

Films

At last the Garneau has embarked upon a post-Graduate program, consisting of the much-praised Czech feature *Closely Watched Trains*.

I'd like to be wildly enthusiastic. Somehow I can't be, but I should make it clear that my judgment has been warped by two irritating mutilations which the film has suffered between Czechoslovakia and here.

In the first place, someone has decided that audiences in the affluent Western democracies will walk out of theatres if they can't see every film wide-screen. Since the film wasn't made that way, the top and bottom of the image have been chopped off to make it properly rectangular. This means the characters lose their heads rather too literally for my taste.

And to this a mediocre dubbing job—when will distributors realize that the audience for foreign films is literate enough to read sub-titles?—and you have a fairly serious gap between the film as made and what you'll see and hear at the Garneau.

Closely Watched Trains is obviously a film of great intelligence, put together with precision, so what I thought its odd wobbles of tone may well derive from this gap.

It's about a boy working in a railway station towards the end of the Second World War, as the Nazi occupation is beginning to crack. The boy is in the Czech tradition of anti-heroism that goes back at least as far as the Good Soldier Schweik, but he ends up shot after depositing a bomb in a German munitions train.

The improvised, almost casual nature of Resistance heroism is well-caught—a decency too spontaneous to dramatise itself.

But I'm puzzled by the other side of the film, in which our hero exhaustively establishes his anti-heroic credentials by attempting suicide after an embarrassing premature-ejaculation incident.

Part of my hang-up is that I'm really bothered by people slitting their wrists, even in humorous contexts (and, come to think of it, what's so funny about *ejaculatio praecox* anyway?).

So I can accept such a scene in a film only if it's pretty straightforwardly functional. And for me, the place of our hero's sexual problems in the total economy of the film remains obscure. I just couldn't fit the personal and the public together.

As a result, I ended up not being able to feel the film as a unit; instead of an interplay of ironies, it boiled down to yet another boy-faces-sex film, within a much better film the full poignancy of which wasn't ever quite allowed to emerge.

Still it's a film well worth fighting over, and you should see it.

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More straightforward fun is provided by *Interlude*, at the Varsova.

This stars Oscar Werner as the Great Conductor who conducts an Affair with a Sweet Beautiful Girl before the claims of Wife and Children call him finally back to Domestic Bliss.

Sweet Beautiful Girl this time round is Barbara Ferris, whose mouth I happen not to like. Ah, remember the good old days, when Leslie Howard fell in love with his accompanist in *Intermezzo*, and she turned out to be the young Ingrid Bergman! Ingrid Bergman Barbara Ferris ain't.

Because this is 1968 and not 1939, the game is played out more stylishly, more grimly. The photography is modern British slick, and there are genuinely superb bits of camera-work every once and a while. Werner gets to be Teutonic and egocentric, which he's very good at; I wish I were convinced by his conducting.

All in all, a pleasant evening for two sorts of people: those who will murmur "So true, so true" and maybe weep just a little, and those who will be highly amused. I'm afraid I'm in the latter camp. Which is not to say the True Confessions and its more stylish variants don't address real problems: it's just that anybody who falls in love with married German symphony conductors is insane.

—John Thompson

If you have an Owl Behind the Door Call for Stanley Cooperman: poet

By R. A. KAWALILAK

The Owl Behind the Door by Stanley Cooperman
McClelland and Stewart Ltd.

The Owl Behind the Door is a decisive book of poems—bold in approach, hectic in subject, moving, never still and very committed.

Stanley Cooperman, now an Associate Professor of English at Simon Fraser University, has produced in *The Owl Behind the Door* a very live collection of poetry. His view is both stirring and realistic. He continually prods the reader with questions, some heavy handed and awkward, but nevertheless leads the reader through several exciting answers.

We are fed Cooperman's laconic wit pinned to the peace and quiet of the printed page:

(and a poet in skinny pants,
a psychedelic shirt
pinned
to his skinless back,
leather dreams
rubbing his shinbones,
jerks through dead books,
weeds, and a tangle
of public hair:
even fire flies vomit
at the glitter of canned
glass
in his mouth)

These poems are auditory, un-comprising pleas to a society that the poet feels is physically dead. Most of the seventy-two poems in this collection are heavy with body-thigh-saliva references. In 'Lucy's Gang-Bang' he writes:

"So
she sits,
walks, rushes
into flesh,
dreams of blood, hopes to
slash
myoptic stars,
everything hairy, red:
in her belly
a wasp,
a panicked sprawl
of lovers
broken at the claws."

Having left the Hofstra University several years ago because it "was like trying to play tennis inside a banana crate, I decided to seek greener pastures elsewhere." In "Epithath for a Small Circle", Cooperman writes:

There it is, a circle
of idiot
space
bulging
with its own
nothing
with Professors
wearing
Charles Olsen's pajamas;

Cooperman gracefully bridges the gap between the traditional conscious and today's new-wave awareness. His poem 'Pastoral' shows shades of the grand rhetoric and intricate allegories of early Robert Lowell while championing the new tactile awareness.

"Your fingers may stroll with mine
on that fair surface, the meadow
whose name we share;
silk may grow like cultivated lawn
sweet as the moon we wrap in glass
(when lovers dance on each others crust
pouring roses from their eyes
as though each blossom were a meteor-stone
immortal as arithmetic)"

Cooperman is very much in this world, believing in man even though he sees him—

"heavy-footed as the stars . . ."

In all, the entire range of human experience is distilled in Cooperman's poetry with a captivation of the bold, radiant, intoxicating essences of our lives themselves. When one reads this poetry, you feel that he is telling you that even for everything that is said, it is only one man's opinion of 'moonlight'.

The book itself, containing several excellent drawings by Gord Oglan, is a work of art ably bound and printed by McClelland and Stewart Ltd.

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