

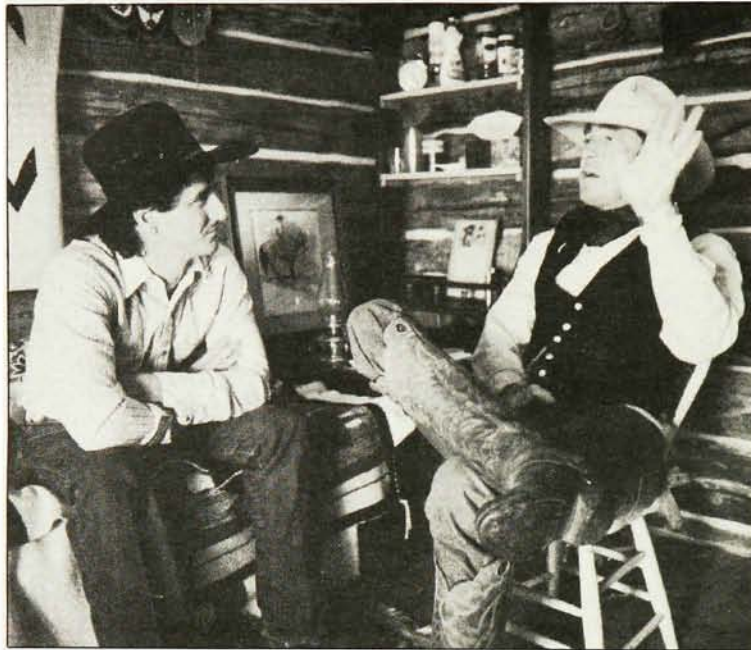
Jacques Godbout's  
**Alias Will James**

The relationship between Quebec and America has been of great interest to Jacques Godbout, writer and filmmaker, for many years. His latest film, a documentary, called *Alias Will James*, tries to investigate this relationship through a study of the Western writer, Will James, who was really Ernest Dufault, born in St. Nazaire d'Acton, Quebec. Will James had fabricated for himself an identity true to the image of the authentic cowboy, born and bred in the far West and this even in his autobiography. In the last years of his life, when some of his books had been made into successful Hollywood films, he was terrified that his true identity would be found out and that he would be accused of being a fake. But, even so, he still came back to Quebec, to see his mother and eat tourtière. Like another well-known "American" Québécois writer, Jack Kerouac, he became an alcoholic at the end of his life and died of sclerosis.

To tell this story, Godbout has adopted a form of filmic collage which is becoming quite prevalent in the new documentary films coming out of Quebec. In these films there is a collage of different cinematic modes being used, both in the visuals and in the soundtrack. Thus, some of the soundtrack consists of an actor (whom we sometimes see on the screen) reading from Will James' novels and his autobiography.

Sometimes this voice-over is superimposed on images of the places concerned, the wide-open spaces of the far West or the jail in Carson City where he spent time for cattle rustling. We also see images of the little village in Quebec where he was born, old photographs of Montreal in the '20s, and over these we hear another voice, one which relates the true origins of Ernest Dufault, alias Will James. And to mix-up our sense of reality even further, there are also clips from old Hollywood Westerns (I presume made from Will James' stories) which are cut in throughout the film. It is here that one of the basic questions of the film emerges. That is, what is the relationship between reality and fiction, life and myth? Here was a man who fell in love with the myth of the West and first, through his drawings and then through his writings made of that myth a reality to millions and of his life a legend which had little relation to his own identity.

Godbout explores the questions further through a series of interviews with representatives of Quebec in the West. There is a discussion with Ernest Dufault's relatives about who he was and his roots in Quebec. There is an interview with Ian Tyson, the well-known folksinger, who was inspired by Will James' books, which he read as a child, to become a cowboy and we listen to a song which he wrote



A latter-day Will James, Dan David, with Ian Tyson

about his hero. There are also interviews with two contemporary Québécois cowboys, who, like Will James, could not resist the lure of the West and became bronco riders.

What is this lure of the West? What motivates someone like Will James to leave his family and culture behind and try to find himself another reality? Ian Tyson, at one point in the film, says that he tried to write a verse for Will James' song where his mother warns him that he dreams too much and that dreams are dangerous. In the process of trying to become a cowboy, Ernest Dufault killed a man in Western Canada, fled to the States, got caught rustling cattle and spent time in prison. It is here that he decided to settle down and try to make it as an illustrator of Western scenes. In other words, he decided to fabricate the dreams rather than be led astray by them. That this relationship between Western myth and Western reality still exists is shown in an interview with one of the Québécois bronco riders. He too is artist, a sculptor, and as in Will James' drawings, his subjects are mostly horses and their riders. Of course, Ian Tyson is also an example of an artist cowboy.

What is the myth of the West and why should it exercise such fascination on non-Americans? Presumably, this is an American myth and little related to our national identity and presumably even less to that of a Québécois. The film never really answers this question except, maybe, through its images. The collage technique of this film gives us bits and pieces of information but, as in an Eisensteinian montage, it is up to the audience to put together the pieces and find an answer. What stays in the mind is the coldness, the closed-off quality of the environment as shown in the images of the small Quebec village and even of 1920s Montreal. This impression is

reinforced by the sequence where we see one of the bronco riders moving out of his sterile Montreal apartment to escape to the wide-open spaces of Alberta.

The views of Ian Tyson's ranch with the horses walking through the mist, the views of Will James' ranch in Montana which he tried to make into a natural paradise, serve to make us aware of what the lure of the West means. The basic conflict in the American Western is between individual freedom and the restrictions imposed by society. The lone cowboy at one with his horse and nature recurs throughout the film. Yet, as in the American Western film, social values come into conflict with this freedom and the film constantly reiterates Dufault's mother's warning. Godbout seems to see in Will James' life and death a sort of parable, a warning to the Québécois that to succumb to the lure of America, and its individualistic ideals and dreams of freedom, can mean a loss of identity which will ultimately be deathly, not only for the individual, but also for the Québécois nation.

At least these were the thoughts and reflections that the film brought to my mind. Jacques Godbout has certainly made an interesting and thought-provoking film.  
Mary Alemany-Galway •

**ALIAS WILL JAMES** p. Eric Michel d. lsc. / research Jacques Godbout cam. Jean-Pierre Lachapelle ed. Monique Fortier mus. Robert M. Lepage sd. rec. Richard Besse, Diane Carrière n. d. Serge Lalortune cam. asst. Seraphin Bouchard animation cam. Raymond Dumas mus. rec. Louis Hone mixing Hans Peter Strobl the song of Will James Ian Tyson voice of Will James Jean-Guy Moreau mus. ed. Suzanne Bouilly add. narr. Réjean Lévesque add. sd. Vital Millette rec. Christian Fortin p. admin. Johanne Carrière, Gaetan Martel p. sec. Carol Gagnon l. p. Michael Bénéard, Carole David, Daniel David and Ian Tyson. Produced and distributed by the NFB.

Morley Markson's  
**Growing Up in America**

In the interest of honesty it must be admitted that the critic comes to this film with certain skewed preconceptions. My wife comes from Worcester, Massachusetts, and has had to battle all her adult life with the furrowed brows of Canadians who have never heard, much less can pronounce, the name of her home town. To get around this she has developed a kind of capsulized Worcester history that she can spew out in 89 seconds.

Worcester is where Freud gave his first American lectures; it is where Goddard started the U.S. rocket program; it is where the inventor of the birth control pill comes from (well, actually, he comes from the little town next door), and, my wife finishes with a triumphant flourish, Worcester is where Yippee Abbie Hoffman was born.

Abbie Hoffman is always at the end of the listing because she can add, for those who want to know more, that he was good friends with her next-door neighbour (now lawyer to the Rock Stars); and for those who are really interested, she notes her family knew the Hoffman family from long standing. What she doesn't generally reveal is the pursed-lipped analysis which her family indulges in when the A. Hoffman name is brought up. The word, from one and all, is that "he broke his father's heart". By this they mean a literal heart attack and a more figurative attack on the heart.

I indulge in this discursion because its images - a montage of Worcester-related things and grieving Hoffman parents - kept reappearing in my mind during Morley Markson's cinematic remembrance of times lost if not entirely past. Twenty years after the height of hippiedom the grouping together of the film's star subjects, including the famous Mr. Hoffman, is as eerie as my wife's Worcesteriana.

What Markson has done is go back and visit a number of the people who originally appeared in his 1971 documentary *Breathing Together: The Evolution of the Electric Family*. Then they were all adjectives: hairy and hip, druggy and revolutionary, sexy and poetic; men (interestingly not women) whose media-hogging politics put them less on the same side than in the same (maybe outer) space. Now they have become middle-aged occupational nouns: social activist, lawyer, father, poet, student, and businessman. Only Black Panther Fred Hampton escaped the slow, grammatical drift out of youth by fixing his future under the career heading of "dead".

The technique the movie uses to revisit its past is both an intercutting of the earlier film and a



Abbie Then and Now: tales of Hoffman



reshowing of that incarnation of themselves to the film's subjects. Their reaction to themselves *perdu* is often quite hilarious. Former White Panther John Sinclair admits that the doped-crazed boy he was would frighten the family-crazed father he has become. "If somebody walked up to me today and started talking like this, I'd probably be frightened, you know. Get this guy outta here." He laughs. Har. Har. Har.

Allen Ginsberg tries to forgive himself for saying the "wrong mantra all along". Jerry Rubin talks about waking up one morning in 1974 and finding that the whole scene he has been involved in had disappeared. Everyone had disconnected their phones and moved away.

The saddest confrontations of then and now are revealed in the lives of the two blacks in the film. Don Cox, a Black Panther who fled the country and now lives in Paris, speaks a kind of French-English, English-French no-man's language. He has had none of the 'life's second chances' which seemed to have abounded for the whites and, not surprisingly, views his life as a kind of shadow of reality. "Nobody cares as long as I don't break the law. I'm satisfied here. I really don't want any attention," he says. We have no idea how he survives except as a kind of Kafkaesque Hunger Artist made up to look like God's lost Watusi.

Fred Hampton's wife and son have plunged from the poetry of the Movement into the reality of the '80s. The political dreams of the Panthers have been replaced by street rapping. What is most interesting is that those of the '60s who changed least, Abbie Hoffman and movement lawyer William Kunstler, come across in some sense like the film's true conservatives. They found a space for themselves and a truth and it has protected them from worrying about the siren lure of other realities.

"I have been doing this for 27 years. I could do it for another 27 years. I don't have to change," brags Hoffman, endearing nonetheless as a kind of aging Peter Pan counter-culture politician.

What is also fascinating is the realization that the political actors of the '60s are absolutely great television. Unlike the rest of us they don't fumble much for words or speak like drones when the camera is turned on. There is a kind of dramatic sweep to their personae which radiates back at the camera. They are comfortable with being either famous or infamous or simply notable. Maybe the '60s were only about images and 15-minute sound bites.

What is irritating about the film is its cultishness. There is an assumption that the audience is supposed to know, and, what is more, feel some kind of historical understanding for the men who are being chronicled. It's more than a "yeah, we were there, man," '60s mantra of nostalgia. One feels that there are certain questions which couldn't be asked. How does Hoffman support himself? Does Tim Leary still take drugs? How is Fred Hampton's son surviving in the ghetto?

They are not asked because there is a kind of film vision of what constitutes intelligence at work in the movie. What is happening is what you see - what has been edited in and makes the most gripping images. What is not there is the uncinematic rest of the lives; the parts where they are not famous; where they have poorly edited their own existences; the parts where they have broken some father's heart in several ways and with several meanings and have to live with it. This turns what is, in many ways, a gripping and interesting film ultimately into something a little too cinema *cutsie-verité*.

Stephen Strauss •

**GROWING UP IN AMERICA** exec. p. Don Haig co-p. Joan Schafer p. Morley Markson d. Morley Markson based on a theme suggested by Don Haig and George Miller consulting assoc. p. John Board cinematography Andreas Poulsson, Leonidas Zourdoumis, David O'Keefe, Yves Billon, Joseph Friedman, Morley Markson asst. camera Leonard Farlinger location equip. P. S. Production Services, Doug Dales sound Aeryn Weissman, Reynald Trudel, Mike Lecroix, John McCormick, Agnes Guerin p. man. Joan Schafer loc. man. Leonard Farlinger prod. asst. Joanna Markson original music score Marty Simon pic. ed. Morley Markson asst. ed. Louise Lebeau cons. eds. Tom Berner, Don Haig sound ed. Karl H. Konrny asst. sound ed. Louise Lebeau Foley Reid James Atherton re-recording sound mixers Mike Hoogenboom, Tony Van Den Akker post-prod. Film House Group, Film Arts neg. cutter May Bischof neg. inner Ricardo Olivero title design Eli Barr Associates titles Meta Media research Claire Weissman, Zoe Thurling, Shari Segal, Paula Draper, Cyril Levitt stills Leonard Farlinger theme consultants Prof. Ron Levaico, Joan Schafer new york liaisons Alan Meislin california liaisons Ken Beckman trans. n. y. The Vanmen northampton mass. video Don Abrams travel Perly Travel, Tic-Toc Tours insurance Arthur Winkler prod. accountant Rowie Walker; with the assistance of City TV, Louise Lebeau, Michael Macina, Ellen O'Leary, Houghton-Mifflin Publishing Co., The Palladium; produced by Morley Markson and Associates with the participation of Telefilm Canada, Ontario Film Development Corporation, Film Arts, P. S. Production Services.

## Nettie Wild's A Rustling of Leaves: Inside the Philippine Revolution

**A** *Rustling of Leaves*, Nettie Wild's feature-length documentary about political conflicts in the Philippines, is a riveting film experience. It's beautifully photographed, dramatically constructed and overflows with the sort of spontaneous footage that sticks in the mind weeks after viewing. Unfortunately, it falls a little short of providing the complete picture we need to understand the complexities of Third World power struggles.

Cinematographer Kirk Tougas headed up a crew which collected an astounding 64,000 feet of film, much of it during two months of living 'underground' with left-wing guerrillas (the New People's Army). From the opening shots of grossly underpaid workers harvesting bamboo it's clear the filmmakers were on the front line of the conflict. Even the talking heads are alive, especially in a disturbing interview with right-wing radio announcer Jun Pala who, when he's not talking with Wild, is broadcasting the names of suspected leftists. This is public service radio with a gruesome twist: those named are

about to be decapitated by the 'tad tads' or death squads.

The camera also crouches behind a bush as guerrillas wait to stage an ambush. The attack fails and, to his everlasting credit, Tougas keeps the camera rolling as he, the crew and the guerrillas flee for their lives.

Wild follows the debate as the guerrillas decide whether to execute a member-turned-traitor and cuts away only as the trigger is pulled. The respite is short; moments later she films the executioner consoling the father of the dead man.

Her support and affection for those of the left is unmistakable, perhaps no surprise after weeks of shared hardship and political action. But she's sold them a little short.

The opening moments of *A Rustling of Leaves* promise that "the six o'clock news will never be the same again", implying that what we're about to see is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It is not, however, quite whole. For example, Wild makes early mention of the six families who for all intents and purposes control the Philippines and are therefore the ultimate enemies of the leftists, legal and illegal. Yet that's the last we hear of the power-brokers. She doesn't tell us who they are, how they won the power or how they manage to hang onto it. Nor does she talk to them. Instead we see their presumed mouthpiece, Jun Pala, at work. He's a frightening individual but, ultimately, one-dimensional without some explanation of who he represents and how the hell a radio station can be used to make before-the-fact death announcements. Granted, the evening news rarely tells the full story of what's going on in lands far away, but even the most cursory television journalism involves giving the bad guys a chance to strut their stuff.

And, apart from a few distant shots of Cory Aquino being presidential, we don't see evidence of any changes the 'People's Revolution' might have achieved. Is her government nothing more than the military puppet show Wild implies? If so, such a startling revelation needs to be backed up by more than the animated graphics she uses to portray the evils of capitalism, imperialism and other philosophies this film so clearly opposes.

It's not that Wild and her crew don't have the skills. Their comprehensive coverage of leftist Bernabe Buscayno's unsuccessful attempt to win the election is superb. Sequences shot at his rallies leave the viewer damp with perspiration from both the tropical heat and the ever-present threat of violence (Buscayno survived an assassination attempt).

*A Rustling of Leaves* is worth seeing. Even with the flaws it's a gripping two hours made all the more worthwhile by the four years it took Wild and her crew to complete the project. She's a filmmaker with imagination, tenacity and social conscience who deserves encouragement. If future projects make a greater effort to penetrate