

Going out of his way

Ron Hallis, munching on some of the sourest grapes from last year's Yorkton Festival, writes: "One wonders if Mr. O'Toole wrote his film reviews for *Maclean's* [sic] *Magazine* after seeing only the first five minutes."

When I used to review for *Maclean's*, I always made a point of not watching more than four minutes of any film. I extended myself for the films at Yorkton.

Lawrence O'Toole
New York, N. Y.

Constructive criticism

The following was addressed to Lois Siegel (see *Cinema Canada* letters #154) and copied to *Cinema Canada*.

Thank you for your letter of June 22, 1988. We very much appreciate that you have taken the time to express your thoughts and we value your opinion very highly.

I have enclosed a copy of our 1988 rules and regulations and draw your attention to the paragraphs dealing with adjudication. As we do each year, we are presently revising them for next year's Festival. Any suggestions for changes, additions or deletions which you might have would be gratefully appreciated and seriously considered.

The Festival is constantly striving to better serve the Canadian film and video community as well as the Canadian viewing public. Our prime aspiration is to see Canadian film and video thrive, prosper and grow. Your criticisms are taken very seriously.

Sincerely,
Ian Reid
Executive Director
Yorkton Short Films Video Festival

A job well done

The following is an edited and translated version of comments made by producer Denis Héroux in response to a query by *Cinema Canada*.

Here, briefly, are my impressions of your September article on the "Minee-Feechie" (*Cinema Canada* #155). The author, Maurie Alioff, whom I don't know and to whom I've only spoken on the telephone, has done a serious job. Obviously, he did his research well and has avoided a *priori* assumptions and platitudes.

Though I hesitate to mention it, underneath

my photo there were only two titles listed, a situation which fails to underline the fact that I all but invented the *genre* in Quebec through my involvement in *Les Plouffe* and *Le Matou*. (Of course my wife Justine shares these credits with me).

The author's comments about *Les Plouffe*, under the heading "Rewinding", are quite fair, particularly in his evaluation of the project. Unfortunately, however, he only mentions the critical reaction by English-language media. It is interesting to note that the film was received quite favourably at Cannes (see *Sequences*, July 1981) and by European critics who were generally enthusiastic. It should also be noted that the film won numerous prizes, including best screenplay at the Chicago Festival, and at Taormina, etc.

The first part of the article pays homage to Pierre Desroches, and with good reason. However, no mention is made of the person at Radio Canada who was really responsible for bringing our great literary works to the screen, Fernand Quirion.

The author quotes (probably out of context) his "knowledgeable source" on Telefilm who says, "(we) won't get involved in any projects of this type because the returns are not there and they are too expensive". Well, if Telefilm is looking for a link between cost and return, it may be in for a surprise. The "Minee-Feechie" has returned more money to Telefilm than certain recent successful features.

The ratings for Minee-Feechie, as published, are somewhat limited. In the case of *Les Plouffe*, the film attendance figures aren't mentioned even though they strongly influenced the television audience size. The same is true for *Le Matou* which was broadcast on both Radio Québec and on Radio Canada. No mention is made of the fact that *Les Plouffe* was sold to the major West German television network (where it was shown on six consecutive Sundays in prime-time) as well as to Italy and to France. More than 20 million Europeans have thus seen *Les Plouffe*. *Louisiane* had large audiences on French television when it was shown at Christmas time, in spite of the so-called box office failure of the film in Paris (more than 300,000 admissions).

The interviews in the article are extremely good when the producers, authors and directors themselves are talking about their projects with subtlety and nuance. The comments become onesided and unsubtle when coming from so-called "experts" like Harry Gulkin and Kevin Tierney, ex-publicists both. It seems to me, unfortunately, that these are deliberately petty statements by somewhat jealous colleagues. Jean Beaudin, Gilles Carle, Marie-Josée Raymond, Phillip Borsos and the other *real* experts speak about the films with much more conviction.

In general, however, the broad conclusions drawn from the research are correct. But it is

important to remember that when these projects go into production the intentions of the participants are always noble. Gilles Carle, whom I personally forced to re-read (Roger) Lemelin's book said, "When I re-read the novel (*Les Plouffe*) I realized that I was dealing with a great novel that transcended the individual dramas of the individuals and became a collective dramatic experience." (*Le Devoir*, 1981). There, the high goal we aimed for from the start was achieved. It is not necessarily the *genre* (Minee-Feechie) that is responsible for success or failure.

As a sort of conclusion, I think the article was well done and represents the kind of research and writing that we should see more of in the press.

Denis Héroux
Montréal

No joint study

In October's *Trade News* on page 61 under the heading "Tax Incentive gets Good Response" you quote Peter Mortimer and a

Study being conducted by ACFTP and CFTA.

No *Joint Study* is being done on a Refundable Investment Tax Credit scheme to replace the old C. C. A. Tax Shelter as implied in your report.

The reality is that the Canadian Film & Television Association (with a minority contribution from DOC) did appoint a Task Force under the Co-Chairmanship of Michael MacMillan of Atlantis and David Patterson of Cineplex-Odeon with Susan Cavan of Alliance, Eleanor Olmsted of Nelvana and Pat Ferns of Primedia as members. David and Susan are members of ACFTP and I believe that their recent membership meeting suggested some points for the Task Force. CFTA hopes that the report, due within a few weeks, will be endorsed by ACFTP and the other Regional Associations. Research for the report was commissioned from Enid Slack Consulting and John Todd.

Perhaps Mr. Mortimer was referring to a Study his Association undertook, with support from DOC, the use of Tax Shelter Finance, which surveyed both our memberships, although we have yet to see any results.

Samuel C. Jephcott
President, CFTA
Toronto

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Montreal International Festival of Films and Videos by Women An open letter to Cinema Canada readers

The Montreal International Festival of Films and Videos by Women would like to add their comments to the misleading allegations and blatant omissions in the article "Locked out of the women's room" which appeared in the September issue (#155).

First, to clarify the significance of feminism to the Festival. The act of researching work by women, the act of reaching out to the communities of women and the act of producing a major international Festival devoted to films and videos by women, are inherently feminist strategies within patriarchal structures. The reviewers' reliance on hearsay to discredit the Festival's ideological position could indicate a discriminatory tendency by journalists, critics and reviewers to use labels as traps for convenient categorization which only serves to obstruct public understanding of the real issues involved.

One of our primary objectives is the breaking down of artificial barriers which limit women's creative acts to the margins of dominant culture. By 1988 feminists and all women not wishing to wear a tag have incorporated the ideological principles of the women's movement into their actions and behaviour. Two decades have asserted that feminist film criticism and practice have altered the main body of cinematic discourse. It is our belief that feminist film theory has successfully influenced conventional filmmaking practice and that this theoretical position has inspired the women in film and video.

To correct some omissions which may give the reader the negative impression that the programming selection was restrictive, we would like to present these figures: there were 32 features, 50 shorts (under 52 minutes) and 64 videos representing fiction, experimental and documentary works by women from 24 countries with 48 attending participants.

The Festival has often been commended by organizations and individuals within and outside Canada for the breadth and audacity of our programming and especially for the number of works presented. It is unfortunate that local freelance reviewers for *Cinema Canada* formed their superficial criticism based on four feature films and six videos in their article, thereby denigrating

and ignoring approximately 140 works by other film and video makers.

Terms like marginal, radical and different have often served to isolate women and independent filmmakers from popular culture. By respecting the filmmakers' choices to decide how to represent their point of view and by bringing as wide a public as possible to see their work, the Festival celebrates the differing voices which signify the diversity of feminist and feminine culture. By mixing all forms of expression, this Festival included articulate experimental work alongside mainstream drama, this happily resulted this year in the awarding of the Prix du public to Brenda Longfellow's *Our Marilyn* and to Mady Saks' *Iris*.

No Festival can ever completely fulfill the demands of a diverse public. It is our mandate to present a program which reveals yet undiscovered talent while encouraging a wide-ranging non-representative audience to see these works. Respecting the primarily francophone local public, we offer a varied program which will appeal to a general public, to the many national communities who live in Montreal and to film aficionados.

This selection process is based on the diversity of women's expression, innovation in narrative presentation and urgency of political issues. Because the majority of women's voices were silenced by this article, we would like to correct some of these omissions, if space permits, and to communicate some of the excitement generated by the program.

In particular, the vision and voice of women making movies has created a site for the confrontation of conventional cinematic codes; for example, new roles for women in *Iris* as the veterinarian; the warrior who leads the Chinese rebel forces in *Romance Of Book And Sword* and a good witch who heals during the Middle Ages in *Le Moine et la sorcière*.

The reevaluation of puritan value systems which have defined women's body image is also a primary concern given voice in Maryse Holder's letters in *A Winter Tan*, in the documentary of the porn industry in *Kamikaze Hearts*, and the process of fiction filmmaking in *She Must Be Seeing Things*.

Giving a voice to the disenfranchised is

another aim of feminist cinema, in *Chronique d'un temps flou*, it is the voice of Québécois youth, in *Die Papierene Brücke*, the Jews in Waldheim's Austria and in *Talking To The Enemy*, the Palestinians and Jews. These three documentaries never deny their subjective perspective on these pertinent topics.

Other strategies are recuperating fiction and history in the epic Polish film *The Girls Of Nowolipki* and telling personal stories in the Georgian film *Krougovorot* and the improvisational in *Erfolg*. Finding new forms of filmic expression are other priorities as in *Mon cher sujet Ana Donde Estas* and *Sohn De Valsa*. To uncover the remote civilization in *Cidado Jatobo* and to discover the intimate relationship of two lonely men in *Un Ange Passe* are newer manifestations of contemporary feminist texts which have enlarged on earlier discourse.

It is generally accepted recognition that our societies are pervaded with discrimination against people of differing classes, races and languages and the misrepresentation of these visible majorities is widespread. Women who understand these subjugations have investigated this negative position as other with informed discourse which began with the early feminist issues. With a frail presence in the male-dominated film industry, which still needs prodding to become equitable, they make choices to tackle pressing issues in whichever form they choose to communicate.

Political agitation began in the women's movement as a reaction to the separation of personal and public spheres, but it has certainly expanded beyond these boundaries to include all of humanities disaccords. Within these parameters, women give the children voice in *Saalam Bombay* and the peasants crying for land reform in *Terra Para Rose*. Women are invading the male-dominated Western genre in Russia, *The Man From The Boulevard Des Capucines*, in Canada, *Cowboys Don't Cry* and in the United States, *Dudes*. Speaking on their own terms, their realms encompass all categories of film to include the poetic, the mainstream, the avant-garde and the consciousness-raising documentary. Our role as a Festival is to respect their choices and to present a limited selection of

international work being produced in the current year. We will not be accomplices to the restriction of women to the margins of "hersay", when it is feminist discourse that has been instrumental in changing male-dominated culture.

In this momentous era of Glasnost, we were happy to welcome a "star" of Soviet cinema, Mme. Lana Gogoberidze, president and founding member of KIWI (Kino Women International) to present her film and to exchange information on the creation of this international association which expands the existing network of women working in the film industry.

The Canadian "star" Jackie Burroughs was in attendance. This extraordinary Canadian actress was articulate and candid about *A Winter Tan*, the innovative collaborative effort in which she gives a vital performance. The misleading caption under the photograph used in the article deliberately misrepresents the positive impact this film had during the Festival.

Celebrating women's culture is fraught with contradictions. The need to correct the misconceptions of women's roles has informed feminist cinema since Germaine Dulac in the '20s. As the '80s draw to a close it is naive to constrain women to predefined notions of feminist and gender ideology which are growing and changing constantly while still challenging dominant structures. The reviewers' tactic to enclose feminist debate within the narrow boundaries of a room fails to understand that the artistic process by definition explodes their convenient metaphor.

This polemical spirit surrounds women in the industry and we are encouraging readers to respond to this article. We would like to use this opportunity to announce that the 5th Festival of Films and Videos by Women will take place from June 7 to 16th, 1989. We hope all women wishing to submit works will contact us for entry forms. Deadline is February 15th 1989.

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