

From censorship to God's country

Encounter explores Canadian film identity



Jacques Leduc, Gilles Groulx and Bill Fruet sit on the Encounter Canada panel.

By WARREN CLEMENTS

Wapi the Killer Dog brought law and order to the North with a few well-timed growls, and opened up Vanier's Encounter Canada film festival two weeks ago.

The festival, organized by students Vince Dorval, Chris Syed and Michie Mitchell, drew together Canadian film-makers and films for a three-day symposium on the state of the art, with the bill footed by the Vanier council.

Quebec film-maker Gilles Groulx talked on National Film Board censorship, producer G. Chalmers Adams discussed the mechanics of making Don Shebib's *Between Friends*, and an exploitation film called *Dr. Frankenstein on Campus*, filmed at the University of Toronto, wowed a small audience in Curtis.

But the big news was an evening of old Canadian films screened Tuesday night in the Vanier junior common room, including the 1919 *Back to God's Country*, a Canadian silent film by David M. Hartford.

Discovered by the Encounter organizers in the vaults of the Canadian Film Institute, *Back to God's Country*, adapted from a Good Housekeeping serial, starts with a Chinese wanderer named Shan Tung and his giant dog Tao in a northern Canadian bar.

Shan is shot, and Tao's name is changed, for some reason, to Wapi.

Years later an author wanders by and is attracted to Wapi's mistress, played by Canada's great silent screen actress Nell Shioman.

RYDAL RIDES

But a "lawless trading vessel master named Rydal, dressed up as a Mountie, wanders onto the scene and sees

Nell performing unnatural acts with a bear by a lake. Rydal's sidekick, who looks as though he invented the leer, cheers on Rydal, but is killed by the father.

Rydal takes the father away ("Canadian law knows no excuse for killing") and throws him off a cliff. The story proceeds until years later, in 60 degree below weather, Rydal winds up chasing Nell through the snow by dog sled.

Nell loses her gun but Wapi shows up and eats Rydal's dog sled.

The piano accompaniment was provided by veteran pianist Horace Lapp, who plays regularly for silent films at the Ontario Science Centre. The Uxbridge born accompanist, whose score was riddled with excerpts from *Stout Hearted Men* and *The Bear Came Over the Mountain*, had seen *Back to God's Country* only once before, that morning, but provided a flawless piano accompaniment.

"Sometimes for the Ontario Science Centre," he said afterward, "I never see the films at all. But you see things building up, tempo and momentum. I've seen enough to know what to expect."

On the same programme as *God's Country* were two Canadian "cameos" from the 30s, out of thousands made at that time by Associated Screen pictures.

LONG AGO

The first, *Back in '23*, revealed that "if we looked back, we'd see a lot of things to prove that 1923 was a long, long time ago." We saw Baden-Powell and wife reviewing scouts and guides in Victoria, B.C., and Rudolph Valentino visiting Canada three years before his death.

The second cameo, *Rhapsody in Two Languages*, was a fast-paced unintentionally humorous sight-seeing

tour of Montreal, but with an interesting historical side-light.

"There are an extraordinary number of elements in the film, such as a girl pulling on her stocking and putting milk out for the cat, that were re-staged in Busby Berkeley's *Lullaby of Broadway* sequence in *Goldiggers of 1935*," said York film professor Stan Fox.

"Warner Brothers had a contract with Associated Screen for whichever of their cameos they liked. So what does this tell us? It tells us Busby Berkeley was copying Canadian film!"

The guest panel, including Fox, Gerald Pratley of the Ontario Film Institute, and cameraman Richard (Between Friends) Leiterman, bemoaned the current state of Canadian films.

NO MONEY

"It's hard to make feature films in Canada because there's no money around," Leiterman complained.

"There's less money than before in France, Britain and the States too, and they're making fewer films. But as we didn't make many to begin with, now we're making none."

"If the NFB and CFDC and CBC felt they were part of the same country and got together," continued Fox, "the money that the governments puts into these bodies would be enough to make an epic film."

"Take the National Dream. Why didn't someone have the imagination to say, why don't we make a feature film? What a magnificent story, as Pierre Berton keeps telling us."

"Adventure and strong characters, an opportunity thrown away so that we can watch it on the small screen, over-described and with commercials in-between."

"Once it's exposed to TV, there's not much chance for a feature film; whereas if it had been a film first, a TV series could have come out of it. It could have been the great film to put us all over."

Wednesday evening brought Shebib's *Between Friends* (1973) and Gilles Carle's *Mort d'un Bucheron* (1973) to Curtis. Guest producer Chalmers Adams said *Between Friends*, which has not been much of a commercial success, may owe some of its financial failure to poor advertising.

SHORT SHRIFT

"We have to find a message that will appeal to most people," he said. "It's possible the impression conveyed was that it was an artier film than most, and short shrift was given to the more

commercial aspects, such as nostalgia, a sense of longing and the special kind of relationship between pairs of characters."

Between Friends, formerly entitled *Good Times Gone By* (in the treatment stage), *Get Back, Surf's Up* and *Winter Sun*, may be given yet another new title, "as in the case of *Blood Mania*, a film which doesn't have a drop of blood in it."

Adams quoted a *Le Monde* film critic who dubbed the film "the North American Jules et Jim", and related the tale behind the shooting of a graveyard scene in Sudbury.

"The headstones were made by the one person who didn't get to go to Sudbury," he said. "All the members of the crew found their names on the stones."

HERE LIES

"Here lies Chalmers Adams, who died on the set of *Get Back* from nervous exhaustion." "Here lies Don Shebib, who died of unknown causes." At that point, any other crew would have murdered Shebib, what with 20-hour shooting days."

Thursday night brought together Quebec film-makers Gilles Groulx and Jacques Leduc and screenwriter Bill (Goin' Down the Road) Fruet, for a rather unbalanced discussion.

Groulx's *Les Raquetteurs*, on a snowshoers' convention, and *Entre Tu et Vous*, a film essay, were screened without subtitles, which made the subtleties rather hard to catch. No problem, though, since Groulx subsequently disowned the film.

"It is only half what it should have been," he said. "I wanted to match my footage against footage of political speeches, but the CBC refused to let me use the speeches."

"The film is intended to show that man tends to impose upon women what the leaders of this society impose upon our society."

Bill Fruet sparked debate by saying, "I don't want my tax dollars used to make political films, period. Too many films from Quebec are too blatantly political. They're not entertaining."

"All of the Film Board's films are political," retorted Leduc. "The NFB was founded as a political propaganda tool, to show the grandeur of our military establishments and the beauty of our parks."

"It's political, but because it's not dissident, nobody complains."

Groulx, whose *Entre Tu et Vous* used everything from negative images of protest marches to English and

French TV commercials, was asked whether he was influenced by French New Wave director Jean-Luc Godard.

GODARD COMPLEX

"I don't think so. We seem to have some complex about Europe," he replied with a smile. "Godard is a contemporary. I know him and I'm not afraid of him."

The evening continued with a screening of Murray Markowitz's *August and July*, a love romp between two girls in the woods. They romp and talk, romp and talk.

"I mean, do you understand what it means to be me?" asks one.

"No," replies the other.

"Well, it's awful."

It was followed by *Dr. Frankenstein On Campus*, a slick film, with Robin (Starlost) Ward as exchange student Victor Frankenstein visiting U of T. Austin Willis is the principal. Frankenstein invents a mind control box "which will make the H-bomb seem like a child's firecracker". You get the point.

During the festival, two films made by last year's Film 401 class were screened. Paul Burford's *Ballad of Hounddog Taylor* was a slow-paced, funny film about stud Hounddog Kane meeting his nemesis. ("I don't know why, Kane, but whenever I'm with a chick she takes over." "Be a power, Eddie.")

Daria Stermac's *Playground in Six Acts* was an overly long and boring sequence of vignettes and images, some visually exciting and some not so. An extra-terrestrial talks about his boring life, a naked girl masturbates while two disembodied voices discuss a New York affair and an electronic score throbs.

Organizer Vince Dorval was "disillusioned" by Encounter Canada's poor nightly turnout.

GOOD SHOW

"Looking at it the morning after, I find I broke my ass, put on a good show, and nobody showed up," he said.

"Volunteers were hard to find, and 70 per cent worked for an hourly rate. We offered a three-day symposium to York, which ran for six to seven hours each night, all free, and we had an average attendance of 75 people a night."

"It was a success which nobody showed up for."

But since the programme was a success, Dorval is optimistic about the chances of the forum being revived next year.

Bunuel's bizarre age

If you thought Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali's *Le Chien Andalou* was bizarre, attend tonight's screening of *L'Age d'Or*, their 1930 collaboration.

The feature film includes a villainous Jesus and some depraved archbishop figures, in a savage attack on the morality of the bourgeoisie of that time.

Introducing the special screening will be Dr. Serge Losique, founder (1968) and director of Sir George Williams University's conservatory of cinematographic art in Montreal. Losique originated the National Festival of Cinema Students Film, now held in conjunction with Famous Players, who supply the prize money.

When first shown in Paris, *L'Age d'Or* created a scandal, and a riot erupted in the theatre. The film was officially banned and all copies were seized by the police.

Henri Langlois, director of the Cinematheque Francais in Paris, saved one copy, from which tonight's print has been duplicated. (In fact



L'Age d'Or (1930)

Langlois is a personal friend of Losique, and jetted into Montreal from Paris weekly for two years to take a Sir George film course on French cinema.

The film will be shown at 7 p.m. in Curtis LH-L.

Cabaret final fling

The last Cabaret of the year comes up this week at Vanier's Open End. Bruce Harrott headlines the show, tonight and tomorrow at 9 and 10.30 p.m.



A scene from York student Daria Stermac's *Playground in Six Acts*, which was screened at Vanier's Encounter Canada and will be screened next week in Calumet's Canadian women's film festival. Other Calumet films will include Joyce Wieland's *Pierre Vallieres*, Judy Steed's *Hearts in Harmony*, Marie Waisberg's *Journals of Susanna Moodie*, and Patricia Watson's *The Summer We Moved to Elm Street*.

The free festival, to be held Monday through Friday in room 109A Atkinson from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., will include visits from most of the film-makers represented. Phone 667-3487 for more information.