

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-Blaché, cinema's first woman director. Directing and writing many of the Gaumont Studio's productions, at the beginning of the century, Guy-Blaché 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-Blaché 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-Blaché's descendants, film historians, luminous excerpts from what fragments remain of her vast filmography, and archival footage of Guy-Blaché herself being interviewed. Although its claims of Guy-Blaché's contributions to the development 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



Alice Guy-Blaché, cinema's first woman director, is the subject of Marquise Lepage's THE LOST GARDEN.

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. ■