

Louise Carré's

Qui a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour?

"Si j'étais restée à la maison cuisiner, j'aurais pu te donner des recettes."
 "Had I stayed at home and cooked, I might at least have been able to give you some recipes."

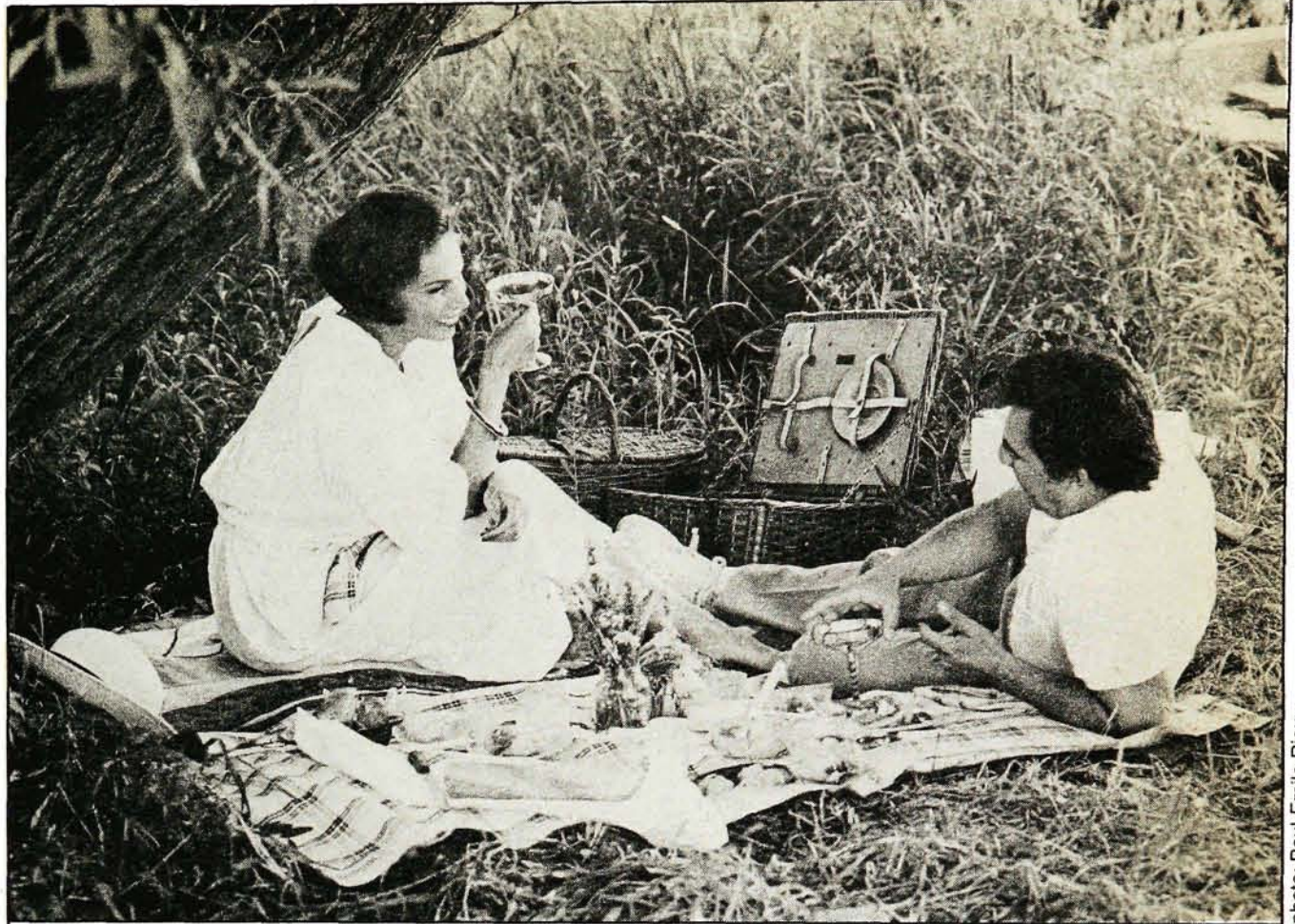
— (Madeline to her daughter)

Given the fragmentary and haphazard development of Quebec cinema, what ends up on-screen is often the result of a narrow selectivity. In other words, huge chunks of collective existence are completely by-passed. It's thus been one of the tasks of a certain feminist cinema (so far) to fill in the gaps in narrative ignored by more mainstream/malestream films.

Louise Carré's second feature (five years in the making), **Qui a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour?**, identifies two such crucial oversights in Quebec cinema: the *bourgeoisie de province* as valid *dramatis personae*, and the (single, middle-aged) woman as artistic hero. Despite a superficial similarity to Anne-Claire Poirier's **La Quarantaine** (1982), a theatricalized transposition of the mid-life crises of urban intellectuals during an emotional country-weekend reunion, Carré's microcosm is that of a regional milieu, the Sorel-Tracy area, some 40 kilometres downriver from Montreal. Drawing on elements of the documentary (social consciousness, aerial photography of industrial landscapes, newsreel flashbacks), and on the movement of the French 19th-century naturalistic novel from Balzac on (in which literature advances from the provinces to Rastignac's famed assault on Paris), Carré has framed an area of contemporary Quebec whose contradictions **Qui a tiré** probes with gentle ruthlessness.

Outside the extremes of urban or rural deprivation, Quebec's middle-classes dwell within the comfortable modern vacuity of the commodity lifestyle: nice homes, new Japanese cars, pastel fashions. From afar, TV brings in remote, brutal images of real conflicts elsewhere. Here in our pastoral landscapes of administered existence, the only problems are ecological: that is, how to harmonize the general (technological development) and the individual (sensibilities).

In this milieu, Madeline (Monique Mercure) is that contradictory rebel, the (filmmaker) artist. After the failure of a film project in the big city, she has returned to Sorel, where she was once married to a local lawyer, and works as a radio talk-show host attempting to slip through particles of social consciousness against the twin obstacles of the minds of her (largely housewife) audience and the private radio-station owner's reluctance to offend his advertisers. Alone here, except for visits from her film-producer and husbandly lover (Michel Gauthier), Madeline lives as an object of scandal, distant admiration, and male desire: her ex-husband (Gaétan Labrèche), her boss (Gérard



• Pastoral moment in deprivation's landscape: Monique Mercure and August Schellenberg in **Qui a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour?**

Poirier) and later the technocrat Fabien (August Schellenberg). (Excellently cast, these three in particular deliver superb portrayals of current male *bathos*).

For all its prettiness (summer, tree-lined streets, the St-Lawrence widening into a Mississippi of the north — with tides), this too is an area of profound deprivation. Dominated by the open pit of an ironworks, the sky segmented by high-tension lines, the river polluted, it's a zone of culturally regressed, *petit-bourgeois* propriety. Here, as Madeline's radio-colleague the sports-announcer Joseph (played with brio by Normand Brathwaite) breathlessly explains, the TV soap opera has become today's Greek tragedy. And recurrences to Greek antiquity (ie, the tragic) crop up throughout the film, notably a blind Oedipus tapping his way through the streets of Sorel, and a one-woman chorus, the voice of female memory, in Lady (Luce Guilbeault).

Madeline's daughter, Renée (Gyulaine Normandin, an up-and-coming young actress in her feature film debut) arrives to see her mother for the summer before heading off to graduate school in California. For Renée (and the bulk of the film), this will be the summer of the discovery of the clash of mind and body, the tyranny of sexual roles, and, above all, her mother's own contradictory reality.

If feminism can be taken as the ideology of that generation of women, today in their fifties, who discovered, along with Simone de Beauvoir, that "woman is not born, she becomes," then the question raised by **Qui a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour?** is what can that generation pass on to its daughters when all the "grand récits" of the Happy Ending have been destroyed? Madeline has only the example of her liberty, with all its contradictions, to give her daughter.

But it's an example of courage, of the heroism of being. One of the central metaphors of the film has Madeline (who stands up to any man, rides a motorbike, etc.) failing again and again and only at the end finally succeeding in swinging from a trapeze without falling. As a shot of a graffiti on the walls of Sorel states: Never surrender. Or as Madeline confesses to Renée, she was always terrified by whatever she did, but did it nonetheless. All things considered, a not insignificant inheritance — one of (and from the) guts.

But the film does (unavoidably?) After all, it's a film) succumb to the Happy Ending. Renée decides not to sacrifice her life to the *grand amour* (that is just the first) and leaves for California. Madeline does finally get her script accepted by a Montreal producer — and a new lover (for a while or longer, who knows? and does it really matter how long?) in the technologically macho, yet poetic Fabien. But as Renée tells Madeline as she's leaving: when and if she ever returns, she doesn't want a pink room any more.

It's for its ability to say "goodbye to pink" that **Qui a tiré** becomes a "post-feminist" film, as Carré describes it. But more than that perhaps, it's for articulating the courage to continue to advance, alone, that takes **Qui a tiré** onto the cultural (postmodern) terrain where blind Oedipus is now all of us. If recent Quebec feminist cinema alternates between an emotional no-place (**Anne Trister**) and a documentary real-place (**Le Film d'Ariane**), **Qui a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour?** suggests a third possibility, an emotional real-place that is a documentary no-place. In short, a description of cinema itself; that is, of *our* cinema, courageous in its difference, simultaneously gutsy and fragile in its risk-taking (its search for an audience). Like Madeline or, better yet, her creators,

Monique Mercure and Louise Carré.

But it's in a Montreal cinema, on a Saturday night, that this difference emerges most clearly: in some recent trailers, among them one for **Qui a tiré sur nos histoires d'amour?** First came the already too familiar crash-bang pyrotechnics of Ridley Scott's **Legend**, then some equally familiar burping-farting inanity from France. Finally, opening with a leisurely aerial shot of Sorel and the St-Lawrence, the preview for **Qui a tiré**, revealing an unfamiliar and foreign place. The place where *we* live: a real emotional place that's nowhere but in the guts of its artists.

Michael Dorland •

QUI A TIRÉ SUR NOS HISTOIRES D'AMOUR? d./sc./ exec.p. Louise Carré assoc.p. Suzanne Laverdière line p. Claire Stevens sc.cons. Réal Larochelle, Michel Rebetez, Larry Tremblay ads. René Pothier, Catherine Didelot cont. Thérèse Bérubé d.o.p. Jean-Charles Tremblay, Pierre Duceppe, Christiane Guéron, Michel Caron ed. Louise Côté, Teresa De Luca mus. Marc O'Farrell mus.orch. Mario Parent p. Daniel Louis, Muriel Lizé-Pothier, Suzanne Comtois, Danielle Charlebois p.coord. Mario Nadeau, Lucie Bouliane, Pierre Guillard, Martin Dubois stills Paul-Emile Rioux set des. Vianney Gauthier, Jean Kazemirchuk, Pierre Gauthier props Daniel Huysmans ward. Lise Bédard make-up Diane Simard, Pierre Saindon hair Louis Jalleo, Stéphane Malo, Pierre David sd. Michel Charron, Dominique Chartrand stunts Gina Duhamel, Yvon Duhamel, Jean Lysight grips Emmanuel Lépine, Richard Bonin elect. Daniel Chrétien, Marc Charlebois, André C. Sheridan, Robert Auclair ADR & Sd.efx. Viateur Paiement, Jérôme Décarie, Jocelyn Caron re-rec. Michel Descombes, André Gagnon grafix Jocelyne Chicoine comm.cons. Danielle Sauvage. Colour 35mm running time: 91 mins. 15 secs p.c. La Maison des Quatre inc., (514) 522-5045 with the financial participation of Telefilm Canada and the Société générale du cinéma du Québec and the collaboration of the Société Radio-Canada (CBC) dist. J.A. Lapointe Films Inc., (514) 331-7832. Foreign sales: Films Transit, (514) 526-0839 l.p. Monique Mercure, Gyulaine Normandin, August Schellenberg, Claude Gauthier, Gaétan Labrèche, Marc Labrèche, Gérard Poirier, Normand Brathwaite, Luce Guilbeault, Geneviève Rioux, Marie-Josée Gauthier, Jennifer Lys-Grenier, Hélène Parent, Viviane Pacal, Arlette Beaudry, Jocelyn Bérubé, Daniel Brière, Isabelle Ouimet, Bertrand Roy.

photo: Paul-Emile Rioux