



Martin Bilodeau, *Le Devoir*

Quebec being small, in regard to its institutions, and somewhat insular because of its cultural history, its people have always perceived Canadian cinema as being foreign. The birth, three years ago, of *La Prix Jutra* (an award show not unlike the Genies, but for Quebec-produced films only), has only deepened the rift that separates the two industries, and that indifference can be felt, from inside the walls Quebec has built, about the cinema made to the east or west of it. In such a context, the movie critic's approach to Canadian films is rarely made under the scrutiny of the neighbouring industry or pressure from the local public. In fact, besides some renowned filmmakers such as Atom Egoyan, David Cronenberg or Patricia Rozema, all of

who have a very passionate following in Montreal – let's not kid ourselves and pretend it goes outside the city's peripheries – Canadian films are seen with a condescending and everlasting suspicion, one fact to feed that argument being that most of them are never shown here. And, in most cases, those that benefit from a distribution in *la belle province* are usually released by a passionless distributor (hence the miserable marketing budgets) and rarely generate much interest from the French-speaking press, unless, of course, it's been applauded in a major festival such as Cannes or Berlin. Lynne Stopkewich's *Kissed* and Thom Fitzgerald's *The Hanging Garden* come to mind as two good examples of this phenomenon.

On the other hand, and for reasons very similar to those I mentioned above,

reviewing a Québécois film can often be a nightmare. Suddenly, as the release of a new film approaches, the publicists become very nervous, and pressure you to do interviews, sometimes before you see the film, which says two things: either they have very little confidence in the film or that you have not been considered – by the filmmaker, the producer or the distributor – to be worthy of seeing it. The latter hypothesis usually means that you have been truthful when you reviewed an earlier work, and the truth is the last thing on their mind when the film enters such a crucial phase as marketing. One fact remains: the Quebec film industry is so close to the media, in terms of distance and influence, that it has come to believe the latter works for it. Unfortunately, many critics have come to believe it too.



Lee Anne Gillan, *The Daily News*

I relate to the prospect of reviewing home-grown movies with a gut-churning mixture of pride, guilt, love and fear. It's like they're my relatives. Canadian films rarely come to Nova Scotia outside of festival time, so when a few brave souls exhibit them in the off-season, I feel the impetus to exhort people to go, to dig a little deeper for a reason. Reviewing movies in a town with few critics and fewer Canadian films leaves us with an awesome responsibility. What if we slag something, and no one comes? Will they just stop sending them? Will it be our fault, the slow demise of Canadian film exhibition? Will we be stoned in the streets? But I don't think it's an automatic response. I don't remove a star from every Kevin Costner film and assign it to a Canadian one (although maybe I should).

Canadian films are harder to love; they don't tend to slobber all over you the way Hollywood films do. You have to go to them. Getting in the way are my own prejudices, rooted in childhood, when my Dad would squint at the TV and inquire, "Is this Canadian?" in a tone usually reserved for "What's that smell?" or "Did the dog do that?" I think most Canadians, for better or worse, can spot this country's product at a hundred paces and in under two minutes. Sometimes we throw up a little wall to protect ourselves from all the Canadianess: the dwindling natural resource as a main character; the unhappy ending, just because happy endings are so American; the disaffected hero narrating his own disaffection in a monotone. But I can get pretty excited about seeing anything that comes near to reflecting my life. Heck, I got excited when Kevin Spacey said "Nova Scotia" during last year's Oscar broadcast. Every glimpse of ourselves onscreen works away at that nagging suspicion that we don't really exist.

When I love something from home I'm definitely prone to flag waving; when I don't, I'm probably less a blind cheerleader for Canada's film industry than something much more annoying; the disappointed math teacher berating students to "try harder, live up to your potential." I tend to cast about for those handy euphemisms like ambitious or unique and save the truly cruel observations for people who can't find me. Why hurt the ones you love when you can hurt the ones who don't know where Halifax is?