

Young Mother Goose

Fly Away Home. Directed by Carroll Ballard, with Jeff Daniels, Anna Paquin and Dana Delaney. Columbia Pictures, 1996.

"You didn't know I could fly," says the inventor, trying to ingratiate himself with the daughter he hasn't seen for nine years early on in Carroll Ballard's *Fly Away Home*. "I wouldn't go bragging about it" comes the cool reply. Readers of Bill Lishman's autobiographical *Father Goose* are in for a surprise when they come to the movies. Lishman told of how, with the help of his family and friends, he taught a group of domesticated Canada geese to fly and in his ultralight plane guided them through their first migration south. For the film, screenwriters Robert Rodat and Vince McKerwin have largely jettisoned reality in favour of a story that is both more dramatic and less interesting.

For those who have read the book or who know of the adventure, here's the advice — forget what you already know. Lishman's story provides the basic narrative of the film, but little else. Lishman's real family who receive the author's "deepest gratitude" for their inspiration and help in the book's dedication must have been surprised to find themselves missing from the film. One suspects that Canadian teamwork has been downplayed in favour of American heroism.

Lishman, here renamed Tom Alden and played by Jeff Daniels, is a principled (read eccentric), divorced inventor living in "Ontario, Canada." That this "Canadian" has a daughter with a Kiwi accent requires a little explanation. However, a dreamlike car crash, probably one of the least violent ever seen on film, takes care of Jeff Daniels' ex-wife, a singer living in New Zealand, and leaves the way clear for Anna Paquin to be transplanted to rural Ontario. (To be fair, Lishman's own sculptures are used in the film and he is one of the pilot doubles for Jeff Daniels.)

It is too bad that the narrative Rodat and McKerwin have created is so lacking in originality. Truly it comes dangerously close to made-for-television clichés about relationships and right-thinking eccentrics clashing with by-the-book authority. That the film rises above the level of formula is due to the skill of the performers and, above all else, director Carroll Ballard.

Fans of *The Black Stallion* and *Never Cry Wolf* know that Ballard is a master of the wordless sequence. Give him humans interacting with animals in a natural setting and he and cinematographer Caleb Deschanel, his associate on the other two films, can make magic. Shot for the most part against an autumnal landscape, the film is visually striking, and some of the composition is reminiscent of paintings of Andrew Wyeth. Paquin's scenes with the geese are charm-

ing, even funny, and you would have to be pretty hardened not to get a little excited or misty-eyed when the geese do finally take to the sky.

The best moments in the film are the lyrical aerial sequences, significantly without Rodat and McKerwin's dialogue. Daniels and Paquin make an appealing father-daughter team, ably conveying their evolving relationship even in silence. There is one wince-inducing scene toward the end of the film when, having run out of fuel and crashed, he must encourage her to fly on alone with the geese, that brings the film to a grinding halt for a deeply unfortunate inspirational moment. While the narrative runs its predictable course, the craft of the director makes it hard to resist, so it is formula given first-class treatment.

According to the rhyme, "Old Mother Goose, when/She wanted to wander/Would ride through the air/On a very fine gander." And — with a 1990s makeover — she still does.

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Happily Ever-Single: Disney's *Hunchback* and the Modern Hero without a Mate

The Hunchback of Notre Dame. Buena Vista Pictures / Walt Disney Productions, 1996. 90 minutes, colour. Directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise.

Disney's recent attempt at adapting Victor Hugo's classic novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* into an animated feature has sparked more than a few suspicious reactions. Those critical of past Disney films (myself included) may expect to enter the theatre and see "Beauty and the Beast, Part II." Fortunately, such is not the case with this film. Disney's current rendition of the story of Quasimodo changes Victor Hugo's original story of tragic eloquence to one which is admittedly "happily ever after." It does, however, retain some of the novel's more interesting and important features.

First, the film keeps the cathedral of Notre Dame as its centrepiece, much like Victor Hugo does in the novel. Both the film and the book open with the ringing of the bells of Notre Dame, which in the film is accompanied by the song "The Bells of Notre-Dame," which is fully six minutes long. Further, the detail and attention to the cathedral as not only a place for sanctuary and imprisonment but also as a character itself is not unlike Victor Hugo's treatment of her as a force and presence in *Notre-Dame de Paris*.

Disney should also receive recognition for retaining some of the more difficult and adult parts of the novel. The film's "Hellfire" sequence is certainly among the most memorable of these, where Claude Frollo reveals his lustful desires for Esmeralda. Both the music and visual content are surprisingly adult: an image of Esmeralda dances in the flames of a huge fireplace as Frollo sings "this burning desire is turning me to sin." Disney could have easily overlooked Frollo's sexual desire for Esmeralda and replaced it with fear or jealousy, but I think the right decision is made to characterize him in his disgusting complexity