



Rich Alexandra (Judith Gault) and poor Crystal (Jane Gibson) meet and exchange lives in *Turnabout*

## Don Owen's **Turnabout**

Here's a surprise, not a big one, but a nice one nonetheless. Don Owen, whose wonderful NFB docu-drama (before the term was coined and subsequently debased) of the 1960s set the tone for a generation of English-Canadian filmmaking, has returned again to his past. With *Unfinished Business* he updated *Nobody Waved Goodbye*, now with *Turnabout* he's done a kind of update of *Notes On A Film About Donna and Gail*. It's 20 years later, in Toronto this time, and Jackie Burroughs has turned into Judith Gault, but Owen manages to keep things moving along so that we don't notice these changes that much. It's more like an idea was updated as opposed to characters or settings.

*Turnabout* is an examination of friendship, desire and roleplaying disguised as a "sisters tell all" sociological exposé. In fact, Owen gently parodies the stylistic excesses of the NFB's Studio D while coming off with what amounts to a rich humanistic tract about women who want to be someone (where) else.

The playful tone is set right from the beginning with shots of Parliament Street in Toronto and then straight mid-shots of Gault followed by mid-shots of Jane Gibson talking directly to the camera: once upon a time there

were two women who once were friends and now are very unhappy... (big goofy frowns and cut to THE STORY).

The women's images merge back and forth indicating just what is going to happen in the narrative. The time is now. Gault is Alexandra, the childless matron of a big Rosedale brownstone and the unhappy lesser half of a sterile yuppie marriage. Crystal (Gibson) is the archetypal female loser: her child taken from her, a boyfriend she describes as a free-lover and free-loader and the possessor of a Regent Street address that to her means that she never has to visit the zoo as she lives in the middle of one.

Now this territory has been travelled before, particularly by Robert Altman in *Three Women*. But Altman's apocalyptic and hallucinatory vision and the remarkable overstylization of Shelly Duvall and Sissy Spacek are nowhere to be seen in *Turnabout*. Owen subtitles the film, *An Improvisation*, and credits the cast with dialogue. Hence there is a very easy feeling to the narrative, itself punctuated by Gault's and Gibson's frequent confessions to the camera. The actual scenes serve to flesh out the details of the women's points of view. Often they tell different versions of the same incidents, setting up a playful inquiry into the nature of truth in the narrative.

The camera is necessarily unobtrusive. The filmmaker has deliberately withdrawn from actively commenting in the way he did in *Notes On...* The dual points of view works to defuse

skepticism about the central plot point, Crystal and Alexandra exchanging lives. As well, their constant commentary on the action introduces a level of irony that would not be present in a straight dramatic presentation.

Gibson is very funny, a sort of Mission Street Flora MacDonald, in command of whatever portfolio she is given. Gault too does a wonderful job with the thankless task of playing someone who yearns to move into a public housing complex because it teems with life. But the unpleasant realities reveal themselves only too soon.

Crystal's new Rosedale life, which now includes her daughter complete with ballet classes, beaujolais and *Toronto Life* garden, also comes up short of expectations.

As the women move into their new identities, the film takes on a dreamier tone. The mid-shots are replaced by long shots and close ups. Crystal and Alexandra speak simultaneously quoting Oscar Wilde's famous saying: There are two tragedies in life: not getting all you want and getting all you want.

What is intriguing is how Owen, with Gault and Gibson, convinces us that the characters are motivated by the inevitability of desire and that this desire is the engine that drives all actions, even if those actions have no rational relationship to reality. The form of the film becomes a very strange kind of confessional that seems to imply much more than the narrative itself. Nothing is anchored in any kind of certainty except for the two women's fleeting friendship. Those moments are etched in a kind of emotional stone.

The real joy of *Turnabout* is watching Crystal and Alexandra discover each other. The real pain comes when they discover and covet each other's lives. The possibilities lie in their friendship and not the materialist manifestations that surround that friendship. The women's open admission at the end amounts to a quiet revelation, but a revelation nonetheless.

In the end, *Turnabout* is a playful essay into the nature of desire. The refrain of a hit of last summer went, "If you have everything your heart desires, how can you want more?" In our culture of satiation and saturation, this could be the secret agenda of most forthcoming North American art. It is a tribute to Don Owen that he has succeeded in making such a warm film out of what could have been an inhumane subject.

Ronald Foley Macdonald •

**TURNABOUT**, an improvisation by Don Owen, exec. p. Don Haig, p. Idir. Don Owen, d.o.p. John Hertzog with Douglas Koch, sound. Christopher Leech, ed. Michael Todd, snd. ed. Anita St. Denis, snd. mix. George Novotny, cam. asst. Glen Treilhard, Naomi Wise, grip. Michael Garstand, clapper. Laurel Pollack, p. mgrs. Laura Battiston, Donna Dudinsky, des. asst. Judith Pankewitz, conspintor. Ed Fitzgerald, gophers. Jessica Cohen, Sharon Foster, Tom Hochmann, l.p. Jane Gibson, Judith Gault, Gordon Rayner, Reg Bobard, Judith Pankewitz. A Zebra Films production produced with the assistance of the Ontario Arts Council and the National Film Board of Canada.

## Roger Cardinal's **Malarek**

MONTREAL - With this eight-letter placeline banged in, Victor Malarek wrote a newspaper article in 1971 that ultimately closed down the bane of his existence in this city - a juvenile detention centre.

Malarek's investigative story of systemic rot that spread through the police, through social workers, through the detention center administration and guards, launched a newspaper career that has led to a senior reporter's job with *The Toronto Globe and Mail*.

This paragon of reportorial doggedness did not attend journalism school. No, Victor Malarek went from the above mentioned juvenile detention centre straight into *The Montreal Star* (now defunct) newsroom where he wrote the story that set his career.

I am not suggesting that persons enrolled in J-School are in the wrong institution and should apply for a transfer. Rather, you have here a young man from a poor and broken family who is bullied by social workers and brutalized in homes and detention centres but who prevails upon that same system with self-determination, a sense of justice and a sensitivity that should, it would seem, have been beaten out of him years earlier.

This is the premise of a complex story clearly brought to light by director Roger Cardinal. *Malarek: "A Street Kid Who Made It"* is produced by Robin Spry and Jamie Brown of Telescene Production and adapted by Avrum Jacobson from Victor Malarek's autobiography, *Hey! Malarek*.

The story is told on several allegorical levels that are current and integral throughout the film and that tie together neatly at the end. At once, you have the making of a successful reporter and a dramatic exposé of a corrupt child welfare system.

But at the heart of this universal success story, Malarek scores a moral victory for himself and for "everyman" who may have at least sensed the dim contours of a prison cell closing in around him.

This \$4 million film has not been dressed-up to titillate paying customers; there are no great heroics here, no fanfare. True, Malarek gets his story but he does not ride off in a blaze of glory. Indeed, the story ends where Malarek's newspaper fame begins - with the award-winning headline spinning off the presses.

The gritty, sometimes vulgar, realism of Malarek indicates that Robin Spry, a documentary filmmaker and director of the award-winning slice-of-life drama *Obsessed*, had a firm hand in the production. The editing is unhalting, beginning with spectacular aerial shots of Montreal, continuing down through an open window with the use of a Steadicam that



stealthily establishes itself in the hub of newsroom activity.

This action leads to a copyboy, older than most, on his itinerant mail run through the newsroom and the shoulder-shrugging characterization of a street kid named Malarek by a young actor named Elias Koteas. Where a less talented actor might exaggerate, Koteas never loses character. (This guy has more in common with de Niro than a pretty face.)

No time is lost in convincing the viewer that Malarek is a well-intended kid. He is likeable from the moment you meet him. The impact of one particular scene early in the film drives home just how believable the character becomes. It is a flashback in which the 11-year-old Malarek, played by Ross Hull, timidly approaches his father, who is stone drunk with his head on the kitchen table, and kisses him while the social worker waits impatiently and a sobbing mother lies battered on the floor. Your heart breaks willingly. This is one of the most emotionally powerful moments I have ever seen on the screen.

The flashbacks are a crucial element of this film. They're used masterfully, not as a crutch for a weak storyline but in order to give the story an added dimension of depth. The story pivots on a flashback that reveals Malarek's lucky break.

Unfairly charged with armed robbery, Malarek finds himself facing a judge and certain punishment for his recidivistic activities. But Malarek's father pleads for his son at the risk of contempt; his words trigger sympathy and the judge lets Malarek go. The rest is newspaper history.

Al Waxman, the leering and befanged social worker, is at his best and better suited to this sort of villainous role than that of the dumb American cop or the funny fat guy down the street. Kerrie Keane, a busy actress and star of Spry's *Obsessed*, plays a skittish crime page editor unsure about whether she wants to be Malarek's mentor or mistress. Malarek best describes her character in a emotional outburst after the editor and publisher attempt to block his story. "She doesn't know whether to smoke or sit down" yells Malarek accusingly. As a straight foil to the impulsive Malarek, Keane is superb.

On the other hand, Daniel Pilon, who plays Banks, the corrupt detention centre administrator, is so straight and void of any personality that he stifles. There is more to acting than meets the eye and obviously, in this film, Pilon's good looks exceed his acting ability.

Kahil Karn plays an escaped "juvi" who becomes at once the lead source of Malarek's exposé and a liability should the police discover that Malarek is protecting an escapee. He is young and, as the popular street terminology of the day went, "wired." A handgun or a knife in his hands looks extremely dangerous. Malarek, himself, has trouble communicating with this kid whose life ends abruptly while running from a police revolver. While the 16-year-old Karn puts in a lot of hard work, the casting director should also take a bow.

Malarek is a hero in-as-much as he is an exemplary human being who has come through a struggle of heroic proportions. He is a Canadian. Nay! a Canadian hero, to whose name this film does justice.

*Malarek* leaves you feeling good about his success and bad about the cruelties he had to endure in our own backyard. House-lights and reflection bring the slow dawning that 1971 was not that long ago.

H. Jean Chantale •

**MALAREK** *exec. p.* Neil Leger, Paul Painter *p.* Jamie Brown, Robin Spry *d.* Roger Cardinal *sc.* Avrum Jacobson *p. mgr.* Jean Desormeaux *asst. p. mgr.* Madeleine Rozon *p. coord.* Chantale de Monigny *mus.* Alexandre Stanké *lst. a. d.* Pierre Plante *2nd. a. d.* Carole Dubuc *3rd. a. d.* Louis Bolduc *apprentice* Maarten Kroonenburg *sc. sup.* Joanne Harwood *cont. app.* Claudia Cardinal *art d.* Claude Paré *art dep. coord.* Louise Cova *set dec.* Pierre Blondin *asst. set dec.* Ginette Paré, Réal Paré *props master* Claude Jacques *set props* Charles Bernier *asst. set props* Richard Carrière *cars coord.* Jacques Arcoette *scene painters* Don McEwen, Cathia Degre *sp. fr.* Louis Craig *swing gang* Gilbert Leblanc, Serge Nadon *d. o. p.* Karol Ike *cam.* Daniel Jobin *1st. asst. cam.* Nathalie Moliavko-Vizotzky *2nd. cam. asst.* Sylvaine Dufaux, Martin Dubois *app.* Éric Larivière *stills photog.* Jonathan Wenk *gaffer* Michel-Paul Bélière *best boy* Marc Henault, John Lewin *elec.* Jeff Scott *key grip* Jacob Rolling *dolly grip* Lennard Wells *grip* Stéphane d'Ernsted *loc. sd.* Richard Nicol *boom op.* Thierry Hoffmann *ward. des.* Nicoletta Massone *ward. asst.* Caroline Breard *dressers* Caterina Chamberland, Francesca Chamberland *hd. makeup* Louise Migneault *hair* Constant Natale *unit mgr.* Michel Chauvin *loc. mgr.* Nicholas Palis *transp. coord.* Jim Disensi *p. a.* Jean-Yves Bolduc, Gilles Perrault *hd. driver* Don Reardon *drivers* David Leblanc, Réjean Bouchard, Ted Wilson *honeywagon* John Ellis *craft services* George Calamatas, Mairi MacEachern *stunts coord.* Jérôme Tiberghien *casting* Nadia Rona/Elite *ed.* Yves Langlois *asst. ed.* Chantale Bowen *pub.* Lorraine Jamison/Novak and Associates. *l. p.* Elias Koteas, Kerrie Keane, Al Waxman, Michael Sarrazin, Daniel Pilon, Kahil Karn, Joseph Cazalet, Vittorio Rossi, Mark Hellman, Patrick Cardarelli, Susan Bain, Claire Rodger, Brian Dooley, Bruce Ramsey, Ross Hull, Alex Brown, Gayle Garfinkle, Nigel Robertson, Susan Almgren, Thérèse Morange, Isabelle Cyr, Michael Burns, Jason St-Amour, Robert Austern, Susan Glover, Walter Massey, Frank Fontaine, Jeremy Spry. A Telescene Production.

## Paul Cowan's See No Evil

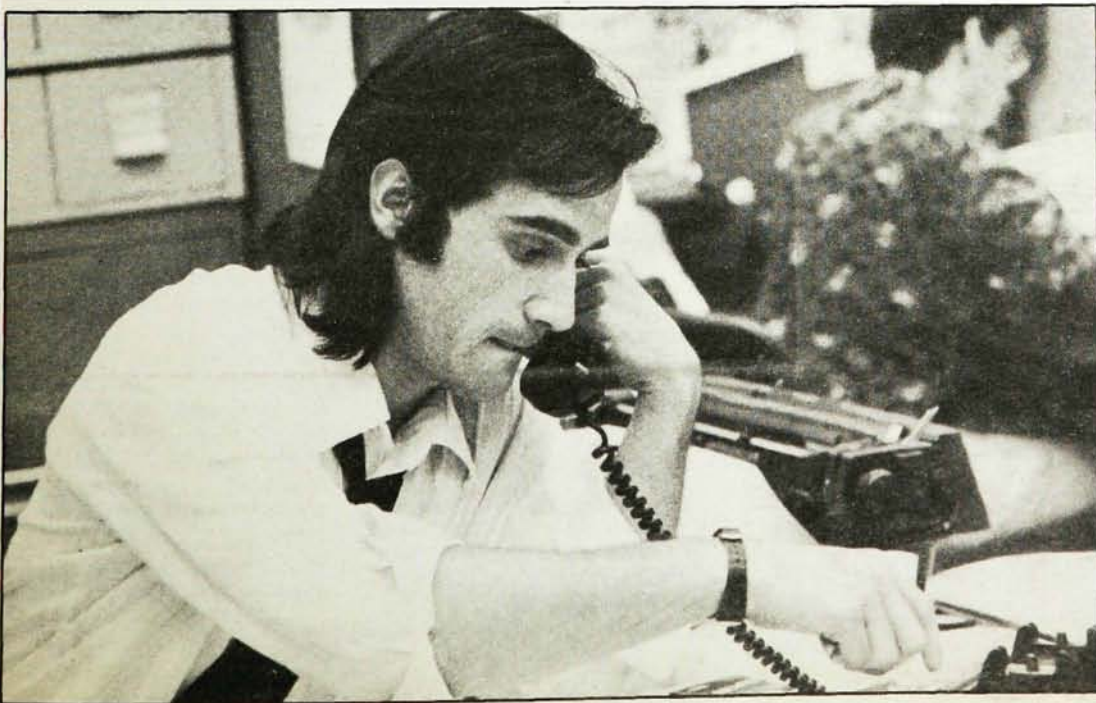
The story of Terry Ryan, a 23-year-old employee at Westinghouse's Hamilton plant who was blinded and disfigured following an explosion at the factory in 1979, is not an unusual one in the annals of labour industry. Instead of being convicted of criminal negligence for having allowed unmarked containers of explosive chemicals on the shop floor, Westinghouse pleaded guilty to the reduced charge of improper storage of hazardous goods and was fined \$5,000. For his part, Ryan has been making do as best he can on his meagre entitlements from the Workman's Compensation Board. What is unusual about this case is the one-man crusade launched by Stanley Gray, a co-worker of Ryan's at Westinghouse, against the triple pillars of big government, big business and big labour.

Paul Cowan's new film *See No Evil* is a docu-drama which chronicles Gray's ongoing struggle from the days following the incident through the court cases of the early '80s to the founding of the Ontario Workers Health Centre. The film begins sensationally with the industrial accident on Nov. 29, 1979. This pivotal episode, however, is really only a launch point for the larger fish in need of frying. Gray's prime target, and the film's main focus, becomes the current state of health and safety in the workplace. The case itself is more of a symptom of evil than the root of it.

Gray's crusade began after inspectors from the Ontario Ministry of Labour filed a one and a half page report in early 1980 (a few weeks following the Westinghouse explosion) which exonerated the company of any blame. In the ensuing months, Gray researched and wrote his own 40-page report which clearly laid the blame for the accident on the company's lax enforcement of safety procedures and its improper handling of inflammable solvents. Toluol, a highly combustible chemical which is used as a cleaning agent, was stored in a drum marked "soap and water". It was this drum which exploded and blinded Terry Ryan.

Gray's report resulted in the ministry filing seven charges against Westinghouse, but it also put the ministry on the spot. If the court action were to succeed, it would repudiate the findings of the original report filed by the ministry's own inspectors. Lawyers from the Ministry of Labour and Westinghouse came to an arrangement: six charges were dropped and one was amended. Westinghouse was fined and the judgement implied that the company was not in any way responsible for the explosion.

Shot in grainy black and white, and using a mix of dramatic re-enactments and interviews, Paul Cowan follows Stanley Gray as he cuts through (and is sometimes overwhelmed by)



Elias Koteas as the title character in *Malarek*