

Documentarist errant: Peter Raymont splits for Boston

A perceived end to documentary filmmaking in Canada and an opportunity to broaden his horizons by working on a documentary series for PBS's Boston television station WGBH have motivated Toronto documentary filmmaker and journalist Peter Raymont to head south of the border. Raymont, whose most recent documentary *With Our Own Hands* aired on CBC Oct. 16 and who will spend the next two years producing three one-hour documentaries for the 13-hour PBS TV series *The Nuclear Age*, began his leave of absence from Canada with a "Moving On" party Oct. 26.

An occasion of sadness as well, the invitations sent out for it were described by Raymont as "my swipe at Telefilm." In a telephone conversation from Boston (where he began his new project at the end of October), the founder of the Canadian Independent Film Caucus lobby group (and one who worked hard for the eligibility of documentaries for Broadcast Fund support) took aim at the Canadian atmosphere in general — and CBC and Telefilm in particular. "Both as far as I'm concerned and from others, they're not really interested in documentary films in Canada at CBC and Telefilm. It's really very sad that the



documentary film in Canada is dying, if not very dead," said Raymont.

Lamenting the lack of a documentary presence at the CBC (for whom he has produced programs for *Venture* and *Sunday Morning*) and *The Journal's* predilection for what he calls "extended news reports" (as opposed to documentaries in the John Grierson tradition), Raymont has found little lately to mollify his dissatisfaction. Despite Telefilm's opening up the Broad-

cast Fund to documentary last May, Telefilm declined to participate in a major project Raymont had been planning for over a year. The NFB meanwhile, for whom he produced and directed documentary films from 1973-78, is also seen by Raymont as limiting: the one film yearly he'd produced with the NFB's Toronto studio had become "about the only game in town."

Although he has no quarrel with CBC's emphasis on dramatic produc-

tions, Raymont says the result has been to shunt aside documentaries, the form that built Canada's reputation as a source of quality filmmaking. Believing there's "less and less basis" for that reputation, Raymont said that, except for the NFB and to a lesser extent TVOntario, "that film form has practically disappeared."

Wistfully recalling the early days of the NFB when filmmakers would troop across Canada with their films and projectors giving screenings in such locales as church basements, Raymont anticipates his U.S. move will afford a broader view to life, films, and documentaries. "The international scope of things is hard to do in Canada," he says.

While *With Our Own Two Hands* will, at least for the next two years, be his last project in Canada, "Fittingly, I think, it may be one of the more useful films I've made," he says, Raymont, who "feels very much a Canadian," isn't ruling out an eventual return home.

"I hope it (documentary) revives. I hope I'll be able to come back and practice my craft in Canada. It's the soul of Canadian filmmaking and when the soul dies, that's it."

James Simiana •

Marie de l'Incarnation: Canadian woman for today's filmmakers

Filmmakers are rediscovering that religious figures make for fascinating film fare.

The NFB's Studio D in '84-'85 produced *Behind The Veil: Nuns* to document the religious life as a career choice relevant to women today. A recent episode of CBC-TV's *Seeing Things* portrayed a priest as a strong, viable character with little trace of the "my son" syndrome.

In American-made features, Hollywood Canadians like Norman Jewison banked a sizeable budget on *Agnes of God*, and Jack Lemon starred in *Mass Appeal*.

So two Ottawa filmmakers — Judith Crawley and Sara Lee Stadelman — who plan to give Marie Guyart (better known as the Blessed Marie of the Incarnation, founder of the Ursulines in Quebec City) a central place in the Canadian film landscape, are suddenly finding their project less unlikely than it might have seemed not long ago.

"I want to see this made," says Crawley. "Sara's created an imaginative piece, a film of inspiration for people of today rather than a religious film. And Marie's adventure is basic to Canadian history."

"Marie Guyart identified completely with Canada," Stadelman explains "She's the first person to speak of it with the words Gilles Vigneault would later come to sing: 'Mon pays.' She's a winner. She experiences the whole bag. She has the book thrown at her. But she catches it and rewrites it."

The life of Marie Guyart was a phenomenal adventure. At age 17, following an arranged marriage, she became Madame Martin. She bore a son, Claude, and within a few years was widowed.

Guyart had to find work. She became housekeeper for her sister's family. Her



brother-in-law took advantage of Marie's "talent pour le négoce" and added his failing transport business to her long list of responsibilities. The workers harrassed her in every way possible, yet she ended up as their most trusted confidante. "I took my stand on the wharves of the Loire river and did a man's business in a man's world," Marie wrote.

But she was leading a double life. While negotiating shrewdly with workers and invoices, rearing her son, managing her sister's household and her brother-in-law's business, Marie was simultaneously committed to an interior life.

In what seemed a sudden move to everyone but Marie, she became an Ursuline — a cloistered nun. Her family fought hard against her decision, the nuns tormented her cruelly, and 11-year-old Claude stood outside the convent gate, screaming, "Donnez-moi ma mère." Marie stayed in the cloister.

All this happened in France. In 1639 Marie landed, in the middle of winter, in Quebec, the first woman missionary in the world. She worked to educate Indian and French children together; learned and wrote dictionaries in three Indian languages; survived earthquake, fire, flood, and temptations of suicide. She died in Quebec exactly 33 years later.

For Stadelman, developing Marie Guyart's story has been a long, lonely road. She began research in 1978, with a grant-in-aid from the Ursulines to write the script. In 1982 Mid-Canada Communications donated studio time and technicians so she could make a video-demo.

That was when Judith Crawley saw Stadelman's video. "I was so taken by Sara's ability as a performer! I knew right away: we've got to make a film of it. People must see it."

"It's not a biography," says Stadelman. "It's an imaginative piece," adds Craw-

ley, "highly sophisticated technically."

Stadelman uses a form in which acting is synthesized with choreographed movement. This allows the actor to span time and space economically, and let's the viewer participate in the full dimensions of the character.

For Judith Crawley, who speaks with the authority of 25 national and 59 international awards, including an Oscar, "This is a film for today — the inspiration of a woman with a strong vision."

Stadelman believes Marie's faith, hope, and compassion thread inextricably through the fabric of Canada. "Religion isn't a sermon or an argument," she adds. "Religion is more than ritual or worship. It can be devastatingly destructive when perverted, or wonderfully instructive when lived out."

Guyart's life is not Stadelman's first encounter with religious figures as dramatic subjects. The Ontario Arts Council gave her a Senior Filmmakers' Award for her 1975 short film of Saint Catherine of Siena in dialogue with modern Everywoman. But for Crawley, making a film on Marie of the Incarnation marks a radical change in genre.

"I liked the story. I saw the video. Sara was so good. Although I'm not a Catholic, I've had a special feeling for Marie from childhood and I can't explain why. Later I understood a little because I could identify with some of her hard choices.

"Sara's story has insights modern viewers wouldn't look for. They'll be surprised by it. It has serendipity. To be a good filmmaker you must have that. You must find gold where you're not looking for it."

Paul Mackan •