

Deepa Mehta Saltzman,  
Norma Bailey and Danièle J.  
Suissa's

## Martha, Ruth & Edie

**T**he short story holds the potential to express strong feelings attached to a situation, no matter how shortlived, commonplace or simple the situation appears. This condensed form of writing pleases and intrigues the reader in its ability to get to the heart of the matter, to exemplify life's most ordinary and passionate moments.

*Martha, Ruth and Edie* is a film based on three short stories. From these points of departure, stories by Cynthia Flood, Betty Lambert and Alice Munro, an unusual process ensued. Three screenwriters, Anna Sandor, Janet Maclean and Barbara O'Kelley, adapted the stories for three directors. Deepa Mehta Saltzman, who originally conceived of the idea for the film and produced the project with her husband Paul Saltzman, and directed one of the sections. Directors Norma Bailey, noted for the beautifully crafted films *Ikwe* and *The Wake*, and Danièle J. Suissa worked on the others. Together the three created the connecting story, pulling together the tales of women, strangers to one another.

That story goes like this: three women find themselves at a seminar meant to help the exclusively female participants confront their fears and share with one another their feelings about sex. Hyperbolic and pretentious Whitney Gerrard (Page Fletcher) leads his ladies on this journey. Becoming vehement and disturbed as Edie makes her way out towards the bathroom, he pronounces that fear is making her move and that she owes it to her sisters to stick it out. However, the calm and composed Edie, played graciously by Lois Maxwell, continues down the aisle and is joined by Ruth who balks at Gerrard's attempt to humiliate Edie. Outside the closed door of the seminar they laugh at its absurdity. They happen upon Martha who is mumbling something about how she hates rules; she has been barred from the seminar as she is late.

On a bench, the three women begin to speak. A simple object, a lighter, sparks a story from Edie's past: a farm in Ontario becomes the setting in the early years following the war. The young Edie is played by Margaret Langrick who made her acting debut in *My American Cousin* for which she won the 1986 Genie Award. Langrick seems a natural, portraying Edie as the 16-year-old hired girl on a small farm. While in the company of her employers, Edie's body and face express a typical adolescent ennui. Left alone, Edie indulges in fantasy. She bathes,

perfumes her body, dresses in her boss' clothes. White-gloved and jewelled, Edie descends the farmhouse stairs in evening dress and unfamiliar high-heeled shoes. Her delights becomes our own as we watch her fuss and pretend, pouring milk into wine glasses, a performance joyfully stylish. Edie is acting for her own enjoyment, Langrick too seems to partake in the pleasure: she moves throughout this sequence with a felt happiness, a convincing air.

The innocence we sense from Edie quickly becomes nerves and excitement as she falls under the spell of a young pilot's dash and kiss. Dash he does and Edie waits impatiently for the letter he promised he would send. Of course it never comes, but her future husband does. He is the mailman who naively believes that Edie's impatience and bated breath are signs of her feelings for him. He asks her on their first date. Langrick's acting displays yet another series of emotions: her original giddiness, and headiness of young love are gone, the following pain and disappointment wane. We see Edie now curious and amused by her new suitor.

Bailey's ability to find and show resonance in the ordinary allows the rendering of the short story to be as successful as it is here. Bailey is consistently sensitive to the ephemeral. The quick, knowing glance between Edie and her charge, as the young postman makes his intentions clear, speaks of the girls' complicity. It doubles back to an earlier shot where the two girls sit together at the window and pine over the stranger who flew into their lives, changing the order of things, if only briefly. Now order has returned and the two girls giggle silently, making something special of life's routine.

Next to tell her story is Ruth, a librarian whose routine is interrupted by her mother's death. Andrea Martin, who appeared on SCTV as a member of the Second City troupe, uses her experience with comedy to portray Ruth's peculiar character. A timid, rather deadpan Ruth keeps her distance from life. She prefers to read about passion than to partake. In her own world everything makes sense, like leaving the electric blanket to heat her dear Mum's corpse as she waits for the undertakers to take it away. Her brother Charles, however, is a true pragmatist, a divorce lawyer who finds Ruth's behavior infuriating and irrational. Their rapport suggests Charles has always had the upper hand. But as Ruth decides to break free from her passive lifestyle, Charles finds himself at the mercy of her whims or more precisely, without a car. With a little encouragement from her aunts Clara and Rosalie, Ruth borrows the car for a spontaneous picnic. The two aunts fly in from Hollywood, whose magic they ran to as teenagers, for their beloved sister's funeral. These eccentrics give Ruth the push she needs to crack her reserve. The emotional transformation is well carried through by Martin's acting and Mehta Saltzman's direction.



Martha, Edie and Ruth (Jennifer Dale, Lois Maxwell and Andrea Martin, respectively) share a laugh and some memories

One of Mehta Saltzman's goals for the film was to create a different feeling for each segment, as each is about a different character. The film successfully does this. The three individual stories are interwoven and any disjointedness is avoided. Both the connecting narrative and the fact that the same director of photography, Doug Koch, and technical crew worked on the entire film contribute to its final smoothness and integrity.

The third vignette is about Martha, a woman with two children, whose husband comes home one night and tells her that he is leaving her for another woman. Jennifer Dale plays the part of the super-mom who has devoted the last 17 years of her life to home, husband and unhappiness. As her world falls from under her, Martha decides to take a big risk and returns to her pre-marriage career of teaching. This time she ventures into a men's prison and teaches literacy skills. The subtlety of changing emotion seen in Edie's story and the humor displayed in Ruth's are never fully realized in this section of the film. The story's potential to be funny and sensitive is foreshortened by the awkwardness of the script. Inside the prison, stilted dialogue and stereotypes abound. Large complex issues have not successfully been boiled down to some comprehensive representation. The detail and succinct, well-chosen scenes crucial to the short-story film are missing. The result is a strain in the acting and direction of this section.

Patricia Kearns •

**MARTHA, RUTH AND EDIE** p. Deepa Mehta Saltzman d. Danièle J. Suissa, Norma Bailey, Deepa Mehta Saltzman sc. Anna Sandor, Barbara O'Kelly, Janet Maclean exec. p. Paul Saltzman assoc. p. Rossie Grose line p. & p. man. Bob Wertheimer p. coord. Kris Michael asst. to p. Carolyn Wong p. sec. Sheila Woodley p. acct. Joyce Caveen asst. acct. Peter Muldoon asst. d. Richard Flower 2nd a. d. Frank Siracusa 3rd a. d. Terry Gould trainee Jill Compton unit & loc. man. Manney Danelon asst. loc. man. Terry Hayes d.o.p. & cam. op. Doug Koch asst. cam. Marvin Midwicki 2nd asst. cam. Arthur Cooper cam. trainee Neil Gibb art d. Tom Doherty asst. art d. James Oswald art dept. trainee Terry Wareham set dec. Gina Hamilton set dresser Michelle Convey asst. set dresser Bill Lee props Vic Rigler asst. props Fiona Andrew costume des. Delphine White asst. costumes Maureen Gurney wardrobe Debbie Williams hair Reg Leblanc makeup Shonagh Jabour story ed. Barbara O'Kelly script sup. Diane Parsons sound rec. Bryan Day boom Mike Lacroix gaffer David Owen best boy Edward Mikolic elec. Tony Ramsey gennie op. Robert McDonald key grip Mark Silver 2nd grip Greg Palermo 3rd grip Blake Ballentine ed. Lara Mazur asst. ed. Susan Shipton 2nd asst. ed. Susan Maggi p. assts. Lisa Jensen, Alyson Reisman, Nigel Protter stills Michaelin McDermott storyboard artist Peter Grau 2nd unit cam. Rich Wincenity clapper loader Joel Guthro key grip J. C. (Jim) Craig pic. vehicle coord. Richard Spiegelman transport. coord. David Chud driver captain G. Kris Hawthorne driver Christa Schadt craft service Brian Cole music Alexina Louie, Alex Pauk l. p. Margaret Langrick, Jeff Christensen, Kate Trotter, Richard Blackburn, Dorian Davis, Daniel Dicks, Jane Dingle, Brenda Bazinet, Jeremy Ratchford, Watt Martin, Olly Jasen, Andrea Martin, Helen Hughes, Lynne Gorman, Chuck Shamata, Frank Moore, Rita Tuckett, Hans Engel, Derek Keurvorst, Charles Kerr, Ruth Rotenburg, Rebecca Applebaum, Monica Bampion-Young, Jennifer Dale, Paul Brogen, Joanna Vannicola, Genevieve Appleton, Tom Butler, Tom Jackson, Elliot McIver, Ric Sarabia, Eric Keenleyside, Peter Colvey, Damir Andrei, Rossie Grose, Adrian Pellet, Lois Maxwell, Nicky Guadagni, Page Fletcher, Irene Pauzer, Marjanka McComb, Jayne Heeley Liliane Clune, Lisa Lelliott produced by Sunrise Films Limited, 35mm, colour.