

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.

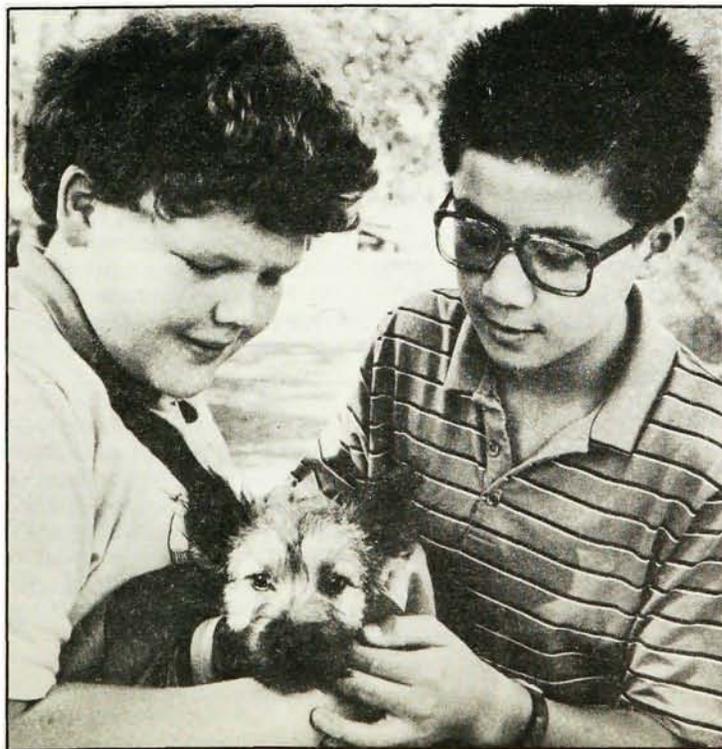
From the start, the subject – desire and passion – is not one of the easiest to treat in film because of the intense emotions it inevitably conveys, emotions which can quickly fall into farce or melodrama. Unfortunately, it's hard to believe in the passion of André's and Hortense' journey because their 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