conceptualized and brought to the screen is worth
one set conceived and brought to the screen is worth
talking about, even in a review of the film and not
one set around it.

A l'Automne de la vie is an independent
production, a very independent one: the
109-minute fiction film was shot in 35 mm/colour
with a budget of $70,000 (an incredibly low
figure), none of which came from federal or
provincial governments or bigtime private
enterprises. At a time when even major
Canadian production houses won't give the
green light to film projects unless they are
approved by Telefilm Canada and/or a television
network, the very existence of A l'Automne de la
vie is somewhat miraculous.

Yvan Chouinard's producers are the simple
folks of Sept-Iles, the local entrepreneurs and
the City itself. They raised the money and all their
names appear in the opening credits, sharing
equal billing with the actors. The Bergerons, the
Vigneaults, Gagnon Electrique Inc., Moto
Côte-Nord Inc. and the other contributors, are
the real stars of the film. The viewer cannot help
being impressed by the sense of pride and
belonging that radiates from this incredible list
of names. A l'Automne de la vie is their movie,
their act of bravado in the face of the Industry.

It is all the more frustrating then to see how
the director they supported has let them down.
Not so much because Chouinard delivered an
amateurish film: with little experience behind
him (he's worked mainly on commercials) and
with a cast and crew composed of local talents,
mostly non-professionals, the reverse would
have been surprising. Most of us, I believe,
can accept the awkward set-ups, the mike and
boom showing inside the frame, the unsteady
blue greens and whites on the overhead lamp shades, the sound of the
camera running or the footsteps of the camera
person, the leaden acting, etc. (Though to be
honest, these technical errors would have been
less conspicuous in a grittier-like fiction, to which
genre A l'Automne... doesn't belong.) But the
viewer still expects the film to be intelligent,
have a good screenplay and get the feeling that
the formal aspects of the movie worked on
paper, at least. It's not the case with A l'Automne
de la vie and there is no one to blame but
Chouinard.

As a classical, dramatic piece, A l'Automne fails
miserably. Scenes range from the grotesquely
abundant to the embarrassingly pretentious, not a
good combination in a naturalistic work. At one
point, a woman reveals to a priest she distrusts,
that she hopes her husband is dead (he's been
lost in the forest for a few days), but later
announces, in a soliloquy, that she plans not to
reveal her secret feelings to anyone. Has she
forgotten the earlier scene? Has Chouinard?
A few hours before being shot, to death, the
motorcycle boy - who's been looking for the lost
man - tells his girlfriend, "Don't you get the
feeling that life is like a movie? With a beginning
and an end. " (We can also hear this philosophi­
cal theory in the song of the film.) It is just very
difficult to sit through this nonsensical rhetoric.

At the end of the film, the last thing we hear
before cutting to a telecast announcing a nuclear
alert, is "You'll pay for your sins." Though the
warning is addressed to a character in the film,
its being juxtaposed to the doomsday message
addressed to a wider audience, gives it a
symbolic importance.

The message is clear: we, the viewers, will pay
for our sins if we don't become better human
beings. One expects this kind of sermonizing
from the intolerant bad guys of the film, the ones
Chouinard wants to denounce, and not from
Chouinard.

They say that "good intentions don't make
good movies"; A l'Automne de la vie blatantly
proves it.

Johanne Larue

A l'Automne de la vie

directed by Yvan Chouinard

Chouinard Production Inc. (418) 966-5660. colour 35mm
running time 109 min. distrib. Cinema Libre.

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Alanis Obomsawin's
Poundmaker's Lodge - A Healing Place

Chief Poundmaker lived for 44 years in
the mid-1800s. Like all native peoples in
this country's history, very little is
known or remembered of him. But he
did say this: "There is strength in us
that we ourselves have not yet recognized, and
one day we will find a place in the world for our
people."

Poundmaker's Lodge in St. Albert, north of
Edmonton - a drug and alcohol rehabilitation
centre for native people - has discovered that
fighting white man's diseases with white man's
remedies will, as it always has, backfire.
Secaucus and comfortable, the lodge finds
remedies through rituals and self-love, aimed at
renewing a spiritual, ancestral connection.

Instead of university-educated social workers
and pop slogans, elders and medicine men work
with the 'patients' to arm themselves spiritually
and psychologically against alcohol and
addiction and other "horrifying results of a long

Sylvie Potvin and Roger Beaudreau get existential
chapter of racism, oppression, rejection, betrayal and great loss.

In the six films Alanis Obomsawin has directed since 1971 (including Incident at Restigouche ('84) and Richard Cardinal: A Cry from a Diaper of a Metis Child ('86), she has been unsparing in her portrayal of the harsh realities of life for First Nations people. Her inspiration has little to do with film as Hollywood defines it, nor with art as critics define it; her inspiration comes from her own people, from their urgent need to have a voice to speak.

Poundmaker's Lodge: A Healing Place articulates clearly what has been too long garbled and denied. Canada's policy of "de-Indianizing" the country used alcohol as the great persuader. Not only did it do the diplomatic dirty work, but it practically created a generation of drunkards and wasted lives. Says one man to Obomsawin, "What did I learn from my dad and grandfather? To get drunk and pass the time. Here, have more.

Poundmaker's Lodge attempts to house the spirit and the future of the people that pass through it. Living the compromise of the white man's world has left them destitute. Says one, "Compromise means to me to lead a good useful life, to be useful to my people, to find peace and contentment by sharing. That's the value of ambition to my people."

Leila Marshy •

Poundmaker's Lodge - A Healing Place

Leuten Rojas: The Secret

L euten Rojas' half-hour dramatic film, The Secret marks a departure for the Chilean-born director. Always concerned with the Latin-American situation, always committed to presenting the reality of the political struggles there and their repercussions here, Rojas has now turned to narrative fiction as a means of communicating the political in the personal.

The personal, we've been told many times, is political. Nowhere is that made more explicit, more literal than in the plot of The Secret. Two brothers, Carlos and Marcos, one still living in Chile, the other a longtime exile in Canada, are reunited by their father's death. Marcos and his family had barely escaped being murdered by the death squads that are Chile's secret police before fleeing to Canada. When Carlos arrives for his father's funeral and wake, we learn that he may have been a member of those death squads: this is the family's secret, and the film's narrative hook.

The Secret locates the conflict between the two brothers at the intersection of family loyalty and political treachery. Carlos' shame, his family secret, is not just the usual social transgression that has informed so many drawing-room melodramas, but a secret with a real-world edge, a stench of cold-fisted, repressive violence.

Though the plot of the film might promote potboiler tension, The Secret is really a lament. It is a lyrical, personal film that gets inside of a family torn apart — by politics, by geography, by the conflicts that tear any family apart — and examines the pieces as they fall. And so the drama is not particularly gripping: the story progresses in a slow, contemplative manner that may or may not have been the director's intention, but certainly has the effect of personalizing the drama. This is not a slick action movie, it's not a TV spy series, it's the tragedy of a family badly damaged by a corrosive political climate.

Rojas has tapped a significant root here. The power of the family often conflicts with the power of the state, but the forces of family loyalty and nationalism are similar enough to be, well, brothers. At its best, The Secret sensitively traces the dynamics of loyalty and betrayal in two of their three most potent guises — family and state. (The sexual aspect is missing.) At its worst, and this is not often, it is an awkwardly paced political drama. At any rate Rojas deserves credit for producing such an earnest, honest film, one that incorporates the contemporary political situation in Chile with more universal questions.

Though the family in The Secret is from Chile, it could have been from the Philippines under Marcos, or from Northern Ireland, or from Quebec in 1970. The magnitude of the atrocities may change, the stakes in human life may vary, but the conflict remains. Civil wars are always the messiest, and nobody fights like families. These are the truths we use to help us mask unpleasant things like self-hatred and the will to treachery. The relationship of family to nation is that of microcosm to macrocosm; they are never two separate worlds. No, they inform one another; they write in and out and sometimes strangle each other.

The political is also, always, personal.

Cameron Bailey •

THE SECRET