

vinces and states in such a bewildering condition of ambivalence, enforcing laws based on such arbitrary standards, that a direct and honest translation of book-into-film was not considered practical. The problem which Kaczender and Gotlieb faced was one of cultural lag and confusion. In 1978, it is permissible (even in Ontario) to write and publish sexually explicit material; but a photograph of the same acts runs a high risk of prosecution. What in one medium is now considered conventional, is in another (even when restricted to an adult audience) considered outrageous. When a book becomes famous, due in great part to its sexual candor, and filmmakers become tempted to cash in on the success but also feel obliged to delete the sex or reduce it to head-and-shoulder couplings or "artfully" choreographed scenes in which a shadow, a bedpost or strategically-placed vase of roses means the difference between an "R" and an "X," what emerges is a hypocritical hodgepodge — a film that talks out of both sides of its mouth — a sniggering yes, and a cowardly no.

The alternative to that dilemma is to alter the book significantly and deliberately in an altogether different direction. When Stanley Kubrick made *Lolita* he recognized two limitations — one in himself (he has no aptitude for depicting sensuality, beyond his highly-developed sense of visual beauty) and the other in society (erotic interplay between a 12-year-old girl and a middle-aged man would not have been permitted in a film in 1963, or even in 1978 given the legal difficulties of Louis Malle's *Pretty Baby*). Normally those limitations would disqualify anyone from adapting *Lolita*, but Kubrick's gamble was that one could produce an "interpretation" of the book, substituting a new kind or pleasure — brilliantly sly satire — for the one that had made the novel notorious. Whether he succeeded or not is open to debate (he occasionally has expressed the wish to try it again, for the film is clearly compromised by moral attitudes of the time) but it is still an option for filmmakers caught in the crevice between avant-garde literature and rear-guard cinema. Following this method of adapting *In Praise of Older*

*Women* the director should have regarded as his models such European films as *Loves of a Blonde* or *Closely Watched Trains* — that is, drawing upon his knowledge of Hungary, and the experience of dislocation in being an immigrant, given us a film that concentrates on well-drawn characters, and a sense of time-and-place that one can almost taste and smell in its palpability.

Kaczender's past films (*Don't Let the Angels Fall*, and *U-Turn*) seemed emotionally flat and uninvolved — which I attributed to the slightness of their scenarios. This time, with a better range of material, the effect is roughly the same — one watches with polite, rather than rapt, attention. And this time my conclusion is harsher: I don't think Kaczender knows how to "hook" an audience. His films look good (in a tv-commercial way) but they are unengaging on any other level.

The novel, slight though it is, maintained a keen sense of irony which the film lacks; space permits only one telling example. Vizinczey depicts an encounter between Vajda and a young actress named Mici. She leads him on, and agrees to go back to his room, then has a sudden change-of-mind and begins worrying if she'll get pregnant. Of her own accord she offers to have sex the "safe" way — orally — ("Well, you want me to do it or not?" she asks; "I wouldn't dream of inconveniencing you," András replies) but given András' attitudes to oral sex he doesn't find deliverance. ("We made love in the French way," he says. "We both came but it didn't help me, my headache only grew worse. Mici was completely satisfied. It was the culmination of her chaste dreams, I suppose: the mysterious immaculate conception.") In the film, Gottlieb and Kaczender show András picking up a young cabaret singer (who does a lusty song-and-dance routine that enflames András's imagination) only to have her turn out, somewhat incongruously, to be merely a "cock-teaser." András goes home, without any sex, complaining bitterly about the fickleness and lack of sophistication of young girls. Frequently throughout the film one finds the novel being

cheapened and coarsened, made into stereotypical situations. Other chapters of the novel, such as one showing Vajda's rather heartless affair with an impoverished mother-of-two, are left out altogether. The end result is a fuzzy and trivial film about a man who never grows up, and who is never forced to take anything seriously.

With the exception of Helen Shaver, normally a fine actress, but here confined to an embarrassingly silly caricature of a North American faculty-wife, most of the cast give creditable performances (especially Karen Black) but they all deserve something better. What in Vizinczey was sensual, witty and elegant is — via Kaczender — rendered merely smutty, cute and photogenic. One may forgive *In Praise of Older Women* for its sexual cowardice, but there is little excuse for its mediocrity.

John Hofsess

## Robin Spry's DRYING UP THE STREETS

d. Robin Spry, sc. B.A. Cameron, ph. Ken Gregg, ed. Myrtel Virgo, l.p. Len Cariou, Don Francks, Kelvin Butler, August Schellenberg, Jacques Hubert, exec. p. Ralph L. Thomas, p.c. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (Radio-Canada) 1977, col 16mm, running time 90 minutes.

This is not the "great" film followers of Spry's career have been expecting.

Nevertheless, it is well worth seeing for its uncompromising depiction of the sordid subterranean world of hard drug pushers and junkies, of anxious-to-please pimps and the girls they exploit: the runaways who are lead into drug addiction then forced to pay for

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it by servicing the string of pasty, insatiable customers coughed-up by most North American cities. It's a "sewer" says an undercover man. And it's a vortex of violence to shock anyone, including those who've tripped gaily over the tattered carpets of a Yonge Street massage parlor.

Originally the film was conceived as a 60 minute CBC-TV special, but after thirteen days shooting a feature had been born. (The secret of such fertility should be shared, what with government cutbacks creating a prophylactic atmosphere for future CBC film productions.) What will bring the film to the local cinema is not the occasional flash of bare flesh, but several fine performances and the many levels on which the film works.

Don Francks unquestionably dominates the film. The former CBC song and dance man, a one time drop-out himself (he once appeared in leathers on the Pierre Berton Show, figuratively spinning the shocked host's bow tie at 3,000 rpm), is most convincing as Peter Brennan, a West Coast pharmacology professor who has become a heroin addict in that lifestyle experimentation endemic to Pacific shores. His wife has deserted him, his daughter has run away. Francks, with his gaunt face, balding pate and waist length pony-tail, is so well cast as the archetypal 60's dope scene drop-out that he visually steals almost every scene.

In a quick cutting, opening sequence a hand held camera, shaking with TV news authenticity, discovers Brennan O.D.'ing in the toilet of a greasy spoon. One of the cuts includes a gruesome close-up of him salivating, a first indication this film is not for the squeamish or those socially isolated souls who think that our greatest problem is the future of the monarchy.

The strident music, accompaniment for Brennan's moments of isolation throughout the film, suddenly becomes muzak, and in the first of many changes in rhythm characteristic of the film's structure, the fast cutting is replaced by a moving camera which reveals an antiseptic hospital room. There, Brennan is cold-turkeying it, sandwiched between white sheets. Len Cariou, cool and sophisticated as a crusading newsman in *One Man*, but a little



Len Cariou (left), a narcotics officer tries to enlist heroine addict Peter Brennan, played by Don Francks, to help break a narcotic ring

worldly to play RCMP officer, Larry, exploits Brennan's helplessness, not unlike the way the pimps exploit their girls. Larry shows lurid slides of a girl forced into masochistic acts to support her habit, hinting she may be Brennan's runaway daughter.

It is then the bones of the plot are revealed: the mounties, demonstrating questionable ethics at once similar to *Kojak* but all too believable in light of the McDonald Commission inquiry, will help Brennan find his daughter — if he helps them break a dope ring and identify the king-pin.

In an inspired bit of filmmaking Larry exits, leaving the projector on automatic ostensibly to give Brennan time for a decision. The slides, previously shown mostly at comfortable home

viewing distance, now become a quick cutting montage, bloody details bludgeoning the viewer as they do Brennan. No soft-sell consciousness raising is this. When a family snapshot snaps by, Brennan's decision is a foregone conclusion.

After possibly the briefest cross-Canada bus trip for a Canadian film — no shots of the Rockies or the prairies — Francks disembarks before Toronto's eternally "new" city hall, takes one last look at his daughter's photograph and symbolically rips it up.

Soon after his arrival but not before a greeting committee of police brutalizes then briefly jails him, Brennan is slowly sucked into the sewer. It's apparently easy if the hang-outs are known, if the right questions are asked, and as is so often the case, if a contact

has been made while rehabilitating in Okala.

Through meetings in topless bars, featuring tasteless shows almost comic on screen, Brennan's circle of contacts grow. They lead him into violence – a jewellery store robbery, ridding the street of "Frenchie" competition – and then into employment suited to his professional training, cutting drugs for street distribution. But he reveals a sort of Hawksian ethics: he only cuts the drugs with pure materials, and refuses to bend when grilled about the high costs.

These developments are intercut with Brennan's long treks through nameless streets, effectively building suspense while he searches documentarily filmed passersby for the face of his daughter. Often, he visits the methadone maintenance clinic to exchange his urine sample for his surrogate drug and to report his findings to Larry, disguised as a doctor. "Dr. Fraud" Brennan puns on their first meeting, one of many one-liners offering comic relief. The effective one liner, *de rigueur* in the fast cutting TV milieu, seems a forte of scriptwriter B.A. Cameron. When Brennan's virility is questioned, one character quips "He couldn't get it up with spray starch and splints."

During an early restaurant stop he witnesses a theft from a car. In what at first appears to be a documentary long shot, a girl, played by newcomer Sarah Torgov, takes a camera but is caught by a black man, ironically wearing a white hat. Arguing, the two conveniently enter Brennan's restaurant where he overhears the man offer to take the girl home and put her up with the help of his woman. The audience knows the girl, Anne, is the archetypal runaway. Her fate, despite that easily identified with signs of middle class success – beauty, poise and, for a teenager, pimple-free skin – will be that described earlier by Larry.

Predictably, too, her fate becomes entwined with Brennan's. She shows up as a waitress in his haunt, then as a shy, reluctant participant in a topless stage show. At first she is shielded by Shiela, the hooker-with-a-heart-of-gold played by Jayne Eastwood with her usual super competence. But Sheila's shield is as short-lived as Sheila. She

is terminated violently for squealing to the police after refusing to allow her daughter to stand-in for a member of a pedophilic daisy chain, staged with a drugged Anne for the benefit of porn-tographers.

Only an inventory could do justice to the many ways Anne is degraded. At one point she is referred to as a "facility," a term to raise the ire of even a closet feminist. Brennan is aware of this; the fatherly concern he should have shown for his daughter is inexorably transferred to Anne, even as her addiction is slashed into our consciousness by the close-up of needle tracks along her delicate white arm.

Most of this would be straight TV formula, tame or violent enough for Kojak, were it not for Spry's skill and wit in rendering the material. He has such feeling for form, he can make socio-political statements, *nouvelle vague* references, and toss off a few nods to the NFB – all without eroding the entertainment values treasured by the apathetic, unpoliticized "home viewing audience."

In sex and violence Spry tells all but shows only just enough. A man's eye is poked out. Several shootings take place. Using a montage in which shots of perpetrator and victim (always backing away from the camera until stopped by a wall) are intercut with steadily increasing rapidity, Spry never includes the explicit shot of bullets or instrument striking. This shot is filled in by the viewer from that fund of experience informed by the glut of violent photographic images seen daily, or the apparently innate capability of humans to visualize gore. The moment of violence occurs between frames, in the mind of the viewer primed by fast cutting. Where the sharp instrument is used, the thug wielding it says more people will be wearing eye-patches, on the last word there is a witty cut to a fig leaf on an alabaster David in the bar, an eyepatch if ever there was one. Later the same thug says, "The citizens have their police, we have ours." Criminal violence differs little from socially sanctioned violence.

In this bizarre world, where promises to do anything in return for a fix are honored, Anne is put to the test with

the sexually imaginative (or perverted, if you prefer). However, the explicit shot is filled in again by the viewer, who may discover his/her sexual imagination has a wider range than earlier thought. The casting of almost grotesque lesbians seems questionable, perhaps designed to confirm male chauvinist prejudices.

Brennan's treks through the streets are done in long takes, Francks forcing the action towards the camera in another mandatory TV technique which forces the camera to reverse dolly and create an attention grabbing, always changing backdrop. Invariably, these shots are filmed in hazy overcast, a light which mutes the colors and adds a bluish cast expressive of Brennan's alienated state of mind. In these sequences a notable time transition has been used: he stops to study strip joint pictures for his daughter's likeness; there is a cut to a subjective shot, hand held; and when the objective shot follows, it is night. This is smooth, yet, momentarily an expressive disorientation in time.

Several distancing devices are used, also with irony. Several times two large neon yellow A's appear behind Brennan; they grab attention, invite only impossible interpretations. A neon record flashes behind his head, becoming a halo – a crassly commercial one. Later, Brennan is hooded and violently shoved into a back seat, but the low angle composition of the shot emphasizes the "Keep Ontario Beautiful" on the license plate. The plot progresses while with simple juxtaposition Spry criticizes the head-in-the-sand attitude to socially reality manifest by bureaucratic sloganeers.

The plot is resolved neatly, as expected from a made for TV flick, but not without more gut-grippling moments of suspense, the seemingly obligatory chase scene, and the somewhat implausible way Brennan leads police to the king pin's mansion.

Some questions, however, remain. Casting a black (Calvin Butler) as a pimp, white stetson notwithstanding, might confirm the racist prejudices now bubbling below the smug surfaces in Canada – unless this is a marketing ploy for stateside acceptance. Torgov is a remarkable young actress.

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In one scene when she parrots paragraphs from self-help books about giving and sharing, it can be seen how easily the supposed gospel truth in such books can be manipulated to serve any end. Warren Davis, once an official CBC face and voice, suffers from that old Canadian actor's problem of too much TV exposure. (Can you see Peter Kent as Citizen Kane, or Barbara Walters as Lady Macbeth?) And the attention to TV lighting values of 2:1 or 3:1 robs Spry of the expressionistic tools of shadow manipulation.

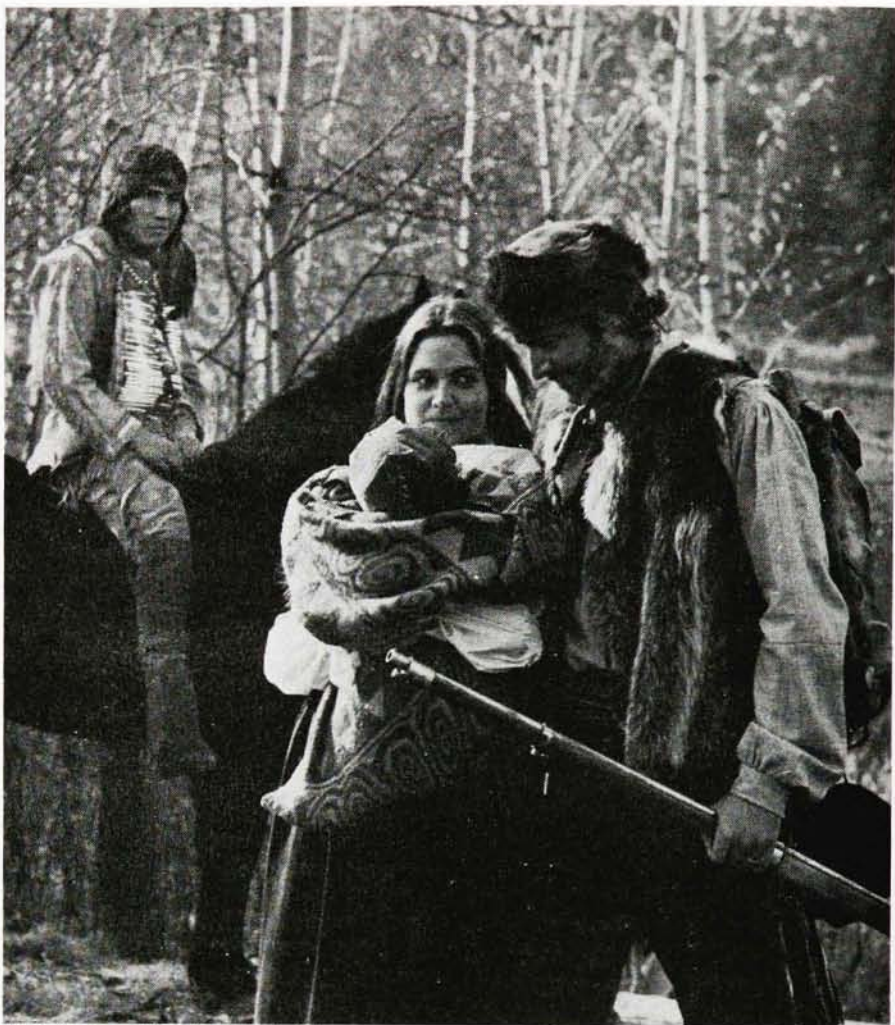
**Drying up the Streets** flirts with the skirts of sensationalism, even lifting them at times. It has none of the didacticism of *One Man*: it sensitizes viewers to social problems with shock.

Doug Isaac

## R. Martin Walters' MARIE-ANNE

d. R. Martin Walters, sc. Marjorie Morgan, adapt. George Salverson, ph. Reginald Morris, ed. Stanley Frazen, sd. Chris Large, m. Maurice Marshall, lp. Andrée Pelletier, John Juliana, Gordon Tootoosis, Bill Dowson, David Schurmann, Linda Kupecek, Bill Meilen, Tantoo Martin, p. Fil Fraser, p.c. The Motion Picture Corporation of Alberta 1978, running time 88 minutes.

*Marie-Anne* is the second feature to be turned out by Edmonton producer Fil Fraser, who made his debut in the Canadian film industry not too long ago with *Why Shoot The Teacher*. Like that film, *Marie-Anne* is a movie shot in Alberta on a subject drawn from local history, and as such it has a peculiar fascination for Alberta audiences. Until Fil Fraser came along, it seemed, people in this part of Canada had never seen themselves or their history fictionalized on the screen — unless it was in the course of an occasional Eastern-financed project, or during one of Hollywood's brief, absurd forays north. Thus the shock of finding that it's possible for *us* to make *real movies*



Marie-Anne and family at Fort Edmonton

about *our* lives and heritage (of course retouching them for painless consumption just like the Americans do) has tended to overwhelm any objective local assessment of the film's actual worth. The Alberta public flocked eagerly to *Why Shoot The Teacher*, as it is now doing to *Marie-Anne*, like proud parents going to watch junior in the school play; and for them the question of how good *Marie-Anne* is when compared to (say) *Pretty Baby* or even to J.A. Martin *Photographe* is likely to appear meaningless in the strictest sense of the term. After all, you just don't look at your own child's performance in the same critical light as you would Glenda Jackson's Hedda Gabler.

Nevertheless, if filmmaking in Western Canada is to escape from parochial smallness of vision, it must be judged

according to criteria just as rigorous as we would apply to any film and it has to be said that by these standards *Why Shoot The Teacher* is an artistic failure enlivened by moments of authenticity and insight, and *Marie-Anne* a movie of no special interest.

*Marie-Anne* (scripted by Marjorie Morgan and directed by R. Martin Walters) is the story of the first white woman to come to Alberta. In the interests of conveying some idea of a film whose major problem is that it seems completely boneless and insubstantial, I'm going to give a full summary of the scenario — more, perhaps, than you ever wanted to know about

During the lengthy credit sequence we see Baptiste Lagimodière, an agent of the Hudson's Bay Company, frolicking merrily through the autumn woods near Fort Edmonton with his