

French Canadian classic to be filmed

Maria Chapdelaine, one of the great romances of French Canada, is being made into a film. French and Quebec movie-makers are co-operating in a \$5-million production which is expected to reach cinemas throughout the world within a year.

Maria Chapdelaine was written by a young French writer, Louis Hémon, who immigrated to Canada in 1911, at the age of 30. Born and educated as a lawyer in France, he was always inclined towards writing and had worked as a journalist in France and England before coming to Canada. Unfortunately, his one great work was not published until after his tragic death at 32 in a railway accident.

Hémon spent less than 18 months in Canada but his portrayal of life in rural Quebec has received world-wide acclaim. *Maria Chapdelaine*, set in the rugged Quebec countryside north of Lake St. John in the early years of this century, has been translated into 18 languages and has been used as a literature text in schools in Ontario and Quebec. It is a tragic love story but, more than that, it is the brave story of hardy settlers determined to wring a livelihood from the bleak backwoods of northern Ontario. Carole Laure, the Quebec actress who will star in the movie, says she had grown up with *Maria Chapdelaine* as part of her life, and she describes the story as an honest portrayal of past generations who laid the foundation of Quebec.

Inept as farm labourer

Shortly after Hémon landed in Montreal, he worked as a labourer on a farm near Peribonka where he soon earned the reputation as being the worst hired hand north of Lake St. John. He was awkward and inept as a farm labourer, but fortunately his employer kept his clumsy helper on the farm because he saw something in Hémon that set him apart from the other settlers in the region. He also allowed him every Saturday free. It was then that he wrote his story. He set it in the harsh landscape where he worked, and based his characters on the people around him in whom he recognized an honest and heroic stubbornness and a mystic devotion to land, language and religion.

Despite his long work hours, Hémon managed to complete *Maria Chapdelaine* by the spring of 1913, and sent it to his Paris publisher. Then he set out with a



Montreal's Carole Laure (right) and Nick Mancuso, stars of new film version.

friend on a fishing expedition in northern Ontario, where he died near the town of Chapleau. He is buried there in the Roman Catholic cemetery in a grave that remained unnoticed for many years.

Maria Chapdelaine was published in Paris in 1914 and a small edition was printed in Montreal in 1916. But it was slow to gain recognition as a minor masterpiece.

In 1919, members of the Quebec Society of Arts, Sciences and Letters erected a monument to Hémon at Peribonka, near where he had worked as a farm labourer and a gifted novelist. And in 1967, a plaque was erected in the Chapleau Centennial Park, close to the young French writer's final resting place.

(Article by Marcus Van Steen in Canadian Scene.)

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation film to highlight opium war

An enterprising and adventurous film crew from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is setting out this month to focus their cameras on one of the critical problems of the Third World. The film, called *The Golden Triangle - Canada's Heroin Connection*, will be made during the opium harvest on the borders of Burma, Laos and Thailand.

Producer-director Bob Clark and his film crew, consisting of cameraman Guy Weese or Ian Matheson and soundman Paul Bélanger, have been filming in the hazardous conditions of Third World countries for some dozen years. The results of their bold initiatives have proved to be popular: the two-part documentary, *McClure's China*, about the work of Canadian missionary-doctor Robert McClure, drew a total Canadian audience of some 1.5 million; *Thailand: Land of the Mountain Elephant* was seen

by 1 386 000 people; while the film *Sixteen Days to Timbuktu*, which traced the route of the salt caravans of the Sahara, reached an audience of 792 000 and was sold to 13 countries.

Clark and his crew also produced filmed reports on Cambodia and the guerilla war in Ethiopia as well as the award-winning television film *My People Are Dying*, about the Vietnamese boat people.

Bob Clark, who in the early Seventies worked as a CBC correspondent in Vietnam, has for years taken a keen interest in the Third World.

"What I felt and still feel," he explains, "is that we get a tremendous amount of material on the Third World made by others and so we get the American point of view, or the British point of view. But we never get the Canadian point of view."