

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 •

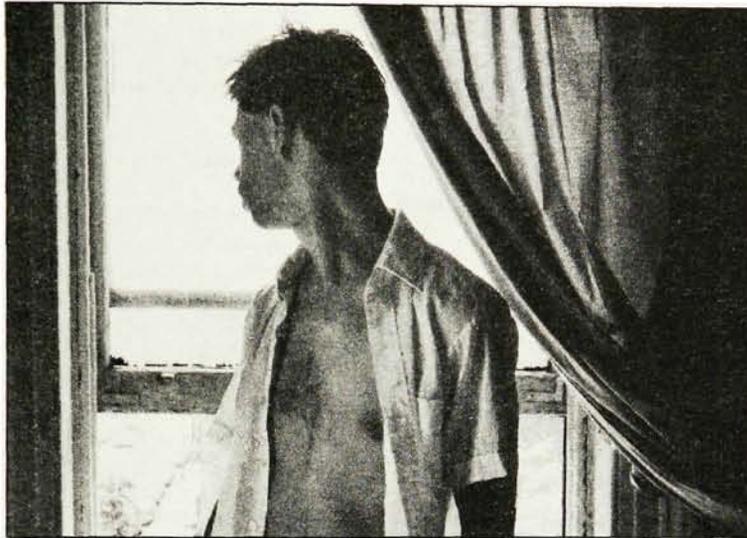
INSIDE/OUT p./d./sc./ed. Lori Spring. From a short story by Lori Spring and Alan Zweig d.o.p. Steven Deme art dir./makeup/ward. Donna Mehalko, Virginia Rankin sd. ed. Steve Munro mus. John Tucker, The Rhythmn Twins 1st a. d. Alan Zweig 2nd a. d. Jolynn Sommerville cont. Annette Manguard 1st asst. cam. 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

Mike 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*

Crossing 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

atrocities. An informal story-book-style narrative is formed through Carmen's experiences and memories as relived through her photo album. The interlocking of these visual elements with Hugh Marsh's evocative ethnic rhythms and sounds of El Salvador form their own distinct set of emotional dynamics.

In her directorial debut, Camelia Frieberg has demonstrated the restraint of a mature filmmaker by focusing on one individual's personal truth set against a vast subject matter. Do not expect the slapstick and glitz of Oliver Stone's *El Salvador*. Though low-tech in execution, the strength of the film lies in the universal truth of an individual's struggle to overcome tyranny and oppression. The film presents itself as an intimate collaboration between filmmaker and subject, where sincerity and empathy are essential ingredients in the film. At times this honesty is almost too earnest, even for a documentary.

Crossing the River serves as an important historical document for both El Salvador and Canada. The world is backlogged with so many stories like Carmen's, that need to be told. In a world where individual rights are rapidly shrinking, personal documents relating dislocation by larger historical circumstances are of vital importance. These insights affect Canada's cultural identity as well as how we view ourselves as a nation, they provide the world with a contrasting picture to the historical propaganda as perpetuated by regimes as in El Salvador.

Some viewers who have seen the central interview with Carmen (which requires a lot of concentration due to her accent and might benefit by the addition of subtitles) comment that they feel disconcerted by Carmen's composure, she does not display the anger which one might expect from someone who has undergone the kind of life-crushing blows she has. With the exception of some minor facial twitches, the close-up reveals a remarkably soft and compassionate face. People like Carmen, who have been so profoundly affected by horrendous exposures have been known to keep it to themselves. It is as if they want to save humanity from the fear and embarrassment of something so unthinkable possibly happening again.

Some of Carmen's stories, however, do give insight into her struggle to readjust after her trauma. Carmen talks about how difficult it was to learn English at school in Toronto because, although her body was at school, her mind was back in El Salvador. She said she would easily fall asleep in the day but that at night she could not sleep. Carmen said she dreamt of being with her family, her brother and husband but when she woke up, she was sad because it was only a dream. *Crossing the River* shows that Carmen will always have to live with the reality of her painful memories yet her commitment and conviction for her people is not a story only of



Carmen A. tries to bury her horrors

suffering but of renewal.

The issues Carmen faces and the challenges in the film present us with a powerful message. One image that comes to mind is that of a National Guard policeman. Carmen tells of her empathy for him. She says she knows the truth of how his wife and children feel. Carmen, like the wisdom of the solidarity of the Committee of Mothers and Families, embraces the enemy who are instruments of her people's destiny.

Frieberg says that "*Crossing the River* is finally an optimistic film. It is fueled by the courage and strength of a woman who has suffered immensely and yet refuses to resign herself to despair, choosing instead to break the silence that terror breeds."

Crossing the River will be premiered at this year's Festival of Festivals in Toronto.

Peter Lynch •

CROSSING THE RIVER p./d./sc. Camelia Frieberg d.o.p. Adrienne Mitchell ed. Maureen Judge sd. ed. Peter Vinet mus. comp. Hugh Marsh mus. perf. Bruce Cockburn, John Goldsmith still photo Daniel Gautreau research coord. Ruth Mandel post. prod. asst. Naomi Boxer asst. ed. Alexandra Gill, Judy Cade l.p. Carmen A. Colour, 16mm, 28 min.

Richard Kerr's Last Days of Contrition

In these days when Meech Lake, nuclear submarines and free-trade form so much of our national debate, a film dealing with the current political environment in the United States is particularly appropriate. Richard Kerr's latest film is not a typical documentary; in fact, it is, structurally, an avant-garde work. Yet its great success lies in

the coherence that is achieved between the film's structural concerns and its strict basis in realistically derived footage. Kerr has taken particularly revealing moments from a trip that he shot while down in the States and crafted a work that deals with the awe and terror that he felt during that sojourn.

The sights and signs that one sees and hears in this film have been distilled by Kerr to represent those exact elements that form a portrait of the contemporary U.S.A. The film is bisected and book-ended by a brilliant 360-degree pan shot of the Badlands of the Dakotas. One sees the bleak vistas, the black hills and its cacti, while on the sound track a repetitive voice speaks through a megaphone about the burying of the dead after the "Next War." This fear of War, of the Bomb, permeates the film, giving it urgency and drama.

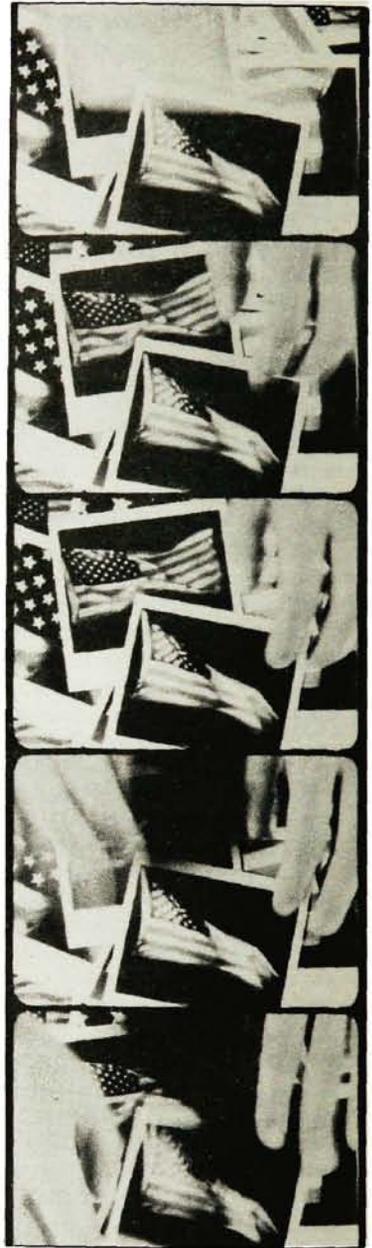
As a title, "Last Days of Contrition" refers both to the final Passion of Christ and to the specific meaning of the word "contrition," which is to be "completely penitent; crushed in spirit by a sense of sin." Here the sin can be read to be the militarization that has supplanted the democratic spirit in much of the United States.

The automobile trip that constitutes the narrative element of *Contrition* stops for specific views of the United States. On the whole, the viewer is presented with a rather forbiddingly postmodern landscape constituting a black version of *On the Road*. Like Kerouac, Kerr has the clear insights that an outsider (a Canadian!) can bring to a land that he loves, but which is not truly his.

So what do we get to see on our sad trip through the vistas of Reagan-dominated America? A touring bus with its insides eaten out by rust, resembling an Apocalyptic vehicle; a sign on farm land that reads: The Land of Opportunity? STARVED. ON MY OWN LAND BY MY OWN GOVERNMENT; the Santa Fe Train with hobos riding on top of a car; an exposed grotto with the Virgin Mary holding the Infant Jesus beneath a Cross; an abandoned Drive-in Movie. In contrast to this imagery, there is a wonderful sequence shot in Buffalo's old War Memorial Stadium - the scene of Robert Redford's *The Natural* - with the Buffalo Bisons, a minor league baseball team, posing for a group shot.

This visual design of America is also contrasted by a series of voices that express great concern for the state of America in the 1980s. One voice argues that the U.S. is in trouble if "We'd rather wave the Flag than the Constitution." Another (Lenny Bruce?) compares the military to sociopaths. Another voice warns, "If the dream of democracy cannot survive in America, it cannot survive the 20th century." Still another states, "We do not need troops to say that we have lost our vision."

Richard Kerr has created a film of tremendous care and integrity. Throughout, we hear the anxious sounds of electronic printers pouring out paper interspersed with the drone of fighter



Last Days of Contrition

planes and the sharp shrieking call of buzzards. Photos of Jackie Robinson and the U.S. flag are presented with the same clarity and purpose as are shots of gnarled cacti and tanks being transported on trains.

Last Days of Contrition is a cry from the heart from a Canadian who loves what American democracy and popular culture have stood for in the past. Richard Kerr has made a film that poses the question: can the U.S.A. abandon its principles and renounce democracy? If so, can the world survive?

Marc Glassman •

LAST DAYS OF CONTRITION p./d./sc./ed./d.o.p. Richard Kerr sd. Patrick Butler l.p. Kim Nedoborski, Dick Gregory Funding Canada Council, Ontario Arts Council, Saskatchewan Film Pool, NFB. University of Regina. B&W, 16mm, 35min dist. CFMDC.