

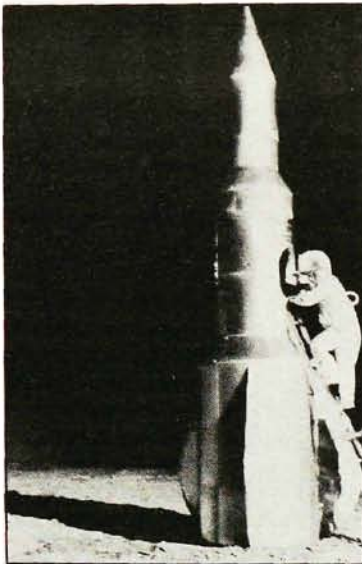
Colin Brunton's
**The Mysterious
Moon Men
of Canada**

Halfway through Colin Brunton's mock-documentary, *The Mysterious Moon Men of Canada*, the film's anaemic protagonist, Brownie McFadden, abruptly and unspectacularly loses his virginity to a much older woman. The incident is just one of a number of narrative cul-de-sacs that appear like warps in the fabric of a one-joke premise stretched too thin for the film's barely half-hour running time. A serious critique of *Moon Men* would be like reviewing a high school science fair – a real spoilsport undertaking, unappreciative of the fun the filmmakers no doubt had cooking it up, and hardly rewarding to the critic for all of that. Still, Brunton and co-writer John Pearson have given *Moon Men* the vague shape of satire, and an occasionally earnest tone that begs, just one time, that the *Moon Men* be taken seriously.

As played by Gerry Quigley, Brownie McFadden is the sort of ineffectual youth that can be found in the self-consciously bohemian center of any Canadian city. Working in a production house directing industrial and education films, McFadden comes across evidence that two Canadians landed on the moon in a homemade rocket in the late '50s and, true to self-effacing Canadian character, hadn't told the world. Fueled with rec-room romanticism, Brownie takes off in a company van to kill two birds with one film, shattering the myth of Canada's dull-witted inferiority and making his own reputation in the process. True to the self-governing laws of Canadian mediocrity, he fails quietly and pathetically.

While hardly a lightning rod for a generation's anxieties, *Moon Men* has been filled by Brunton with the kind of cheap cultural artifacts calculated to elicit a snicker from any native Canadian under thirty. *Moon Men's* production banner, "Great Lakes Films", brings to mind the torpid government-funded educational films that made us ecologically aware in geography classes, while Brownie's Sagan-esque prologue calls to mind their public television equivalents. Designating Wasaga Beach as the moonshot's launch site is a tongue-in-cheek shot of mystique for that well-paved stretch of Southern Ontario cottage country; the mere mention of its name is meant, no doubt, to elicit the same mild thrill of recognition as seeing undisguised chunks of Toronto in Cronenberg films.

Brownie's van is shadowed throughout the film by another Canadian icon-gag, a blind cyclist making his way across the length of the country. This bit of business could have turned into very black satire, but Brunton handles it



The Mysterious Moon Men of Canada

with the same distracted sleight-of-hand as every other humorous notion in the film, and the gag drops from view, leaving the option open for screening at the CBC and any other place that takes its Marathon of Hope seriously.

Brunton is just as absentminded in his handling of ethnic stereotypes. A Portuguese landlady is outfitted like a gypsy, seems incomprehensible to Brownie, but handles a personal computer with intimidating ease. A black couple who witnessed the moon-shot answer Brownie's inquiries with tent revival homilies and "Amen's". Brownie drives away buzzing with excitement at forbidden barriers crossed: "I was enjoying youth and valuable experience. I had rebelled against my boss. I had talked to a black couple."

This statement serves notice for the callow, suburban "white boy" aesthetic that guides *Moon Men*, and while Brunton may have hoped to transcend it with such a blatant definition of its ambitions and insecure ethnocentricity, the line lands with the thud of an inadvertent confession. In this light, Brownie's deflowering seems little more than an unconscious nod to the coming-of-age comedies produced by the same "white boy" aesthetic. This goes some way in explaining why *Moon Men's* gags assemble around the film's narrative like afterthoughts, and even more why Brunton, his cast and crew should have spent so much effort on a comedy that just isn't very funny.

Rick McGinnis •

THE MYSTERIOUS MOON MEN OF CANADA p. Colin Brunton, Bruce McDonald d. Colin Brunton sc. Colin Brunton, based on the short story of the same name by David McFadden d. o. p. Gerald Packer art d. Mara Ravens rocket Norman Comeau ed. Bruce McDonald mus. Shadowy Men on a Shadowy Planet, The Gun Club p. asst. Larry Hudson sd. mix Daniel Pellerin titles Metamedia l. p. Jerry Quigley, Clarence and Lynn Haynes, Larry Hudson, Ron Cook, Ellen Dean, Marsh Phillips Funding Canada Council, Ontario Arts Council, LIFT. Colour 16mm, 27 min. dist. Film Clips.

Lori Spring's
Inside / Out

The Canadian short film has long had a tradition of providing a number of distinguished directors their first opportunities in creating highly evocative and personal pieces of narrative. Some of the most acclaimed Canadian film directors working today first attracted public attention for their initial half-hour productions. Into this ongoing milieu, Lori Spring makes her directorial debut with *Inside/Out*, a psychological portrait of a woman which at times is both a confession and a cathartic exercise for its maker.

At first glance, one can almost oversee the film as a melancholic foray into urban angst, washing our senses with a gloomy existential philosophy. But on closer look, one can see that Spring has fashioned a very stylish picture with remarkable attention given to small but precise details throughout the film. If there is a feeling of *deja vu* with respect to certain elements in *Inside/Out*, the director nevertheless displays a number of impressive strokes in what is her first film work.

The 27-minute film draws us quickly into the world of Joanna, a bright, successful writer who decides at the outset to force herself into seclusion within her apartment. Reasons are never made particularly clear, only that she is "exhausted with the effort of trying to look as if I feel all right." As Spring has drawn Joanna, the heroine's outer veneer is a tough one to crack and we are ultimately left wanting to know more about her. Certainly the carefully etched details of her life have not been left out. She has everything anyone could ask for: brains; beauty; health (she works out diligently); temperament; talent and taste (a great-looking apartment). Yet she is inevitably unhappy, a forlorn temptress who admits that she has "no idea of what I'm afraid of."

To pass her time in isolation, she writes out her diary; is visited by a grocery boy who seems attracted to her; takes video images of a lonely woman across the street; and when these fail to move her, invites a few friends to dinner where she plays a videotape she's been creating. In this pivotal scene, Joanna's guests shift uncomfortably in their seats while watching, what is in essence, their host's painful- drawn-out self-analysis on video. Spring seems to be almost parodying herself as if paralleling our own experience of watching *Inside/Out* with those of Joanna's guests in the film.

Spring has cleverly staged the scene in one long wide shot and in doing so has brilliantly captured the dissonant melancholy of her alter ego. It is here, in this one brief moment, that Joanna suddenly appears as Spring may have wanted her to be – sympathetic and vulnerable. When her guests fail to realize that it is her soul Joanna has lain down for them to see, it becomes readily clear why and how Joanna and the rest of the world have been pushed away from one another. It is a fleeting moment of affinity in *Inside/Out*, and one can only try to imagine a similar kind of objectivity the film may have employed throughout its tenure.

But these are small quibbles. There are greater rewards reaped elsewhere in the film. Spring's use of video imagery (Joanna is a hopeful filmmaker) is quite inspired as it reflects the fractured and discordant sense of Joanna's mind. There are a number of evocative moments when we come close to realizing a sense of the alienation surrounding Joanna's heart and the rest of her world.

Emma Richler is effective as Joanna, and she makes the most of each small moment afforded her by the script. Jackie Burroughs appears briefly but memorably as Mrs. Ambrose, the lonely woman who foreshadows Joanna's own existence. Less successful are the supporting characters who are not as adept at fashioning a comfortable presence before the camera. Nevertheless, their flaws are given short shift in the wake of Steven Deme's beautiful cinemato-



Emma Richler, as Joanna, on the set of *Inside/Out* with director Lori Spring