



The September, 2013 LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library is the four-dvd set LES CLASSIQUES DE FREDERIC BACK (FREDERIC BACK CLASSICS). Released on the Imavision label by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, nine short animations stunningly represent the distinguished career of master Impressionist Back. All the films embody lifelong devotion to environmental conservation. In addition to the animations themselves, there are a 1960 interview with Jean Giono, author of the book L'HOMME QUI PLANTAIT DES ARBRES (THE MAN WHO PLANTED TREES); a seven-minute 1988 interview with Hubert Tison, Back's film producer and fellow preservationist; a 1994 interview of twenty-seven minutes duration with Frederick Back himself; an illuminating 32-minute PORTRAIT DE FREDERIC BACK (PORTRAIT OF FREDERIC BACK) with English narration; an eleven-minute mini-documentary about Frederic Back's creation of LE FLEUVE AUX GRANDES EAUX (THE MIGHTY RIVER), and a twelve-page booklet which includes capsule summaries of each of the nine featured works.

Disc 1 contains the following material:

1. An introduction to Frederick Back and his animations
2. ABRACADABRA
3. INON OU LA CONQUETE DU FEU (INON OR THE CONQUEST OF FIRE)
4. LA CREATION DES OISEAUX (THE CREATION OF BIRDS)
5. ¿ILLUSION?
6. TARATATA!

All of the five films listed above are suitable for family viewing. ABRACADABRA, LA CREATION DES OISEAUX, ¿ILLUSION?, and TARATATA! are dialogue-free. A rating and review of each follows below.



ABRACADABRA Canada 1971 Remastered in 2002 wordless short color
 animation 9 ¼ minutes Societe Radio-Canada Producer: Hubert Tison
 10 of a possible 20 points

** ½ of a possible *****

*indicates outstanding technical achievement

Points

- 1 Co-Directors: Graeme Ross, Frederic Back
- 1 Editor: Therese Bernard
- 1 Camera: Paul Webster
- 2 Lighting
- 0 Story: Frederic Back, Graeme Ross
- 1 Music: Pierre Brault
- 1 Design: Frederic Back

- 1 Sound: Gilles Clement, Gilles LeClerc
 - 1 Animation: Frederic Back, Graeme Ross
 - 1 Creativity
- 10 total points

A very creative title credit triangulation opens ABRACADABRA. This 1971 film is quite primitive compared with later Back productions. Made over a period of six months using acrylic paint on transparent cels, a process favored by co-director Graeme Ross but disliked by Frederic Back, the picture opens with a little girl exploring summertime outdoors. Minimal character features, picture dialogue and a direct, uncomplicated heroes-and-villains storyline make this animation appealing to preschoolers as well as school-age counterparts.

The world is sunny and inviting. Singing joyfully, a young girl in blue jumper and black tights smells flower fragrances. She will serve as protagonist and point-of-view character. A sudden shower interrupts her play, refreshing vegetation, but then yields to a returning cheery sun.

However, a villainous sorcerer appears, casting a spell which results in imprisonment of the solar disk. Darkness shadows the earth. What can be done to restore light?

It becomes the mission of Little Miss Cheerfulness to recover the missing fireball. Asking various ethnic individuals if they know where it is yields no pertinent information, but permits the animators to people the screen with stereotypical African, Oriental and Native American youngsters. Collectively, they search for light in darkness.

Upon entering a volcano, all are covered with ashes, emerging as three chimney sweep lookalikes. Scrubbed and showered by Nature's waters, the questing quartet proceeds to a nearby grotto where they discover the malefactor's hideaway.

Through an inexplicable burst of magic, the sun's obscure location in a sea chest is disclosed to them. The unnamed blonde-haired leader obtains the evildoer's book of magic spells and begins reading it. She reverses his enchantment, liberating the cosmic source of light which returns promptly to its usual position in the sky. Mustachioed troublemaker is foiled as usual, a rainbow

replaces lightning flashes and the film concludes with youngsters dancing under a polychromatic umbrella as a pennywhistle or recorder repeats the drumbeat-punctuated melody which introduced Back's happy singer.

ABRACADABRA features considerable background detail and variation, which sharply contrast with minimally expressive faces and character movements. Not Back's finest work, but an enjoyable appetizer for novices unfamiliar with lengthier, more mature achievements.

This playful bagatelle won the International Animation of Film Award at Barcelona, Spain in 1978.



INON OU LA CONQUETE DU FEU (INON OR THE CONQUEST OF FIRE)

Canada 1972 short color animation narrated in English by Budd Knapp and in the original French by Luc Durand 9 ½ minutes Societe Radio-Canada

Producer: Hubert Tison

*indicates outstanding technical achievement

17 of a possible 20 points

****1/2 of a possible *****

Points

1 Director: Frederic Back

2 Editor: Therese Bernard
2 Camera: Paul Webster
2 Lighting
1 Story: Pierre Sarrazin
2 Music: Jean Cousineau
2 Design: Frederic Back
2 Sound: Gilles Clement
1 Animation: Frederic Back
2 Creativity
17 total points

INON is derived from an Algonquin legend relating how fire's warmth was brought into the world. It was generated over the course of three and one-half months. Inspired by aboriginal cave paintings, Back resorted to a felt pen with solvent on paper and air-brushed cels to make this film.

Thunder God Inon prefers to use flame exclusively to terrorize man and beast, leaving terrestrial creatures in a world of frigid discomfort. As the film opens, curtains of pale greens and rusts hang from a chilly nocturnal sky. Terrific fiendish sound effects of ear-shattering thunderclaps are accompanied by flashes of jagged lightning.

Back proceeds to show a pow-wow of frightened men and animals. Together, they seek relief from polar blasts and evil spirits who lead hunters to counterfeit trails. One of their group, Bear, shares a dream ascribed to Glooscap (Manitou). In his vision, Wolf, Eagle and Beaver travel to the mountain of setting sun and fire. If the trio cited journeys there in reality, then surely they will succeed in snatching fire and bringing it back to their homeland. Glooscap will keep them safe. For did he not provide the original idea?

So off go the three selected adventurers. En route, Wolf is distracted by a stag. Off he trots in pursuit, leaving Beaver and Hawk to continue their quest alone.

Approaching their destination, the two undistracted animals are attacked by Thunder's Daughters, guardians of sacred fire and tormentors of all who dare approach it. One of them strikes down Beaver with an arrow. But that fails to

prevent the determined thief from running off with his prize. Eagle takes some flame also, enclosing it in a mussel shell.

Hot in pursuit, an enraged Inon sings off the fur on Beaver's tail with a well-aimed lightning bolt when he tries to hide underground.

Meanwhile, Hawk conceals fire in trees, successfully frustrating the Thunderer and his children. Beaver is equally triumphant, safeguarding burning brightness in subterranean obscurity.

Ultimately, the two bold robbers return safely to their neighbors and are given a heroic welcome. Wolf, though, remains forever outside in shadows, a punishment for unfaithfulness to duty.

Budd Knapp's colorful, dynamic narration adds dramatic potency. Narrator of the original French version is Luc Durand.



LA CREATION DES OISEAUX (THE CREATION OF BIRDS) Canada 1973 wordless short color animation 10 minutes Societe Radio-Canada

Producer: Hubert Tison

13 of a possible 20 points

1/2 of a possible **

*indicates outstanding technical achievement

Points

1 Director: Frederic Back

1 Editor: Therese Bernard

1 Camera: Paul Webster

0 Lighting

1 Story: Frederic Back

2 Music: Pierre Brault
2 Design: Frederic Back
2 Sound: Gilles Clement
1 Animation: Frederic Back
2 Creativity
13 total points

Featuring Native Canadian rhythms played on recorders, or pennywhistles, and drums accompanied by cutout animation, LA CREATION DES OISEAUX continues Back's explorations into the legends of Canada's true pioneers. It was made over a period of eight months using felt pen on colored paper and paper cutouts.

Storm God Howling Wolf sends wind blasts to blow away fish from fishermen, destroy twig shelters and detach leaves from trees. Mr. Nice Guy. Electronic burblings represent wind's whirlings very effectively.

Natives rebuild devastated homes. In response, Howling Wolf incites ally White Bear to deposit snow throughout the forest, burying everything below tree branch level.

A disconsolate maiden sings wordlessly to Glooscap (Manitou) for assistance, with anachronistic organ accompaniment. The sovereign Creator God heeds her supplication and, with portentous drumroll, awakens a slumbering Sun, who quickly drives off Howling Wolf and White Bear. His rays soon melt the blanketing snow.

Then Glooscap breathes upon dead leaves, reviving them as birds.

A chilly Northland myth, presented wordlessly in denatured, bleak colors. Pierre Brault's evocative music is especially commendable.



¿ILLUSION? Canada 1976 color wordless short animation 11 ½ minutes

Societe Radio-Canada Producer: Hubert Tison

*indicates outstanding technical achievement

19 of a possible 20 points

***** of a possible *****

Points

2 Director: Frederic Back

2 Editor: Andre Long

2 Camera: Paul Webster

2 Lighting

1 Story: Frederic Back, Leonie Gervais

2 Music: Normand Roger

2 Animation: Frederic Back, Leonie Gervais

- 2 Designs: Frederic Back, Leonie Gervais
 - 2 Sound: Normand Roger*, Gilles Clement*
 - 2 Creativity
- 19 total points

¿ILLUSION? is a telefilm with organ and flute accompaniment. It was made over the course of eighteen months using felt pen on transparent cels, pastel crayons, and touches of gouache on tinted papers for backgrounds. Actual schoolchildren were utilized and their voices recorded and integrated into the soundtrack.

When a closing bell rings, exuberant singing children rush out of a rural schoolhouse to exercise in pastures, plant flowers, or milk a cow. A storm arrives, temporarily dampening spirits. But it passes after refreshing foliage and is followed by a rainbow. Joyful once more, schoolmates journey to an unpolluted brook, gather flowers, play hide-and-peek with bunnies and participate in a hopscotch game.

Into paradise intrudes a prestidigitator, camouflaged as a one-man band. Calliope and drums herald his entrance. This stranger has a fascinating ability to metamorphose living animals into mechanical toys. Much to the joy of the audience, he also morphs flowers into balloons. After passing out tempting ice cream cones, the wonderworker continues altering Nature's landscape. Trees become electric towers, power lines, skyscrapers. As electronic music plays, huge conduits materialize to carry away polluted wastes from brick and concrete factories whose walls crush every sign of vegetation. Noise pollution ensues.

At this point, juvenile workers are compelled to toil endlessly on assembly lines. When they begin to murmur dissent, the magician boss makes war upon them, only to find the tables turned by sheer numerical dominance. He is chased into stone walls and vanishes. Petrified, perhaps?

Factories disappear just as mysteriously, being replaced by the same meadows observed earlier. Tudor-like folk songs are then lilted by liberated youths returning with relish to pastoral recreations. The sun reappears. But steel plates and rivets replace it onscreen at the final credit.

¿ILLUSION? won First Prize at Iran's Tehran International Film Festival in 1977.

Other awards for the film include Second Prize at the International Film Festival in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, a prize at the Krakow, Poland International Short Film Festival, another at the Australian International Animated Film Festival, and First Prize in the Nature and Environment Category at the Paris, France International Short Film Festival in November, 1977.



TARATATA! Canada 1977 color wordless animation 8 ½ minutes

Societe Radio-Canada Producers: Hubert Tison, Frederic Back

19 of a possible 20 points

***** of a possible *****

*indicates outstanding technical achievement

Points

2 Director: Frederic Back

2 Editor: Therese Tison

2 Camera: Paul Webster

2 Lighting

1 Story: Frederic Back, Suzanne Raymond

2 Music: Normand Roger

2 Animation: Frederic Back

2 Designs: Frederic Back, Suzanne Raymond

2 Sound: Normand Roger

2 Creativity

19 total points

Suggested by the annual Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day parade on June 24th in Quebec, Canada, TARATATA! is an attempt to capture its colors, sounds, and pomposity in animated form. It was created over an eight-month period using

acrylic, felt pens, colored pencils, pastels, and paper cutouts. In 1979, it won a prize at the International Youth Film Festival in Lausanne, Switzerland.

A church bell tolls, followed by a trumpet fanfare. Preparations are underway for an urban parade. Marching bands, a limousine, photographers dashing about to get showy snapshots, costumed pioneer settlers, loggers, minuet partners, Celtic step dancers, gymnasts, a strongman, cheerleaders, a hydroelectric power float, all participate in a lively, vibrant celebration of prosperity, progress and self-congratulations.

Four and one-half minutes into this grandiose spectacle, a small boy intrudes, trying to squeeze through crowds of spectators to obtain a decent view. No such luck. When he attempts to climb a street lamp pole, an officious policeman scolds him and denies the desired vantage point. The disconsolate youngster waits for crowds to dwindle, picking up a discarded flag after marchers have passed and then sitting down on a littered curb with only a dog for company.

There he fantasizes about a child-like combination of circus and fairytale, with sprites, clowns, elephants, balloons, and fireworks in chaotic combination. His reverie is interrupted by applause from adult onlookers. Or is he still daydreaming?

The film concludes in a fountain of skyscrapers with appropriately celebratory sound effects. Ideal viewing for youngsters ages 5-9.

Disc 2 contains the following material:

1. TOUT RIEN (ALL NOTHING)
2. CRAC!
3. LE FLEUVE AUX GRANDES EAUX (THE MIGHTY RIVER / MAGTOGOEK)
4. FREDERIC BACK ET "LE FLEUVE AUX GRANDES EAUX" (FREDERIC BACK AND "THE MIGHTY RIVER") mini-documentary about the making of the film THE MIGHTY RIVER

All the material on Disc 2 is suitable for family viewing.



TOUT RIEN (ALL NOTHING) Canada 1979 Remastered in 2002. wordless short
color animation 11 minutes Societe Radio-Canada Producer: Hubert Tison
18 of a possible 20 points ****1/2 of a possible *****

*indicates outstanding technical achievement

Points

- 2 Director: Frederic Back
 - 2 Editor: Jacques Leroux
 - 1 Camera: Paul Webster
 - 2 Lighting
 - 2 Animation: Frederic Back
 - 2 Music: Normand Roger*
 - 2 Design: Frederic Back
 - 2 Sound: Marien Desrosiers, Michel Descombes
 - 1 Story: Frederic Back
 - 2 Creativity
- 18 total points

Suggested by a performance of Igor Stravinsky's 1918 music parable
L'HISTOIRE DU SOLDAT (A SOLDIER'S TALE) based on a Russian folk tale , TOUT
RIEN (ALL NOTHING) was made over a period of twenty months using wax-based
colored pencils on frosted cels, with pastels on tinted paper backgrounds. It won
First Prize at the Bulgarian International Animated Film Festival in 1978 and
received a Special Prize at the Ottawa, Canada International Film Festival in 1980.

A haunting wordless vocal escorts viewers through the creation of Earth. Last of living things to materialize are humans Adam and Eve. From the very beginning, they are special cases, believing themselves privileged, yet underappreciated. Alone of creation, they imagine themselves to be something else, actors unrestricted by supervision of any kind.

First they wish to become aquatic merman and mermaid, supplicating their Creator for those roles. So be it.

But they tire of swimming about underwater and beseech alteration from scales to fur.

This desire is also granted. Coming onto land, the pair is annoyed by the itchiness of their new outerwear and its heat in boiling sun. These drawbacks goad them into another funk. It would be better for them, they suggest to an increasingly vexed Generator, to trade fur for feathers. How marvelous to fly!

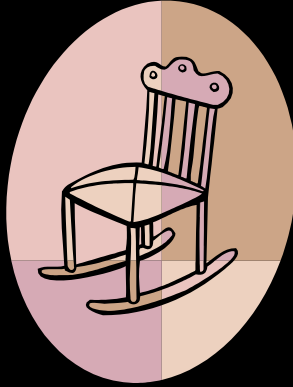
So they are granted wings. But their bodies are too heavy for prolonged resting on branches. Soon they topple to the ground.

A disgusted Progenitor removes their avian encumbrances, replacing them with bare skin.

Once more disgruntled, the two humans angrily plot a payback. They begin hunting and fishing, destroying whatever does not resemble their flesh. Habitats are ruined. Feathers, fur, and scales become decorative accessories: hats, sweaters, coats, belts, shoes.

As these vindictive creatures proliferate, they crowd the planet with more of their self-centered, destructive ilk. But enlightenment is finally attained in contemporary times. Children reject the natural fashions of their parents and adopt practices of peaceful coexistence with nature. A rainbow display ends the film, promising a better future for all living creatures.

TOUT RIEN (ALL NOTHING) was an Oscar nominee for Best Short Animation in 1981.



CRAC! Canada 1981 color wordless short animation 15 minutes

Societe Radio-Canada Producer: Hubert Tison

19 of a possible 20 points

***** of a possible *****

*indicates outstanding technical achievement

Points

2 Director: Frederic Back*

2 Editor: Jacques Leroux*

2 Camera: Claude Lapierre, Jean Robillard

2 Animation: Frederic Back*

2 Music: Normand Roger*, Denis Chartrand*, Le reve du diable*

1 Lighting

2 Sound: Normand Roger*, Andre Riopel*, Gilles Pare*, Michel Descombes*

2 Story: Frederic Back*

2 Design: Frederic Back*

2 Creativity

19 total points

CRAC! was a particularly costly film for Frederic Back. While working rather hastily on it, fumes from a fixative entered his right eye, eventually leading to loss of all sight there.

Utilizing more than seven thousand drawings, the film was made with Prismacolor® pencils and pastel on frosted cels, the frosting providing more texture than customary transparent ones. It was completed in twenty-two months.

CRAC! is an abbreviated history of French Canada as witnessed through the creation and utilization of a rocking chair.

Opening with a solitary deer gazing directly at the viewer from within a snowy forest, it proceeds to show a Canadian logger's journey to find a suitable tree for crafting into a piece of furniture. One is located and promptly chopped down. Further sawing, pounding, drilling, and planing results in production of an amiable rocking chair with a painted smile on its top crosspiece. This is presented to the carpenter's girlfriend as a present, which she gratefully receives.

Marriage follows, with boisterous dancing and fiddling. The twang of a juice harp provides an additional element of authentic folk music.

Time passes. An infant joins the contented family. The rocker becomes a favorite resort of mother and child. Its unvarying smile seems to welcome visitors. Additional siblings appear. Harnessed to their imaginations, becoming train, obstacle course, leader of a parade of chairs, the focal character of the film endures considerable roughhousing, receiving eventually a sharp kick from a frustrated boy using it as substitute for a parental shin. Wood snaps. Crac! The assaulted chair topples over.

Repaired and repainted by the boy's father, Wooden Smile resumes its career of service until finally years later it gives way under the weight of its creator, sending him crashing to the floor. Crac! This time there is no reprieve and the offending furniture is tossed out into the snowy yard.

Discarded, neglected, archaic, with peeling paint exposed to unaccommodating weather, the aging wooden relic helplessly endures its miserable lot, observing through unblinking eyes transformation of rustic retreat into urban sprawl. Concrete impinges on and replaces grass. The pioneer homestead it once adorned is sold, then razed. Power lines fragment previously unbroken horizon.

Eventually a museum is constructed at the site of the old woodsman's dwelling. A guard employed there spots the antique with its dulled face still visible about to be consigned to a junkyard or landfill. Intervention forestalls that fate. Once more painted and refinished, the film's voiceless protagonist is placed incongruously in one corner of a contemporary art gallery. There it serves as a rest center for its preserver.

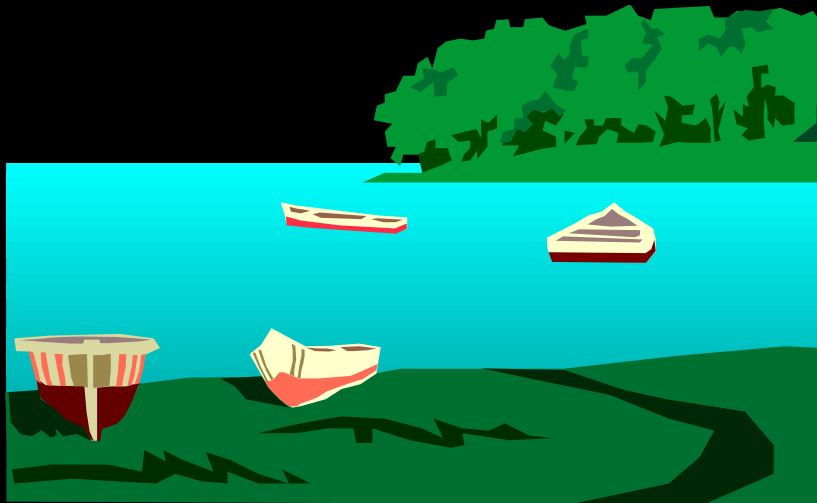
Attracted to its cheerfully inviting creak, bored child visitors request permission to sit on its boards. An accommodating host yields his comfortable observation post, relishing smiles of pleasure and joy from boys and girls as they ensconce themselves in a comfortingly noisy souvenir of the past which is durable enough to bear gouging heels and clawing hands. When they leave at closing hour, memories enliven otherwise dull nights, with sounds from rollicking parties recalling festive companions long vanished.

The music of CRAC! derives mainly from the theme song of a Quebec television soap opera titled LES BELLES HISTOIRES DES PAYS D'EN HAUT (BEAUTIFUL STORIES FROM THE HIGH COUNTRY). Denis Chartrand modified the music using a synthesizer. Its original melody is adapted from Alexander Glazunov's THE SEASONS. Fiddle, accordion and guitar are prominently featured in the lively rhythmic score.

With flawless sound recording over a wide range of volumes, CRAC! showcases the artistry of Normand Roger, who designed its overall sound with assists from a team including Andre Riopel, sound effects wizard Gilles Pare, and sound mixer Michel Descombes.

Animation, designs, and story are all the work of Frederick Back operating solo. This film is a valentine to his adopted home of Quebec and his Quebecois wife. Its mobility is due to a proliferation of crossfades which convey images as seamlessly as the soundtrack does music and incidental noises.

CRAC! won over forty awards, including a 1982 Oscar for Best Short Animation, Grand Prize at the 1982 Ottawa, Canada International Animation Festival, a Ruby Slipper for Best Film at the Los Angeles International Children's Film Festival in 1982, First Prize at the Odense, Denmark Fourth International Fairytale Festival of 1982, a Special Jury Prize at Annecy, France in 1981, a First Gold Plaque Animation Prize at the 17th Chicago International Film Festival in 1982, and a Prix du Public at an Annecy competitive retrospective in 1991. Additionally, it was ranked sixth among the "50 Greatest Masterpieces of the World Animation Set" in Los Angeles (1984). Definitely not a film to be missed.



LE FLEUVE AUX GRANDES EAUX (THE MIGHTY RIVER / MAGTOGOEK)

Canada 1993 short color subtitled animation with English narration by Donald Sutherland 24 minutes Societe Radio-Canada

Producers: Hubert Tison, Frederic Back

19 of a possible 20 points

***** of a possible *****

*indicates outstanding technical achievement

Points

2 Director: Frederic Back*

2 Editor: Norbert Pickering*

2 Camera: Jean Robillard*

1 Lighting

2 Scenario: Frederic Back*, Hubert Tison*

2 Design: Frederic Back*

2 Music: Normand Roger

Music Recording: Jocelyn Dion

2 Animation: Frederic Back*, Shui Bo Wang (In-betweener)

2 Sound: Normand Roger*, Denis Chartrand*, Michel Descombes*,
Luc Boudrais*

Narration Script: Jean Salvy*, Pierre Turgeon* Adaptation: Hubert Fielden*,
Patricia Lavoie*

Narrator: Donald Sutherland*

Research and Documentation: Jean Provencher*, Francis Back*,
Claude Villeneuve*

2 Creativity

19 total points

LE FLEUVE AUX GRANDES EAUX (THE MIGHTY RIVER / MAGTAGOEK) is the last and most ambitious of Frederic Back's short animations. Running approximately 24 minutes, it's comprised of 17,000 drawings and took four years to complete. This majestic animated documentary was shot on 35 millimeter film using a computer-assisted camera. Prismacolor® colored pencils on frosted cels were employed, along with a fixative coating to give cels transparency. That was required due to their frequent layering, often creating densities three or four thick. With tiers of cels moving at differing speeds, over two hundred camera setups were necessary to complete the animation.

The film opens with scenes of the St. Lawrence estuary, a vast gulf spanning miles of water between Newfoundland and Quebec. Cries of birds are heard through all-enveloping mist. Tracking down to the floor of the waterway, kelp, anemone and coral gardens are discovered. Here, too, is a seal-birthing ground which ices completely each winter, but invariably thaws with the advent of spring.

European explorers arrive in 1534 with caravels, their fleet commanded by Frenchman Jacques Cartier. He claims all visible territory for the King of France. These foreigners are awed by sightings of huge colonies of whales, sea turtles, and walrus. Such prize wildlife could be easily killed, gutted, dressed, and sold for massive profits to markets in the Old World. Great auks would provide useful oil. So, too, the whales, by no means immune to deadly harpoons. Walrus, driven inland and killed, were stripped of ivory tusks. Hunting, fishing and trapping on a scale never imagined by waste-conscious native tribesmen became commonplace. Furs and sealskins make comfortably fashionable winter coats. Too bad for the animals living inside them. Tadoussac village becomes the largest fur-trading outpost in North America, with both native and foreign visitors pouring into the settlement for lucrative haggling.

Above the village of Three Rivers (Trois Rivieres), the Saguenay pours into the St. Lawrence River, expanding it into a huge freshwater lake. Snow geese feast on

sand banks. Pigeon migrations obscure the sun twice a year. The temptation to massacre unresisting mobile feasts is overwhelming. So great are the numbers of birds that no one displays concern about decimating them.

Envious of New France's vast supplies of animal skins, Britain launches wars to wrest control of that prosperous colony away from its cross-channel neighbor. In 1759, it attacks Quebec with a convoy of 173 ships, 9,000 soldiers and 30,000 sailors. These forces conduct a scorched earth campaign resulting in starvation of 6,000 inhabitants bottled up within the besieged French fortress. The city is compelled to surrender. Montreal also falls into the hands of the British. France sues for peace and relinquishes control of its northern territories.

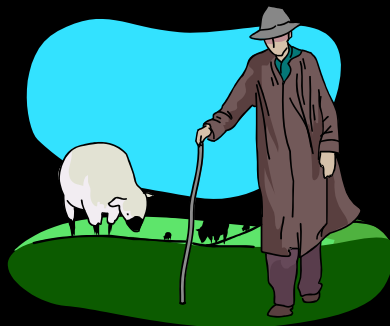
A shipbuilding center in Quebec is established by the new English administration. It becomes Britain's largest port in the New World. One thousand four hundred ships would eventually moor there annually. These would transport not just furs and ivory, but oaks and pines from Quebec province's once-virgin forests to European cabinetmakers and carpenters. Huge storehouses had to be built along the river, competing with farmhouses and spas for space. Logging camps and sawmills proliferated, as more and more land watered by the St. Lawrence was cleared for agricultural or commercial uses. Eventually fifty million people would reside in the St. Lawrence Valley and they would need homes, schools, churches, factories, roads, and hydroelectric power.

To move resources from the North American continent's heartland east to established seaports, the St. Lawrence Seaway was constructed almost six hundred feet above sea level. Its system of locks and canals provided an unbroken path for shipping from the Great Lakes all the way east to the Grand Banks. Steel, oil, wheat, pulp, chemicals, and concrete filled the holds of ships bound for Atlantic seaports. More destructively, industrial contaminants also flowed the same direction to the Atlantic, with devastating consequences to marine life and waterfowl downstream. Will the inhabitants of the valley unite to save its ecosystem before pollution irrevocably destroys it? Perhaps, if they are alerted to the impending environmental disaster and take quick action to restore sensible balance between the needs of non-human species and the demands of modern industrialized human society.

LE FLEUVE AUX GRANDES EAUX (THE MIGHTY RIVER / MAGTOGOEK) has justly received numerous awards, including a Grand Prize at Annecy, France in 1993, the Prize for Best Animated Film: 10-40 minute Category at Cinanima in Espinho, Portugal, the Aspen Award from the 1994 Aspen Film Festival in Colorado, a 1994 Best Film prize from the Ankara International Film Festival in Turkey, the Los Angeles Critics' Award for Best Animated Film of 1993, an Oscar nomination for Best Short Animation, the Grand Prize at the 5th International Animation Festival in Hiroshima, Japan, a Best Film: 10-30 minutes Category prize from Canada's Ottawa International Animation Festival in 1994 and a Chris Award, Art & Culture: Animation Category at the Columbus, Ohio International Film Festival in 1994.

Disc Two also features an eleven-minute subtitled mini-documentary titled FREDERIC BACK ET "LE FLEUVE AUX GRANDES EAUX" (FREDERIC BACK AND "THE MIGHTY RIVER") produced in Canada in 1993.

Disc Three is devoted solely to Back's best-known work, L'HOMME QUI PLANTAIT DES ARBRES (THE MAN WHO PLANTED TREES) and subtitled interviews with Hubert Tison, executive producer of that film, and Jean Giono, author of the story upon which it is based. The Tison interview, from 1988, runs seven and three-quarters minutes. Giono's 1960 interview was recorded in France and runs twenty-two minutes. All three items are suitable for family viewing.



L'HOMME QUI PLANTAIT DES ARBRES (THE MAN WHO PLANTED TREES)

Canada 1987 color short animation with English narration by
Christopher Plummer 30 minutes Societe Radio-Canada

Producers: Hubert Tison, Frederic Back Originally in French with English subtitles and narration by Philippe Noiret.

20 of a possible 20 points

***** of a possible *****

*indicates outstanding technical achievement

Points

- 2 Direction: Frederic Back*
- 2 Editing: Norbert Pickering*
- 2 Camera: Claude Lapierre*, Jean Robillard*
- 2 Lighting
- 2 Script: Jean Giono from his story L'HOMME QUI PLANTAIT DES ARBRES (THE MAN WHO PLANTED TREES)
- 2 Animation: Frederick Back*, Lina Gagnon*
- 2 Production Design: Frederick Back*, Lina Gagnon*
- 2 Music: Normand Roger
- 2 Sound: Normand Roger*, Denis Chartrand* Herve Bibeau* (sound recording)
Narration: Christopher Plummer* (English); Philippe Noiret (French)
- 2 Creativity

20 total points

Made over a period of five years, L'HOMME QUI PLANTAIT DES ARBRES (THE MAN WHO PLANTED TREES) required twenty thousand drawings to fill its half-hour length. Wax-based color pencils on frosted cels were utilized to create this masterpiece. Crossfades and staggered mixes through multiple exposures produce a relentlessly mobile procession of overlapping images. Back's longest work pays generous tribute to earlier master artists: the "madness" scenes in the early portion of the film were inspired by paintings of Pieter Brueghel and Vincent Van Gogh, trees in bloom were modeled after landscapes of French Impressionists and a final depiction of elderly shepherd Elzeard Bouffier is indebted to a Leonardo Da Vinci self-portrait.

For this extended animation, Back proposed to producer Hubert Tison that the complete text of Jean Giono's philosophical tale should be narrated and simultaneously visualized. Such a lengthy solo narration for an educational animation was unprecedented. Tison was won over, however, and Back travelled to France where he won approvals and cooperation from the original author and

from prospective narrator Philippe Noiret. Once their commitments were made, Back returned to Canada and began the exhaustive task of creating drawings to match each scene of the text. Lina Gagnon was hired to complete and polish artwork.

An unnamed Frenchman with a passion for solitary expeditions through Gallic uplands is the storyteller through whose account viewers and readers alike are introduced to the life and achievement of an illiterate peasant named Elzeard Bouffier. After the deaths of his only child and wife, Bouffier withdraws from human society and devotes himself to isolated shepherding in the foothills of the French Alps. Noting with chagrin the paucity of water and trees in that section of his native land, the hermitically-inclined rustic decides to begin a massive project of soughing acorns on barren mountain slopes.

This routine has been underway for a number of years when the narrator first encounters Bouffier. Though this is unclear from the text, Monsieur B. is a fictional creation of the author, who seems to have based him on American John Chapman, the legendary Johnny Appleseed.

In a series of brief conversations between visitor and host in the latter's home and pastures, the purpose and range of the scheme are clarified. On later trips to the same locales, hiker, readers, and viewers discover a changing environment, with first young oaks and then sapling beeches appearing in former wastelands. Their roots found paths to subsoil water undetected by the handful of human residents in the area.

Undeterred by war, social disapproval or government meddling, Bouffier continues his crusade, successfully populating the barrens of northwest Provence with forests of oaks, beeches, and birches. With shade for people and ground cover, foliage for insects and rodents, and oxygen-generating timbers now available, the refreshed land acts as a magnet for settlement by villagers seeking unspoiled plots for gardening, or blooming fields of wild grasses for sheep and cows to munch upon. These new settlers are amicable, not relentlessly battling over meager resources, a situation which induced insanity and suicide among former inhabitants of the region.

This fantasy of a return to invigorating, unadulterated Nature was particularly appealing to Frederic Back, matching his own environmental concerns and

proposed lifestyle improvements. In fact, the animator set out to accomplish in Quebec what Giono's imaginary protagonist did in Provence. Thousands of trees have been planted in Back's adopted province as a direct result of this story. War has not been eradicated, nor pollution eliminated. But perhaps an essential first step is in evidence.

All aspects of L'HOMME QUI PLANTAIT DES ARBRES (THE MAN WHO PLANTED TREES) are crafted with superior skill. Its soundtrack captures blustery sirocco winds that scour upland plateaus of a district once trod by released convict Jean Valjean as he found his way to the village of Digne and beyond. It was in this very environment that the confirmed misogynist experienced repentance and transformation, so Giono may have believed a therapeutic potency existed in its atmosphere. This invisible healing is given dynamic visual expression through swirling misty veils of muted colors. Those are products of Back's unique vision, perhaps founded on recollections of a boyhood in the Saar Valley, a region variously governed by warmongering Germany and an adjacent less bellicose France.

Sounds are so critically significant to this tale that music is only sporadically interspersed between blocks of narration. Timing of both elements is exquisitely realized with precise dovetailing.

A continuous flow of images prevent any creeping symptoms of stultifying pedantry from intruding upon viewer absorption in story and character. Back's decision to use frosted cels likewise pays enormous dividends, lending a persuasively three-dimensional depth to his scenery. Lighting is uniformly strong, never leaving viewers in murky confusion, unsure of what is being shown on screen.

Awards presented to this 1987 film include Grand Prize Co-Winner at the 1987 Annecy Film Festival in France, Grand Prize at the 2nd International Animation Festival in Hiroshima, Japan, Best Animation Film citation at the Tampere, Finland Film Festival in 1988, an Oscar for Best Short Animation in 1988, a Grand Prize and Audience Choice Prize at the Ottawa, Canada International Film Festival in 1988, and First Prize: Religion and Philosophy Category at the Birmingham, Alabama International Educational Film Festival in 1989.

Both the film and its source in English translation are now available to borrow from the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania.

The first three discs in the set include photo galleries of scenes from the nine short animations.

Disc Four contains a French-language documentary with English narration , **PORTRAIT DE FREDERIC BACK (PORTRAIT OF FREDERIC BACK)** from 1987. It is thirty-two minutes in duration and suitable for family viewing. Also on the final disc of the set is a twenty-eight minute subtitled interview with animator Frederic Back from 1994. Shot in Canada, it is also suitable for family screening.

Kino Ken is deeply indebted to Frederic Back's website at www.fredericback.com for a treasure trove of detailed information about these films. For more information about Mr. Back, an online store whose merchandise sales assist in worldwide conservation, and a children's area devoted exclusively to Frederic Back's biography and techniques, please visit the above cited location. It's highly informative and quite welcoming to youngsters.