

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

*À l'Automne de la vie* is an independant 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 *À l'Automne de la vie* is somewhat miraculous.

Yvan Chouinard's producers are the simple folk of Sept-Îles, 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 Electric Ltée, 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. *À 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 gels on door windows, the diffusing gauzes 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 *vérité*-like fiction, to which genre *À 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 *À l'Automne de la vie* and there is no one to blame but Chouinard.

As a classical, dramatic piece, *À l'Automne* fails miserably. Scenes range from the grotesquely absurd 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 philosophical 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"; *À l'Automne de la vie* blatantly proves it.

Johanne Larue •

*A L'AUTOMNE DE LA VIE* d. /sc. Ivan Chouinard p. Pierre Lessard d. o. p. Guy Deschenes set des. Clément Lévesque ed. Ivan Chouinard sd. Denis Pelletier, G erald Filion, Bernard Huard, Germain Beriau, Sylvain Lamarre m. R ejean Garneau, Pierre Fontaine l. p. Sylvie Potvin, Roger Boudreau, Blaise Gagnon, Michael Turnbull. A Les Films Chouinard Production Inc. (418) 962-5660. colour 35mm running time 109 min. distrib. Cinema Libre.



Sylvie Potvin and Roger Boudreau get existential

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. Secluded 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 psychically against alcohol and drug addiction and other "horrifying results of a long

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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 Diary of a Metis Child* ('86), she has been unwaveringly committed to portraying the rich and raw realities of what it means to be a Native Indian in Canada. Her inspiration has little to do with film as Hollywood defines it, nor with art as critics label it, but comes from her "own people, from their urgent need to have a place 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 *raison d'être* for genocide by forever branding the Native Indians as savage, uncivilized and drunken. Says one man to Obomsawin, "What did I learn from my dad and grandfather? To get drunk and pass out. And what did the Indians learn from the first white men? Here have more booze so we can get you drunk. Here, have more booze so we can take your land. Here, have more booze so we can take your women, so we can get your furs."

Founded in 1973 by Eric Shirt, the Lodge has been directed since 1982 by his brother Pat. Now 35, Pat has been through six different high schools, many jails, and 13 years of sobriety. Most of the people that pass through the centre are referred by prison doctors, social workers and community organizations. The stay is 30 days and the only stipulation is that guests have been sober for 48 hours prior to arriving at the centre. In the last 10 years the average age of the participants has dropped from 35 to 25. There is a lot to fight against. "We're more than just bows and arrows," says Pat to a group, "we've

got a lot of things to be proud of; caring, sharing, being good to one another."

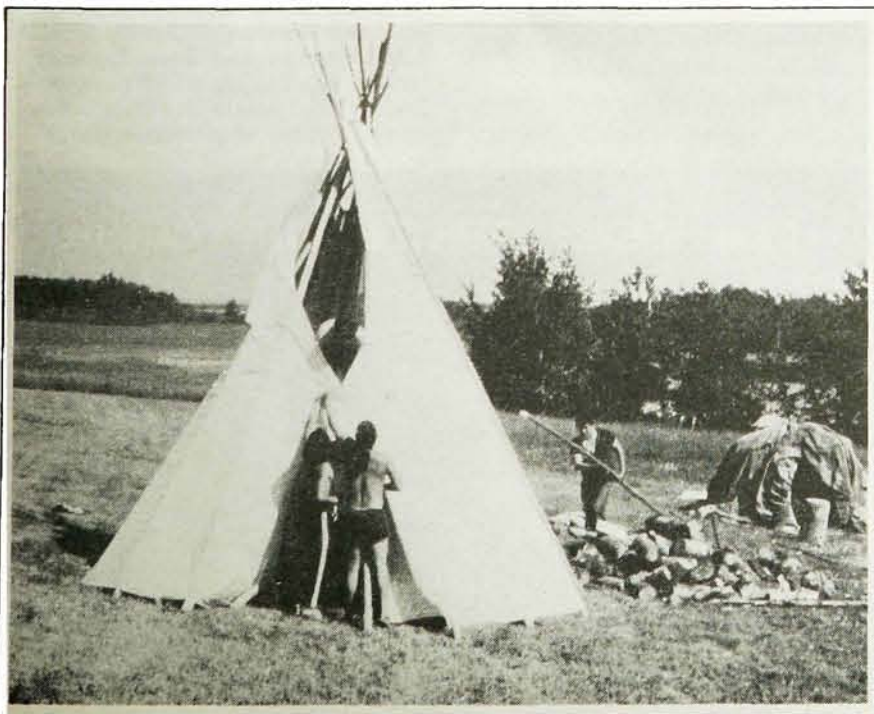
Obomsawin speaks to many of the participants, joins their group encounters, witnesses the ritual of the sweat lodge. More importantly, she has made a film of subdued and serious poetry: light breaks through rocks and trees, a young man runs along a hillside, close-ups on struggling faces are held tight and long.

The resounding sense of purpose that seems to echo both in the Lodge and throughout the film is testament to Obomsawin's courage to embrace a painful and difficult reality. The film is a portrait of a people, one where intimacy replaces voyeurism and pity yields to understanding and fury. Says Obomsawin, "It doesn't matter where I'm going, when I'm going to a native person, I'm always going home."

*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, "Ambition to me means 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** *sc./d.* Alanis Obomsawin *ed.* Rita Roy *voice of Chief Poundmaker* Brian Eyahpaize *cam.* Roger Rochat *add. photog.* Doug Cole *assist. cam.* Michel Bissonette *loc. sd.* Raymond Marcoux *song written and performed by* Shannon Two Feathers *principal flute* Dario Domingues *add music violin* Luc Dominique Tremblay *harmonica* William Butler *flute* Sarain Stump *traditional chant* Gordon Tootoosis *sd. ed.* Paul Demers *assist. sd. ed.* Jean-Pierre Viau *voice rec.* Christian Fortin *mus. ed.* Julian Olson *re-rec.* Jean Joutel *anim cam.* Pierre Landry *title des.* Louise Overy *optical layout* Susan Gourley *studio administrator* Marie Tonto-Donati *post-prod. co-ord* Grace Avrith *prod. co-ord.* Andrée Lachapelle *exec. p.* Andy Thomson *research* Alanis Obomsawin *p.* Alanis Obomsawin, Marrin Canell, Robert Verrall.



Building a place to heal



What's the Secret?

## Leuten Rojas The Secret

Leuten 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 father 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 same 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 promise 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 truisms we use to help us mask unpleasant things like self-hatred and the will to treachery. The relationship of family to nation isn't that of microcosm to macrocosm; they are never two separate worlds. No, they inform one another; they writhe in and out and sometimes strangle each other.

The political is also, always, personal.

Cameron Bailey •

**THE SECRET** *d.* Leuten Rojas *asst. d.* Owen Coughlan *cont.* Sheila Reesor *p.* Roger Casselman *prod. co-ord* Sheila Reesor *prod. asst.* John Holmes, Susan Atkinson, Harry Fercerber *sc.* Leuten Rojas *Spanish Dialogues* Ramon Sepulveda *texts* Jorge Etcheverry *trans from Spanish* Zuzana Pick *d. o. p.* Antonin Lhotsky *asst cam/ grip* Richard Garner *add cam/ grip* Oscar Amaya *loc. sd.* Mark Freedman *loc. sd. asst.* Caroline Glouce *make-up sup.* Jacqueline Lamberts *make-up/ ward.* Maria Heffernan *props* John Cameron, Milprop, Capt. Michael T. Calnan, Calnan Military Vehicle Collection *transport* Tim McGaney *Productions ed.* Leuten Rojas *ed. consult* Marilu Mallet *asst ed.* Sheila Reesor, Owen Coughlan, Marilyn Nazar *m.* Chris Mayo, Good Egg *Productions graphics* David Berman, Typographics, Millennium Arts Inc. *exec. p.* Zuzana Pick *l. p.* Manuel Aranguiz, Jorge Etcheverry, Douglas Campbell, Leonor Leon, Gabriela Miralles, Glen Richard, Alejandro Sepulveda, Cristina Sepulveda, Norman Boucher, John Holmes, Brian Graham, Ellen Manchie and members of the Chilean community in Ottawa. Produced by Luz Films, Ottawa with the financial assistance to the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council. *col* 30 minutes.