

Cinema via coffee at Madame Rouge's

Prelude: Want to know why a beautiful Australian film like "My Brilliant Career" plays in Halifax for only five days! The answer is—because commercial theatres like The Oxford are part of a lucrative monopoly. It's a rare occasion, indeed, when they exhibit any film being handled by a Canadian film distributor [as "My Brilliant Career" was], and when they do, it's usually just as 'filler,' because there is a quota, a guaranteed screen-time for Hollywood films. The following is a backroom conversation overheard in a small pool-of-light diner downtown. This diner just happened to share a paper-thin wall with one of them sleazy Touch of Eden parlours. . . .

by Billy Dodge

Madame Rouge: So Boys, tell me how it is. I want to know the ins-and-outs of this whole film set-up before I go makin' uhh. . . a few recommendations, you know what I mean.

Pretty Boy: It's big Ma! Some say it's the biggest racket going.

Dark Eyes: C'mon Pretty Boy! She doesn't want a mouthful of candy wrappers. Read the stuff you wormed out of that wingy old bat at the library.

Madame Rouge: What stuff? Go on Boy. You're the only one here with them certified Coll-Edge Papers. Read me what you got.

Pretty Boy: Okay. For those in the know, it's what's called a lucrative monopoly. Odeon Theatres, together with Famous Players, owns or controls somewhere near 430 theatre screens in Canada, which includes just about all the prime urban locations.

Dark Eyes: Damn! I knew those crummy movie joints downtown had somethin' more going for them than pink popcorn.

Madame Rouge: Shutup Eyes. I want to hear this.

Pretty Boy: Well according to the Canadian Council of Filmmakers, Odeon and Famous Players operate in a closed circuit "family compact" with the Big Seven.

Madame Rouge: Well they come in all sizes, but who's this Big Seven?

Pretty Boy: They're the major Hollywood producer-distributors.

Madame Rouge: They got names?

Pretty Boy: Yeah, Universal, Paramount, United Artists, 20th Century Fox, Columbia and Warner Brothers.

Dark Eyes: I don't like the sound of this Rouge!

Pretty Boy: Operating a functional monopoly, the Big Seven divide the Canadian market tidily between them. Screen-time is guaranteed to the Hollywood product by the two theatre chains.

Dark Eyes: Who are they?



Pretty Boy: I told you already. Odeon and Famous Players. In other words, there is a quota, a guaranteed screen time for Hollywood films in the majority of Canadian theatres. The total Canadian box office is around \$220 million annually. But, get this, the Librarian is sure that's an old figure.

Madame Rouge: Yeah! well my figure's old too, but a lady could go far wearing those kinds of jewels. You know what I mean. Is that it?

Pretty Boy: No! Roughly one-third of the money goes south of the border to the distributors and two-thirds remains with the exhibitors. Canada is the largest foreign market for Hollywood films anywhere in the world. Fact is, we've become Hollywood's biggest foreign customer, despite the size of our population. We are the only country which still permits unimpeded entry of American films and unimpeded export of their revenues.

Madame Rouge: Okay, Alright, Enough! I don't want to hear it. So we can't play tops. I never liked the smell of them big fat cigars either.

Dark Eyes: But Rouge, Toronto stinks of cigar smoke. That's where they're making all those second-rate, made-for-television, Hollywood imitations. What's their name. The something, something, Film Development people. They know what shit people will sit and star at.

Pretty Boy: "They" happen to be the Canadian Film Development Corporation. If we were smart, we'd be hanging on to their tails.

Dark Eyes: After you. I may be hungry but I'd rather see life from this side of the street.

Madame Rouge: Shuddup! Both of you. I want to know about the local set-up. Who's showing what to who. My clientele are fussy. And they got some big ideas.

Pretty Boy: There's been a few good films playing the big theatre chains. 'Elephant Man' and 'Ordinary People' both had long runs.

Madame Rouge: What's a few laughs when it costs you nearly \$4 just to get in the door.

Pretty Boy: They're not funny films.

Madame Rouge: Who cares. Even my girls are looking for a little foreign exchange these days. Hollywood's played out. America's lost its trump. They ain't the only ride in town. And you know their Big Car Families are through.

Pretty Boy: Well there's only one other choice. The Dalhousie Film Series. They show some good films, old and new releases. Students get in for \$2. Everybody goes there.



Dark Eyes: Yeah! Everybody but me! What do they show in the Arts Centre, just a lot of pretty pictures. A lot of frills and fur and red carpets. Did you see 'The Bronte Sisters' there? You think they'd be caught dead in a place like that?

Pretty Boy: I liked the film.

Dark Eyes: You would. Sometimes I think you ought-a take a walk or something. This campus life is starting to affect your grasp of reality. Have you ever heard of Wormwood's Dog & Monkey Cinema.

Madame Rouge: What's that Eyes? I've heard about that place.

Dark Eyes: Wormwood's is an alternative cinema downtown, right across the street from the Paramount Theatre. In the National Film Board on Barrington Street, to be exact.

Madame Rouge: What are they doing there?

Dark Eyes: Good question. I don't know. All I know is they have the best damn film programs anywhere in the city. Their two-month schedules offer as much [if not more] film than Dalhousie shows in one full year, i.e. Fall, Winter & Summer. That's what I call Cinema! \$2 for everyone.

Madame Rouge: Yeah great! The only thing wrong with that place is you can never find a seat.

Dark Eyes: Well not if you don't try getting there a little early, instead of arriving fashionably late.

Pretty Boy: So what do they show?

Dark Eyes: For starters: Third World, documentaries, Indian, Japanese, Australian, French, German, Swedish, East-European, Italian, you name it! Including your Hollywood classics, some animation, and last, but not least, independent films, made-in-Canada!

Madame Rouge: Well, like I said, I've gotta make some recommendations. Is there something special Eyes that's coming up? I think I'll go check out this place myself. See what they've got cookin'.

Dark Eyes: DAYS AND NIGHTS IN THE FOREST is coming up Rouge. On Saturday, December 13 at 7:00 and 9:30 p.m. and Sunday, December 14 at 2:00. It's by one of the world's greatest filmmakers, an Indian director named Satyajit Ray.

Pretty Boy: Big deal!

Madame Rouge: What do you mean, big deal! Just remember Pretty Boy, bringing you into this world weren't easy. . . . I never imagined getting you out into it was going to be any easier.