Jean-Daniel Lafond’s
Les Traces du rêve

The screen is white with snow. Soon a heavy figure emerges from the white space. The camera zooms in on a man who fills the frame. The man is one of Quebec’s leading filmmakers, Pierre Perrault, who this time does not hold a camera. Perrault plods through the woods imposing himself as the master. It is not by mere chance that the director, Jean-Daniel Lafond, lets us hear his subject; voice first. Perrault’s poetic narration invites us to share his dream of giving back Quebec’s tradition to real people in real places. It is a dream which Les Traces du rêve captures.

In the style of Perrault, who gives the Quebecois great credit, Lafond takes us on a journey. He speaks to us from the social uproar of Cannes to his own portrait. Lafond is of Quebecois heritage and his film captures a dream. Lafond moves towards a peaceful place in the woods, imposing himself as the narrator. Lafond invites us to share his dream with others.

Perrault’s l’Ile-aux-Merens, which Les Traces du rêve captures, is a dream which Lafond lets us experience. Lafond, inspired by Perrault’s story, produces his own portrait. Lafond follows in Perrault’s footsteps and captures his own portrait.

In Les Traces du rêve, Lafond films Stephane-Albert and Maurice the crosses of Béja. Together with Perrault’s living document of the voice, the film captures Perrault’s own style of cinema direct.

From Cannes to the woods, we are taken on a journey to Béja. The philosopher Michel Serres, and the poet Michel Garneau are also part of the voyage. Lafond discovers the past in Perrault’s film, and compares it to the present of Béja. Focusing on Pierre Perrault’s trilogy where Béja is the theme, Lafond avoids Perrault’s more controversial work. Lafond uses Leopold Tremblay, (one of the men portrayed in Perrault’s trilogy) as a link between the 60’s and the present.

Things haven’t changed profoundly. Lafond reveals an increasingly clearer portrait of Pierre Perrault, cutting back and forth from the men’s conversations. Lafond evokes reactions in Perrault, reactions which contribute to the tracing of his own portrait.

Twenty years separate Pour la suite du monde (1963) from La Bête lumineuse (1983). Throughout his work, the theme of men (not women) in communion with nature remains constant. Lafond translates his own idea of what Pierre Perrault is all about – the filmmaker, the poet, the nationalist. Perrault is filmed with critics, philosophers, writers, poets, musicians and actors in his films, and Lafond captures the reactions in Perrault, reactions which contribute to the tracing of his own portrait.

The next scene shows Lafond on his own in the woods. Lafond is inspired by Perrault’s story and produces his own portrait. Lafond, inspired by Perrault’s trilogy, produces his own portrait.

Soon Lafond is one of the rare filmmakers who tells us that her name is Fanny and that she has lost her parents but that she is less sad at night. On the screen we get a long-shot of a horse passing by in front of the film. Lafond is of Quebecois heritage and his film captures a dream. Lafond moves towards a peaceful place in the woods, imposing himself as the narrator. Lafond invites us to share his dream with others.

Through her conversation with her grandmother, we learn that the child’s parents are dead and that now that the grandmother is sick, Fanny will have to go and live with Jean-Claude, who is vaguely referred to as her “uncle.” Thus, in the first 10 minutes, the basic situation of the film is set up – an orphaned child, with the possibility of a “family.” The next scene shows Jean-Claude at an office party where children and their antics seem to chaff away, a top-of-the-morning bachelor, unable to relate to them and is only concerned with his music and being able to devote himself to it during the coming year.

What is a children’s film? How would one define it and what is its purpose? The obvious examples are the Walt Disney films which have dominated our screens. But children’s films are made all over the world and, in the socialist countries, special attention is paid to their production and distribution. Like any form of entertainment, they can also have educational value, aiding children in their psychological development and helping them to cope with the world. Bruno Bettelheim, the renowned American psychologist, has also referred to children’s fairy tales. Films are also a mass medium and, as such, are vehicles for the values and ideologies particular to their culture. Unfortunately, in Quebec and Canada, there has been much support for children’s films. Except for Rock Demers’ Tales For All series, for which Bach et Bottine is the third of seven projected films, the previous two are Mélançon’s La Guerre des tuques and Michael Rubbo’s The Peanut Butter Solution, much of the work in this area has been done specifically for television.

It seems to me that one of the crucial ingredients of a children’s film is seeing the world from a child’s point of view – children make little distinction between the real world and the world of the imagination. This is immediately evident in Bach et Bottine. Fanny is quickly defined by her interactions with her grandmother and her environment. In the film, we see the resemblance of the heroine of the Swedish books and films.