

# Kamouraska falls short, let down by poor script

By J.W. BELTRAME

Maclean's Magazine, in a recent interview with Claude Jutra, co-writer, director, and producer of Kamouraska, said Jutra had followed up a good film (Mon Oncle Antoine) with a great film (Kamouraska). Time Magazine reiterated that statement and added that it was the best film ever made in this country.

After such favourable reviews, Kamouraska comes as a let-down. It is not a great film, nor does it compare favourably with Antoine, Jutra's film of a young boy's coming of age in repressed rural Quebec.

This is not to say it is not worth seeing — it is the most ambitious film ever attempted in Canada, and even though it falls short of its goal, there are enough good moments in the film to make it a must for movie-goers. But in the end, the script lets it down.

The story, an adaptation of Anne Hebert's novel (which won the Prix de Librairies in France) begins with the middle-aged Elizabeth Rolland (Genevieve Bujold) patiently waiting for her second husband (Jerome) to die. As she walks to the window, she sees the young bearded American doctor, George (Richard Jordan) driving his sleigh toward her on a road of ice. He stops under her window, and Elizabeth murmurs "my love, my only love". She is dreaming, and the film flashes back to her teen years.

Jutra captures Lower Canadian life beautifully in dress and scenes of primitive rural Quebec, while truthfully and unmockingly revealing the mores of that time.

Elizabeth is ecstatic when a marriage is arranged for her to the Lord of Kamouraska, Antoine Tasse (Phillipe Leotard). But the bliss of early wedlock soon dissolves, as Antoine falls back to his drunken, whore-chasing, premarital ways.

The stage is set for Elizabeth's initial flirting with freedom from Antoine and the morals of her times, to her declaration in the climactic scene in which Elizabeth and her new love George undress in front of a lighted window.

But only the death of Antoine will ensure complete freedom, as they both realize.

They persuade Elizabeth's servant girl Aurelie, who thinks herself a witch, to poison Antoine. In a beautifully erotic scene, Aurelie, Elizabeth, and George erupt into laughter at the surprising discovery of their own evil.

On the whole, the acting is superb. Genevieve Bujold is at her best as the "black angel" Elizabeth. Phillippe Leotard is the perfect buffoon, staring into space for hours on end, falling out of bed in the middle of the night, and begging on all fours for forgiveness to his Catholic God.

In one comic scene, the drunk Antoine breaks into the room where Elizabeth has sought safety from her husband, and tries to rape her while her aunt and the other women of the house pound on his back.

Richard Jordan wrestles with the stiff dialogue he is given, and for the most part emerges victorious. Suzie Baillargeon is delightful as the servant girl, the accomplice in Elizabeth and George's adulterous romance.

The dialogue gives a lot of trouble to the otherwise excellent film. The script, written by Jutra in collaboration with Anne Hebert, constantly calls for voice-overs to indicate thought. This not only slows the film's timing, but forces on the actors such awkward lines as "I will play my madness out", "It is fear which will destroy us", and "Now I know why I was born".

Michel Brault's indoor shots emphasize the rigid customs and nature of the people. His scenic rural shots of Quebec reflect beautifully the passion of Elizabeth's love.

The film ends with Elizabeth mourning her wasted life as Jerome dies. As Brault's camera centers on Elizabeth, she appears to grow old before our eyes.

At two hours and ten minutes the film is too long, and a few more comic scenes would have gone a long way both in making the time go faster, and in giving us a more human view of the tragic personalities.



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