

Kudos to the Crawleys

(The following was addressed to 1986 Genie Special Achievement Award winners)

Dear Budge:

I would like you to know how delighted I am that the Academy of Canadian Cinema finally honoured you and Judy with a Genie for your outstanding contributions to the Canadian film industry.

I also was honoured with a Genie this year and in my acceptance speech I neglected to mention how grateful I was for what you and Judy have done to make the award possible in the first place. As almost half the professional filmmakers working in Canada today got their start with you, that debt of gratitude is a great one. Through your company, you two spawned more writers, directors, editors, animators, cinematographers, recordists, mixers, films accountants, producers and film hustlers than any other privately owned company in North America.

So please let me take this opportunity now, on behalf of all of us, to say, "Thank you, Budge and Judy. Thank you for inspiring and guiding so many successful careers... this Genie is also yours."

With love and respect,

Bruce Nyznik
"Crawley College"
Class of '69,
Toronto

Free the avantgarde

I wish to respond to the appeal for greater state-subsidies voiced in the "On (Experimental) Film" column in the April '86 issue. Florian Hopf, a German, is quoted as stating that "artists need help" and "the government, the state owes them something," as well as urging "young artists in this country... to become more aggressive, more united and more aggressive against the government," to develop "tactics" and to "give up competition between themselves."

Obviously, not everyone would agree with this point of view including the critic (Jonas Mekas) and the artist (Stan Brakhage) who were largely responsible for the 'creation' of the American avant garde film 'movement'.

Jonas Mekas, in a statement to the Congress of Experimental Filmmakers (Chicago, 1985), wrote:

"I do not believe that any organization is beneficial to the avantgarde filmmaker.

"I believe that whatever experimen-

tal happened in cinema (or any other art), it happened by way of right circumstances, the ripeness of time, etc. — but not because of the organized, 'rights' unions' 'humanistic' and other movements.

"I do not believe that grants and subsidies (state, federal, etc.) are good for the health of the avantgarde, experimental film.

"I believe that the grant system (300 grants yearly to independent film and video "artists" presently) has crippled the experimental avantgarde film and video movements in the U.S.A. during the years 1968-80.

"I do not believe that society's mistrust (inadequate appreciation) of artists (economically, esthetically, and in any other way) is bad for art (creativity).

"I believe that the experimental avantgarde film (& video) maker has to be outside of the official society's benefits, care, protection, equality, etc.

"I believe in the total social irresponsibility of the artist. By which I mean, that only by being totally responsible to his/her art the artist can be most responsible to the society."

Stan Brakhage, in a letter published in "The Media Arts In Transition" (Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1983), wrote:

"I think it best if U.S. artists (i.e., those who really **must** create and are not simply 'show and telling', Look, Ma, no hands and so forth ... those who, in other words, work only out of the necessity of their, each his and her, unique nerve ends in stiffened resistance to the popular fakery around them) — these artists ought to avoid the public scene, as it now is, at **all** costs, ought finally go 'underground', as it used to be said of filmmakers all too prominent for such designation ... anyone's home, now, the only possible decent theatre or gallery or museum — the only conceivable place to 'surface'."

More could be said, but I think the foregoing is sufficient (except, perhaps: beware of "a man in a shirt and tie...who speaks like a philosopher").

Peter Lipskis
Vancouver

Alas, Bruce Elder

Alas, Bruce Elder, "with actual gods behind (him)" — mind you, not those of the avant-garde ("as it is currently practiced") and certainly not those of narrative cinema (to which he is "resolutely opposed") — but actual gods, which he certainly confuses for the things he sees (and reads; see *Cinema Canada* No. 126); alas, these gods are not those which circumscribe the rational (that "form of thought which seeks to resolve all contradictions in some grand synthesis") — and indeed, Elder fails to recognize the grandness of his own lamentable syn-

thesis here — these gods, which endow him with "the power to produce difficult, long and hermetic movies disguised as texts," and which so easily excuse his "provisional" complicity with "the same grandiose self-heroizing standpoint" that his film **Lamentations** ostensibly critiques; these gods present themselves under the twin guise of Elder's Ego and Enlightenment. Eee!!

That this film **Lamentations** elaborates a structure whose "unity cannot be grasped in any single viewing" is not surprising. It belies both Elder's evasive strategizing and his complete effacement of political reality.

• Surely, someone who mourns the loss of the avant-garde (as it was once practised) is similarly guilty of a "longing for a bygone Golden Age."

• Surely, Elder's "critique" of that "exclusionary form of thought which establishes distinctions among things (or features) and effectively chooses among them by ranking them in hierarchy," fails to acknowledge the limitation of his own perceptual/cognitive system being described here. Does not Elder see the mountain looming in the foreground, the huge fissures between successive film frames that his eyes/brain so easily accommodate? Can he effectively critique these "systems of representation" and still walk to work?

• Surely, I have quoted Bruce the Elder

out of context! Context?! Just what context does his work exist in? Does not the production of an eight-hour long, hermetic movie which ostensibly critiques the illusory projection of the real (the simulacral which the mistakenly equates with the rational) and the fragments of modernity (history, convention), exist outside of these contexts — simply by virtue of intentionality? Yeah, sure.

• Does not the epic nature of this "experimental" movie belie Elder's romantic aspirations and his unwillingness to recognize, for better or worse, the reality of our simulation, the oppressive political ramifications of his own patriarchal (hierarchical) power? Just how does this film function as a *critique* of anything real or simulated anyway?

I could go on. Recapitulating Elder's "academic" arguments is pointlessly tempting.

Whether Elder sees black cows at night — or trips over his own feet as he walks/falls on his way to work — is ultimately no concern of mine; that such a pompous rhetorician is taken so seriously by so many (can this really be true?) is! Certainly, the cinema does not need Bruce Elder!!

Herbert Templeton
Buffalo, N.Y.

BOOKSHELF

In **Exporting Entertainment**, Kristin Thompson's study of the world dominance that the U.S. film industry achieved between 1907 and 1934, the author has assembled abundant data on the methods and practices used to establish and maintain American supremacy, even after sound film created a substantial language barrier (*U. of Illinois Press, Chicago, \$24.95*).

During the Second World War, Great Britain's film industry enjoyed unprecedented activity, producing some 300 features and countless shorts. Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, in **Britain Can Take It**, closely examine 14 key films — such as Ray Boulting's *Thunder Rock* and the Noel Coward & David Lean classic *In Which We Serve* — that played a vital role in sustaining civilian morale and presaging future accomplishments (*Blackwell, NYC, \$24.95*).

The origins of motion-picture dramaturgy are explored by John L. Fell in **Film and the Narrative Tradition**, tracing the movies' literary form to the Victorian era's belletristic conventions and technological progress (*U. of California Press, Berkeley, \$12.95*).

In **Talking Animals and Other People**, Shamus Culhane, a creative artist and a leading figure in the animation field, has written a lively, engrossing autobiography that is also a fascinating account of the U.S. animation industry. He describes his collaboration with Disney, Fleischer and Lantz, his contribution to Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Popeye and Betty Boop, and his extensive work

in TV commercials (*St. Martin's, NYC, \$24.95*).

A unique reference work, **Film Review Annual 1984**, expertly edited by Jerome S. Ozer, reprints in their entirety reviews published in 23 widely different publications. This 3rd yearly volume assembles up to 2000 reviews of some 300 films released in 1984, and includes full cast-&-credits, production data, extensive cross-indexing and major awards, making it a valuable research tool (*Ozer Publ., 340 Tenafly Rd., Englewood, NY, \$75*).

St. Martin's Press, an active New York publisher has issued four new star biographies of uncommon interest. Keith McKay's **Robert De Niro** is a compelling portrait of an actor whose versatility and craftsmanship illuminate widely divergent roles (*\$14.95*). Alan Levy's **Forever Sophia** reveals Loren's joys and sorrows of combining motherhood and stardom (*\$15.95*). In **The Secret Life of Danny Kaye**, Michael Freedland highlights Kaye's eccentric style and the frustrations that marked his career (*\$14.95*). An impressive collection of stills, many recently discovered, enrich **James Dean: American Icon**, David Dalton and Ron Layen's tribute to the late screen idol (*\$16.95*).

In **Who Sang What on the Screen**, Alan Warner meticulously compiles and cross-indexes over 1200 songs heard on- and off-screen since 1927, listing the performer's and the composer's names and the music's source (*Merrimack, Topsfield, MA, \$11.95*).

George L. George