



Where the Truth Lies

Cannes Film Festival (5/11–22/05)

By Tom McSorley

The beer is cold and it is free. The sky is a warm azure canopy. The Mediterranean, just off the end of the Canadian Pavilion's wooden deck, is that same sky's inviting blue mirror. People are herded inside to hear new Telefilm Canada boss Wayne Clarkson introduce Canada's two pre-eminent film directors, David Cronenberg and Atom Egoyan. They speak genuinely about how proud they are to be Canadian filmmakers who have films in Official Competition at the most prestigious film festival in the world. Transplanted American filmmaker Stuart Samuels, who also has a film in the festival, speaks supportively about how movies can get funded in Canada. Applause all around from the assembled, and it's quite an assembly of industry and media types—there's Robert Lantos; there's Liam Lacey of *The Globe and Mail*; there's Piers Handling of the Toronto International Film Festival; there's... well, you get the idea. Smiles are smiled all around, and it is a grand day for Canadian cinema.

All the while, I am thinking: what happens if Stephen Harper becomes Prime Minister? Beyond the impressive international selection of films on offer; beyond the happy accident of sitting at a table next to Salma Hayek at a tiny restaurant; beyond the cluster of remarkable films coming out of small independent republics of the former Yugoslavia—my experience of Cannes 2005 was dominated by a decidedly Canadian set of uncertainties. First, outside the many cinemas along La Croisette and way back home in Canada, there was the minority parliament of Paul Martin's Liberals. Should the

government fall and an election be held, and the Conservative Party of Canada win, that would likely signal trouble for the perennially precarious Canadian film industry, given the avowedly U.S. friendly “free market” philosophy of the now non–progressive Conservatives.

Meanwhile, up on the screen, the Canadian films looked somehow not so obviously Canadian. David Cronenberg's *A History of Violence* is set in Indiana, written by an American, and stars Viggo Mortensen and Ed Harris; Stuart Samuels's *Midnight Movies* is a documentary about American cult film classics such as *Night of the Living Dead*, *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and *Eraserhead*; only Egoyan's *Where the Truth Lies* seems to make any direct

Canadian connection. Finding Canada in any meaningful sense is difficult in at least two of these “Canadian” films. “Does that matter?” I am asked by several people. The eternal question.

Some argue that it does not affirm the uncertainty of our national border. I wonder. If so, what are the implications of such a position? It appears that the only certainty—except for no 2005 Stanley Cup winner—is that the definition of what constitutes a Canadian film appears, at least here in Cannes, to be shifting. That shift should be examined with unflinching honesty about what it really means.



L'Enfant

But enough of Canuck uncertainty! This is the south of France, the Mount Olympus of film festivals, the richest and most decadent gathering of movie stars in the world.

The 58th edition of Cannes was, on paper at least (critical opinions of this year's crop varied wildly, *comme d'habitude*) one of the strongest in years, with new films from world cinema greats such as Cronenberg, Egoyan, Wim Wenders, Michael Haneke, Gus Van Sant, Lars von Trier, Jim Jarmusch, Johnnie To, Hou Hsiao-Hsien and the brothers Dardenne (who captured the Palme d'Or with *L'Enfant*). In addition to the official competition lineup, there was the



Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne

world premiere of George Lucas's latest *Star Wars* instalment, and a well-regarded offering from the ever-prolific Woody Allen, *Match Point*. In addition to the considerable contemporary cinematic riches, there was the peerless Cannes Classics section, offering up restored prints of films by Michael Powell, Louis Malle, Satyajit Ray, Emilio Fernandes and Luis Buñuel, as well as new documentaries about Ingmar Bergman and by Jean-Luc Godard.

As usual at this cinematic Mecca, away from the paparazzi and the red carpets, tucked into small market screenings, there were wonders to be found. For example, from Italy there was Francesco Munzi's *Saimir*. Reminiscent of early Pasolini, this spare and tough-minded film chronicles the coming of age of a young Italian man of Albanian parentage who helps his father smuggle Albanians into Italy. Then there was Igor Sterk's *Tuning* from Slovenia (a small cinematic powerhouse, the most consistently impressive national cinema in Europe these days), a mature, minimalist portrait of a long-standing marriage gone stagnant. Also from Slovenia was *Desperado Tonic*, an omnibus film by four young directors about

cinema itself, and one of the year's most inventive, unpredictable, thoroughly enjoyable film experiences. From Croatia came Tomislav Radic's low-budget gem, *What Iva Recorded*. It's a clever comedic drama involving a birthday party, a video camera and an expected guest who never turns up.

While 16-year-old Iva records the evening on her new camera, the family squabbles and fights, loves and laughs, and a microcosmic portrait of the tensions of Croatian society is rendered with intensity and humour.

In spite of these impressive international film experiences, at Cannes 2005, Canada just won't let go. Incredibly, mere days after the gathering at the Canadian Pavilion, Conservative MP Belinda Stronach crossed the floor to join the Liberals. The Liberals survived the vote and there will be no summer election. The filmmakers I spoke to in Cannes were visibly relieved at the news. Their dread of anticipated draconian Conservative cultural funding cuts has been stilled. For now. As ever in Canadian cinema circles, here and back home, nothing is certain except uncertainty.



A History of Violence

Yorkton Short Film & Video Festival (5/26–29/05)

By Calvin Daniels

It was the night for *Shadow Pleasures* at this year's Golden Sheaf Awards. The performing-arts film based on the works of famed author Michael Ondaatje, *Shadow Pleasures* took home the Golden Sheaf Award of Excellence, the highest honour of the Yorkton Short Film & Video Festival. It was nominated in seven categories at the 58th annual festival and won six other Golden Sheaf Awards, including Best Performing Arts/Entertainment Film.

The 58-minute film is a fusion of poetry, prose, dance and sound directed by Veronica Tennant. Tennant, who has an Emmy Award to her credit as well as being a former prima ballerina, collected the Golden Sheaf for Best Director-Fiction at the awards gala Saturday evening. Ondaatje, best known for *The English Patient*, narrates the film. "This really is a film of love," said producer Peter Gentile shortly after accepting the major award at North America's longest-running film festival. He explained the film ran into a number of obstacles during production, including a funding situation that left them scrambling for dollars. "We were shooting while the power outage was going on in Toronto. We were in the dark, setting-up sets for the next day, but no matter what was in our way, we kept going."

Shadow Pleasures has been doing well on the festival circuit, and was nominated for four Geminis, picking up one for Art Direction, the only Golden Sheaf to elude the film, which went to Mark Gabriel for *Yellow Bird*. Gentile said winning awards at Yorkton is an honour, but he went farther than that. "These are the things that really keep you going," he said, adding collecting so much hardware in Yorkton "was beyond my wildest imagination. In the end, filmmaking is a hard way to make a living. It's not even a living. It's an affliction. It's something you just

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