

● "Chubei" brings an ancient tale to life in *The Lovers' Exile*



films which characterized the early days in Japan.

So an interest in bunraku need not be exotic. It can be theoretical as well. With the Bunraku puppet theatre, the spectators' attention is also divided in three. In front of them are the puppets — all three-foot dolls of a remarkable expressivity. Behind each of the principal puppets are three puppeteers who are fully visible to the audience (and while we can see the face of the chief puppeteer, his two assistants are masked). Finally, to one side of the puppet stage, there are two musicians — again a narrator who is also a singer (this time called a *yoruri*) and a *samisen* player whose strummed punctuation to the drama always seems a little out-of-sync, following the action slightly, as if trying to slow it down.

By showing us all these details, *The Lovers' Exile* by Marty Gross is both a documentary on the Bunraku theatre and a filmed version of a famous bunraku play — "Meido no Hikyaku," which some people will know as the famous film by Mizoguchi, *Chikamatsu Monogatari* (*The Crucified Lovers*, 1954). Furthermore, in his own filmic art, Gross manages to duplicate and intensify the formal properties of the original bunraku drama. Working mostly in medium-shots and with a few long-shots, Gross has developed this division of three. The frozen faces of the puppets contrast with the impassive faces of the *yoruri* to whom Gross, at key moments, cunningly cuts away. For at no point in the film can we see where the *yoruri* are in relation to the puppets or, indeed, where the different sets are in relation to one another. If early Japanese film screenings displaced the spectators from their conventional relationship to the screen, so too in *The Lovers' Exile*, is the relationship of the spectators to the actions they are watching similarly held at bay.

Moreover, in the course of the film, we see three different *yoruri* and three different *samisen* players. But (at least to Western ears), the sound remains the same. Thus the art of Chikamatsu and of the Bunraku theatre is eternal while individual performers might change. Similarly, romantic passion is eternal

while individual victims of it are destroyed or fade away.

Like classical Japanese art, *The Lovers' Exile* is less synthetic than analytic. The different parts that affect us are kept separate in the mind. While we might be viscerally moved by the extraordinary dexterity of the *yoruri*, our attention may be engaged by an appreciation of gesture — of the simulated gesture of a puppet's head bowed over and twitching with grief, or of feet so skillfully manipulated that we are almost unconscious of the fact that they are walking on air. As Roland Barthes has put it:

Bunraku does not aim to "animate" an inanimate object so as to bring a piece of the body, a shred of man, to life, all the while keeping for its vocation as a "part." It is not the simulation of the body which Bunraku seeks, it is — if this can be said — the body's tangible abstraction.

If classical Japanese theatre, including the Bunraku theatre, is held in check by the strong presence of verticals and horizontals, so in *The Lovers' Exile* Gross intensifies these restraints by masking all his action by a frame within the frame. This allows him to place his subtitles in the bottom frame beneath the picture, allowing the represented image to retain its full integrity. This leads me to the one, pedantic reservation I have about this uniquely valuable, this formerly delicate, this extraordinary Japanese/Canadian film: if Gross had put a slight tinge of pink or yellow in the titles, the experience of reading them might have caused less pain to the eyes.

Peter Harcourt ●

The Lovers' Exile

d. Marty Gross d.o.p. Kojo Okazaki, Hideaki Kobayashi sc. Marty Gross adapted from *Meido no Hikyaku* (1711) by Monzaemon Chikamatsu dialog./subtitles Donald Richie, Marty Gross ed. Marty Gross mus. superv. Toru Takemitsu mus. ed. Carl Zittler sd. rec. Hideo Nishizaki p. Marty Gross p.a./translator Toshiko Adilman p.a. in Japan Ryu Yasutake stills Ian Buruma stage settings Kazuo Sugimoto p.c. Marty Gross Film Productions Inc. col. 35mm running time 90 min. dist. New Cinema

Sophie Bissonnette
Martin Duckworth
Joyce Rock's

A Wives' Tale

A Wives' Tale is a 73-minute film about the women who supported the 1978 strike of the Sudbury miners against Inco. It is the most ambitious labour film to be made in Canada in recent years, certainly the most ambitious made in English-speaking Canada since the early days of Evelyn and Lawrence Cherry and their agrarian populist films of the '40's in Regina.

A bilingual film, released first in French in Montreal, *A Wives' Tale* is very much in the tradition of militant Quebec cinema — the executive producer was Arthur Lamothe, whose film *Le mépris n'aura qu'un temps* (*Hell No Longer*) remains a landmark of radical documentary. However, unlike most Quebec militant films, and unlike most labour-oriented documentaries made in English in Canada and elsewhere, *A Wives' Tale* is pre-eminently, self-consciously, happily and proudly a feminist film, insisting on the priority of women's experience and women's wide-ranging voices and visions as its perspective on the strike.

The Inco strike made labour history in Canada — it was originally provoked by the company to dispose of a nickel stockpile, on the evident assumption that a few months on picket lines would deplete the union treasury and the energies of the workers, so that they would crawl back to work whenever Inco offered some paltry concessions. This did not happen. The strikers held out for eight and a half months, until they were offered a contract that made the strike worthwhile. The main reason they were able to hold out for so long was the support given by Wives Support the Strike. The Wives raised money for special needs, organized a Christmas party that gave out 10,000 toys, held suppers, sales, ran a thrift shop, developed a clear analysis of the reasons for the strike, and gave financial, emotional and physical support which proved to be invaluable.

The most important accomplishment of the women who organized in Sudbury, as their experience is presented by the film, was the validation of the work women do, the skills women have, and the right of women to speak on their own behalf. The most difficult challenge for the filmmakers, aside from the usual impossible hardships faced by radical artists here and everywhere, was to make this self-validation interesting and accessible on film.

Mines and foundries make wonderful material for film documentarians — the colours and sounds of the molten metal, the awesome machinery, the physical courage of the workers daring the fury of the elements... How then to move from this audio-visual spectacle to the subject matter of *A Wives' Tale* — two or three women arguing around a kitchen table about how far they can press their desire to be kept informed about strike matters and have their say about issues which directly affect their lives?

One solution found by the filmmakers was simply to juxtapose these disparate elements: near the end of the film, when the strike is over, one of the women is shown doing her laundry, "helped" by her toddling child. In a very low-key scene we see her alone in the basement with the child and the washing machine. Cut to the most visually

dramatic sequence of the film, at the mines, ending with a shot of molten metal pouring in a golden stream down a hillside from great vats tipped against the indigo evening sky. A woman's voice, humming, connects this scene of Men and their Machines back to the familial reality which makes the drama possible. Cut to an early morning scene of a miner eating breakfast, a woman talking about her life since the strike ended six months earlier, how she tries to get out some evenings to see other women.

Another way of involving the viewer with the issues of the film is to allow individual wives to speak for themselves, not as "experts" but as witnesses to their own growth. Towards the end of the film a younger wife talks about how her involvement with the strike changed her: "I'm not scared to go out by myself any more." Whereas before, even when entering an elevator she was terrified that someone would talk to her and she would have nothing to say. When she says this, we've already seen her speaking in a crowded auditorium, speaking of being a miner's daughter, and a miner's wife, and a miner's mother.

Cut from the young woman in her rocking chair to a picket line for another strike. The Inco strike is over, but some of the women in Wives Support the Strike have formed support groups that now go out to organize in their community. The picketing women form a circle, as women have formed circles throughout the ages, sewing circles, healing circles, witch's circles. I remember the words of a song by Anne Sylvestre, sung earlier in the film by Pauline Julien at a benefit for the strikers — singing of women who have borne and suffered and buried men throughout time, she pays tribute to "une sorcière comme les autres."

The heart of the film is the growth of these women, these potential witches, picketers, organizers, mothers, wives, movers and shakers. They argue, they yell bitterly at each other. An older Scots woman, paying homage to her husband's "thirrrty years of serrrrvice," announces that she will abide by his decision, whatever it is. And what of her own thirty years of service to him? This is my question, but it is raised, in other ways, by other women in the film.

One woman says firmly, "My husband is the one who works and brings home the paycheque, but I'm the one who balances his bank account." Another who has been very active in the group announces "I'm not for the strike, I'm for my husband... and if my husband decides to go back to work, then fuck the strike!" Other women applaud. Cathy, one of the thirty women on strike (out of 11,700 strikers) retorts, "It's not your strike, it's everybody's... this is history in the making."

A number of feminist documentaries have used historical material (photographs, old footage, oral testimony) to pay tribute to active women of the past (*Great Grand Mother*, *The Lady from Grey County*, *Union Maids*, *Babies and Banners*, *Rosie the Riveter*). *A Wives' Tale* also uses this sort of archival material, to a very different effect, as it serves to validate the work and experience of women as working-class wives and mothers, and it brings their rich and untapped history directly into the present, showing the unbreakable connection between working-class struggle and feminism.

The opening sequence of the film moves from a scene in the mine to an overview of the city of Sudbury. A woman's voiceover offers factual in-

• By combining their forces the women in *A Wives' Tale* take on the world



formation which is rooted in personal experience — she speaks of "our labour" as the source of Inco's profit. Over footage of the strike she brings the film home: "The strike has now been going on for six months... We, as wives of the strikers... our history is a forgotten one." Roll credits: *A Wives' Tale*... Tracking shot: railway tracks, music, old pictures, old footage, women's voices recounting their history, their arrival in Sudbury as pioneers, as miner's wives and daughters and mothers, always spoken in the first person; the story of one woman and of many — as paid workers during the war who joined the first union in 1944, who were laid off when the war was over and returned to their customary unpaid work at home; as wives of miners who spoke out against the hardships of the strike of '58 and were then blamed for the poor contract the miners accepted soon after. Cut now to present-day footage, the Wives of '78, haunted by the shame of twenty years ago, an undesired shame which recurs throughout the film — if we speak out now and they take a bad contract we'll be blamed... But we're speaking out against the settlement... They're afraid we'll turn out to be smarter than them... They're afraid of us... They don't trust us... our own husbands. Nervous, shy, brassy, tough as old sinew, organizing, collecting money, phoning, speaking, arguing, cooking, washing, cleaning, bright as new pennies, learning new skills, learning the value of skills they already have. Balancing the family bank account means they can balance the group's account very well thank you — but the union insists that cheques be signed by a union officer. And the women agree, after an argument. But one of the women who gives in later pipes up and informs her pontificating husband that he is a male chauvinist pig. She explains to the camera that she grew up in a family where father was boss — she thought it was natural and right. Now she's having second thoughts.

In a written statement accompanying the film's Toronto opening, the filmmakers refer to the Wives' insistence that "we record their lows as well as their highs, their tensions and conflicts — all that would keep them 'real,' even on the big screen, and far away from being 'heroines.'"

"A québécois film, still and always an act of faith."

"Briefly, *A Wives' Tale*, 73 coloured minutes where the sound and image belong to women."

"It is a different cinema, why hesitate to name it? It is a militant film, a feminist film, a tale of women."

— The filmmakers.

Barbara Halpern Martineau •

A Wives' Tale won this year's Quebec Critics' Award and was recently nominated for a Genie as best theatrical documentary.

A Wives' Tale

d. Sophie Bissonnette, Martin Duckworth, Joyce Rock in collaboration with Joan Kuyek d.o.p. Martin Duckworth, Len Gilday (asst.), Jean-Charles Tremblay (asst.) sd. Joyce Rock, Glen Hodgins (asst.), Aeryn Weismann (asst.) ed. Michel Arcand, Sophie Bissonnette sd.ed. Pascale Laverrière, Liette Aubin sd.mix Jean-Pierre Joutel neg.ed. Dagmar Gueissaz song lyrics/text Sophie Bissonnette, Joyce Rock narration Marika Boies, Rita Lafontaine, Claudia Pharand, Giselle Trépanier mus. David Burt, André Paiement, Rachel Paiement, Rachel Paiement (arrangement) musicians David Burt, Michel Dasté, John Doerr, Rachel Paiement song "Une sorcière comme les autres", written by Anne Sylvestre, sung by Pauline Julien titles Lise Nantel, Josette Trépanier post-p. Pierre Comte p. sec. Camille Dubuc, Michele Vincelle p. man. Nicole Rodrigue-Lamothe p. Arthur Lamothe p.c. Les Ateliers Audio-visuels du Québec, with participation of the Institut québécois du cinéma, and Radio-Québec funds & services Conseil des Arts du Canada, Development Education Centre, National Film Board col. 16mm running time 73 minutes dist. Les Films du Crépuscule Inc. (Québec), DEC Films.

Albert Kish's

The Image Makers

The National Film Board of Canada is as familiar and delectable to most Canadians as apple pie is to our southern neighbours. It has also been nearly as pervasive for four decades, both reflecting and creating Canadian cultural images.

The Image Makers, The National Film Board: The First Forty Years, directed and edited by Albert Kish, is this unique institution's hour-long birthday film. With over 10,000 titles to choose from,

Kish has shouldered a positively herculean task — to tell the Board's story with shots from 60 films. Exclusion was the major challenge.

The Image Makers is a shortened and reworked version of the narration-free compilation film aired a little over a year ago on the CBC. At that time, fragments from the films themselves, while edited and arranged with Kish's masterful touch, were supposed to represent what the present film refers to as 'the collective memory of a nation'. This new version, with narration by Kish and Marjorie Morton (and no less skillfully edited), now has verbal cohesion, as the late John Grierson, founder of the Board, speaks the inspirational opening and closing words about the organization's purpose: "To bring Canada alive to itself and to the rest of the world." What follows is an epicurean film buffet.

A select group of filmmakers comments periodically on the Board's past. Tom Daly and Guy Glover recall how, during World War II, they and other young Canadian filmmakers learned technique from Grierson's experienced and imported non-Canadian colleagues. Kish shows plenty of 'shot and shell' but inexplicably misses the propaganda message hammered out repeatedly in the wartime shorts — that there would be a brave new world based on internationalism, not nationalism, in the wake of victory. Postwar Canada spurred rabid nationalism and lent support to the United Nations idea.

Kish asks Glover if the Film Board 'invented' Canada. For the balance of the film, this unstated premise is his focal point. Perhaps 'invent' is the wrong word. By projecting Canada and its people literally and figuratively, by creating a sense of oneness out of diversity, and by finding excitement in shared commonality, or the unusual in familiar situations, the Board compensated for the overwhelming physical and cultural limitations that militate against 'Canadian-ness'.

In a superb visual blending, Kish demonstrates how, from the beginnings, Canadian films have revealed Canada's faraway-ness. He believes that the Board's vision of Canada is one of pockets of immigrants, urban and rural, in the context of geographical isolation. Taken as a total composition, the core of his film convincingly portrays what might be called Canadian exotica in everyday life. It might have been appropriate if Kish had speculated about national mythology in this context.

As for the Board's non-commercial approach to film, one amusing sequence has millionaire media-mogul Geoff Stirling ranting and raving at an exasperated Mike Rubbo about how wasteful and

uncommercial Film Board shooting is. It is common knowledge that the Board throws away 19 of every 20 feet shot. It is expensive exploration. But, that one remaining foot may reveal the subject for what it is rather than for what the director thinks it should be; a fact that is essential to an understanding of how the Film Board's documentary tradition tries to reveal the truth behind the image.

There are many filmmakers who doubtlessly feel hurt because their work did not appear in *The Image Makers*. The French Unit, for example, receives only cursory mention. If exploration, propagation and celebration of Quebec culture are that unit's *raison d'être*, the English audience surely deserves a few more glimpses of the other Canada.

Also, films about Canadian authors, artists and politicians go unmentioned, as do the few but significant feature films. With several Oscars and worldwide renown, the animation unit could also argue for more screen time. Every claim for recognition is justified. But the line had to be drawn somewhere. The Board's 1981 catalogue alone has over 2000 titles in it.

The Image Makers salutes all NFB filmmakers, past and present, each of whom can identify with founder Grierson's inspirational benediction — that the Board is here to bring Canada alive to itself and the world, to declare the excellences and strengths of Canada in respect to creating the present and future.

There is some irony in light of this film tribute. Since 1939 the National Film Board has been telling the world about Canada — North America's best kept secret. Recent government budget slashing has brought the Board to its knees. As a key guardian and promoter of Canadian culture, the NFB deserves a larger perspective. It earns priceless national and international prestige for a paltry .00069 percent of annual government expenditure. Perhaps *The Image Makers* will convince those who hold the purse strings to 'praise the Board and pass the hat'.

Gary Evans •

The Image Makers

d./ed. Albert Kish photog. Andreas Poulsson, Barry Perles, Douglas Kiefer, Eric Chamberlain commentary written by Albert Kish, Marjorie Morton narrated by Richard Gilbert original mus. Keith Tedman loc. sd. Claude Hazanavicius, Jean-Guy Normandin sd. ed. Bernard Bordeleau re-rec. Jean-Pierre Joutel, Adrian Croll library services Antoinette Lapointe p. co-ord. Grace Avrith studio admin. Louise Spence assoc. p. Donna Dudinsky p. Adam Symansky exec. p. Peter Katadotis Lp... more than 400 directors, producers, cameramen, editors, writers, composers and film technicians since 1939. p.c. National Film Board, 1980 running time 58 min. 25 sec. col. 16mm.

• A glimpse of the good old days. Here, NFB cameraman Lawrence Cherry

