

sagging flesh. Only in form and style is *Diary* a cheap and rather vacuous soft-core porno flick. In its essence it can be seen as a profound moral fable on one of the central themes in Western art: the struggle of the soul of Man against the downward pull of evil and annihilation. Dostoevskian in its insight into the workings of a nihilistic soul, *Diary* is an urgently contemporary rehandling of the Faust theme. If Iain Ewing's Dave is a chaotically incoherent character — jovial, sinister, chivalrous, harsh, giggly, romantic, cynical, tit-crazy — it is because he embodies the very essence of Chaos itself. Disintegrated by nihilism and satiety, he is incarnate Evil, offering nothing but oblivion and death.

Defying the superficial conventions that represent Evil as hideous and inhuman, Iain Ewing shows us the pathos of a soul whose fall into the void has been from a height of clear idealism. There is pathos in his story of Joan, the girl enslaved by the heroin pusher, and pathos in his thwarted desire to be a rock singer, the brightest of them all. Like Lucifer, he was once a bright angel, and in his fallen state, seeking to put the cold touch of nihilism and death upon other souls, there is manifest self-hatred. As he says, in a line that captures the lean economy of the film's dialogue: "I never loved Joan; it was only a game." His vindictive hatred of woman, and of all idealism, is the face of idealism gone sour. As he offers to Tom the dismal satisfactions of his own infernal existence, which Tom at first perceives as paradise, we can almost hear him say, with Marlowe's Mephistophilis, "Why this is Hell, nor am I out of it!"

It is a mark of Ewing's daring intuition that his characterization of Evil goes so far as to encompass the grotesquely comic. Traditionally of course, sin is indeed absurd, a travesty of true humanity made in God's image. While Tom's erotic encounters lead upward to Love with the pure Simone, Iain's gross couplings touch bottom when he is assaulted in a basement by lady-wrestlers in Viking costumes. Squawking feebly for help, he is held down and lashed on his chubby pink buttocks — an image of infantile impotence. Evil is overcome by being rendered ludicrous.

Playing opposite this suburban Satan, Tom Celli gradually invests the protagonist with spiritual dignity and moral grandeur. As an ex-priest he embodies the thwarted desire for a transcendent faith, at once vulnerable to Iain's delusive promise of erotic bliss, and hungry for a higher satisfaction. Out of the dark night of the soul in which the Tempter has found him, there comes the re-awakening of the spirit. He communicates to Iain his insight that "Materialism is the religion of modern man", and begins to yearn for less barren

gratifications. He talks derisively of Catholicism, agrees to hear Iain's "confession", and even engages in a rather perfunctory Black Mass at Iain's suggestion. Yet we can see that, even as he parodies his priestly function, he is recovering his conviction of its meaning. At the same time, Iain, while he initiates these mockeries of faith, implicitly acknowledges its power. The gamble for Tom's soul has become the harrowing of what remains of his own. The heart of the film is the sequence following the Black Mass: in a surreal fantasia (in tinted monochrome) Iain nails down the lid of a coffin over Tom — an image expressive of the essentially annihilating nature of his patronage.



Iain Ewing and Tom Celli

But the vestiges of Iain's humanity continue to compete with his Despair (the sin for which there is no forgiveness). In spite of himself, and in memory of his love for Joan, he helps Tom to vanquish the beast who has imprisoned Simone. Only after learning of Joan's death does his hatred for life cause him to demand fulfillment of the pact that will result in Tom's, or his own destruction. He has performed a saving act in assisting Tom to the realization of a redeeming love. But for him there is no salvation. The filthy waters, to which he has earlier compared his soul, close over him.

The vision of modern life, or more particularly of Toronto life, displayed in *Diary of a Sinner* is melancholy indeed. The spirit that animates the screenplay is a bleakly tragic one. For although the plot depicts the redemption of a soul by Love for spiritual desolation, the character with whom the author has chosen to identify cannot find redemption for himself. Indeed, it is just his diseased vision of a loveless, depraved, vicious world which Tom needs to be rescued from. In other words, *Diary of a Sinner* is a fantasy in which Iain Ewing destroys himself in order to save the inno-

cence which his own nihilism endangers. A sacrificial act of the imagination, it is a Faust story written by one of the damned who retains enough love for his former brethren, for his unfallen self, to commit suicide rather than to spread damnation further. Iain Ewing is a character out of Graham Greene, a saint who volunteers for Hell.

Robert Fothergill

Love at First Sight

She takes one look and BAM — it's love at first sight. But what is wrong with Dick and why does he call himself Roy, and in what way is he disabled?

By the time you know, the belated title has told you that *Love at First Sight* is a film by Rex Bromfield starring Valeri Bromfield and Dan Akroyd, and you can settle back for a cheerful half-hour with one of the most human, ordinary, funny and engaging Canadian couples ever: Roy and Shirley.

She's like the essence of Judy Holliday. One of those crazy dames who walk past the gates of hell, chewing bubble gum and reading aloud from a tourist guide. Dense but delightful.

And he's tall, dark, and in Shirley's opinion, obviously handsome, but with a difference: he has a disability. It's the kind of thing that in the hands of playwright David French creates a diatribe, but blooming under Bromfield's touch, only accentuates the vulnerable, incomplete qualities of man. Everyone has some flaw. But if you're in love, like Shirley, you hardly even notice.

Love is blind. And so is Roy.

Did you automatically flinch? Not to worry. Bromfield isn't out to create false heroics, sloppy sentimentality or to moralize. Roy's blindness doesn't make him tragic or incapable. Shirley doesn't give a hoot, not that much fazes Shirley anyway. And as Bromfield sets up the story so that you don't have to feel pity or concern, you are able to nervously enjoy the very human predicaments this couple get into on their visit to Niagara Falls.

For instance: While Shirley waits impatiently in the car, Roy enters a thin woods to relieve himself out of sight of the road.

"Can you see me?" he calls.

With the exasperation that indicates this has been going on some time, she answers, "Yes."

After awhile he calls again, "Can you see me now?"

"Yes! Go further!" she calls.

Finally, his voice again: "Now can you see me?"

"No. Roy! Where are you?" she panics, realizing neither of them know.

This scene finally melted even a sophisticated Cannes audience this year. As Bromfield exclaimed with happy relief: "It really broke them up."

Bromfield's sense of humour is so rare nowadays one feels like capturing it under glass. But film will do. Subtle, understated, it is based on character, not silly situations. It is, in fact, the gentle humour formed of an attitude to life, of a genial acceptance of the human condition and the lovable qualities of the human's ridiculous, idiosyncratic nature.

It is also the humour of survival, of the Good Soldier Schweik and Buster Keaton and of the lovely crazy comedies of the thirties. Maybe it's just in time!

To make this type of comedy work, the acting must be nearly perfect. And I think it is. Shirley is played wonderfully by Valeri Bromfield, the director's sister, she was part of the old Second City troupe and is now a regular performer on the Bobbie Gentry Variety Show. And Ray is an observant and sensitive portrayal by Dan Akroyd who can be seen here in Toronto with the present Second City group at the Firehall Restaurant, 110 Lombard St.

The characters are both believable and amusing. Facial expressions and reactions do not seem to be created for the benefit of audience but rise naturally from the incidents of the plot and the basis of the character. Seemingly unperformed, the roles distill the essence of those recognizable human foibles that make us love each other and forgive ourselves.

When this works, true comic art is created. Rare as it is wonderful, any director illustrating an ability to produce it should be hung with bells and fed delectable things every hour on the hour by a happy public.

Bromfield's film background includes a tiny comedy *I Am Chinese* made in 1966 and shown at Cinecity; many CBC fillers and shorts, those on artists like Pachter, Redinger, Zelenek and Danby amounting to an hour's viewing altogether; and a short on Karel Appel called *Appel Salad* which avoids all didacticism, to the annoyance of those anxious to be educated. Even at this early stage in what, hopefully, will be a long and fruitful career, he has good control of actors, excellent editing judgment and generally inconspicuous well-considered use of technique.

But best of all he has subtlety, and in subtlety lies the birth of humour, in my opinion. For when an audience must search a little for the gag, or patiently let the ludicrous force of circumstances shape the absurdity that becomes amusing, then the audience itself is creating the humour rather than accepting a calculated, cued barrage such as TV comics utilize. And when the audience finds humour in a situation, they are not just amused, they are happy.

—N.E.

Montreal Main

Frank Vitale's remarkable first feature film, *Montreal Main*, probes deeply into the troubled and insecure inner core of the people who will not conform to society's limiting black-or-white, male-or-female classification. And in so doing it suggests the diversity of sexuality, the shades and shifts lying inherent and unacknowledged in all people. Watching, you flash Lolita, Peter Lorre as "M", parental incest, and a flood of forgotten allusions from history and literature about the secret mysterious world of indeterminate sex and forbidden love.

Long after sexual diversity is acknowledged and understood, Canadians will be proud of this early work, this original, brave, revealing and beautifully constructed film.

It has the integrity of a diary, or a confession. It is an inside study of humans hunting for those relationships that define emotional life. In a world where sexuality is no longer linked inevitably to parenthood, and people are becoming disconnected digits in a computerized society, desperate for individual meaning, the relevance of the need to love and be loved, and perhaps the impossibility, have implications that reverberate into the twenty-first century.

With zero population, and the next generation about to become the first so-called "permanent society" the male and female will obviously develop into other beings than those their genders define now as essential to the survival of the species. Vitale's film previews a world where the only real need the characters have for each other is the need to be needed. During the course of the film the consequences of that and the resulting emptiness make us realize that in losing adherence to animal functions and their structures (hunting, bearing, protecting, helping each other survive) we drift into a realm where individual purpose is lost and emotional survival endangered.

Thus a grimy group of Montreal Main's loft-dwellers, artists and gays, and their incestuous infatuations, jealousies and experiments, offer not only a widening experience for an audience, but a portent of a future generation's problem in finding out how to be needed as individuals, when no one is.

Credits for script and cast are the same. Following studio, star and auteur systems in filmmaking, group or cooperative works are now developing a new strength and popularity. Vitale's work is a forerunner here also. A kind of Imaginary Documentary, he and his friends have found a way to present what amounts to a conjecture, or day-dream, in the style of reality.

Charged with a raw realism created

by the semi-improvisational technique, it hoodwinks the audience into forgetting this is no Actuality Drama, *à la* Allan King, but an exploration of possibilities that, like daydreaming, permits safe investigation without actual danger. Perhaps it is Vitale's way of clarifying his thinking, looking for solutions, diverting his energies and avoiding mistakes; indeed, *living* a projection of his life based on truth: an Imaginary or Pretend Documentary.

At any rate, it works and works well. Vitale is one hell of a filmmaker. His background includes *Country Music Montreal 1971* a competent and original study, shown on the CBC; being associate-director and co-producer on some four or five films during the time he lived in New York; and experience as unit director on *Joe* and as a cameraman for *Newsreel*.

Vitale's editing is often superb; intuitive and exciting. The style of the film encompasses lyricism, impressionism, routine shots and awkward, jumbled, hand-held shooting, in a combination that at first seems jarring until one realizes that it simply mirrors the way we see life: things are beautiful sometimes, ugly another. The technique, style and theme blend inseparably and Eric Block's camerawork is totally unified with Vitale's direction.

Unfortunately improvisational acting techniques seem to have caused almost impossible sound problems for Pedro Novak, and many words, phrases and comments are muddled, missed and lost. This is too bad particularly because on a first viewing you need all those words to help keep everyone sorted out and the plot figured, since the film doesn't follow precise chronological or linear action.

The music is aptly composed by jazz improvisational artist Beverly Glenn-Copeland and is fittingly lyrical on the surface, nervously pulsing underneath, underlining and in harmony with the film.

Finally, the story: The main plot involves a bearded photographer named Frank, played by Frank Vitale, and his many-leveled and complicated infatuation with a twelve-year-old boy named Johnny. Whether motivated by beauty, jealousy, longing for youth, innocence, mystery or rebellious defiance of ethical codes, the friendship between the two includes attractions of parenthood, brotherhood, sexual love, danger and perversity. The theme is reversed and carried into a sub-plot involving Frank's friend Bozo and his attempt at a love affair with a charming, normal girl named Jackie.

Both expose the ignorance of the straight world about other emotional worlds, the radiating consequences of love and lovelessness, and the limitations of a system that believes the myth