



Le Déclin de l'empire américain

1986 101m *director and script* Denys Arcand, *producers* René Malo and Roger Frappier, *cinematographer* Guy Dufaux, *editor* Monique Fortier, *music* François Dompierre; *with* Rémy Girard, Dorothee Berryman, Pierre Curzi, Louise Portal, Gabriel Arcand, Dominique Michel, Daniel Brière, Yves Jacques and Geneviève Rioux

Le Déclin de l'empire américain was the first Québécois film fully to stake out a cinematic claim on the modern world. In the manner of *Return of the Secaucus Seven* (1980) and *The Big Chill* (1983), *Le Déclin* assembles a gaggle of privileged academics who are socially and amorously involved with one another. Very much in the style of a classic French farce, the first act intercuts women working out in a lavish gymnasium, while talking about sex, with men preparing dinner in a luxurious chalet in the Eastern Townships, while talking about sex. A performance piece throughout, the film delights through the dexterity of the acting and the wit of the dialogue. With the second act, however, when the women arrive at the chalet, the tone of the film migrates from the carefree ebullience of *La Règle du jeu* (1939) to the wounded thoughtfulness of *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961). For what is declining in this film, finally, is the ability of the Québécois privileged classes to believe any longer in cultural sovereignty, reducing them to the compensatory pleasures of food and sex—thus paving the way, 17 years later, for Arcand's depoliticized *Les Invasions barbares* (2003).

AWARDS: Genie Awards – Picture, Director, Screenplay, Supporting Actor (Arcand), Supporting Actress (Portal), Editing, Overall Sound, Sound Editing, Golden Reel Award; Toronto International Film Festival – Best Canadian Feature Film, People's Choice Award; Cannes Film Festival – International Critics Prize; New York Film Critics Circle – Best Foreign-Language Film; Academy Award Nomination – Best Foreign-Language Film; AV Trust – Masterwork

Peter Harcourt

Goin' down the Road

1970 87m *producer, director and editor* Donald Shebib, *script* William Fruet, *cinematographer* Richard Leiterman, *music* Bruce Cockburn; *with* Doug McGrath, Paul Bradley, Jayne Eastwood, Cayle Chernin, Pierre La Roche and Nicole Morin

Pete and his pal Joey are two wistful roustabouts from the Maritimes with 30 bucks and an abused Chevrolet labelled "My Nova Scotia Home." They pick up and head for Toronto where they find temporary work in a soft-drink factory, drown their troubles in beer, and make various futile attempts to improve themselves. Joey marries a woman he has made pregnant, then loses his job. After robbing a food store, Pete and Joey, still believing there is a better life somewhere, take to the road once again. Don Shebib's first feature is easily the most influential English-Canadian film of its generation with pitch-perfect performances by Doug McGrath (Pete) and Paul Bradley (Joey), and the film is still an impressive piece of realist cinema. Its intelligent blend of fiction and documentary realism gives it a clarity and insight into the lives of marginal people sharing a universal burden of existence, unable to cope with their own aspirations but never losing their dignity.

AWARDS: Canadian Film Awards – Best Feature Film, Actor (McGrath and Bradley); AV Trust – Masterwork

Wyndham Wise

