Home Movies: Tales from the Canadian Film world by Martin Knelman
Toronto: Key Porter Books 1987, 238 pages.

Every filmmaker who's ever been trashed in print by Martin Knelman should be delighted by the publication of his latest book. Home Movies: Tales from the Canadian Film World is the revenge they've been waiting for. The front flap promises Knelman will look at the financial, artistic and political complexities of our movie-making over the past two decades. "The back flap" more modestly confides that it is "part consumer survey, part business analysis and part gossip column." But those who believe back-flaps and their money are soon parted.

Home Movies is divided into three sections: Dancing with Hollywood, Making Media and Slouching Towards China - framed by an introduction (Opening Shot) and a conclusion (Closing Shot). In his introduction Knelman writes, "Whenever Canadian movies were made, they were made in the shadow of the American eagle, or the MGM lion, or of Mickey Mouse" and that, "there was an unmistakable sense that if you were in the game of making major movies, sooner or later Hollywood was the place you had to go to even if the movie was about a Canadian who goes to China..."

This sets the tone not only for the lengthy Dancing with Hollywood section, but for the entire book. For these are not so much Tales From the Canadian Film World as tidbits about Canadians who've made it big in Hollywood. Thus in the first section we get anecdotes about Daniel Petrie, Ivan Kane, and Norman Jewison. Louisazz (Thanks Margot); Joshua Tenenbaum (diro Ted, Mordor); The Decline of the American Empire (Merci, Oscar); and Garth Drabinsky (Lovey, MCA), each rate a chapter.

The book's title, seemingly self-evident, means not only movies made in Canada or movies made by Canadians but also that they are austere, to be shown only to friends and family. Not fit for public consumption. If there's no "California connection" it's not worth looking at. The Canadian Moose depicted on the cover only deserves attention when he's hit by the spotlight from Grauman's Chinese. It also becomes clear that Quebec only rates mousse status in Knelman's home. The Decline of the American Empire's Oscar bid and a few anecdotes on Jutta, Simenon and Markovitz make up the Quebecois content of the promised look at the "financial, artistic and political complexities of our movie-making over the past two decades." Lebowski, Forcier, Groulx, and other great original filmmakers from Quebec who never wanted to go to Hollywood, just don't rate. Knelman's 50 Notable Home Movies 1978-1987 list includes only four Quebec entries.

Unfortunately Home Movies is gushy, sloppy journalism and even its gossip is the kind you can dish out to the subject without embarrassment. Knelman writes that The Tax Fade has "no redeeming qualities". Neither does his book.

We should know more about other national cinemas. Like daily exercise and quitting smoking, familiarity with other film cultures is good for us and it's something we often find ourselves promising to do more of. When we do try, however, we find our efforts are often thwarted. Tests on national cinemas have become the domain of academia. And most of us can't overcome such common truisms as: Quebec only rates mousse status in Knelman's home. The Decline of the American Empire's Oscar bid and a few anecdotes on Jutta, Simenon and Markovitz make up the Quebecois content of the promised look at the "financial, artistic and political complexities of our movie-making over the past two decades." Lebowski, Forcier, Groulx, and other great original filmmakers from Quebec who never wanted to go to Hollywood, just don't rate. Knelman's 50 Notable Home Movies 1978-1987 list includes only four Quebec entries.

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national film industry is to document national reality," founded the first Latin American school of documentary film in Santa Fe. The school produced several films. They won prizes abroad, embarrassed the government at home, and paved the way for what would be called the 'New Latin American Cinema' movement.

In the '60s Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas co-founded the Cine Liberacion film collective and co-directed The Hour of the Farmers. Drawing from those experiences they introduced the influential concept of 'Third Cinema' which is a cinema characterized by "collective productions, parallel distribution (which emphasized audience discussion) and direct confrontation of political events."

These events crop up in different sections of the book. But the editor has successfully ordered the articles so that, despite disparate subjects and styles, they give the impression of being part of a single narrative.

Barnard's Popular Cinema and Populist Politics, the first essay in the book, is a survey of Argentine history, the history of Argentine cinema, and the different ways in which national and international politics have influenced Argentine film. Barnard's excellent synthesis clearly and concisely conveys the various limitations, the space these articles take up could have been put to better use.

The Canadian film industry has never enjoyed the popularity, influence or financial rewards enjoyed by Argentina's. The vagaries of politics have never resulted in our film talent being exiled or murdered, in the destruction of entire generations of filmmakers. Yet when I read that cultural colonization results in "subjective social meaning to the goal of multinationals striving to sell their goods" and to a "socialization process that turns us into spectators and consumers of life, instead of its protagonists", I feel I'm reading Cinema Canada instead of a report by the Argentine film workers' union.

There are similarities between the two industries. Part of what made reading Argentine Cinema so interesting to me was the sense of déjà vu in reading about the Motion Picture Association of America's power in Argentina and about their industry's distribution problems. Part of what made Argentine Cinema valuable was that it made me realize that cultural colonization of countries that are not superpowers is the norm. The difference between ours and Argentina's is merely a matter of degree.

Argentine Cinema leaves us with a desire to know more, and especially, with a desire to see the films. It surpasses its modest aspirations and is a happy intrusion onto academic turf. I hope Canadian writers and publishers will continue producing this kind of work.