

La Vraie Nature de Bernadette

cinema canada

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1972 96m *director, script and editor* Gilles Carle, *producer* Fernand Rivard, *cinematographer* René Verzier, *music* Pierre Brault; *with* Micheline Lanctôt, Donald Pilon, Reynald Bouchard, Robert Rivard and Willie Lamothe

At a moment when the once all-powerful Catholic Church had lost its grip on Quebeckers, Gilles Carle made this sardonic fable about a woman's quest to find spiritual harmony on her own terms. Like many real-life 1970s professionals, Bernadette Brown (Micheline Lanctôt) drops out of city life, expecting to find nirvana down on the farm. In the movie's early scenes, her naive idealism gets battered by her disappointing new environment. The house she bought is a ramshackle shack occupied by a horse; her neighbours are far from being wise and noble peasants with life lessons to teach. As our heroine discovers that country life is actually venal and nerve-wracking, she ironically begins to resemble her namesake, Saint Bernadette of Lourdes. The locals believe that this city woman can heal the lame and cause water to flow on arid land. The fact that Bernadette's blessings include sexual favours is typical of Carle's take on miraculous transformations. He both mocks and venerates, mainly through Lanctôt's indelible performance as a woman who won't give up on her vision. The movie's final scene anticipates by 30 years Nicole Kidman's settling of accounts with hypocritical country folk in Lars von Trier's *Dogville*.

AWARDS: Canadian Film Awards – Director, Actress (Lanctôt), Supporting Actor (Pilon), Musical Score; AV Trust – Masterwork