

## Traître ou patriote

2000 83m *prod* National Film Board, *p* Eric Michel, Adam Symansky, *d/sc* Jacques Godbout, *ph* Francois Vincelette, *s* Serge Boivin, André Chaput, Jean Paul Vialard, Patrick Viegas, *mus* Maurice Druon, Joseph Kessel, Anna Marly, *narr* Thor Bishopric, Luis de Cespedes, Thomas Donohue, Hubert Fielden, Serge Houde, John Koensgen, Howard Ryshtan; *with* Gerard Filion, Jean-Louis Gagnon, Madeleine Parent, Jacques Godbout, Josh Freed.

## Anne Hébert

2000 50m *prod* National Film Board, Télé-Images Création, France 3 (France), Le Studio Via le Monde (France), *p* Eric Michel, Agnès Vicariot, Catherine Viau, Daniel Bertolino, Louis Leroux, *d/sc* Jacques Godbout, *ph* Michel Brault, *mus* Robert M. Lepage, *narr* Sylvie Drapeau, Jacques Godbout; *with* Anne Hébert, Claude Beauchemin, Jean-Pierre Bissonnette, André Chaput, Denis Tribalat.

Imagine if the reknown author Mordecai Richler had spent the last 40 years not only writing novels but also directing films. The reaction would have been seismic. English-Canada's critical establishment would be salivating, eagerly waiting his new book or film, ready to compare the latest literary works to those made for cinema. Documentaries would be compared to essays, novels to fiction features, as this reconstructed Mordecai might be expected to reflect, in both art forms, on our lives and fates as Canadians.


While Anglos in Toronto and elsewhere can only fantasize about such a figure, in Montreal there resides an auteur who, basically, fits the description. As a novelist, he has won the Governor General's Award. He has also been an editor at a distinguished publishing company for over 40 years and a contributor to important dailies and magazines such as *Le Devoir* and *Maclean's*. He has scripted plays for Radio-Canada, and written many essays and poems. His film work has been equally prestigious and prolific. He has directed more than 30 films and has worked with the likes of Charles Denner, Pauline Julien, Louise Marleau and Carole Laure. His films have garnered prizes at festivals around the world. Have you guessed who he is? Even in Quebec, where he certainly has the respect of critics, the public does not respond to his works with overwhelming support; and among English-Canadian readers and filmgoers he is virtually unknown. His name is Jacques Godbout and his work, in cinema and literature, is among the most distinguished ever created in Canada or Quebec.

In his most recent documentary feature, *Traître ou patriote*, he purchases a picture of an important-looking individual from an antique shop. Taking it to a party, he asks a number of historians, both English and Québécois, to identify the portrait.



**Above: Novelist and director, Jacques Godbout.  
Below: His great uncle Adélarde Godbout, c.1942.**

# REVIEWS REVIEWS



No one can. *Traître ou patriote* turns on this fact: the collective ignorance that Québécois society has fashioned around a man who was the premier of the province for five tumultuous years during the Second World War.

The premier that history has ignored is Adélard Godbout, and he is Godbout's great uncle. Godbout, the elder, attained his highest elective office in 1939 in an atmosphere of high drama caused by the European crisis that led to the Second World War. As a Liberal, Adélard Godbout was a supporter of Mackenzie King, the prime minister of Canada, and a royalist in sympathy with the British cause. When Britain declared war on Nazi Germany in 1939, so did Canada. Many Canadians, both English and French, joined the armed services, swelling the ranks of Canada's tiny peacetime forces.

Quebec's response to the war, however, did not match the enthusiasm of English-speaking Canada. Many Québécois harboured a deep-seated hatred of the English, the people who had dominated them for over 200 years. Like the Irish, they preferred to remain neutral. Of course, many Québécois voluntarily joined Canada's wartime effort, but Adélard Godbout realized that a large number of his provincial constituents wanted to stay out of the European conflict. In *Traître ou patriote*, Jacques Godbout investigates that time, which many of his fellow Québécois would prefer to ignore. Immersing himself in the topic, he rents an apartment, places blow ups of wartime photos on the walls and plays videos of archival films of the period that show the propaganda that stirred millions.

Adélard Godbout, his filmmaking nephew points out, was a forward-thinking politician who gave women the vote, established Hydro-Québec and instituted compulsory education. His speeches were eloquent and elegant, a far cry from the utterances of the Union Nationale's man, Maurice Duplessis. Yet, in the election of 1944, he was defeated. His sin, of course, was to maintain a loyalty to the federal Liberals even when King

conscripted in Quebec. This was a motherhood issue for many, and Godbout was perceived to have failed the test. For the young Jacques Godbout, his great-uncle's defeat was a source of humiliation that still rankles him after all these years. In a revealing conversation with Montreal journalist Josh Freed, Godbout reacts with a "c'est ça" to his friend's comment that *Traître ou patriote* is really about Jacques and not about Adélard. We learn very little about Adélard's personal life in the film. It is Jacques whom we learn to care about, and it is his determined image, as filmmaker and relative, that remains the potent icon in this revealing documentary.

Although he is now in his mid-sixties, the ever vigorous Godbout quickly followed *Traître ou patriote* with another documentary made for television, *Anne Hébert*. This film is a loving tribute to the woman who died last year and who is the finest exemplar of modern literature in Quebec. Godbout had known Hébert since the late 1950s when he embarked on his literary and filmmaking career and she was writing poems, novels and the occasional script for the NFB. They remained in contact with one another even though Hébert chose to reside in Paris.

It was during her time in France that Hébert came into her own as a novelist. Godbout points out that Hébert could best recall Quebec while in self-imposed exile. Among her finest works were *Kamouraska* and *Les Fous de bassan* both of which were made into films, the former by Claude Jutra in 1973 and the latter by Yves Simoneau in 1987. Godbout's documentary quotes from both works as well as other Hébert books. As much as possible, Godbout uses footage of Hébert discussing her own work, a very successful strategy since the novelist proved, over and over again, to be a charming and attractive subject.

As a writer himself, Godbout is uniquely situated to produce a documentary on a celebrated author. He had already done so twice in his career, creating a fine profile of his tragic colleague Hubert Aquin who committed suicide in 1977 (*Deux épisodes dans la vie d'Hubert Aquin*, 1979), and a respectful portrait of the Quebec writer and artist who was known as Will James (*Alias Will James*, 1988). He is able to link the writer with the text, involving the audience with the question: Why were these works created? Godbout's theme in many of his novels, such as the *Galarneau* books, as well as his films, is the search for a Quebec identity. Anne Hébert found herself far from home in Paris; so did Will James (born Ernst Dufaux), who remade himself as a cowboy in the American West. Quebec, Godbout seems to be saying, is a society in search of an identity beyond that of a defeated, humiliated people.

Throughout his intermingled career, Godbout has played out this quest. Increasingly, his search has become personal. How will it end? Only time, and perhaps more novels and films, will reveal the ending of Godbout's own mysterious quest.

Marc Glassman