

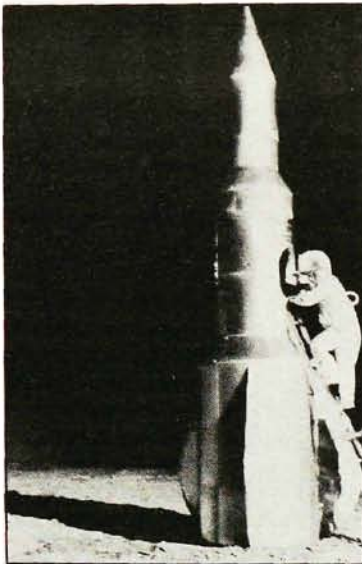
Colin Brunton's  
**The Mysterious  
Moon Men  
of Canada**

**H**alfway 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**

**T**he 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

graphy and John Tucker's illuminating score. For it is in the visual and aural contributions of these two gentlemen that Spring has found her most successful collaboration. However, with this impressive film debut, one can only look forward to the next work of this talented director.

Moze Mossanen •

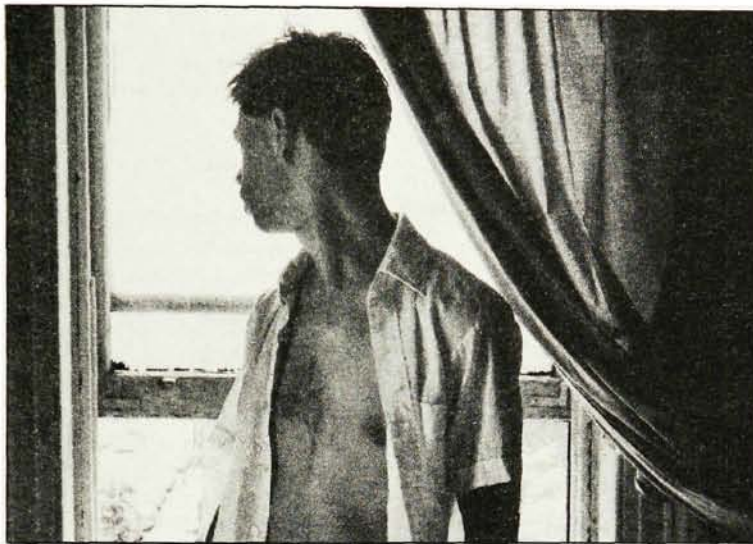
**INSIDE/OUT** p./d./sc./ed. Lori Spring. From a short story by Lori Spring and Alan Zweig d.o.p. Steven Deme art dir./makeup/ward. Donna Mehalko, Virginia Rankin sd. ed. Steve Munro mus. John Tucker, The Rhythmn Twins 1st a. d. Alan Zweig 2nd a. d. Jolynn Sommerville cont. Annette Manguard 1st asst. cam. Frank Polyak 2nd. asst. cam. Marcus Elliot video Nick Shefter stills photo David Rasmus craft services Marilee Pinto grip Dennis Kane gaffer Ted Fanyeck ass. ed. Michael Werth, Scott Munro consulting ed. Sally Patterson 2nd unit 1st asst. cam. Charlotte Dishar 2nd unit asst. cam. Andrew Potter prod. asst. Randy Zimmer, Mark Fawcett, Graeme Lynch prod. consultant Alexandra Raiffe sd. mix Daniel Pellerin neg cut Francont Films opticals Film Opticals Hiles Meta Media i. p. Emma Richler, Jackie Burroughs, Larry Epp, Alan Zweig, Donna LaPointe, John Carr, Mark Fawcett, Rhonda Kristi. Colour, 16mm, 27 min.

## Mike Hoolboom's From Home

**M**ike Hoolboom's new film is a powerful and disturbing work which deals with love, memory, sexuality, murder and desire. *From Home* is a neo-narrative that is frankly experimental in structure. Hoolboom utilizes fictional footage, personal documentary elements and archival sequences of either a historic or intimate nature in an abrupt and seemingly arbitrary manner that forces the viewer to reflect on the ontological and ethical implications of the cinema. The film contains sequences that are shockingly explicit about details in the director's - and subject's - lives. Hoolboom asks for, and gives, no quarter in his devastatingly honest depiction of the break-up of his relationship with Svetlana Lilova, a Bulgarian émigré.

The audience is made to see the two true lovers, their fictional constructs who play at being "Mike and Svet", meditations on the nature of the cinema, an odd private-eye satirical sub-plot, photos of Edward Weston and the birth of the airplane, and a series of reconstructed screen tests. While the viewer is confronted by these apparently disparate elements, he is not particularly reassured by the director's self-assessment, that he knows it is difficult to place "two pictures together" and make those parts into a seamless whole. In fact, the viewer, like the narrator/director, is forced to embark on a quest in search of the meaning behind the relationships in the text.

*From Home* is a film of contradictory impulses. It begins, and ends, as a consideration of the word "love". Eschewing the sentimental, Hoolboom presents what love can mean to a



Mike Hoolboom falls for a simple twist of fate in his controversial new film *From Home*

person during and after an affair. The desperation that develops at the end of a relationship as mutual comprehension disintegrates into anger and diffidence, is effectively contrasted with the wealth of good humour when trust in another still exists. Hoolboom is asked by a friend (Gary Popovich) to define love in semantic and intimate contexts. His only true reply is to film Svetlana making love to someone else. The acknowledgement that ultimately this director's muse is his art and not his woman, is presented as a painful realization. Yet this ebb and flow of love definitions is made to work against other formal elements in the complicated scenario.

*From Home* is elliptical in impact and digressive in construction. At one point, Hoolboom has a narrator state that, "Contradiction is only another way of saying the same thing twice." This may be a clue to Svetlana's enigmatic character but it reveals little of the structure for the film, which rarely re-doubles its constituent parts.

Indeed, the only deliberately "doubled" characters in the film are Mike and Svetlana and their *doppelgangers* are generally depicted in a phlegmatic manner. Fenway Crane, Hoolboom's alter ego, is given a farcical background as a potential Nobel laureate in a sequence which presents visually a home-movie of a typical suburban family's three children taking a bath, while on the soundtrack underneath the portentous description of the director's life, one can hear the old pop hit "There I've Said It Again." This complex joke is typical of Hoolboom's approach to character throughout the film. The audience is allowed to be dazzled, titillated and amused, but is never allowed an entry into the true spirit of Crane/Hoolboom or the two Svetlanas.

The reasoning behind the virtuoso structuring of the film becomes clearer in a remarkable sequence which depicts the romantic beginnings

of aviation at the turn of the century. Over shots that move from an aircraft taking off while a crowd cheers, to a ship, crippled, hurtling down from the skies, a voice (Hoolboom's) speculates that the memory of love is like an accordion: from one body can emerge many corporal forms. So it is with *From Home*. The multiplicity of forms that the film takes are manifestations of the cineaste's desire to come to grips with the memory of his private past.

*From Home* reaches its emotional peak when the director decides to film his protagonist in the act of making love. This section is as problematic as it is strong, and exploitive. Here the *verité*-like visual element is counterbalanced by a disturbing narrative about the cameraman who shot the "shambles" left by Jack the Ripper at the final dwellings of his victims. A shot of the director cutting film is placed tellingly near the end of this sequence, allowing Hoolboom "no way out" of this particular ethical closure.

Where can one hear Svetlana in this film? She can be heard recounting scientific and fantastic parables at various points. The viewer sees her talking, laughing, making love. Yet ultimately she remains a director's other quest, which is to feel capable of "putting one picture next to the other," to make a narrative. In this vein, *From Home* is successful, the finest work yet by one of Canada's most prodigious talents. Mike Hoolboom deserves the viewer's respect for this brave offering. Yet one is left dissatisfied. The viewer still wants to know: where is Svetlana and her voice?

Marc Glassman •

**FROM HOME** p./d./sc./ed. Mike Hoolboom d.o.p. Mike Hoolboom, Gary Popovich sd. design Tom Thibault, Mike Hoolboom sd. rec. Jim Anderson, Peter Chapman, Svetlana Lilova, David Müller, Karen Saunders, Randy Smith i. p. Martha Cronyn, Maria Friedhoff, Svetlana Lilova, Midi Onodera, Andrew Scorer, Camille Turner, Victor Willis Funding National Film Board of Canada, Ontario Arts Council, Mike Hoolboom. B & W, 16mm, 55 min. dist. CFMDC

## Camelia Frieberg's Crossing the River

Amnesty International and the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador have recorded over 65,000 deaths since the civil war began in 1979. More than 7,000 people have disappeared and tens of thousands have been held as political prisoners. The death squads and the government's security forces, often working in collusion, continue to this day to carry out acts of terror and oppression with impunity.

- From *Crossing the River*

**C**rossing the River is a committed and informed investigation into the life of a Salvadorean refugee, Carmen A. (who has chosen not to use her real name in the film in order to protect her family living in El Salvador.) The film records Carmen's painful memories of El Salvador, her commitment to the Salvadorean cause and her adjustment to a new life with her children in Toronto.

Carmen A. was born in Guazapa, El Salvador, of a peasant family. Guazapa has been plagued by civil conflict between guerrillas and Salvadorean armed forces over the last 10 years. The film opens with a still photo of a group of Salvadorean women who are bravely dedicated to and brought together by a common cause called the "Committee of Mothers and Families of Political Prisoners Disappeared and Assassinated from El Salvador." Carmen A. joined this group after the disappearance of the father of her children. She later found out he was captured by the National Police. Carmen, along with her six-month-old son, was also detained, interrogated and tortured by the National Guard when she came to them enquiring of her husband's disappearance. Francisco was released after seven months but was gunned down a year later at a bus stop on his way home from work. Carmen believes his murder resulted from his membership in a local farmer's union. Carmen was left pregnant and with a two-year-old son. The spree of violence continued to haunt Carmen's family and friends to the extent that she had to flee her native country. Carmen had to leave her children behind, arriving first in Mexico before finding refuge in Toronto. She was later reunited with her children.

Carmen's blunt and direct line in the film "Francisco did not commit any crime" conveys a sense of the helplessness and frustration of the El Salvadorean people and the senselessness behind the tragic loss of her companion. Her testimony to the camera is set against a stark black background creating a feeling for Carmen's isolation and personal grief. Photographer Daniel Gantreau's stills provide a chilling backdrop recreating the oppressive atmosphere surrounding Salvadorean