

INDUSTRY

BY Wyndham Wise



Franklin the Turtle

In November, the Ontario Media Development Corp. (OMDC) organized a unique three-day event that it called From the Printed Page to the Silver Screen. There were films at the Royal Ontario Museum (*Mansfield Park*, *Chocolat* and an advanced screening of *The Quiet American* among others), discussions and a book fair. The intent was to bring together publishers and literary agents with film producers who might want to make movies out their books—if they can find the funding. “It was our goal to get book people together with film people,” said Michel Frappier, the new head of the OMDC. “We are encouraging the various sectors to work together. Overall, we were happy with the results as this was a first-time effort. The In Conversation panel on Sunday attracted over 140 publishers, agents and representatives from the film industry.”

Undoubtedly the highlight of the event was the panel moderated by Daniel Richler of *BookTelevision*. On stage at the ROM theatre was the legendary Hollywood producer David Brown (*Jaws*, *The Sting*, *The Player*, *Chocolat*), screenwriter Robert Schenkkan (who co-wrote the remake of *The Quiet American* with Michael Caine and Brendan Fraser), director/screenwriter Patricia Rozema (*I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*, *Mansfield Park*), producer Christina Jennings (*Conquest*, *Jacob Two-Two and the Hooded Fang*) and author/screenwriter Edward Riche (*Rare Birds*, *Made in Canada*). Riche, who was in town for the Geminis—he won for his contribution to *Made in Canada*—said in a interview the following day, “It was a kind of loose, wide-ranging discussion about what the problems are with adaptations. To my mind, if you pick the right property there is not much of a problem. Very often I think failed books make for great movies.” Brown seemed to

concur when he told the audience, “Sometimes movies are better than the book,” and Rozema observed that, in general, “shorter novels adapt better on the screen.”

The next day, at a book fair held at the Sutton Place Hotel, Michael Hirsh, co-founder and outgoing CEO of Nelvana, and Valerie Hussey, CEO of Kids Can Press (which was sold to Nelvana in 1998), publisher of the hugely popular *Franklin the Turtle* books, held a Q&A over lunch. Gail Thompson, head of marketing and promotion at the OMDC, saw this as a perfect example of “increased opportunities in cross-sector collaboration” and a template for the future activities of the newly restructured OMDC (formerly the Ontario Film Development Corp.). Once only a funding agency for the film sector, it now embraces film and television, music, book and magazine publishing, and interactive digital media.

The new direction for the OMDC began in 2000 and was formally implemented in February 2001. “They [the provincial-cultural bureaucrats] began to look at the cultural sector as a vital cluster,” says Frappier. “The entertainment and leisure industry is expanding fast, and Toronto and Ontario are well-positioned to grow in this sector. We’re trying to encourage the various sectors not only to be integrated within themselves, but seek other partners. Our mandate is very simple—job investment and content production. Even though we are a cultural agency, we have an economic mandate, and a lot of our programs will be aimed at making our sectors more successful.” Frappier, whose background is in marketing, advertising and, at one time, was the senior vice-president of corporate development in North America for the Thomson newspaper chain, sees this as an advantage. “I bring a lot of private-business acumen to the job, and we have some terrific people here in programming, policy and marketing.”

All the new OMDC programs are grouped under three general headings: The Business Innovation Group, Marketing and Promotion, and Tax Credits. With regards to film, the OMDC will continue to operate its successful Al Waxman Calling Card Drama Program, which now falls under the New Voices, New Visions initiative. In November, it announced a new program partnership with the National Film Board, the Al Waxman Calling Card Documentary Program with a contribution of \$45,000 from the OMDC and a co-production agreement with the NFB. Detailed information, application deadlines and forms can be found on the OMDC Web site: www.omdc.on.ca.