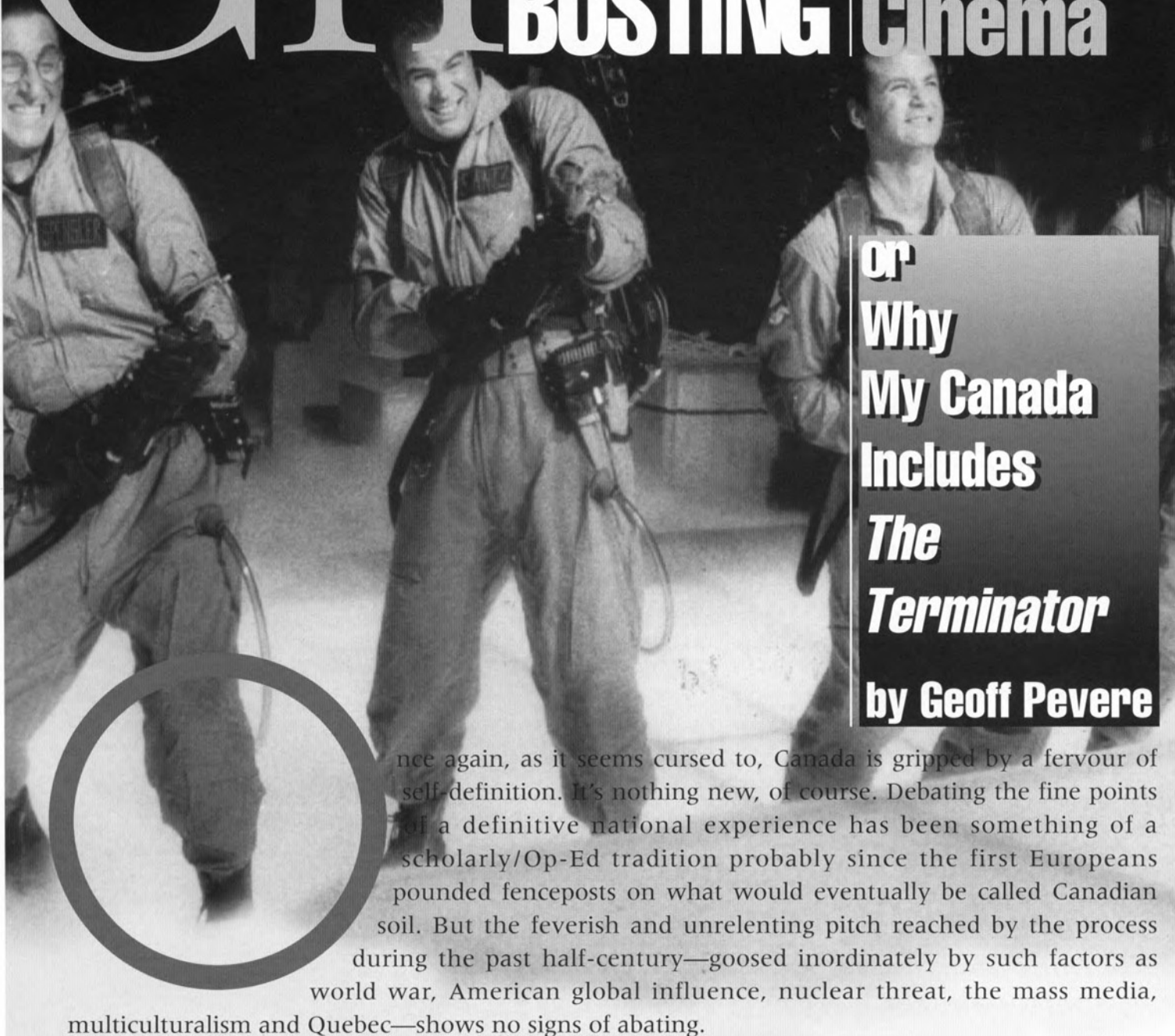


Ghost BUSTING

100
Years of
Canadian
Cinema

**Or
Why
My Canada
Includes
*The
Terminator*
by Geoff Pevere**



nce again, as it seems cursed to, Canada is gripped by a fervour of self-definition. It's nothing new, of course. Debating the fine points of a definitive national experience has been something of a scholarly/Op-Ed tradition probably since the first Europeans pounded fenceposts on what would eventually be called Canadian soil. But the feverish and unrelenting pitch reached by the process during the past half-century—goosed inordinately by such factors as world war, American global influence, nuclear threat, the mass media, multiculturalism and Quebec—shows no signs of abating.

On the contrary, we seem to spend more time doing microscopic probes of the national navel lint now than ever. Not long ago, the CBC National Evening News, that faultlessly revealing bellwether of liberal mainstream Anglo concern, spent an entire week probing the reasons for the

apparent wounds on the body politic. In 1995, as the threat of Quebec seceding from this fragile house of cards hardened into an all-too-conceivable possibility, our major media were flooded by iconic images of almost hysterical national solidarity. Everybody's bumpers insisted their Canada included Quebec, thousands flocked to Montreal with the apparent intention of holding the country together with the feel-good adhesive offered by a hug, a song and a two-dollar flag.

Not long ago, I was invited by a Toronto university professor to moderate a public panel discussion featuring seven influential academics in fields ranging from history to film studies. The topic (as if you didn't know)—"Defining Canada." I accepted as much out of curiosity as concern. Like many Canadians, the act of defining Canada has for me become something of an irresistible national spectator sport. And in the same way that sport represents a form of mediated conflict whose appeal is based largely on the fact that it's ultimately never resolved—there's always another game, another season, another championship to be won—so the vigorously rhetorical campaign for national self-definition is by now something which exists independently (and quite happily) of any genuine hope of resolution. I mean, think of it: what would happen if anybody actually did "define Canada" to the universal satisfaction of everyone concerned? What would we do for rhetorical amusement? Where would that leave our journalistic elite; what would non-fiction authors be left to write about? And what would Peter Gzowski be left to talk about? The great national question finally settled, we'd need panel discussions to resolve the issue of what to discuss on panel discussions. But, any comprehensive attempt at "defining Canada" must take into account a culture obsessed with "defining Canada."

The fact that the level of self-defining anxiety among Canadians is currently ratcheted higher than ever seems to be the product of a number of sinuously interconnected circumstances and events. As initially independent from each other as these factors may seem, they do share one crucial characteristic—each poses a fundamental threat to the terms under which Canadians have defined themselves. Which is to say, the old paradigms are slipping away well before we've had a chance to come up with new ones.


Most apparent of the current crises is, of course, the question of Quebec sovereignty, the consequences of which have assumed nothing less than apocalyptic proportions for most Anglo-Canadian nationalists. This dark vision is like an Old Testament variation on the house of cards analogy: if Quebec goes, the rest of the country will

collapse into a state of shattered vulnerability, its scattered carcass ripe to be picked over by the evil predators just waiting to drop from the sky. It's us vs. the flying monkeys. Besides, Quebec has traditionally provided such a convenient opportunity for Canadian identity seekers to define the English-Canadian experience in negative terms—as what we are not. To lose Quebec is, thus, to lose one very important way of seeing ourselves.

Equally threatening to traditional modes of national self-regard is the steady continental mutation of governments from contract to business. In the age of multinational corporations, as the ideology of the marketplace becomes the ideology of governance, the toll on conventional forms of Canadian nationalism has been enormous. As there is no market value on cultural distinction, no profit to be made from being "distinctly Canadian," our provincial and federal governments have grown increasingly disinterested in the idea of state-supported national sovereignty. And when government becomes a bottom-line operation—a form of "virtual corporation"—along the lines of Molson's, IBM or Viacom, money becomes the only standard of worth, and money, as we well know, knows no borders and brooks no ideas of cultural distinction. Thus Jean Chrétien can, with apparent impunity, continue the gradual bleeding to death of public broadcasting—long a crucial institutional pillar in the self-defining process—and Premier Mike Harris of Ontario can hamstring the once-vibrant Ontario Film Development Corporation.

When the language of profit becomes the dominant discourse of government, the language of culture—and particularly unprofitable culture—is inevitably drowned out, and the notion of promoting cultural distinction is marginalized to the point of oblivion.

Like money, technology has a way of rendering irrelevant, or even ridiculous, the process of



Left: Ivan Reitman's *Ghostbusters*: Written, directed, produced, starring and co-starring Canadians, *Ghostbusters* is the best Canadian movie ever made in America.

Below: Director James Cameron with Arnold Schwarzenegger—bringing Canadian content to heavy metal mayhem.



defining national selfhood. The operative self-justifying buzzwords of current technological development are "communication" and "information," concepts to which one can hardly stand in opposition. Who'd decry the "idea" of communication? Who'd oppose the notion of the "free flow" of information? And yet, by now, it's patently apparent that technology, particularly to the extent it makes possible the dissemination of mass media, has been one of the most consistently effective agents in the undermining of the development of a secure and clearly defined national character. It was radio which first delivered American network broadcasting to the Canadian hinterland, a legacy usurped and intensified by television a generation later. Motion pictures delivered the irresistible spectacle of American mythology packaged as entertainment, and prerecorded music technologies ensured that American popular music, like American popular culture, would dominate the collective consciousness on both sides of the world's longest undefended border.

Now, of course, it is the utopian call to cyberspace, a virtual universe of instantaneous, point-and-click communication which, among other dubious self-promoting selling points, is deemed progressive precisely for its capacity to make things like national culture seem not very hip. In cyberspace—a term, incidentally, originally coined by Canadian William Gibson—we're all supposed to be citizens of the same wired universe, the Global Village Marshall McLuhan (another Canadian) saw coming 30 years ago. Maybe so, but why does the Global Village increasingly feel like like a mediaeval one? While the power is concentrated in the walled castle on the hill, the rest of us—or those who can afford to buy into the dream, anyway—sit in our huts pointing and clicking, pointing and clicking, pointing and clicking.

The yellow brick information superhighway of the Internet sure seems to have a lot of corporate billboards on it, and the equally vaunted grassroots dialogue offered by Net access may be just as dubious. While computer technology may allow average folk to talk to more average folk faster than ever before, just what is it they're largely talking about? So far as I can tell it's *The X-Files*, *Pulp Fiction* and Brad Pitt—American popular culture. In the context of this village, I suppose the fact that Canadian-born mega-babe Pamela Anderson Lee has more web sites than just about any other living celebrity ought to be a source of national pride. But if it is, it's a damned slim one.

The struggle for national definition only grows more desperate as we skid closer to the millennium. Author Mark Kingwell points out in *Dreams of Millennium* that millennial angst is not only a defining condition of our cultural times, it's a condition largely defined by a creeping, unshakable sense of uncertainty. Not for nothing is *The X-Files* a hit, argues Kingwell, nor is it insignificant that people are panicked by killer viruses, obsessed with alien visitation, joining fringe survivalist cults or discreetly wearing nipple rings to corporate board meetings. We're all desperate to identify with something, anything, lest the sky fall on top of us and we're left naked, defenceless and—worse—existentially unaffiliated. Thus the uncertainty Kingwell describes in his fascinating book is not just the uncertainty of what lies beyond the millennial divide—though I think we can rest assured it will



Mary Pickford, Toronto's own Little Mary, became "America's Sweetheart" during the glory days of silent cinema.

include advertising—but the uncertainty of self. It is, in short, a boom time for identity crises. The only more dreadful thought than not knowing what lies ahead is not knowing who you are as you approach the brink. Thus, for English Canadians, who have made a national pastime out of publicly ventilating their sense of cultural uncertainty, the approach of the millennium can't help but conjure up nightmare visions of national oblivion—if we can't figure out what we are by the time

the next century hits (which

we most likely won't),

then we must, as a nation, be doomed.

Lower the millennial backdrop behind these other identity-eroding

factors—Quebec

sovereignty, bottom-

line neo-conservatism,

technological displacement—and you've set

the stage for a world-

class cultural identity

breakdown.

Maybe this is why the

celebration of the

country's first century

of moviemaking has

hardly amounted to a



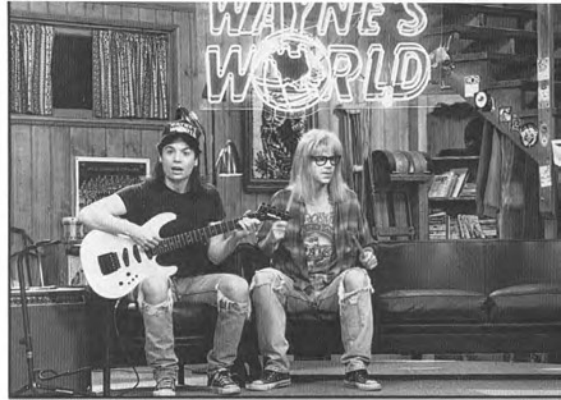
Jim Carrey, from Jackson's Point, Ontario, has become one of the highest paid actors in Hollywood and a natural successor to Jerry Lewis's "stupid" style of physical comedy.

hoedown. On the contrary, not much is being said about it at all. There are, so far as I know, no books, television specials or documentary series being planned to mark the event in English Canada, and I know of no plans to install a sculpture of Nell Shipman on Parliament Hill. Last year, when the British Film Institute commissioned a series of national cinema centenary documentaries, the commissioned nations included not just the conventional imperial big guns (the U.S., France, Japan, Great Britain), but such unusual suspects as Korea and even New Zealand. But no Canada. To be fair, there may be perfectly reasonable excuses for such indifference. Maybe it's the difficult-to-ignore idea that this is a country of two, largely independent centuries of cinema—a sticky logistical hurdle for documentary production and national celebration alike. Then there's the plain fact of the medium's virtual invisibility in the country's cultural life anyway. For reasons that need no further elucidation here, moviemaking has always been a marginal form of cultural expression in Canada—less so in Quebec, but even there movies rank relatively low on the Francophone cultural totem pole—so celebrating their first century certainly makes less apparent sense than observing, say, the cancellation of *Front Page Challenge*, or Karen Kain's profoundly uninteresting retirement from the National Ballet of Canada. It's the Genie Award dilemma projected on a centenary canvas. How can you ask people to celebrate what most of them never knew existed anyway?

Which is one of the reasons this list of the 100 most influential names in the first century of Canadian cinema—selected and compiled by Wyndham Wise and Marc Glassman—is so rich in “distinctly Canadian” implication, revelation and contradiction. For what strikes one initially is, in that congenitally self-deprecating manner many Canadians have, the fact that there are 100 names, and that, among those fivescore names, there are so few whose presence there feels like padding to make the triple-digit mark. (I'd like, for

instance, to keep the presence of Beirut-born Keanu Reeves on the list a subject open to argument.) Moreover, the achievement of the triple-digit goal has been facilitated by an idea which cuts to the very heart of this country's current sense of cultural schizophrenia: instead of restricting the names on the list exclusively to those who made movies in Canada over the century, the list implies a notion of Canadian achievement which is not restricted by border or, in some cases—like Keanu's, for instance—even by birthplace. In other words, this list's definition of what or who is Canadian not only includes Quebec filmmakers, but also such people as John Candy, Robert Lantos and Steve Williams—a comedian, a producer and a computer f/x Wunderkind respectively. The kind of people, in other words, who conventionally have not been admitted to the established arenas of cultural certification in this country.

However, it is in the juxtaposing of the national with the internationally noteworthy which really blows some fresh air along the hitherto-airtight



Wayne's World—starring and co-written by Michael Myers and produced by Lorne Michaels—is about growing up young and white in Scarborough.

Margot Kidder as Lois Lane: A dependable, calm and reliable sidekick to our immodestly overendowed neighbour.

Cheech & Chong's Nice Dreams: Written and directed by Tommy Chong. The real-life version of The Fabulous Furry Freak brothers were icons of the 1970s drug culture.



corridors of Canadian cultural thought. And not because the conventional definitions of distinctly Canadian (herewith known as "dC") cultural activity are rendered ridiculous or irrelevant by the admission of Canadians who have had an extra-national impact, but precisely the opposite. When we open the doors to actors, entrepreneurs and Hollywood directors, as well as the usual roster of Telefilm fundees and canon-friendly domestic auteurs—when we can find room in our official sense of self for Jim Carrey and Paul Almond—we discover a truly exhilarating sense of continuity. Quite the opposite, in fact, to the traditional notion that Canadians who have left to make movies down there have somehow sold out their national identity. Call it the creeping Canadianization of popular culture.

Studying the list, certain fairly objective categories present themselves immediately: a great many documentary-related institutional careers, for example, and an equally great number of québécois iconoclasts, many of them directly engaged with the local political climate of their era, most of them with reputations rooted in the nurturing turbulence of the Quiet Revolution. A certain number of pioneering filmmakers, actors and entrepreneurs (some—like the remarkable Ms. Shipman—pioneering in all three at once), and the essential but familiar ranks of contemporary Anglo-Canadian hyphenates—the writer-directors who virtually have kept the idea of distinctive English-Canadian movie-making alive over the past decade—Cronenberg, Egoyan, Maddin, McDonald and Rozema. These are the kind of people and practices upon which the bulk of conventional criticism rests, and who have been used to supporting the core assumptions of national character: that we are a nation of sideline observers, not participants. And,

being a nation of sideline observers, we work more productively with the raw material of fact than the pure whimsy of fiction. We're disinclined toward heroics and breathe the oxygen of irony. We are emotionally reticent and dramatically hesitant, and we are so painfully disengaged from our own instincts that we can make movies dealing with sex and voyeurism only if they're about sex and voyeurism.

As a set of assumptions, these fit more or less snugly within the big picture of Canadian national identity as it has been framed over the past half century: that Canada is a facilitator, a negotiator, a diplomat, a peacekeeper and, most unsurprisingly, a darned productive place for the training and development of that professional class of observers called journalists. In this global mythology, Canada has grown into its little brother role to the U.S. with no shortage of skill and pragmatic cunning. We're a dependable, calm and rational sidekick to our immodestly overendowed neighbour to the south, an unassuming but more than competent id to the

American
superego.

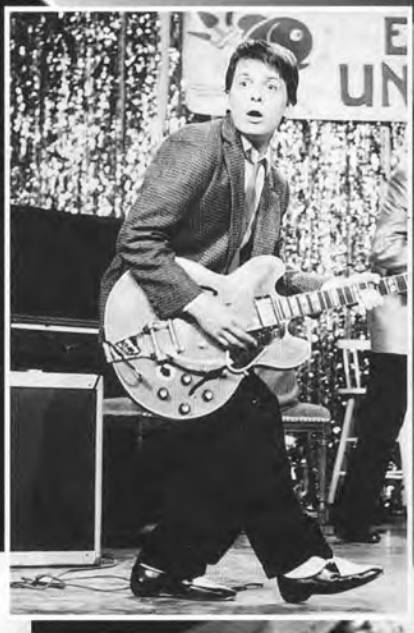
Spock to

their Kirk, so to speak. We boldly go where we're told.

Now consider the other names, those which historically have not been wanted on the voyage of national self definition. They also tend to arrange themselves categorically, and the categories bear fascinating relationships to those which largely dominated Canada's postwar image of itself as a rather detached (and a tad bland) but efficient facilitator of other people's dramas. As early as "Aykroyd, Dan," for example, one is faced with what may be the most potent international pop cultural influence ever exerted by Canada, which is in the field of TV and screen comedy. After Aykroyd comes John Candy, Jim Carrey, Tommy Chong, Michael J. Fox, Lorne Michaels, Rick Moranis, Michael Myers, second-career comic star Leslie Nielsen, Catherine O'Hara and Ivan Reitman. (And to this one might well add the various Kids in the Hall, Phil Hartman, Dave Thomas, and even the dreaded Howie Mandel.) This is not just a coincidence of nationally grown comedic talent we're talking here, but a shift in comedic tone and approach in a direction one is pretty well compelled to call dC. It's rooted in sketch comedy, and usually in the parodic imitation of forms of American pop



THE CANADIANIZATION OF AMERICAN
COMEDY: Leslie Nielsen as mega-gooft
Detective Drebin from the *Naked Gun*
movies; inset: Michael J. Fox,
the 1980's most popular and cutest
neocoon, in *Back to the Future*.



culture—which strongly suggests a comic tradition virtually invented by none other than Ed Sullivan’s most notorious serial-guests, Wayne and Shuster. It is steeped in ironic detachment and over-mediated experience, the product of spending way too many thousands of hours at the unidirectional receiving end of American popular culture. In two words, it’s post-modern comedy, and in that sense represents a fascinating extension of the meta-media theoretical strain in Canadian intellectual life that runs through Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, Arthur Kroker and Derrick De Kerckhove. Furthermore, its current domination of American TV and screen comedy bears the mark of far too many Canadians to be comfortably written off as serendipity. When one connects Wayne and Shuster with Lorne Michaels (who was married to Shuster’s daughter for a time) and Hart Pomerantz, then Michaels to *Saturday Night Live*, then Ivan Reitman to *SNL*, then *SNL* to *SCTV*... Well, you get the picture. It’s a comedy which grows out of observation and detachment, conditions which seem to have had nothing short of a defining influence on both how and why Canadians make movies. Or act, produce and even market them.

The list also includes a number of reasonably familiar names of directors who left here so long ago their birthright seems to require constant stressing: Norman Jewison, Sidney J. Furie, Ted Kotcheff, Arthur Hiller, Daniel Petrie. These things spring to mind when these names are clustered together: first, nearly all of them moved into Hollywood production after training in Canadian, American or British TV; all of them left the country during the 1950s seeking work; and all belong to another seemingly expansive tradition in Canadian cultural and intellectual activity—they’re efficient, impersonal, omni-generic generalists. Apart from Jewison’s *In the Heat of the Night* and *Moonstruck*, and maybe Kotcheff’s *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (which critic John Hofsess once famously tagged “the best American movie ever made in Canada”), it’s hard to bring these filmmakers’ movies to mind without actually looking them up. All have made fair to good movies in forms ranging from westerns and horror movies to science fiction and romantic comedy, but none have made one that more than a very few would ever call great.

However, our concern is not the evaluation of merit, but the coincidence of enduring professional efficiency among these veteran Canadians in Hollywood. Initially entering the system from outside, each seems to have used detachment as a way of

objectively understanding the system and what it wants, and working efficiently within those industrial requirements. Not envelope-pushers these Canucks, but tidy envelope fillers. Even James Cameron, the most successful and famous Canadian in Hollywood since Ivan Reitman arrived in the late 1970s, is somehow both distinctive and generic. While he brings a genuine auteurist singularity to his approach to blockbuster, heavy-metal mayhem (*Terminator* and *T2*, *Aliens* and *True Lies*), he’s also another shrewdly objective student of commercial genre and industry desire. He knows what the box office wants—no surprise for someone raised in the surreal civic theme park and border town of Niagara Falls, Ontario—and he provides it inflated with steroids. An envelope-pusher certainly, but those pushed by Cameron tend usually to be those stuffed with bank notes.

Cameron rose to A-list prominence during the 1980s, a decade in which Canadians played a conspicuously, fascinatingly crucial role in the development of some of the Reagan era’s most successful and archetypically reactionary popular entertainments. Apart from the *Terminator* movies, which were to the supply-side decade what John Wayne movies were to Eisenhower’s 1950s, Cameron also played a seminal role in pumping up the decade’s other definitive symbol of inflated Yankee assertiveness—John (“Can we win this time, sir?”) Rambo.

Along with Sylvester Stallone, it is Cameron who is credited as *Rambo: First Blood Part II*’s screenwriter, and, in turn, it’s *Rambo Part II* which is credited with, perhaps more than any other movie of its era, finding popular expression for an America inflated with almost hysterical narcissism and invincibility. But that’s only where the plot grew thickest.

The character of John Rambo was first created by a University of Toronto professor in a novel called *First Blood*, which in turn was filmed in British Columbia in 1982 by Ted Kotcheff.

But wait, Cancon conspiracy junkies, there’s more. The Cameron-Schwarzenegger link reveals yet another key maple leaf connection during the decade that humility forgot. The unlikely

Some will think this yet another rationalization for the selling out of our national experience to the Yanks and multinational corporations. On the contrary, it is a way of imagining dC in a continental context in which geographically defined national experience has long been sold anyway.

Right: William Shatner as Admiral James T. Kirk.

Below: *Rambo: First Blood Part II* written by James Cameron, based on a character created by a U. of T. professor.

Bottom: Norman Jewison’s ground-breaking racial drama, *In the Heat of the Night*.



super stardom of the Austrian bodybuilder was in no small part facilitated by his careful handling by two Canadian-born directors. Not only Cameron—who had the genius to cast the unearthly slab of beefcake as an affectless killer cyborg in *The Terminator*—but also Ivan Reitman, who doubled the actor's popular constituency by exploiting Schwarzenegger's canny willingness to make fun of himself by playing comedy. If it was Cameron who saw the droid beneath the muscle, it was Reitman—in *Twins*, *Kindergarten Cop* and *Junior*—who saw the tongue in the droid's cheek.

Reitman (born in Czechoslovakia but raised in Toronto from the age of four) first scrambled to the top of the Hollywood heap with 1984's *Ghostbusters*, not only a record-holder for most successful movie comedy in history, but a movie with so much Canadian creative input behind it some have even argued it rightfully belongs in our movie history not theirs. No matter where you put it, it leaves a maple-syrupy residue. By the time he'd made *Ghostbusters*, Reitman's place in post-Watergate comedy was already secure. He had directed one of the *National Lampoon's* successful road shows—which included in its cast a number of future *Saturday Night Live* and *SCTV* stars—and acted as producer to *National Lampoon's*

Animal House, a seminal instance of cinematic sophomoria which also broke all comedy box office records—until *Ghostbusters*. Thus, if the comedy of ironic detachment came to dominate popular culture through the late 1970s and 1980s—and Jim Carrey is only the most popular and extreme product of this tradition—then Reitman is nothing less than its primary impresario, the man who Canadianized popular North American comedy.

Even more compelling, however, is the fact that Cameron and Reitman, while the most visibly successful Canadian movie people in Hollywood during the 1980s, were hardly the only ones. The enormously successful *Back to the Future* series acted as the crossover vehicle for Edmonton-born Michael J. Fox, who pole-vaulted effortlessly into the role of proto-yuppie Marty McFly in the *Future* movies after establishing himself as the decade's cutest neocon, Alex Keaton, in the top-rated TV sitcom, *Family Ties*. On an even less stirring but inarguably dC note, by the end of the decade it was hard to find a comedy which didn't feature at least one prominent card-carrying Canadian such as Aykroyd, Rick Moranis, the late John Candy, Catherine O'Hara or Martin Short.

Canada's solid supporting role in the North American political economy is also evident in the kind of actors on the list who've managed to do some successful cross-border career shopping. For just as conspicuous as the absence of really big stars (what are we to make of the fact that the biggest are Mary Pickford and Jim Carrey?) is the presence of firmly reliable character talent: people who rarely took centre stage in anything they appeared in stateside, but whose contributions from the narrative sidelines—like the country they came from—were rarely less than dependable, professional and, well, solidly supportive. As befits their nation's foreign policy and persona, these Canadians never upstaged the truly bankable, and invariably American, talent they appeared alongside, but merely bolstered that bankability by contributing to the smooth operation of a foreign-made vehicle. Think of Hume Cronyn's faultlessly intelligent work in *Lifeboat* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* or,



Catherine O'Hara in *Home Alone*: *SCTV's* most successful female graduate.

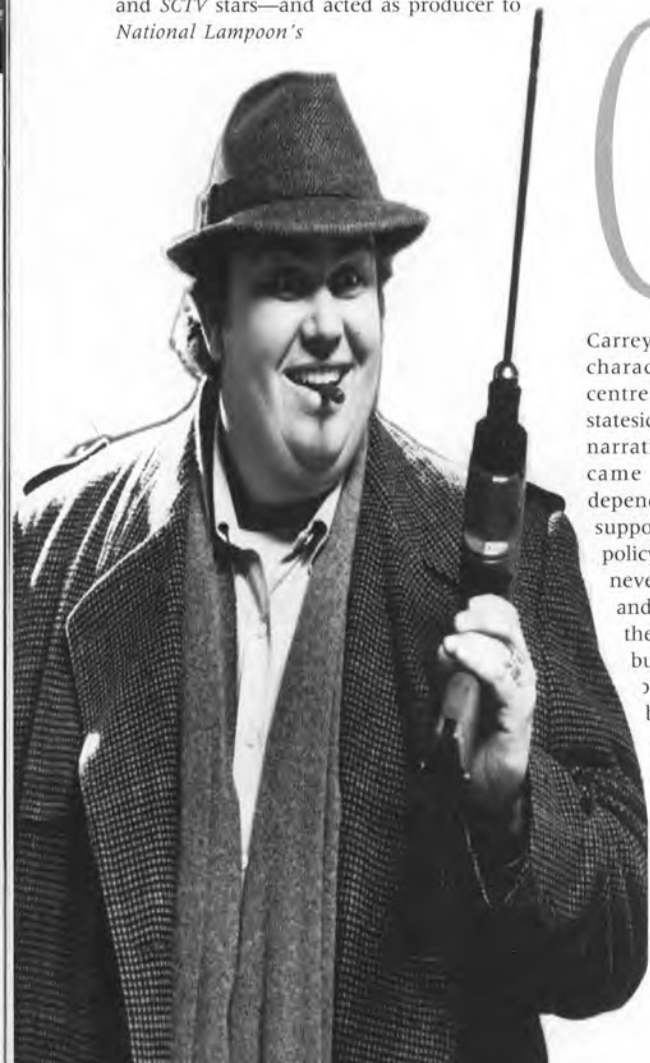
decades later, in *There Was a Crooked Man* and *The Parallax View*. Or consider Jack Carson, the character actor's character actor, a bearish presence whose gallery of glad-handing second bananas couldn't help but enhance the comparative glamour of a host of stars, including James Cagney, Joan Crawford, James Stewart, Marlene Dietrich, Cary Grant, Judy Garland and Paul Newman.

And when Canadian actors did tend to take the lead, it was purely in the supporting sense—they played leaders as opposed to playing leading roles. In this context consider the careers of such people as Raymond Massey, Walter Pidgeon, Lorne Greene, William Shatner, and the pre-mega-goof career of Leslie Nielsen. Repeatedly, on TV as often as in movies, Canadians emanated a quality of impersonal paternal efficiency which made them perfect for the impersonation of literally dozens of bland authority figures, or, interestingly enough, villains. For the role of solid supporter and controlling authority is, of course, never more than a script or genre away from sheer antagonism, and for every good sideliners Canada has contributed to Hollywood history, it has contributed as many memorable heavies, cowards and all-around weasels: Raymond Burr in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*; Walter Huston in son John's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*; Christopher Plummer



John Candy as Uncle Buck and **Dan Aykroyd** (with John Belushi) in *The Blues Brothers*.

It's hard to find a 1980s American comedy which doesn't feature at least one prominent card-carrying Canadian.



(engaged in a heavy metal ham-off against bland Canadian authority figure Bill Shatner) in *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*; the sublimely evil John Vernon in *Dirty Harry* (as "The Mayor"), *Point Blank* and *Charley Varrick*; Donald Sutherland in *The Dirty Dozen*, *1900* and *Animal House*; Saul Rubinek (not listed) in *Against All Odds*, *Unforgiven*, *True Romance* and *Nixon*; officious prick Henry Czerny in *Clear and Present Danger*. Perhaps this, too, says something about what seethes beneath the surface of apparent Canadian reticence: scratch a contented sideliners and watch the bile run out. This might also account for the latent nastiness in so much post-Reitman Canadian comedy as well. Jim Carrey is funny, but he's also more than a little scary.

While Canadian women in Hollywood have tended not to play mayors and villains as often as their male country persons (but then neither have American, British or Rumanian women either), they too have established a noble tradition of beefing up the dramatic periphery. And, in what may tell us something about the relationship between gender, popular culture and nationhood, their roles have quite often amounted to a critical or doubting chorus to the main action. Thus, while Canadian women, enduring the lot of Hollywood actresses generally, have spent an inordinate amount of time playing wives, girlfriends, mistresses, acerbic alcoholic malcontents and salty-tongued tramps, they've tended to use the opportunity to undermine slyly the authority of the main and mostly masculine action centre stage: Geneviève Bujold in *Tightrope*, *Choose Me* and *Dead Ringers*; Kate Nelligan in *Eye of the Needle*, *The Prince of Tides* and *Frankie and Johnny*; Helen Shaver in *The Color of Money* and *The Believers*; Margot Kidder in *Superman* and *Willie and Phil*; Catherine O'Hara in *Beetlejuice*, *After Hours*, *Heartburn*

and *Home Alone*. A chorus of quiet but pungent female disapproval.

One could, of course, go on: How about this homegrown knack for likeably bland, fleetingly bankable hunks, from Glenn Ford to Keanu Reeves and Justin Priestley? Or the long list of technical innovators and exhibition impresarios, not the least of whom are Richard Day, who virtually defined the studio look of Hollywood films from the 1930s to the 1950s, Douglas Shearer, who created the MGM sound department, and Garth Drabinsky, who built the second largest theatre chain in North America? These, too, bear consideration when one is confronted by the prospect of accounting for the Canadian century in movies, not only because they reflect a country which has assumed a secure but supporting role in the development of North American culture—which is to say global, popular culture—but because the role taken is so metaphorically consistent with Canada's global role in the last part of this century. Therefore, as we close on the millennium and fret over what identity we'll cling to as we're swept over the brink, perhaps our Canada should include Los Angeles.

I expect that such a suggestion might smack of treason, if not heresy, to a certain strain and vintage of nationalist. Which is understandable, up to a point. The dominant emphasis of English-Canadian nationalism for the last several decades has been rooted in the idea of a country distinguished by attitude, but defined by geography—Canadian is what Canadians do in Canada. As fragile as that reasoning is (and it's the reasoning I grew up with), it's also manageable, neat and comforting. It erects a wall around the definition of national experience which can negate anything which dares stray beyond it. Anyone remember the reason why hyper-nationalist troubadour Stompin' Tom Connors gave back his Junos and walked away from his career for 14 years (rather like a hoser equivalent *Dirty Harry*, throwing his badge away in disgust)? To use Tom's phrase,



Pamela Anderson Lee in *Barb Wire*: She doesn't make the list but the Canadian-born mega-babe has more web sites than just about any other living celebrity.

to protest the Canadian tolerance for "border jumpers." Today, at the end of the first movie century and the threshold of the new millennium, we might well rethink the efficacy of those imaginary walls as the definitive parameters of what we call Canadian. Some will think this yet another rationalization for the selling out of our national experience to the Yanks and multinational corporations. On the contrary, it is a way of imagining dC in a continental context in which geographically defined national experience has long been sold away anyway. And not by you and me. Sold by governments increasingly operating like multinational corporations, and facilitated by the seductively irresistible colonizing agents of technology and media.

We can acknowledge this as the new reality and mark our cultural territory within it, or we can retreat from that reality into an increasingly nostalgic and reactionary myth of an ideal Canada which, if it ever really existed, is in rapid retreat outside of the bounds of Stompin' Tom songs, *Morningside* panels, Robert Bateman prints, and the kind of Mountie kitsch you can buy in gift shops from Vancouver to St. John's. But lest we forget, even the Mounties have sold their licensing rights to Disney. ■



Dave Thomas and Rick Moranis as the legendary Bob and Doug McKenzie.

SCTV's Canadian content—"Two guys in toques sittin' around drinkin' beer." Good day, eh?