

OPINIONS

Yes, We Ain't Got No Heroes

by Ronald H. Blumer

Don Shebib says it isn't worth the fight anymore. People are crumbling about the demise of *Time Canada* and threats to their cable links with Byzantium. Any attempt to Canadianize things is regarded in some weird way as a threat to our hard-won freedoms. (After all, we didn't fight for the Declaration of Independence for nothing!) Why bother with the whole idea of a Canadian cinema anyway? Who really cares?

These thoughts were flashing through my mind as I stood up in front of a class of junior college students and tried to explain why a course in the cinema of Canada should be of concern to them, a trifle more relevant than the Mickey Mouse course they were anticipating. I quoted them both Atwood and Grierson in connection with the whole idea of culture being a mirror. In order to identify ourselves, to recognize ourselves, we need to get an image back and no other country cares enough about us to do this, it's something we have to do for ourselves. As I talked I found myself facing a sea of scepticism. The years of Can. lit. courses, of boring poetry and history lessons, the thousands of hours of American television, movies, and music had taken their toll. I quickly realized that most students regarded any discussion at all about Canada as a colossal pain in the ass. Partly out of curiosity, partly out of masochism, I asked them to write down their feelings about Canadian culture. What I received surpassed my bleakest expectations.

"We have a grey nature, an unopinionated way of looking at things," said one student. Another had a more cinematic vision: "... dreary, dull colourless; often in black and white." "We are less advanced than the United States," complained one student, "music, fashions and movies come here a couple of months late." The most significant demonstration of our failure as myth makers came from a young man who said quite simply, "our history is not glorified with many heroes." The attitude of the class was neatly summed up by an 18-year-old girl whose family have been Canadian for at least five generations:

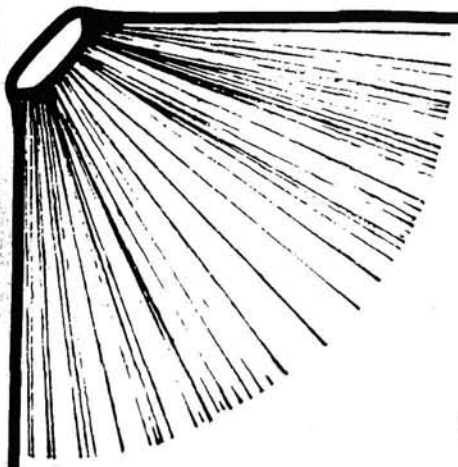
"The word Canadian conjures up for me a picture of intense boredom and drabness - anything dull or mediocre in life. It also gives me the sense of a country with no identity, we are here by some fluke of history or nature. It also reminds me of being forced to digest unbearable Canadian novels in school because people were afraid that the kids were becoming too 'Americanized'. Canadian is a state of mind which jams U.S. cable stations and warns us that we better watch Canadian T.V. or else. A country so incensed with lack of interest in Canadian content that magazines are banned and radio stations forced to play more and more Canadian music. It's a bitter country, mad at itself and blaming others for its failures."

The question I keep asking my students in the course is this, why have we been taught to be bored with our country? In whose interest is it that we should think this way? The answer is blank silence or as Brian Moore put it in *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, "He doesn't want to talk about Canada. There you have the Canadian dilemma in a sentence. Nobody wants to talk about Canada; not even us Canadians."

AT LAST...

the entire collection
of
Cinema Canada
is available
in hard-bound volumes.

The copies are limited
because of the scarcity
of back issues so write soon.



Issues 1 through 7	\$45. (limited edition of 30)
Issues 8 through 14	\$35. (limited edition of 100)
Issues 15 through 20	\$40. (limited edition of 60)

Cinema Canada, Box 398, Outremont Station, Montreal H2V 4N3