

An artist is his own fault  
—One of those guys who hung out with Kerouac

arts

## Films of Exile from Pool and Wenders



Nastassia Kinski and Harry Dean Stanton in a scene from Wim Wenders' *Paris, Texas*.

By ADRIAN IWACHIW

We are told in the Genesis myth of the Fall that humankind is somehow estranged from its original home, its primal security. So we create our own homes—family, nation, religion, culture. When these fail, we feel homesick. We are exiles, and we search, both for identity and for a meaningful place to locate ourselves in the world.

This world-wide homesickness is the essence of Wim Wenders' cinema. His protagonists are geographically and existentially dislocated; they drift through the suffocating atmosphere of cities, and frequently lose themselves in the muddy gulf that separates America from Europe, a Europe that so eagerly and awkwardly attempts to clothe itself in American culture. To portray this psychological rootlessness, Wenders has developed a personal style that makes extensive use of redundant slow takes, and particularly of the beautifully-composed travelling "road" shots that are his trademark.

Wenders' latest film, *Paris, Texas*, a \$1.6 million production, was scripted by Sam Shephard, and has a Ry Cooder soundtrack. *Paris, Texas* tells the story of Travis (Harry Dean Stanton), who is found wandering through the Texas desert after having been missing and assumed dead for four years. The man refuses to speak, but when his brother Walt (whose business card is found in his jacket) flies in from Los Angeles, he persuades Travis to return with him.

In Los Angeles, Travis learns that Hunter, his seven-year-old son, has been living with Walt and his wife ever since he was mysteriously delivered to them four years earlier. After an initial coolness between them, Travis and Hunter gradually re-establish a warm father-son relationship, and decide to drive to Houston in search of Jane, Hunter's mother and Travis' long estranged wife.

*Paris, Texas* differs from Wenders' better known films in a peculiar way. The compelling film noir urgency of *The American Friend* and the creeping angst of the masterful *The State of Things* are transformed into something more hopeful. The last half-hour of the 150-minute film, in fact, comes close to being a *Terms of Endearment*-style tearjerker. Wenders has seemingly traversed through the long, dark tunnel of alienation and lost identity; now he seems to be seeing a light at the end of the tunnel.

In the end, however, it is no such thing. When Hunter is finally reunited in a tearful embrace with his mother, Travis climbs resolutely into his pick-up and drives off. With Wenders there are no 'happy endings.'

For Wenders, the deepest communication between characters is rarely direct. Travis and his son achieve their most tender moments when they walk on opposite sides of the streets, Hunter imitating his father's comic gestures, or while speaking via walkie-talkie on their trip, or through Travis' tape-recorded message to Hunter. Similarly, Travis and Jane only communicate over a telephone, separated by a one-way mirror in the booth where she worked.

Harry Dean Stanton is perfectly suited to the role of Travis. We see him change from a disoriented wanderer pacing through the desert with a deranged buoyancy, to the pensive realist, who sees that his greatest hope—that the three of them reunite happily—is an impossible one. Nastassia Kinski, as Jane, puts in a less convincing performance, however, but then Wenders is definitely a man's director—practically all of his major protagonists (with the exception of nine-year-old Alice in *Alice in the Cities*) have been male.

The young Canadian filmmaker Léa Pool, in her recent film *La femme de l'hotel*, also address the idea of alienation and exile in a painful and lonely world, but from a distinctly female perspective.

*La femme de l'hotel* utilizes the film-within-a-film format to explore the relationships among three women. Andréa (Paule Baillargeon) is a director making a film about an emotionally burned-out singer (played by Marthe Turgeon) who suffers a breakdown. At the hotel where they are staying during the filming, Andréa comes across Estelle (Louise Marleau), who is undergoing an emotional withdrawal similar to that of the troubled singer portrayed in the film.

Both Andréa and Estelle (and the actress-singer, though her character is left undeveloped) are uprooted, exiled; they have been hurt by the city. Estelle, with her blank stares and slow movements, lacks any real contact with the world about her, but a sense of solidarity is established between these women who have "nothing to lose" because they belong

nowhere. And in the end, Andréa finds in Estelle the strength and inspiration needed to complete the film.

Upon this basic outline, Léa Pool has constructed an exquisitely-crafted, mysterious film tapestry. The story is given out in fragments, challenging the spectator to participate with his or her own emotional experiences. The pacing of the film is wonderful, and both the soundtrack and the cinematography of the early Montréal winter are memorable.

There is the silent insistence of the snow outside, the waves rolling rhythmically against the shore, the rain Estelle hears in a dark auditorium... She ponders going away to the sea, for "a season of rain, rain," where there are no friends, no acquaintances, only the waves and rain washing away the past in a cathartic surge of forgetfulness. To Estelle, he singer's rest home (in the film-within-a-film), the furniture store they converse in, and the hotel are all places where one can find temporary comfort without attachments.

Towards the end of the film, the line separating reality from fiction blurs. The cameras often suddenly intruding into scenes that seemed to be real, rather than part of Andréa's film.

When Andréa completes her shooting, Estelle leaves as inexplicably as she arrived. The hotel had been just another place to pass through, a stage somewhere between her past identity and the emptiness ahead of her. We are left with a shot of her sitting on a train, an image that appropriately calls to mind the final shots of Wim Wenders' *The American Friend* and *Alice in the Cities*. In the latter, the simultaneous exhilaration and vertigo of their freedom, metaphorically expressed as the characters push their heads out of the window of the speeding train that is taking them away; but nowhere in particular.

*La femme de l'hotel* is a brilliant film. For a Canadian filmmaker who has only made one other feature, this is quite a promising achievement.

# TBR

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is coming soon.

Poetry, short fiction, short drama,  
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Drop submissions off at 111 Central  
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## Rendering of mediaeval Pope Joan thin slapstick

By STEPHANIE GROSS

The new comedy, *Pope Joan*, presented by Nightwood Theatre, is a whole-hearted, but half-successful attempt to tell a story about a woman who "climbs the rungs" to the papacy during the Dark Ages.

While *Pope Joan* was adapted from an historical account of a woman's cunning rise in the mediaeval church, it is by no means a period piece. It is, in fact, advertised as an "unhistorical answer" to the question of Pope Joan's existence.

The play successfully depicts the hierarchies and hypocrisies of the papacy during the Dark Ages, but this is all contained within the first 20 minutes. The rest of the play simply repeats itself.

Much of the humor in *Pope Joan* is achieved through puns. This is important because in the middle ages a high office of the church demanded a storyteller's love for language.

Joan is able to capitalize on her ability, and, having an eye for opportunity, she climbs ruthlessly to the top.

Brother Frumentius, on the other hand, is one character who can never find the right word. He oscillates between contemporary and biblical language, providing the play's best laughs.

At other times, the comedy is taken a step too far, often bordering on the ridiculous. Perhaps a darker shade of humor would have illustrated the hypocrisy of the times more effectively than *Pope Joan*'s slapstick approach.

Joan's guardian angel, Saint Lioba, is a character seen only by Joan and the audience. Lioba not only foresees the downfall of Pope Joan, but also plays an active part in her demise.

It appears that the playwright approves of religion in general but disapproves of its insti-

tutionalization in the church. Saint Lioba could be used to make this message clearer but instead clouds the issue with ambiguity.

The most convincing areas of the play come during its infrequent serious moments. While the use of contemporary language is meant to link the audience and the players, there is not enough development in any of the characters to successfully bridge the gap.

In the final analysis, *Pope Joan* is too superficial. At times the characters run around the stage for no reason at all, save an attempt at hilarity.

Though the play provided the audience with a few laughs, it provided little irony, empathy or audience understanding.

*Pope Joan* runs until September 23. Showtimes are 8:30 p.m. Wednesday through Friday, 7 and 11 p.m. on Saturdays and 2:30 p.m. Sundays. Tickets are \$6.25 and \$8.25 at Nightwood Theatre, 296 Brunswick Avenue.

## ArtStuff

### ON CAMPUS

#### Continuing

*British Artists Prints, 1972-77*, an exhibition of 56 graphic works by 30 well-known British artists. Art Gallery of York University, N145 Ross. Through to Oct. 5. Hours: M-F 10-4.

#### Sept. 25 5 p.m.

Poet, playwright and critic Dennis Lee kicks off a series of regular readings co-sponsored by Winters College and the Creative Writing department. Winter's Senior Common Room.

### OFF CAMPUS

#### Continuing

*FOB* (Toronto Free Theatre until Oct. 11)

*FOB* (*Fresh Off the Boat*), is an American play about American Asians. When not indulging in pure Americanisms, playwright David Hwang reverts to stereotypical images of Asians in America. The play is intended to expose the cultural conflicts facing both Asian immigrants and American-born Chinese in the U.S.

The play opens with Grace working in her father's Chinese restaurant. The quasi-ethnic mood is set, then enhanced with the entrance of Dale—a recent Chinese immigrant obsessed with the mythological figure of Kwan Kung, "god of warriors, writers, and prostitutes."

Soon after, the audience is introduced to Grace's cousin Steve, an American-born Asian who shuns his ethnic origins. Hwang's script is as stereotypical as the JAP or PREPPY handbooks that were so popular only recently.

*FOB* was produced by the Canadian Artists Group responsible for the successful *Yellow Fever* which played at Toronto Free Theatre last year. The group is struggling to build a purely Asian theatre in North America.

*FOB* hobbles along limply on the premise that it is breaking down cultural precepts and injustices. Instead, the play merely exploits Asian clichés.

If *FOB* receives the criticism it deserves, the meagre attendance at 26 Berkely St. is likely to continue, as the reputation of the Canadian Artists Group is in serious jeopardy.

Both the producer (Phillip Ing) and stage manager (Karl Jason) are York expatriates.

The play is booked for a four week run at the Toronto Free Theatre until Oct. 11.

—Paulette Peirol

*Something to do With Space*, a sculpture exhibition focusing on seven local artists' concerns with space. Featuring Brian Buignon, Jane Buyers, Stephen Cruise, Andreas Gehr, Mark Gomes, Olaf Hanel and Peter Hill. Art Gallery at Harbourfront and outdoors around York Quay Centre. Through to Oct. 21. Hours: T-F noon to 6, Sat. and Sun. to 9. Free.

*Dream Points*, an exhibition of holograms by Chicago artist Doug Tyler. Interference Hologram Gallery. Through to Nov. 3. 1179A King St. West. 535-2323.

Starting today, the Ontario Science Centre hosts the sixth annual *Festival of Live Electronic Music*. Over 16 composers will be represented in four shows through Sunday. The Thursday, Friday and Saturday performances are at 8 p.m. Tickets: \$5. The Sunday show is a 3 p.m. matinee, and is included free with regular admission.