

L'HOMME QUI PLANTAIT DES ARBRES

A bird swirls in the air, a man walks in the serene and yellow desertlike landscape. The narrated tale begins to unfold.

Reaching a deserted village, the man tries to drink at a fountain, but it is dry. He walks on. The wind keens and blows and, after 25 days, hope is receding. In the distance a tiny black silhouette appears, and the man finally comes upon a shepherd, tending his flock, who offers him a drink. The man experiences a sense of confidence and assurance, and is invited to the shepherd's home to share a bowl of soup, and a pipe in front of a good fire.

In the almost magical candlelight, the shepherd conjures up visions of despair, famine, and killing, and then produces a bag of acorns. He takes the bag when he next sets out with his flock. After the sheep are settled, he plants 20,000 acorns — a Christ-like figure sowing the seeds of hope. The winds blow, the rain pours and the trees grow. The shepherd's harsh memories of World War I battles and the ravaging of the land are softened as the trees flourish — the faded colours change to pure delicate Renoir hues of green, blue, yellow. The streams run, a youth drinks from crystal-clear water and sees his reflection therein; birds and flowers abound; the four seasons melt into one another.

A delegation comes to examine the natural forest and a pompous official addresses the assembled crowd, but a caring forester is more interested in talking to the shepherd of the beauties of nature and the wonders of the forest.

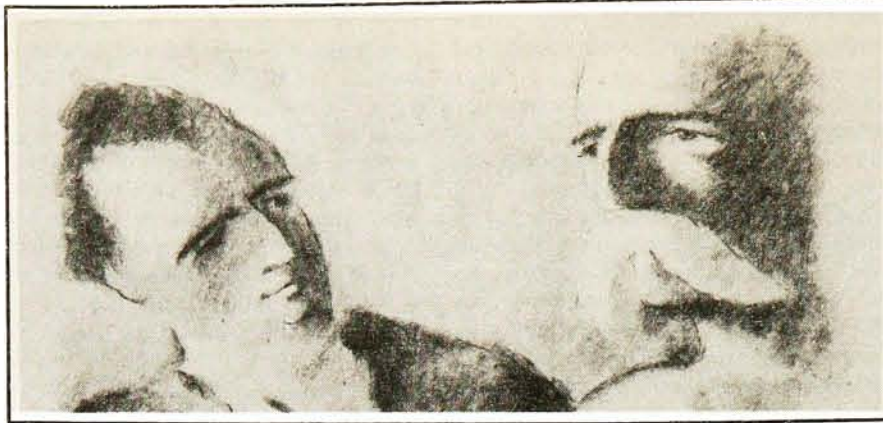
Life proceeds, and the shepherd is now white-haired and old, and the young man he befriended is older too. In the name of progress, trees are cut to make roads through the forest — and the tourists arrive in buses. The fresh air is a novelty, and families move into the once-deserted village and repair the houses, and children romp, gardens bloom, and there's dancing and music once more.

The circle is complete, the shepherd's work is done and, in a remarkable ending, built upon many dissolves, he shelters under the original oak that he planted, his eyes closed — at one with nature...

A ravishingly beautiful film from the revered Frédéric Back which, if memory serves correctly, is his first since the award-winning *Crac* in 1982. The drawing is wonderful — the shepherd and his dogs and delightful sheep, the individual faces of the village people and the

MINI REVIEWS

by Pat Thompson



• L'Homme qui plantait des arbres

tourists, the changes from parched landscape to battlefields — all executed by a master hand (and mind) in, it is hazarded, oil pastels. There must be hundreds of dissolves in the film which give it a vitality and flow that is truly extraordinary. The images are complemented by a remarkably crisp soundtrack, and the continuous narration (in French on the tape screened) is the magically liquid voice of Philippe Noiret.

An absolute must-see for everyone, but especially those lovers of animation who will immediately perceive and applaud a master craftsman at work in peak form. The big question is, why didn't *L'Homme qui plantait des arbres* win in the short film competition at Cannes this year? So far, it's also entered in the Los Angeles International Animation Festival and the Odense (Denmark) International Film Festival.

d./sc./drawings Frédéric Back. **Asst.** Lina Gagnon. **sd./orig. mus.** Normand Roger. **With the collaboration of** Denis L. Chartrand. **anim. cam.** Claude Lapierre, Jean Robillard. **exec.p.** Hubert Tison. **spoken by** Philippe Noiret. **prod.** Société Radio-Canada (613) 724-1200. 30 mins. Col. 35mm/16mm/tape.

REPLANTING THE TREE OF LIFE

"A tree is earth's crowning glory." And this film sets out at a cracking pace to explain the why and the how, and does it very well. The voice-over narration skims past the "cycles of growth and decay as earth goes through its season." Forest life — the birds, plants, insects, fruits and flowers, as well as humans on a walking tour — are lovingly displayed. It's pointed out that the tree has been at the centre of culture from the earliest beginnings as a symbol of the source of all creation. An ingenious chain of tree facts and lore unfolds, running as fuel, to the structure of wood and on to how trees condition the air.

Everyday reality follows — land cleared of trees for housing, built with lots of wood; the felling of trees for timber and the mills that process it. Then the statistics — three billion tons of timber used every year throughout the world; one-third of humanity depends on firewood to cook food. An upbeat ending provides details of replanting the forest of Canada under the 'silverculture' project which, of course, takes time (60 years), labour and money.

A helter-skelter pace doesn't distract from the well assembled and presented material, and three first-rate cinematographers show off their stuff to great advantage. A good film to spark many discussions — or many more films.

1987 Golden Sheaf Award, Yorkton Film & Video Festival, for Best of Category: Nature/Environment.

p./d./ed. David Leach. **cam.** David Leach, Barry Stone, Richard Stringer. **sc.** Amanda McDonnell. **mus.** John Welsman. **narr.** Murray Cruchley. **titles:** Meta Media. **exec.p.** Heather MacAndrew, David Springbett. **(c)** Asterisk Film & Video Productions 1986. 20 mins. **Eng. & Fr.** 16mm/3/4" & 1/2" videotape. **Distributor:** McNabb & Connolly Films, 49 Danville Dr., Willowdale, Ont. M2P 1J2 (416) 226-3060.

MUD SPINNER

A lively look at Walter Keeler, a potter working in Wales, from a filmmaker who was a freelance cinematographer and stills photographer in Canada until the mid-'70s.

The potter tells his own story on the track and recalls that around the age of 14 he joined a local history society and went on digs, and at 16 was off to art school for pottery classes. When he got on to the wheel, he knew it was what he wanted to do most — mud spinning. "I like to make functional things that can be used. I think of myself as a thrower first and foremost... I enjoy making useful pots."

Keeler and his family live on a farm, using the land sensibly and keeping some livestock — sheep, geese, cows.

The excitement of throwing pots — the truly creative thing — is well captured in some lovely shots of the potter's hands and face as he concentrates on the pot on the wheel, and its design in close-up. "It's a dialogue between me and my material. If you are too precise, the life goes out of it."

Keeler prepares for firing. Packing the kiln is tedious and the whole process takes about two days. He prefers salt glaze because, "One of its attractions is its uncertainty..." As he cements bricks at the front of the kiln, its burners flare, there's smoke and flame — and the potter puts potatoes to bake in a cranny of the kiln as the firing proceeds.

Keeler's wife is always curious at the opening of the kiln — and the potter likens the marvellous moment to the opening of Tutankhamen's Tomb! This time the kiln gives up shapely pots and jugs, fat teapots, lidded jars, swirl-pattern plates, and the speckled brown glaze glows.

A beautiful shot of the satisfied potter walking away through his barn doorway ends a charmingly placid look at someone who does what he wants to do in life, and enjoys it immensely. A warm, sensitive film — a mite too long — but informative and knowledgeable in a very human way.

A film by Lutz Dille. 30 mins. Col. 16mm. **Distributor:** Kinetic Film Enterprises Ltd., 408 Dundas St. E., Toronto M5A 1A5 (416) 963-5979.

TO DREAM, TO DANCE

The young man sits at a desk (in colour) and dreams of a ballerina (black-and-white) who wants him for her partner. In his mind's eye he thinks back to an active life — running on the boardwalk by a lake, effortlessly climbing a long flight of steps, up and up... The ballerina glides across the rehearsal hall, lost in her difficult and demanding art. The young man experiences again his crashing fall on the boardwalk, on the steps — and his present situation is revealed.

A little fragment, delivering a message of hope in rather sentimental fashion, and with a *dénouement* that smacks a trifle of soap opera. However, it's well shot and edited and, it is hoped, will serve as an OK introduction to more ambitious projects.

p./d./ed. Jim Blokland. **cam.** Allan Piiil. **l.p.** Bruce Monk (Young Man), Judith Brewer (Ballerina). **running time** 5 mins. Col/b&w. **Available from:** International Tele-Film, Toronto (Claus Hobe) (416) 241-4483.

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