

12. FILM SHOWING & DISCUSSION: "BLACK ROBE" (3/16/04) (continued)

Very sincere, earnest film. Used Indian actors. Tried not to idealize or mythologize, but still angered Native Americans, including actors in film.

Line from histories through novel to film. Bryan Moore, novelist, read essay by Graham Green, went to history by Francis Parkman, who was quite anti-Indian and anti-Iroquois. Then to the Relations. Wrote novel. Bruce Beresford, Australian director, made into film. Toned down in places, but still very harsh.

What can you see in film that comes from the Relations? "These are our fathers." Admonition about how will have to stay up with Indians etc. Father Laforgue patterned on specific Jesuit. Smokey hut, other difficult conditions. Sorcerer enemies, even specific dwarf sorcerer, his name (though comes from another enemy of Jesuits, not the dwarf). Long journey westward (which film drastically simplifies). Capture by Iroquois, even detail of priest coming out of hiding. Torture of priest. Politics of baptism.

How does the film depart from the Relations? In character of priest? In what way is Father Laforgue more a character from the 20th century?---doubts, willingness at end to accept Indian viewpoint. What about the attitudes towards Baptism of the dying priest at the end of the film?---not characteristic of Jesuits, no mass Baptism. What is Father Laforgue's great revelation?--this worldly orientation.

How is the representation of language a problem in films about Indians?--or about any other foreigners? Cf. Mel Gibson film on Jesus. Indians mostly had to learn new language, memorize lines. It shows: very slow, halting. How does this affect image of Indians---stolid, impassive, not big talkers. What would the alternatives be?

What Indian groups does the film distinguish? How does it differentiate/contrast them? Montagnais (Innu), represent the most uncomprehending, most unused to French, express most naive reactions, first contact. Actually had been in contact the longest. Iroquois, villains, the ferocious other. How conveyed? Village like Star Wars or a Kurosawa castle. Most ferocious face paint. Wanton cruelty. Gloating. Not surprising that real Iroquois upset. Huron and Algonkian, in middle. At different points, each group as everyman or every-Indian.

How does the film represent Indians in general? Fierce but realistic. At one with world, which fierce, bleak place.

How does the film represent the clash of religions? What epitomizes each religious outlook: dreams versus heaven. What is wrong with focusing on heaven? Defers everything, diverts from real life. How does emphasis on heaven depart from relations? Which side looks better/more realistic in film?

What can you say about the depiction of violence and sexuality in the film and their meaning? What do you think about Churchill's criticism? Do you think the filmmakers really think the sexuality of the Indians and Daniel is worse than Laforgue's? Whose sexuality is being criticized?

Do you think the film lets us understand the killing and the torture in their cultural context? (See the readings by Wallace and Richter.) What about Churchill's critique as a whole?

Larger significance of violence, savagery, a summing up whole encounter. The big thing that must be explained, 500 pound gorilla. Traditional blaming of Indians, more recently Whites.

What is the significance of the landscape?

If the film can be about other things as well as 17th century France, what are those other things? Whose sexuality do you think it has in mind? What country besides France and Canada?---Ireland. How do you guess it might relate to Moore's life, his situation? his relationship to church? His place in world?

In what ways is "Black Robe" the answer to or antithesis of "Dancing with Wolves"?--- anti-romantic, anti-idealization of Indians. Dunbar (and many others, .e.g Hawkeye) taken in by Indians or absorbs essence/virtues of Indians, more Indian than the Indians. Laforgue learns lesson, but Indians still radically the other, will never be absorbed. Detached from his own past but not absorbed in new reality. Alone in world.