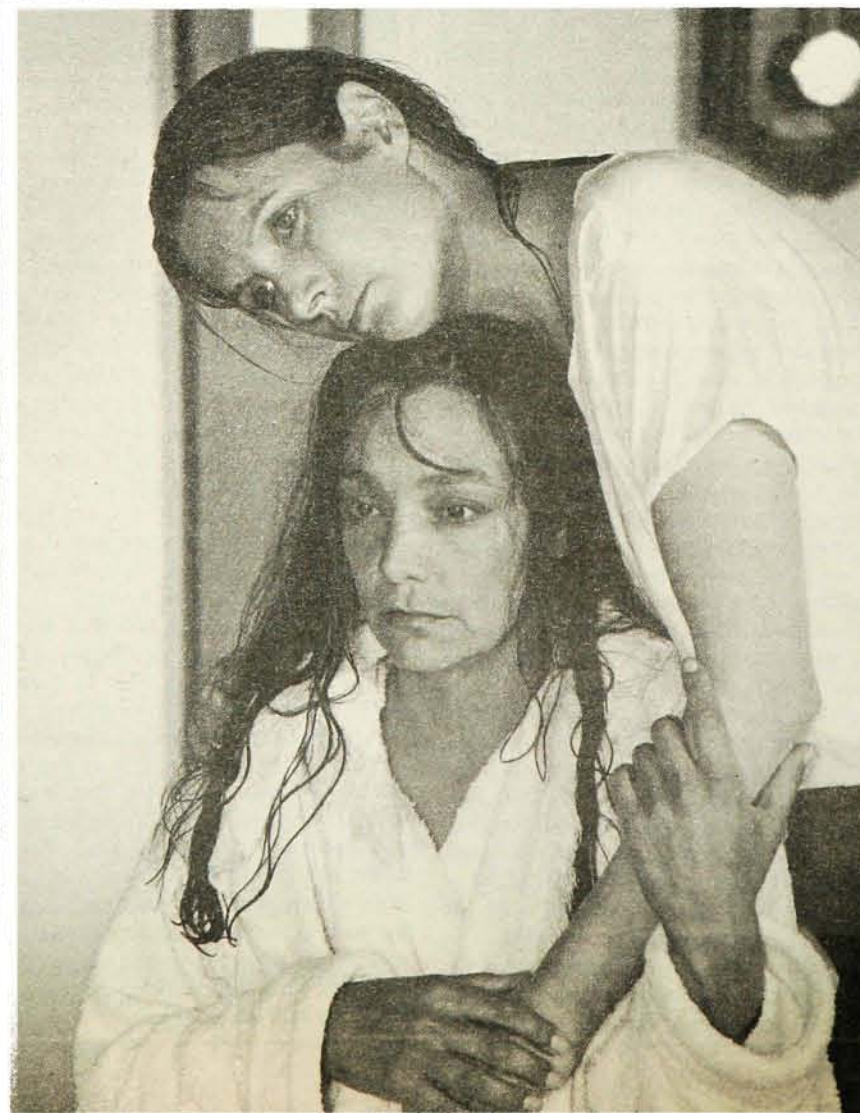
Cinema Canada: The central characters in many of your films often have to put up with a lot, and even undergo traumatic experiences, but there's never any pessimism in your work. You seem to emphasize people's strength and resilience, and to feel not only that they can survive their crises,



• *Loyalties*: the murderous David (Ken Welsh) and the aristocratic Lily (Susan Wooldridge)

I have to hang onto the belief that films have to be rooted in some sort of historical truth or reality of the present. I mean I'm not in it to be making a lot of money or to produce pure entertainment.

• *Loyalties*'s survivors: Rosanne (Tantou Cardinal) and Lily



but grow as a result of them.

Anne Wheeler: I think that's a pretty fair statement. With *War Story* there were a lot of dark sides that I tended not to get into in great depth – the torture and such. I usually feel like I've got to leave some strength and hope at the end of a film, and a sense of growth. I guess that's what gives the films a right to exist, in a way.

Cinema Canada: Some might feel that there was a touch of sentimentality, even, at the conclusion of *Loyalties*. What Lily and Rosanne and their children have gone through is pretty awful.

Anne Wheeler: I hope by looking so closely at these two individuals that you have a sense that certainly it could have gone the other way – and probably in real life it would have gone the other way – that is, that Lily, having stood by this man once, will continue to stand by him. I mean, statistically, that's the truth. So the film is the exception. We played around a lot with the idea that Lily was going to call the police on this woman, and revert back to her old values. But it just seemed to lose its purpose by doing that.

Cinema Canada: I get the feeling at the end, that what the two women have found is ample recompense for what they and their children have suffered. Is that going too far?

Anne Wheeler: I don't think it goes too far. I mean I certainly want the audience to feel moved. I want them to see enough of Lily in the first part to know that she is very upright and has made this decision before, and there is a chance she would make it again – to stand by her husband. But I hope I make the rape so horrific that you would find it equally hard to believe that she wouldn't do something about it.

Cinema Canada: It seems to me there are a lot of unanswered questions in *Loyalties* about the past, as well as about the future. I wonder, for example, what the relationships between Lily and David, or Rosanne and Eddie, were like before we see them. How did Lily react to the incident in Colchester, were there any signs of that kind of behaviour in her husband before, and so on? And actually I kind of wondered that about Edna and Bob in *Change of Heart*. I don't think it's the films' need to give you that kind of information, or that they don't work perfectly well without it – but it does seem that they do choose not to give it to you.

Anne Wheeler: If you give all that information, it becomes a different kind of film – the tail starts to wag the dog. You've got all this information you feel the audience needs, and so you can weigh yourself down with exposition, rather than just deal with the present. In terms of the past of both those couples, the actors and I went through their relationships from the time they'd first met, so there'd be a sense, wherever possible, of knowing where they'd come from.

If you told much more about the past, the mystery would be given away. Obviously, the first scene of the film is just a tickler. Again, we played with the idea of knowing what had happened in England, either through scenes or some way of indicating to the audience that they were trying to escape from some specific kind of scandal. But the dramatic tension really seemed to drag. So we had that in scripts but took it out before

we shot. So we had that in the script but took it out before we shot.

Cinema Canada: *What about the character of David? He's certainly capable of pretty monstrous acts.*

Anne Wheeler: I think Kenny Welsh outdoes himself in the role. And it was not an easy role to get a good actor to try, because a lot of men are going to think that it's going to ruin their careers to have such a role in their repertoire – it paints them with one they don't want to be painted with: they want to be a hero. So I was thrilled when he decided he would take the part – some people wouldn't even audition for it. Probably in both of the films that Sharon and I have done together, the male characters aren't as developed as I would like them to be. I feel that they're a weakness, if I'm to identify a weakness. Because there aren't too many scenes for us to get close to David – and yet if we get too close to him, we'll know what his history is. We kind of get bits and pieces: that he was educated in London, that he comes from a working-class family, that he is obviously trying to cover his past and doesn't like people knowing where he's from, those kinds of hints. So he suffers from being the mysterious character. I really am thrilled with Ken's performance, though.

Cinema Canada: *He's one of the very few North American actors, I think, who can do an absolutely faultless British accent – in fact he does two of them here, a Northern one and an educated one.*

Anne Wheeler: Susan was nervous about that when we were casting a

Canadian for this part. She was there to help him, if ever he needed it, but I don't think he ever did. It would have been nice if he could have had one or two more scenes, but in terms of choosing priorities, we couldn't figure out a scene that would move the story along for him and not give away the plot. We couldn't afford to just stop and get to know David, in this story.

Cinema Canada: *I wonder if there's any significance to the fact that the white male here goes from plausibility and respectability to monstrosity, whereas the Métis male goes from drunkenness and assault and battery to sympathy and consideration at the end?*

Anne Wheeler: Yes, it's conscious – we were conscious that we were doing it. I had done a lot of research on sexual child abuse a couple of years ago when I was at the Board, and there are those stereotypes which it's important to destroy. Because, of course, most sexual child abuse is done by people whom the child respects or cares for. We didn't go for incest – but we wanted him to be a good doctor, an attractive person, someone whom the average person would trust.

Cinema Canada: *Would you say that landscape and climate have symbolic significance in the film? I wondered, for example, why it's raining so markedly in so many scenes.*

Anne Wheeler: It rains I think twice, in terms of time. It's done for mood, and we certainly arranged that so the whole rape scene would have a particular effect. I didn't want to be explicit; I didn't

want to exploit the actors, but I wanted it to be a pretty awful scene – and dramatically rain helps me that way, and darkness. I would have had to be much more explicit if I had done it in sunlight, for instance. So it's definitely moody, and we tried to work it in twice so that it doesn't just come on with that act. It also comes on when there's that nice scene with Eddie and his kids jump-starting the car.

Cinema Canada: *The performances in Loyalties, and also in Change of Heart, were just terrific: large casts, a wide range of characters, and not a weak link anywhere. Can you say something about the casting process, and also about your relationship with the actors before and during the shoot?*

Anne Wheeler: Some of that might stem from the fact that I have acted, and acted for some pretty awful directors – non-directors. I really put a lot of emphasis and power into the casting. I had a casting director for both of those two films, Gail Carr, who cast both of them, who again is another working relationship that I am really grateful for. I want to work with her again and again, because we have the same sort of sensibilities about talent. In both films we had to cast a lot of non-actors, so we had to judge people's innate qualities, and their intuition, and their raw untrained talent, and we never disagreed on our choices.

I do a lot of different things in casting. I put a lot of energy into casting – I'll send actors playing the roles I'm casting them for into improvisations, and see how they maintain that character, or if

they really understand that character and what that character would do in this situation. The same with kids. I play a lot of games with them, to see if they're just being cute or if they really know how to act – or stay real, basically, because with kids you're pretty well casting them for themselves. On the set, I'm just not a "Colonel" kind of director. Performances are the priority, and I make it clear to the whole technical team – if I need more time for the performances, I'll cut down my shots and I'll cut down on the complexities of the shots, and simplify everything in order to give time to the performances, if that aspect of things isn't working. And the actors know that I give performances priority – and that, for some reason I don't understand, seems to be a rarity in Canadian film.

Cinema Canada: *A related question, then, might be: how important is visual style to you?*

Anne Wheeler: If I'd had more time I think *Loyalties* would have more visual style, but I was lucky to have Vic Sarin, who has shot so much news and documentary, and we worked very quickly together. We often had to completely throw out what we'd planned, because of weather or other factors. There just was not enough flexibility in the schedule to do what we wanted to do. But for me, editing, shooting style, music, all those components of film – if you really notice one of them, if it jumps out at you, then I think you've put too much emphasis on that.

Cinema Canada: *The look of One's a Heifer, and also Change of Heart, I*

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thought, really captured landscape in a way – living in Alberta myself and seeing a lot of movies which were not made in Alberta, and then suddenly seeing the place on the screen, and in a very beautiful way. *Loyalties* didn't quite seem to have that quality.

Anne Wheeler: It was lack of time, and I didn't have any second-unit days to speak of, so we couldn't just dwell on the place – and Lac La Biche is a hard place to get visually on film. Also there was so much content that I could only afford in terms of time to use it as a backdrop or as a context – like for the party, where you have suburbia on the edge of that big wild lake, things like that. There are scenes that are on the editing floor which I miss, but I couldn't afford to linger. I guess I could piece up the editing and make time for that, but the performances, again, are the priority for me – what happens between those people. So I make the choices. There weren't a whole lot of plain, ordinary environmental shots, and I tried to choose the locations that were indicative – Beatrice's place, and so on.

Cinema Canada: How much of the look of your films is influenced by the DOP you happen to be working with?

Anne Wheeler: I always choose my own locations, and always work out with them beforehand what kind of lighting and what kinds of shots I'm going to have, what order I'm going to take them in and all that. I've shot half-a-dozen documentaries myself, and so have some dialogue with camera people. But I think you see a difference in the camera styles in the films that I

make, so they obviously make some contribution. I'm the kind of director who tries to get the best out of everybody that's working with me: choose the people you work with very carefully, and try to have them do their job as well as they can, so that their individual styles aren't smothered, and so they don't feel that they're continually doing things that are unnatural to them or against their judgement. In the same way that I cast actors for certain qualities, and try to help them give the greatest performance of their life, I try to do the same with my sound people, my art director, or whatever, and only stop them when they stop being a team member – when they start trying to outshine the rest.

Cinema Canada: Are you happy with the way *Loyalties* turned out? Obviously you've got to be relatively happy, but do you feel you got everything you wanted to get?

Anne Wheeler: I don't think a director ever...if I was totally happy I'd probably stop making movies. There were certainly lots of things I wanted to do with the film that I didn't get to do, and again that was a matter of time. I'm really happy with the performances. But, as I said, in order to get them I did have to sacrifice some stylistic things. The money did get a bit tight at the end. I probably would have spent a bit more on the music if I'd had the cash to do it. So these are things that you want to improve upon, no doubt about it. But in general for a first, low-budget feature, I'm reasonably satisfied.

Cinema Canada: Do you see yourself

I could make an exceptionally good living right now just doing series' work. You come in for a week and prep for a week and then shoot for a week and then you're gone – but raising kids and having a sense that life doesn't go on for ever, I want to put a lot of time into a few films

consciously progressing as a director? Are there aspects of your craft that you've seen you're getting better at, or that you'd like to develop further, or new things that you'd like to try?

Anne Wheeler: You will see more humour in my pictures in the future.

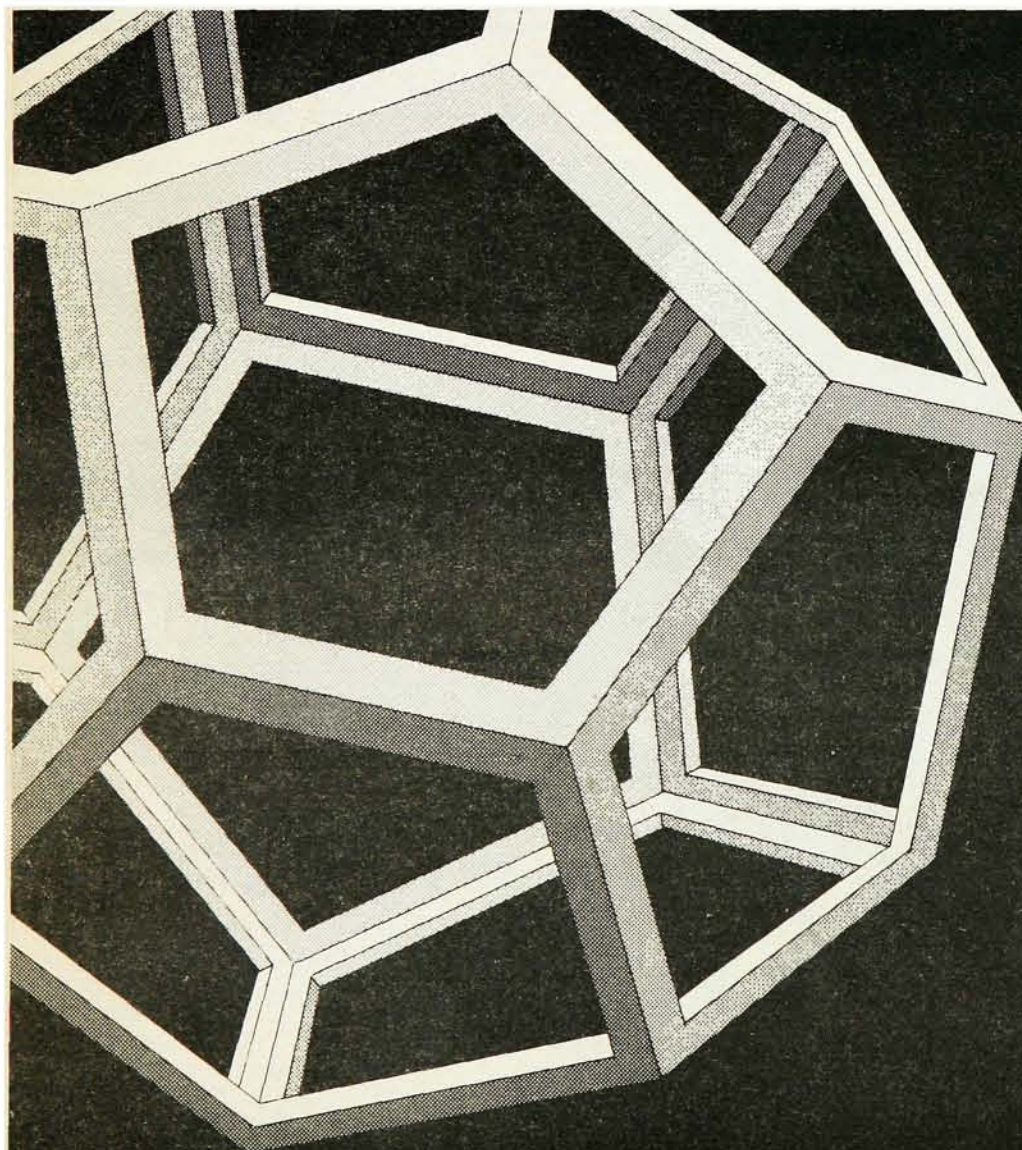
With growing confidence you get rid of those awkward moments where you feel a film is self-conscious. I think my films have become gradually less self-conscious over the years. I've got a strong musical/light-comedy background, and I'd like to have time to use those things, and feel confident to use them, more in the future. I don't usually take a project on unless I know I'm going to learn something from it, and I try not to perform the same exercise twice.

Cinema Canada: What's coming up next?

Anne Wheeler: I've decided to write and direct my own stuff for awhile. So I'm writing a script called *Bye Bye Blues* inspired by my mother's side of the war story, of coming home to the prairies and supporting a family by being in a band. It's been much fictionalized, though. It has a lot of good spirit and music in it, and meaning, I hope. And then I'm doing one for Atlantis Films called *Cowboys Never Cry*, which is based on an Alberta book. And I've bought this children's book which I'm going to develop.

Cinema Canada: You're busy, then.

Anne Wheeler: I get a lot of offers to do series work. I could make an exceptionally good living right now just doing series work. You come in for a week and prep for a week and then shoot for a week, and then you're gone – they don't even want you there for the editing. Which might keep my looks up – but raising kids, and having a sense that life doesn't go on for ever, I guess, I want to put a lot of time into a few films.



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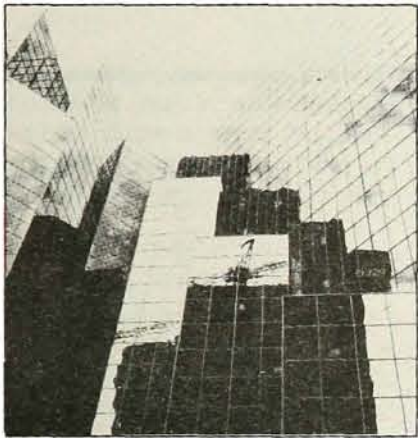
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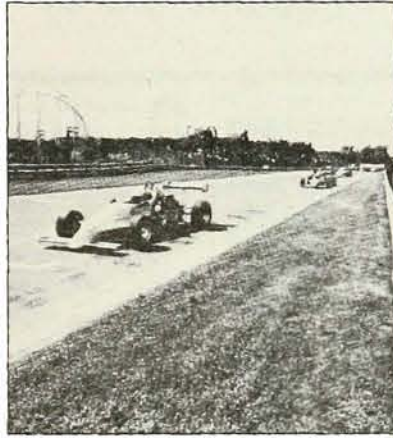
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