

# STRATFORD

## Natalie Edwards

Tenth International Stratford Film Festival. Big deal now. The lobby of the Avon on opening night is as gay as a schoolyard at recess. Everyone greets friends, last year's acquaintances, points out celebs. I play paparazzi, tri-x'ing everyone. Look, there's famous John Hofsess, carnation boutonniere, looking, as always, like Van Johnson in a role. There's Sami Gupta from Western, in purple raw linen; Betty Jane Wylie in a wonderful stitched leather cape; Len Klady in the customary army jacket. . . .

David Beard is back at his table by the wall selling film books and mags rapidly, socializing jauntily. And now a rousing entry from Pat Thompson, the force behind Pratley & Denton's efficiently organized structure, working again as co-ordinator. I meet Nona Macdonald, PR for Ontario Place, and we suddenly recall where we knew each other in our past lives. She introduces Doug Trowell, President of CKEY. Then here's Clive Denton, Program Director of the Festival and a great film person, looking, always, like a father who didn't expect triplets; and Arne Ljungstrom of the Toronto Film Society, Helen Arthurs and Jaan Salk too. How I miss George Patterson. Touched to notice that this Festival has been dedicated to his memory. There's Prof. John Katz of York University, and now, here's Festival Director Gerald Pratley, resplendent in a gold brocaded jacket.

We filter into the auditorium. Horace Lapp, who'll accompany the silents again this year, grins broadly at me. "I like your hat" says he. Kevin, the usher at the door, vows he'll remember me forever and I shall not have to dig daily for my pass. Remarkable fine fellow that. I feel good.

The lights dim, curtain pulls back, and the screen materializes — that white space where everything, anything, can exist. I love this moment. I float.

**HUNGER**, 1974. Can. NFB, Péter Földes. 11 min.

Computer animation. Lines form images we recognize, shift, form new images, shift again. A couple becomes a car, a waitress turns into food in this fable of greed, as the lines become symbols which evolve into other symbols. Nicely done.

Now Gerald Pratley comes on stage to introduce the Festival. Started by Tom Patterson in 1956, this was the first film festival in North America. Gerald brings us up to date briskly, finishing with 1971 and the newly redone Avon Theatre and the revival of the Stratford Film Festival in its present form.

Hon. James Auld, introduced, congratulates Stratford Film Festival on its 10th, Gerry on his energy and dedication, and reminds us that the Ontario Film Theatre which Pratley and Denton parented, is now five years old. (That deserves an article. Should I?) Dilys Powell, 35 years the critic for the Sunday London Times, introduced as critic-in-residence, replies in both English and French. Her presence bodes well for the Elevenses.

French cultural counsellor Bernard Poli speaks. He's witty, urbane, delightful. Remarks that 200 films were made in France last year. Does that explain why we'll get five this week?

We'll see 40 films in the next nine days.

We sit back, relax. The audience murmurs and gently falls silent.

**LACOMBE LUCIEN**, France, 1974. Dir. Louis Malle. 130 min. Color.

This much praised movie strikes me as opportunistic. Certainly highly commercial as it appears to deal with the subject of collaboration during war, yet avoids raising any uncomfortable self-questioning in audience. Actually it seems more to be a romantic melodrama, than a careful study of a slightly psychopathic numbskull who slides into collaboration, or a clear statement on French collaboration with the Germans during the Second World War. (We see the Jews humiliated and threatened but we do not see Lucien suffer. Whom does this please?)

On examination, the characters are seen as astonishingly clichéd, though the fine acting of Holder Lowenadler as the cultured aristocratic Jew, and of Therèse Giehse as his stubborn, proud Yiddish mama, elevate their roles and seem to make the film more than it is.

Pierre Blaise, a country boy selected by Malle for the part, doesn't act at all however, and all the collaborators are typically stupid, corrupt, decadent or cynical. Styles not only vary in acting, but the film itself seems a bit of everything: fable, morality play, melodrama, love story, wartime tale, etc. Maybe that's why it seems such a lot to some people but not to me. I feel it hasn't settled its own artistic direction.

Next morning: Lie awake and reconsider **Lacombe Lucien**. Like some parts better. Sets attractive, period interesting, acting classy — still — still — I feel pushed by Malle. Come to realize that we are prepared because of film's subject, for some gut-wrenching torture scenes, and our gratitude when these are by-passed, tends to fall thankfully to the collaborators, psychologically.

Finally, film isn't exactly an apologia for collaboration, nor a humane study of the ridiculous motivations of war, nor a truly careful examination of the boy, nor of the theme . . . what is it then? Perhaps just an incomplete comment by a man who doesn't really know *how* he feels — Louis Malle. And in that way it appeals to the audience which doesn't want to decide this hard question either.

Dilys Powell sums it all up in one word at Elevenses next morning: "Ambivalent."

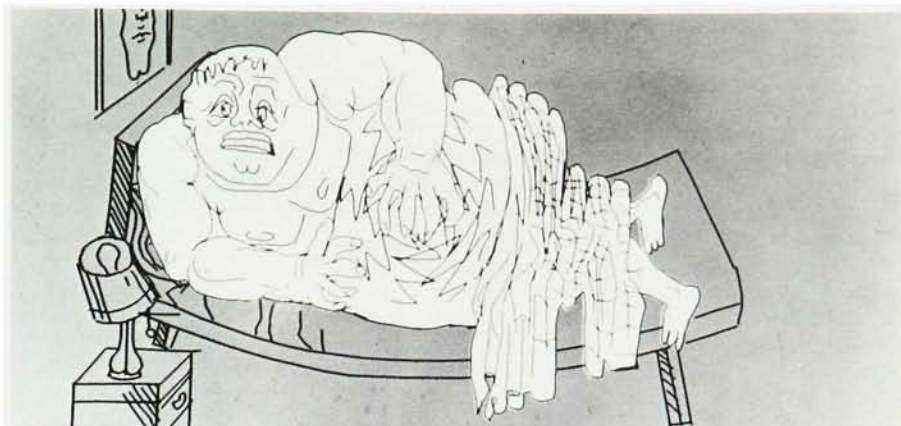
**ETERNAL LOVE**, USA, 1929. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. 85 min. b/w.

Matty Kemp, executive of Mary Pickford Co. explains in the program notes why and how some of these rare old films have been saved and made available. Scarcely seen and almost lost, this series of early films is a very special extra of the Festival that I much appreciate.

Aside however from Lubitsch's gorgeously back-lit hair on his heroines, and the shock of Barrymore's hammy acting, the film is an interesting example of the view taken of women and the use of them (us!) in film at that time.



David Levine Copyright © 1988 NYREV



Scene from "Hunger"

**I.F. STONE'S WEEKLY, USA, 1974.** Dir. Jerry Bruck Jr. 62 min.

Excited about **I.F. Stone's Weekly**. Wanted to shout Bravo but didn't. Should have. Think of all those concerts where if the musicians even get all the notes right the audience choruses bravos in every accent. Why are film audiences so silent? But at least long loud clapping must have shown Montreal's Jerry Bruck how we felt.

Documentary kept brief, beautifully built, backgrounded, over-voiced and detailed. Follows Izzy Stone over about 3 years. The time spent may have frustrated Bruck then, but it adds layers of believability and authenticity.

Watching Izzy Stone speed-read a newspaper like a rapid rat sniffing for tid-bits is an unforgettable sight. And after all the journalistic documentation, cross-cutting to video of politicians, generals and so on (how did he ever get that Ingersoll interview?) Bruck dropped in newsreel shots of Vietnam like mind-bombs! Artful. Accurately timed. I burst into tears from his calculated impact and its devastating effect. Impressed by Bruck's careful manipulation of material.

Felt afterwards I really knew something of the fabulous Izzy Stone. I believed what I was shown and was impressed with what I believed.

Next morning at Eleveses Gerald had Leo Drapfield, the distributor who made **The Little Theatre of Jean Renoir** available (Phoenix, N.Y.) and Maurice Whiteman of International Telefilm in Toronto, as well as Jerry Bruck.

Bruck, barefoot, brash, boyish, enthusiastic and determined, soon took over the discussion. Sitting on the edge of the couch and smiling winningly at the audience he berated the system of distribution, the monopolies, etc. and well aware that criticism without alternate suggestions is just mouthwash, launched into a full and carefully planned approach to a method of distribution which would ignore the current organizations in control.

Someone behind me, noting his aggressive energy, whispered to their friend, "He must be an American."

But he isn't. Here's a bit of the notes I took while he talked;

Re **I.F. Stone**: Was a subscriber while in college to Stone's Weekly, much influenced by Stone's integrity and nerve.

Now 90 16mm, 10 35mm prints. Played 50 weeks in 8 US cities and is selling in Europe "very well" country by country.

Using commercial distribution he couldn't make money. **Stone** cost \$32,000 over 3 years (typically a documentary costs about \$1000 a minute so this is good for a 62 minute film). So far he has recovered this money plus costs, posters, prints, subtitles for Cannes etc. and started to make money with the film. He'll use profits for his next.

Bruck: "Whoever has the rights to the film makes the money."

Bruck's Way: Do It Yourself: First, establish the film critically in New York. Use a repertory theatre there and make

sure critics come, have pics etc. There's a limited theatrical circuit that can be booked independently, about 10. Play film there on percentage, advertising and promoting in each city. This has a multiplying effect on surroundings. Second: set up distribution service of your own. He has a telephone number and address where his stuff is stored and ready to go out. Third: be aware of the market: TV, countries like Finland, Sweden, Denmark, selling or leasing to schools, library systems. Eventually big pay-off here. Finally, remember: the time spent distributing your own film is no more than that usually spent fund-raising; it gives you good direct contact with audiences, rental lists, etc. and it gives you a clear sense of "how the world works."

Bravo, Bruck!

But **I.F. Stone's Weekly** and **Eternal Love** had not been all that was shown on Saturday. At 7 p.m. we'd also had a modestly interesting 3 minutes of animation from the Netherlands called **Butterfly — 1975**, and a Canadian 17 minute short, **Just Lather, That's All**, directed by John Sebert from an adaptation by John Overaker from a Spanish short story by Hernando Tellez. It was a nice vehicle for E.M. Margolese and George Touliatos, yet almost completely lacking in impact and relevance, despite its theme of the difficulty of killing. It worked like a one-act play, and film added no new dimension to it, I felt.

**THE LITTLE THEATRE OF JEAN RENOIR**, France, 1970, Dir. Jean Renoir. 100 min. Lovely color.



Jean Renoir

This was a sweet pleasure; a movie made for fun by a man who loves making movies. As it opens, 80 year old Renoir amiably, like a kindly foreign Hitchcock, explains as he stands beside his little stage, what he will show us.

Basically it's a poem of love and memory in three parts, with an 1890's song (sung in period style and dead seriousness by Jeanne Moreau) to commemorate his 1894 birth. The first

section is stagey and artificial, an extension of the sentiment of his personal favorite, *The Little Match Girl* (Anderson) to an old loving couple who go to sleep forever in the snow of a Christmas night. The second section, to alleviate the sweetness of the first, is a comic, witty and satirical tale of a lady who loved her shiny waxed floors (*The Electric Waxer*) too much, with her tragic fate highlighted by a subway chorus and soloists using good voices and operatic style to sing of her misdirected love. Opera Bouffe.

Having moved us gently from a stagey beginning, through a melodious interval, contemporary setting, Renoir completely captures us with his final offering: *Le Roi d'Yvetot* or *The Virtue of Tolerance*. As usual there is much more here than meets the eye. Renoir is truly a filmmaker who *benefits* his audience: a Master.



"Le Petit Theatre du Jean Renoir"

As, at the closing sequence, the camera lifts to the dappled sunny greens dancing in the skies, so does the audience feel a lift and a happiness, freed for sentiment and love.

On his 80th birthday, September 15, 1974, Renoir finished a piece for the New York Times with:

"For, after all, I have been happy. I have made films that I wanted to make. I have made them with people who were more than my collaborators; they were my accomplices. This, I believe, is one recipe for happiness: to work with people you love and who love you. The advantage of being 80 years old is that one has had many people to love."

But Saturday, Sept. 14 at the Stratford Film Festival wasn't over yet. At 9:30 p.m. *Scarecrow*, a 17 minute Irish film by John Sharrad about a poor farmer during the drought of 1931 who goes berserk, has interesting detail and potential, but is too drawn-out and shows signs of inexperience in handling its melodramatic ending. Perhaps it's a first work. Nice visual effects.

**THE ADVENTURES OF BARRY McKENZIE**, Australia, 1972. Dir. Bruce Beresford. 114 min. Garish color.

My notes say: Last show Sat. A piece of shit. I tried but couldn't make myself laugh. Kate would call this "gross."

She'd be right.

Barry Humphries is co-author of a comic strip, which he's turned into a screenplay, and then performed in drag in an exuberance of undergraduate humor. Actually Barry Crocker as the big Aussie visiting England, is like an oversized Dick Van Dyke, without the subtlety.

The dialect was difficult to understand, but the jokes, limited in subject as they were, had the obvious wallop of a kangaroo's tail, with the equivalent pleasure. I'm sure parts of this were really funny, but considering it as a whole I'm afraid my brain flushed it out, appropriately enough. I'm just too grown-up for this kind of stuff; too much of a woman to really want to scream over male inadequacy, transvestism, etc. and too much of a female to find that Male Chauvinist Pig attitude to women funny.

If you think I'm a snob because I don't like hearty fart, burb and bang humor: So be it. Coming after the Renoir just finished this film for me. But not the audience. There was lots of laughter.

**IRAN** a picture album of contemporary antique and modern aspects of the country, made for RAI TV by Claude Lelouche, effectively introduced the Sunday 3:30 feature.

**THE MONGOLS**, Iran, 1973. Dir. Parviz Kimiavi, 92 min. Colour and b/w intercut.

Where else but at a film festival would you see an experimental film from the new Iranian cinema? A fascinating unsuccessful film in which writer-director Kimiavi tries to analyze something of the nature of film, of falsity, of the creation of characters or beings (the Mongols in this case) out of research and history, of the surreality of their temporary existence, of the director's personal problems, life, fascination with film and so on. More too. I barely touch the boggling possibilities roused by Kimiavi. Yet his answers are unresolved, his pace achingly slow, his use of repetition, familiar in Iranian music and art, an agony to the abrupt western mind.

He seems to be trying to work out a new direction; to place creation and process in perspective. But this muddled eastern 8 1/2 with its bow to Godard & Truffaut doesn't finally reveal the director, the Mongols, or why all this money and time should have been spent.

⊖⊕, called H - A in the program for the hydrogen atom is described as a 7 minute experimental film by Julius Kohányi which deals with circles containing designs and splashed of color that can best be described as an updated McLaren under the influence of Gershon Iskowitz, backed by electronic music. The designs move in and out, supplant each other, turn and spin. John Wyre was the composer. I felt like this at the end: ⊖⊕

A one minute Dutch animation lesson in over-indulgence, **Your Heart is Your Health** followed. Like to see it run on TV between beer and cig. ads.

**THE BIRCH WOOD** Poland, 1970. Dir. Andrzej Wajda. 98 min. Controlled color.

Polish TV presents . . . and the sound of a rich mellow violin; the sight of a slow cart carrying a white-faced most melancholy youth; a scheme of browns, greys, sad blues and rich gloomy colors as the music swoops from major to minor chords, and we're obviously in for a highly romantic "Gothic" tale of death, mystery and love:

Wajda, best remembered by a generation of film students as the director of *Ashes and Diamonds*, *Kanal*, etc. here uses film to adapt a romantic short story. Many close-ups, some rather obvious imagery and repeated visual clues become more acceptable when imagining seeing this on TV.

It was a beautiful old tale, luxurious with symbolism, beautifully told. Flashed Isaak Dineson's *Winter Tales*. I don't eat dessert often, but when I do, I like something rich and extravagant. That's the way I like a film like this: just once in a while. Can't be excited or inspired all the time - relaxing and sighing is good for you too. And pleasurable.



Scene from Wajda's "The Birch Wood"

**RICHARD III** Britain, 1955. Dir. Laurence Olivier. 160 min. Fairly crude color.

Was curious to see if my early memories of the marvels of this film would hold true. So was Dilys Powell, Amelia Hall. For them it did; for me it didn't. I was unmoved. It seemed ponderous, awkward and creaky. Unmotivated scenes and untold plots weaken it, masses of characters dilute the effect of the words and in the end it seemed nothing more than Olivier's interesting and subtle performance in front of some rather tatty sets.

Olivier makes this interpretation of King John so witty and devilish the audience was kept laughing until it was time for them to stop. He was certainly in control, but still the play looked bad, and as a film it's just a good record.

**Monday, September 16, A day with the Canadian Filmmakers.** Elevenes: Gerald Pratley introduced the group: Julius Kohányi, Robin Spry, Lee Gordon (Westminster Films), François Jaubert (NFB) and Bob Barclay, while a CBC crew got ready to film them talking to us. A big fellow with beard and pipe, looking like Denholm Elliot in **Duddy Kravitz**, (Norm Allin?) snapped his fingers as he strode about, and lights were poked up their stalks and bloomed into glare.

Jaubert defended festivals. People discussed Selection Committees and the deeds thereof. Barclay defended Jerry Bruck after a comment from Pratley that caused a chorus of 'ohs!' followed by a general laugh as Gerald hastily explained that he hadn't meant it *that* way. Spry talked about shooting footage for **Action** during the October crisis, and putting the material aside, later to resurrect it for a film that would explain what his film **Reaction** was about people reacting to.

About the NFB he said: It's a funny place. You get interference before you start and after you're finished, but if you get going at all, you're free in between."

By 12 noon all the lights are out and folded up and screwed down, and while I listen to the same old song about Canadian distribution and Canadian persona, the crew coils cords, packs equipment, and silently steals away.

The afternoon is spent in the hot and happy sunshine with everyone picnicing on the island. My friend husband comes from Toronto and is with me. He sees Spry's **Action** but has to leave before **Dreamland** is shown. What a pity, for it is a film he'd much admire and appreciate.

**DREAMLAND**, Canada, 1974. Dir. Donald Brittain. 86 min.

This documentary of early Canadian film history deserves solid raves. It opens on the Dreamland Theatre in Edmonton, Alberta, 1896 and closes with the establishment of the NFB in 1939. I started to write as fast as I could so I might remember everything I saw, but there was too much. Suffice it to say then that it is a comprehensive, informative and delightful documentary, in a witty, bemused style, narrated by Brittain himself with a respectful, affectionate, yet light touch.

It ought to be on every university and community college film course in the country, in every library collection, and freely available everywhere.

Congratulations to Peter Morris (and Barbara Sears) of the CFI for their marvellous research, to John Kramer for brisk editing, to Charles Hoffman for delightful background music for the "silents" and to producer Kirwan Cox for a fine essential film.

It is distributed by the National Film Board and the Canadian Film Institute.

Monday evening of the Canadian Filmmakers' Day two new Canadian films were shown: **Bingo** and **Action**. Since this piece on the Stratford Festival is composed of as many styles as I had moods, let me now divert from the film-by-film approach, and offer a few thoughts on politics in these films.

**ACTION: THE OCTOBER CRISIS OF 1970**, Can. 1974. Dir. Robin Spry, 87 min. b/w.

**BINGO**, Can. 1974. Dir. Jean-Claude Lord, 116 min. Color.

Seeing Lord's **Bingo** and Malle's **Lacombe Lucien** within this week, forces a comparison, as both are melodramas drawing heavily on audience preconceptions to bolster their effect. Both also focus on young men, showing how they are drawn

almost inadvertently into a political atmosphere that finally involves them more deeply than they imagined, or eventually want.

Lucien appears superficially to be a more detailed character, but in fact it is Rejean Guenette as François in *Bingo* who reacts most to events that occur and therefore takes on more depth during the course of the film.

Lord has a decided point of view, Malle's is ambiguous I feel. Lord says that revolt against big business and "foreign" capitalists is due and that a student may wander into a revolutionary movement without really knowing much about what's going on, and if he doesn't watch out he will be used by the pros in the business. It's a fable with a moral: Look and Learn before you Leap.

Malle on the other hand is working in past tense. His film neither really explains the past nor prepares the audience with help for making a future decision about collaboration, should they have to. After a few drinks his slightly psychotic dunderhead reveals the name of an underground leader who rejected him, and thus finds himself aligned with the collaborators. The consequences barely touch him, and are accordingly barely touched in the film. His unmotivated and opportunistic approach is mirrored in the film itself. Is Malle deliberately or intuitively or accidentally doing this?

Lord is deliberate. He manipulates the audience into either catching on to the manipulation of the boy, or, if they are too unobservant to see it, letting them get caught in the same trap as the boy.

Some find the parents in *Bingo* ridiculed and youth idealized. The boy seems to me a typical bored student ready to enter the larger world and beginning by way of his camera, photographing his Dad's co-workers' strike. He is romanticized: that's the usual way to capture audience empathy. And in the end he and his equally idealized and innocent (politically speaking) girlfriend are destroyed. Lord doesn't want anyone to miss the point. It's deliberately aimed to encourage young revolutionaries to be careful. *Bingo* is all about trying to win.

It's a deliberate and perhaps effective (because popular) political film, that Lord actually wrote back in 1967-68.

But perhaps my sympathies for the Québécois were reinforced by viewing Robin Spry's *Action* earlier in the evening.

Certainly *Action* is more than a stunning documentary of the October crisis of 1970. It worries me more than any *L.L.* or *Bingo* could because a documentary, by its nature as direct cinema, deals, or seems to deal, in facts – and therefore works effectively as propaganda at once and later, if it is good enough to last, as history.

Unless someone else makes an equally capable film of that particular situation, in ten years *Action* will represent the most obvious view of the time.

And what view does it show? Well, it vacillates, seemingly showing a rounded view, but, as any journalist knows, though you give equal time to several viewpoints, it is where and how you place them that nullifies or increases their effect.

I found *Action*, like *Bingo*, pro-reform, anti-establishment, but desiring an unbloody revolution. How can I condemn that when I really agree?

Spry's early narration deals in statements that may or may not be absolutely factual – no documentation is offered. This sets the background feeling of injustice to Quebec on what appears to be a solid foundation.

Visuals are mated to voice-over, narration and commentary in such a fashion that certain conclusions become unavoidable. Newsreel voices speak of huge threatening crowds for instance, yet none are seen. This has the effect of negating the reports. And, according to Spry, it was deliberate.

In order to accomplish his subliminal plea for reasonable and non-violent solutions, Spry also adds two weighted interviews. He intercuts T.C. Douglas and his explanation of the misuse of Government powers almost too frequently, and he includes a lengthy filmed argument between Trudeau and journalists of which the public never saw more than the last 30

seconds after the CBC cut it. (We heard the bleeding hearts – Watch Me bit, not the attempted reasoning.)

There was some mocking and disdainful laughter. Later I found as many people were laughing at the journalists as at Trudeau. Interesting. I wish the fact that this TV film was cut had been somehow revealed in Spry's documentary. Izzy Stone would certainly have told us!

Selective editing can do just about anything with newsreel footage. No wonder governments like to control it. Before this week is out I'll see some more attempts at manipulating history: *The French 1789*, a dramatization of the events leading to the storming of the Bastille; and *The Days of Betrayal*, a Czech reconstruction of the political compromises in Europe previous to the Second World War.

I now feel that my stated desire two years ago for more



From "*Action*" – Pierre Laporte's funeral

political film, which was somewhat mollified last year with Réjeanne Padovani and *Sense of Loss*, has been quite well satisfied. Now, if anyone cares, I'd like more film that expresses the true needs, ambitions, and situations of the other half of the world – the Better Half, as men used to say. □

# INTERMISSION

TO BE CONTINUED

Next issue – Natalie tackles the last two dozen films in the 10th International Stratford Film Festival, Part II.

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