

Degrassi Junior High (Term III)

Wake up in the morning, feeling kind of lonely; hey, I've got to go to school..." This chirpy, almost inane melody, juxtaposed with a barrage of images – of faces in closeup, of papers falling out of lockers, of kids running out of classroom doors, and moving through the crowds of the hallway, "...hey, I've got a new friend" – forms the entrance, the channel, into the world of *Degrassi Junior High*.

Created by Linda Schuyler and Kit Hood and now in its third season, *Degrassi* is the constantly evolving story of a menage of kids in a junior high school, of their quirks, their loves, and their fears. A strange mixture of soap opera, situation comedy, and drama, the stories are woven together to form a mosaic.

Stories overlap thematically: the nature of love and infatuation, the danger of relying on the horoscope to define the future, and the manipulation of events. In the episode, "Star Crossed", Erica schemes to manufacture a date, and then substitutes herself for her identical twin. Convinced that because it is in her horoscope she will find love, she sets out to find a boyfriend, only to find out she has been used by the boy she wanted. At the end, defeated by her own scheming, Erica sits forlornly on the steps of the bowling alley, while another reunited couple run down the steps together.

An award-winning show, *Degrassi Junior High* has become famous for its willingness to tackle formerly taboo subjects unsentimentally, such as teenage pregnancy, homosexuality, and anorexia, and for its almost documentary realism. In part, this sense of realism is drawn from the nature of the acting, which in the tradition of neo-realism draws on characterizations close to the actor's life experience. The style is untheatrical, non-demonstrative, giving the illusion that the young actors are simply acting out their lives.

But this sense of realism is somewhat blinding; in fact, *Degrassi Junior High* is highly constructed. The *mise-en-scène* and editing have little to do with the preconceived idea of a passive camera recording reality. There is a highly developed psychological use of the camera: the camera is constantly moving into close-up on Erica's face, recording her reactions, her final disillusionment with love, giving the sense of an interior life to the character. The camera draws us in as viewers.

It is the active use of camera which breathes life into otherwise ordinary situations. We follow the tracking camera down the hallway between classes, following the central character of the moment, while other figures spill out of the frame. Scenes are often cut in a staccato fashion, the stories overlapping one into the other. Within the space of five minutes, we move from the home of

the twins as they examine the horoscope, to the entrance of the school where Lucy's ex-boyfriend attempts to apologise, to Joey in the hallway trying to persuade the depressed Wheels to join their bowling team, to the twins leaving school... This technique of simultaneous action and multiple narratives is borrowed from soap opera, but used here to create a dynamic, almost breathless feel to the action.

Yet the beauty of *Degrassi Junior High* is that the total effect is so seamless, it is almost invisible. This created world is accepted as 'real', as a reflection of everyday lives in an ordinary junior high school.

The characters themselves have become part of a changing landscape over the years: characters such as Joey, the optimistic and sometimes obnoxious dynamo in the Hawaiian shirt, Caitlin, the eager-beaver scholar, and Spike, the sullen girl with a Mohawk hairdo who is now a young mother. They are not the stagnant entities of most TV series, but evolving and changing characters.

And despite touching on highly moral issues, the solutions are not dealt out in neat packages. Snake must come to an understanding that his athletic older brother who he worships is gay, even though he has ridiculed gays in the past. And although he comes to accept his brother, his parents cannot, and his brother must leave, rejected by his family. When Monica, the anorexic, is offered help she cannot accept it, and yells in the final scene, "I don't need help!" The show rejects easy endings, recognising that some problems run deeper than polite discussion.

Degrassi Junior High is a minor miracle, evolving

from a one-shot project done on a shoestring budget into an international success. What emerges through it all is Schuyler and Hood's sensitivity and warmth for their characters, and a sophistication of concerns not often seen on television.

Anne Weiss •

DEGRASSI JUNIOR HIGH (Term III) *exec p.* Linda Schuyler *p./series creators* Kit Hood, Linda Schuyler *sup. wr.* Yan Moore *exec. p.* CBC Angela Bruce *exec. p.* WGBH Kate Taylor *mus.* Wendy Watson, Lewis Manne *d.o.p.* Phil Earnshaw, CSC *p. mgr.* Sari Friedland *d. a.* Mitra Sen *sd. rec.* Ervin Copestake *art d.* Judy Shiner *asst. cam.* Colleen Norcross *gaffer* Tom Wright *best boy* Michael Bawcutt *key grip* Paul Smith *grip* Steve Massey *cont.* Kevin May *2nd a. d.* Jonathan Freedman *cam. trainee* Michael Dyer *sd. rec. asst.* Dino Schiavone, Francoise Pelletier *art dep. asst. stills* Janet Webb *craft services* Frank Faulk *tutor* Laura Papsin *p. sec.* Laura L. Vickers *post. p. coord.* Brian P. White *sd. ed./ Foley art.* Manse James *post. p. asst.* Peter Winger, Barbara Haughey, David Yonson *mus. rec.* Peter Goodale *research* Loretta Castellari *pub.* Kathryn Ellis *d.* Kit Hood, John Bertram, Eleanore Lindo *sc.* Yan Moore, Susin Nielsen, Kathryn Ellis *ed.* Eric Wrate, Robert de Lint, Roushel Goldstein, John Bertram *l. p.* Dayo Ade, Stefan Brogren, Michael Carry, Amanda Cook, Irene Courakos, Maureen Deiseach, Angela Deiseach, Anais Granofsky, Neil Hope, Sara Holmes, Jacy Hunter, Cathy Keenan, Arlene Lott, Maureen McKay, Bill Parrott, Amanda Stepto, Keith White, Sara Ballingall, Danah Jean Brown, Tammy Campbell, Andy Chambers, Christopher Charlesworth, Sabrina Dias, Chrisa Erodoutou, Rebecca Haines, John Ioannou, Colleen Lam, Kyra Levy, Pat Mastroianni, Stacie Mistysyn, Siluck Saysanasy, Karen Sheridan, Duncan Waugh, Trevor Cummings, Annabelle Waugh, Michael Blake, Steve Bednerjak, Michelle Goodeve, Roger Montgomery, Dan Woods, Deborah Lobban, Susin Nielsen, Nancy Sinclair, Timm Zemanek, Dorothy Philips, Montgomery Randal, Elizabeth Marmur, Sue Johansen, Ross Churchill, Sheila Brogren, Vanessa Dyllyn, Dave James, James Johnston, Dawn Tunney. A Playing With Time Inc. production.

Jean Chabot's La Nuit avec Hortense

There is something seductive about the title, something that invites us into an intriguing world: night, with all its charm and mystery, all the ghosts and shadows it evokes. The beginning of the film draws us right into this world with a long subjective travelling shot. We are driving, slowly, on a dark, deserted country road. The headlights flash on the trees, beaming a passage through the surrounding darkness. Voices hum a peculiar and melancholy chant. The mood is rather disturbing yet fascinating.

After such a promising start, your expectations are high, but unfortunately, they are never fulfilled. There were many problems on the set of *La Nuit*... even reports of a violent dispute between the director, Jean Chabot and his star, Carole Laure, and the final result certainly shows evidence of the strain. There are many pleasurable elements in the film but, somehow, they don't hold together to form anything coherent.

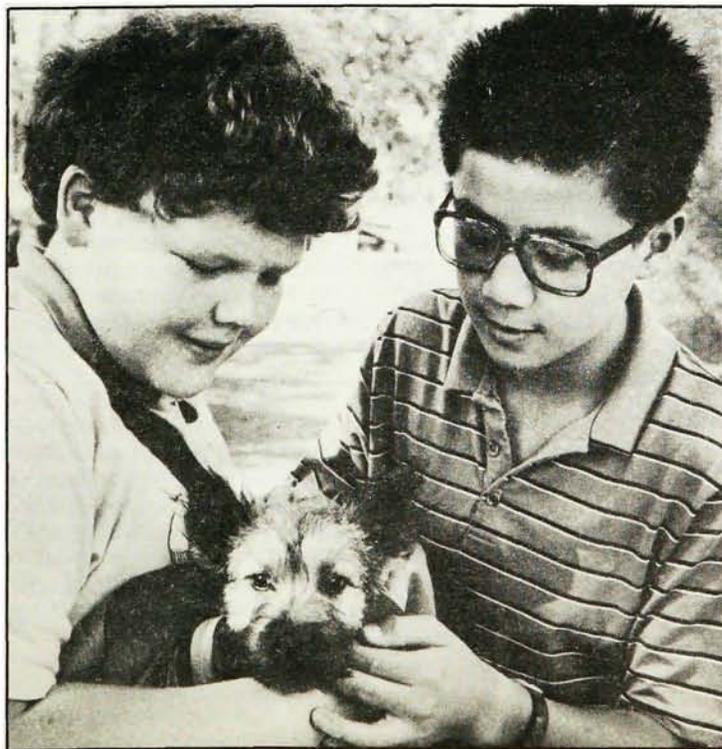
From the start, the subject – desire and passion – is not one of the easiest to treat in film because of the intense emotions it inevitably conveys, emotions which can quickly fall into farce or melodrama. Unfortunately, it's hard to believe in the passion of André's and Hortense' journey because their experience doesn't seem to spring from the characters themselves but rather from some kind of exaggerated plot twist.

André (Lothaire Bluteau) meets Hortense (Carole Laure) just after deciding to leave Montreal in the wake of a psychological breakdown. Instead of following up on his original plan – heading for Chicago – he spends his night with Hortense.

Chabot uses a narrative form that is closer to poetry than to traditional linear story-lines. The film is built around a series of unconnected events, linked by symbolic elements that emerge from a recurring dream which is haunting André. The couple will have to confront some of these elements – most representing some aspect of nature – in order to progress along the route of their journey and strengthen their relationship.

One of these elements is water. André and Hortense have to be purified in the turbulent rapids of the river in order to make a fresh start together. Later, a storm will break as if to amplify the couple's burning desire in the first love scene. Chabot is certainly not the first to use forces of nature as symbols for hidden dimensions of passion, and as instruments that bring some characters to face their emotions, but here something is not working.

The main problem with the film is that we



Duncan Waugh (Arthur) and Siluck Saysanasy (Yick) with Phil the dog

never feel any kind of interaction between the characters and the symbolic nature surrounding them (which is supposed to provoke their union). We perceive André and Hortense as two separate, though parallel entities that never really mingle with each other. That's too bad because the technical quality of *La Nuit avec Hortense* is quite remarkable. Chabot juxtaposes color and black and white film to evoke the two different worlds of reality and of André's dream, a simple idea – though perhaps over-used – but very effective here. Sometimes, the black and white tones reflect in the colors and vice versa, especially in the water scenes which wash almost everything out to reveal only neutral colors and harsh shadows of night, almost as if the real and unreal were coming together in moments of pure magic.

The beauty that Chabot has given the images, through their grainy texture and appealing contrasts, is certainly one of the interesting aspects of the film. The actors, too, do their share in trying to bring the film to life. Carole Laure finally succeeds in giving a certain weight to a character by playing it simple, thus helping to keep Hortense's mystery intact. Lothaire Bluteau, unfortunately, didn't have enough material to sink his teeth into.

But *La Nuit avec Hortense* has problems in the orchestration of all these artistic and technical elements. They are not organized in any way that brings us to some deeper understanding. Chabot begins beautifully, and his ending is also worthwhile, but the rest of the film just doesn't work. The lesson learned from *La Nuit avec Hortense* is that it is decidedly not easy to make a good lyrical film.

Claire Valade •

LA NUIT AVEC HORTENSE p. Nicole Lamothe d. Jean Chabot sc. Jean Chabot d.o.p. Daniel Jobin art d. Normand Sarrazin ed. Claude Beaugrand mus. Richard Desjardins l.p. Carole Laure, Lothaire Bluteau, Paul Hébert, Germain Houde, Marcel Sabourin, Louise Forestier, Denis Bouchard, Michel Barrette, Karen Racicot. Produced by Les Ateliers Audio-Visuels du Québec. Distributed by Astral Films.



Hortense (Carole Laure) and André (Lothaire Bluteau)

François Bouvier's
and Jean Beaudry's
**Les Matins
Infidèles
(Unfaithful
Mornings)**

Marc and Jean-Pierre, friends and fellow baby-boomers, are unequally committed to the project they ostensibly share. Marc (Jean Beaudry) is writing a novel based on the photographs taken by Jean-Pierre (Denis Bouchard) of an undistinguished street corner in Montreal. The deal is that Jean-Pierre will provide a daily shot of the corner (taken at exactly 8 a.m.) for a period of one year.

However, Jean-Pierre soon begins to cheat, winding back the clock in the window of the café, (which appears in each photograph), whenever he misses the appointed time. Worse yet, he skips weeks at a time and compensates with a series of phony shots which he submits to Marc. To complete the assault on the assumed purity of artistic inspiration, he also takes liberties with the composition of the supposedly candid photo by imposing his own *mise-en-scène*.

Jean-Pierre's unfaithfulness to the creative pact is interwoven with his unfaithfulness to his loved ones. He ditches his lover/photographic assistant, Julie, (played by Violaine Forest), after meeting another woman while photographing the street corner. She, too, is sloughed off by Jean-Pierre when she becomes pregnant; he even sheds his car, abandoning it on the street when it has outlived its usefulness. And when the landlord threatens Jean-Pierre for lack of payment, he adopts the time-honoured, Montreal tradition of the midnight move, clearing his things out of the apartment in the dead of night and imposing himself on Marc.

As played by the manic Bouchard (*Lance et compte, Jésus de Montréal*), Jean-Pierre is a cad – a charming cad, but a cad nonetheless. He blows the rent money up his nose and generally behaves without a whit of sensitivity to those around him. Jean-Pierre's one redeeming feature is his obvious devotion to his five-year-old boy. (He lets the kid paint on the walls while he snorts coke and watches hockey, the very model of the enlightened, Yuppie parent.)

Betrayal is omnipresent. Marc, already feeling betrayed by his partner, Pauline, (Louise Richer) – she leaves him in spite of their 'modern', open arrangement – realizes that Jean-Pierre is being unfaithful to the street-corner project. The purity of the original idea has been sullied by Jean-Pierre's lack of commitment and Marc's work on his novel



Marc (Jean Beaudry) working on the novel inspired by Jean-Pierre's photographs.

suffers. He is further betrayed by his colleagues at the university who give up their principled strike, leaving him alone on the picket line. He resigns in protest.

The only successful relationship portrayed in the film is one between father and son. But there, the indulgence so central to the relationship points mainly to the self-absorption the boomer generation brings to every aspect of life. This is, after all, the first generation to use the word "parent" as a verb, and the explosion of books and films on the subject would have us believe the concept has just been invented.

Co-writers and directors Bouvier and Beaudry (their first feature was the acclaimed *Jacques et Novembre*), in what is perhaps an ironic commentary on their own partnership, paint a portrait of two individuals whose collaboration is doomed by their personalities. Jean-Pierre is a "maudit irresponsable," as Marc tells him, while Marc, the politically correct, guilt-ridden college prof – in a fit of anger after Pauline leaves him, he kicks over a garbage can, only to come back and clean up the spilled contents – is a "hostie d'hypocrite" in Jean-Pierre's view.

Ultimately, it's next to impossible to have any sympathy for Jean-Pierre, and the contrived climax of the film (in which he sheds his life the way he's abandoned the constituent elements of it) is thus robbed of its potential impact. It's also hard to understand what drives the friendship between the two men, or between any two characters in the film for that matter (with the exception of the blood bond between father and son).

Les Matins Infidèles harks back to an earlier time in Quebec film when everybody was depressed, alienated, and unable to get any satisfaction. Back then it was due to not having reached maturity (read independence). Now, it's

supposedly a result of the comfort and indifference of the post-referendum era. (Which, I suppose, amounts to the same thing).

Technically, *Les Matins Infidèles* is assured. The acting is uniformly good; the photography and editing are of very high standard, and Michel Rivard's soundtrack adds greatly to every scene. The film contains some memorable images, but as a psychological exposé, it falls somewhat short of its goal. After raising a number of important questions about commitment (and its flipside, betrayal), and offering up some occasionally humorous insights into the creative process, *Les Matins Infidèles* settles down to the level of mere navel-gazing.

Frank Rackow •

LES MATINS INFIDÈLES (UNFAITHFUL MORNINGS) p. François Bouvier assoc. p. Marc Daigle d. /sc. Jean Beaudry, François Bouvier cam. Alain Dupras sd. Claude Beaugrand, Esther Auger set des. Karine Epp cost. Gaëtanne Lévesque ed. Jean Beaudry sd. ed. Claude Beaugrand mus. Michel Rivard 1st. a. d. Carle Delarochette-Verpet p. mgr. Claude Cartier casting/2nd a. d. Marquise Lepage cam. asst. Pierre Pelletier app. cam. Esther Valiquette standcam op. Alain Dupras, Steve Campanelli (Going Steady) addnl. cam. Eric Cayla boom Esther Auger, Catherine Van Der Donck asst. art d. Claude Laflamme, Jean-Luc Dequoy makeup Kathryn Casault, Lucille Demers gaffer Pierre Provost elec. Marc Charlebois, Denis Ménard key grip Philippe Palu grip Christian Bédard sp. fx. L'Intrigue unit mgr. Catherine Thabourin p. a. Andrée Bouvier, Jean-Paul Rémy, Edmond Delorimier asst. ed. Suzanne Boullier ed. cons. Yves Chaput, André Corriveau asst. sd. ed. Francine Poirier sd. fx. Jérôme Décarie asst. sd. fx. Monique Vézina loc. sd. Jocelyn Caron post. sync team. Diane Boucher, Annie Jean, André Turcot, Mathieu Roy-Décarie, Normand Belanger 2nd unit. : art d. Claude Poirier stills Pierre Dury key grip Eliot Deraspe, elec. Patrice Houx p. a. André Dupuy, Ann Langis mix. Michel Descombes asst. mix. Luc Boudrias l. p. Jean Beaudry, Denis Bouchard, Laurent Faubert-Bouvier, Violaine Forest, Louise Richer, Nathalie Coupal. dist. Aska Film International. A Lundi Matin Production with the participation of Telefilm Canada, SOGIC-Québec, and Radio Canada.