

## Hurray from L.A.

On a recent visit to Telefilm in Beverly Hills, I picked up an issue of yours (Jan. '85).

Do you realize how wonderfully written your magazine is?

In this particular issue, special note to Lois Siegel who wrote so well about the Grierson Seminar, and to Andrew Dowler who did the review on *The Surrogate*.

Now that I've mentioned those two names, I feel terrible about not mentioning all the others. You employ some of the finest writers I've come across in this genre.

My reason for being at Telefilm was to pick up a tape copy of producer Harry Gulkin's newest film, shot in Newfoundland. When y'all get around to it, I think you'll enjoy it, as I did.

Continued good writing to all of you.

**Dick Romaine,**  
Dick Romaine Agency,  
Los Angeles

## Critical quandary

I would like to congratulate Cinema Canada for the extraordinary coverage you extended (No. 112) to the Canadian retrospective, "Northern Lights", at last year's Festival of Festivals. Your writers - Gail Henley, Joyce Nelson, Dot Tuer, Michael Dorland and Andrew Dowler - did an excellent job of capturing the tone and content of the event. In fact it was overwhelming to read some of the praise. We felt we were participating in a piece of history by mounting the event and it made it all the more worthwhile to see the excited reaction.

At the same time I would also like to comment on Maurice Yacowar's review in the same issue of *Take Two*, one of the books the Festival published to coincide with the Canadian retrospective.

*Take Two*, like its predecessor, *Canadian Film Reader*, was conceived as an anthology, yet he criticizes the book for consisting mainly of reprints. Is this not what an anthology is? It is designed to bring disparate and often hard to find articles together in one place and assure their continued use. Certainly this is what *Canadian Film Reader* was.

The inclusion of articles by Jay Scott, Marshall Delaney and Martin Knelman, which Yacowar felt didn't belong in a collection of this kind, was an attempt to reflect the full range of writing on Canadian film, and to open the market for this book beyond a small academic community to people who read these critics regularly. If these same people happen to dip into a piece written by Jim Leach, Kay Armatage or David Clandfield, so much the better.

The editor, Seth Feldman, was very sensitive to the fact that the *Canadian Film Reader* did not include any writing on Lefebvre or Cronenberg, who he considered to be Canada's two most important directors. This explains why there are two articles in *Take Two* on each of them. We asked Peter Harcourt to update his Lefebvre piece but unfortunately other commitments intervened. The only serious writing on Cronenberg

was done for *The Shape of Rage*. The solution was not an ideal one in both cases but much as we would have liked we can't invent new articles.

The suggestion that because there are only three new pieces in *Take Two* (I count five) means that our film study is not vital but is running on the spot is ridiculous. After all this is an anthology. *The Screen Reader*, or Bill Nichols' *Movies and Methods* are no less valuable because they reproduce previously published articles. No doubt a *Cinema Canada Reader* would provide a similar function.

We would like to have escaped from the "Toronto-Ottawa hub" and reprinted material from critics across the country, but where is the critical writing in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland? Would "new overviews of Larry Kent, Labrecque, Beaudin, Mankiewicz, Arcand, the aesthetics of the new mini-series, the Plouffe mythology, the regional independents... Micheline Lancot's *Sonatine*" have been written by critics in these provinces? I think not.

Yacowar also raises a question of form, noting that one-third of the articles come from "editor Feldman and his two co-conspirators, the dynamic duo of Handling and Harcourt." This suggests that the people involved in publishing the book were self-serving. Other writers, Jim Leach, Bruce Elder, David Clandfield were equally represented in the book. Furthermore Handling and Harcourt have written extensively on Canadian cinema for years. Quality, not attempts at self-promotions, was the paramount criterion of inclusion.

Bruce Elder's article on *Not a Love Story* was included because it is one of the few pieces to critically examine in detail a single Canadian film. It is the only perspective on an important film but I don't think that there is any obligation in an anthology to present a balanced share of opinions. Many people who work in this industry would violently disagree with Gathercole's article but Yacowar doesn't feel a need to balance her opinions. Why? Perhaps because he agrees with Gathercole and not with Elder. Elder's piece wasn't included because it was negative, it was included as an example of what critical writing can be in this country. Let somebody answer Elder with the seriousness and insight that he applies to this film and I'm sure such an article will endure in future anthologies.

But what I find most disturbing is that Maurice Yacowar reviewed *Take Two* in another magazine, *Canadian Author and Bookman*, a piece that is quite different in tone and content from his Cinema Canada review. It begins, "This book provides a valuable survey of the types of film writing done in Canada," and concludes, "The collection demonstrates how serious writing on film can be and how important the art is to the nation's cultural identity. As the various pieces tease us out of thought they justify calling this anthology of separate pieces a 'tribute' to Canadian film." What kind of double standards are being applied here?

Every critic is free to express his opinions. Yacowar makes some valid points but the overall negativity that he brings to this review is unfortunate and not all that constructive. Questions like, "This book done, where is the outlet for new writing?" are patently absurd. This is what Cinema Canada and the other journals from which we have excerpted are there for. Reviews like Yacowar's

damage chances of doing precisely what he wants to see done. What he seems to want from *Take Two* is another, completely different book. Do we criticize Bergman because he doesn't make Godard films, or Cronenberg because he doesn't make Lefebvre films? Let all these other books flourish, let different kinds of films be made, but please review what is there.

I also find it unfortunate that you haven't yet reviewed the other book published by the Festival and Irwin Publishing, Peter Morris' *Film Companion*, a most important book by any standard, but perhaps you have plans for this in the near future. Maurice Yacowar, in the same issue of *Canadian Author and Bookman*, called it "the best reference book we have on the understudied subject of Canadian film. No writer on Canadian films, and few on Canadian culture, should be without it... This book is so wide-ranging, detailed and good...."

Perhaps his enthusiasm for this book could find its way into the pages of your magazine.

**S. Wayne Clarkson,**  
Director,  
Festival of Festivals,  
Toronto

Maurice Yacowar replies:

*Despite Clarkson's gallant defence, I remain disappointed that Take Two did not live up to the opportunities the occasion of the 1984 Festival provided. Let me pick up four other small points:*

*(1) There are Canadian film writers and scholars (some even are both) outside Ontario. (2) I explicitly stated that I was not charging the editors with self-interest. (3) In my view, Bruce Elder's piece on Not A Love Story should have been excluded, not because it's negative (after all, a negative piece on a film should be as respectable as a negative book review), but - in Clarkson's words, "as an example of what critical writing can be in this country" - but isn't. For his "seriousness and insight" I would say "trivializing and hallucination." (4) Finally, on my horrid "double standards", for Cinema Canada I assumed a specialized readership, experienced, knowledgeable and interested in Canadian film; for Canadian Author and Bookman I was advised to assume a general readership without such experience; therefore, with different needs and expectations. I thought it necessary to acknowledge the different readerships and the consequent difference in the book's uses. I shouldn't have to apologize for trying to be fair both to the book and to its different constituencies. But what the hell, Wayne Clarkson is a terrific guy and he puts on a great Festival so: okay, I'll try not to do that again.*

(Yacowar's review of Peter Morris's *The Film Companion* will appear in the next issue of Cinema Canada - ed.)

## Business unappreciated

I suspect that Michael Bergman's article "So Where's the Business in Canadian Film Business?" (March 1985), was written in order to solicit a response from the producer community. (i.e., refuting the various assertions in the article). The fact that there are a number of 'on-going' Canadian production companies

producing motion-pictures is response enough. Being part of one of those organizations, I am offended by some of the author's comments. For a company to exist in the film production business on an on-going basis, there must be a balance of both creative and business elements. In the recent past, the business elements have brought about the CCA, co-production deals, and Telefilm Canada which has helped to develop film production as a growth industry.

Mr. Bergman makes no account for the work involved in motion-picture production, nor for what has been accomplished in the past, nor for the strides of those producers attempting to create a more mature industry. It is fine to conclude that "(the) final answer to making money in film is dependent on business and business practices", but how can one present such a solution when there is no apparent appreciation of the business?

**S. Howard Rosen, M.B.A.**  
Business Affairs,  
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Toronto

Michael Bergman replies:

*My article was both a comment and a call for greater participation of Canadian businessmen in film. There are many important achievements in the Canadian film industry, but I cannot accept that continuing and long-term dependence on government funds is one of them. While government has an important role to play, it is only because of the industry's apparent fragility. Only when solid roots are put down into the private investment community will a truly strong, independent film industry exist. The need, although perhaps momentarily necessary, of significant government investment or advances, such as the up to 49% through the Broadcast Fund, made to even established production companies should sound warning bells to any businessman. If significant government money is needed today, it is because many producers alienated private investors during the tax-shelter heyday. Sure, there are other issues, but private investment must rank as a priority amongst them. Mr. Rosen speak of business in the sense of manufacturing a product. I speak of business as the quest for financing and financial management through private investment and in the spirit of free-enterprise methods. The general negative attitude of Canadian business to the film industry speaks for itself of the imperative and immediate need to address this vital problem.*

