God Returns to Cannes

Born Again

by Marc Gertler

Hayley Newton's journey to Cannes should have been a celebration. Instead, it was a nightmare.

As a young actress, Hayley had hoped to make a name for herself at the Cannes Film Festival. But when her chance finally arrived, she found herself drawn into a web of deceit and danger.

It all started with the death of her famous father, who had been a prominent Pieces, and the festival was the perfect place for her to make a comeback. But as she walked the red carpet, she realized that something was amiss.

People were speaking in hushed tones, and Hayley couldn't help but feel that she was being watched. It wasn't until she stumbled upon a group of shady characters that she realized the full extent of the threat she was in.

They were after her father's secrets, and Hayley was the only one who knew where they were hidden. She had to find a way to protect herself and the people she loved.

With the help of a mysterious stranger, Hayley sets out on a dangerous mission to uncover the truth. But as the stakes get higher, she realizes that she might not survive.

In the end, Hayley must make a choice between her own safety and the justice she believes in. Will she risk everything to protect the innocent, or will she be silenced forever?

The truth is out there, but it's up to you to find it.
daze, yet going through the rituals beau­
tifully day after day. Interviewed after in­
terview, deal after deal. It was, to put it
blandly, a delight to watch these young
Canadians, far from the more mundane
realities of their home bases in Toronto
and Montreal, living out the dream — and contributing enormously to a
positive, dynamic, bouncy Canadian
image.

For it was the whole Canadian film in­
dustry that was benefiting. As Jean
Le­
febvre, head of the Festivals section for
Telefilm Canada (which did its habitual
superb job at Cannes) put it, the popula­
rity of Zoo and of Mermaids had a cata­
lytic effect on the sale of other Canadian
products. If, for the first time, interna­
tional distributors, exhibitors, buyers were
actually lining up to purchase the rights to
these two films, awareness of other Cana­
dian movies, and the concomi­tant will­ingness to risk, was growing by leaps and bounds (in Australian
fashion, so to speak).

As a result, by all reports, other Cana­
dian films were doing very well. Rock
Demers, one of the major architects of
Canada’s new success, a success based on
experience and professionalism, was report­ing twice the amount of sales he had
hoped for. The Haunting of Ham­
ilton High, too, was reportedly doing
very well. (Life has its little ironies —
Bruce Pittman, High’s affable director,
habitual caretaker of the psychology —
elegant Petit Carlton, this year remained
working on a new project in Toronto,
victim to the new work ethic in Cana­
dian film.)

This positive Canadian situation, how­
ever, was not created solely by Zoo and
Mermaids. Both of the films contributed,
but they are not the great Canadian
masterpiece, neither one of them. Zoo
smacks a wee bit of the Jean-Jacques-Be­
nain school of invention, an aesthetic trip into film noir,
while Mermaids: A Life in the Daylight
is mind and heart and knowhow. More
cheaper than its U.S. counterpart, Canada’s new success, a success based
on a policy of nurturing a culturally
interdependent, as they do, mutatis
mutandis, in, say, Britain, Italy, Germany.

Canada is seen as a beehive of activity
and projects. Not only Bethune, for
example, but a brand new Canada/Cana­
d/France co-production, Le Pala­
quin des Lannes, had its publicist in
Cannes to announce that it was moving
ahead; so, too, Antonioni’s next film will
be shot in Toronto, Vancouver (and
Rome’s Cinecitta’); and Canada has
joined Italy, France, and the U.S. in filming
The Jeweller’s Shop, from a play by Po­
land’s Karoly Wojtyla, also known as
Pope John Paul II.

So the activity is seen as intense and
widespread. And most encouraging, there is a perception that even though
Hollywood North will always be part of
the Canadian film and TV production,
the worst excesses in terms of incompetence, ripoffs, and cultural abdi­
cation are a story of the past, and that
indeed genuinely Canadian programming and films are now not only a possi­
bility: no leaps and bounds now, but
a growing fact of life.

It might be noted in passing here that
Telefilm Canada’s temptation to go
offshore, horror, for which he does esca­
tecake before ahesion to the story of
the loving relation­ship between a son and his father.

Mermaids, on the other hand, is totally
small, totally endearing, witty, charming, achieving exactly what it wants to achieve
within the confines of a very small budget — and proving that all you need
is mind and heart and knowhow. More
importantly, perhaps, its pontilled be­
rine, wondrously incarnated by Sheila
McCarthy, may forever banish the cliché
of the sad, introspective Canadian lover.
In this, the Year of McCarthy in Canadian
film and theatre (Sheila is also starring in
Cabaret at Stratford, Ontario), Canada
is looking more and more like a place
where people are alive, where they actu­
ally can laugh and have fun, where it isn’t all socially prescribed cold and psychology — even though, golly (and admittedly) life north of the U.S. can still be pretty rough.

So the Canadians, revitalized in image,
showed signs of new life in real life as
well. One of the great things about the
Cannes Film Festival is that it furnishes the big
ternational context from which to judge
the Canadian film scene. And the sim­ple fact is that the Canadian situation is now seen in positive terms; as well, the
future is judged as promising. There were
over 100 Canadian films available for
viewing, perhaps 20 of them released since last year’s Festival, and about 15 of
them brand new. I am in no position to
report on them, not having seen many,
not having time, and so on; moreover, sa­
fies figures, always tricky to pin down,
are simply not available at time of writing.
Vitality and optimism, however, were
the Canadian trademark this year, and
non-Canadians everywhere were talking
Canadian film. 1986’s success at MIP (the
TV Festival in Cannes in April) had
already been repeated this year, with
over $5 million in sales and $20 million in
co-production accords. And now Cana­
dian film was doing the same. 1986’s
success with Le Déclin. Loyalties, etc.,
was being repeated by Zoo and Mer­
maids.

And so indeed the image has changed,
two years in a row has done it. Peo­
ple seem to understand the Canadian
situation. The vast sums (in excess of
$100 million) being invested by Tele­
film Canada and various provincial bod­
ies is seen as a truly successful venture,
the cornerstone for Canadian film and TV
production which is attracting substi­
tutional sums and responsible, knowledge­
able activity from the private sector. As
long as this situation lasts, and as long as
the Canadian dollar remains so much
cheaper than its U.S. counterpart, Cana­
dia, given its pool of talent, expertise, es­
tablished cadres, and now relatively ra­
tionalized procedures, will continue to
be immensely attractive as a filmmaking
place.

Cannes knows that major Canadian
production entities exist, with solid,
long-range plans; that distribution and
international selling is becoming more
Canadian, with more investment in pro­
duction from these Canadian entities,
that co-production and co-financing ar­
rangements with the U.S. and European
or Asian partners are now far more fea­
bly and equitable; that Canada has in­
ded worked out a system in which fea­
ture film and TV are working together,
interdependent, as they do, mutatis
mutandis, in, say, Britain, Italy, Germany.

The New Australians

What is especially intriguing in all of this
— and here one confesses to indulging a
whit in wishful thinking and sheer speculation — is the shifting
emphasis. Canadians have been
looking ahead and the possibilities opening
up. Could it be that Canadian film will
become a viable alternative to Ameri­
can-style, American-recipe product in the
future? Has it not? Few Canadian films,
little publicity, no fêtes — (Mel Gibson
slipped in and out of Cannes unnoticed)
— what has happened to the Australian
film presence? I did see a splendid Aussie
film, Travelling North, starring Leo
McKern and Julia Blake, about an aging
couple. Phillip Noyce’s Shadow of the
Peacock, with the usual excellent per­
fomance by Wendy Hughes, was also a
fine flick — exotic, breathing the quality
one has grown to expect in Australian
product. But the few other Aussie fea­
tures slipped by without furor.

It seems that we have come home in
Canberra or Sydney or wherever has made a regrettable decision, based on
lack of knowledge of the raison d’être of
film festivals, which has given the im­
pression that even though there is going
to be a slight loss (temporary?) of creative drive. Su­
Surely the latter is not the case? One thing
sure, however: in the absence of any
sign of vitality, the Australian presence
products, has become I have experienced
in Cannes in a decade. I fail to see how
either Australia, or Cannes and the inter­
national scene, for that matter, have
been well served by the change.

If Australian film has missed the role of
Great Alternative to Hollywood, then
British may well assume that mantle, gi­
ging every sign of an ongoing filmic re­
surgence. British bounce was due not
only to the efficient British Pavilion, the
brick-edged, winking, saucy, beautiful­
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fluenec on the international film scene as well. Channel Four had no less than 18 films at Cannes. The recent ones to watch for: Peter Greenaway’s The Belly of an Architect, Steven Fears’ Prick Up Your Ears (both in the official competition). David Leland’s Wish You Were Here, and Alan Clarke’s Rita Sue and Bob Too (both in the Quinzaine).

The Festival, in commemorating its Fortieth Anniversary, chose to create the Prix Rossellini, in honour of that great force in the history of film, precisely to reward “outstanding contribution to progress in film.” No wonder that the first recipient became Britain’s independent cultural network, Channel Four.

Canada cannot yet compete with this level of performance. But who knows, in the next few years, given the present rates of progression, the Aussies may have to make way, and even the Brits may be saying “Well done, Canada!”

Meanwhile, in late May, in Annecy’s Animation Film Festival, Canada and Norman McLaren were being honoured for our prodigious contribution to this category of film creativity.

* * *

### National Cinemas

Cannes, however, is much more than any single country or group of countries. As always, the Festival offers an incomparable opportunity to see films from any number of places, films that are part of one or other of the official offerings of the Festival, or on their own, as it were, on the market. Especially if one is operating within a network of friendly acquaintances furnishing inside info gathered from many countries over the years. Cannes can be the source of many filmic delights. Produced from those privileged conditions, then, are the following hits and pieces, gleaned from (sometimes) judicious viewings.

Scandinavia was well represented this year with many films richly deserving international distribution. These relatively small countries continue to serve as splendid examples of states that refuse to impoverish their culture, insisting on financing quality films which in most instances cannot hope to recoup their costs, but which are considered essential to the maintenance of national culture.

Finland’s Shadows in Paradise is a dry, sly, demystified love story, with a lot to say about Finnish society, directed by an outrageous iconoclast, Aki Kaurismäki.

Sweden had at least three impressive films at Cannes: Stefan Jarl’s Threat delves deep into the tragedy of Swedish Lapland and the threat, after Chernobyl, of the extinction of the reindeer, and of a whole culture dependent on these animals. Bo Widerberg returns to his early form with The Serpent’s Way, a beautiful, harsh, modernistic tale of social injustice in nineteenth-century Sweden. Gunnel Lindblom continues to assert herself as one of Sweden’s leading directors in theatre and film. Also a major actress (she will soon take over the role of Gertrude in Ingmar Bergman’s production of Hamlet at Stockholm’s Royal Dramatic Theatre), Madame Lindblom’s Summer Nights is a graceful film that — with intelligence and loneliness communicatess a tragic sense of life’s passages and problems — and love. It’s the kind of study of human relationships that Sweden do so well.

The Norwegian husband-and-wife team of Vibeke Løkkeberg and Terje Kristiansen (she writes, directs and stars, he produces and does the cinematography) present a stunningly picturesque, tortured Hud (The Wild One), a story of incest, at once angry, sympathetic, horrific.

Denmark offered a most unusual delight, Gabriel Axel’s rendition of Isak Dinesen’s Babette’s Feast, featuring Ste­ phane Audran and the by-now elderly actors of Carl Dreyer’s three last films (Days of Wrath, Onset, Gertrud). Slow but mesmerizing, this tale of a repressed religious group is built on a rather special premise — God’s grace works through French haute cuisine. Feast is a sly Dreyeristic parable, affectionate, and ultimately, immensely moving.

The Eastern European countries share Scandinavia’s concern for and dedication to film qua national culture. Yugoslavia, for example, furnished an excellent, moving case study of a little known, yet horrible, phenomenon: 20,000 Gypsy children from Yugoslavia living in slavery, scattered over Europe. The great Andrzej Wajda, directing once again in Poland, returns to his early romantic, baroque style in Chronicle of Love Affairs, a minor work about desperate romantic youth in Poland on the eve of World War II. Minor Wajda is still mighty fine cinema. Marta Meszaros heads a very strong Hungarian output with her splendid Diary For My Loves, the second part of her autobiography told in film, this segment centering on how she became a filmmaker. Through this superb movie, one of the finest shown in Cannes, Madame Meszaros is retelling the recent history of Hungary with insight, courage, and amazing freedom. And she strengthens her position as possibly the world’s finest woman film director.

The United States had numerous films featured in every facet of the festival. Radio Days, Woody Allen in a minor key, but still probably the best U.S. film in Cannes, was complemented by Paul Newman’s sincere tribute to Tennessee Williams and to his wife Joanna Woodward’s acting performance in a very straight rendition, really a recording, of The Glass Menagerie. The Soviet’s Andrei Konchalovsky continues his American films for Cannon with a stunningly photographed, but rather ludicrous, swamp movie, Shy People, almost redeemed by Barbara Hershey’s acting. At the other end of the scale, the Petrie sisters, Ann and Jeanette, received encouraging response to their generous, committed documentary, Mother Teresa.

Probably the most fascinating and moving U.S. experience, however, was directed by Britain’s Lindsay Anderson, and starred film elders Lillian Gish, Bette Davis, and Vincent Price. A lovely film about old age and dying, set in Maine. The Whales of August rests solidly on the magnificent Miss Gish. Scoffing at the report that she is 91, Lillian pointed out that she is in fact, only 87. The only reason she seems to have been around so long is because she was only 12 years old when D. W. Griffith first directed her 75 years ago — a living, gracious, marvelous history of Hollywood right there.

France, the host country, continued its recent pattern of failing to impress. Jean-Paul Denis did present a charming, gentle, ironic historical tale, Field of Honour. Jean-Luc Godard, Shakespeare, the Cannon boys, and Norman Mailer (sort of, for a while) got together for a Godardian exercise in film language dialectics, with rather predictable results. King Lear it was said to be, but of course Shakespeare would share with 99% of the audience in sheer befuddlement as to what on earth is going on — a few of the
remaining 1% would no doubt express intellectual delight. Godard's other contribution, a short segment from a kind of compilation opera video (Aria) proved a far more intriguing experience. And finally, of course, Maurice Pialat did win the grand prix for his Sous le soleil de Satan, a decision that elicited almost universal outrage (as we shall see below).

So who dominated Cannes '87— I think I would rate the British as No. 1, were it not for the by-now-often-proclaimed revelation of the festival that this article relentlessly is headed into. Ettore Scola's The Family is one of that strong director's finest efforts, rich and funny, human and sad, with a memorable, modulated performance by a giant of film history, Vittorio Gassman. Marcello Mastroianni, on the other hand, is simply magnificent in an brilliant Italian co-production, Dark Eyes, but that film is from the Soviet Union. The Taviani brothers, Paolo and Vittorio, give us a delightful vignette of early Hollywood, D.W. Griffith and all, in Good Morning Babylon, their own loving tribute to filmmaking, a tragic-comic fairy tale, operatic, slightly schizoid, romantic, shot through with modern film techniques — in other words, a Taviani film, and deserving of a far better reception than that afforded at Cannes.

Then there was Fellini, in his best film in years (and years). Federico Fellini Interview with Fellini himself should be a minor film, one of those rambling, self-indulgent, whatever-strikes-Fellini's-fancy things. But it is so right, so effortlessly flowing, so wise perceptive, funny and sad that everyone fell in love with it — a wonderful film experience, well deserving the special 40-year-anniversary award especially created for it. Starring Fellini and himself, with a few great moments from his alter ego, Marcello Mastroianni.

A Search for Meaning —
(Give Me Religion or Give Me Death)

Even though one is aware that one's viewing is partial, that no batch of films at a single festival can pretend to stand for an entire world's film production, still, Cannes, by its very immensity, and by the fact that it tends to have first choice in presenting the quality films from each country, does enable the critic to spot trends, developments, an evolution in this or that direction. And so, can anything be concluded from this year's offering?

Last year, Cinema Canada titled my Cannes report "God Goes to Cannes" — possibly very flattering, but probably it was because of the unusual presence of overtly religious films, and the amazing prize-winning performances of three of them — The Sacrifice, The Mission and Thérèse. Well, the trend seems to be continuing.

The top award this year, as mentioned, went to Maurice Pialat's Sous le soleil de Satan (Under Satan's Sun), a film rendition of Georges Bernanos' religious novel; the second prize (Grand Prix Special du Jury) to a Georgian (U.S.S.R.) film, Repentance, that cries out for a return to religion; and the third prize (Prix du Jury) was split between two movies, one, Shiraz Path to Purity, by the Japanese Rentaro Mikuni, in which a man progresses along Buddha's route to perfection, the other, Yeelen, by Souleymane Cissé of Mali, about a similar experience dealing with African deities. Wim Wenders received the Best Director award for his Wings of Desire, the main character of which is an Angel, contemplating Berlin in all its tragic desire for happiness. Last year, as dutifully reported in Cinema Canada, I quoted the night porter in my hotel reflecting on Festival developments by quoting André Malraux; and all, in Good Morning Babylon, their own loving tribute to filmmaking, a tragic-comic fairy tale, operatic, slightly schizoid, romantic, shot through with modern film techniques — in other words, a Taviani film, and deserving of a far better reception than that afforded at Cannes.

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Back to the U.S.S.R.

If, of which might be more than enough for any world film festival; enough to win, to work for the current year's edition as the finest of recent times. But Cannes '87 was to be even more than that. Indeed, another revelation was in store for anyone willing to look and listen. Cannes was a revelation to the film world that the U.S.S.R. once a great movie power, was back in business.

I have been watching the performances of the Soviets at world film festivals for the last 25 years. Especially in the last dozen or 15 years, that performance has been mostly pathetic, a testament to stupid bureaucratic repression — so much talent and techniques was Cannes, with, usually, so much spirit and creative élan. And yet we kept hearing reports that there was indeed another cinema in the U.S.S.R., managing to exist marginally in spite of the regime.

Well, Cannes '87 certainly proved this to be true, and more. The most brilliant film, aesthetically speaking, of the entire Festival surely was Oci Gornie (Dark Eyes), a joyous, funny, lyrical celebration of life and human frailty, an Italian-Russian co-production. Chekov seen through Fellini via Marcello Mastroianni, but all of it very much the personal creation of Nikita Mikhalkov. His younger brother of Andrei Konchalovski (who now works mostly for Cannon, out of Hollywood, while still retaining Soviet citizenship), has to be rated among the very best in the world, his early promise more than fulfilled. Not for Nikita the great profound questions doggedly pursued, nor ideological concerns, but rather nuance and satire, theatre and playfulness, insight and warmth, and all of it to the service of a delightful and profound rendering of the human comedy.

Dark Eyes appeared early in the Festival, a sure bet. I felt, for the grand prix. But then towards the end, came the shocker, the stunner, a movie that had us wondering whether what we were seeing and hearing could really be from the U.S.S.R. — Nikita Mikhalkov's Repentance, directed by Tengiz Abouladze, indeed was made in the Soviet Union, in 1984 in the Republic of Georgia — which furnished seven of the 13 winners this year. Repentance is a huge, sprawling, poetic work, a symbolic history, really, of the Soviet Union in the last 50 years — and the most searing decimation of the regime I have ever seen. Going far beyond anything even from Czechoslovakia in 67/68, or Poland in the heady days of Solidarity. Through a surrealistic mixture of satire, comedy, and tragedy, Repentance viciously denounces Nicinism, and then dares go beyond, to the central issue today: what about the aftermath, the repression of human rights? The film is an operatic plea for humanity and freedom, it affirms the supremacy of art and religion over bureaucratic materialism; and in so doing it testifies to extraordinary going-on within the Soviet Union.

Given its quality, and above all its far-reaching implications, I feel that Repentance was clearly the grand prix winner, even over the remarkable Dark Eyes. It is not just the film's interpretation is based on conversation and ignoring, our knowledge of the situation, but also moved by a hope that Glasnost is indeed a reality. Certainly these films have gone further than even the most surprising words and gestures emanating of late from Gorbatchev and friends. The USSR is still unable to understand the profound changes that have been going on for 10 years in China. So how can we understand what is going on right now in what we have been told is the enemy, the U.S.S.R.?

As one Czechoslovakian expatriate put it, the world may be in for a huge number of remarkable Soviet films. All the years of police-state repression are now being accounted for, the damming up of talent, and stories, experiences, sentiments, bursting to be communicated. Now all of this energy may be released and the film is a runaway success, eliciting an intense, often agonizing debate.

What of all this may mean in the broadest sense to the ideological relationships and indeed of world history, one hesitates to predict, inhibited by prior history, cynicism, our own brainwashing and ignorance, our knowledge of the fragility of hope, but also moved by a hope that Glasnost is indeed a reality. Certainly these films have gone further than even the most surprising words and gestures emanating of late from Gorbatchev and friends. The USSR is still unable to understand the profound changes that have been going on for 10 years in China. So how can we understand what is going on right now in what we have been told is the enemy, the U.S.S.R.?