

## Eric Till's **Gentle Sinners**

One is not especially predisposed to like this film: another adolescent coming of age that takes place in another small community in the Canadian bush. And yet, as soon as we get past the bible-thumping ignominy of the caricatural parents (played in living two-dimension by Jackie Burroughs and Kenneth Pogue, not their fault one suspects), the film quite unabashedly seduces. The opening scene has Eric (known as Bobby by his parents, and played beautifully by Christopher Earle) scammed out of his money and every stitch of clothing off his untanned vulnerable hide. The shot of a youngster trying to literally find his trousers while thumbing rides on the open road as the sun is coming up is both moving and hilarious, and sets the tone for this quite delightful production.

Eric's classic search for the father culminates in his finding the wonderful Uncle Sigfus, his Icelandic bachelor uncle, who shares the duties of avuncular confident with his friend Sam. Ed McNamara as the former and George Clutesi as Sam give the most heart-wrenching and understated performances, beautiful and totally believable, so clear and elegant one simply envies the seamless quality of the acting.

The plot plots its way through finding venue to support the errant nephew, as he has forfeited his work in lumber by alienating the town grotesques, the evil Tree brothers. Sigfus and Sam take Eric trawling for fish and director of photography Kenneth Gregg gets some extraordinary moments out of the lake

scenes, while our hero, who cannot swim, is almost drowned.

Eric meets the ingenue, Melissa (Charlene Senuik) while she is collecting money for the evil Tree brothers. Director Eric Till gets the most out of these young actors, evoking with the shimmer of an impressionist painting the evanescent quality of adolescent summers of first love.

The climax of the film has all the magic, passion and dread of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. Dire threats arise for boy, man, and nature, plus our hero gets to rescue his "maiden fair." And in case we missed the allusion, the writer does throw Huck, in book form, at us more than once.

*Gentle Sinners* is such a work of art, a story worthy of telling and a Canadian film which transcends in many important ways the simple genre piece it could have succumbed to being; the cinematography is frame-for-frame most exquisitely executed, and the direction is almost flawless. And yet... again there are these nits which should not be overlooked, if only because they were not necessary. The women in this tale, most likely based on "true" or "real" ones, are, without exception, whores, witches and wimps. Ed Thomason is a writer of such apparent and rich talent, that surely he could have avoided the obvious, the cheap thrill of creating another brazen buxom lass, smothering mother, helpless housekeeper, or golly-gee ingenue who must be booked and bedded before the finale. There is so much humour and compassion and sincerity in this story, based on the Valgardson novel, that one is stunned by such lapses.

Jackie Burroughs plays without a hitch the fundamentalist mama, so why must we have her go quite over the edge as a complete witch? The slut in the team of hitchhikers is not particularly offensive - in fact she is beautiful realized - only this sluttishness is a theme amplified by

the ingenue's mother, who, as housekeeper of the evil Tree brothers, is mistress to both, and rendered helpless to protect her nubile, and presumably virginal, daughter from their lecherous advances.

Okay, enough, the heroine did have to be in some terrible danger or the hero's efforts to save her would not have been so grand or passionate. Still, she did have her own strategy for escape, and might have succeeded had she not fallen for Eric. So we come back to the bothersome wimpification of the female principal.

For all that, there shouldn't be a dry eye in front of the set when this film is screened on CBC Jan. 6. Despite its flaws, it is truly worth viewing.

Anna Fuerstenberg ●

**GENTLE SINNERS** d. Eric Till **exec. p./p.** Peter Kelly **assoc. p.** Flora Macdonald **a.d.** Tony Thatcher **2nd a.d.** Mike Williams **sc.** Ed Thomason, based on the novel by W.D. Valgardson **p. asst.** Roman Stoyko **unit man. (Tor.)** Gail Einarson-McCleery **unit man (Wpg.)** Alix Washchshyn **cont.** Kathryn Buck **p. sec.** Deborah Osborne **des. coord.** Bob Powers **d.o.p.** Kenneth Gregg **cam. op.** Michael Storey **cam. asst.** John Maxwell **lighting** Erik Kristensen **light. assts.** Len Watier, Keith Jenkins, John Wilson **sd.** Erik Hope **boom** Chris Davies **art d.** Milt Parcher **des. (Wpg.)** Stan Langtry **des. asst. (Tor.)** Catherine Baseraba **des. d. (Wpg.)** Robert Lowe **grafix** John Simons **set dec.** Peter Razmofsky, Michael Happy, Bill Chody **cost.** Betty Dowson, Michael Harris, Ruth Secord **cost. (Wpg.)** Gloria Tallman, Ted Patterson **make-up** Mario Cacioppo **make-up asst.** Barb Zaporzan **hair** Phil Benson **staging** Ralph MacDonald, Robert Wytka, Derek Loomes, T.B.A. (Wpg.) **painter** Randy Chodak **sp. efx.** Doug Wardle **des. sked. (Wpg.)** Welland Jennings **carpenters** Dave Mackling, Gerry Filby **cast.** Dorothy Gardner, Michelle Metivier **post. p.** Toni Wrate **film ed.** Ralph Brunjes **lab (Wpg.)** Mid Can Labs **p. coord.** Laurie Cook **unit pub.** Sally Swank **coffee** Kim Forrest **lp.** Christopher Earle, Charlene Senuik, Ed McNamara, Todd Stewart, Jackie Burroughs, Kenneth Pogue, Neil Bennett, John Curtis, Frank Adamson, George Clutesi, Benjamin Darvill, Jessica Steen, Jeff Hirschfield, Cathi Allen, Joanne Allen, Don Emms, Ralph Almond, Clarence Franklin, Joe Tenhaft, Gudmunder Peterson **p.c.** Canadian Broadcasting Corp.

## Don Carmody's **The Surrogate**

In spite of its terminally rotten script and direction, *The Surrogate* has something rare and valuable to offer the discerning moviegoer: dramatically functional, integrated and central-to-the-storyline sex.

Now, in the unabashed stroke movies - *Candy*, *The Story of O* - the sex is certainly necessary, there'd be no movie without it, but it's not what you'd call "dramatically functional," not when the drama is either perfunctory or totally absent, the young-woman's-sexual-odyssey storyline being a narrative rather than dramatic construction. In the ordinary dramatic movie - *Coming Home*, *Body Heat* - it is not sex that functions, but desire (with or without fulfillment) and its consequences. The sex scenes have value only as statements of fact: they did it and the earth moved, or they did it and it shows their marriage is boring. Apart from rape scenes (and without going into the question of whether they do, or do not, constitute sex scenes), sex which delineates and develops character, furthers the plot and is, itself, dramatic (that is, filled with conflict, crisis and resolution) is a rarity. In Canadian film, only James Woods' scenes with Debby Harry in *Videodrome* come readily to mind. Entire movies built on and worked out in terms of explicit sexual conflict (again excluding rape) are almost unknown. Currently, we have Ken Russell's *Crimes of Passion*, before that *The Stud* (with Joan Collins, from her sister's novel) and possibly *Lolita*, and the films of Russ Meyer. Then the idea starts getting diluted - *Shivers* might be included, but there are those parasites.

There is, of course, a perfectly good reason for the scarcity of good (or even bad) sexual drama, apart from the impositions of self, public- and governmental censorship, and that is that sex requires consent and co-operation, but drama requires conflict.

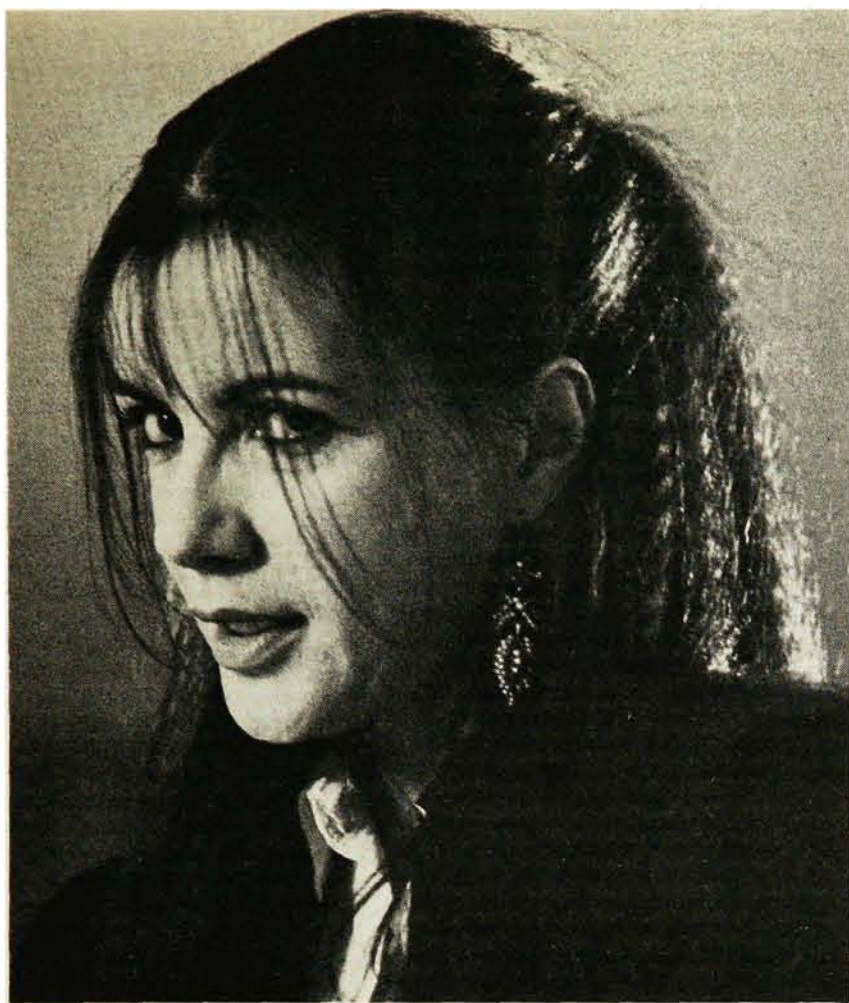
The premise for *The Surrogate* provides a fine arena for sex-with-conflict: Frank Waite (Art Hindle), an upper middle-class car-dealer, has an impotence problem and so much rage that he has blackouts from time to time, both of which he blames on his wife's frigidity - they haven't made love in a year. The wife, Lee (Shannon Tweed), does seem cold and hostile, but that could just be her response to life with Frank. We do know that she likes to masturbate in the bath and that she says she's willing to make it any time he can get it up, so we think she can't be all that frigid. Our sympathies, not high for either one, are balanced between them.

The drama starts when Frank's psychiatrist suggests the couple hire sex surrogate Anouk Ven Derlin (Carole Laure). She'll get you fucking again, through deeds not words, says the shrink, but warns that her treatments can be monumentally weird. Waiting for Anouk's first visit, Frank and Lee, who has been dragged into this against her better judgement, are clawing the walls. When she arrives, the tension escalates: they seem to be just making nervous small talk, but it's plain she's probing for an opening, a way to get



● Ed McNamara and Christopher Earle in *Gentle Sinners*: seamless acting





● Carole Laure as *The Surrogate*: more deeds than words

things rolling. It comes when Frank says Lee doesn't like to be touched. So Anouk starts touching her, sexually. How will Lee react to her first sexual touch from another woman? How will Frank react to seeing the woman he cannot arouse being turned on by another? How will Lee react when Frank's hands replace Anouk's? How will she react when the caresses get genital, when tongue replaces finger? What will Frank's attraction to Anouk do to the current situation and to later developments? Can either of them cope with this while it's happening? How will they be changed when it's over? These are dramatic questions central to the development of character and plot and their presence generates a level of tension not often found in sex scenes.

Anouk's next appearance carries the sexual drama forward. She shows up at the apartment with a sample-case in hand, explaining that the surrogate business doesn't pay the rent and wondering if Lee would like to buy some sexy lingerie. Lee isn't home, but Frank is and he's getting hot, hotter still when Anouk shows him the panties she's wearing. The action starts as a cross between a seduction and a tease, then turns violent. Frank rapes Anouk. Or does he? There is equal indication that he has been manipulated into fulfilling a violent fantasy. But Frank is terrified of his own rage. He's left weeping and huddled, not knowing what's happened (and we're not supposed to know either) and wondering what he's turning into. And what will this do to Lee when she finds out?

All this occurs against, and is given weight by, a series of murders, first of random men, then of the couple's friends and associates. We know from the structure that the killer is one of the three principals and that it will be the effects of increasingly experimental sex that

will precipitate the climax and unmasking.

Unfortunately, any but the most naive viewer will guess the killer long before the halfway mark, thanks to Carmody's hamfisted handling of verbal and visual clues and thanks, more importantly, to his rigid adherence to genre cliché. More unfortunately still, Carmody has no idea of how to make his movie move. His dialogue is banal and obvious, his camera placement tries, at best, for the functional, and sometimes misses. Trivial and irrelevant scenes are played out in full, while important ones move by too quickly. The suspense scenes, in particular, are so flat that one suspects Carmody, whose previous experience was as producer on *Porkys I and II* and *Spacehunter*, is only interested in his sexual material.

Which brings us to the most unfortunate thing of all: Carmody can't handle his sex. It's not only that his directorial ineptitude denies us the eroticism that cinema can create, but that his kindergarten-level sexuality just doesn't understand or sympathize with the more non-conformist sexual expressions his script demands. After the standard porno fantasy of Anouk as the horny Avon lady, she next shows up as a dominatrix and, sexually, the picture collapses. What happens is this: Frank arrives home to find Lee bound and gagged in a chair. Anouk, in full leather gear, rushes out and belts him with some kind of ritual baton. He grabs it and breaks it. She puts a knife to Lee's throat and demands a little bootlicking from Frank. He complies to save his wife, but Anouk comes too close. He disarms her and chucks her out. Lee, freed, reveals Anouk was waiting for her when she came home. They conclude she's gone off the deep end. Despite the wardrobe and dialogue, this is not a sex scene; it is straight melodrama from beginning to end and,

as such, a betrayal of the content and direction of the drama that has gone before. It would have taken little to fix the scene: begin with Lee, hands bound and gagged, involved with some kind of apparently consensual SM caresses with Anouk. Bring on Frank; involve him in the scene by way of seduction. Let Lee work the gag out of her mouth and holler for help. Then bring out the knife and run the melodrama. Played that way, the scene would have held the dramatic tension and raised the questions of the earlier scenes, but to do so would have required some understanding of SM as practised by real people and some sympathy for non-conforming sex. Carmody seems to possess neither.

Indeed, he seems inclined to laugh at the sexually different. Jackie Burroughs' cameo, as a middle-aged woman all dressed and ready to play a fantasy as a little girl with a policeman and some ice cream, seems structured for laughs at her expense (we know Hindle is the wrong man, she doesn't). But Burroughs plays the scene with such delight and an utter lack of condescension that the shabbiness of its intentions is at once eclipsed and highlighted.

Much the same occurs with the character of Eric (Jim Bailey), Lee's best friend. He needs to be sexually non-threatening for her, but he's written as a mincing flutney queen with a wholly unnecessary fondness for at-home drag — a typical gay caricature — so that when the script demands he develop a sexual interest in Anouk, the result is total unbelievability. Despite this, Bailey manages to inject some sympathy and real human feeling into the role, as does every other major cast member. Laure and Hindle are competent pros and they give it their all, to good effect. Newcomer Shannon Tweed handles Lee's brittleness and low-key hysteria well enough to suggest that she may grow into a good actress. Watching them work provides the main pleasure, sexual or otherwise, of the movie.

Co-producer, with André Link, John Dunning, is quoted in the press kit to the effect that what interested them in *The Surrogate* was the originality of the idea. If they'd allowed themselves at the same time to become attracted to a talented writer and director, *The Surrogate* could have been a fine addition to a badly neglected genre.

Andrew Dowler ●

**THE SURROGATE** d./p. Don Carnody exec. p. John Dunning, André Link p. Jim Hanley asst. to p. Oriana Bielawski p. man. Josette Perrotta p. office coord. Irene Litinsky loc. man. François Sylvestre craft serv. George Calamatas loc. scout Jacques Laberge p. acct. Rejane Boudreau bookkeeper Barbara Pecs 1st a.d. Jim Kaufman 2nd a.d. Elizabeth Halko script Marie Theberge sc. Carmody, Robert Geoffrion mus. Daniel Lanois cast. Elite Productions, Vera Miller, Nadia Rona, Rosina Bucci d.o.p. François Protat 1st asst. cam. Yves Drapeau 2nd asst. cam. Michel Bernier stills Piroshka Mihalka sd. man. Stuart French boom Michael Berrie best boy Jean Courteau rigging Jean-Paul Houle elect. Alex Amyot key grip Serge Grenier best boy Robert Grenier trainee Borek Sedivec 3rd grip Gregoire Schmidt art. d. Charles Dunlop asst. art d. Jean Bourret set dresser Normand Sarrazin asst. art dept. Michel Boyer ward. mistress Nicoletta Massone asst. ward. Francesca Chamberland dresser Catarina Chamberland make-up Jillian Chandler daily make-up Micheline Foissy, Kathryn Casault hair Bob Pritchett hair (daily) Christianne Bleau p. assts. Harold Trepanier, Michel Chauvin transp. coord. Neil Allan Bibby drivers Joe Sanchez, Mark Hindle, Philip Stilman ed. Rit Wallis asst. ed. Susan Schneir p.c. Cinepix Inc., Telemetropole Int'l dist. (int'l) Inter-Ocean Film Sales running time: 100 mins. l.p. Art Hindle, Carole Laure, Shannon Tweed, Michael Ironside, Marilyn Lightstone, Jim Bailey.

Ronald Wilson's

## Sam Hughes's War

Early in this two-part historical drama, telecast by CBC Nov. 21-22, an aide rushes into Canadian minister of Defence Sam Hughes's office and announces: "Gentleman, we are at war." "Thank God!" says Hughes heartily, "let us pray."

From there on, World War I, the Great War, becomes Sam Hughes's abiding passion, his *raison d'être* as the drama carefully examines the complex personality of this military hero. *Sam Hughes's War* is an excellent vehicle for Gordon Pinsent's talents. His Sam Hughes is a fully realized creation: by turns blustering and pompous, vulnerable and whimpering with martyred self-pity, courageous and stubbornly nationalistic, paranoid and even pathetic. Pinsent's range here is remarkable and the role must be a landmark in his career. But what makes this production work is the subtle edge of irony, even cynicism, that runs right through the drama, carefully, quietly undercutting any simplistic notion of official heroism that such Great Wars give rise to.

Partly, this ironic edge is the result of focussing on the bureaucrats, the officers and politicians working safely behind the scenes of war's grim theatre, rather than detailing the drama of soldiers at the front. Staying mainly inside the boardrooms and offices and Cabinet meetings and Parliamentary arena and private luncheons of these war-time, male bureaucrats is both a fascinating decision and a problematic one. On the one hand, it makes the production very dependent on dialogue and rather visually static and claustrophobic. On the other hand, it is the means for depicting the personal intrigues, the political wheeling and dealing, the infighting of officers, Cabinet ministers, and Honourable Members on-the-make. To a degree, *Sam Hughes's War* becomes somewhat mired in the slough of these interrelationships. It is hard to keep track of all the players, hard to follow all the career-intrigues being advanced, especially when the British contingent of bureaucrats, officers, and politicians becomes included. But the primary relationship is that between Sam Hughes and the Canadian Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden. Pinsent's volatile Hughes and Douglas Rain's patient Sir Robert play off each other very interestingly, leading up to a crisis of opposing wills that threatens the friendship, their political party, and the Canadian war effort.

But the essentially refined politesse of these personal/political intrigues is contrasted by the occasional, brief scene at the front: scenes that quietly reveal the inferior equipment, the misery and mud of the trenches, the arrogance of the officers, the terrible anonymity of the foot-soldier. One scene stands out: a half-dozen corpses lie caught in the barbed-wire while two commanding officers stroll past the dead soldiers, talking about some abstract matter. In another brief scene, Prime Minister Borden visits the wounded at the front. He stoops down to comfort a soldier whose eyes are bandaged, saying: "Your noble sacrifice will not have been in vain." The nurse replies tersely that the





● Gordon Pinsent as Gen. Sam Hughes: Tory businessman finds war a raison d'être

man can't hear him - his hearing is gone as well.

Through the use of such brief moments from the front, the production subtly but effectively punctures the pomposity of bureaucrats using the war to advance their own political or military careers. This ironic edge keeps an interesting tension at work in the drama, a tension that is especially effective in the portrayal of Sam Hughes. For example, in a shot clearly alluding to the movie *Patton*, Hughes stands in front of the British/Canadian flag, giving a rousing speech about making the Canadian army "500,000 strong." After a slight delay, there is a polite sprinkle of applause for his rousing words. Such non-verbal signifiers recur throughout - a pause, a glance, a bit of music that subtly undercuts Hughes's world-view. At the same time, he emerges as almost larger-than-life: the hero with the tragic flaw. The achievement of *Sam Hughes's War* is that it is able to maintain the creative tension among its various levels of meaning.

I would have liked the role of Max Aitken (James Rankin) to have been more expanded, more clearly defined. As Canada's first press publicist for the war effort, Aitken's political manoeuvrings and insights into the use of film and print for propaganda purposes were clearly pivotal not only for the mobiliza-

tion of the home front, but also for the future directions in which government propaganda would be taken. In this production, Aitken (later, Lord Beaverbrook) remains a somewhat mysterious figure: clearly central to the intrigues, but rather nebulous and undefined in terms of exactly what he does. Had his press role been explored, the dimensions of war-time bureaucracy would have been even more fascinatingly illuminated.

Joyce Nelson ●

**SAM HUGHES'S WAR** d. Ronald Wilson exec. p. Peter Kelly p. Martin Kinch sc. Jim Burt cam. David Doherty. Ross Menzies, Tom Farquharson co-p. John Delmage, assoc. p. Sharon Keogh, p. asst. Stacey Curtis sc. asst. Jeanette Solomcoe unit man. Jacques Simard cast. Christine Shipton, Tina Neal cost. Hilary Corbett make-up Mario Cacioppo des. Ray Kellar hair. Sandra Petelko p. sec. Dana Mason ed. Peter Evans mus. Richard Bronskill l.p. Gordon Pinsent, Douglas Rain, Rony Van Bridge, Christopher Newton, Richard Donat, Peter Elliott, Mary Charlotte Wilcox, James Rankin, Marigold Charlesworth, Douglas Campbell, Rodger Barton, Raymond Clarke, Desmond Scott, Maurice Evans, Mervyn Blake, Claude Bede, David Gardner, Gillie Fenwick, John Innes, David Fox, David Main, Michel Lefebvre, Mary Charlotte Wilcox, Philip Craig, Herb Rolland, Darcy Dunlop, Leslie Yeo, David Clement, Brendan McKane, Ted Follows, Lewis Gordon, Howard Jerome, Reg Dreger, Herb Field, Anthony Bekenn, George Buza, William Colgate, Sam Malkin, Andrew Lewarne, Tom Rickert, Alan Katz running time: (Part I) 86'32", (Part II) 87'.

## Tom Shandel's Walls

Ought one to give a violent sociopath an even break?

The question remains very much open as the humanitarian social worker Joan Tremblay (Andrée Pelletier) slumps to her inevitable, bloody, stop-action death at the end of *Walls*, a low-budget 16mm film based on the famous 1975 hostage-taking by Andy Bruce at the now defunct B.C. Penitentiary. The socio-path in this case is Danny Baker (Winston Rekert), who has been doing stretches of time in "the hole" (solitary confinement) and who, after a brief reprieve to ordinary cell life, possible only because of the exertions of Joan and a humanitarian lawyer (Alan Scarfe), becomes fighting mad when returned there. It is then that he plots and executes his escape attempt, with three other prisoners holding Joan and five other prison staff hostage.

Rekert turns in a good performance as Danny, an intelligent (we are impressed by his reading "The Waste Land" in solitary - not easy with a berserker in the next cell) and, we suspect, misguidedly sincere if brutal drug addict. He is at Western Penitentiary because he slit a guard's belly back East in order to be transferred to this maximum-security institution near his mother, who is hospitalized nearby. Can we say that his heart was in the right place? Danny tells Joan that it is inhumane treatment that has forced him to use violence to get what he wants. This is not hard to believe; scenes of life in the hole show it to be what it no doubt is: psychic torture. Given the horror of his surroundings and the soul-destroying treatment he receives from his guards, it is no wonder that Danny is violent. The question is, how far can he be trusted with more freedom?

- *Walls* can provide no answer, only the suggestion that the solution lies far beyond the penitentiary precincts, in reform of our notions of crime and punishment; the question of what the true function of prison is, whether to punish, detain, or correct, has always been in debate. In the meantime prisons

remain an uneasy mixture of the three, a *pis aller* until we make up our minds, and they are controlled in practice by the wardens and guards who operate them. Just how cruel the guards are is known only to the prisoners, and it is on this point that the effectiveness of *Walls* depends. Unfortunately, some of the film's drama is dissipated in the uncertainty of a single issue: whether the guards did in fact plant drugs in the prisoners' cells in order to have a pretext to send them back to the hole.

The question is important because the answer would tell us whether it is the guards' cruelty or Danny's inability to cooperate that sends him back to solitary and galvanizes him to plot a desperate escape. We hear only in passing, as a throwaway when Joan is talking to another prison official, that the drugs were planted, and there is doubt that she may have been deceived by Danny, to whom she has been growing more attached as the focus of her cause. And so, just whose fault is Danny's final catastrophic eruption? We don't know, and our lack of knowledge prevents us from taking sides, from participating fully.

Christian Bruyere has written a competent screenplay here, wisely steering clear of an improbable love story (although classification officer Mary Steinhäuser was supposed to have been in love with Andy Bruce) and concentrating on a hardhitting, just-the-facts presentation (this viewer had to avert his face from wrist-slashings and countless hypodermic syringes being discharged into elbows). Tom Shandel's direction also has played up the documentary feel of the film, consciously minimizing any glamor that might attach to the lead players as would have done a 1940s Warner Bros. movie of this type. *Walls* is blemished, however, by an aggressively insipid and pervasive musical score by J. Douglas Dodds and Michael Oczko, which makes the film seem needlessly cheap and made-for-TV, and also a reverberant soundtrack in which some of the dialogue is lost. Cinematographer Douglas McKay has done well making the B.C. Pen look almost as dismal as it really was.

In their effort to expose a social problem through a personal drama the makers of *Walls* have been careful, but for this viewer they have in their fastidiousness made a few errors of emphasis. By leaving vague the precise degree of responsibility of Danny and



● Moral dilemmas in *Walls* as Winston Rekert holds Andréée Pelletier hostage



his warders they have revealed a lack of concern over Danny as an individual, and have thereby deprived the viewer of some of the dramatic participation to which he is entitled. As for the social issue, *Walls* hints that humaneness is the best attitude as far as making prison a more pleasant place goes, but that an atmosphere of trust and compassion can be poisoned in an instant so long as a capacity for cruelty remains in people. The film even leaves open the possibility that Joan was the cruellest of all, for making Danny believe in a mercy that was impractical and therefore could only be snatched away.

Paul Vitols ●

**WALLS** d. Tom Shandel sc. Christian Bruyère exec. p. Michael Chechik p. Christian Bruyère & Tom Shandel assoc. p. Tom Braidwood ed. Barbara Evans mus. J. Douglas Dodd & Michael Oczko d.o.p. Douglas McKay p. des. Graeme Murray p. man Tom Braidwood 1st ad.d. Bob Akester sc. sup. Christine Wilson 1st asst. cam. Trig Singer 2nd asst. cam. Joel Ransom gaffers Burt Skelton, Dave Anderson best boy Leonard Wolf, Jim Hurford key grip Fred Ransom loc. sd. Richard Patton sd. boom B.J. Clayden cost. des. Trish Keating ward. sup. Tish Monaghan prop. master Wayne McLaughlin asst. props. Bill Thumm make-up Linda A. Brown asst. make-up Phyllis Newman sd. ed. Jane Morrison, Ingrid Rosen asst. ed. Bruce Giesbrecht 2nd asst. ed. Patricia Isaacs neg. cut. Daniele De Foy sd. mix. Barry P. Jones set dec. Rose Marie McSherry asst. set dec. Della Johnston const. coord. Barry Broly lead carp. Garry Broly carp. Chris Prior lead painter Elmar Theissen sp. painter Philip Morgan set wireman Duncan McGregor greensman Mark Guildemeester labor. Ben Rusi, Bob Nicholson, Chris Wills, Dennis McBride 2nd a. d. Mathew O'Connor 3rd a. d. Rob Cowan university loc. Fitch Cady p. coord. Gabriella Martinelli, Catherine Howard p. acct. Elizabeth Pontsa cast. d. Lindsay Walker asst. cast. Michelle Allen, Hagan Beggs art work Cecilia Ohm-Eriksen sp. efx. Thomas Special Effects Ltd. sp. efx. tech. Bill Orr teamsters Ken Johnston, Ian Urquhart, George Grieve add. photog. Tobias Schliessler, Trig Singer p. asst. Christopher Haddock craft serv. Leslie Beale cater. Brown Cow lighting Canadian Prolite Inc. sec. Moss' Trucking Services mus. rec. Goldrush Recording Co. at Mushroom Studios, Vancouver post. p. Omni Film Productions Ltd. titles West Coast Film Opticals lab. Alpha Cine Services p. c. Jericho Films (604) 224-0506, 732-9983 intl. sales Films Transit (514) 527-9781 running time: 90 mins. lp. Winston Rekert, Andrée Pelletier, Alan Scarfe, John Wright, John Lord, Lloyd Berry, Howard Storey, Antony Holland, Elizabeth Leigh-Milne, Perry Long, Dale Wilson, Tony Morelli, Jacques Hubert, Raimund Stamm, Ron Sauvé, Blu Mankuma, Denis Nouveau, Kent Barrett, Christopher Haddock, Hagan Beggs, Judith Berlin, Mike Winlaw, Lon Katzman, Cam Lane, John Wardlow, Ted Stidder

## Martin Lavut's **Charlie Grant's War**

CBC producer Bill Gough, writer Anna Sandor and director Martin Lavut chose to build *Charlie Grant's War* around the myth Grant was "an ordinary man who made a difference." It is an odd choice, given the details of Grant's life in this made-for-television feature, and one which reduces the film's dramatic scope.

Grant, an unsung Canadian hero who helped rescue 600 Viennese Jews from the Nazis before the Second World War, must have experienced radical personal changes in his lifetime. He left behind a complacent upperclass Vancouver existence when he journeyed to Europe in 1930, where eventually he became established in the Vienna diamond trade and mixed with the city's best

society. At a time when "ordinary" men either sided with the Nazis or conveniently ignored their treatment of Jews, Grant risked his life to save people who were neither his family, co-religionists nor countrymen. As a price he suffered the horrors of wartime prison and concentration camps – and survived. This is hardly an ordinary, but a singular, complex, extraordinary man.

Yet the film, especially in its treatment of the early Vienna days, where his whole achievement just drops into his lap, chooses to simplify Grant in a way that seems false. A carefree Grant knocks about Europe until his money runs out in Vienna, at which point destiny provides a series of wonderful people to befriend him: they just can't help trusting his honest Canadian face. While playing up Grant's charmed life among the musicians, intellectuals and cultural elite of Vienna, the film avoids any emphasis that he moves among predominantly Jewish society. Its light-weight tone ignores the possibility Grant's benefactors might have had an ulterior motive – to place a sympathetic Gentile foreigner deliberately in an influential position to help them later.

The film eschews such complexity. It keeps safe distance from a theme which could have given it extraordinary emotional weight: Grant's personal identification with the Jews. Born into a WASP family whose anti-Semitism is ingrained (his mother, though working to get Jews into Canada, comments: "It's one thing to keep them out of clubs – I can understand that"), Grant himself bears no prejudice. The film never tells us why. Grant is fatherless; his uncle Manlus (Douglas Campbell) looks after him only from a sense of duty; his two father-figures, Jacob Goldman (Jan Rubes) and Paul Trefius (Peter Boretski), are both Jewish. This intriguing motif at best remains submerged. The film minimizes Grant's Canadian family life,

ending before his inevitable confrontation with his uncle and reunion with his mother, who reluctantly took up his cause.

*Charlie Grant's War* holds your interest largely because of R.H. Thomson's agile and skilled performance in the leading role. Thomson plays Grant as a typical Canadian hero – that is, a hero who is barely heroic. In manner, gesture and expression Thomson leaves no doubt Grant is a Canadian abroad, not an American or a Brit: unimpressed with airs and pomp, he still worries that his clothes are wrong. A Thomson performance is always a pleasure – his exuberance carries the role – yet it does not seem to convey the real Charlie Grant. That man's personal wars – against family, country and self – remain obscure.

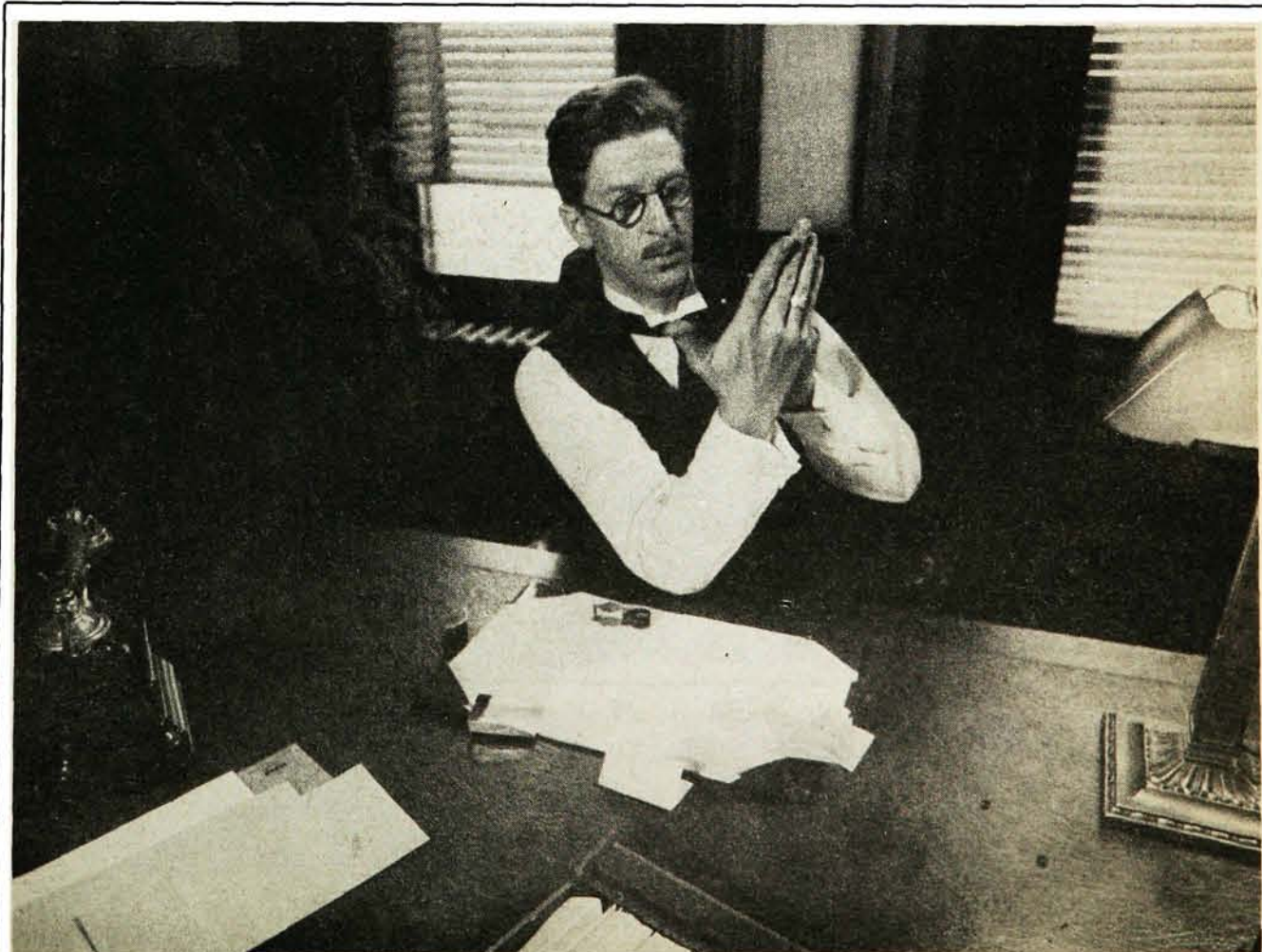
Issues, not characters, shape *Charlie Grant's War* – the refugee question, Austria's collective responsibility, the Mackenzie King government's shameful policy toward Jewish immigration. The film emerges from CBC's docudrama tradition – Gough, Sandor and Lavut all have worked on the network's docudrama series *For The Record* – a tradition which tends to place social and political perspectives ahead of personal ones. Docudrama style accounts for the film's superfluous newsreel footage (the 1930s Austria setting alone should cue the impending Nazi rise) and its earnest journalistic tone. It uses Grant's personal story to illustrate the Canadian government's unconscionable anti-Semitism, featuring characterizations of Prime Minister Mackenzie King and Immigration Minister Frederick Blair, and informing us that Canada received a disgracefully low total of 5,000 Jewish refugees during that period (if Grant has been unsung, it is because most Canadians would prefer to forget their country's shame). Social criticism stands behind Grant's misplaced confidence that Canada would accept his Jewish

friends or the ironic banality of lines like "All citizens are treated equally in the civil service." But this political stance takes precedence over Grant's personal story. The film seldom accommodates the viewer's desire to look a little deeper into Grant's character.

When director Lavut can interrupt the social and political agenda long enough to fix his camera on the actors and keep it there, as when Jacob Goldman teaches Grant kaddish in the concentration-camp quarry, the film registers a substantial emotional impact. The concentration-camp sequence is the film's strongest, perhaps because all issues are reduced to the bare requirements of survival. However, these moments of genuine drama, as opposed to dramatized social criticism, are too few: the film needs less history, more Grant. But with an "ordinary" Grant at the centre, lacking conflict, self-doubt, or an engaging complexity, the docudrama approach cannot sustain the film's two hours and 15 minutes length and this compelling story rarely soars to compelling heights. *Charlie Grant's War* is by no means a bad film: if only it were not so damned undistinguished.

Bruce Malloch ●

**CHARLIE GRANT'S WAR** d. Martin Lavut a.d. Rob Malenfant sc. Anna Sandor p. Bill Gough assoc. p. Harris Verge d.o.p. Vic Sarin orig. mus. Thomas LeGrady art. d. Arthur Herriott unit man. Neill Browne cast. Marsha Chesley, Doug Barnes film ed. Myrle Virgo p.c. CBC-TV l.p. R.H. Thomson, Joan Orenstein, Jan Rubes, Douglas Campbell, Marigold Charlesworth, Peter Boretski, John Friesen, Nicholas Rice, Annie Szomosi, David Bolt, Heinar Pillar, Michael J. Reynolds, Jean Archambault, Peter Dvorsky, Michael Fletcher, Belinda Metz, Charles Palmer, Larry Reynolds, Joe Cooper, Brendan McKane, Derek Keurvorst, Robin McCullough, Vlasta Vrana, Michael Tait, Don Macquarrie, Chris Bark running time: 129 mins.



● R.H. Thomson as Charlie Grant: obscurity hiding behind an honest Canadian face



## Camera Canada

On Dec. 2 the CBC-TV network began a 13-week anthology of half-hour dramas under the title *Sons and Daughters*, running in the 5:30-6 p.m. slot each Sunday. All were produced by Atlantis Films/Toronto (416) 960-1503.

This anthology is a mixture of previously televised pieces, plus six new dramas being presented for the first time. The opening film *Cornet At Night* was reviewed in *Cinema Canada* last month. The remaining five new offerings are now reviewed — all 24 mins/col. The complete 13-week schedule is also appended.

### JO'S SONG

Jo admires her friend Lisa, who is in the school's Fall Follies, playing the piano and singing the song for which Jo wrote the lyrics. Performing is much more exciting than writing, says Jo: "How many people have posters of writers on their walls?" She wants to be up there too — in the spotlight — so, aspiring to be like her Mom who's a dancer, she takes up tap-dancing. Somehow Joe doesn't seem to get the expected fun out of it, and certainly nothing approaching her Dad's enthusiasm for his sports coaching. Practice does not make for perfect twinkling tap toes, and Jo is dropped from the Follies line-up. Fed up with her klutzy reputation, she accuses her parents of given up on her. After a little heart-to-heart talk with Mom and Dad, she feels better and decides to join the audience for the Fall Follies. Lisa gamely plays and sings, and then makes a graceful acknowledgement of Jo's lyrics, and they are together in the spotlight.

A sort of ordinary little story, quietly presented and easy-going, that makes its point abundantly clear. Some Ontario film folk may be slightly unnerved by the fact that Jo's Mom (Julie Wild) bears a remarkable resemblance to Mary Brown, the well-known provincial censor!

**d.** Seaton McLean, **p.** Janice Platt, Michael MacMillan, Seaton McLean, **sc.** Janice Platt, Seaton McLean, (based on novel "Miss P. and Me" by Florence McNeil) **cam.** Rene Ohashi, **mus.** Louis Natale, **lp.** Rebecca Fleming, Lisa Ann Turina, Allan Royal, Julie Wild. Produced in Association with TVOntario, and with the participation of Telefilm Canada.

### WHITE LIES

The irritating Emma and the equable Marie-Anne are best friends, even though Marie-Anne always seems to beat Emma at most sporting things. Selections are about to be made for

the basketball team, and the pair make a pact: if *both* of them don't make it, neither will play.

The inevitable happens. Emma is selected for the team and Marie-Anne isn't. Emma agonizes; talks to another girl about it; discusses it with her older brother; and shies away from the hard decision. She lies to Marie-Anne about going skiing with her parents for the weekend, and her hapless friend sees her with another girlfriend. So Marie-Anne lies to Emma, "The family is moving — perhaps to Indonesia!" Emma wallows around and quits the basketball team, and then finds out Marie-Anne has lied, lied to her! Mutual recriminations ensue, everything is got off respective chests, and they finally reach an understanding — and play a little street hockey in a snowy back alley.

A sort of empty piece, with not enough bite in the script and soft direction. The teenagers' acting is on one note and, consequently, there's not too much tension. But Montreal in winter looks, well, if not inviting, definitely picturesque.

**d.** Don McBrearty, **p.** Michael MacMillan, Seaton McLean, Janice Platt, **sc.** John Frizzell, **cam.** Rene Ohashi, **mus.** (composed by) Bruce Ley, **lp.** Stephanie Morganstern, Virginia Thomas, Julie Desjardins, Tim Webber. In association with TVOntario and the participation of Telefilm Canada and co-operation of Assn. of Canadian Film Craftspeople.

### CAROLINE

Caroline, part-Indian, part-white, returns to the Indian reserve that her mother left to marry a white man. Ben, the grandfather, cannot forgive or forget, and is unrelenting towards Caroline's friendly advances. "My grandfather and my mother didn't get along because my Dad wasn't Indian... He felt that anger every time he looked at me that summer."

At the general store operated by the grandparents, Silas, the young helper, befriends Caroline, takes her in the truck on deliveries and gives her a yo-yo from long-forgotten, unsold stock. Caroline gradually sells all the yo-yos to the local kids, spurring on sales with lessons. Ben won't admit that he's proud of her business sense, and he lashes out, "Don't ever feel that you have to do anything for me."

Urged on by Mary, his wife, old Ben admits to Caroline that she reminds him of his daughter. He talks about her leaving and how ashamed and hurt he felt. A few tears fall and they take a walk together — the first step in the healing process.

A pleasant, sincere, slow-moving, rather stodgy little film, but with general all-round family appeal. Competently acted, especially by Joanna Schellenberg, who makes her debut opposite her real-life father, August, playing old Ben, her grandfather.

**d.** Peter Shatalow, **p.** Seaton McLean, Michael MacMillan, Janice Platt, **sc.** Janice Platt, Seaton McLean (from a dramatization by Alexander Bremner, based on short story "The Sense She Was Born With" by W.P. Kinsella), **cam.** Mark Irwin, **csc.** orig. **mus.** Richard Bronskill. In assn. with TV Ontario and with participation of C.F.D.C.

### AN OUNCE OF CURE

It's the faraway '50s and the wonderful moment has arrived for Elizabeth — Martin, heart-throb of Grade 13, is about to kiss her, in the moonlight, on the verandah. "I was a mess of emotions." But her dilemma is that she can't decide whether she wants Martin to kiss her again, or to leave so that she can rush to the telephone and tell her best friend Joyce all about it.

The first experience with love is tersely chronicled with humour, understanding, wit, and a large dollop of irony. The torture, the agony, the time spent with the beloved — "37 days and 65 hours" — and the sixty-five pages of diary entries, is all there.

Alas, the handsome Martin ditches Elizabeth for the hateful Mary Bishop with whom he stars in a school play. The painful let-down leads Elizabeth from crying jags, to the wry contemplation of a bottle of pills, and the downing of a tumbler of booze while babysitting. This final folly leaves her somewhat wiser, and with a new understanding of life's inanities.

This little goodie is given life and charm by a superior screenplay (from Alice Munro's short story) by John Frizzell, who does his *auteur* bit by using his own name for a character. And Martha Cronyn is so heartwarming as the hapless Elizabeth, hope and eagerness flickering across her face, dying to find out about love and going through a small hell in the process. A nice period recreation of the '50s, replete with saddle shoes, crinolines, and Connie Francis.

**d.** Don McBrearty, **p.** Janice Platt, Michael MacMillan, Seaton McLean, **sc.** John Frizzell (based on short story by Alice Munro), **cam.** Mark Irwin, **csc.** **mus.** Bruce Ley **lp.** Martha Cronyn, Cathy Burns, Greg Spottishwood, Winner of Best Overall Production, 1984 Canadian Film & Television Assn. Awards.

### HOME FROM FAR

In an opening tragedy, Jennie's twin brother Michael dies in a car accident.

The grieving parents finally decide to take in Hildie, a younger girl, from the Children's Aid. As she has a brother, they decide to keep the two children together. The boy's name is Michael and he's about the same age as Jennie.

The pressure builds as Jennie tries to cope with feelings of hostility towards Michael, who uses some of her brother's possessions and gets on well with her father. The mother explains the background to Michael who, after his friendly overtures have been repulsed by Jennie, retires to his personal hideaway in an old wooden garage. When Jennie discovers it, she has to see what he's doing and, after lighting a candle, prowls around. Startled by the returning Michael, she overturns the candle and starts a fire. Together they manage to douse the flames.

In a coda, the parents talk over the matter and Jennie tries to accept all the blame. The kids discuss their feelings of guilt, and about hurting, and then join amicably on a project — a playhouse for Hildie. At the gala opening they put on a magic show, using the late Michael's costumes and box of tricks.

A rather icky script is given some life by the children, who are well handled, but the parents come across as a bit *too* good to be true.

**d.** Bruce Pittman, **p.** Seaton McLean, Michael MacMillan, Janice Platt, **sc.** Joe Wiesenfeld, **cam.** Mark Irwin **csc.** **mus.** Bruce Ley, **lp.** Fiona McGillibray, Simon Craig, Nadiene Gibney, Diana Barrington, David Main. In assn. with TVOntario, with participation of C.F.D.C. and co-operation of Assn. of Canadian Film Craftspeople.

*Non-commercial availability/16mm & video: Magic Lantern Film Distributors, Toronto. (416) 844-7216, and Vancouver (604) 271-3311.*

### SONS AND DAUGHTERS CBC TELECAST SCHEDULE

Dec. 2/84 *Cornet At Night*  
Dec. 9/84 *Jo's Song*  
Dec. 16/84 *I Know A Secret*  
Dec. 23/84 *Olden Days Coat*  
Dec. 30/84 *White Lies*  
Jan. 6/85 *RW*  
Jan. 13/85 *Caroline*  
Jan. 20/85 *Pick Me Up At Peggy's Cove*  
Jan. 27/84 *An Ounce of Cure*  
Feb. 3/84 *Bamboo Brush*  
Feb. 10/85 *Home From Far*  
Feb. 17/84 *David*  
Feb. 24/84 *Boys and Girls*

Pat Thompson ●

## Next month in Cinema Canada :

● An interview with the CBC's Pierre Juneau ● Technology and culture, part two ● News and reviews