

William Sorochan's  
**Chimera**

**C**himera is an interesting departure from the acceptable norms of documentary filmmaking. It presents a traditional theme (the search for one's cultural identity) and reinvests it with a unique visual language that gives the film broader scope and wider meaning. While not entirely successful, the film's virtues outweigh its flaws. Director William Sorochan is an interesting addition to the Canadian film scene.

*Chimera* is a 103-minute experimental documentary that, at its best is reminiscent of the works of Michael Snow and James Benning. The film is made up of 47 stationary sequences, each lasting from one to two-and-a-half minutes, exploring man's relationship with his environment. The film was shot in rural Alberta over a six-month period in 1986.

Due to its unique form, the viewer goes through numerous emotional responses towards the images presented - joy, sadness, intrigue, boredom, frustration, action. One of the film's flaws (or virtues) is that you can never pigeonhole where the director is coming from. This is somewhat irritating when viewing the film but adds to its resonance and power when looked back upon. The soundtrack accompaniment is Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* as performed by Glenn Gould, and it is here where the film becomes problematic. Bach's intellectual approach is at odds with the emotional imagery, creating an irritating paradox which detracts from the final presentation. One feels that the director felt obliged to add this soundtrack and the viewer can sense the uneasiness in this marriage. The flow is truncated, it's too herky-jerky for immediate acceptance, resulting in an alienating

effect. However, this effect may have been imposed by the filmmaker for a reason, which, if true, adds to the enigmatic nature of the work.

The film's strength is its visuals, and it is for them the director should be commended. Each sequence is carefully balanced and framed for maximum emotional response. The prairies, always somewhat stereotypically portrayed as loving sunsets and waving fields of grain, are depleted in a natural, straightforward manner which eschews pretty pictures and relies on truth (both ugly and beautiful) to communicate the unique beauty of this region of Canada. It is this aspect of the work that tends to bring across the emotional understanding that the director tried to express. It is in his images that the director creates a dialogue with his viewer, never digressing to unnecessary stagginess or preaching. The film is full of cinematic wonders and it's unfortunate that the uncertain structure of film and music takes away from this virtue. The film is somewhat similar in the visual aspects to the works of the great American film director Anthony Mann; it will be interesting to see if Mann's emotional manipulation of images can be duplicated by this director if he decides to embark upon narrative filmmaking.

*Chimera* lives up to its enigmatic title. There is a lot to belittle, yet, it's hard to get the beauty of this film out of your head. The more you think about it, the more you forget about disliking this film, concentrating more on the warmth the film successfully conveys. It might be best classified as a minor work from a potentially major artist. G.H. Lewmer ●

**CHIMERA** *pid/ed/cam* William Sorochan. *Neg. Ed/ Lenka Svab. Mus.* "The Well-Tempered Clavier-Book 2" by Johann Sebastian Bach performed by Glenn Gould. Made possible through the assistance of: NFB PAFPS Program, Alberta Cultural Heritage Foundation, CBS MASTERWORKS, Dept. of Radio and Television-Univ. of Alberta / Apple Canada Inc. *Running time:* 103 min. Colour, 16mm. A FAVA production *dist.* Film and Video Artists Society of Alberta.



From *Chimera*, Alberta director Bill Sorochan's feature-length experimental documentary



Jack Huggins is *Mr. Nobody* in Lyn Wright's film about elderly abuse

Lyn Wright's  
**The Elderly at Risk**

**M**r. *Nobody* and *A House Divided* are the first two films in Lyn Wright's trilogy about the abuse of the elderly produced by the National Film Board. As North America greys, and as the baby boomers grapple with their own aging and dying parents, the elderly are emerging from the long shadows of the North American youth culture.

*Mr. Nobody* is Jack Huggins, reclusive and eccentric. We first see him slowly hobbling up a steep concrete sidewalk. It's a long walk as he moves through patches of sun and shadow. He advances towards us framed on one side by lush greenery and a flower bed; on the other by an endless row of cars parked against the curb. Finally, he turns to take his last few steps, the most difficult ones, to the front door of his home.

Jack Huggins' life has been difficult, much like the walk we just witnessed. After many years of

cares for his aging and ailing parents, Jack is on his own, ready for some relief. Instead he is faced with a barrage of well-meaning but misplaced intervention for refusing to conform to our notion of 'the golden years.'

Jack has a hobby. He collects things. He spends hours roaming the city streets and parks searching for discarded treasures. He does this in spite of warnings by nurses and doctors that he must stay off his swollen and infected feet. He rescues abandoned cats and kittens. He also rescues discarded junk: old radios, TV sets and other electrical appliances.

He collects much more than he can deal with. His home becomes a storehouse packed with hoarded items from bottles and papers to television sets and pieces of wood. Neighbours concerned about the fire and health hazards call in the Health Department. Jack is slapped with cleanup orders he can't or won't comply with. Finally, he is shipped off to a hospital where he is forcibly sedated and certified incompetent. To top it all off, his estate is taken over by the Public Trustee.

"I never owed a cent," Jack protests, "and now I'm being treated like Mr. Nobody. Just Mr. Nobody out on the street."

The film raises interesting questions about public care. To what extent does society have the

responsibility or the right to intervene when an individual neglects his or her own welfare? How does one determine neglect and who does the determining?

If the film can't answer those questions, it at least opens a door for us into the world of the elderly. By the end we know that Jack is a treasure—a quixotic character with a refreshingly independent spirit.

Jack, without family support, happily found an ally in Senior Link, a neighbourhood organization which arranged a lawyer from the Advocacy Centre to go to bat for him.

For the elderly in *A House Divided*, the family was the problem. The film tells four stories of elderly abuse within the family. In the first, the distinction between the abuser and the abused becomes clouded. A long-suffering 50-year-old daughter 'gets along' for many years with her aging mother whom she loves dearly and has taken into her home. The relationship changes when the care-giver is pushed beyond the limits of her endurance. Love turns to hate and outside help is necessary to bring some balance back into the family.

Financial abuse is the topic of the second episode. The father, completely disabled after a severe stroke, survives only because of the constant care of his wife. Their children convince them they should pool their life savings and buy a large house where they can all live together. When the diverging needs of the two families bring the situation to a crisis, the financial arrangement they have entered into tears the family apart. The older couple are not allowed to go their separate way because of the son-in-law's intransigence. What starts as a suspicion that they have been cheated financially now becomes a reality. The older woman must turn to the courts to escape her own family.

In the third story, a 73-year-old woman must deal with her 33-year-old alcoholic son. The formerly perfect, mother-adoring son has turned into a monster. Unfortunately, we never hear his side of the story. We hear her litany of beatings, forgiveness and hope for a change which never comes. She begins to report the beatings. Once again the courts must intervene with an order barring the son from entering her apartment.

For the final story, the film goes south to San Francisco. The surprise is to find elderly abuse a problem within the Chinese family system. An older Chinese father is pushed aside by his wife and adopted son. He's forced to live in the basement while wife and son take over the rest of the house, take away his social security cheques and even deprive him of food. He longs to return to China but doesn't believe he will ever be able to fulfill that dream. Rather than meekly accepting his fate, he has the courage to seek out redress. He finds a friendly and effective support community and discovers he is not alone. There are others like him who have

been neglected and abused. The love and support he expected to find within his home and family he now finds outside the home.

Along with child abuse, elderly abuse has for too long been a shocking and often taboo subject. Wright, who previously dealt with children of divorce in *Dad's House, Mom's House*, has broached the topic of the elderly with tact and sensitivity.

John Friesen •

THE ELDERLY AT RISK. PART ONE: MR

NOBODY d./sc. Lyn Wright ed. Leslie Borden Brown cam. John Walker, CSC sd. rec. Ross Redfern sd. ed. Gary Oppenheimer mus. Randolph Peters narr. Tedde Moore ad. cam. Leonard Gilday, CSC, Doug Kiefer, CSC; Joan Hutton ad. sd. Ian Hendry, Ervin Copestake ass. cam. Gillian Stokvis, Cathryn Robertson, Phillippe Champion, Per-Inge Schei, Joel Guthro, Yvonne Dignard ass. sd. ed. Robert Benson tech. coord. rerecording David Appleby marketing Doug Eliuk unit admin. Sonya Munro p. Silva Basmajian exec. p. John Spotton running time 35 min, 16mm 5 video, colour. Produced and distributed by the NFB.

PART TWO: A HOUSE DIVIDED d./sc./narr. Lyn Wright ed. John Kramer cam. John Walker, CSC; David Meyers, Charles Knowal loc. sd. Ross Redfern, Stephen Longstreth, Michael Mirus sd. ed. Eva Jaworska mus. Randolph Peters re-recording Jack Hereen marketing Doug Eliuk unit admin. Sonya Munro p. Silva Basmajian exec. p. John Spotton running time 35 min, colour, 16mm, video.

IFVA Film and Video Showcase

Venues for the work of independent film and video producers are generally scarce in this country, especially compared to those available to more commercial productions. But during this year's Independent Film and Video Alliance annual general meeting in early June,

Vancouver was treated to a curated showcase featuring one program of films and another of videos.

Titled 'In Absentia'—meaning, in the absence of—and organized thematically around this concept, the programs were put together by Maria Insell (film) and Paul Wong (video). And although the two curators each interpreted the concept slightly differently, the essential aim of each seems to have been to give a presence to otherwise marginalized voices.

The film program featured 12 films, three of which were excerpts from longer works, and was described overall by Insell as raising "important questions about the representation of an experience of loss, alienation or social tragedy." Janis Lundman's *Las Aradas* operates very effectively within this context.

This eight-minute film successfully conveys the horrible story of the 1980 Sumpal River killings, in which members of the El Salvadoran army massacred the inhabitants of a refugee camp. As the narration becomes more obscene with details, the juxtaposition of the pastorally calm imagery, devoid of people, assumes a kind of unpredicted grotesqueness and reflects the lack of photographic documentation of the incident.

Justin Hall's *On Rooftops*, described as "a cultural memory of St. John's, Newfoundland... depicting the original architectural monuments of the city," is also without people, but attempts and achieves a much different effect. This film was the most powerful in the program and best exemplifies some of the strongest qualities of the work shown—the use of tonalities and textures. *On Rooftops* also made good use of the relationship between sound and

image with its appropriate, music soundtrack, and the emotional attachment of the film never deteriorated into sentimentality.

Which is perhaps where the technically and visually appealing *Waterworx* (*A Clear Day and No Memories*), by Rick Hancox, may have erred a bit. Memory—including film as memory—cannot be trusted unequivocally. Hancox's film doesn't consider the potential danger here.

The 11-tape video program, in general, felt less tentative, consequently a bit more dynamic, than the film showcase.

The excerpt from Michael MacDonald's *What Price An Island?*, which featured scenes of clear-cut hillsides and coverage of a native Indian rally to preserve Meares Island, allowed the speakers to make a strong statement—not mere rhetoric, but an eloquence of integrity and true feeling.

Following this came James Solkin's music video, *Tarde Gris*, in which children's drawings of war, violence and torture in Latin America articulated these horrors more powerfully than photographs or actual film footage could have. It also demonstrated that our society has become so accustomed to violent news images, we almost expect them and have built up a resistance to their potency.

*Amherst*, by Jim MacSwain, uses a resemblance to news documentary to question the accuracy of memory in his return to small-town Nova Scotia. A strange but effective silence to the images that accompany his monologue of discovering his homosexuality enhances the underlying suggestion that the viewer must reinterpret the film—or video-maker's point-of-view.

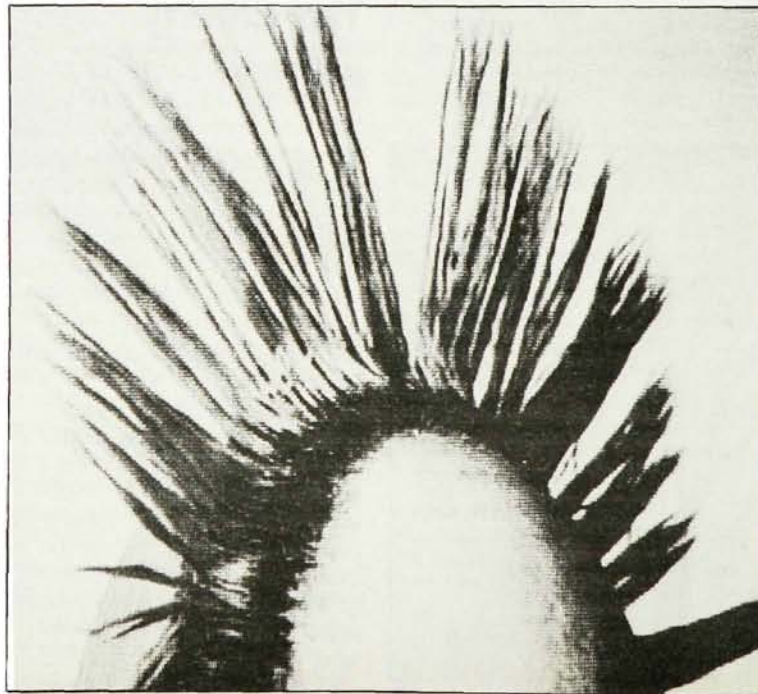
Joe Sarahan's *Rise And Fall Of An Empire* is a visually interesting investigation on the waning world of "punk." However, the ideas of the subjects come across as secondary to the look—the fashion statement of the movement—and in fact seem more superficial than the sophistication of the production suggests.

Least successful in this program is John Greyson's *The AIDS Epidemic*, a rock-video look at the paranoia surrounding AIDS. The message, that "Acquired Dread of Sex" is unhealthy, is fine. Unfortunately, its presentation is weak, particularly given what we have come to expect in terms of dynamic from the rock-video format.

But, on the whole, the two programs worked well. The thematic considerations of the curators shaped the showcase in a manner perhaps more powerful than a less-organized sample of Alliance members' work might have done. And certainly these productions are segregated outside the main avenues of contemporary "cultural" views.

If nothing else, the IFVA Showcase demonstrated the strength of its membership aside from its lobbying power—the ability to create powerful, 'other' voices, and have them be heard.

Calvin Wharton •



Punk hairstyle 'statement' from Joseph Sarahan's *Rise and Fall of an Empire*