

REVERB

A Cheerful Philistine

"... The British," says Gerald Pratley, ("Are They Watching In Wichita?" April/May 1977) "do not make French films, the Americans do not make Russian films, the Spanish do not make German films. Why then should Canadians want to make American films - which is what so many English-language Canadian filmmakers feel bound to do these days?" Perhaps because Canada shares a boundary and language with the United States? Pratley should take another look at the atlas: Canada is a kind of elephantine Belgium, except that we haven't produced a Georges Simenon or Django Reinhardt (assuming a gypsy can have a nationality). Both Simenon and Reinhardt, of course, are often taken for French.

Pratley argues that an artist's talent is blighted when transferred to alien soil. His clincher: "Renoir's American films (he was forced into exile as a result of the Great War (sic)) were not the true Renoir." Now in a certain sense, any work created by an artist is "true" to him, but one sees what Pratley is getting at: **The Diary Of A Chambermaid** is a pretty dreadful film. Renoir, a typical Frenchman, transplants badly. Or does he? After Hollywood, Renoir went to India and made **The River**. I haven't seen it, but some say it's a masterpiece. ("... *Un beau film, de cette beauté majestueuse et sereine qui fait les grands morceaux symphoniques ou les grandes cycles romanesques.*" - Claude Beylie: *Jean Renoir, Cinema D'Aujourd'hui*, Paris, May/June 1975.) When Renoir came back - belatedly - to France, he made one of his best films (**French Cancan**) and one of his worst (**Elena et les hommes**.) Renoir doesn't prove anything, except that even great directors have their ups and downs.

Suppose for "Renoir" we substitute "Hitchcock." I personally prefer Hitchcock's English films to his American, but I wouldn't argue that **The 39 Steps** is "truer" to him than **Shadow Of A Doubt**. And what about Bunuel? Do we accept **Land Without Bread** and reject **Los Olvidados** and **Cela s'appelle l'aurore**? I notice Pratley doesn't mention Norman McLaren. If McLaren emigrated tomorrow to the United States, does anyone believe his talent would suffer? There is no way of establishing that an artist is better for being, as it were, regional rather than cosmopolitan.

Pratley's nationalist aesthetic puts him in the curious critical position of being able to damn a film without seeing it. "... Bergman's next film, **The Serpent's Egg**, filmed in Munich, will be the first Bergman film that will not be true to him." Earlier in the article, he rhapsodises: "Think of the films of Eisenstein, and contemplate the natural expression of one's nationality in art of the screen." Thanks to Pratley, we now know that even if Eisenstein had succeeded in filming **An American Tragedy**, it wouldn't have been much good.

On Canadian cinema, Pratley is cheerfully philistine: "The feature-length films of the NFB - from **Drylanders** and **The Merry World Of Leopold Z** to **Why Rock The Boat?** and **The Heat Wave Lasted Four Days** - all have one common strength: they are naturally Canadian, making non concession to the so-called requirements of international box office. *Whether they succeed or not in both artistic or financial terms is immaterial.*" (My italics.) Maybe it isn't art, but it's Canadian. There's a form of Calvinism operating here; English-Canadian directors will have to take their chance with posterity, but the French Canadians are automatically among the elect. For the obvious linguistic reason, no one can mistake their work for Hollywood. "On a long bus journey from Kapuskasing," Pratley tells us, "I sat next to a French-speaking woodsman who looked and sounded exactly like a character from a Gilles Carle film." Had I been Pratley, I'd have changed my seat. But I suppose he sees no difference qualitatively between Carle and Michel Brault. It's enough that they're both Quebecers.

Nor does he seem able to distinguish between nationalism and chauvinism, between attacking Americans as imperialists and Americans as individuals. "... **Why Shoot The Teacher?** fails because its principal character, on whom the success of the film depends, and who should be totally imbued with a sense of being Canadian, is played by an average American actor with no sense of feeling for the role and its background." Later Pratley concedes that, yes, Raymond Massey did play Abraham Lincoln, but that was all right, as there was no danger of American actors feeling they were "subjugated" by the lone Canadian. But what is valid for Bud Cort must also be for Massey, and an American Pratley would argue that, as a product of the Canadian upper class, Massey was singularly ill-equipped to impersonate Honest Abe. Or John Brown, for that matter.

Geoffrey Minish
Paris, France

No Universal Themes

Gerald Pratley's article "Are They Watching in Wichita?", hit upon many of our film industry's softer spots. As a hopeful filmmaker, I have followed this debate amongst the professionals, with great enthusiasm.

I do think that throughout it all, they have neglected one point. Great American films do not reflect a problem particular to Americans, but a universal problem as the Americans respond to it. Any good film is distinguished by the way it shows the rest of the world how one group of people are affected by a common problem. For

example, **The Grapes of Wrath** is foremost a film about poverty and economic depression. It is a great "American" film because it so accurately portrays how the American people lived through it.

Goin' Down the Road could have been about two young men from any small town trying to make their way in the big city. It was so wonderfully Canadian because it showed how two Canadian young men went to Toronto. It was a set of situations that anyone in any country could identify with. The actual details (Newfoundland to Toronto) are simply the outer trappings.

Bergman's films are about Swedes experiencing humiliation, sexual frustration, broken marriages. The key is not "Swedes experiencing", but "experiencing humiliation, etc."

If Canadians were to acknowledge that they too are subject to those things which affect everyone and make films about that, no one would care whether it was made and set in Toronto or New York or Salt Lake City, Utah.

It is the lack of universal themes that makes so many Canadian films unacceptable to American audiences. No one wants to watch a group of people doing something that they themselves don't understand. It is foolish to search for "the Canadian identity". It is apparent in everything we do, in how we react and how poverty, wealth, love, hate and political strife affect us.

Any good filmmaker knows this, and sees that it is the key to world acceptance of his work.

Arden Ryshpan
Montreal

Standing Up For A Shoe

The following correspondence took place between Anna Kalsø, the creator of the Earth Shoe, and Veronika Soul the creator of Cinema Canada's recent cover.

Dear Ms. Soul,

I saw your shoe cover for a film magazine and wonder one thing: How come no Earth Shoes?

Anna Kalsø

Dear Anna Kalsø,

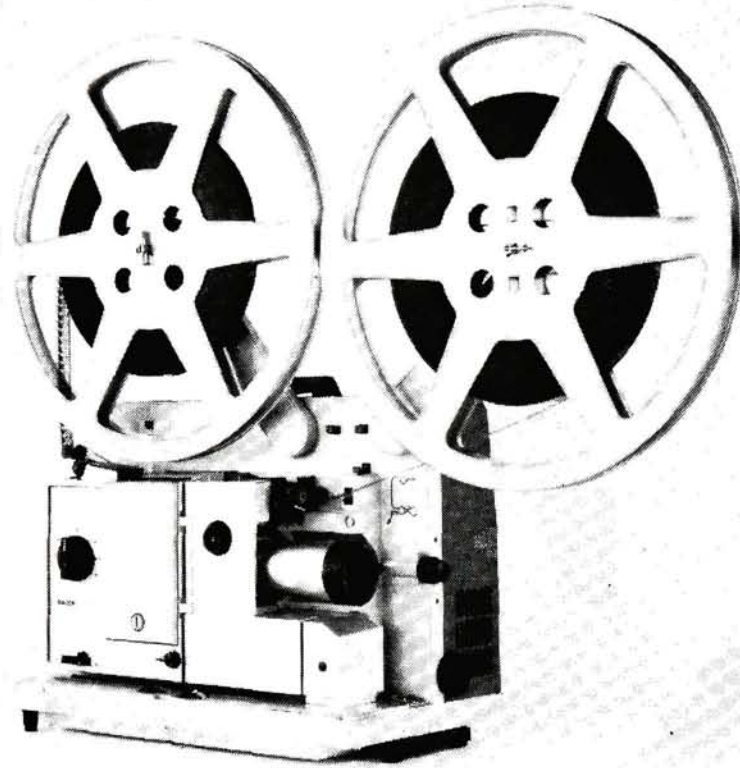
It seemed appropriate to use Canadian shoes for the Cinema Canada issue on Canadian film and culture. So ... I didn't really forget Earth Shoes... I forgot Roots (Canada's answer to Earth Shoes)!

Veronika Soul

P.S. Thank you for your shoe postcard. For some reason, whenever I see an Earth Shoe, the only thing I can think about is Stevie Wonder and high heeled snakeskin dancing shoes with lavender silk stockings.



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The first system of its kind, STEADICAM is a unique and revolutionary camera stabilizing system which has been quietly making film history during the course of the past year, breaking new ground in handheld cinematography.

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STEADICAM

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Charles Champlin
L.A. Times CALENDAR
November 28, 1976

Camera Operator Garrett Brown, inventor of the system, is seen using the STEADICAM stabilized camera system to film the dramatic fight sequence in ROCKY. James Crabe was Director of Photography.



The STEADICAM system was developed and is manufactured by Cinema Products Corporation under exclusive world-wide license. Foreign and U.S. patent rights to cover all aspects and applications of the STEADICAM system have been applied for.

"... Not only did that last reel include some of the most wildly exciting fight footage ever put on the screen, but it also provided an emotionally gratifying capstone to a picture that is truly an ode to the human spirit... And a final word must be said for James Crabe's incredible camera work—not only his stunning views of Philadelphia's historic monuments, but the squalor of the South Philadelphia slums, two breath-taking swoops up the broad steps of the Philadelphia Art Museum, a protracted run past swinging sides of beef in a meat-packing plant, and, of course, the virtuoso photography of the climactic bout... In many ways, ROCKY is a picture that should make movie history."

Arthur Knight
The Hollywood Reporter
November 5, 1976

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