

FILM REVIEWS

close-ups of Manon's face against monotone backgrounds, the Pietà of Michelle cradling her half-clad brother as he dozes in a drunken slumber, and the images of the earth, the water, the colours of the leaves: this is an austere, evolved, visual language exercised with complete control. That sense of control, in fact, extends to every aspect of the film, its passions and its scope rendering it universally accessible. But there is another, equally profound reflection here. That sense of self that

Quebecers watching the film will experience is a very particular thing; that amazing right to say: "This is where I live, these are the people and the elements and the seasons that I live with," fills one with a heady kind of elation. It is an essential part of what motion pictures are all about, something rare enough in any part of the Canadian experience.

Barbara Samuels

Micheline Lanctôt's *L'homme à tout faire*

p.c. Corporation Image Ltee. (1979) p. René Malo exec.p. Jean-Claude Lord assoc.p. Ted Kotcheff s.d./sc./dial. Micheline Lanctôt a.d. Pierre Gendron 2nd. a.d. Michèle Mercure cont. Thérèse Bérubé p. assist. Francyne Morin p.sec. Suzanne Comtois p. account. Bérangère (Catou) Maltais d.o.p. André Gagnon focus François Gill 1st assist. cam. Robert Guertin 2nd assist. cam. Daniel Vincelette ed. Annick de Bellefeuille, Diane Boucher (assist.) sd. Marcel Fraser boom Yvon Benoit sd. ed. Pierre Leroux, Jean-Pierre Cereghetti (assist), Louis Dupire (assist.) m. François Lanctôt or. songs Gilles Vigneault mus. mix Louis Hone art.d. Normand Sarrazin art. assist. Daniel Champagne, Céline Mayrand props Pierre Fournier makeup Mickie Hamilton, Chantale Ethier hair Constant Natale cost. Henri Huet ward. Dominique L'Abbé p.sup. Jacques Normand, Jean Gauthier (assist) messenger Louis Gascon chief machinist Jean-Maurice de Ernsted machinist Denis Ménard chief electrician Claude Charron elect. Claude Brasseur stills Jean-Pierre Pelicano, Lise Labelle film titles Productions Ciné-Titres Enrg. op. eff. Les Films Transfocal Inc. l.p. Jocelyn Bérubé, Paul Dion, Andrée Pelletier, Gilles Renaud, Marcel Sabourin, Janette Bertrand, Danielle Schneider, Camille Bélanger, Roger Turcotte, Guy Thauvette, Louise Lambert, Martine Pratte, Pauline Lapointe, Martin Labrecque, Francis Labrecque, Madeleine Guérin, Louis Thompson, André Miron, Christiane Tessier, Véronique Vilbert, Denis Yukon Ménard col. 35mm run. time 99 min. pub. Thérèse David Publicité distrib. Les Films René Malo Inc.

Micheline Lanctôt, who began her film career as an animator and turned to acting (*La vraie nature de Bernadette*, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* and, more recently, *Blood and Guts*) has written and directed a feature film.

L'homme à tout faire (The Handyman) is not a movie that takes critics and audiences by storm, but it is the kind of satisfying film fare that makes you want to see another film by Micheline Lanctôt.

When she was acting, Lanctôt had a natural buoyancy about her. (No director could contain it, though in at least one

film, *Ti-cul tougas*, it alone was not enough to sustain faltering comedy.) *L'homme à tout faire*, also has that quality of buoyant wit, but here it is more than a glimmer of personality. Lanctôt is, we discover, a well-nurtured writer and director of comedy.

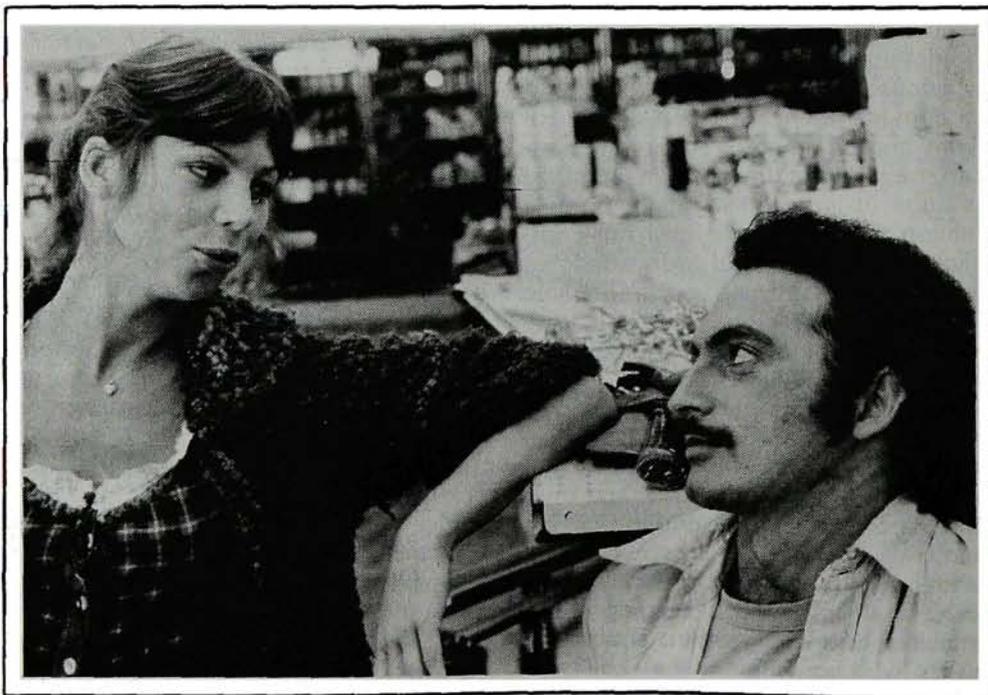
The film is a simple retelling of the tale of a hopeful country boy's journey to the metropolis. A difficult subject because it has already been done (in Canadian film, *Goin' Down the Road* is considered a classic), Lanctôt is never self-conscious about that. In fact, the film succeeds at several points in distilling its small truths into that jolting first shot.

Armand Dorion (Jocelyn Bérubé) is the type of man condemned to unhappiness as long as he is without a woman. When his wife and kids, by her former marriage, leave the unemployed carpenter, he decides to move to the city to look for

work and another lover. In Montreal he falls for the first woman whose eye lingers over his country garb — a young girl who is ultimately uninterested in Armand's design of the way things should be. His next find is older and married: Thérèse (Andrée Pelletier) hires him to finish the basement of her suburban home. After what seems an interminable period of stepping around and over each other, they realize they are in love.

A comedy of manners in the vein of *Cousin Cousine*, Lanctôt's film is not as refined or enlivened with foibles as the former, which became a North American hit. *L'homme à tout faire* won't go that far, though it is a pleasant relief from the befuddled comedy of cynicism that has so firmly rooted itself in our contemporary culture.

Lanctôt has said the film is about marginals, but it isn't really. For all their disappointments, her characters haven't dropped out of Quebec society and don't intend to. Thérèse is mainstream middle class. She falters, but she only really wants to get back to her husband through the hapless Armand. We suspect this during the scene when Thérèse's mother, played with much good grace and fun by Québec's "star" TV writer Janette Bertrand, discovers that her daughter is having an affair with the carpenter. There is a lengthy moment of silence before she breaks into peeling laughter, soon joined by her daughter. Armand, meanwhile, is



Their eyes tell it all, as Manon (Danielle Schneider) puts the make on a receptive Armand (Jocelyn Bérubé) in *L'homme à tout faire*

still in the bathroom trying to act employed and save his dignity.

Jocelyn Bérubé plays the soulful Armand with real sensitivity and restraint. This is the kind of role which leaves audiences feeling that acting is not really work, and at the same time, as if they've just been through a psychological sauna. Bérubé is great — in spite of the inconsistent script. There is a shot of Armand and Thérèse coming out of a restaurant on the evening they are finally going to have together, that locks the image of poignant incongruity forever in one's mind.

Andrée Pelletier is not yet wholly at ease before the camera. There are times when her brightness seems false. In her sobered moments though, her voice and bearing have just the right cowed uncertainty about them. (She isn't helped by the confusing shift of focus in the middle of the film; the Dorion character is almost lost while we follow the frustrated suburban housewife through her paces.) Pel-

letier brings a certain classiness to the screen, and this may prove an important role for her.

There are other fine performances, by Marcel Sabourin and Gilles Renaud. For the most part though, Lanctôt's secondary characters are disappointingly one-faced.

While the music (by François Lanctôt) is often predictably emphatic, thus obtrusive, the film affords two striking musical moments. The first, when Armand, at the height of his passionate courting, leaves Thérèse alone in the kitchen while he plays her a violin serenade from behind the bedroom door. We are so conditioned into equating docility with weakness that we forget it can be heroic. And Gilles Vigneault's closing ballad ("All roads lead to the city...") is a winning movie theme song, in any language.

Joan Irving

Margaret Laurence, First Lady of Manawaka

p. c. National Film Board 1978 exec. p. Roman Droiter p. William Weintraub d./sc. Robert Duncan art. d./research Ronald Blumer d. ph. Barry Perles cam. assist. Andy Kitzenuck sd. Michel Hazel, Bernard Bordeleau re. rec. Jean-Pierre Joutel mus. ed. Don Douglas ed. Sidonie Kerr elec. Don Caufield unit admin. Tamara Lynch col. 16mm running time 52 min. 52 sec. distrib. National Film Board.

"Art, in fact, is never life."
- Margaret Laurence

explore the life and work of an author must walk a fine line, balancing the tensions between two realities — imaginative and biographical. Two recent films which, in my opinion, have achieved this difficult and delicate balance are David Kaufman's *A.M. Klein: The Poet As Landscape* and Donald Brittain's *Volcano: An Inquiry into the Life and Death of Malcolm Lowry*. Because filmmaker Robert Duncan was producer for the latter work, I anticipated that his directing of *Margaret Laurence, First Lady of Manawaka* would merit a similar distinction.

Duncan is a Scots-Canadian who came to Canada in 1967. He worked as a journalist for the *Montreal Gazette* until 1968, when he began writing for CBC productions. In 1974, he began his liaison

with the NFB — writing for, producing, and directing several projects, including the Lowry film and the delightfully penetrating profile of ad-man Jerry Goodis, entitled *Have I Ever Lied to You Before?* for which Duncan served as writer.

"*First Lady of Manawaka* was made," says Duncan, "to help readers, students and admirers understand Laurence's background and its relationship to her works." Interviews with her childhood acquaintances — including a teacher, a neighbour, a piano instructor — recollections from Laurence herself, and information provided by a voice-over narrator, convey to the audience a sense of Laurence's early life: the loss of her parents, the influence of the United Church, the importance to her of ancestry, her inner compulsion to write — which had already emerged by the primary grades. Laurence speaks of her sense of isolation until high school, when she found that she could write for the school paper. The excitement of this discovery made her feel that "maybe I actually have some talent that is socially acceptable." We learn of the impact on her life of the Second World War, then university, work, marriage, travel, children, divorce. The film makes use of still photographs, old film footage of soldiers returning, newspaper clippings to create a feel for the past.

By intercutting anecdotal recollections with readings from the novels, the film interweaves the biographical with the literary. But in doing so, it suggests a simplistic cause-effect relationship, as though we must find our way through her literature mainly by knowing her life. This is perhaps most evident and irritating in the decision to show us tracking-shots of modern-day Neepawa, Laurence's hometown, while we hear on the sound-track actress Jayne Eastwood reading passages

To my mind, a particularly challenging form of documentary is the film which attempts to explore the life and literary work of an eminent writer. The special challenge that arises from this endeavor stems from the subtle interrelationship between the 'events' in imaginative fiction and the events in an author's life. No matter how close an author's real life experiences are to his or her literary creations, it can be argued that, ultimately, the literature transcends those objective correlatives, to achieve its own life and symbolic meaning beyond the confines of biography. According to this view, the whole of the literary work is more than the sum of the author's life.

Thus, the documentarist who would

Council of Canadian Filmmakers ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, May 28, 1980
7 : 30 pm

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