

# REVIEWS

Zale Dalen's

## The Hounds of Notre Dame

Canadian filmmakers have often had a weakness for rambunctious, larger-than-life central characters, the kind of people who normally inhabit *Reader's Digest* columns on "My Most Unforgettable Character." From *The Rowdyman* to *Outrageous*, such characters have been the focus of attention, and have livened up uneventful plots simply by being there. At first glance, *The Hounds of Notre Dame* (produced by Fil Fraser, directed by Zale Dalen) looks as if it falls into the same mold. "Pere" Athol Murray is a priest who chain-smokes, drinks whiskey, swears moderately (never more than a "goddam" or a transliterated "muckers"), reminisces about reading St. Augustine, coaches a hockey team at an impoverished school in Saskatchewan, and says unfashionable things about the C.C.F. The Rowdyman Rides West.

But it's not quite as simple as that. The real subject of *The Hounds of Notre Dame* is not so much the renegade priest but — as the title suggests — the community built up around him. Most of the minor characters regard Pere's blustering eccentricities with humorous indulgence, and quietly go about their business unperturbed. He dominates the community, but it also has an existence apart from him; the climactic events of the plot — one boy's decision to leave, and another's to stay — take place independently of him. The film is emphatically not an exercise in idolatry.

Most of the actors contribute to this feeling with a nice sense of underplaying. Only David Ferry as Fryer, the "new boy" who has to be initiated into the community, is guilty of overstating his reactions, and hamming up his role. At the other extreme, Frances Hyland underplays so much that you scarcely notice she's there — not at all a normal reaction to this actress. The dynamic Lenore Zann is largely wasted in a superfluous and underdeveloped role. Even Genie award-winner Tom Peacocke, in the central showcase role, restrains himself as much as the part allows, and his finest moments are quiet and private rather than public and ranting. The real stars of the film are the motley assortment of boys who make up the "Hounds," a collection of marvelously real and expressive faces.

The major strength of the film lies in Ken Mitchell's tightly structured and intelligently written screenplay. Rather than try to cover all of the historical Murray's checkered career, Mitchell

compresses events into a classic 24-hour span, beginning with a political rally (at which Pere says all the wrong things) and continuing through the next day (the official rebuke from the bishop, played — mainly with his eyebrows — by Barry Morse) to the climactic hockey game and the inevitable blizzard. This compression does at times produce some implausibilities — Fryer passes through successive stages of rebellion, humiliation, acceptance, and leadership all in about 12 hours — but it serves its dramatic purposes admirably. Murray is seen in relation to the historical period (it is 1940, and on the radio Mackenzie King is appealing to the young men to defend Christian civilization), to his political views (the C.C.F. are atheist socialists, but the Nazis burn books), to his educational — ahem — methods (if boys don't like poetry, box their ears and recite Hopkins), and to his foundation in religious faith ("Gang," he says cheerfully in the middle of a Latin mass, "it's a great thing to hold God in your hands").

It would perhaps be expecting too much for a film set in Saskatchewan to do without a blizzard scene, or to restrict itself to less than two outhouse jokes. But the atmosphere of small Western towns is quite splendidly evoked in the hockey game sequence, with its fiercely partisan crowd, its

fumblingly inept but enthusiastic play, and Coach Murray ringing the changes on inspirational dressing-room pep talks.

Zale Dalen's direction is largely unobtrusive and efficient. As in his earlier film, *Skip Tracer*, he keeps the action moving at a clean, crisp pace. If *Hounds* doesn't quite have the same dark overtones as *Skip Tracer*, that may be largely attributed to producer Fil Fraser's desire to appeal to a more family-oriented audience. Which is not to say that *Hounds of Notre Dame* is sentimental pap. Dalen's fast direction, combined with Mitchell's tight script, avoids all the perils of cliché. (Well, most of them.) Much of *Hounds* is indeed predictable, and the ending has no dramatic surprises to pull out of the hat. The new boy does *not* turn out to be a hockey star who saves the team from defeat; and no one gets lost in the blizzard. (The blizzard scene does have some unfortunate voice-over moralizing, punching home the point for those too dumb to get it.) Ron Orioux's photography is elegant and, again, understated: I only remember one grain elevator.

All in all, *The Hounds of Notre Dame* is a very pleasant, well-made, unpretentious, thoroughly likable film. It doesn't make cosmic statements, it isn't trying to be The Great Canadian

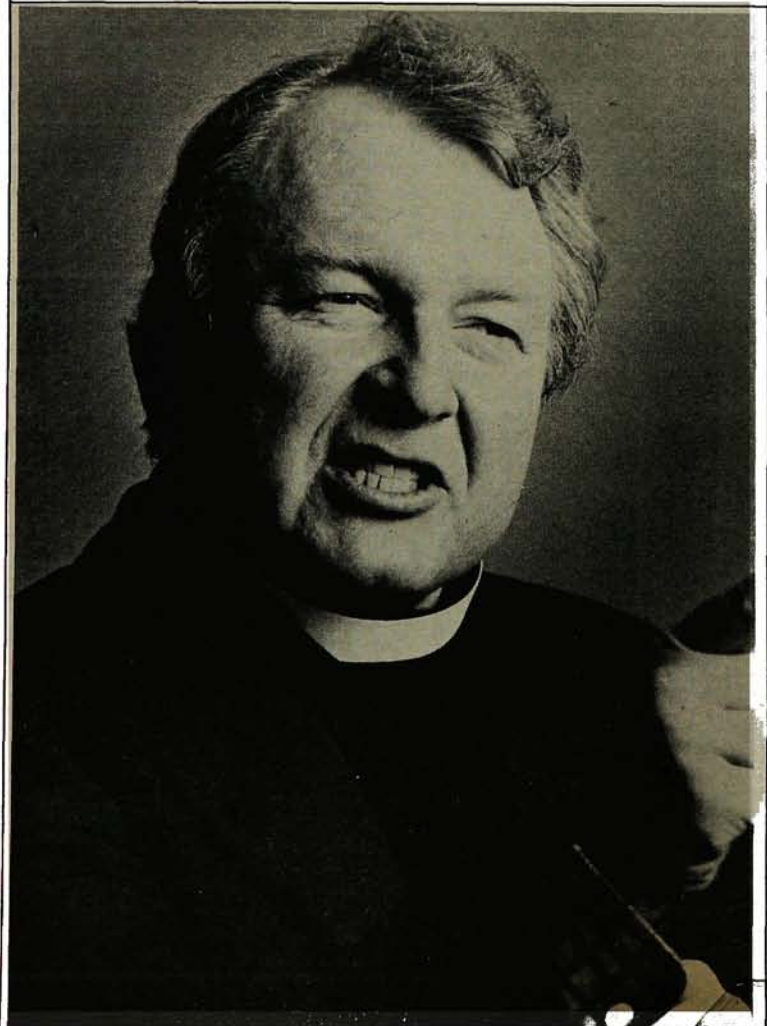
Movie, it's not an earth-shaking contribution to culture. But it is the kind of film that needs to be made, the kind of film on which a genuinely Canadian cinema can model itself more profitably than on the spurious sparkle of "Hollywood North."

Stephen Scobie

## The Hounds of Notre Dame

d. Zale Dalen p. Fil Fraser p. man. Eda Lishman p. acct. Linda Jeffery p. co-ord. Nives Lever unit man. Randy Cheveldave a.d. John Board (1st), Libby Bowden (2nd), Deb LeFaive (3rd) cont. Donna Wong Juliani d.o.p. Ron Orioux asst. cam. Ian Preston (1st), Larry Todd (2nd) gaf. Neil McCauley best boy Cody Emslie 1st elect. Charles Konowal key grip Shelley Degan asst. grip Bill Mills, Ian Reid art d. Richard Hudolin. Jack Hudolin (asst) carp. Dee Embree, Tom Scheitel, David Ackerman, Earl Dean, Barrie Pollock set dec./props. Carmen Milenkovic asst. props. Shirley Inget, Laurie Mang, Colin Gregory, Alan Stutchbury cost. des. Wendy Partridge ward. asst. Bhabara Borycki, Randy Fraser seamstress Vonnie Metz make-up Rita Steinmann, Lynn Copeman ed. Tony Lower mus. Maurice Marshall sd. Larry Sutton, Paul Coombe, Mike Hoogenboom sd. ed. Jim Hopkins boom Brock Stevens 2nd unit cam. Gary Seib craftsers. Cindy Dyck transp. capt. Alfred Borbely drivers Jim Mountstephen, Rod Kempa p. guaran. Rob Iveson cast. Bette Chadwick pub. Jami Drake typist Marg Germann l.p. Thomas Peacocke, Frances Hyland, Barry Morse, Lawrence Reese, Lenore Zann, David Ferry, Phil Ridley, Dale Heibein, Paul Bougie, Rob MacLean, Bill Sorenson, Bill Morton, Matt Keegan, Mike Bova, John Sexsmith, Bill Ashley, Jim Brock, Ginny Bast, Ken Kramer, Herb Lehann, Frank Germann, Ed MacLag, Elizabeth Moulton, Carol Frost, Terry Vogt, Phil Holden, Bill Droeski, Frank O'Malley, Chris Kambeitz, Barry Burns p.e. Pere Film Productions (1980) col. 35mm dist. Pan-Canadian Film Distributors Inc. Running time 100 min.

● No pussy-footing around for *Hounds'* invincible Pere Murray (Thomas Peacocke)



### Key to Credit Abbreviations

p.c. production company p. producer/production d. director d.o.p. director of photography sc. script/screenplay ed. editing/editor mus. music sd. rec./re-rec. sound recording/re-recording a.d. assistant director asst. assistant loc. man. location manager ward. wardrobe cost. des. costume design set dec. set decoration cam. op. camera operator elec. electrician carp. carpenter special ex. special effects acct. accountant compt. comptroller sec. secretary l.p. leading players pub. publicity col. colour dist. distributor.

Marty Gross'

## The Lovers' Exile

Classical Japanese art contests the assumptions of most of Western art. It contests the relationship of illusion to reality, of speech to gesture, of intelligence to emotion, and of art to work. In the early days of cinema, for example, screenings in Japan were conducted in a most unusual way. Rather than enclosing spectators in a darkened room and fixating their attention on a luminous screen, Japanese "cinemas" consisted of a series of tatami mats in front of which was a banshi — a professional narrator who told the story of the film. To one side of the banshi was the screen, to the other were the projectors. The attention of the spectators was thus divided in three: in front of them was the verbal text as animated by the banshi; to one side was the visual text as it existed in the film; and to the other side was the apparatus that made the pictures possible.

Film screenings were thus hierarchical and non-illusionist. It was the banshi that the spectators came to hear, not to see the actors on the screen. In fact, so strong were these banshi that they managed to delay the introduction of talking pictures to Japan for over three years. For the talking picture necessitated the demise of the banshi and of the unique conditions of viewing