

Terence Maccartney

## Filgate's

Morley Callaghan

## First Person Singular:

**M**orley Callaghan - *First Person Singular* is a documentary made by a master - Terence Macartney-Filgate - in first-class form. Of course, he's more than ably aided by his subject, Morley Callaghan, a runaway talker if ever there was one, whose reminiscences of his early life run by in breathless profusion.

Callaghan walks each day in the Toronto where he was born - Irish and Catholic - at the turn of the century. He remarks that he never felt different, and only later realized that he was born in an outpost of the British Empire.

In addition to Callaghan's own voice, R.H. Thompson chronicles the early days, while the period is visualized through some lovely archival footage of Toronto - its streets thronged with people served by streetcars and graced by noble buildings. The '20s, with jazz and speakeasies and bright young things whooping it up, flashes by. Amid all this nostalgia, Callaghan tells of his student summer job at the *Toronto Star*, and of how he met Ernest Hemingway who was a foreign correspondent for a while. It was at the *Toronto Star* that Heming-

way read one of Callaghan's short stories, while the young writer sat opposite him with the galleys of an early Hemingway novel.

This encounter led Hemingway to get some of Callaghan's short stories published in American magazines in Paris, and to Morley and his bride arriving at that fabulous city in the '20s, where they met with Hemingway and other illustrious literary leading lights - F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ezra Pound, James Joyce.

Callaghan returned to Paris for this film, and roams and remembers in a sprightly, cheerful manner sitting in café-bars conjuring up the past, a fund of stories spilling from his lips as though the action all took place yesterday.

Callaghan's lengthy and prolific career is commented on by (among others) Margaret Atwood, Mordecai Richler, publisher Louise Denny, and his longtime lunch companion Robert Weaver. His two sons, Michael and Barry, provide more personal glimpses.

He is now 84, and still writing. He walks aggressively, incessantly, throughout the film - and talks the same way. The opinions, anecdotes, and ideas flow back and forth like the tides. The vitality leaps from the screen and rushes nonstop over the viewer. Indeed, if there's a complaint, it's that 48 minutes is not long enough, and the film is jam-packed with incident and movement. It should have been 90 minutes at least.

This is an effervescent look at one of Canada's enduring literary figures, directed by an enduring filmmaker, Terence Maccartney-Filgate, a pioneer of

the Candid Eye technique at the National Film Board in the '50s. Filgate displays all his formidable background and expertise in this fine example of a documentary that captures the flavour, merit and yes, ego of a leading Canadian writer, and a lot of details and tales of his early life. The weaving of the present-day with the past, the setting of the period, all skilfully blend to capture and enthrall the imagination, so that the viewer is left wanting to know more about Morley Callaghan, to read or re-read his books, and perhaps to sit at his feet and hear more stories and reminiscences.

Pat Thompson ●

p./d. Terence Macartney-Filgate. sc. Marilyn Powell. cam. Andrew Binnington, Terence Macartney-Filgate. ed. Christopher Reilly, Robert St. Hilaire. sd. Edmund Chong, Pierre Camacho, Jim Ottolini. narr. R.H. Thompson. Readings by Michael Kamer, Lorna Jackson. col. 48 mins.

Giuliano Montaldo's

## Control

*Control* is a well-intended television movie which raises the morality quotient of prime-time television. For this reason alone, this international co-production deserves a large audience. It should be seen.

Unfortunately, the script is not as developed as one would expect from Irish-born Brian Moore, a preeminent Canadian author now living in California. The screenplay starts slowly and ends abruptly; characterization is weak. One is left with the unresolved odyssey of 15 individuals who, after spending 20 days locked in a bomb shelter, emerge asking themselves 'why can't we live with each other without fear and loathing?'

Commendably, this question is clearly framed on prime-time television. A distinguished professor (Burt Lancaster) is employed by a politically motivated peace organization to lend his fine name to the publicity of a new state-of-the-art bomb shelter. The same international mix of 15 unwitting individuals are each offered \$10,000 upon completion of a 20-day stretch inside the luxury shelter and a \$5,000 bonus if there are no early defectors.

We are not aware, however, that the prof is scheming to turn this publicity stunt into a gut-wrenching experiment in human behaviour by simulating a nuclear attack outside the shelter. He does this by means of phony television and radio transmissions and a hysterical cast of thousands clamoring to break into the bomb shelter and hog all the bunkbeds.

Our friendly castaways on this nuclear age Gilligan's Island are in turn cast into a series of desperately predictable mini-misadventures in a weak attempt to profile and build character. The heating system overloads, (it gets really

hot); the young son of peace activist Kate Nelligan disappears - "where's Gilligan!" - (worries a lot of people including his mom) and is eventually found alive (but really cold) in a secret bomb shelter morgue.

There are many such diversionary, time-killing subplots in which several relationships begin to take shape. But only in one instance do two characters engage in a straightforward dialogue about the greater implications of living in a bomb shelter in 1987.

*Control* screams for dialogue; there is nothing else happening down there in the static grey concrete! An opportunity for subtle acting and bright writing, missed. Here, we might have seen characterization at its best with the various actors adapting the different personae of the nuclear arms debate - the dove, the hawk, those who believe that building a super bomb shelter is fatalistic and those who say it is a wise precaution.

Instead, we get Ben Gazzara, who does not cease being Ben Gazzara (as we've come to know him) literally summing up the story for a reporter after emerging from the big bunker. "You can't escape nuclear war even in a bomb shelter," says Gazzara.

The film ends on a freeze-frame close-up of Lancaster's best imploring stare. Lancaster is another actor whose star status exceeds his acting skill. Overworn Hollywood faces are somewhat of a distraction that tend to shine through and obscure the characters they portray.

Mercifully, Lancaster appears only at the beginning and end of the program but it is cleverly suggested, halfway through the story, that the prof is behind the scenes and in control. His human subjects, under close observation, are by this time convinced that nuclear war is imminent.

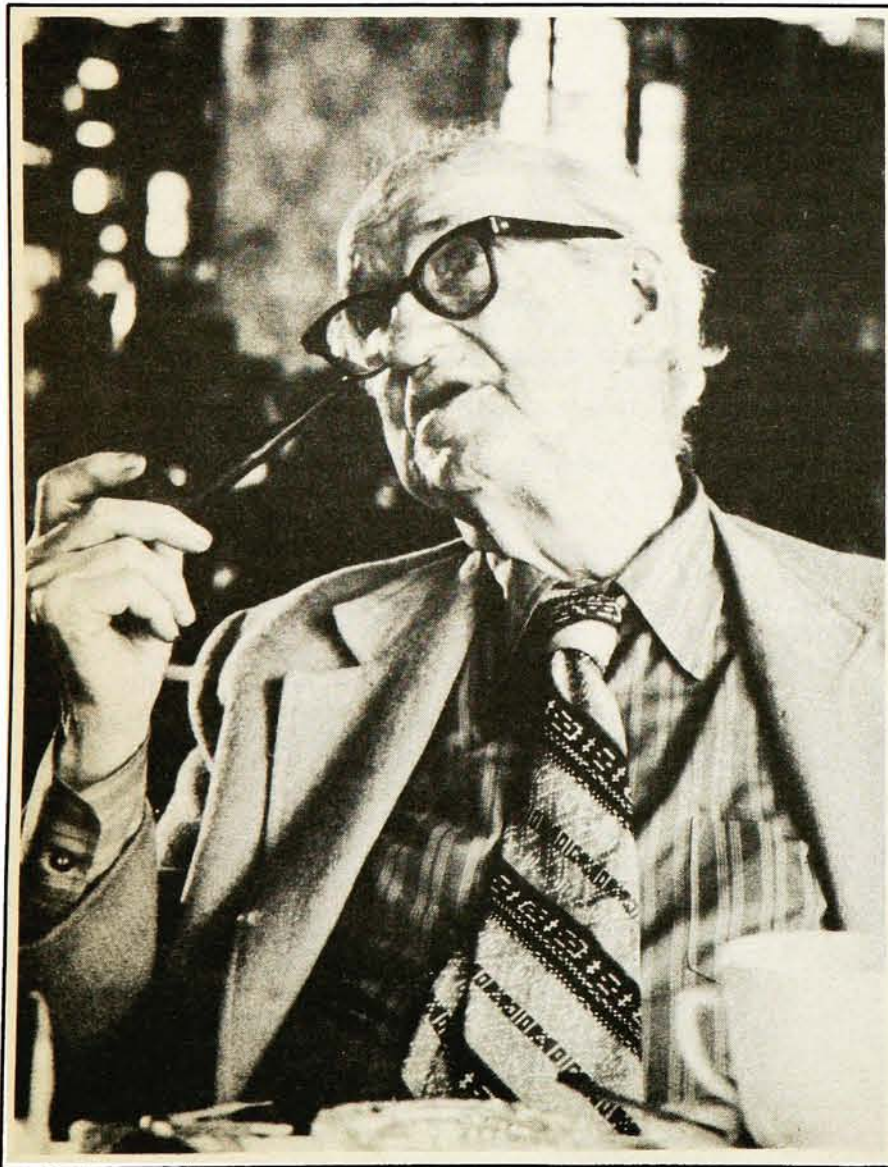
Fear reigns, there is the inevitable moment of truth in which the 14 (there has been one defector) evenly divide themselves into the saints (read: Gazzara, Nelligan and among others Kate Reid, whose acting skills are left unchallenged) and rogues. The saints vote with moral conscience to allow the clamoring unwashed into the antiseptic bomb shelter while the rogues vote with the survivalist instinct of the warring human being - to kill or be killed.

The rogues get the guns and thus their own way. They go out shooting (blanks) only to find the purging rays of the bright sunshine, the world in its perpetual state of pre-annihilation preparedness and Lancaster's sullen (blank) face asking the television audience... "Would you attempt to save your neighbour if doing so jeopardized your own chances of survival?"

Commendably, the question is asked. Regrettably, no effort is made to help the viewer comes to terms with an answer.

Jean Chantale ●

**CONTROL** exec. p. Denis Héroux p. Franco Cristaldi co-p. Alexandre Mnouchkine d. Giuliano Montaldo sc. Brian Moore, Jeremy Hole d.o.p. Armand Nannuzzi. l.p. Burt Lancaster, Kate Nelligan, Ben Gazzara, Kate Reid, Erland Josephson, Ingrid Thulin, Andrea Ferriol. A Canada/France/Italy co-production produced by Alliance Entertainment Corp. (Canada), Les Films Ariane (France), Cristaldi Film (Italy), in association with CTV. running time 120 min. Broadcast April 6, '87.



● Morley Callaghan speaks in *First Person Singular*