

FILM REVIEWS

Sunday in the Country

Just what we need, yet another *profound* film: this time something from John Trent about the morality of violence. And that apparently excuses the fact that *Sunday in the Country*, itself, is a rather violent film. A classic contradiction. If violence breeds violence, as Trent tries so hard and so enthusiastically to suggest (giving his sincerity the benefit of the doubt), then this film is, in a sense, a part of that same process.

Pretensions aside, *Sunday in the Country* chronicles the day that order, if not law, returned to Locust Hill courtesy of one Adam Smith. Locust Hill could be Anywhere, America and Adam Smith is presumably but one of the decent folk everywhere who are perplexed and perhaps bitter at the sight of their country "going to damnation" Smith, for one, is particularly disturbed. He is, in fact, something of a nut, no presumption about it, although Trent tries to play the man's instability down.

Smith, in the person of an ever so righteous Ernest Borgnine, owns a farm some five miles back from the highway running through Locust Hill. He's a hard-working, God-fearing man who has lived alone and increasingly apart from the surrounding rural community, with only his granddaughter, Lucy, back from university for the summer; his hired hand, Luke; two dogs, Peter and Paul; and a couple of guns, not deified.

One Sunday after church, this run down Eden is visited by the very devil, himself, a cheeky and psychotic killer named Leroy. With his two partners in crime, Dinelli and Ackerman, he has held up a nearby bank, killing four people. And here they are, standing in Adam Smith's front yard. But Smith is prepared. He knew, or at least guessed, that they were heading his way. For some reason though, he declines to tell the others or, more logically, get them out of harm's way. Smith is not a logical man. Instead, he has made the appropriate plans for their protection. After all, "a man's gotta do what he thinks is right" Everything is under control.



Scene from "Sunday in the Country"

It's the stuff of *Straw Dogs* and *Death Wish*. He is not content merely to blow Dinelli (Louis Zorich) off the front porch with his shotgun. He's not happy just to hold the other two for the police. No, Adam Smith must have justice and justice is a methodical and cold blooded torture which doesn't stop until Ackerman (Cec Linder) is also dead. They must learn, these bastards. And so too must his granddaughter, finely and sensitively played by Hollis McClaren, who objects with good reason to his strange turn of mind. He arranges a little lesson for her, perhaps to prove again to himself, if no one else, that his vigilance is justified. Oh yes, he's in complete control.

This is simply a game. Adam Smith knows no more about the value of life than Leroy. As far as he's concerned, "dyin's good for some folks if life ain't worth living" and for once, he can pass his own judgement on the three cases at hand. Ernest Borgnine's conception of this once rational man's unaccountably deranged reaction to the irrational situation is grim-faced and generally low-keyed, quite in contrast to Michael J. Pollard's now patented interpretation of the personification of Evil, as the animated and incoherent punk, Leroy. Side by side they're

dramatically effective foils and yet they're really two of a kind. Leroy the more impulsive killer and Smith the more deliberate.

Adam Smith explains that he has his reasons. He offers no admission or remorse. Nor does the film suggest that he should: it is clearly drawn in his favour. His rationalizations in turn speak for the film's simplistic morality.

It would be appropriate, although contrary to that same morality, if Leroy were to escape Smith's justice. He is, in fact, "saved" by the police, an irony that only he seems to understand, as he rides away from the Smith farm, chuckling and snickering at his good fortune. Unfortunately, that's not the end of it. Indeed, if it were, then all that the film tries so hard to justify as Right and Good would be denied. But no, it goes three deaths further.

If nothing else, *Sunday in the Country* makes a good case for gun control.

And Adam Smith is satisfied. He has been a busy man. This day, seven people have died in Locust Hill: he has killed three. His granddaughter has left him. Luke too. He's alone now. Such as it is, that seems to be his punishment.

All this, and on a Day of Rest, no less. There must be a moral there . . . somewhere.

—Mark Miller

Gina

It struck me that *Les Ordres* was such an interesting film because it managed to synthesize the aesthetic tendencies that have been developing in Québec cinema over the past decade. As a fictionalized account of a real event and given the expository framework within which Brault worked, it combined two key trends in Québécois cinéma — a propensity for the documentary which allows a fictional work to be rooted in a strong social and political reality. This tension exists in almost all of cinema, yet this familiarity with an environment has eluded English-Canadian filmmakers. *Gina* has a similar structure to the Brault film, although Arcand uses it in a more self-conscious manner.

His film ties together two narrative threads. A film crew is shooting a film on the textile industry, and we see what they shoot — interviews and scenes inside the factories — as a film within a film. On the other level the crew is staying at a hotel where they meet Gina, a stripper, who is working the hotel for a couple of nights. This structure allows Arcand to develop certain ideas by having the two parts of the film play off against each other. It is fitting that this particular framework allows Arcand to look back at his first feature film — a documentary made for the NFB on the textile industry which is still unreleased although made in 1968 and 1969, *On est au coton*. Arcand is interested in different modes of exploitation, all of which are interdependent and finally embrasive. Within this dual structure Arcand places two people, both women, who reflect the differing components of the film. There is Gina, an outsider, a visitor, who is essentially rootless, a wanderer, exploiting her body as her job. On the other hand we have Dolorès, who is a worker in one of the factories visited by the film crew. She is the polar opposite of Gina — she looks old before her time, she is passive and submissive, yet kind and sympathetic — but essentially she has

been ruthlessly exploited by an industry, and she is trapped within her life.

One level of *Gina* exists almost on this level of an analysis of exploitation and the interesting paradoxes and contradictions that result. But perhaps more essentially we are shown a group of people who slowly and tentatively try to establish contact — one of the film crew is attracted to Gina, while the director of the film shows an interest in Dolorès. These relationships do not even reach a sexual level, they are played out by lonely people striving for warmth.

The key moment of the film comes with Gina's strip-tease where all the diverse elements of the film converge. It is indeed an incredible scene — a group of snowmobilers who live in an abandoned boat frozen into the ice, have come to leer and jeer at Gina; the film crew is there, with a tension already existing between these two very different groups. And finally the director has also brought Dolorès. The scene has been set with one of the most revealing moments of the film that is magical in its power and its implications. Dolorès and Gina are in the bathroom together — Gina preparing for her strip act and Dolorès combing her hair. Facing the mirror, side-by-side, Gina asks Dolorès in a completely emotionless voice how much she earns a week working at the factory. After telling her that she gets about \$85 a week, Dolorès returns the question to Gina who replies that it varies but sometimes she earns as much as \$400. Suddenly while the two are talking, we realise that they almost look alike — for this split-second. Separated totally as people in their lifestyles, their sudden resemblance is tragically stated. With the strip Gina exerts total power over her audience, especially the snowmobile gang. Yet after this, alone in her hotel room, Gina is brutally gang-raped by this same group. Enraged she phones the heavies who handle her act and releases a violent brutal climax to the film.

Interestingly the film crew, throughout all this, is totally inactive and ineffective. Arcand cross-cuts the rape to the member of the film crew attracted to Gina, reading a book in

bed. Next day he drops by to see her but any real form of contact has vanished. It is then that the film crew is recalled to Montréal, unable to finish their documentary. Having seen the snowmobile gang wiped out, Gina flies out of Montréal on holiday, while we see the film crew shooting a commercial police drama.

In many respects *Gina* is also the flip-coin to Réjeanne Padovani. While Padovani explores the lifestyle of those who hold the power, *Gina* looks at those who are exploited by that power. And ultimately Arcand shows us that nothing changes, indeed most kinds of action, except those that are violent and essentially selfish, are ineffective. In the same cold and unemotional way that Padovani orders his wife killed, Gina obliterates the gang of snowmobilers. The difference is that in *Padovani*, the wife embodies certain human values, while *Gina* has no such equivalent force, except perhaps Dolorès.

Patrick MacFadden once described Larry Kent's *High* in *Take One* as a "bleak etching of a society deep in spiritual winter." This comment can also be applied to *Gina*. But perhaps more disturbingly Arcand questions the role of the cinema in working for change. The last image of the crew, shooting a cop-film with Donald Pilon, (a swipe at *The Collaborators*) is of a lonely, lost, directionless group. If Arcand is pointing at a bankruptcy amongst the film community then the future does not augur well.

— Piers Handling

Orillia: Our Town

Martin Lavut, sociologist? Yes, but with a sense of humour. His first film (reputed to be autobiographical), *At Home*, concerned a trivia maniac who wound up collecting people. Since then, Martin Lavut has directed shorts for series such as *Of All People*, numerous dramas which he describes as "atrocious; we wouldn't want to mention those", a recent one-hour CBC drama called *Melony* which was "almost detestable but at least it was my own script" and many commercials "which we do want to mention. . . ."