The Lost Garden

Directed by Marquise Lepage, written by Lepage
in collaboration with Solange Collin. National Film Board
of Canada, 1995, 52 min. 16mm and video.

Made at the NFB's Studio D as part of its
contribution to the centenary of cinema, The Lost Garden is a biography of pioneer French
filmmaker Alice Guy-Blache, cinema's first
woman director. Directing and writing many
of the Gaumont Studio's productions, at the
beginning of the century, Guy-Blache moved
to the United States to create her own studio,
Solax, and returned to France and unjust
obscurity after the collapse of her filmmaking
business in 1922. In the first quarter century
of cinema, Guy-Blache wrote and directed
literally hundreds of films. So, why haven't
you heard of her, you might ask. And that is
precisely the point of Montreal director
Marquise Lepage's loving portrait of this
extraordinary woman. (Perhaps her relative
invisibility in cinematic history is what
attracted Lepage; after all, is there a more
fitting subject for a Canadian filmmaker?)

Playful and poetic, at times overly
ingratiating, The Lost Garden assembles
interviews with Guy-Blache's descendants,
film historians, luminous excerpts from what
fragments remain of her vast filmography,
and archival footage of Guy-Blache herself
being interviewed. Although its claims of
Guy-Blache's contributions to the develop-
ment of cinematic techniques and styles of
acting are overstated, The Lost Garden is a
valuable demonstration that the history of
cinema, like cinema itself, is a struggle
between what gets left in the frame and what
gets left out.

Gavin Frogboy

Directed and written by Jeffrey Erbach.
Winnipeg Film Group, 1995, 10 min. 16mm.

Winnipeg director Jeffrey Erbach's Gavin
Frogboy is the engaging tale of a rather
unusual and solitary young man named
Gavin (James Crompton) who lives at home
with his divorced father (Stu Lavitt). As dad
brings home female companions, Gavin sits
in his bathroom pretending to be a frog and
listens to his father's amorous exertions.
Adding to Gavin's already skewed sense of
the world are radio reports of giant insects
roaming his town; whether they are real or
products of his adopted amphibian
imagination, we are never certain. Whatever
the case, like many Canadian characters
before him, Gavin has sought refuge in the
murky swamps of his mind rather than enter
the terrifying traps of adulthood. Although
the dramatic engine of this quirky narrative
(a bizarre family meltdown) could perhaps
be developed more fully, Erbach's rendering
of the displacement, alienation, and retreat
into the imagination of his protagonist is
impressive.

Big Deal, So What

Directed and written by Su Rynard, 1995.
23 min. 16mm and video.

Written and directed by Toronto filmmaker
Su Rynard, Big Deal, So What is the story of
Rachel, a bemused young woman of the
1970s who decides to move out of her
parent's safe suburban home and find her
own way. Her search involves a job at a
lunch counter, an uncertain astrological
dependency, and a tentative belief in herself.
Played with appropriately awkward grace by
Sheila Heti, Rachel joins a long line of
Canuck movie teens who've left home to
discover the dubious joys of Canadian
adulthood. In this case, though, Rynard's
richly drawn character is poised to discover
the trick to this adult game, enduring its
idiocies while probing its possibilities. Wisely
observing from the margins, Rachel assesses
her odds in comparison with her friend
Amanda, her distant father, and her reserved
yet generous mother. In addition to its
distant but distinct echoes of early Jane
Campion, or even Hal Hartley, Rynard's film
features a fine soundtrack by Bush as well as
a sharp, stylish visual design. The 1970s
never looked so good. Despite an abrupt
ending which mars its finely balanced
tensions, Big Deal, So What offers a refreshing
take on the getting of wisdom, Canadian
style.

Fiction and Other Truths:
A Film About Jane Rule

Directed and written by Lynne Fernie and
Aerlyn Weissman, produced by Rina Fraticelli.
Great Jane Productions in association with the
National Film Board, 1995, 57 min. 16mm and video.

Internationally acclaimed author and social
activist Jane Rule is the remarkable subject of
this largely unremarkable documentary about
her life and work. Raised in the United States
but disturbed by the ugly conformist
tendencies in American life revealed in the
McCarthy Era, Rule moved to Canada in the
1950s. Since settling in Vancouver, she has
written many of her best novels, been an
outspoken and persistent critic of censorship,
and a regular contributor to the gay
newspaper, Body Politic. Using still photos and
interviews with Rule, literary luminary
Margaret Atwood, filmmaker Donna Deitch
(who adapted Rule's novel Desert of the Heart),
and others, the film recounts a life lived with
courage, commitment, and more than a little
humour. Examining Rule's life and work (she
is now retired on B.C.'s Galiano Island), the
film offers an absorbing account of the creative
and conflictive intersections of personal and
pop cultural history. Despite its somewhat
pedestrian style, especially compared to
Forbidden Love, Fernie and Weissman's
imaginative feature-length predecessor, Fiction
and Other Truths must ultimately be judged a
success because, thanks largely to its
extraordinary subject, it does challenge the
way we see the world. ■