

Spanish-American film generates credibility gap

El Norte—(The North)
Dir: Gregory Nava
Script: G. Nava and Anna Thomas
Spanish with English subtitles

El Norte is one of the few recent Latin American films which does not plead, whimper, or play on the viewer's sentimentality. It escapes stark classification, combining genres of the epic, documentary, and, in its weaker scenes, romanticism.

Director Gregory Nava thinks *El Norte* falls chiefly into the Latin American stream of "dream-realism," arising from authors such as Gabriel Marquez and Carlos Fuentes. Says Nava, "There's an undercurrent of violence beneath this poetic beauty that can erupt at any moment, at any place."

The film opens with a lustrous view of the Chiapas Mountains in Guatemala where we are introduced to the family and fellow villagers of the two central characters, Rosa and Enrique. Nava's weaving of the characters into the surrounding environment provides a continuity which is maintained throughout the film; Rosa and Enrique refer to themselves as 'homeless', and their journey is marked by a constant struggle to integrate themselves with their various environments.

The further "norte" (north) they progress, the more we see that simple survival is a more realistic goal than integration.

El Norte's Guatemala is terrorized by unidentified armies and desperate dissidents. Rosa and Enrique's family is killed in a heated slaughter; they themselves are left trapped in their own homeland.

Brother and sister remember stories of "the north," of "toilets that you flush, and everything vanishes," where "even the poorest people own cars." The rest of the film is devoted to following their arduous trek through Mexico, an underground, rat-infested sewer, and finally to San Diego.

The filming of *El Norte* seems itself to have been a strenuous task: how to make a film of epic proportions on a very limited budget. Gregory Nava already proved his capabilities in this respect with his 1973 award-winning *The Confessions of Amans*, with only \$13,000 spent on shooting. In the chiapas, Nava's crew shot in a village where there were, on average, eight killings a week. In morelos (near Mexico City), Nava says they were faced with the exhortations of armed terrorists and threatened with being kidnapped.

El Norte's worst flaw is the shallowness of its prime characters (the script was written by Nava and his wife, Anna Thomas). Rosa and Enrique are portrayed as loving, harmless youths driven by their lust for life. To work and live in freedom are their only aspiration (although in San Diego we see token glimpses of their materialism).

The North American audiences for which *El Norte* was intended will find Rosa and Enrique difficult to believe, not because of their simplicity, or naiveté, but but because of their utterly pure hearts.

El Norte attempts to provide an epic storyline told in a "personal and intimate" manner. The film falls short not so much in the length of the journey but its scope. The viewer never sees beyond the peripheral vision of its two main characters. The narrowness of the film does, however, compliment the dream-like images that are *El Norte's* strength; the stark, virile hallucinations of Rosa when dying of typhoid fever, and the grisly memories of Enrique, seeing his father's head hanging from a tree.

El Norte also attempts to fall into the category of dream-realism. The difficulty of this genre is in distinguishing between fantasy and realism. *Ereindera*, a recent film of a similar style, worked because it was clearly a dream motif super-imposed upon a realistic set. *El Norte*, on the other hand, tries to present a semi-realistic plot in a dream-like manner. While it becomes tempting to blame the weakness of the plot on the film's stylistic goals, certain details like Enrique's almost immediate landing of a job as a waiter's assistant in a classy San Diego restaurant, are inexcusably farcical.

—Paulette Peirol

□ Dave Howard Singers gives his farewell performance at Larry's Hideaway at 10 p.m. Tickets \$2. 493-6698.

Oct. 5

□ *The Dressing Gown*, written and directed by Sky Gilbert, opens at the Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, 566 King St. W. Through Oct. 21. Tickets \$6.25, \$8.25. Showtimes: W-S 8:30 p.m., Sun. 2:30 p.m. 927-8998

Oct. 7

□ Comedian Father Guido Sarducci from *Saturday Night Live* will appear at the Faculty of Education Auditorium for one show only. 371 Bloor St. W. Tickets \$10.50 at BASS. 698-2277.

Oct. 8

□ John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra, will appear at Convocation Hall, U of T Campus at 8 p.m. Tickets \$9-\$14 at BASS or the U of T SAC office.

Oct. 10

□ Mendelson Joe stomps on for two sets at the Bam Boo, 312 Queen St. W. Tickets \$5, \$6 for smokers.



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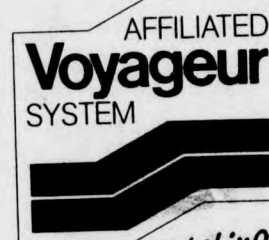
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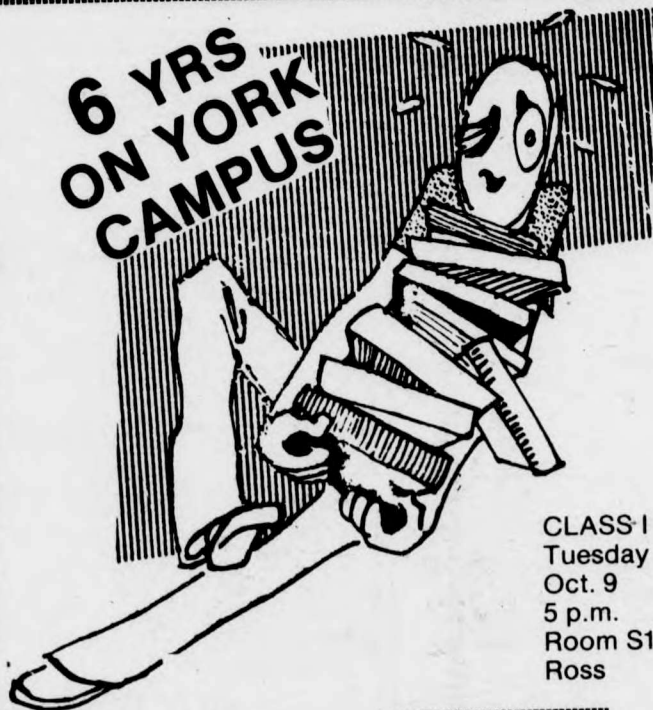
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