

Rhodes. We can only hope that Paul Lynch's next film will come soon and stretch further.

—Alastair Brown

Les Ordres

The knock in the middle of the night

Written and directed by Michel Brault, Edited by Yves Dion, Camerawork by Michel Brault and François Protat, with: Helene Loiselle, Jean Lapointe, Guy Provost, Claude Gauthier and Louise Forestier.

At 5:17 a.m. on the morning of October 16, 1970, I was watching television. It was quite a funny program, a bit like Orson Welles radio program supposedly about the invasion of the Earth by Martians. This one was called "The War Measures Act," but unlike Welles' production of thirty years earlier, this one wasn't particularly believable — people en masse being arrested and held without trial; soldiers with sub-machine guns at the corner of Peel and St. Catherine. It was just a bit too far-fetched — this is Canada, after all, British system of justice, nice wide roads, street lamps, colour television, pizza parlors — I mean, I know it might sound a little trite, but surely "it can't happen here."

But for 450 other totally innocent people, the spectacle was a little more involving, because for them that famous knock in the middle of the night that's only supposed to happen in Russia and Nazi Germany, had already happened. One minute at home changing the baby's diapers, the next minute stripped

Scene from "Les Ordres"



naked, hands up against the wall of some anonymous garage, with someone looking up your ass with a flashlight.

Michel Brault's *Les Ordres* ("The Orders" as in "I was only following...") is a film that probably will not be shown commercially in Toronto or Edmonton or Vancouver. Maybe there will not even be an English version. Not that the film lacks drama and not that it is

not well made — it's easily one of the most subtle moving films that I have seen this year — but, you see, the story that this film relates could not really interest people in Toronto or Edmonton or Vancouver because, let's face it, it certainly couldn't happen there. Except for one small fact — it already did. For the law that (in gentle bureaucratise) "suspended" the rights of those 450 Quebecers also suspended the rights of all Canadians. The only difference was that it was they that were stripped, showered, shaven and fingerprinted and thrown into a cell without a word of explanation while you and I watched on television thinking, "well anyways, it has nothing to do with me."

Michel Brault's film, however, provides no such emotional loopholes, so perhaps it's lucky that you probably will never get to see it. The film isn't out to prove anything beyond what the events themselves proved. It is the story of five individuals culled from verbatim interviews with over forty people who, like the rest, had been imprisoned and held without being formally charged. At the beginning of the film the well known Quebec actors give their real names and describe who they are representing in the film — a social worker, union organizer, a doctor and a housewife. This is done not through any Godardian razz mataz, but simply because they are telling the truth. And the stories that follow are not souped up to be any sort of epic tragedy because the simple fact was, that for most of the people arrested, the experience was no more than a minor nuisance (especially when put beside what's happening to other people in other countries.)

Nobody was tortured particularly, and in general everything operated with exemplary efficiency — oh ya well there was this unemployed guy, married with two small children and the prison guards jokingly told him that he would be shot in three days (you know boys will be boys) and he believed them! Isn't that a scream! But maybe after five days locked up in a cell with no explanation, when the worst thing that you had ever done in your life was to drink a few too many beers — maybe even someone from Winnipeg might start to believe that anything is possible. And the fact that he had to enter a mental hospital after he was released — well who knows, maybe he would have gone a little looney anyways sitting at home watching television. You see, there are no real horror stories coming out of this particular reign of terror — a few husbands separated from pregnant wives, mothers separated from their children and people arrested through clerical error. Much worse things have happened.

Look at films like *Battle of Algiers* or *Burn*; now here are injustices that we can really get our political teeth into! But strangely enough, Michel Brault's was much more effective because there is something packaged about a drama, and something packaged about your response to it that makes the experience artificial. For in these dramatic films, with everything sewed up and nothing left dangling, we can all smugly retire to our coffee houses with a comfortable feeling of enagement. *Les Ordres* is different. It is haunting like no other political film partly because it's so close to home and partly because it's so understatedly real. When no one gets killed or tortured we are reduced to mild words like humiliation and injustice. But anyone who has read the history books knows that this is how it happens — Nazi Berlin wasn't built in a day. One of the big things in Canadian law is precedent, and because it could happen so effortlessly four years ago, ("Daddy, what were you doing during the War Measures Act?") it could happen again. Brault's subtle camera and his portrayal of these five ordinary John Smiths makes it bloody difficult to feel smug about anything.

—Ronald Blumer

The Lost Tribe

On his last day of work as early morning film reviewer with the CBC in Montreal, Associate Editor Ronald Blumer decided to try out a little test — to give a review of a phony film with an absurd plot and see if anyone would react. The thesis was that if the cadence of the voice is right, and the whole packaged in the right style, any imaginable absurdity could get by. The following review was broadcast Friday August 30, 1974 at 8:15 a.m. So far as we know the only question asked was, how can we see this movie? Mr. Blumer is currently on Baffin Island scouting locations.

The second film I saw this week, *The Lost Tribe*, is a first feature film by the young Vancouver director John Schouten. The film is worth seeing if only for its rather unusual script because the story presents the astounding thesis that the Eskimos of Northern Canada are in fact one of the lost tribes of Israel — presumably they strayed a little North on their way out of Egypt. The amazing thing is that *this* unlikely story comes across totally convincingly with Murry Westgate giving a powerfully moving performance as the village leader; a sort of Moses in seal skins, who has led his people out of the desert into the barren frozen tundra. But the real star of this film is the special effects man, who has turned this vast biblical metaphor into something very believable on the screen. There is, of course, no parting of the Red Sea in the Arctic Ocean,

but the splitting of the glaciers and the blinding, white on white snow storms raise this modest, low budget film to epic proportions.

The film is chock full of biblical references converted into Eskimo folklore. There are the non-believers praying to the golden walrus calf and the eating of unleavened whale blubber during the pilgrimage to the promised land in mukluks. But this *Exodus* of the North really exists on the level of personal human drama with Alexandra Stewart playing a moving Ruth, and John Vernon as the fiercely credible Johocifat. Intriguing as the idea is though, I'm not sure that this film will convince very many people that the Eskimos are really Jewish; but as the sun sets on the five month long sabbath and you see their ghostly silhouettes against the oil lamps, you get the spooky feeling that the great Canadian North has many secrets still to be told.

— Ron Blumer

Black Christmas

Directed by Bob Clark, Produced by Gerry Arheid, script by Roy Moore from "Stop Me...", photography by Reginald Morris (of the Paper Chase), music by Carl Zitrer.

I was relieved when I noticed the small U.S. flag sitting on the detective's desk at Police Headquarters. It made *Black Christmas* look like an American movie. Also, the kind of crowd that would go to it always bolt abruptly once the film ends; they'd never notice the combined financial credit after the titles to Famous Players and the Canadian Film Development Corporation, or that in fact this was a typical sell-out Canadian film. And they wouldn't need a U.S. flag to identify its national character either.

Robert Fulford tells us that in Barry Lord's Maoist criticism of Canadian art Lord identifies works that colonized people create to buy status and profit for themselves by helping the imperial power exploit their fellow colonialists, as "comprador" art.

That's *Black Christmas*. Politically, it's a browner's sycophantic effort to sidle up to lower U.S. taste for cheap thrills and fast cash.

As Jean Paul Belmondo said to Jean Seberg at the end of *Breathless*: "C'est vraiment dégueulasse."

The strangest thing about seeing this anti-female stock horror caper at the Imperial in Toronto was the incredible juxtapositioning of it with a reasonably clever, highly female-oriented 1972 NFB short, *L'oeuf* by Clorinda Warny, full of surreal effects and montages relating to eggs and life. Someone must



Margot Kidder in "Black Christmas"

have noticed they both dealt with the female.

The combination was about as sensitive as that ad in which a chicken encourages you to eat at Colonel Sanders.

Black Christmas is well located and photographed. It features a sorority house where, one by one, accompanied by what women prefer to think of as harmless though sick-minded obscene phone calls, all the little ladies get their comeuppance for being lovely, young, well-to-do and/or liberated. And the most suspicious male is of course artistic. A pianist.

The satisfactions of a film in which upper middle-class females, sharp and sexy, are terrorized and brutally or gruesomely destroyed can be easily seen to appeal to all misogynists, insecure and frustrated men, and a thwarted and denied working class who resent college kids, liberated women, intellectual and particularly artistic males, and, quite possibly, the expense of Christmas.

The performers came in for a shaking from Toronto critics, but actually they were quite acceptable in their roles. Abandoning any social, sexual, moral or political critical attitudes, toward the movie, the females had the edge in performance. Margot Kidder particularly gave life and vivacity to her characterization of the cynical sorority sister, while Andrea Martin (super in *Cannibal Girls*) was humorous, touching, warm, silly and sympathetic to a fault. Even Marian Waldman's guzzling sewer-mouthed house mother, wildly overdone, and American Olivia Hussey as an affected snob-sister, worked hard to try to capture both the silliness and scariness of the plot.

Canadian males shouldn't go unnoticed either. I found it sad, life does

go by so fast, to see Doug McGrath, a male who can literally reek sex, relegated to a sexless stereotyped boob-cop role. But he made it a pleasure anyhow, and with James Edmond, as a father who acts somewhat more bewildered than quite necessary (was he ever told the plot?) and Art Hindle and Les Carlson, the Canadian contingent did what they could, which was basically, lie low.

Keir Dullea played the paperback pianist with anguished sensitivity rather suitably, but finally the only performer came out on top was the heavy breathing garbled telephone voice(s), which gives you some idea of whose alter ego invented the script.

— Natalie Edwards

Child Under a Leaf

That glossy world pictured in consumer magazines and in sunny Sunday Supplements, with the fur throws, white deep pile rugs, forever green plants, and wide glass walls leading into flagged gardens; that wonder-world of buxom healthy women in impeccable white caftans sprawled contentedly among the cushions, with handsome sensitive males standing nearby holding a Chivas Regal, and maybe a baby or a cat or dog cunningly settled by the latest in porcelain fireplaces; well, that world of fad and fashion and fancy comes to a sort of life in *Child Under a Leaf*, a new semi-Canadian film by George Bloomfield.

Photographed with centre-spread skill by Don Wilder (*Paperback Hero*) the woman is Dyan Cannon (*Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice*), the lover, Donald Pilon (*The Pyx*, *True Nature of Bernadette*, etc.), the baby Julie Bullock and the husband Joseph Campanella. The emotion-nudging music is by Francis Lai, known primarily here for his work for *Love Story* rather than his many Claude Lelouch scores.

This is another CFDC backed film made blatantly for the U.S. market, calculated with such care that commercial slots and easily cut censorable scenes are practically marked with dotted lines, ready to be clipped out for TV. Unlike *Black Christmas*, it doesn't place an American flag in sight, and in fact, to satisfy nationalists, perhaps, an Information Canada sign can be briefly glimpsed in one street scene.

Other than that there is nothing to offend the American TV viewer with a sense of the foreign, especially once Micheline Lanctôt's French Canadian accent has been removed, and another